

The Wild West in Italy and in the Italian Imagination:
Travel Writing, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and
Popular Culture

by

Alessandra Alice Magrin

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

Submitted by Alessandra Alice Magrin, to the University of Strathclyde as a thesis

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in HISTORY.

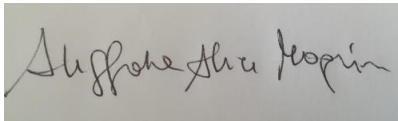
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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many individuals and institutions that helped me bring this PhD project to a conclusion. I cherish the opportunity to thank all the people who have supported me during this long journey. My supervisors, Mark Ellis and Manuela Williams, and my reviewer John Young, provided me with invaluable advice and insights, as well as constant support, throughout many years.

This work would not have been possible without the assistance of the staff and collections of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. The sponsorship provided by the project “The Papers of W. F. Cody” enabled me to carry out numerous research trips in Europe and in America. I would like to thank the Board Members and staff: Bruce Eldredge, Bill Garlow, Naoma Tate, Dine Dellenback, Jeremy Johnston, Linda Clark, Deborah Adams, Sam Hannah, Mary Robinson, Paul Fees, and all the staff who provided useful reference and feedback during my trips to Cody, Wyoming. I would also like to thank the other associate editors of the “The Papers of W. F. Cody”: Frank Christianson, Doug Seefeldt, Michelle Delaney, Julia Stetler, and Chris Dixon for their guidance and assistance in times of need.

I would like to thank the staff at the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library in London and particularly the former director, Professor Philip Davies, for the help provided during my fellowship there. Staff in many Italian libraries deserve a thank you for helping me locate several of the sources employed in this thesis and for offering precious insights and additional information which were useful to my research. Thanks to the staff at the National Library of Rome, the National Library of Florence, the APICE library at the University of Milan, the Archiginnasio Library in Bologna, Biblioteca Alessandrina in Rome, The Primoli Foundation in Rome, the Camillo Caetani Foundation in Rome, the cinema archive of Milan (Cineteca Milano), the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, the Library of Verona, and the Library of Pinerolo. Thank you also to Dr. Chiara Milani at the Library of Como, and to Dr. Livia Porta and Magda Nosedà at Como’s Carducci Association, for providing useful information about Carla Porta Musa and Buffalo Bill. I would like to thank also the staff at the Eye Film Museum in Amsterdam, at the Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, particularly Steve Friesen, and the staff in the Western History and Genealogy at Denver Public Library, in Denver, Colorado, especially Kellen Cutsforth.

A special thank you goes to all the friends and family who have lent a hand during my research and who have supported me in many ways during the writing of this thesis. Thanks to Tom F. Cunningham for the many inspiring conversations about Buffalo Bill and for providing me with copies of his books, showing me Wild West pictures from his collection, and offering other interesting secondary material. I am extremely grateful to Laura, Cesare and Marzia Rossi for offering me accommodation and help during several long research trips in Rome and Florence, thank you for always treating me like one of the family. Thank you to my friends and colleagues in Glasgow who offered support in times of need, particularly Bianca Scoti and Meryem Horasan. Thanks to my Italian friends who have always cheered for me during the course of this PhD, Elisa and Marco Caretta, Alessandra Cetraro, Gabriele Bonomi, Francesco D'Argento, Martina Mingolini, Mirko and Matteo Munaretto. Thanks to my family, my father Ottorino, my uncle Ferdinando, and my Grandmother Gianna (who passed away during the writing of this work), for loving me, supporting me and encouraging me in all possible ways during these long years. Last but not least, thank you to my husband Marcel for his love and devoted help every day since we met, some years ago, in the Graduate School at Strathclyde University.

Abstract

This thesis examines how the Wild West as a regional phase in American history and its myths have been introduced in Italy and how they have entered the Italian collective imagination. It argues that the Wild West is lastingly connected to Italian culture and identity through the figure of Buffalo Bill (W. F. Cody). This study assesses how knowledge of the American frontier and its myths were first spread across Italy by the narratives and memoirs of travellers who journeyed to the American West. It looks specifically at the ways in which these travellers depicted western territories and their inhabitants, and at the same time at how they expressed patriotic feelings for their motherland. The Wild West was then popularized on a mass-scale by Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, which visited Italy twice at the turn of the 20th Century receiving an extraordinary success. The image of the Wild West spread by Buffalo Bill was then further propagated and lionized in popular culture: literature, graphic art and cinema permanently fixed Wild West images in the Italian collective imagination.

“The Wild West in Italy and in the Italian Imagination” offers a new scholarly perspective on this topic by analysing an extensive body of archival material, some previously unknown and all yet to be fully appreciated by scholars. This includes newspaper articles in Italian, letters and visual material such as brochures, original illustrations, satirical cartoons, posters and photographs. By employing an interdisciplinary approach this thesis establishes connections and creates a transnational narrative which explains the specifically Italian responses to the Wild West and its myths, focusing particularly on the idiosyncratic ways in which Italians have adopted and appropriated them to fit their needs. This study also partly looks at the image Americans had of Italy and at the ways in which Italy was perceived by the members of the Wild West show. By engaging with these materials and approaches, this thesis reframes the discourse on the reception of the Wild West myth and of the western genre in 19th and 20th Century Italy.

Introduction

This PhD thesis demonstrates how the Wild West is connected to Italian culture and identity through Buffalo Bill. Thanks to Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, Italians became accustomed to Wild West images and ideas on a mass scale. These ideas became engrained in the collective imagination of Italians who, over time, appropriated Wild West characters, concepts and aesthetics to fit their own nationalistic purposes and needs. In the 20th century, due to the myth making which popular culture fostered, Buffalo Bill came to be the personification of the West, and the Wild West itself became a legendary place of the imagination for Italians.

A crucial point that this thesis is aiming to accomplish is to expose the sanitizing meta-narrative of Cody's show and to explain why it appealed to turn-of-the-20th-century Italians. In some respects, Americans were seen sceptically; in others, they were admired, and people tried to imitate them. This ambivalence would be resolved after the 1906 tour of Italy, when the Americanization of Italy began to take off. For Americans, meanwhile, Italy symbolized a key testing ground for the advancement of their project of Americanization and the nation was employed in the meta-narrative of the Wild West show as a picturesque, yet effete and decaying place; this was done in such a way as to emphasise the modernity and superiority of American culture.

This study, therefore, looks at how national histories influenced the reception of the 'Western' as a genre and the 'Wild West' as a concept, and takes into account different stages in the Italian interest in the Wild West, leading to cultural contamination and transfer. The network of interconnections between Italy and the American West is a subject which has been tackled in several disciplines: film studies, literature, popular culture, history, communication and reception studies. This is the first study of its kind which attempts to involve all these disciplines in conversation, strengthening the links between them, in order to point out the resulting 'transculturation', and in doing so show a meaningful experience of the contact zone Wild West.

This PhD thesis was conceived as part of a fellowship with the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, which envisaged the retrieval of primary sources and archival material regarding Buffalo Bill in Italian repositories. My task was, primarily, to collect material regarding the 1906 tour of Italy, which was almost totally unknown

to scholarship. Up to this time, the Italian holdings of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, the main repository for William F. Cody-related material and artefacts, consisted mainly of primary source material regarding the 1890 tour and gathered by its participants. With the material found in Italy, my home country, I was to write a PhD thesis as a monographic study on the Italian expeditions of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and its aftermath. However, during the course of this research, the evidence of complex historical and cultural relationships that preceded *and* followed the enactment of William F. Cody's show revealed that this spectacle was a tile, albeit an extremely relevant one, in the colourful mosaic of the impact of the American West and its myth in Italy, and one that could not, therefore, be analysed as a mere standalone episode in 19th and 20th century Italian cultural development. As Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes wrote in their best-selling book, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922*, the importance of the pre-existing setting into which the Wild West show inserted itself is of the essence:

When we conceive of response in terms of reception and appropriation, we need to take a longer view. We need to ask ourselves to what extent the Wild West intersected with ideas about the American West that had already been formed by earlier carriers of imagery, in novels by the likes of François René de Châteaubriand and James Fenimore Cooper, through journalism, travelogues, immigrant letters, or visual materials such as paintings, drawings, prints and photographs.¹

Literature Review:

Previous scholarship on the Wild West show has persistently considered the European tours as a cohesive experience of Western (i.e., pertaining to the American West) culture, and has shown little or no awareness of the idiosyncrasies that characterized each country's experience.² The research dedicated to the Italian tours—which consists of only four publications available in English language, and some informative but non-scholarly work published in Italian—has persistently interpreted the Italian reception through the prism of the influence of trends in mass literature. It has also been susceptible to the repetition of questionable 'facts', inherently passing on the idea of Cody's Wild West show as the first veritable contact Italians had with the American West, its people, its customs, and its myths.³

¹ Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 111.

² Julia Stetler, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Germany*, PhD diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012.

³ See Daniele Fiorentino, "Those Red-Brick Faces: European Press Reactions to the Indians of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," and Naila Clerici "Native Americans in Columbus's Homeland: A Show Within the Show", in Christian F. Feest (ed.), *Indians and Europe* (Lincoln: University of

Realization of this prompted me to dig deeper into the issue in order to determine whether there had been earlier and/or direct connections between Italians and the American West, prior to the transculturation operated by Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, and to examine how such earlier episodes might have influenced 19th and 20th century Italian culture.

In the absence of an overarching study devoted to the Italian reception of American Western culture and myth, a preliminary investigation of the available literature on European responses to, and representations of, the American West has been conducted. The investigation indicated that the bulk of this research was predominantly centred on examining the ways in which 'Europeans' (whatever this word might mean) created, and reacted to, literary works of fiction on the American West.⁴ Non-fiction, however, remains understudied. In particular, Ray Allen Billington's work, *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier*, highlighted an important gap in the scholarship on this subject: that is, the study of travellers' accounts, which Billington appears to marginalise in his study for being too "subjective and unreliable".⁵ Billington's limited consideration for those sources opened a door for my research. This gap has led me to investigate memoirs by Italian travellers who visited the American West(s) from the late 18th century to the end of the 19th century. Examining their themes, measures of success, and inter-textual references has convinced me that they played a role in moulding an early Italian collective imagination about the American West. Thus, the initial focus of this study is on those narratives which have helped to form the idea of a 'Wild West' in Italy—an idea whose birth is commonly attributed to Cody, but whose seeds, evidently, were already sprouting thanks to the circulation of some of these sources (along with the very first version of western dime novels, which will be assessed at the end of Section I). Furthermore, narratives have been assessed which appear to tout the values of *Italianness*, which is an important concept connected to

Nebraska Press, 1999); Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Irene Lottini, "When Buffalo Bill Crossed the Ocean: Native American Scenes in Early Twentieth Century European Culture," *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 31, issue 3 (Oct., 2012), pp. 187-203.

⁴ This approach has been widely employed since the 1980s and remains the preferred perspective in the studies on foreign responses to the American West and its myth. See Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery Land of Promise, the European Image of the American Frontier* (New York: Norton, 1981); and Naila Clerici, "Native Americans in Columbus's Homeland: A Show Within the Show"; Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William F. Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

⁵ Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery Land of Promise*, pp. 75-78.

identity and nation-building of the new-fangled Italian entity. The exaltation of Italian identity will, indeed, resurface several times in discussions of the reception of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, and this is also connected to the legacy of the show in Italian popular culture. By addressing Italian narratives about the West which contained patriotic elements, we can uncover the roots of this sentiment and realize that it was not a unique response to Cody's show alone, but instead constituted a pattern in the Italian collective psyche.

Assessing the circulation—and the promotion—of the core themes in these travel narratives (for example, savagery, adventure, and wildness versus refinement and civilization) also unveils a mechanism on which the reception of Cody's show depended. Travellers' narratives indeed contain personal opinions, pre-conceptions, and stereotypes, but, precisely for this reason, they must be taken into account as products of a given era and community. The said sources, therefore, are able to convey and reflect inclinations, patterns and information which are widely recognized and accepted, and which transcend the level of subjectivity of the individual traveller. They can, instead, be envisioned as examples of the 'global' transmission of knowledge, ideas and beliefs which swept certain societies at certain times. Applying these considerations to this study prompts another question: Why use travellers' accounts to research the Italian reception (and re-appropriation) of the 'Wild West' myth? The answer is: because of their relatively wide circulation and success in Italy, travellers' narratives can also be counted as early agents of cultural contamination with a standing equal to the novels of Fenimore Cooper and other forefathers of the Western genre.⁶ Both these kinds of works—novels and travel narratives—were indeed part of the same literary market. They concurrently featured in newspapers, and they often borrowed ideas and descriptions from one another, which in some cases made factuality and fiction merge inextricably. Travellers' accounts can also be considered 'cultural products' like any other (such as photographs, dime novels, live shows), and can therefore help explain and interpret other experiences and contacts Italians had with the 'Wild West'.

In order to give a fuller picture of what texts about the American 'Wild West' were available in Italy in the 1800s, early *feuilletons*, dime novels, and illustrated

⁶ We must remember that between the second half of the 18th century and the end of the 19th century, 'travel literature' gained momentum on both sides of the Atlantic, representing highly popular concurrent genres of fictional writing.

travel magazines have also been examined.⁷ The *feuilletons* and dime novels consisted of exclusively foreign imports and entered the Italian literary market during the second half of the 1800s, while the magazines began as translations of French issues and later gained their niche among the Italian readership, especially among young readers. Interestingly, after the arrival of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the availability of foreign *feuilletons* and dime novels decreased and would be superseded by Italian-made dime novels and adventure books about the 'Wild-West' and particularly about the enduring character, Buffalo Bill.

American scholarship has tended to undervalue, and often not consider at all, the role of Italy in the assessment of the Wild West show. The works of Louis Warren (*Buffalo Bill's America*), Paul Reddin (*Wild West Shows*), Joy Kasson (*Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*), L. G. Moses (*Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*), and Don Russell (*The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*), despite being excellent studies on the American renditions of the Wild West show and on the life of William F. Cody, fail to give the sufficient consideration to the European setting, and particularly the Italian one.⁸ Italy is mentioned only in passing in Russell's, Moses' and Kasson's books, while Warren's book on the life and times of Buffalo Bill, only considers occurrences in the city of Rome and omits the way in which the show was received in other parts of the country. Reddin gives lengthier perspectives on Italy, but analyses only the reception of the first Wild West tour and interprets it negatively, based on limited sources which only gave a restricted view of the show's reception. Reddin also fails to provide reasons for the perceived lack of success of the Wild West show in Italy.

These partial views are due to the sources used, mostly to be found in the English language and giving an American-centric perspective. My translation and interpretation of the new sources collected during this study from Italian into English provide a transnational counterpart with a much more comprehensive use of sources. It will also provide a more nuanced version of the events that occurred during the course of the two Wild West show tours, as well as a full account of the 1906 show

⁷ See Chapter Three.

⁸ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*; Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

tour which is the first available to English speaking scholarship. Some studies have focused in part on the Italian tours, such as Irene Lottini's journal article "When Buffalo Bill crossed the ocean: Native American scenes in early twentieth century European culture" published in the *European Journal of American Culture*.⁹ Lottini focuses, however, solely on the 'staged authenticity' of the Indigenous performers and on their representations in terms of the stereotypes which had been set by works of western literature such as Cooper's and Gustave Aimard's novels, and does not take into account the broader spectrum of reactions to the Native performers during both the 1890 and 1906 shows.

Also focused on the representation of the Native performers are the contributions of Daniele Fiorentino, "Those Red-Brick Faces: European Press Reactions to the Indians of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show", and Naila Clerici, "Native Americans in Columbus's Homeland: A Show Within the Show", in the collection of essays edited by Christian F. Feest, *Indians and Europe*.¹⁰ Their essays provide a good, but limited, selection of press reactions to the 1890 Wild West show and perceptive insights concerning the ways in which Native performers were perceived by Italian audiences. Having employed the Wild West show's 1890 scrapbook—housed at the McCracken Research Library—as primary sources, the essays completely omit responses to the Native performers during the 1906 tour. This is a point where the analysis in this study provides new evidence drawn from the original sources on the 1906 tour collected for this research. This study considers the differences in the treatment of the Native performers in 1906 and highlights the new meanings which the Italians attached to them during the process of construction of their collective reflections on the 'Wild West'.

The article by Renee M. Laegreid, "Finding the American West in Twenty-First-Century Italy", on the reception of the American West in Italy provides a first attempt in English-speaking scholarship to engage with the understanding of the Wild West in the Italian imagination.¹¹ Unfortunately, the article offers only a cursory understanding of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, mainly focused on the 1890 challenge between Buffalo Bill's cowboys and Italian mounted herdsmen. Laegreid

⁹ Irene Lottini, "When Buffalo Bill crossed the ocean: Native American scenes in early twentieth century European culture", pp. 187-203.

¹⁰ Daniele Fiorentino, "Those Red-Brick Faces: European Press Reactions to the Indians of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show"; Naila Clerici, "Native Americans in Columbus's Homeland: A Show Within the Show".

¹¹ Renee M. Laegreid "Finding the American West in Twenty-First-Century Italy", *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, Issue 4, (Winter 2014), pp. 411–428.

then focuses on 21st century renditions of the myth of the American West in Italy, mainly in contemporary cinema and in local rodeo exhibitions, overlooking Italian popular cultural renditions of the myth of the Wild West and Buffalo Bill in the 20th century. Except for a brief reference to Emilio Salgari's work, Laegreid's discussion of Italian popular literature devoted to the Wild West is minimal, omitting references to Buffalo Bill dime novels, comics, and other Western pulp fictions which circulated in Italy from the aftermath of Buffalo Bill's Wild West tours until the 1990s, and which offered a distinctive and shaping imprint to the Italian collective imagination of the Wild West in the 20th century.

This thesis will provide more fundamental evidence through which to analyse popular literature and dime novels which have shaped a distinctively Italian myth of the Wild West—on which the 21st century Italian renditions of the Western genre also depend. The works of Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad*, Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History*, and the Italian language scholarship of Daniele Fiorentino have enabled me to re-construct the socio-political context of Italy which is essential to an understanding of the issues connected to Italian nation building and identity which came to be reflected in the reception of the Wild West shows.¹²

Italian publications on the Wild West show exist, but are only of factual and non-scholarly nature. Among them we find Andrea Biscaro's *Buffalo Bill é arrivato a Torino*, Mario Bussoni's *Buffalo Bill in Italia: l'epopea del Wild West Show*, Massimiliano Galanti's *Buffalo Bill, gli indiani d'America e altri indigeni in Romagna*, and *Buffalo Bill: L'uomo, la leggenda, il West* by Pierluigi Gaspa.¹³ These studies are informative and descriptive, and are valuable to this extent, but fail to make wider connections and offer interpretive insights on the meanings of the Wild West show, Italian nation building and Italian identity, and they also fail to engage with the popular culture responses to the myth of the Wild West.

¹² Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d'Italia 1848-1901* (Roma: Gangemi, 2013); Daniele Fiorentino (ed.), *Gli Stati Uniti e l'Italia alla fine del XIX secolo* (Roma: Gangemi, 2010); Daniele Fiorentino, Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Stati Uniti e Italia nel nuovo scenario internazionale* (Roma: Gangemi, 2012).

¹³ Andrea Biscaro, *Buffalo Bill é arrivato a Torino* (Torino: Neos Edizioni, 2010); Mario Bussoni, *Buffalo Bill in Italia: l'epopea del Wild West Show* (Fidenza: Mattioli 1885, 2011); Massimiliano Galanti, *Buffalo Bill, gli indiani d'America e altri indigeni in Romagna* (Cesena: Casalini Editore, 2018); Pierluigi Gaspa, *Buffalo Bill: L'uomo, la leggenda, il West* (Reggio Emilia: Imprimatur, 2016).

Sections I and III of this thesis have benefited from the contributions of work by Christine Bold. Her books, especially *Selling the Wild West*, have facilitated an understanding of the process of production and marketing of popular literature devoted to Western themes.¹⁴ Although her study relates to the American market and context, her evidence has encouraged the application of similar approaches to Italian counterparts of the American dime novels and pulp fictions in this study. This has been an important area to explore, because, just as American publishers prompted authors to create particular kinds of stories which appealed to their own vision of the American West, so the Italian publishers and authors of Westerns fiction drove the Italian interest in this genre by emphasizing themes that would appeal to their own specific market, readership and political context. The latter point became evident during the era of Italian colonialism, and even more so during Fascism when popular literature was subjected to new requirements and tests to ensure alignment with the basic ideology of the regime.

Lastly, the study in Italian by Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi, *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, has provided a valuable reference to all the Western popular literature published in Italy during the 19th and 20th century—particularly early Western novels, Buffalo Bill dime novels, and other Western pulp fictions which engaged with the myth of the Wild West.¹⁵ This book has also provided a solid context on the history of these publications and on the way the Italian literary market worked. My study has benefited from the perspective and framework outlined in Gallo's and Bonomi's book and has built upon it by analysing in more detail a selection of the popular Westerns their book discussed, namely those which dealt with the Wild West myth popularized by Buffalo Bill.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing discussion of the scholarship surrounding Buffalo Bill, American showmanship, Native American performers, and popular Western culture is that this thesis fills a gap in the literature by uncovering a large amount of source material which has never been fully appreciated by scholars. By making new connections through a consciously interdisciplinary approach, I offer a thesis which I hope will be of interest and value to scholars and students of this period and this subject matter.

¹⁴ Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West: Popular Western Fiction 1860 to 1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1987).

¹⁵ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer: storie e miti dall'Ovest Americano* (Verona: Colpo di Fulmine, 1996).

Methodology:

This PhD in history is informed by several other disciplines, and generally adopts an American Studies approach. The material examined in this study has not been merely read as factual evidence, but is also assessed interpretively and critically. Consequently, interdisciplinarity is a recurrent feature of my work. The thesis as a whole is more than a straight account of the Wild West show in Italy; it represents a rounded analysis which draws insights from a host of disciplines that I hope would engage a range of different audiences.

Given the nature of this study, the methodology to be adopted had to be inevitably eclectic. Different approaches were employed depending on the subject that was being tackled in each chapter. The methods employed are based in the fields of cultural history, (new) western history, Indigenous studies, literary criticism, popular culture, film studies, audience reception, gender studies and post-colonialism. Despite the variety of these theories, the underlying and unifying approaches to my thesis are those coming from Entangled History (a.k.a., *histoire croisée*) and Transfer History. These concepts, as proposed by Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, leading European comparative historians, in the volume *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, speak most powerfully to my thesis:

Histoire croisée proceeds not from fixed quantities or terms, but from problems and questions that can only be defined in the course of the analysis. It privileges concrete objects such as institutions, legal systems, works, disciplines, while retreating from global constructions such as nations and societies. It proceeds from ways and means, conflicts and strategies. ‘Entanglement’ is its magic word not only as a general condition, but as an historical process; ‘Entanglement’ binds together the macro and the micro and underlines the self-reflexivity of both actors and historians as well as the plurality of perspectives among observers.

Transfer history looks at the interrelationships between two entities, whether nations, regions, towns, or institutions. It underscores the significance of given intermediaries [...]; the weight of various media, above all cultural media; the specific co-optation process of the transfer. Like *histoire croisée*, it aims to relativize the meaning of the nation-state, it seeks to demonstrate, for example, that what we know as ‘French’ culture incorporates a variety of foreign influences [...] To recognize what happens in a intercultural transfer the Historian is forced to compare, at the very least to look at the old state of the examined object in contrast to its new context, to compare the social origins of the disseminators and affected populations in one land with those in another, to consider the terms of one language alongside that of another, and finally to interpret a phenomenon as it exists in the national culture from which it originates to the same phenomenon as introduced within a different culture.¹⁶

¹⁶ Heinz-Gerard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, “Comparative History: Methods, Aims, Problems”, Deborah Coen, Maura O’Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, (New York: Routledge), pp. 31-33.

I have found these historical tools to fit well the themes and purposes of my thesis; they have, in fact, allowed me to develop a ‘parallel tracks’ perspective of the subjects of my study, which I have ‘entangled’ and ‘disentangled’ as required, depending on the issue that was being tackled. Such a method has also allowed me to justify lasting cultural transformations in the subjects of my research. Another valuable methodological aid to my thesis was offered by James Cook and Lawrence Glickman in the volume *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History*. Their contribution was instrumental to pinning down some concepts regarding culture in my thesis; in particular, what can be considered as ‘culture’ and who/what can be defined as agents of culture? They provided definitions of culture as:

- Artistic Expression: a movement, an idiom, a mode of display (e.g. P.T. Barnum’s three ring spectacles).
- Culture as an institution that generates and circulates its own values and images: includes explicitly cultural sites of production such as theatres, museums, publishing houses, amusement parks and film studios.
- Culture as a common set of beliefs, customs, values and rituals: as a whole way of life or as tradition.
- Culture defined as transnational or global circulation: to account for cultural practices and intellectual debates never wholly contained by nation states.¹⁷

These definitions enabled a reflection on the concept of culture that was being employed in my study, and helped to legitimise the decision to tackle the case study of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, itself—which, for decades, has failed to be taken seriously in scholarly debates about cultural significance. All the above notions designate the Wild West as an agent of culture in its own right. More generally, these concepts provided the insights required to gather several disparate sources together, from diaries to comics, novels, live shows, drama, films, and to combine them together so as to create new powerful strands of historical and cultural meaning.

The other unifying approach and insights followed in this thesis come from Transnational history. Transnational history is employed as an umbrella term. In this, the work of Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History*, has guided and inspired me, particularly the issues he points out with America’s self-perceptions, as well as his rejection of “the territorial space of the nation as the sufficient context for a national history”.¹⁸ The main interest of my study lies in how knowledge and experiences of the Wild West moved across

¹⁷ James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, Michael O’Malley, *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. ix.

countries, and how those experiences were then fixed in a shared, collective imagination, which only at times coincided with the national space. Some meanings and methods of transnational history are still rather controversial.¹⁹ I hope my research can rebut some of the criticism of transnational history; for instance, my research challenges the point about not using primary sources enough, given that two thirds of my thesis is based on primary research and archival findings.²⁰

Archival Research:

Indeed, the archives and libraries visited for the purpose of this study were numerous and located across different countries. The first repository I visited at the beginning of this research was the McCracken Research Library at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, in Cody, Wyoming. There, I became acquainted with the first bulk of primary sources, the newspaper clippings from the Italian Scrapbook, the letters, and the visual material in the William F. Cody Collection, M.S.6., which have been used in the analysis of the first tour (1890) of Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Italy. A small selection of this material, especially the newspaper clippings in English language, had been analysed by previous English-language scholarship on the Wild West shows. The research for this thesis is the first which takes into consideration a broad survey of these sources. I have translated large excerpts from newspapers and paragraphs from letters from Italian into English, with the text in the original language available in the footnotes. This has accurately rendered these sources available to English speaking scholars for the first time. The next repositories I visited were the National Library of Florence and the National Library of Rome, Italy. There the bulk of the material on Buffalo Bill's Wild West's 1906 tour of Italy was collected. This was the missing tile to complete the analysis of the Italian Wild West shows in full and was the mission for which my fellowship with the Buffalo Bill Center of the West came into existence. Over a hundred newspaper articles were collected in these libraries. All this constitutes original material which has never been assessed by scholarship before, either in English or in Italian. Having translated large

¹⁹ For example, the criticism of the nation-state which relies at the same time upon those same concepts of nation states for understanding and outlining the movement of ideas, peoples, and customs. See David Thelen "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History", *Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, Issue 3 (1999), pp. 965–975.

²⁰ See Kiran Klaus Patel, "An Emperor without Clothes? The Debate about Transnational History Twenty-five Years On", *Histoire@Politique*, No. 26 (2015), p. 9. Online, https://www.histoire-politique.fr/documents/26/pistes/pdf/HP26-Pistesetdebats_Kiran_Patel_def.pdf. Last accessed 17/01/2020.

passages from these articles, I analyse them in the section about the second (1906) Wild West show's tour of Italy. A selection of these sources will be deposited at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West for inclusion in the Digital Archive of W. F. Cody, a NEH-funded project which envisages the digitization and editing of unpublished material about Buffalo Bill. I will be responsible for the editing and annotations of the aforementioned 1906 newspapers.

The next research visit took place at the British Library in London, where I spent four weeks thanks to a postgraduate student fellowship awarded to me by the Eccles Center for American Studies. There, I consulted a large number of travel narratives by Italian travellers in the American West, analysis of which constitutes the core of the work of Section I of this thesis. Excerpts from these narratives were also translated from Italian into English and further secondary literature was collected in this repository.

A series of short visits to small libraries and archives was then undertaken. I visited the Primoli Foundation in Rome, to see several photographs of the 1890 Wild West show and read excerpts from the diary of Count Giuseppe Primoli, one of the amateur photographers at the Wild West show during the 1889 French Exposition in Paris and the 1890 Roman stopover. I visited the Braidense and Sormani Libraries in Milan, where I obtained original copies of the dime novels and pulp fictions discussed in Sections I and III of this thesis, and where I consulted the Luigi Motta archive. I also visited the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. I looked, to no avail, for copies of the early films that director Filoteo Alberini had shot with Buffalo Bill in 1906, but I was able to have a fruitful conversation with silent cinema expert Mario Musumeci and retrieve some secondary material on the figure of Alberini. I visited the civic library of Verona, where I collected newspaper sources from Verona and secondary material on Emilio Salgari, the leading western novel writer of turn of the 20th century Italy. I also visited the civic library of Como, where I collected newspapers from the city of Como and learned from the curator, Dr. Chiara Milani, that a prominent local author had recalled seeing Buffalo Bill in Como at the age of four. I visited the Cinema Archive of Milan (Cineteca Milano), where I watched the restored copy of *Pinocchio* by Giulio Antamoro (1911), which features scenes set in the Wild West. Other libraries visited include: the Biblioteca del Risorgimento in Bologna, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio also in Bologna, Biblioteca Civica di Pinerolo, near Turin, the State Archive of Rome, and the Centro

APICE Library at the University of Milan, Biblioteca di Verona, the Civic Photographic Archive of Milan (Civico Archivio Fotografico di Milano), Biblioteca Alessandrina of Rome, and Fondazione Camillo Caetani also of Rome. Last, but not least, there was a week-long visit at the Denver Public Library's Western History Collection, where I obtained correspondence of Nate Salsbury and other minor members of Cody's shows, as well as newspaper clippings from the Salsbury scrapbooks.

Some material was also consulted online, such as the Buffalo Bill Collection at the American Heritage Centre, University of Wyoming at Laramie, where copies of the documents consulted were partly translated by me from Italian into English and are available for English speaking scholarship for the first time in this thesis. I saw online the Italian silent westerns in the Desmet Collection of the EYE Institute, Amsterdam, the photo collection at the Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave in Golden, Colorado, and the programmes and photos digitized in the William F. Cody Collection at the McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming. I also consulted the digitized newspaper archives of the Cinema Museum Archive of Turin and of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia of Rome, the digitized newspapers collection of the Braidense library of Milan, the digital newspaper library of Tuscany (Emeroteca digitale Toscana), and the archive of newspapers of the Piedmont region (Archivio giornali del Piemonte).

Early versions of parts of this thesis have been published as research articles and book chapters in edited collections. Part of Chapter One in Section I has been published as "Premiers voyageurs italiens à la frontière américaine" in the volume *L'Ouest et les Amériques: entre arts et réalités*.²¹ Parts of Chapter Four and Five in Section II have been adapted for publication for the article "Rough riders in the cradle of civilization: Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in Italy and the challenge of American cultural scarcity at the fin-de-siècle", published in the *European Journal of American Culture*.²²

²¹ Alessandra Magrin, "Premiers voyageurs italiens à la frontière américaine", in *L'Ouest et les Amériques: entre arts et réalités*, Marie Cristine Michaud and Eliane Elmaleh (eds.), (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016), pp. 217-228.

²² Alessandra Magrin, "Rough riders in the cradle of civilization: Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in Italy and the challenge of American cultural scarcity at the fin-de-siècle", *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 36, issue 1 (March 2017), pp. 23-38.

Structure:

Section I of this thesis looks at the ways in which the Wild West was recounted and imagined prior to the Wild West show. Travel narratives and foreign dime novels set the scene for an adventurous and sensational Wild West, upon which Cody's show would later be superimposed. Section II looks at the live shows of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, conceived as agents of Americanization, and at the same time looks at the ways in which Italians responded to the 'soft power' of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Chapter Four in Section II provides the socio-political context of Italy at the time of the arrival of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and examines the ways in which Italians were seen in America. This provides a window into the American mindset of the time and foretells some of the opinions that Wild West show members would have of Italy. Italy was a troubled nation with a unification only accomplished *de-facto* and with a vastly inhomogeneous population. Americans held low opinions of Italians, caused partly by mass immigration. Italy, however, was also slowly marching towards industrialization, and the 'invention' of leisure time occurred around the same time of the arrival of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Circus, theatre and cinema were all extremely popular mediums in Italy and were seen as gathering and socialising places. The Wild West show would also be conceived as such by Italians.

Chapter Five in Section II looks at the setup of the enterprise of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and at the arrival of the 1890 show in Italy. Attention is paid to how the figure of Buffalo Bill was seen by the Italians at this point: that is, as a youthful and chivalrous "knight of the prairies" who mesmerized audiences with his appearance and stage persona. Buffalo Bill became so popular that he was employed by the satirical press to comment on a series of local and political events. This usage proves the prominence of Buffalo Bill in Italian culture of the time and shows an instance of appropriation of this character by Italians. The chapter then looks at Annie Oakley and at how she was received by the press as a frail, small woman who could shoot better than a man. She was also seen, however, as somewhat of a freak by the press, which abhorred the idea that Italian women could embrace the use of arms, as Oakley did. The Native performers are then considered in the light of the comments of the Italian press. They are seen as romanticized and at times quirky characters who had popped out of a western novel; their individuality and their capacity to survive as cosmopolitan subjects was largely ignored by Italians. The visit of the Wild West show to the Vatican and the challenge set up with the Roman

butteri horsemen are then examined. These events were crafted by William F. Cody and his management, as occasions through which to enhance the visibility of the show locally and ensure its resonance transatlantically, as the news of these events reverberated in newspapers all over the world. The opinions that cast members held about Italy and its people are then assessed. They generally revealed a degree of bias on the part of the Americans. Italians were flattered publicly and within the local press, but were criticized privately and by American newspapers.

Chapter Six looks at the sixteen years that elapsed between Cody's first and the second show in Italy. First, the troubles Buffalo Bill had in the aftermath of Wounded Knee are assessed, along with the way Italian newspapers covered this massacre on a reservation. Then the triumphs and glories of Buffalo Bill at the 1893 Columbian Exposition are examined, as well as the ways in which Italy, and particularly Rome, were represented as decaying symbols of the Old World, while America was heralded as an emblem of modernity and superiority, as the culture destined to lead humanity. Meanwhile, in Italy, a fake Buffalo Bill was touring and discrediting the real Buffalo Bill with bogus challenges and swindles. This would damage the fame of William F. Cody to an extent. His credibility, however, recovered during his return to Italy in 1906.

Chapter Seven looks at the origins of the "Congress of Rough Riders of the World", paying special attention to the preparation of the show. An assessment is undertaken of the masterful way in which Cody and his public relations crew prepared the publicity for the show, including a close look at bureaucratic preparations. The figures of Cody and John Burke are analysed in the light of the press reports from Italian newspapers. John Burke was much appreciated by Italians for his cordiality, and his tall tales provoked amazement in news reports. Cody was seen as on a descending arc in his life; he is depicted as wise, but also older, preoccupied with representing himself as part of "Nature's Aristocracy" in Italian newspapers and keen to establish connections with nobility. The representation of the Rough Riders is then examined. Italians appreciated, in particular, the exoticism of these riders and embraced the racial hierarchies which were inherent in the master-narrative of the Wild West show. The way in which Italians have received Native performers in 1906 is also analysed. During this tour, they were portrayed as a "Vanishing Race" and were examined with the concepts and language of social anthropology. Indeed, leading Italian anthropologists studied them in the show

encampment. The Native performers were feminized and Orientalized in the press reports. This demonstrates how the Wild West show's meta-narratives of conquest were easily transferred to the Italian context, and how much of a grip they had on Italians. The chapter then looks at the ways in which the Wild West show was exploited by the satirical press, as a metaphor that allowed succinct points to be made about local events and political occurrences. This demonstrates the real outreach and popularity of the Wild West show in 1906. The show was so popular that it became the preferred vehicle for satire in Italy, and this attitude lasted for years after the show's departure. The chapter then looks at the ways in which the Wild West was employed in early Italian cinema, from the first footage of the Wild West show shot by pioneer cinematographer Filoteo Alberini, to the early western motion pictures produced in Italy in the aftermath of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. The chapter ends with an evaluation of the reception of the 1906 show, concluding that the show was vastly appreciated in Italy, though with some reservations. The echo of the Italian show, once again, reverberated across the ocean and was exploited by the Wild West show crew to aggrandize their success and impact.

Section III looks at the aftermath of Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Italian society and Italian popular culture through a single chapter. Chapter Eight starts with an assessment of Western-themed publications issued in Italy after passage of the Wild West show, including novels, dime novels and the pulp fictions about Buffalo Bill. Special attention is paid to the way in which the authors of these publications appropriated the character of Buffalo Bill, crafting it in such a way as to better suit Italian readerships, and ultimately to conform to the demands of the Fascist regime. The popularity of the name of Buffalo Bill was a guarantee of success to those publications, so that more and more of them introduced his name in the titles to enhance sales. The chapter establishes that the memories of the Wild West show consecrated the character of Buffalo Bill in Italian popular culture. The chapter then focuses on the Western novels of Emilio Salgari and his epigones, and on the special role they envisioned for Buffalo Bill in their literary production. Salgari embraced the Wild West show's meta-narratives of conquest and the civilizing duties it entailed in most of his western novels. Salgari's epigones, Luigi Motta and Calogero Ciancimino, continued to ride the wave of the 'Buffalo Bill Brand' with a series of novels which capitalized on his name. These novels extended the lifespan of the myth of the Wild West and Buffalo Bill after World War II and set the stage for other

popular culture appropriations of this myth, namely comics and cinema. The chapter then looks at how these mediums adopted the Wild West myths and characters for the appeal of their popularity, to serve different nationalistic needs. The chapter closes with an assessment of films which featured different renditions of the character of Buffalo Bill, concluding that this figure has hugely influenced the reception of the myth of the American West and of American culture in Italy throughout the 20th century.

SECTION I: ITALY GOES TO THE WILD WEST

Travel Writers, Dime Novelists, and the Origins of Italy's Myth of the 'Wild' West

(1785-1890)

Chapter One: Early Italian Travellers on the Frontier:

The 'pull of the wild' and critical outlooks on colonial America

Buffalo Bill, although perhaps the most famous populariser, certainly was not the first 'agent' to spread visions and myths of the American Frontier in the *Bel Paese*. Between the end of 1700 and the first half of 1800, there were a large number of travellers—not real pioneers in the sense of settlers, but rather *flanêurs* or amateur explorers—who, pushed by the curiosity for the *other* and driven by a 'call of the wild', began a sort of 'reverse' Grand Tour, in America rather than Europe. Almost all of them published accounts of their travels upon their return, but many of these books were only received by an elite audience; the degree of literacy in Italy, which at the time was only a geographic denomination, was extremely low, and the whole debate about America, long before the start of mass Italian migration to the New World, was considered to be a 'niche topic' for intellectuals, or at least for aristocratic philanthropists.¹ However, some of these sources received a very singular popularity for their time, acting as the stepping-stones to successive and internationally acclaimed Frontier depictions. This is the case with the travel diaries of Luigi Castiglioni (1790) and of Giacomo Costantino Beltrami (1824).

Both Castiglioni and Beltrami keenly took part in frontier life: the former by studying it from a scientific point of view, the latter by actively participating in its advancement. Both of them published their accounts at the end of their journeys, and in so doing they fully contributed to revealing the reality of those unknown territories, in Italy as well as in America, allowing them to provide the 'raw materials' which helped the mythologizing of these regions.² The most interesting points about these travel narratives are, arguably, the peculiar portraits they offer of the 'Wilderness' and of life on the American Frontier. Interestingly, these

¹ Naila Clerici "Native Americans in Columbus's Homeland", p. 417.

² Fedora Giordano, "The Anxiety of Discovery: The Italian Interest in Native American Studies", *RSA Journal*, vol. 5 (1994), p. 86.

descriptions have little to do with the representation of the Frontier and the West as an ‘exceptional place’, but rather they define it by comparing it to Italian and European environments, as well as establishing parallels to the classical world.³ In particular, the descriptions they made of Native Americans seem to be characterized by inherently positive remarks; instead, it is the exploits of the pioneers that are rather strongly criticized. As will be later assessed, these appear to be common tropes in most of the narratives of Italian travellers in the West, which featured along with appraisals of Italy’s own culture. This shows how, since the beginning of the ‘mythopoeia’ about the ‘Wild West’, Italian national pride left little room for the ‘incorporation’ of ideas of American ‘exceptionalism’ and ‘Manifest Destiny’. This would change in time, especially after Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show visited Italy.

Chapter 1.1. Luigi Castiglioni: critique of American colonialism and defence of Indigenous customs

The first travel journal to introduce this paradigm was that of the Milanese botanist, Luigi Castiglioni. Born in 1757, he was the nephew of Pietro and Alessandro Verri, two of the most influential philosophers of the Italian Enlightenment.⁴ Before leaving for America in 1785, he travelled to Paris and London to improve his fluency in French and English. In Paris, he befriended Benjamin Franklin who actively encouraged him to travel to America.⁵ The account of his journey, entitled *Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell’America del Nord* (Travel to the United States of North America), was published in 1790 in Milan (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The diary manages to mingle Castiglioni’s interest in nature with his curiosity about humanist and philosophical issues discussed by theorists of the inferiority or otherwise of the New World, and he especially challenged the doctrines—endorsed mainly by Cornelius De Pauw and by Georges-Louis Leclerc

³ See Tim Youngs, “The Importance of Travel Writing”, *European English Messenger*, vol. 13, no. 2, (2004), p.55-62, and Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

⁴ Brothers Pietro (1728-1797) and Alessandro Verri (1741-1816) were the editors of the literary journal *Il Caffè*, and founding members of the ‘Accademia dei pugni’ (Academy of Fisticuffs), an illuminist cultural institution of Milan.

⁵ Marco Cerruti “I ‘selvaggi’ nel *Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell’America settentrionale* di Luigi Castiglioni” in Fedora Giordano (ed), “The Anxiety of Discovery: The Italian Interest in Native American Studies”, p. 81, cited also in Giovanni Dicapua and Luigi Saibene, *Luigi Castiglioni nella terra degli uomini liberi*, (Cosenza: Rubbettino Editore, 2005), p. 48.

de Buffon—who supported the thesis of the degeneration of America and its species.⁶

Indeed, we see that in his memoir Castiglioni was very interested in the study of Indians, in order to contribute to the philosophical debate about the nature of the ‘savage’. His opinions appeared to be strongly in favour of the indigenous: he considered them “noble savages” who would still be fundamentally pure, despite white men’s attempt to corrupt them.⁷ We find this idea in the chapter about Pennsylvania, which was then a “Contact Zone” –if one refers to the term coined by Mary Louise Pratt – i.e., a frontier territory where settlers and indigenous peoples often mixed, sometimes mutually enriching their respective cultures.⁸ In that area, Castiglioni believed that the greatest dangers were not represented by extemporaneous encounters with the “savages”, but instead with white men, who

...always start a war against the savages, and being the assailants, they deceive them in contracts, they trespass their borders, they steal *cannots* from them, and they never stop bullying them [...] [I]t is not surprising, then, if the savages try to avenge the insults they continually receive, by often ambushing and killing their ferocious enemies [...] These facts that often occur in the vast American continent, if they were known in Europe, would serve to give a better idea of the savages, and reveal the vices and sins of those who wrongly claim to belong to a civilized nation.⁹

Even when Castiglioni described the natives’ most gruesome practices, such as scalping, he emphasized that the conduct that they adopted with their friends was very different from the way they treated their enemies: “The Savage, though acting so inhumanely to war prisoners, by often tormenting them with a slow death, is, on the other hand, just as welcoming and affectionate with his friends; he shares with them what he has, this being a sign of his good heart.”¹⁰

⁶ On the philosophical dispute over the New World, see the excellent work of Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), (Italian title: *La disputa del nuovo mondo*, 1955).

⁷ Marco Cerruti, “I ‘selvaggi’ nel *Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell’America settentrionale* di Luigi Castiglioni”, p. 83.

⁸ Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 8.

⁹ “Fanno quasi sempre guerra coi Selvaggi, essendone gli aggressori, li ingannano nei contratti, oltrepassano i limiti fissati per i confini, rubano i loro *cannots* ed usano sempre con essi delle prepotenze [...] Non è quindi meraviglia se tentando i Selvaggi di vendicarli degli affronti, che continuamente ricevono, sorprendano spesso e massacrino i loro nemici[...] Questi fatti, che spesso accadono nel vasto continente d’ America, se fossero conosciuti in Europa, servirebbero a dare una migliore idea dei Selvaggi ed a scoprire i vizi e le iniquità di coloro che a torto pretendono di appartenere a una nazione civilizzata”, Luigi Castiglioni, *Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell’America settentrionale* (Milano: Stamperia G. Marelli, 1790), vol. 2, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰ “Il Selvaggio però così inumano coi prigionieri di guerra, ai quali spesso procura con tormenti una lenta morte, è altrettanto ospitaliere, e affezionato agli amici, al segno di dividere con essi di buon cuore ciò che possiede”. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

It is clear, therefore, that Castiglioni celebrated the qualities of the Indians by comparing them against the flaws of the ‘civilized’ settlers, in such a way as to emphasize the virtues of the former. The only blame that Castiglioni puts on the natives is drunkenness, although, as he never ceased to stress, they were often driven to drink by white men. This appears to be a vice that Castiglioni finds equally detestable among both the Indians and the settlers:

At daybreak the Indians took over, and getting drunk with brandy they began to sing other no lesser distasteful songs, and sometimes quarrels and fights, were followed throughout the day by drunk *Canadians*, and by other random people. These are the exercises, and the amusements of these miserable people, who spend days in an almost continuous drunkenness for the sole pleasure of being immoral. Fortunate Italy, and fortunate its people, where the abundance of liquor does not produce such great abuses, and where the drunkenness is regarded among wellborn people as the vilest of vices.¹¹

In addition to the rebuke against alcoholism, in these words we find a not-so-veiled sense of superiority towards his own sobriety-devoted culture.

Last, but not least, the following account demonstrates how Castiglioni stood out against the issue of the decline of the New World, suggestively referring to de Buffon, and taking, explicitly, an anti-Depauwian stance, by saying:

Together with the alleged degeneration of animals it is asserted by certain famous authors, that men are degenerate in America, as much in body, as in spirit. But if we reflect on this proposition, we will find it as equally erroneous as the first. The ancient inhabitants, that is, the Savages, are perhaps less robust than European peasants, but in this case they would not differ from the Chinese, from the Negroes, and the Indians who are also residents of an old continent, and were not so much regarded as degenerate nations.¹²

Perhaps this is one of the earliest apologies for the savage that we can find in the literature of the period, after the most famous one by Rousseau. Certainly, it is the first written Italian source to speak so favourably of them. This penchant for the positions of Rousseau will be an item that will have a major impact in the dissemination of knowledge about Native Americans in Italy.¹³ These pro-

¹¹ “Allo spuntar del giorno sottentrano i Selvaggi, e ubriacandosi con l’acquavite incominciano altre non men disgustose canzoni, e talvolta liti, e zuffe, che sono seguite durante la giornata da ubriachi Canadiani, e altra gente del popolo. Tali sono gli esercizi, e gli spassi di questi miserabili abitanti, che passano i giorni in una quasi continua ubriachezza per il solo piacere d’ essere scostumati. Felice Italia, e felici que’ popoli, ove l’abbondanza de’ liquori non produce sì grandi abusi, e dove l’ubriachezza vien riguardata fra le persone ben nate come il più abietto dei vizi”. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

¹² “Unitamente alla pretesa degenerazione degli animali, si asserì da alcuni celebri Autori, che gli uomini siano degenerati in America, così nel corpo, come nello spirito. Ma se riflettiamo su questa proposizione la troveremo egualmente erronea, come la prima. Gli antichi abitanti, cioè i Selvaggi, sono forse meno robusti dei contadini Europei ma in tal caso non differirebbero dai Cinesi, dai Negri, e dagli Indiani che sono pure abitanti dell’antico Continente, e non per tanto furono riguardati, come nazioni degenerate”. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 159-160.

¹³ See Silvia Rota Ghibaudi, *La fortuna di Rousseau in Italia (1750-1815)*, (Torino: Edizioni Giappicchelli, 1961); Antonello Gerbi, *La Disputa del Nuovo Mondo*, (Milano: Adelphi, 1955),

Rousseauvian conceptions of North America and its ‘noble savages’ strongly characterize Castiglioni’s diary, which also, it must be said, represents the first example of a travel book about America written entirely in the Italian language. Moreover, he was among the first in Europe to combine, in the same work, a study of nature with the first pseudo-ethnographic observations of the natives and other American dwellers. Precisely for this reason, Castiglioni’s work achieved great success at the time, so much so that it was later published in German, exposing therefore the book to the attention of a much wider foreign audience.¹⁴

Chapter 1.2. Giacomo Costantino Beltrami: ‘Accidental discoverer’ and inspiration behind the most popular versions of the Frontier myth

The same attitude towards Native Americans and similar remarks to those of Castiglioni can be found in the journal of another Italian traveller to America: Giacomo Costantino Beltrami. In 1824, Beltrami published his travel diary, called *Voyage à la découverte des sources du Mississippi et de la rivière sanglante*. This work was first published in New Orleans in French while the English version, enriched with drawings and maps, came out only in 1828, under the title *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America Leading to the Discovery of the Sources of the Mississippi and the Red River*. The Italian version was not released in Italy because the Vatican decided to permanently index Beltrami’s writings, due his to participation in the uprisings against the papacy in 1820. Despite this, an Italian translation appeared in Tessin (Italian-speaking Switzerland) in 1832, although the translation was not undertaken by Beltrami himself.¹⁵

Beltrami’s American journey was organized in this way: he arrived in New York from Italy in 1822 and after fortuitously meeting the explorer William Clark in 1823 he decided to depart with little means and with two Indian guides in a canoe to navigate up the Mississippi. He did so successfully and, thanks to the guidance of the Indians, he reached (and claimed to have found) the northern sources of the Mississippi, which were then still unknown to white men. Therefore, the decision to

(2000), pp. 380-389; Ezio Raimondi, *Romanticismo Italiano e Romanticismo Europeo*, (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1997).

¹⁴ Giovanni Dicapua and Luigi Saibene, *Luigi Castiglioni nella terra degli uomini liberi*, p. 26. Also see Marco Cerruti, “I ‘selvaggi’ nel *Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell’America settentrionale* di Luigi Castiglioni”, p. 85.

¹⁵ Luigi Grassia, *Un Italiano fra Napoleone e i Sioux* (Roma: Il Minotauro, 2002), p. 205

embark on this adventure came spontaneously after that transcendental meeting with Clark. This journey represented for Beltrami a rich opportunity to know directly the frontier and to grasp the essence of the myth of westward expansion, of which he had read so much in his youth, and which was evidently the driving force behind his romantic disposition.¹⁶ This trip transformed Beltrami into a direct witness of life on the frontier. The Italian scholar Daniele Fiorentino has appropriately called him an “involuntary ethnographer of the manners and customs of Native Americans” at a time when many thought they were about to disappear. The publication of *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper—a novel that officially opened the literary trope of the Vanishing Indian—appeared in 1826, two years after the release of the first version of Beltrami’s travel journal.¹⁷

It is perhaps worth to begin to consider how the Italian traveller depicted the images of a tribe of Sioux Indians and of their leader, chief *Tatangamani*:

[In] the face of these Savages [...] the painter and the sculptor could recall the features of a Roman figure; especially, the profile of their nose is almost entirely Roman, while that of women is absolutely Grecian [...].¹⁸

[Chief Tatangamani] is an old man of a hideous aspect, bent under the weight of years of atrocities; but despite the scars with which his naked body was covered, the dignity with which he wore his buffalo skin, hung on his shoulders like the Ancient Romans wore their *clamis* tunic, his bow and quiver slung across his back, a club which added to the imposing gesticulations of his right hand, and his Indian followers, who with an air of pride and independence, formed a circle around him, gave him more *éclat* and majesty than are possessed by sceptered kings [...].¹⁹

Beltrami describes these Indians in an absolutely neoclassical way. It must be pointed out, in fact, that in the course of his narrative he constantly made comparisons between Indian traditions and those of the ancient classical past of Italy. In so doing, Beltrami seeks the approval of its public and aims to transmit the sense

¹⁶ Daniele Fiorentino, “Dei ‘selvaggi’ buoni ma non troppo”, in Fedora Giordano (ed.), *Gli Indiani d’America e l’Italia vol. 3* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2006), p. 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39. For a more detailed analysis, refer to the article by the same author, “Accidental Ethnographers. Italian Travelers and scholars and the American Indians (1750-1900)”, *European Review of Native American Studies*, 4, n. 2, 1990, pp. 31-36.

¹⁸ “[Dans] le visage de ces Sauvages [...] le peintre et le sculpteur pourraient reconnaître un modèle de la figure Romaine; leur nez surtout est presque tout à fait romain, tandis que celui des femmes est tout à fait grec [...]” Giacomo Costantino Beltrami, *La découverte des sources du Mississippi et de la rivière Sanglante* (La Nouvelle Orléans: Benjamin Levy, 1824), p. 85.

¹⁹ “[Le Chef Tatangamani] est un vieillard d’un aspect hideux, courbé par le poids des ans et de ses atrocités ; mais, néanmoins, les cicatrices, dont son corps nu est couvert, la dignité, avec laquelle il portait sur ses épaules sa peau de buffaloe [sic.], comme les Romains leur *clamis*, son arc et son carquois, qui lui pendaient en écharpe, une massue, dont il rendait plus imposantes les gesticulations de sa main droite, et ses Indiens, qui, avec une air de fierté et indépendance, faisaient cercle autour de lui, lui donnaient de l’éclat, et de la majesté, plus qu’en ont les rois avec leurs sceptres [...]”, *Ibid.*, p. 88.

of respect for these cultures, so remote and difficult to understand for Europeans. In this, it is likely that Beltrami was inspired by the literary models of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Rousseau himself, that he had read in his youth and who helped to form his pre-Romantic disposition.²⁰ Later in the narration, Beltrami also seems to recognize, with an ounce of resignation, the negative effects that the contact with white men had on Indians: “God knows how many kind souls hide under such a savage bark? ...Nevertheless, the contact with civilized peoples has already thrown big vicious roots in their heart”.²¹ He also considered reprehensible how white settlers exploited indigenous tribes by appropriating their land: “I believe that the Americans, by continuing to force the Savages out of their own lands, they will eventually become such themselves; I have encountered some of them in forests and in deserts, and they could only be distinguished from the Savages by their language and by this peculiar characteristic which prevails throughout the nation”.²² It is indeed in the descriptions of American colonists that we see Beltrami’s observations taking darker tones:

I was told that when the Yankees part from their father’s house, they get but a flange, a yoke, an axe and a pickaxe. It is a symbolic heritage, with which they sometimes run through three or four thousand miles, until they find somewhere to use it effectively; and the parents do not hear anymore from their son nor the son from their parents. The next day, we stopped at another small hut also inhabited by Yankees. Another American gentleman who had met these people before, two or three thousand miles back, asked them for what adventure they had left their first establishment. The head of the family replied that it had been to get away from their neighbours, and that he would also desert there, in the event that a family came to settle within 60 miles of his neighbourhood. His wife was not at home. She had gone visiting a neighbour, her relative, 80 miles away. You see, Countess, that land which in Italy would suffice half a dozen sovereigns, is too narrow in the New World for an American family. It seems that the spirit of society does not unite them too much, or that interest sets them apart.²³

²⁰ Daniele Fiorentino, “Dei ‘selvaggi’ buoni ma non troppo”, p. 43.

²¹ “Dieu sait combien d’âmes bienfaites [sic.] se cachent sous cette écorce sauvage? ...mais le contact des peuples civilisés, a déjà jeté de grandes racines vicieuses dans leur cœur”, Giacomo Costantino Beltrami, *La découverte des sources du Mississippi et de la rivière Sanglante*, p. 87.

²² “Je crois que les Américains, à force de chasser les Sauvages, finiront par le devenir eux-mêmes ; j’en ai rencontrés dans les forêts, dans les déserts, qui ne se distinguaient des Sauvages que par la langue et par cette propriété qui règne dans toute la nation”, *ibid.*, p. 299.

²³ “On m’a dit que les Yankees, quand ils se séparent de leur maison paternelle, n’obtiennent qu’une bride, un joug, une hache, et une pioche. C’est un patrimoine symbolique, avec lequel ils parcourent quelquefois trois ou quatre mille milles, jusqu’à ce qu’ils trouvent à l’employer utilement ; et les parents [sic.] ne savent plus rien de leurs fils, ni les fils de leurs parents [sic.]. Le jour suivant, nous nous arrêtâmes à une autre petite hutte, également de Yankees. Un monsieur américain, qui les avait connus autrefois ailleurs, à deux ou trois mille milles de là, leur demanda, par quelle aventure ils avaient abandonné leur premier établissement. Le chef répondit, que cela avait été pour s’éloigner des voisins, et qu’il allait aussi désertier de là, attendu qu’une famille était venue s’établir à 60 milles, dans son voisinage. Sa femme n’était pas à la maison. Elle avait été voir un voisin, son parent, à 80 milles de là. Vous voyez, Comtesse, que le terrain, qui suffit, en Italie, pour nous donner une demi-douzaine

In this portrait, which pre-empted Horace Greeley's famous edict, "Go West Young Man!", we note that Beltrami offers a sharp criticism against this ideology. The Italian, not without the touch of irony which characterises his writing, reflects on the implications of the spirit of colonial expansion, which in some cases seems to lead American society, not to progress, but to the harmful excesses of solipsism—something which deprives the Indians of their land for trivial reasons, and at the same time exposes the settlers themselves to the degradation of human relationships. Overall, it cannot be ignored how the early West described by the first Italian travellers, differs significantly from the version found in the meta-narrative of conventional pioneer literature which gave rise to the exceptionalist myths of the frontier. The Italians' portraits do not contain, in fact, the hegemonic attitudes towards indigenous populations which characterized this pioneer literature, and which has made it popular first in America and then abroad. Instead, they adopt a benevolent perspective on those who were often addressed as "savages", a perspective which must have appeared uncomfortable, or at least unpopular, in the eyes of supporters of Manifest Destiny.²⁴ Moreover, these accounts had the merit, due to the uniqueness of their experience, of acting as a reservoir of ideas from which several other interpreters of the myth of the frontier could draw. Another important legacy of these early travellers' narratives is that they helped to blaze a trail for further travels in the American frontier.

de souverains, est trop resserré dans le Nouveau Monde, pour une famille d'Américains. Il paraît, que l'esprit de société [sic.] ne les rapproche pas trop, ou que l'intérêt les éloigne", *ibid.*, pp. 301-302.

²⁴ As it will be assessed, this attitude changed when Italy was unified and took on the role of colonizer of Africa and other eastern territories.

Chapter Two: Italians in the Trans-Mississippi West: challenging the ‘epic aura’ of the ‘Popular Frontier’

Inspired by the pioneering examples of Castiglioni and Beltrami, upper and upper-middle class Italians continued to regularly travel to the North American West throughout the 19th century, and just as frequently challenged the fledgling notion of American exceptionalism in their published accounts.¹

Count Arese Lucini’s trip to America arose on the pretext of going there to supervise Charles Louis Napoleon, the future Napoleon III.² He travelled in 1837 from New York to Kansas, mostly by ferry, stopping when there were places he desired to visit. In some occasions, he took to a canoe and travelled with “half-breed” guides, as he called them. In this way, he came into contact primarily with the Delawares, Pawnees, Omahas, Winnebagos, and the Sioux. In 1830s America, the line between civilization and the perceived frontier had quickly moved beyond the Mississippi River, giving way to the era later portrayed in Western epics, which is the version of the American West(s) which has remained fixed in the popular imagination to this day. Arese Lucini, with his travel account, was the first Italian (and self-proclaimed as such) to launch a “popular” version of the Trans-Mississippi West onto the Italian literary market. Like Castiglioni and Beltrami before him, in his *A Trip to the Prairies and the Interior of North America (1837-1838)*, Lucini railed against settlers and their methods of civilization, implying that they were the real perpetrators of the Native American people’s misery:

I visited an Indian tribe living a few leagues from the town (St. Louis). They were what are called hereabouts civilized. *Thank you. Thank you a thousand times for that sort of civilization* (Emphasis mine). Nothing more degrading to human nature can be imagined than those wretches who have adopted no part of civilization except its liquor, its and its gunpowder. Seven or eight miserable buffalo-skin tents supported by trees, poor samples of horses, thin and galled grazing nearby, some women preparing deerskins or taking care of hideous, stark-naked babies, a few saddles, a few guns, a few clumsy utensils, and empty bottles. That made up the colony of the Indians they call *civilized*. Their get-up is the most grotesque you could hope to see. It is a combination of the white man’s and their own; and all of it dirty and disgusting. Some of them speak a few words of bad English, about the same kind I flatter myself that I speak. These unfortunates have learned neither to cultivate the ground nor to raise cattle. The game they kill provides their food, and the skins they sell are exchanged for brandy, gunpowder, tobacco for the men,

¹ For more un-exceptional perspectives on travel in the American West, see David M. Wrobel, *Global West, American Frontier. Travel, Empire and Exceptionalism from Manifest Destiny to the Great Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).

² Lucini was a family friend of the queen consort of Holland, Hortense de Beauharnais—the mother of Napoleon III, who had been exiled after the failed attempt to seize the French throne in 1836.

beads of glass or Chinese vermilion for the women. This tribe is what remains of the Delawares, formerly so numerous and so strong.³

The critique against forced civilization appears to be clear, but it also conveys a belief in something inherently unrecoverable in the natives, as if they were doomed beings, whose condition was only made worse by the white man's attempt at civilization. To make matters even worse, Arese Lucini reported that the American government "buys land from the Indians, by force if necessary, and pays them a few cents for it, surveys it, and re-sells it at 10 shillings [sic.]. But that is not the only immoral thing about it: for instance, this year the government pays them half in money, and for the other half it sends them merchandise which apparently is such a drag that the Indians do not want it".⁴

Arese Lucini sometimes used the Old World's mythical past as a yardstick for the new; unlike the case of Beltrami's account, which was soaked in romantic ideas, it is easy to see how Arese Lucini employs specific examples to demonstrate his particular ideology:

While visiting a library, I acquired, without intending some historical information by the help of an old chronicle. That windfall gave me great pleasure; for there I read that the first three navigators who landed on American soil were all Italians. The first was Christopher Columbus, who on behalf of Spain discovered the West Indies. The second was John Cabot, a Venetian merchant established at Bristol, who discovered for England the island of Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia. And the third was John Verrazzano who, for France, discovered the coast where Savannah now is, even according to others, Canada. As always, I was proud to be an Italian, but I was especially so at that moment and I could not keep myself from deploring the fatality which, even in times long gone forced us to sell our courage and our talents to foreigners. But our day will come. At least, one must hope for it and hasten it with all one's might.⁵

In this passage, in fact, the author's proud words for the motherland and for the commemoration of the genius and boldness of the great Italian explorers, only draws attention to the incompleteness of glorious deeds undertaken as part of other nations' enterprises. It is therefore easy to understand how important Arese Lucini considered the unification of Italy, as a way of reclaiming the history and accomplishments of its people.⁶ This attitude was determined by the Italians' self-identification as an

³ Francesco Arese Lucini, *A Trip to the Prairies and the Interior of North America (1837-1838)* (New York: Harbor Press, 1936) p. 46. Italics mine.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

⁶ Between the 1830s and the 1850s the cause of Italy's unification made Italians, and especially the very idea of Italy, very popular in America. The fate of Italy was also very dear to republican Americans, primarily because the *Bel Paese* was seen as a nation enslaved by the great European powers, which for centuries deprived it of the inalienable right to determine its own destiny. This ideal, first introduced by Italian immigrants in America—such as Filippo Mazzei, Lorenzo Da Ponte, Giuseppe Ceracchi, and even Castiglioni, who though he only stayed for a few years in the U.S., had

‘oppressed’ population, a condition Italian travellers also observed in the fate of Native Americans. As will be discussed later in this study, this apparent empathy would fade once the unification of the Italian country was accomplished and the newly formed nation would be required to embrace colonialism, itself, in order to acquire the status of a *de-facto* European power, thereby moving from the position of oppressed to that of oppressor.⁷

Antonio Caccia, a medicine graduate, travelled to California in 1848 when the echoes of the Gold Rush eventually reached the Italian peninsula.⁸ The reality he encountered upon his arrival was not quite as striking as the accounts of the verdant land of plenty and overnight wealth of which he had heard so much in the past; instead, he was confronted by a rather grim picture:

There were puddles here and there, swamps, ponds and often stagnant waters: the vegetation was a real wasteland. The men who were looking for gold, appeared much more worthy of compassion than envy. Pale, emaciated, and naked from head to toe and squelching in the mud, those gold-maniacs worked worse than those sentenced to jail, without ever lifting their eyes from the ground. They hoed underneath four, eight, twelve feet deep; they flushed the shovel in the loose material and then riddled it, all with a transfixed gaze like a real Argus.⁹ When they could see the blessed golden nuggets, their breathing got crazily heavier, when they could not, they sighed for the lost time[...]. If this gold craze continues as it is no one will want to know about agriculture anymore [...] gold turned out to be doubly fatal to the country, firstly because, seduced by greater profits, no one wanted to work on rural settlements any longer; and secondly because gold introduced the most tremendous social vices: sweet idleness, gambling, lust, ambition, the yearning for domination and arrogance.¹⁰

prolonged contact with politicians such as Jefferson and Washington —was subsequently fuelled by political exiles in America, such as Giuseppe Mazzini, and Garibaldi. Historian Andrew J. Torrielli defined these Italians as “men of superior calibre... and as such they were bound to be welcomed by kindred souls in America”. Andrew J. Torrielli, *Italian Opinion on America; As Revealed by Italian Travellers, 1850-1890* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 5. Italy represented also a much-coveted commercial destination for many Americans, who already traded with the Kingdoms of Sicily and Sardinia, and hoped that a free and united Italy would bring more extensive market exchanges. Last, but not least, Italy was considered a cradle of culture and art, and revered by Americans as the home of all things beautiful.

⁷ See Chapter 4.4.

⁸ During the 1840s, there was a hiatus in the arrival of Italian travellers in North America, because Italy was going through a period of revolutionary change. Italian Liberals from northern Italy wanted independence from the Austrian Empire, and from 1843 to 1847, small, but frequent, republican insurrections took place throughout the north of the peninsula. Finally, thanks to the strategic efforts of Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, the first Italian War of Independence took place in 1848. It was unsuccessful, but for the following 13 years, it triggered a series of other Independence wars, carried out by an alliance of a volunteer army led by Garibaldi and the Monarchic militia commanded by the Kingdom of Sardinia. Eventually, Italy became a unified country in 1861 (although it did not become a republic until the end of World War II). See Franco della Peruta, *L'Italia del Risorgimento* (Roma: Franco Angeli editore, 1996).

⁹ In Greek mythology, Argus constructed the *Argo* for the Argonauts, aided by the goddess Athena.

¹⁰ “Qua e là v'erano pozzanghere, paduli, e spesso laghetti d' acque stagnanti; la vegetazione era un vero nulla. Gli uomini che vi cercavano l'oro apparivano assai più degni di compassione che d' invidia. Pallidi, smunti, rabbuffati e nudi da capo a piedi quegli auromaniaci lavoravano peggio che condannati da galera senza mai levar l'occhio da terra. Zappavano sotto sotto a quattro, a otto, a dodici piedi di profondità; tiravano col badile la materia smossa e poi crivellavano collo sguardo fisso fisso, e

When Leonetto Cipriani, a future senator of the Kingdom of Italy, reached Courthouse and Jail Rock in Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, he could not help but think that they reminded him precisely of Saint Angel's Castle in Rome.¹¹ Cipriani's realisation is only the further proof of how every traveller had the same irrepressible need to interpret the novel and the 'exotic' with the mindset of their original culture. Cipriani, just like most other travellers in this survey, was proud of his own culture, and each time he stumbled across an 'Italian' in the West, he did not hesitate to express his joy at an unexpected encounter with a compatriot. In Nebraska, Cipriani found a group of emigrant tombs with Italian names, and finally near Fort Lawrence he met a rather enigmatic character: the illegitimate son of Napoleonic General Andrea Massena, who lived in the West as a sort of Italian 'King of the Wild Frontier'¹²:

Only Leonetto continued on the path along the river and at short distance from the Fort he found a camp of Indians. In front of a tent there was a white man dressed the Indian way, in suede deerskin, but judging from his physiognomy it was evident that he did not look American. He mistook him for Canadian and started a conversation with him, but what was his surprise when he learned that he was the natural son of the famous Marshal Massena, not recognized nor legitimized, but brought up in the family with the other legitimate children, and who, humiliated by such position of inferiority [...] had come to America and had settled among the Indians, where he had also taken a wife; he said that he was ashamed to confess that he was happy in his condition of "savage" and he would not go back to Europe, not even for a million.¹³

The frequency with which Cipriani meets other Italians in the West shows that, in addition to visiting, a considerable number of them had started to permanently settle there, which has been confirmed by the in-depth study on migrant settlers in the West by Andrew F. Rolle, published at the end of the 1960s.¹⁴ The analysis of Cipriani's and previous travellers' narratives suggests that these travellers offered portrayals of westward expansion through a perspective that was not merely foreign, but distinctively Italian, as well as providing an array of useful references and

da veri Arghi. Se vi scorgevano i benedetti granellini o granelloni d' oro, respiravano con gusto da matti, se no sospiravano il tempo perduto[...]Se cosi la continua, codesta mania dell'oro, nessuno vorrà più sapere di agricoltura[...] Al contrario l' oro tornava doppiamente funesto al paese e si perché niuno non voleva più lavorare alle colonie agricole, sedotto da un maggior guadagno; e si perché coll' oro si venivano introducendo i più tremendi vizi sociali: il dolce farniente, il giuoco, il lusso, l'ambizione, la libidine di dominio e la prepotenza." Antonio Caccia, *Europa ed America: Scene della mia Vita*, (Munich: Giorgio Franz Tipografo-Editore, 1850), pp. 407-426.

¹¹ Leonetto Cipriani, *Avventure della mia vita* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1934), p. 102.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 103

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Andrew F. Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 153.

insights into the history of early Italian communities in Mid-western and Western America.

Another illustrious Italian, pioneering anthropologist Giovanni Capellini, often cast aside his scientific approach to indulge in a decidedly anti-colonial attitude. Interestingly, his observations turned sourer the more westward he traveled, as is evident in his description of a group of Ponca Indians when, among other things, he found himself questioning their gender, just as many other Italian commentators had done before (and still others would do afterwards):

Walking among those picturesque groups, to admire the strange styles of their attire, I imagined myself to be attending one of our carnival scenes. [...] *At first it was my great curiosity and uncertainty to know if I was dealing with a warrior or with a woman; because neither the lack of beard that is often ripped hair by hair at the age of puberty, nor the difference in the hair, and nor the buffalo robe used indiscriminately by both sexes, allowed me to make head or tail of anything [...]* After asking some questions to the interpreters, and noticing the small differences in the ornaments, I recognized that women had a small circle or a turquoise star printed on their forehead or chest. (Emphasis mine).¹⁵

The fact that the narrator recognized women from men only by their ornaments might appear an exaggeration. Perhaps surprisingly, he was not the only one to experience and report such concerns. Other travellers would have the same problem as he did, as we will see in later sections, several Italian journalists once they stood face to face with Buffalo Bill's Native performers.¹⁶

If Capellini was puzzled by the native inhabitants, he was vitriolic in his remarks about the growing negative influence of white settlers, while on a research trip to an Omaha reservation:

It will not take long, and before the civilizing missions will turn the Omahas into honest and skilled farmers, *the Yankee greedy for territory*, which, however, is still in possession of those ancient owners, will try to persuade them to withdraw from the surroundings of Black Bird, to blend in with neighbouring tribes. If the advice does not suffice and the poor Omahas do not show themselves willing to change their home once again, *after being forced into committing some crime against*

¹⁵ "Passeggiando fra quei gruppi pittoreschi, per ammirare le strane fogge degli abbigliamenti, m'immaginavo di assistere a una delle nostre scene carnevalesche[...] Da principio grande era la mia curiosità e incertezza di sapere se avevo a che fare con un guerriero o con una donna; poiché la mancanza della barba che viene strappata a pelo a pelo all'epoca della pubertà, la niuna differenza nella pettinatura, ed il *buffalo robe* usato indistintamente da ambi i sessi non mi permettevano di capirne un'acca[...] Dopo aver fatto alcune domande agli interpreti, tenendo conto delle piccole differenze negli ornamenti, riconobbi che le donne in generale avevano un dischetto o stella di color turchino stampata sulla fronte o sul petto". Giovanni Capellini, *Ricordi di un viaggio scientifico in America* (Bologna: Tipografia Giuseppe Vitali alle Scienze, 1867), pp. 177-178. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶ See Chapter 5.8.

*whites, the latter will find a way to drive against them an armed expedition, and destroy them under pretext of civilizing them....*¹⁷

A decade or so later, Francesco Varvaro Pojero, a young Sicilian bourgeois who hopped on a train on the first Transcontinental Railroad and travelled all the way to Wyoming, was rather underwhelmed by the sights of the town of Cheyenne which in his view was “afflicted by *roughs*, villains that plagued the entire West, living off robberies, and committing the most heinous crimes.”¹⁸ His bewilderment and dissatisfaction could not be lessened even by the leisure that the McDaniels’ theatre-saloon offered:¹⁹

Walking around the town, I saw several casinos, various billiard halls, and many bar-rooms, where there was music. I also saw a theatre, the theatre Daniel (sic.) whose signboard said: *Temple of Mirth and Beauty—strictly moral*—I entered. It is a warehouse with a row of boxes, built so as to cover almost entirely the auditorium. They put me in one of those and, as I was sitting down, a woman, ugly as sin, showed up to me; she was dressed a bit like a ballerina and a bit like a gypsy, with a garden-shaped hairdo, her face was crimson as the rocks of the *Pike’s Peak*.²⁰

Undertones of disappointment can also be traced in the book, *Un Viaggio nel Far West Americano* (A Trip in the American Far West) by Giovanni Vigna dal Ferro; this was a journalistic pamphlet about the ‘Far West’ published in Bologna in 1881.²¹ Interestingly, this is one of the first books on the Italian literary market to directly and exclusively address the “American West” as a topic in itself, hinting at a rising interest in Western themes among a steadily growing Italian readership. The sketches of Western life he presents are riddled with dissatisfied remarks, evidence of the

¹⁷ “Non andrà molto, e prima ancora che l’incivilimento delle missioni abbia fatto sentire il suo benefico influsso, rendendo gli Omahas onesti ed abili coltivatori, l’Yankee ingordo del territorio, del quale sono tuttavia in possesso quelli antichi padroni, cercherà di persuaderli a ritirarsi nei dintorni di Black Bird per amalgamarsi con tribù limitrofe. Qualora il consiglio non basti e i poveri Omahas non si mostrino disposti a cambiare una volta ancora la loro dimora, dopo averli spinti incontro a qualche delitto verso i bianchi si troverà modo di fare contro di essi una spedizione armata per distruggerli col pretesto di incivilirli [...]”, *ibid.*, p. 186. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ “Cheyenne era funestata dai roughs, canaglia che desolava tutto l’Ovest, vivendo di rapine e commettendo i più atroci delitti”. Francesco Varvaro Pojero, *Una corsa nel Nuovo Mondo*, Vol. 2 (Milano: Fratelli Treves Eaditori, 1878), p. 43.

¹⁹ McDaniels’ Theatre was a noted gambling saloon, on present-day Pioneer Avenue. In 1876, James McDaniels owned two establishments in Cheyenne and, for a few months, one in Deadwood, where Wild Bill Hickok was murdered on August 2nd, 1876. McDaniels’ Deadwood theatre burned to the ground at the end of the same month. See Campton Bell, “The Early Theatres, Cheyenne, Wyoming, 1867-1881,” *Annals of Wyoming*, vol. 25 (January 1953), pp. 3-21.

²⁰ “Il teatro Daniels, Chiamato nell’ insegna —*Temple of myrth and beauty*—Cioè tempio dell’allegria e della bellezza, rigorosamente morale—Entro. E’ un magazzino con una fila di palchi, costruiti in modo da coprire quasi interamente la platea. Mi ficcano in un palco, appena seduto mi si presenta una donna, brutta fino a fare schifo, vestita un po’ da ballerina, un po’ da zingara, con un giardino in testa per pettinatura, e colla faccia vermiglia come le rocce del *Pike’s Peak*”, Francesco Varvaro Pojero, *Una corsa nel Nuovo Mondo*, Vol. 2, pp. 41-42.

²¹ Some excerpts from this book appeared in the Italian newspaper *La Patria*. See Giuseppe Massara, *Viaggiatori Italiani in America (1860-1970)*, (Roma: Biblioteca di studi americani, 1976), p. 49.

discrepancy between some elements of the fictional Far West that the author himself (and, by extension, his readers) had expected to find and the reality that he witnessed:

How many times, my beautiful female readers, have you happened to hear about the Pacific railroad stopped by countless herds of buffaloes, with its assaults by the savages, so that the carriages became travelling fortresses, and the passengers who became soldiers by force had to defend themselves against the barbarian attackers by blows of a rifle? All of these battles that you might ascribe to the imagination of some fanciful traveller, are now distant legends. Today, there is no longer a buffalo, even if you were willing to pay its weight in gold, and all the red skins that are seen on the railway, are but pitiful beings, ragged and miserable, begging for some money or for a gift of a bottle of *whiskey*. Really, in this respect, we were disappointed in our expectations[...].²²

Similarly unmoved, Carlo Gardini, an Italian diplomat in America, provided an account of a performance of a Wild West show he attended in St. Louis, Missouri:

You see the ironies of the world! Little more than half a century has passed since the Indians lived as masters in this place, and now you only see them reappear in the guise of acrobats to entertain the *pale faces*—a name which they gave to the Europeans before and then to the Americans—[the Indians] are predestined by the laws of nature to the annihilation of their race. I learned in the programme that the notorious trappers, Texas Jack, Texas Ned and Buffalo Bill, were among the most renowned champions of the troupe. Here are three sanguinary men, who, after having stained themselves with so much human blood and after causing so much terror, I saw not only applauded, but arousing the admiration of the audience, particularly of female spectators, for their athletic forms and for their skills in various exercises.[...] This show impressed me without entertaining me[...].²³

This review refers to a show that Gardini claims to have attended in a St. Louis theatre, on an indefinite date between 1878 and 1886, which featured “red skins of the Kaw and Comanche tribes” as well as “the trappers Texas Jack, Texas Ned and

²² “Quante volte mie belle lettrici non vi è avvenuto di sentir parlare della ferrovia del Pacifico. Arrestata da innumerevoli mandrie di buffali (sic.), coi relativi assalti dei selvaggi, tanto che i vagoni erano cambiati in altrettante fortezze ambulanti che i passeggeri divenuti soldati per forza dovevano difendere contro I barbari assalitori a colpi di carabina? Tutte queste battaglie che si crederebbero il parto dell’immaginazione di qualche fantastico viaggiatore, sono oggi tradizioni lontane. Oggi non si trova più un buffalo a pagarlo a peso d’ oro e tutte le pelli rosse che si veggono sulla ferrovia, non sono che disgraziati, laceri e miserabili che vengono a chiedere l’elemosina di qualche soldo o il regalo di una bottiglia di *whiskey*. Davvero sotto questo rapporto noi fummo delusi nelle nostre aspettative [...]. Giovanni Vigna dal Ferro, *Un viaggio nel Far West Americano*, (Bologna: Monti, 1881), pp. 14-15.

²³ “Vedete le ironie del mondo! Era passato poco più di mezzo secolo dacché gli Indiani dimoravano come padroni in questo Stato, ed ora soltanto vi ricomparivano sotto le spoglie di saltimbanchi per divertire le facce pallide—appellativo che essi diedero agli Europei prima e agli Americani poi, predestinati dalle leggi della natura all’ annientamento della loro razza. Dal programma appresi che i famigerati trappers Texas Jack, Texas Ned e Buffalo Bill figuravano fra i più rinomati campioni della troupe. Ecco qui tre sanguinari che dopo essersi imbrattati di tanto sangue umano, e dopo aver sparso tanto terrore, io vedevo non solo applauditi, ma per le loro forme atletiche e per la loro bravura nei vari esercizi destare l’ ammirazione degli spettatori, e in grado superlativo quella delle gentili spettatrici[...].questo spettacolo, che fecemi impressione senza divertirmi[...].”, Carlo Gardini, *Gli Stati Uniti*, vol. II (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1887), p. 16. About Gardini see also the essay by Francesco Surdich, “Gli Indiani nei ricordi di viaggio di Carlo Gardini”, in Fedora Giordano (ed.), *Gli Indiani d’ America e l’ Italia* vol.2, (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2002), pp. 51-60

Buffalo Bill". But what exactly was the show that the Italian traveller observed? Due to the lack of a precise date and incongruent details it is hard to say for certain.²⁴ At any rate, Gardini's opinion of the show he attended demonstrates how audiences, especially foreign ones with limited knowledge of the historical events of the West, were susceptible to dime novels' alluring myths. Gardini's review subtly criticizes the way Americans entertained themselves. He was shocked by the enjoyment people could draw from the deeds of individuals that he judged to be mere brutes. The average late 19th century Italian bourgeois, including Gardini, favoured leisures such as opera, drama, and classical music; the fact that Americans were fond of other types of entertainment, so dissimilar, implied that they had twisted ethics, as well as a lowered sense of aesthetics, and were therefore, in this respect, inferior to Italians.²⁵

Whether Gardini attended the original Buffalo Bill's Wild West or not, the description and opinions conveyed in his book remain significant for the purposes of this study. Moreover, the illustration on pages 28-29 with the caption *La danza di guerra degli Indiani* (The Indians' war dance) appears to be the first lithograph of a Wild West show to circulate within Italy.

²⁴ Gardini wrote that he attended the performance after seeing colourful advertisements outside the Southern Hotel, which, according to press reports, was burnt to the ground in 1877 and not rebuilt until 1881. The Buffalo Bill Grave and Museum record of Cody's performances indicates that he acted in St. Louis theatres only in 1879, 1880, 1881, and 1882 (other performances took place outdoors). Gardini cannot have been at the Southern Hotel in 1879 and 1880, but the remaining dates, 1881 and 1882, are also problematic in terms of congruence with other events: Texas Jack died in 1880 and 'Texas Ned' (Ned Buntline) had already left the troupe in 1872. Cody toured the USA with "Doc" William F. Carver in the 'Wild West Rocky Mountain Prairie exhibition' and it is possible that Gardini attended this show and misread its performers in the English brochure or perhaps his memory failed him and led him to believe that those 'big names' had been the real showmen. He may also have seen an early combination show with Buffalo Bill and "Captain Jack" Crawford, the "poet scout", or even attended a fake Wild West Show, in which an imposter masqueraded as Cody.

²⁵ See Chapter 4.5.

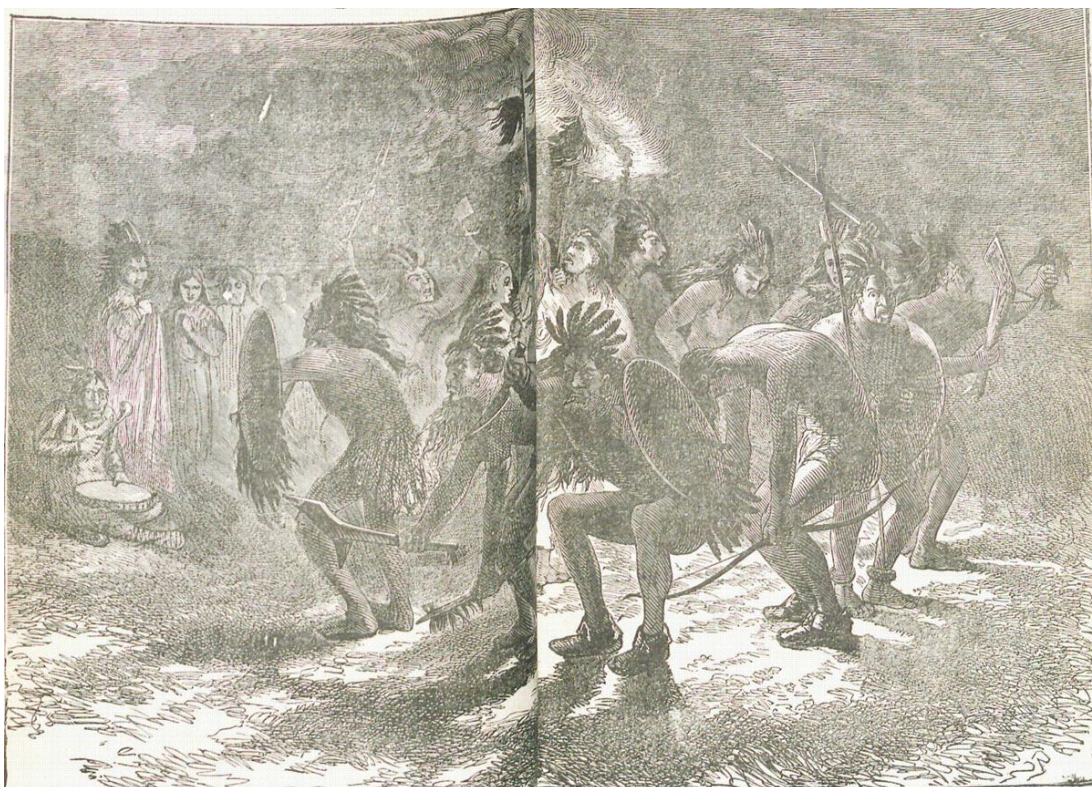


Figure 1: “La danza di guerra degli Indiani”, Gardini, *Gli Stati Uniti*. Vol. II p. 28-29.
Courtesy of the British Library.

In addition to the alleged spectacle of Buffalo Bill, Gardini came across other ‘emblems’ of the ‘Wild West’, like cowboys, who he depicts in rather neutral tones:

Cowboys, nearly modern-day centaurs, spend their entire existence on horseback; they eat and go to bed outdoors in the middle of their herds, i.e. on the ranch, and acquire as a result of this kind of lifestyle an imprint so hard and wild that it reminds you of those *Gauchos* of the *Plata*. Armed to the teeth to defend themselves, since earlier times, from the attacks of the Red-skins, they show a phenomenal talent in the so-called *round-up*, which occurs one or more times a year, and consists of choosing and allocating the livestock of each individual owner.²⁶

Gardini, however, later specifies in his pages that the cowboy lifestyle was slowly disappearing, noting that Cincinnati and Chicago half a century before were populated by cowboys who were now gone, and eventually coming to the conclusion that “[...]within few years we will see many of the Far Western lands populated and civilized just as those which arose on the left bank of the Mississippi River.”²⁷ In

²⁶ “I *cow-boys* quasi novelli centauri, passan l’intera loro esistenza a cavallo, mangiano e si coricano all’ aperto nel mezzo delle loro mandre (sic.) ossia nei *ranchos*, ed acquistano per effetto di questo genere di vita un’impronta sì fiera sì selvaggia, che ti ricorda quella dei *Gauchos* della *Plata*. Armati sino ai denti per difendersi massime nei tempi anteriori dalle aggressioni delle *Pelli-rosse*, spiegano una bravura fenomenale nel cosiddetto *round-up*, il quale ha luogo una o più volte all’anno e consiste nello scegliere e ripartire i capi di bestiami dei singoli proprietari”, Carlo Gardini *Gli Stati Uniti*, Vol. II, pp. 72-73.

²⁷ “[...] in pochi anni, molte terre del Far West le vedremo popolate, incivilite al pari di quelle, che si estendono oltre la riva sinistra del Mississippi (sic.)”, *ibid.*, p. 76.

this, the Italian traveller seems to anticipate a crucial theme in the history of the American West which became impossible to ignore: the disappearance of the wilderness, and the end of the frontier — a transition which, within a few years, would make the careers of its main popularisers: Frederick Jackson Turner and William F. Cody, who voiced this concept in very different, though equally famous, ways.²⁸ In this sense, Gardini's statements could be evidence that "Frontier anxiety", to use David Wrobel's term, was already in the air between the 1870s and 1880s, so much so that even a tourist like Gardini, such a fleeting, though perceptive, observer, could spot it.²⁹

²⁸ See Richard White's essay, "Frederic Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill", in Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, ed. by James R. Grossman, *The Frontier in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 7-66.

²⁹ For an investigation of the concept of Frontier anxiety, see David Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

**Chapter Three: Shaping the ‘True’ ‘Wild West’:
Feuilletons, Dime Novels, Illustrated Travel Magazines and Italian readers
before Buffalo Bill**

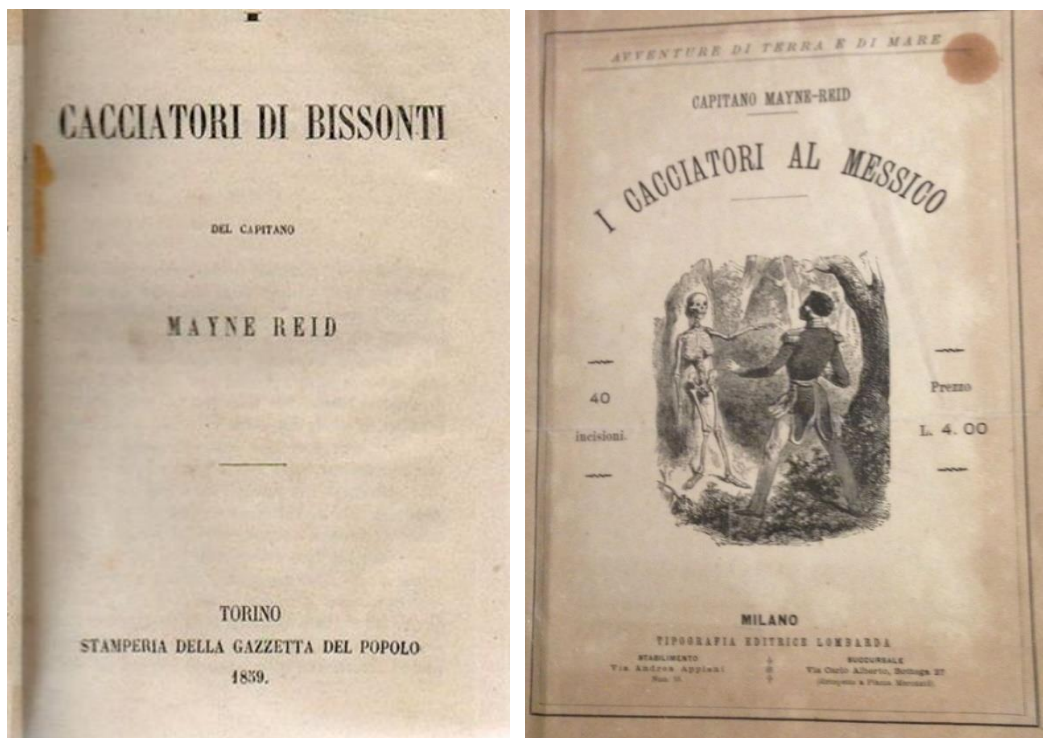


Figure 2 (left): I cacciatori di Bissonti, Stamperia Gazzetta del Popolo, Turin, 1859. Courtesy of Biblioteca Civica Imperia.

Figure 3 (right): I cacciatori al Messico, Tipografia Lombarda, 1878. Courtesy of Biblioteca Sormani, Milan.

Coeval with the circulation of travel narratives in the literary market of (pre- and post-unified) Italy were a plethora of other sources that were becoming increasingly available, many of them in translation, to a growing literate readership. After the trailblazing works of Chateaubriand and Cooper were translated into Italian in the 1820s, they quickly became a sensation. Cooper, for instance, often earned biographical portraits, appraisals, and reviews in literary magazines such as *Il Raccoglitore Italiano e Straniero*, and later in *Nuova Antologia*.¹ There also appeared works of fiction authored by Italian missionaries, among which stands out the tale of the *Savage Watomika* by Father Antonio Bresciano, published in a collection called *Narrative e ragionamenti etnografici* (Narratives and Ethnographical Reckonings), in

¹ *Raccoglitore Italiano e straniero*, anno 2, parte 1, (Milano: Ant. Fort. Stella e figli, 1835), pp. 266-274; *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti* (Direzione della Nuova antologia: 1883), p. 616.

1861.² Another ‘Western’ protagonist in the Italian literary market of the second half of the 1800s was French author Gustave Aimard, whose novels were translated and published in a pioneering editorial series called *Biblioteca di Viaggi illustrata* (Illustrated Travels paperback library), in Milan.³ The ‘pioneering’ editors were mainly located in Milan and the most notable among them were Luigi Nervetti, the first Italian publisher of Cooper’s novels, and Gaspare Truffi—who, in addition to publishing Cooper, also published several different ‘adventure authors’ like Defoe and Irving. The editors Muggiani and Guigoni—who published Aimard, the ubiquitous Cooper, Mayne Reid, and, though not related to westerns, Harriett Beecher Stowe—were just as pioneering, especially in their insightful intuition of catering to an audience which differed from the classical ‘middle class’ target of most other Italian editors.

Of all the writers of western fiction, Mayne Reid was the one who enjoyed the most remarkable success in Italy. Seven different publishers contended for the publication of the novels by the Irish-born writer. The first of his novels published in Italian was *I Cacciatori di bissoni* (Adventures in Search of a White Buffalo), put out as early as 1859 by the newspaper *La Gazzetta del popolo* from Turin—which, at the time, was still the capital of the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia. After national unification, other editors became interested in publishing Reid’s fiction: the editor Sonzogno of Milan, who in 1868 published *I cacciatori di Capigliature* (The Scalp Hunters), and the aforementioned Muggiani and Guigoni who, in 1878, published two of his novels: *Il Capo Bianco* (The White Chief), and *Il Re dei Seminoli* (Osceola the Seminole).

Also in 1878, the editor Tipografia Lombarda published *Alla caccia dei bissoni* (The Hunters’ Feast) and *I cacciatori al Messico* (The Rifle Rangers, or Adventures in Southern Mexico); eight years later editor Treves published *La schioppettata mortale* (The Death Shot), while the Verona editorial group Nuova Arena published a *feuilleton* edition of *La regina delle pelli rosse* (The White Squaw) between December 1885 and February 1886. While some of these publications were aimed at a middle-class readership and were released in elegant hard-bound editions made of quality paper and good printing details—in particular the products from editors Sonzogno, Treves and Tipografia Lombarda—others

² Antonio Bresciano, *Il Selvaggio Watomika*, appendix to *La casa di ghiaccio*, in *Narrative e ragionamenti etnografici* (Milano: Tipografia e libreria arcivescovile, 1861), Cited in Gallo and Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

targeted a more popular audience of newly literate readers and were modeled on the dime novels produced by the American publisher Erastus Beadle, (publisher of the series Malaeska), and emulating in particular the earliest version of his collection (Beadle's Dime Novels rather than the Half Dime Library).⁴ The difference in price between the two types of publication also made this distinction unmistakable: the cost of the hardbound copies was 4 Liras, while Guigoni's paperback editions cost only 50 cents. It could be safely argued, therefore, that among all Italian editors of popular fiction, Guigoni was the one whose activity constituted an 'Italian response to Beadle'. Guigoni began by publishing cheap editions of classical works from the Italian and European literary tradition (Dante, Hegel, Machiavelli, Goldoni). At the end of the 1870s, he became engaged in the lucrative business of the serial publishing of Cooper's novels, starting with *The Crater* which was translated in Italian as *Il Robinson del Pacifico* (Robinson of the Pacific). Once he realized the great potential of adventure and western fiction, he then embarked in the successful publication of Mayne Reid's, as well as Gustave Aimard's novels.⁵ All the publications within Guigoni's 'economic library' had a soft cover, tinted in a powder blue colour. That particular colouring was not arbitrary; it served to conceal the flaws and irregularities of the low-quality paper material.⁶ The illustrations in Guigoni's paperbacks also appeared to be of evident lower quality than those of the editions by Treves and Sonzogno, which were often reproduced straight from Beadle's original editions.

⁴ See Christine Bold's essay: "Malaeska's Revenge; or, the Dime Novel Tradition in Popular Fiction", Richard Aquila (ed.), *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 24-32.

⁵ The Italian translations of Reid's and Aimard's works were carried out by Ezio Colombo, who was contracted with both Guigoni and Muggiani during the 1870s and 1880s, and could translate from French and English into Italian and specialized in American topics. Biographical information on Colombo is virtually non-existent. Research into his Italian publications shows that, in addition to translations, he authored essays on the voyages of Columbus and Cortez.

⁶ The pages were bound folded in stacks of four, and the reader had to cut the pages open with a paper cutter. The copy I consulted at the Braidense Library in Milan still had several pages uncut.

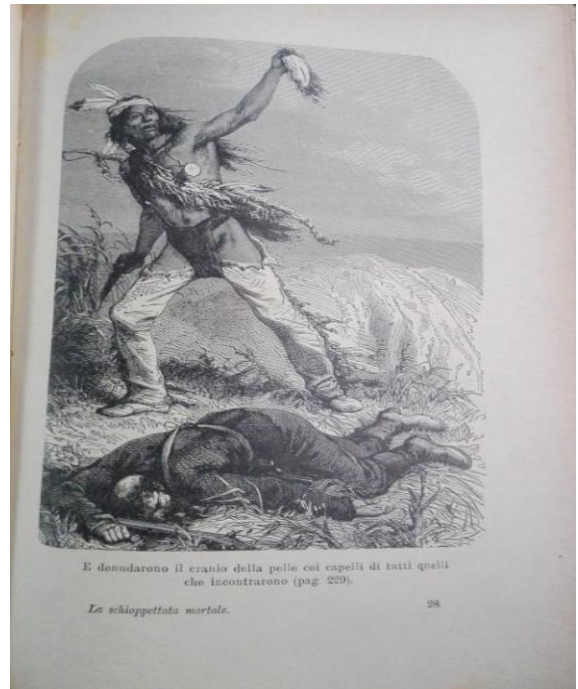
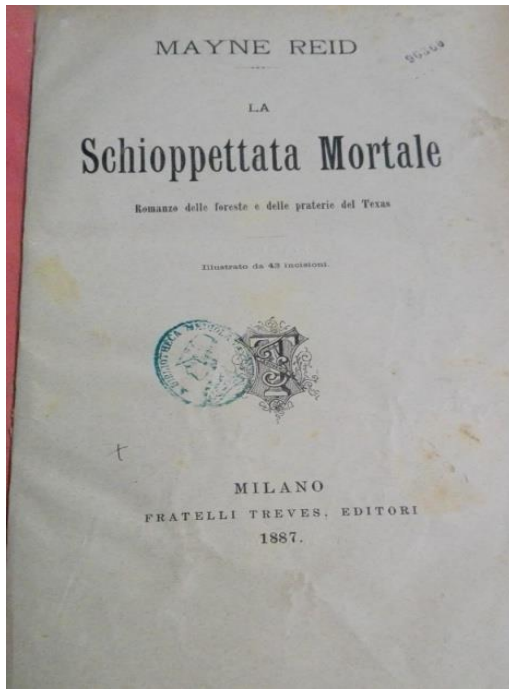


Figure 4: The hardbound edition of the Death Shot by editor Sonzogno, Milan 1887. Courtesy of Biblioteca Sormani, Milan.

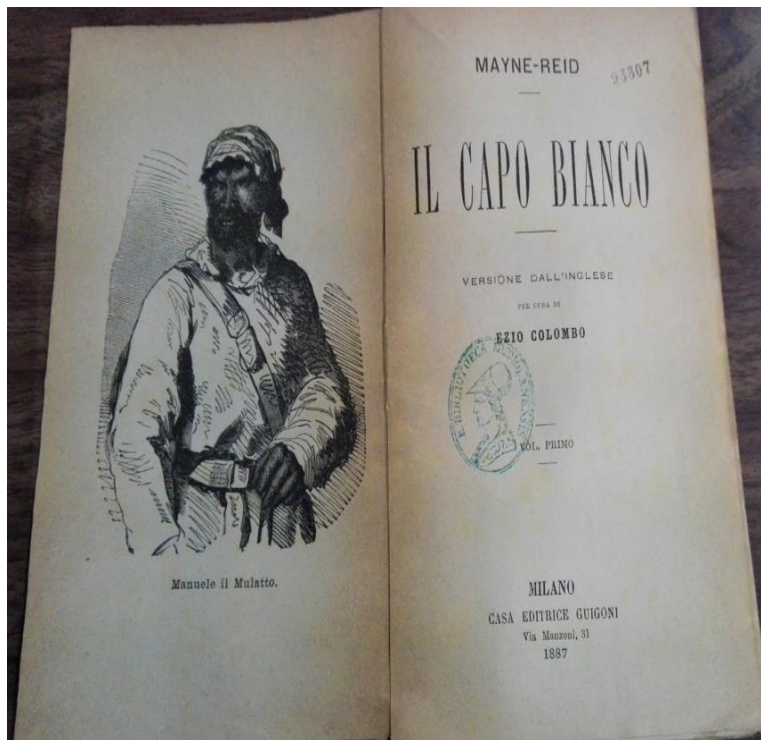
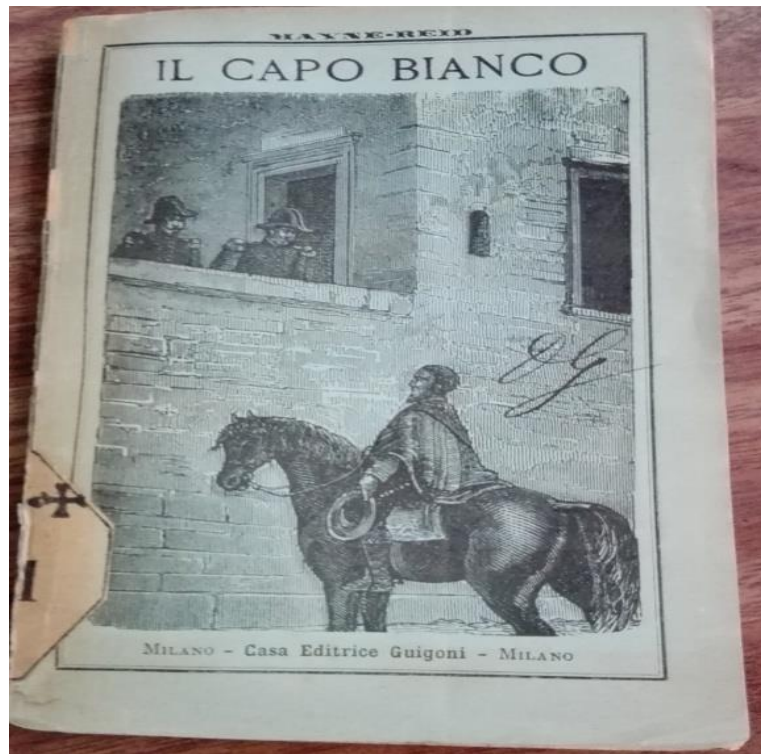


Figure 5: The affordable paperback version of The White Chief/Il Capo Bianco by editor Guigoni. Courtesy of Biblioteca Braidense, Milan.

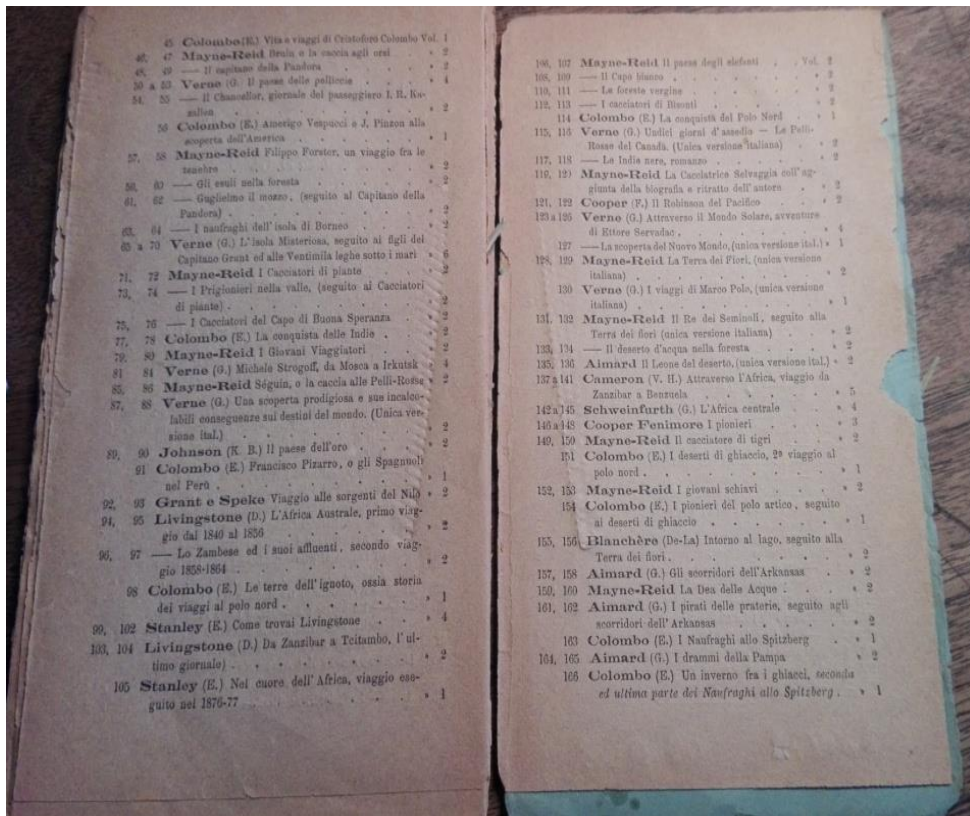
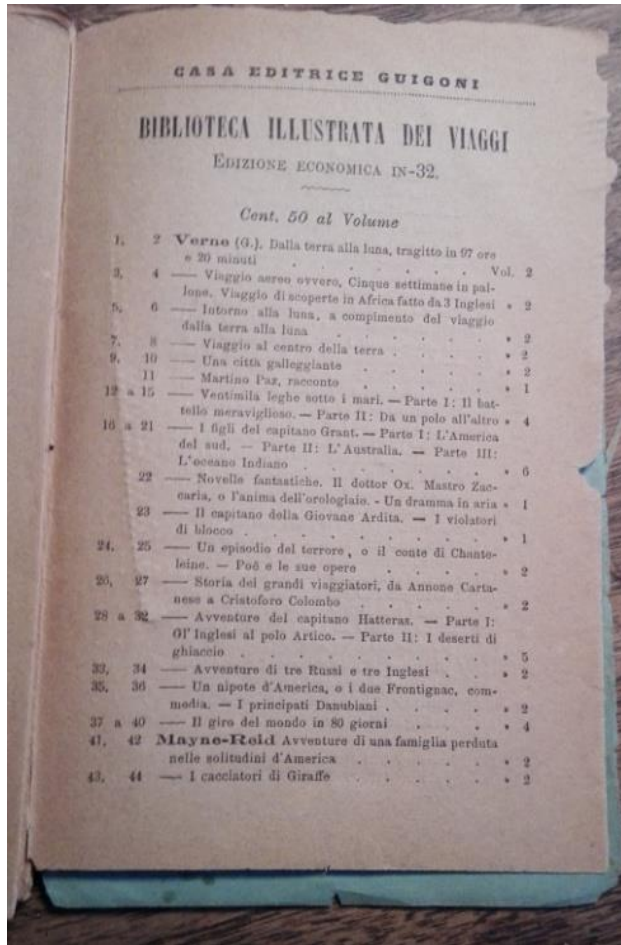


Figure 6: Catalogue of publications in Guigoni's economic Illustrated Travel Library collection (1878). Reid's and Aimard's books are among the most published works (i.e., more than Cooper). Courtesy of Braidense Library, Milan.

One of the reasons behind Mayne Reid's and Gustave Aimard's extraordinary Italian success—leading, as will be analysed later in this study, both authors to inspire Emilio Salgari's western fiction—was the exaggerated claims of authenticity that the authors and (more often) the Italian editors boasted in their books. Editor Tipografia Lombarda wrote on the 1878 edition of Mayne Reid's *Alla caccia dei bissoni* (The Hunters' Feast): "Captain Mayne Reid has visited all the countries he describes [...] this writer combines in his work, the attractions of the novel along with the veracity of the description of types and customs. Such details, as well as the geographical and historical ones, are rigorously correct, there being no romance in his writings other than the adventures of the heroes he paints with the magic colours of his fine palette."⁷ Similarly, in the publisher's note to readers of the 1878 edition of *Il Leone del Deserto* (The Desert Home), the Milanese editor explained:

Gustave Aimard was more fortunate than his predecessors. Separated for many years from the civilized world, he lived the nomadic life in the middle of the prairies, near the Indians, adopted son of one of their mighty nations, sharing their dangers and fights, accompanying them everywhere, the carbine in one hand, the knife in the other [...] The works of Gustave Aimard are therefore not novels; it is his life he tells us, his disappointed hopes, his adventurous journeys. The costumes he paints were his own, the Indians he talked about he knew. In a word he has seen [...].⁸

Such declarations must not be taken as exceptional, indeed, as scholar Nathaniel Lewis states in his work about the role of authenticity in Western American literature, "virtually every author in every western genre from novel to tourist manifesto claimed that his or her work was 'true', an accurate representation of the western landscape and its people".⁹ This was necessary because writing about the West presented the issue of realistically describing what was by definition out-of-the-ordinary and hardly accessible, as opposed to an Eastern environment which was

⁷ "Il capitano Mayne Reid ha visitato tutti i paesi che descrive[...] questo scrittore accoppia né i suoi lavori, alle attrattive del romanzo, la verità della descrizione dei tipi e dei costumi. Tutti i particolari che si riferiscono a ciò, come pure quelli di geografie, di storia e delle produzioni, sono rigorosamente esatti, non essendovi di romanzesco né i suoi scritti altro che la narrazione delle avventure degli eroi che dipinge coi magici colori della sua tavolozza", Mayne Reid, *Alla caccia dei bissoni*, (Milano: Tipografia Lombarda, 1878), p. 1.

⁸ "Gustavo Aimard fu più fortunato dei suoi predecessori. Separato per molti anni dal mondo incivilito, visse della vita nomade in mezzo alle praterie, vicino agli indiani, figlio adottivo d'una delle possenti nazioni, dividendo i loro pericoli ed i loro combattimenti, accompagnandoli da per tutto, la carabina in mano, il coltello nell'altra. [...] Non sono quindi romanzi i lavori di Gustavo Aimard; è la sua vita ch'egli racconta, le sue speranze deluse, i suoi viaggi avventurosi. I costumi ch'egli dipinge erano i suoi, gli indiani di cui parla li ha conosciuti. In una parola egli ha veduto[...]". Gustave Aimard, *Il Leone del deserto, Scene della vita indiana nelle praterie*, (Milano: Bontà e Comp., 1878), pp. 5-8, cited in Gallo e Bonomi, *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 29.

⁹ Nathaniel Lewis, "Truth or Consequences: Projecting Authenticity in the 1830s", William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis (eds.), *True West: Authenticity and the American West*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 23.

largely well known and clearly identifiable.¹⁰ Moreover, as Lewis maintains, authenticity signposted the author's presence in the actual West, thus validating his ability to mimetically reproduce reality, conferring authoritativeness on both himself and his work.¹¹ Still, these premises were not only true for the American context and American writers but, as the quotes above suggest, were also being applied to European authors and editors of western writing. Therefore, the underlying claim of authenticity played a paramount role also in establishing the fortune of these publications in Italy. Specifically in the Italian context, this thirst for veracity had been established in the readership by a long 19th-century dominated by travellers' diaries, which, along with historical fiction, had been staple best-selling publications in the Italian literary market.¹² For this reason, the inflated claims of 'thorough exactitude', and the denial of the 'novelistic' components of these western stories, not only showed conformity to the dogmas of the western canon, but revealed the existence of a stigma attached to literature based on the fantastic in Italian publishing and thus in the literary market of the time. Therefore, within such parameters, the fictional had to become, in a way, truer than reality to obtain validation. Indeed, a pattern is suggested in which the fanciful, or merely entertaining, component of this type of literature was more widely accepted in other European and North American countries, whereas in Italy this genre had to display an obligatory moral backbone of authenticity to become well-received among the public. This is connected to an early debate on literature and a sense of nationhood, wherein certain genres were privileged by Italian institutions for their alleged capacity to inspire youth (and, generally, budding readers) to become upright and devoted citizens.¹³ In order to gain widespread approval, an inherent sense of didacticism had to pass through even the works which had been conceived to be naturally more frivolous, such as adventure novels; so when the didactic element was not there it was in the publishers' best interest to take care of it. It is evident, that in this climate Buffalo Bill's Wild West—centring around the themes of realism, authenticity, and didacticism—found a fertile ground in Italy. The pattern of establishing authenticity persisted to the point that, well into the 20th century, Italian writers of adventure and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹² Emilio Franzina, *Dall'Arcadia in America: attività letteraria ed emigrazione transoceanica in Italia: (1850-1940)*, (Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), pp. 75-88.

¹³ Paola Martinuzzi, "Children's Literature", in Gaetana Marrone (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies: A-J* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 463-464.

western fiction, would still go to great lengths to secure the (usually fictitious) title of ‘Captain’ for themselves, so that their persona already seemed to substantiate the content of their books, without the need of further explanation.¹⁴

The longing for authenticity, however, does not explain why a writer like Karl May, a German author of adventure and western novels, did not enjoy the same success as Reid and Aimard among the Italian readership. The catalogues at the National Library of Rome show that a small number of copies in the original language had circulated in Italy in the late 19th century. However, the bulk of May’s novels were translated and published in Italy only in the 1930s, and continued to be published even after the war, until the mid-1970s. Without descending into sweeping generalizations, it can be inferred that after the Italian National unification the knowledge of German language had progressively waned, fostered by a resistance towards Germanic culture, generally. May’s fiction might also have faced an initial shortage of translators from German into Italian, but, in any case, it would not have fared well in unified Italy because of the message it fostered: the alleged superiority of Teutons over (pretty much) everyone else. However, with the *bouleversement* of the political scenarios in 20th century Europe, May’s narrative was eventually found suitable in the 1930s. In fact, the political climate on the eve of World War II fostered the circulation of western literature through the filter of nationalistic and anti-Anglo-Saxon stories in the Axis nations, which finally allowed ample room for the celebration of May’s production.¹⁵

Going back to the late 19th century, the other narratives which enjoyed ample success in Italy were those by the French author Louis Laurent Simonin, respectively published as: *Attraverso gli Stati Uniti dall’Atlantico al Pacifico* (Le monde américain: souvenirs de mes voyages aux États-Unis) and *Il Far-West degli Stati Uniti: i pionieri e i pelli rosse* in 1876 (Le grand-ouest des Etats-Unis: les pionniers et les peaux-rouges: les colons du pacifique). A book by the Englishman William Hepworth Dixon, *La conquista Bianca* (The White Conquest), first published in the 1870s, also enjoyed relatively good fortune in Italy. Traveller Varvaro Pojero, for example, read Dixon’s and Simonin’s novels before travelling to America.¹⁶ As with the ‘dime novels’ of Guigoni, these books were released in ‘paperback editions’ or as

¹⁴ See Chapter Eight.

¹⁵ Westerns were still an enormously popular genre both in Italy and Germany. Hitler, for instance, was a devoted reader of May’s fiction, as noted by Klaus Mann as early as 1940. See Mann, “Karl May: Hitler’s Literary Mentor”, *Kenyon Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Autumn, 1940), pp. 391-400.

¹⁶ Francesco Varvaro Pojero, *Una corsa nel Nuovo Mondo*, preface, vol. I, p. IX-X

feuilletons, in order to reach an extended audience of readers, many of whom were in need of texts that did not require sophisticated skills of literacy or who were attracted by vivid illustrations.¹⁷

The need to lower the price and the standards of the publications, but at the same time capture new readerships, also marked the birth of illustrated travel magazines, economical weekly/monthly publications which flaunted brightly coloured images printed, once again, on low quality paper. The earliest publication of this kind was *Il Mondo Illustrato* (The Illustrated World), first published in 1847 in Turin by editor Pomba, but which, precisely because of its precocious start (before Unification there were exceptionally high rates of illiteracy, even in an advanced region such as Piedmont), was still just reaching a niche audience. Other illustrated publications soon sprang up after Unification, with the common goal of attracting a more diversified and ample audience: for instance, in Naples, there appeared *L'Amico del Popolo* (The People's Friend) and in Rome, *Il Veridico* (The Truthful).¹⁸ An important magazine for the dissemination of knowledge about the American West was *Il Giro del Mondo: giornale di geografia viaggi e costume* (Around the World: journal of geography, travels, and customs) published in Milan by editor Emilio Treves in collaboration with French publisher Édouard Charton, which periodically reproduced extracts from the travellers' books, themselves published entirely in the 'premium' book-length series. *Il Giro del Mondo* ran from 1864 to 1880 and, by virtue of the partnership with Charton, often replicated content from the French *Revue des Deux-mondes* and *Le Tour du monde*. Then, from 1871, there came the *Giornale Popolare di Viaggi* (Popular Travel Journal), which in 1879 was re-named *Giornale illustrato dei viaggi e delle avventure di terra e di mare* (The Illustrated Travel Journal of Land and Sea Adventures), and along the same lines the *Biblioteca illustrata dei viaggi intorno al mondo* (Illustrated Library of Travels Around the World), both published by Sonzogno, whose main focus was Africa and the Orient, but often featured stories and excerpts from travel narratives about the American West.

¹⁷ Gallo and Bonomi, *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 25. Simonin's travels in California featured in the 1866 edition of *Il giro del mondo*, but excerpts from novels could also appear. For example, Dixon's *White Conquest* appeared in the 1877 edition.

¹⁸ Aurora Raniolo, "La stampa illustrata nella seconda metà del 19 secolo", in *Archivio fotografico-iconografico della Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina*, p.2. Online, <http://www.movio.beniculturali.it/bua/societasindacatopolitica/getFile.php?id=2447>. Last accessed 06/01/2019.



Figure 7 (left): *Giornale illustrato dei viaggi*, issue n. 284, 1901;

Figure 8 (right): *La biblioteca illustrata dei viaggi intorno al mondo*, issue n. 40, 1899.

Author's copies.

The novelty factor of these publications stemmed from the innovations in the image reproduction techniques in the 1880s, which allowed for illustrations to be more elaborate and true-to-life. In the 1890s, newspaper printing became industrialized. Consequently, illustrated magazines became even more affordable and their dissemination increased along with the continuing rise in literacy of the population. At this point, magazines hired their own teams of illustrators, who became the most skilled group in newsrooms. Artists of the calibre of Gennaro D'Amato (who had previously worked for the *Illustrated London News*) and Alberto Della Valle worked for Treves's and Sonzogno's travel magazines between the last decades of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Around the same time they would also illustrate different editions of western novels by Emilio Salgari.¹⁹ The allure of these publications lay in the originality of their illustrations, which often became more important than the accounts themselves. The emphasis on the 'wildness' and 'danger' of the American West, the striking diversity of the indigenous *other*, as well as the ruggedness of the life of the settlers, were always enhanced by dramatic illustrations, cultivating a sense of the extraordinary and appetite for the sensational in the readership. It is interesting to observe how articles

¹⁹ See Chapter Eight.

and illustrations in such magazines focused on the North American West differed considerably from those which focussed on areas where Italy harboured existing plans of political influence, such as Abyssinia or China.²⁰ The latter literature aimed to enthuse and inform potential Italian settlers, by providing reports, data, and concrete information (supported by accurate maps and realistic images of the flora and fauna) on the specific areas where the Italian government aimed to expand, whereas the literature on the American West—with no underlying purpose such as promoting settlement—clearly tapped into an audience of ‘armchair travellers’ rather than prospective colonialists. This distinction shows how the American West was not necessarily a place Italians planned to physically inhabit, but was, first and foremost, where they wanted their imagination to run wild. Nonetheless, the Italian audience’s faith in the essential authenticity of what was being written about the ‘Wild West’ could be an intrinsic and important element of the pleasure to be derived from such material.

In light of this evidence, it would be reasonable to assert that, by opening up a niche and nurturing the desire for exoticism and excitement in the Italian readership, the dissemination of these publications—beginning with travel narratives, and then paperback westerns, and illustrated magazines—paved the way for the success of a show such as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, as well as for the establishment of a fully-fledged myth of the ‘Wild West’, on which Cody so much depended, and which became a major attraction for Italians in the 20th century.

Overall, I argue that the accounts of the Italian travellers discussed above could be envisioned as an authoritative counterpart to the sheer mythopoeia constructed by Euro-American Western literature which had been penetrating Italian literary markets in the 19th century—in the aftermath of Cooper’s novels. The travellers’ cynical and, at times, Italo-centric accounts were partly aimed at debunking, or at least reducing, the epic aura of the West that *feuilletons* and popular fiction authors like Aimard and Reid promoted, and which had found an eager market in post-Unification Italy.

Nevertheless, as Italy became a single country, it also developed a facet of public opinion which followed dominant trends in other European powers, and which had not characterized its pre-Unification experience. That is to say, Italians now embraced settler-colonialist ideals of their own and began depicting otherness as

²⁰ See, for instance, the issue of *Il Giornale illustrato dei viaggi*, “In Abissinia”, n. 368, year 1903 or *Biblioteca illustrata dei Viaggi intorno al mondo*, “La Cina Cinese”, n. 5, 1899.

inferiority and saw in other races evidence of a need of domestication. Once the political union of the country was achieved, Italy quickly changed its perception of otherness, and the strong anti-American views and empathy for the Native American cause shown in the travellers' accounts of the early frontier gave way to the highly moralizing and belittling portrayals of 'Indians' found in the narratives about the Trans-Mississippi West and, as will be seen in the next section, in Italian press reports about Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. In the attempt to exorcise the national fear of being considered an inferior people and in response to lingering anxieties of once more experiencing colonisation by another European power, Italians worked on becoming a colonial power themselves, moving decisively from the position of the potential oppressed to that of the confident would-be oppressor. This change is reflected in aspects of the Italian reception accorded to Buffalo Bill's Wild West and to its performers, and partly explains why the exceptionalist meta-narrative of Cody's shows eventually found fertile ground in the *Bel Paese*.

SECTION II: THE WILD WEST GOES TO ITALY:

Buffalo Bill and his 'Wild West' Show (1890 & 1906)

Introduction

During the latter decades of the 19th century, the American West grew to have a pivotal importance in the international imagination. While Italians continued travelling more and more frequently to the American West, for a range of different reasons, the West itself progressively started to lose its regional specification, epitomising for some observers America as a whole.¹ Mass migration, as the ultimate form of travel, brought people back and forth between the old and the new world, furthering the spread of curiosity about the American West. At the dawn of the 20th century, the 'Wild West' had already ceased merely to designate a place, but it rather evoked a plethora of concepts and characters: the cowboy, buffalos, Indians, settlers, stagecoaches, wagon trains, gold-digging, cattle drives, ranchers, gunfighters, lawlessness, violence, self-reliance, and individualism.² Above all the Wild West equated a particular lifestyle, that of the 'Rough Riders' and of the 'Strenuous Life', mottos that became the emblems of the cowboy president, Theodore Roosevelt, and, by extension, became also those of the whole nation—particularly so in the eyes of European foreigners.

This section of my thesis looks, therefore, at another shaping occasion of contact between Italy and the American West: William F. Cody's Italian tours with his Wild West show. As this study seeks to point out, its reception was affected both by foreign fictional sources on the American frontier and by the substratum of knowledge provided by Italian travellers' narratives of American Western experiences. This influence, despite not being always uniform or reciprocal, still evidently existed, as testified to by mentions and excerpts which often appeared in newspapers and popular magazines. It is my contention, therefore, that Cody's meta-narrative was superimposed on that pre-existing layer of information and assumptions and, in turn, construed its own message.

An investigation of a relationship between the knowledge of America (and particularly of the American West), derived from travel memoirs and the reception of

¹ For in-depth perspectives on Italian immigrants and travellers in the American West, see Andrew F. Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised*, and Marie-Christine Michaud, "Immigrants italiens et frontière américaine: Pioneers! O Pioneers", *Anglophonia* 19 (2006), p. 55-66.

² Will Wright, *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), p. 1.

Cody's show has never been undertaken by previous scholarship. I deem it to be a significant marker, in that beliefs, assumptions and prejudices that were evident in the Italian press reactions to Cody's show had already appeared, on many occasions, in Italian travel narratives. On other occasions, Italian travel narratives contradicted some of the messages and ideologies that the Wild West advanced, suggesting the Italian regions where Cody's colonial discourse would find a less fertile ground, although sometimes Cody would succeed in subverting and superseding negative reactions. Studying these subjects in correlation with one another (something that need not always be done in a biunivocal way), also dispels the idea assumed by some American scholars, that before the advent of the Wild West show Italians held next-to-no knowledge about the American West.³ Instead, it is proposed that a degree of continuity existed in the history of Italian thought about America and its Western regions, in a transnational flow of knowledge, which saw characters, ideas and theories move from one place to another in a ceaseless process of negotiation and adjustment. However, before starting to examine Cody's Wild West venture, its reception in Italy and its influence on the Italian imagination, it is essential to posit certain premises on the historical background and reciprocal dealings of both countries on the eve of the arrival of the Wild West show in Italy.

Chapter Four: Italy, America, and the 'Wild West' in context

Chapter 4.1. Italian politics and society after National Unification

"We have made Italy, now we must make Italians." This emblematic motto from the Piedmontese minister Massimo d'Azeglio encapsulated how the first twenty years of Italian politics were spent seeking viable ways to 'unify' the heterogeneous traditions and lifestyles of the new Italian people. The differences in customs, economy and religious habits that Italy faced were so prominent that branding them as 'regional diversity' would be incorrect and grossly simplistic; each city or rural community carried on its own set of values and traditions, and existed as a cultural fortress in its own right—as a sort of legacy of the Renaissance city-state. Several southern regions were literally invented by the demographic statistical bureau during the process of

³ As seen in the works of Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, and René M. Laegreid, "Finding the American West in Twenty-First-Century Italy", pp. 411–428.

unification, resulting in cities ostensibly belonging to the same region that shared no significant common heritage and, more often than not, spoke languages (i.e., dialects) that were only vaguely intelligible to speakers from neighbouring towns.⁴

The spread of a standardized version of the Italian language (spoken, as well as written) was truly one of the most challenging endeavours of national levelling. This process took time to take effect. Between the 1870s and 1880s people from the lower classes had little or no incentive to become literate and learn to speak, read and write in Italian, specifically, as the lack of material targeted at a popular audience allowed Italian to be perceived as the language of the elites; moreover, schooling children meant that they could not help in field or factory work, and this aggravated the reluctance of proletarian families to educate their children. Men who gained literacy did so by force, during their compulsory conscription service, which obliged them to learn how to read and write in Italian in order to be discharged from military service. The education of Italian females, beyond essential basic literacy and numeracy skills, was generally deemed unnecessary regardless of their social status—as ignorant women were thought to be easier to control in a male-centred society—but learning was particularly discouraged in the members of the rural working-classes, where most females filled roles of breeders and housekeepers. Primary education was made compulsory for both genders only in 1877 and consisted of just two to three years of attendance. Whatever the effectiveness of this very basic instruction, it was in any case hindered by persistently high rates of truancy and the fact that enforced attendance was generally never put into practice by the authorities. The figures given by the 1881 census correspond to this picture: 61.9% of Italians remained illiterate, a percentage that had dropped to just 48.7% by the next census twenty years later (1901).⁵ In 1891, the Italian government did not dispense sufficient funds to undertake the census, having diverted them to failing colonial endeavours in the Horn of Africa, but, assuming a steady decline, in 1890-91 the illiteracy rate must have been around 55%. This means that when Buffalo Bill Cody visited the country more than half of the Italians could not read the newspaper reviews of the show, nor properly understand what was written on the gigantic advertisement posters that plastered their towns, although the latter evidently compensated for this through the use of a remarkably striking iconography, which

⁴ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871-1995* (Harlow: Longman, 1984), (1996), p. 17.

⁵ *Annali di Statistica*, s. VIII, no. 17 (Rome 1965), 300. Quoted in Martin Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 36.

captured everyone's attention.⁶ If the growth of mass-schooling plodded slowly, elitist education thrived: the unified country counted, during the 1880s, 17 state universities with around 13,000 students (most of them were male, as the enrolment of females in higher education was allowed only in 1874; for a long time, women's higher education, if any, took place inside the home), although on many programmes the staff exceeded the overall number of students enrolled.⁷

Such unequal access to knowledge was but a mirror of the oligarchic distribution of wealth and power. The Italian economy at the time of the unification was based largely on agriculture and a sketchy development of industry, with a vast majority of the population composed of agricultural labourers working on land owned by a comparatively small percentage of aristocratic and bourgeois families, or by the clergy. *Mezzadria* and *latifundium* were the most widespread forms of agricultural allocations, particularly in the central and southern regions of the Italian kingdom, and provided for the minimal needs of the sharecroppers. This centuries-old stratification of socio-economic relations, with ancient origins, rendered it particularly difficult for the new Italian governments of liberal inspiration to pursue a firm and much-needed politics of reformism. In addition to this societal/political stagnation, at the beginning of the 1880s the Italian economy suffered a harsh blow inflicted by the fall in the prices of agricultural and commercial products: the lowering of import prices opened the market to cheap grains and cereals from America and Asia; this also meant that the few industrial products that Italy manufactured, chiefly silk, were also meeting fierce competition from foreign markets. This situation had severe repercussions on the already precarious socio-economic conditions of new Italy, and it is thought to have been a major propellant of the Italian diasporic migration to the Americas. Between the 1880s and the enactment of American immigration restriction in the 1920s, more than four million Italians migrated to the United States, and yet, considering the dire conditions—on all fronts—which their home-country faced, it is surprising to see how many members of the Italian proletariat and working-classes chose not to leave. The prospects for social redemption in post-unified Italy looked particularly grim: given the absence of trade unions or even of a system of laws protecting basic workers' rights (the first attempts were introduced only in the early 1890s, during the first government of Prime Minister Francesco Crispi), the lower classes were bound to

⁶ See chapter 5.5. and 7.1.

⁷ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 39.

survive either by accepting the inhumane working conditions in the fields or, mostly in the north of the country, the gruelling schedules of factory work.

One of the alternatives for those who refused to conform to this fate was to embrace rebellion, a radical path, and those who chose it almost always paid with their lives. Two types of social subversion emerged along with the birth of the Italian nation: the earliest was the famed brigandage which acquired a romance which had fascinated foreign visitors, and particularly Americans, during the 18th and 19th centuries; the other type (more organised and carried out internationally, mostly in urban environments) was anarchism—and will be tackled in the following section. Connected to the sub-urban environment of regions like Calabria, Campania, Basilicata and Apulia—but also the Abruzzi, Marche, Molise, and Piedmont—brigandage had been present since the Middle Ages as a form of rural banditism.⁸ However, it was only during the process of unification that this activity acquired the insubordinate political connotations which differentiated its members, characterized by Eric Hobsbawm as “social bandits”, from other petty criminals.⁹ Indeed, Italian brigandage envisioned and targeted criminal activity in such a way as to counteract the control of local territory by institutionalised powers. Such strong aversion to, and distrust of, any centralised government, which was perceived as the meddling of ‘outsiders’ in local affairs, must be interpreted as a psychological legacy of centuries of incursion, ravages and exploitation of the rural populations carried out by foreign authorities, be it under Napoleonic, Bourbon or Papal rule, and even that of the Garibaldi army—which allegedly arrived to set the southern populace ‘free’, only to deliver it into the hands of yet another alien power, the House of Savoy. The process of national unification was therefore perceived by most southern rural communities as an extensive act of foreign invasion. Evidence of this stands in the fact that, during the *Risorgimento* and the first two decades of life of the Kingdom of Italy (1860-1880), brigand revolts became endemic, so much so that a branch of Italian historiography, called *meridionalista*, believes that these conflicts comprised a true civil war, given that they produced more casualties than all the three Italian wars of independence.¹⁰ In order to suppress these rebellions, the Savoy Government

⁸ Although traditionally associated with Italy, the term brigand appears to be British in origin given that during Roman times (49 B.C.) a tribe called the Brigantes dwelled in modern Yorkshire and, according to Ptolemy, was intensely devoted to looting and robberies. See Brian Hartley and R. Leon Fitts, *The Brigantes* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1988).

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Abacus, 2000), 1st pub. 1969, p. 20.

¹⁰ Raffaele Nigro, *Il brigantaggio postunitario: dalle cronache al mito* (Bari: M. Adda, 2010), and Michele Carilli, *La Brutale Verità: Il lato oscuro dell'unità d' Italia e il brigantaggio postunitario*

resorted to massive military reinforcements and the promulgation of special norms such as the “Pica law” in 1863, named after its creator, Member of Parliament Giuseppe Pica—not a Piedmontese, as one might think, but a southern man from Abruzzo. Almost unleashing a witch hunt, the Pica law essentially gave a license to kill any group of at least three people who were found “strolling through the public streets or countryside” and suspected of being there to “commit crimes and offenses”.¹¹ The gory and intransigent way in which this repression was carried out by the Piedmontese-Italian army, coupled with the exceptionally unsympathetic and xenophobic national media coverage of these events, ensured that several brigands of that era eventually passed into history and legend: Carmine “Donatello” Crocco in Basilicata, Michele “Colonnello” Caruso, in Apulia and Luigi “Chiavone” Alonzi who was active on the border with the Papal State, were all celebrated as local saviours by southern Italian populations.¹² Interestingly, also a number of women—wives or widows or even sisters of other brigands—contributed to this resistance. The *Brigantesse*, as they were called, Filomena Pennacchio, Michelina Di Cesare, Maria Maddalena De Lellis, and Maria Oliverio, often received worse tortures and harsher public disparagement than did their male counterparts, because they not only conspired to defy centralised power, but as women embracing weapons they rebelled against their “genteel nature”, behaviour which was considered by Italian society in general, backed up by the intelligentsia, to be an intrinsic and utter abomination, which had to be discouraged and eradicated by the most exemplary means.¹³

As Eric Hobsbawm has amply documented in his essay about banditry, there seems to be a common set of features, psychological as well as social, which unite different types of bandits throughout the world. When analysing the examples of the Italian brigand along with the Western American outlaw/bushwhacker these

(Roma: Aracne, 2012). It is, however, impossible to determine the exact number of killings caused by the fight against brigandage due to the difficulty in obtaining official documents (several were lost or destroyed), and because official historiography still rests on a policy of censorship towards the topic of brigand repression. For instance, the history of brigand revolt remains excluded from history modules in Italian state schools and the Italian State still applies an official veto or “State Secret” to about 140,000 documents from the period 1860 to 1870.

¹¹ *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del regno d’Italia*, n. 1409, Turin, 15/8/1863. For further insights on the Pica law, see Gaetano Marabello, *La Legge Pica*, (Napoli: Controcorrente, 2014).

¹² Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 78.

¹³ See, for instance, what Cesare Lombroso wrote about a decade later in his, then, exceedingly popular, study *La Donna Delinquente* (The Delinquent Woman), 1903. For a thorough study of Italian female brigands see Valentino Romano, *Brigantesse* (Napoli: Controcorrente, 2007) and Pino Casamassima, *Bandite, Brigantesse e Partigiane, Il ruolo delle donne col fucile in spalla* (Roma: Stampa Alternativa, 2012).

connections appear to resonate all the more vividly. Italy and America in those times were in fact “societies where blood called for blood”, to paraphrase Hobsbawm once again, in that both countries shared a deep crisis of legitimacy which led to years of violence in the name of nationhood. Such distinct yet parallel social settings, and a certain affinity between the natural landscapes, made sure that the figures of these guerrilla fighters could lend themselves to a variety of associations. As early as the 1850s a newspaper article about California appeared in the *New York Times* that seemed to grasp such similarities, putting forth an apt comparison between Western American bandits and Italian brigands:

The Indians, although deprived of some of their most daring leaders, are still in arm, presenting a threatening appearance and ready to pounce down upon the settlements the moment they cease their watchfulness. This is a most serious drawback to the prosperity of the Southern country. That section of the State possesses the most glorious climate under Heaven—soft, genial and pleasing as that of Italy—a soil teeming with the elements of almost fabulous crops—productions as varied as those of the tropical and temperate zones, but, unfortunately, the country is in the hands of the original settlers—the native Californians, who hold immense tracts of land, any one large enough for a good sized German principality, and refuse to subdivide them by selling to Americans. The consequence is that the country is very thinly settled and miserably cultivated. All these circumstances encourage the existence of bands of marauding American outcasts from civilization, who, like the brigands of Italy, are safe from pursuit in the deep recesses of the mountains and sally out upon the highways to waylay every traveller that passes.¹⁴

Note how the journalist intuitively brings the asperity of California’s ‘wilderness’ into conversation with the features and implications connected to the Italian landscape; just as the isolated rural setting of the southern peninsula had allowed bands of brigands to prosper by criminal deeds, similarly the “lack of civilization” caused by the sparsity of settlements was believed to be producing an alarming parallel experience in the Far West—still partly under the control of Indigenous populations, themselves deemed to be major conspirers against civilization.

As we are reminded in this article, both types of banditism, brigandage and outlawry/bushwhacking, required spatial as well as social isolation to be carried out successfully, and their proponents had to be gifted with a great deal of self-reliance and initiative in order to ensure their own survival. It would seem natural then to place the figure of the Italian brigand in close affinity with that of the outlawed/bushwhacker cowboy: we need only think of folk heroes such as Jesse James and Billy the Kid and their attacks/flights in the backwoods. However, the Italian brigand is less individualistic than one might be inclined to think; the post-

¹⁴ “Capture of the Indian Chief Antonio—Trial at San Diego of Three of the Rebels”, *New York Times*, 17/1/1852.

unification brigand, while often located at physical distance from civilization, had to keep alive a network of social relations with the local community, on which he depended for survival and security. While seeking temporary refuge from persecution in the backwoods, the Italian brigand often spent time in his own native village, protected by a circle of relatives and faithful friends. Despite similarities between the figures of brigands and outlawed cowboys, in recent years the *meridionalista* historiography has increasingly associated the Italian brigand revolts with Native American resistance, seeing this “intimate connection” as stemming from their shared history of ruthless extermination, and certain similarities in techniques of retaliation.¹⁵ Even though some of the comparisons of *meridionalista* historians might appear rather stretched, I argue that what really unites the brigand, the outlaw and Native American in the collective imagery of Italy and America is a subversive and anarchic sentiment which is universal to mankind. This intuition was certainly seized on by several Italian directors of *spaghetti western* films, who used these characters interchangeably in their plots—going beyond the mere dialectic of good and evil—with the intent of passing on messages about Italy’s hidden and shameful history of brigand repression.¹⁶ Despite the severe repression of the Pica law, brigandage continued to exist in Italy for several decades, although in a much more episodic way than the scale seen in the immediate post-unification period.

With regards to the proliferation of brigandage in America, while some historiographers claim the *Mafiosi* to be the natural development of the brigands in a more urbanised and civilised environment, I argue that—strictly speaking—such a comparison does not work.¹⁷ Brigandage, by its very nature, must be regarded as an idiosyncratic phenomenon, which began and terminated on Italian soil. It could not have been exported to the New World, partly for inherent reasons, such as the different geographical and societal conformation of the U.S., but most of all because brigandage entailed acts of defiance against the Italian monarchy, specifically.¹⁸ *Mafia*, on the other hand, far from being a form of social subversion, can be seen as a

¹⁵ See Gaetano Marabello, *Briganti e pellirosse* (Lecce: Capone Editore, 2011), who draws many close comparisons between distant cultures, including techniques such as smoke signals and mutilation of the enemy corpses.

¹⁶ In several Sergio Leone movies, the outlawed gunman is the positive character, while the sheriff represents the evil corrupted system. This can be interpreted as an allusion to the history of Italian brigandage, wherein rural criminals were seen as innocent fighters and the Italian army as the greedy invader.

¹⁷ Eric Hobsbawn, *Bandits*, p. 142.

¹⁸ If we are to envision a form of social subversion which was successfully transplanted to America, adding to the American radical substratum of labor and Freethought ideologies, we might instead look at insurrectionary anarchism.

kind of organised crime which sought (and still seeks) to gain control of local territory opportunistically and, contrary to brigandage, does not necessarily work against centralised power; instead, it often operates in a parallel way, sometimes even engaging in tacit, subterranean cooperation with the state's legal and administrative institutions in order to pursue common goals.¹⁹ The motives and customs of criminals differ from those of “social bandits”.

Chapter 4.2. “Italian backwardness vs. American modernity”: the impact of this myth on the shaping of a reciprocal collective imagination in the second half of the 19th century

End-of-the-19th century Europe, into which Cody ventured with his show, was an extremely heterogeneous territory. In that decade, the divide between the north of the continent, characterized by a prosperous growth of industry and technology, and the south, where elements of feudal tradition still lingered, was perhaps at its widest. Britain stood out as the most forward European nation, at least in terms of economy, industry, and colonial expansion, and British colonialism was only rivalled by that of France, which had been expanding its empire in Africa as well as Central America and Asia. However, France's cultural dominion greatly exceeded its colonial boundaries, in that, by the end of the 1880s, Paris was considered the universal capital of the arts and culture, something attested to, for instance, by its outstanding hosting of the Universal Exposition in 1889.²⁰ Germany was in a process of steady industrial advancement which coincided with its national re-unification and its dawn as a new colonial power, something which ignited cyclical reactions of hostility by the neighbouring Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose international power and influence was inexorably receding.²¹ The rest of Europe—especially new southern nations such as Greece and Italy, or even older ones, such as

¹⁹ See, for example, the American decision to repatriate incarcerated gangsters as free men (e.g., Lucky Luciano), to help US troops end Nazi occupation of Italy. Tim Newark, *Mafia Allies* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2007). For more information about the cooperation between mafia and state in 21st century Italy, see Maurizio Torrealta, *La Trattativa* (Bologna: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2010).

²⁰ Jill Jonnes, *Eiffel's Tower* (New York: Penguin, 2009), p.10. On the cultural dominion of 19th century Paris, see Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle-Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

²¹ See Jens Uwe Guettel, “From the Frontier to German South-West Africa: German Colonialism, Indians, and American Westward Expansion”, *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol 7, Issue 3 (November 2010), pp. 523-552.

the Spanish Kingdom, gripped by the overbearing Bourbon monarchy—made their own weak attempts to modernise in the face of an agrarian crisis worsened by the arrival of American products into European markets.

Emigration to the Americas, north and south, offered a solution for thousands of Spaniards, Greeks and Italians, but also Polish and other eastern Europeans affected by famine, economic recession and landlessness. This wave of migrants, often referred to as “the New Immigration”, occupied the lowest social strata in America, as colonies of recent arrivals sprang up across the United States, including in the American West.²² Deprivation and competition with old immigrant groups often resulted in systematic ‘scapegoating’ of the newest immigrant group and the formation of prejudices which eventually affected American internal affairs and relations with several European countries.²³

The case of Italy is in itself quite peculiar. When we compare it to other Western European countries, one of the most striking things is its recent status as a unified nation and, as John Agnew aptly puts it, Italy’s “persistent disunity based on geo-economic and linguistic fragmentation”.²⁴ As suggested in the previous section, the most liberal fringes of population of the Italian peninsula had harboured a strong sense of ‘Italianness’ since the age of the Enlightenment, but the political unification of Italy was achieved by a small minority of politicians and aristocrats. This ruling oligarchy sought to impose the same political institutions and economic structures as existed in the most advanced countries of Western Europe on a society composed largely of unlearned peasants who were deeply attached to Catholic religion and its customs. Religion is indeed a paramount factor in the construction of Italian national identity. An aspect often overlooked in the Italian historiographical debate, is that Italy, unlike most other European countries, never achieved the religious revolution which gave rise to individualism in England, Holland and certain regions of France and Germany—despite the efforts of a cluster of sixteenth century Italian intellectuals to promote forms of religious renewal (particularly Calvinist

²² On immigration in the American West, see Jesse L. Embry and Brian Q. Cannon (eds.), *Immigrants in the Far West: Historical Identities and Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2015).

²³ The most notorious example is the New Orleans lynching of eleven Italian immigrants in 1891 by an Anglo-Saxonist mob. See Patrizia Salvetti, *Corda e Sapone: storie di linciaggi degli Italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Roma: Donzelli, 2003).

²⁴ John Agnew, “The Myth of backward Italy in Modern Europe”, in Beverley Allen and Mary Russo (eds.), *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 34.

Protestants).²⁵ Individualism, moral and political, continues to be considered a key feature of the “great” Anglo-Saxon democracies, and particularly of America. Agnew argues that, for a very long time “the common identity of Italians as Catholics made the achievement of a more circumscribed national identity seemingly redundant for large segments of the population”.²⁶ This ambition found eventual expression in the *Risorgimento*, commonly thought to have begun in the aftermath of the 1815 Congress of Vienna, leading to uprisings and wars of independence against the Papal state and other foreign powers of Catholic orientation such as Austria and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies between the 1820s and 1861.

Italy in the 1850s appeared on the brink of becoming a modern liberal republic, possibly inspired by America, or at least supportive of the United States. The quest for Italian independence from foreign occupation had generated feelings of admiration and sympathy among other European powers, and American ruling elites, who interpreted the uprisings as part of a process of self-determination which originated in America, itself.²⁷ To the traditional curiosity of scholars and artists concerning remnants of an ancient civilization, was added the interest of politicians and intellectuals in events leading to the unification of the states of the peninsula. By the end of the 1830s, thanks to the propaganda of some exiles, such as Piero Maroncelli and Lorenzo Da Ponte, the “Italian question” found fertile ground among the American intelligentsia, who were intrigued by the riots of 1848 and the reputation and American exile of Garibaldi (who would decline Lincoln’s offer of a command in the Union army).²⁸ Giuseppe Mazzini, the intellectual force behind the *Risorgimento*, maintained contact with several prominent British and American personalities, in particular Albert Pike and Moncure D. Conway, and promoted the idea of Italy as a country striving for its unification under the banner of democracy, of which America was the emblem.²⁹

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁷ Paola Gemme, *Domesticating foreign struggles: The Italian Risorgimento and Antebellum American Identity* (Athens and London, The University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 55; Roy Merel Peterson, *Echoes of the Italian Risorgimento in Contemporaneous American Writers*, “PMLA”, vol. 47, n 1 (1932), p.235, cited in Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d’Italia 1848-1901*, p. 29.

²⁸ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations*, p. 123; Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il risorgimento d’Italia: 1848-1901* (Roma: Gangemi, 2013), p. 28.

²⁹ Albert Pike (1809-1891), American lawyer, freemason and soldier. He negotiated several treaties with Native Americans during the Civil War. Moncure D. Conway (1832-1907), Abolitionist and Unitarian minister, he maintained a long correspondence with Mazzini in which they confronted several socio-political issues. See Bender, *A Nation Among Nations*, p. 123.

Thus, the republican élan of the *Risorgimento* fuelled the hopes of many for a new dawn for Italy, enlightened by the glow of democracy. This represented, at least theoretically, a good occasion on which to shake off the backward image, commonly associated with the Italian peninsula during the 18th and early 19th century, of a derelict country imprisoned in an everlasting immobility under the oppressive and sloppy rule of the Bourbon Kingdom, Austro-Hungarian dominion of the northern regions, and the decadence and obscurantism of the Vatican State. When unification was near to completion, it became clear that monarchy was to become the designated form of state. This was interpreted, in the transatlantic political debate, as a misstep or even a “betrayal” on the part of Italy. The Savoy monarchy and the Papacy remained chief symbols of antidemocratic dominion, and this appeared as a manifestation of Italy’s reluctance to make a real break with the past. Therefore, in the perception of many Americans, initial appreciation for the Italian cause gave way to harsh criticism.³⁰ This recalled images of a pre-unified Italy, “a backward nation that was lying in the ruins of its ancient greatness,” as Italian scholar Daniele Fiorentino puts it.³¹ These concepts can be found in great numbers in the American press of the time, as well as in narratives of American travellers in Italy, who often conceived of 19th century Italy as a monolithic entity, rather than a “mosaic of localisms”, thereby giving way to several gross generalizations.³² Such oversimplified impressions were spread by books that played a prominent part in the building of an American collective imagery of Italy between the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Representations of Italian cities (such as Rome and Venice) as decaying and wretched places were popularized by novels such as *The Bravo* by James Fenimore Cooper and *The Marble Faun* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, while William Dean Howells’s *Venetian Life* portrayed the Italian “populace” as inherently treacherous and dishonest.³³ In American 19th century novels, Italians were represented, according to Joseph Cosco, as “liars, unethical, lazy, dissolute, sensual, dramatic and childish”.³⁴ These themes are amplified in the

³⁰ Joseph Cosco, *Imagining Italians, The Clash of Romance and Race in American perceptions 1880-1910* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), p. 7.

³¹ Daniele Fiorentino, “Gli Stati Uniti e l’Italia del Risorgimento all’Immigrazione”, p. 35, in Daniele Fiorentino (ed.) *Gli Stati Uniti e l’Italia alla fine del XIX secolo* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2010).

³² Leonardo Buonomo, *Backward Glances: Exploring Italy, Reinterpreting America (1831-1866)* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

³⁴ Joseph Cosco, *Imagining Italians*, p. 7, quoted in Maria Susanna Garroni, “Prospettive americane sugli immigrati italiani e la loro terra d’origine tra il 1870 e il 1914: per un percorso di ricerca” in Daniele Fiorentino, (ed.) *Gli Stati Uniti e l’Italia alla fine del XIX secolo*, p. 103.

writings of Henry James (especially in the essays about Italy from 1872 in magazines and later collected in the book, *Italian Hours*), wherein descriptions of Italians as beguilingly mischievous individuals dominate.³⁵ Another major *leitmotif* about Italy is to be found in the literature of Mark Twain, and concerns the endemic poverty of the population, which lived side-by-side with the ostentatious affluence of the elites. He writes in *The Innocents Abroad* “(Italy) is one vast museum of magnificence and misery [...] And for every beggar in America, Italy can show a hundred—and rags and vermin to match. It is the wretchedest princeliest land on earth”.³⁶ Italian scholar Leonardo Buonomo rightly argues that “what is depicted by certain American writers is not a country inhabited by real people, with concrete—perhaps prosaic—problems and needs. It is rather a gigantic picture [...]”.³⁷

These caricaturised images of Italy, I argue, served for American travellers and writers the function of a ‘pre-Orient’, that is a domesticated and tamer version of the Orient theorized by scholar Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978).³⁸ Italy was often envisioned by Anglo-Saxon onlookers as devious, ambivalent, unfathomable, but also feminized, idle, weak, thus inherently inferior.³⁹ What appear to be mere recurrent literary caricatures were progressively assimilated into American public opinion, becoming shared ‘knowledge’ around the last quarter of the 19th century.

Similar judgments would attend aspects of the American reception of news about Buffalo Bill’s Wild West tour of Italy. From the way in which American newspapers described Italy in relation to the Wild West show, in words as well as satirical cartoons, to the opinions about Italians that Cody, Annie Oakley and other members of the Wild West show disclosed in their personal letters and diaries, and even in an alleged discourse about Italy of a Native American chief, there emerge generalized views of Italy that markedly resemble those popularized by the American

³⁵ See the excellent critical study by Carl Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Writings of Henry James* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

³⁶ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 203.

³⁷ Leonardo Buonomo, *Backward Glances*, p. 15.

³⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient* (New York: Penguin, 1978), (1995). In *Orientalism*, Said claims that America’s understanding of Orient “was ‘less’ dense” (p. 2), and its fascination began only after the Second World War (p.4), a judgement with which I disagree, Orientalism was present in American society since at least the second half of the 19th century. Though mostly a reflection of Europe’s own fascination, several 19th century American travellers and writers’ experiences bear witness of their willingness to come into contact with the ‘Orient’, either as a direct experience (i.e., by travel) or as a mediated one (through ‘Orientalised’ objects or souvenirs like Persian rugs). See Naomi Rosenblatt, “Orientalism in American Popular Culture,” *Penn History Review*, vol. 16, no. 2 (April 2009), pp. 51-63. Online, <https://repository.upenn.edu/phr/vol16/iss2/5/>

³⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. See also John Dickie, “Stereotypes of the Italian South 1860-1900”, in Lumley and Morris (eds.) *New History of the Italian South* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 119.

writers mentioned above. Since it is doubtful that a busy scout-entrepreneur like Cody, or a spirited sharpshooter such as “Little Sure Shot” (Chief Sitting Bull’s name for Oakley) could find time to study the literature of James or Howells, it is more likely that, through mass-publishing and the popular press (let us bear in mind that by 1872 *The Innocents Abroad* had sold an astounding 100,000 copies only in North America), these concepts were internalised, becoming widespread commonplaces and influencing Americans’ conceptions.

I wish to suggest that just as 19th century Italians shared ideas about the American West thanks to books, travel narratives, and early popular literature, Americans had derived by similar means a collective idea of Italy. Of course, other agents were at play: Americans encountered Italy in school through the study of classical history and culture, as well as Italian art, which explains how they were acquainted with Italy’s past. Their view of contemporary Italy was derived from travel diaries, novels and newspaper articles, yet from a distinctly American perspective. These two images, of Italy’s legendary past and of its problematic present, were in sharp contrast to one another. This was something of which Americans were well aware, and which fascinated and repulsed them at the same time. A 1905 report about Italian immigration, entitled *The Italian in America*, fully encapsulates this sentiment in its inception:

Long ago there used to be a childish patter in our primary schools: ‘In 1492 Columbus crossed the ocean blue.’ Most of the children had in mind that Columbus was born in Italy and in the upper schools there was some slight tracing of the opening of North America to immigrants through the guidance of the Cabots and Verrazzano, but there was little reckoning of any contribution of living Italians to American development. Our scholars, at large, were far more attracted by the memorials of the Old Roman Empire than by the present day problems of Italy. The uncovering of a headless and armless bust was much more interesting than the inspection of an Italian rookery. We knew in a general way the dreary annals of Italian decadence—of the provincial and civic alienation—of the regal and oligarchic impositions—of foreign invasions and internecine conflicts—of the greedy extortions of the ruling classes, and the heavy burdens of the toiling masses. We were moved to sympathy with the ardor and the struggles of high spirited patriots for the redemption of their fatherland. Garibaldi, Cavour, Mazzini—[...] were honored in America perhaps more highly than in any other country of the world, outside of their native land. But we had no thought of any particular appeal of Italy to us or her entry in force into the pressing problems of our own life and growth [...]until the common people began to come over in swarms and enlarge our familiar view of the Italian in America.⁴⁰

This ambivalent attitude towards Italy, made of harmony and conflict, decisively veered towards disparagement when “swarms” of Italian immigrants arrived during

⁴⁰ E. Lord, J. Trenor, S. Barrows, *The Italian in America* (New York: B. F. Buck & Company), 1905, pp. 1-2.

the last two decades of the nineteenth century, drastically altering America's earlier perception of the country and its inhabitants.

Chapter 4.3. The impact of immigration, racial theories, and anarchism in furthering images of a backward Italy in Gilded Age America.

The direct encounter with masses of Italian immigrants led Americans to expand and revolutionise their ideas about Italy.⁴¹ Americans had to adjust rapidly to masses of laborers and unskilled workers who flocked into their major cities, choosing to live in Italian-speaking neighbourhoods where they preserved most aspects of their own culture.⁴² This choice, dictated by multiple causes (from the need to maintain family ties to the fear of anti-Italian violence), actually prevented a quick integration. American public opinion often attributed the material and moral dejection of those 'Little Italies', to an inherent peculiarity of Italians, rather than to the social deprivation faced by all immigrants, regardless of their nationality.⁴³ An article in the *Chicago Herald*, emphatically titled "The Evils of Italian immigration", reported that, "there are over 5000 idle Italians in New York City huddled together like hogs in tenement houses, endangering the health of the city, a curse to themselves and to everyone else".⁴⁴ Very influential in furthering the collective stereotyping of Italians was also the work of Jane Addams, a social worker from Chicago who dealt with the integration of ethnic minorities during the decades of the largest Italian mass immigration (mid 1880s to 1910). Despite her good intentions,

⁴¹ Assessing the contribution of emigrant testimonies in the formation of ideas about America in Italy and, particularly for my research, about the American West is complex. Intercontinental connections between Italian immigrants and their country of origin were often discontinuous and unstable. Letters arriving to Italy from the American West certainly exerted an influence on the people who read them, but 'new immigrants' in the 1890s were still largely illiterate, so that correspondence was extremely limited and is difficult to locate. When letters are available, they tend to show a recurring structure: greetings, the state of health, and financial transactions. Negative comments or accounts of adverse conditions were often self-censored to relieve apprehension, preserve pride and maintain hope. Italian immigrants often returned to Italy after a number of years spent working in America; their accounts were passed on orally and helped shape an image of America, but the Italian collective image of the American West, before the advent of popular literature and Cody's show, must be considered a prerogative of the upper and middle classes, who did not leave their homeland in significant numbers.

⁴² Ilaria Serra, *The Imagined Immigrant: Images of Italian Emigration to The United States between 1890 and 1924* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), p. 136.

⁴³ Stefano Luconi, "La rappresentazione degli italiani nell'immaginario statunitense", *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, n. 5 iss. 4, 29/01/2011, online, http://www.studistorici.com/2011/01/29/luconi_numero_5/, last accessed 01/11/2016.

⁴⁴ "The Evils of Italian Immigration", *Chicago Herald*, 23/07/1888.

Addams riddled her memoirs with contemptuous remarks such as: “southern Italians represent more likely than any other group of immigrants the pathetic stupidity of peasants who flock in dilapidated houses”.⁴⁵ Sometimes American newspapers also gave demoralizing accounts of the living conditions of those who had remained in Italy, in an attempt to put forward the idea that the class of immigrants now arriving on the American soil was already irremediably doomed and unfit for assimilation. An article in the *New York Times* in 1886 reported on “The Miserable Condition of the Italian Peasantry”. Italian agricultural workers, the columnist claimed, were victims of an inward and at the same time outward deprivation: “Health and morality are inseparably bound up together[...]The few times when the peasants earn money they drink to excess, so as to be seen rolling on the ground: they have no morality and live in abominable vice”.⁴⁶ Such negative commentaries undoubtedly worsened the perception of Italy in the U.S., while at the same time fostering confidence in America’s Manifest Destiny as a modern and superior nation. This was also noted by Joseph Cosco, who states in *Imagining Italians* that, “by observing and usually disparaging contemporary Italian national character, Americans could analyze and promote their own [...]”.⁴⁷

This sharp perceptual change must be attributed also to a paradoxical cross-fertilization between Italian criminal anthropology and northern European social Darwinism. These fledgling pseudo-sciences had a dramatic impact in America, in particular the work of Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his school. The Italian scholar, who became a celebrity within the international academic community, coupled Darwin’s notions of monogenic society with his own theory of *atavism*—which envisioned the existence of ‘evolutionary throwbacks’, that is, physical traits which he considered markers of a primeval delinquent inclination—thereby explaining societal differences as a set of “physical characteristics, which, more than any other environmental factor defined individuals’ social, psychological and intellectual profiles”.⁴⁸ He ascribed violence to an ‘atavistic’ feature typical of the African and Oriental descent, a concept that was furthered by Lombroso’s followers, criminologists Enrico Ferri, Giuseppe Sergi, and sociologist Alfredo Niceforo, who theorised a racial determinism between northern and southern Europeans, and especially between northern and southern Italians, defining them as

⁴⁵ Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 170.

⁴⁶ “The Miserable condition of the Italian peasantry”, *New York times*, 07/03/1886.

⁴⁷ Joseph Cosco, *Imagining Italians*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*, p. 72.

not only biologically different (e.g., Alpine vs. Mediterranean stock), but also mutually incompatible.⁴⁹ Sergi, in particular, claimed that the northern Italians possessed Celtic blood, which featured in the most civilised populations of Europe, rendering them less criminally-oriented than the southerners.⁵⁰

The arguments of Lombroso, Niceforo and Sergi offered a convenient legitimisation of nativist rhetoric concerning the inherent supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon stock at the expenses of the ‘Mediterranean’, emphasising the incapability of the latter to positively assimilate into American society, and demanding migratory restrictions. Understandably, these theories had an exceptionally wide reception and lasting impact on American thought, such as the study by psychologist Henry H. Goddard on immigrant feeble-mindedness and Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916).⁵¹ President Theodore Roosevelt, who popularized the notion of ‘race suicide’ found inspiration in Sergi’s book, *La Decadenza delle nazioni latine* (The Decadence of Latin Nations, 1900).⁵² A visible influence of Sergi’s work are the writings of eugenicist Edward A. Ross who, in his book *The Old World in the New* (1914), drew liberally from the thoughts and lexicon of the Italian scholar:

In the veins of the broad-head people of Piedmont, Lombardy, and Venetia, runs much Northern blood—Celtic, Gothic, Lombard, and German. The other Italians are of the long-head, dark Mediterranean race, with no small infusion of Greek, Saracen, and African blood in the Calabrians and Sicilians. Rarely is there so wide an ethnic gulf between the geographical extremes of a nation as there is between Milan and Palermo. [...] In nothing there are two peoples so unlike in their crimes. While northern Italy leads in fraud and chicanes, southern Italy reveals a rank growth of the ferocious crimes that go with a primitive stage of civilization.⁵³

Such ‘primeval’ inclinations to violence and criminality represented perhaps the most deep-seated and recurrent stereotyping that affected Italians, in America and elsewhere, as newspapers indicate. In 1880, just at the beginning of the Italian mass migration, the *New York Times* already warned its readers that Italians:

[A]re not a class of immigrants whom we can receive without danger to ourselves. In clannishness and persistent adherence to the speech, dress and mode of life of their own country the Italian and the Chinese immigrant are on a par [...] But the Chinaman very rarely gives the police or the courts any trouble, while it is notorious that no

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁰ Stefano Luconi, “La rappresentazione degli italiani nell’immaginario statunitense”, pp. 5-6.

⁵¹ Henry H. Goddard, *Feeble-mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2008); Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (Abergele and Indianapolis: Wermod and Wermod Publishing Group, 2012), (1916), pp. 78-80.

⁵² Giuseppe Monsagrati, “Theodore Roosevelt e l’Italia”, in Daniele Fiorentino, *Stati Uniti e Italia nel nuovo scenario internazionale 1898-1918* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2012), p. 63.

⁵³ Stefano Luconi, “La rappresentazione degli italiani nell’immaginario statunitense”, pp. 5-6; Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Old World in the New; the Significance of Past and Present Immigration to the American People* (New York: Century, 1914), p. 97; <http://archive.org/details/cu31924021182898>.

foreigners with whom we have to deal, stab and murder on so slight provocation as the Italians.⁵⁴

Between the 1880s and 1890s stories of brigands and *banditi* frequently appeared in America's most prominent newspapers. The *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* often published accounts of Italian immigrants connected to brigandage and other criminal activities which, more often than not, were embellished by fanciful details. For instance, in February 1890, when Buffalo Bill's show had just arrived in Italy, an article irreverently titled, "An Italian Romance: The Mother of Twelve Brigands Robbed by her Husband", appeared in the *New York Times*. The piece told the story of the Cardarellis, a family of fraudulent Italian green grocers living in Columbia, South Carolina, who had planned to return to Italy with "21,000 dollars in cash" after "leaving behind 8,000 dollars of unpaid liabilities". They were about to embark on the transatlantic journey when the wife, Angelina:

[...] who had been suffering with a tumor, was taken seriously ill and taken to a hospital. Giacinto (her husband n.d.a.), taking advantage of the opportunity thus offered, robbed the old woman of the entire amount of money she had in her possession and took the first steamer for Italy[...] Angelina and Giuseppe (their youngest son n.d.a.) are now in New York, penniless, the former in a dying condition. A prominent member of the Italian colony in this city, who knew the parties in their native country, says that Angelina is the mother of twelve brigands, who infest the rugged passes of fair Italy. From these she got large sums of money while in America. She was once the wife of a noted brigand but ran away with Cardarelli [...].⁵⁵

This whimsically derisive story powerfully demonstrates the image of the Italian as a helplessly devious individual, a product of his genetic 'brigand' disposition. The association with brigands exerted a particularly strong appeal to Americans, because it connected the criminal element that people 'saw' in current Italian immigrants with the romanticized images of Italy's past in books.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the play *The Brigands*, performed at the Casino theatre in New York City in 1889, strengthened the connection between Italianness and savage brutality.⁵⁷ The political and

⁵⁴ "Undesirable Immigrants", *New York Times*, 18/12/1880.

⁵⁵ "An Italian Romance: The Mother of Twelve Brigands Robbed by her Husband", *New York Times*, 03/02/1890.

⁵⁶ Even though it is true that the persecution of brigandage that the Italian government implemented in those years pushed many southerners to escape via immigration, this amounted to a relatively small percentage. Most Italians migrated to America for purely economic reasons. The American social setting and, in particular, the urban areas where the majority of them chose to settle could not possibly have allowed them to carry out their brigand activities in the same way that they did in rural Italy. The minority of Italian immigrants who continued to perform criminal activities did so in organized gangs which represented, arguably, a prelude to the Mafia, since they were now freed from the element of social oppression by a centralized power—a defining condition intrinsic to brigandage.

⁵⁷ Created by Jacques Offenbach and translated into English by W. S. Gilbert, the play is centred on a group of Italian brigands, one of whom falls in love with an aristocratic dame, they kidnap her and ask for a ransom. Upon capture, they are granted amnesty and pledge to lead a righteous life. See

‘scientific’ background which surrounded the debate on Italian immigration, the poor conditions of urban immigrant communities, and the rapid, though lasting, transformation of American society bolstered the most primitive and brutal images of Italy, which replaced more picturesque and appealing images.⁵⁸ This was compounded during the 1890s by a cyclical economic crisis that caused a great deal of unrest among the lower classes, which included a growing number of Italians.

In addition, by the last decade of the 19th century, the slow increase in the level of mass education awakened class consciousness in Italy.⁵⁹ Along with the development of socialist ideals, this triggered a radical shift on certain fringes of the Italian population. In the aftermath of the severe repression of brigandage, in the eyes of many men (and women) of humble origin, political radicalism was the only viable path and an act of retaliation against the monarchy.⁶⁰ According to Marcella Bencivenni, for oppressed Italians “anarchism represented essentially a ‘new religion’ that gave voice to their vengeance and aspirations. This prophetic element was crucial in mobilizing and organizing them. [...]What struck a responsive chord among the contadini was the hope that a revolution would come to stamp out all the wrongs and create a new world without poverty, hunger or injustice[...].”⁶¹ Thus, the millenarian underpinnings of Italian anarchism contributed a new gospel, that of the propaganda of the deed.⁶²

The years 1878-1902 are scattered with multiple seditious acts by Italian individuals who railed against emblems of oligarchic power—and effectively immolated themselves.⁶³ Echoes of the anarchic deeds in Europe put the United States on alert. North America had in fact represented a political haven for dissidents

Andrew Crowther. “The Brigands”, *W. S. Gilbert Society Journal*, vol. 2, no. 16 (Winter 2004), pp. 508–09.

⁵⁸ Maria Susanna Garroni, “Prospettive Americane sugli Italiani e la loro terra d’ origine”, in Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il risorgimento d’Italia: 1848-1901*, p. 104.

⁵⁹ Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 11.

⁶⁰ The spark was the arrival in Naples of notorious Russian exile Mikhail Bakunin. By the mid-1870s anarchic ideas filled the void left by the Republicanism of Mazzini, and anarchists became the leading anti-authoritarian wing of the First International. See Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, p. 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶² On Luigi Galleani, see Nunzio Pernicone, “Luigi Galleani and Italian Anarchist Terrorism in the United States”, in *Studi Emigrazione/ Études Migrations*, Rome, 30, III (1993), pp. 469-488.

⁶³ The killing of King Umberto I in 1900 (after failed attempts in 1878 and in 1897), the assassination of French president Sadi Carnot (1894), of Spanish Prime Minister Canova del Castillo (1897), of Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary (1898), and the attempted murder of King Leopold II of Belgium in 1902, all led to the execution of their assassins or their alleged suicide. On early Italian anarchist attacks in Europe, see Sergio Fedelbauer, *Attentati Anarchici dell’Ottocento* (Milano: Mondadori, 1970), and Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli anarchici Italiani nell’ epoca degli attentati* (Bologna: Rizzoli, 1981).

and over time several Italian activists had settled there to avoid governmental persecution.⁶⁴ Despite its blatant sodality with capitalism, America still retained a strong appeal to socialists and exiled anarchists because emergent trade unionism, which convinced them of the real possibility of a socialist bouleversement of society.⁶⁵ However, the death of President William McKinley resulted in many Italian immigrants being suspected of involvement. The *New York Times* reported on an alleged “prophet of evil”, an Italian barber in Kansas City with “a sort of veneration” for the anarchist Emma Goldman; he was said to have predicted the death of McKinley a month before it happened.⁶⁶ A week later, the same newspaper ran a headline “Italian Workmen Yelled with Delight when Mr. McKinley was Shot”.⁶⁷

The mixture of anarchist attacks in Europe, the increase in workers’ uprisings in the United States, and the implications of the McKinley’s assassination ensured that a degree of paranoia took over in American public opinion and that the already fierce anti-Italian sentiment escalated further.⁶⁸ At the turn of the century, Italian immigrants in the U.S., and the first generation of Italian-Americans, were therefore not only discriminated against their alleged non-white ethnic origins, their backward mores and their red-blooded temperament, but were systematically associated with terrorism. Such fierce discrimination contributed to the Immigration (Anarchist Exclusion) Act of 1903.⁶⁹

The *New York Times* vehemently inflamed the anti-Italian debate, singling out Italians as “anarchists and assassins”, and attributing their misconduct to a manifestation of their collective historical (under)development:

The Italian temperament seems to be particularly adapted to intrigue and conspiracy[...]Most of the great conspiracies of European history have been the creations of Italians; all the ‘great’ assassins have been Italians. The Italian of manners and education is a gentleman, a charming and vivacious companion, a fluent conversationalist. The Italian of the soil is often a coarse creature, quarrelsome and vindictive. [...] Especially it is during the last five decades that the word Anarchist and

⁶⁴ See the case of the exiled militants of the Sicilian Fasci who fled from Francesco Crispi and Antonio De Rudini’s draconian repressive measures, eventually establishing Socialist Unions in Houston, Texas. Stefano Luconi, “Socialisti e Anarchici negli Stati Uniti”, in Daniele Fiorentino and Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Italia e Stati Uniti nel Nuovo Scenario Internazionale* (Roma: Gangemi, 2012), pp. 111-113.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁶ “Prophet of Evil Led a Band of Anarchists Two Years Ago”, *New York Times*, 11/09/1901.

⁶⁷ “In Fear of Anarchists” *New York Times*, 18/09/1901.

⁶⁸ On anti-Italian sentiment and anarchist phobia in the Gilded Age, see Scott Miller, *The President and the Assassin: McKinley, Terror, and Empire at the Dawn of the American Century* (New York: Random House, 2011).

⁶⁹ The act banned the immigration of anarchists and other supposedly dangerous elements; it was mainly directed against Italians and Russians.

Italian have become more or less synonymous. [...]. And yet, today the question cannot but present itself: has Italy ceased to bless the world with men like Da Vinci and Raphael to curse it with such monsters as Cesario [sic.] and Brechi [sic.]? .⁷⁰

This column gives yet another glimpse of common perceptions of Italy and Italians in American society at the turn of the 20th century, combining prejudice with back-handed admiration, a confused understanding of history and a smattering of Anglo-Saxonism and racial theories. The observations of Buffalo Bill, his show associates Nate Salsbury and John Burke, performers Annie Oakley and her husband Frank Butler, manager Charles Eldridge Griffin (*Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*), and American newspapers commenting on the successes of Cody's show all defined Italy and its people as the quintessence of chaos, decay, corruption, criminality and anarchy.⁷¹

In the 1880s and 1890s, anxieties about bouts of anarchic individualism also became a main source of preoccupation in Italy's internal affairs, where a strong current of nationalist discourse on Italian 'collective traits' began a debate on eradicating this abhorrent 'vice' and rectifying the 'national character'.

Chapter 4.4. 'Italian Character' and Nationalism: 'Forging the Nation' between Colonialism and Emigration.

Another major aspect of Italian society in the last two decades of the 19th century was the upsurge in nationalism, which eventually brought the (initially reluctant) nation to take part in the 'Scramble for Africa', with ruinous consequences. The birth of Italian nationalism was not an overnight phenomenon, but stemmed from a current of patriotic debates on the nature of the Italian people, which began in the *salons* of the Enlightenment (both on the peninsula and abroad), and informed the political thought of the *Risorgimento*. The idea of the existence of a series of national traits which defined a rather elusive 'Italian character' was, at least initially, more of a foreign construct than a national one—foreign press accounts,

⁷⁰ The *New York Times* author refers to the anarchists Sante Geronimo Caserio, who killed French president Sadi Carnot and Gaetano Bresci, who killed Italian King Umberto I. "Anarchism and Assassins", *New York Times*, 15/09/1901. Emphasis mine. The journalist's description of Italians of different classes echoes a similar view held by Buffalo Bill ten years earlier during his visit in Italy and voiced in interview with American correspondents and private letters with family and associates. See Chapter 5.11.

⁷¹ See Chapters 5.11. and 7.7.

novels and memoirs abounded with commentaries on Italy which fostered the anti-Italian sentiment through the reification of the essence of its people.⁷²

Between the second half of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1890s, the debate on the character of the Italian nation permeated the national discourse. In the Liberal era in Italy, when the failure to implement good intentions on national identity-building vouchsafed during the *Risorgimento* was obvious, and when crowds of able-bodied men chose emigration, public interest in the discourse on national character grew as a reaction to that stagnating atmosphere.⁷³ Self-denigrating critiques were counterbalanced by phases of elation when claims of ‘cultural uniqueness’ were professed.⁷⁴ As Silvana Patriarca explains in *Italian Vices*, “by having to construct themselves in relation to several more positive and more successful *Others*, Italian nationalists oscillated between arrogantly exalting their ‘superior’ culture and despondently deprecating their state of inferiority”.⁷⁵ This type of discourse, and the fact that it was undeniably influenced more by what “non-Italians have said about ‘Italian character’, than what Italians themselves have said and done with the idea” ensured that some of those stereotypical representations were internalized, leading to the development of a sense of national identity in the context of political dependency.⁷⁶

In that period, the characteristics of modern nationalism, especially the militaristic aspects of it, were being established.⁷⁷ During the centuries that Italy spent as a colony of other European powers, a widespread de-militarization had taken place throughout the whole peninsula, and this, in the nationalist debate, was seen as a dishonour which had rendered the Italian people effete and emasculated. Therefore, militarization was thought to be badly needed, to re-instil long-lost vigour in the

⁷² This attitude was common in essays and treatises published throughout the 19th century both within and without Europe. One example is Jacob Burckhardt’s famous 1860 essay, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, which, despite its attempt to highlight an ideal(ized) era in the Italian past, reified the supposed traits of its people.

⁷³ Unlike in America, the process of Italian national unification had been undertaken by the elites, who perpetuated themselves in the government and institutions, failing to involve, let alone include, the ‘masses’. See Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Tiziano Bonazzi “The United States, Italy, and the tribulations of the Liberal Nation”, in Jörg Nagler, Don H. Doyle, and Marcus Gräser (eds.), *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 151-168.

⁷⁴ Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices*, p. 7. These exaggerated bouts of patriotism, as previously examined, were also typical of Italian travellers in the American West, who, confronted with *Other-ed* values and customs, re-asserted their self-worth through various claims of ‘Italian cultural superiority’.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

⁷⁷ These are features that accompanied Italy until WWII, arguably paving the way to Fascism.

Italians. This realization led to a broader desire for self-regeneration, which was thought to be necessary in order for Italy to reacquire its legitimate place in Europe. As in America, where the national character needed regeneration from its condition of cultural subordination to Europe, and to which the response was the rhetoric of American Exceptionalism, in Italy a nationalist discourse also began to take hold.⁷⁸ Just as Cody and Roosevelt were great supporters, and exporters, of American Exceptionalism, in Italy the figure who most contributed to the promotion of the philosophy of Italian primacy, and the reconstruction of the self-confidence of the Italian people was Francesco Crispi, who served as prime minister from 1887 to 1891 and later alternated as president with Giovanni Giolitti and Antonio Di Rudiní. From 1893 to 1896, Crispi pushed Italy deep into the colonial enterprise, but his real contribution to nation-building started long before the start of his parliamentary dictatorship—as his time as prime minister is often defined by Italian scholarship.⁷⁹

The rhetoric of the Italian primacy and feelings associated with it date back to the 1878 Berlin Congress, when the Italian failure to take a firm stance on the control of the Mediterranean caused outrage in public opinion. Specifically, Italy was looking for opportunities that would grant it control over Tunis, the land of the ancient city of Carthage. Other than the obvious advantages for trade and industry that the control over such territory would have offered, Tunisia was considered by many Italians to be a land of ancestral kinship, and several intellectuals and members of parliament—including Francesco Crispi—believed it to be a crucial place in the creation of a nation-building narrative, because it re-established a lineal connection with the Roman Empire.⁸⁰ Other imperialist enthusiasts, such as deputy Tommaso Tittoni, even believed that by virtue of the legacy of the Roman Empire, Italy should possess ‘permanent rights’ over Tunis, and that the Latin poet Statius “should be read to justify an Italian drive to express their language and culture in the shadow of Carthage”.⁸¹ Ancient Rome was obviously a symbol of glorious times for the Italians, as indeed it was also for foreigners. Both the intelligentsia and the political class of the time believed that in such an era of frenzied colonialism, the Italian nation had to reconnect with its ancient imperial past if she wanted to become

⁷⁸ On the theme of American subordination to European culture see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), (2007), pp. 140-181.

⁷⁹ See Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi: From Nation to Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸⁰ See Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 129, and Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, pp. 411-416.

⁸¹ Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 92.

relevant in international geo-politics. Unfortunately, this did not happen in 1878, and at the news that Britain intended to control Cyprus and France Tunis (invaded in 1881) Italy felt 'ousted' from the Mediterranean as the new *mare nostrum* dissolved. Crispi, then a member of parliament with the 'historical' Left, was furious and pushed the Rome newspaper he managed, *La Riforma*, to publish articles that inflamed the debate on 'arming the nation': "Italy must arm, arm, swiftly and mightily because [...] only the strong prevail".⁸² In distress, Crispi ranted, "we are truly decadent", in a letter to a freemason friend.⁸³ The trope of decadence hence became an integral part of the national debate, where it would linger for decades, fuelled—other than by Crispi's tirades—by inputs from disparate spheres of society, from literary culture to the social sciences, and this question resonated outside of Italy.⁸⁴ This was fostering, as late historian of Italy Christopher Duggan acutely observed, "a sense that only some great event—a war for instance—or some great man, could save Italy from the moral quagmire into which it was sinking [...] and that the best solution for Italy's decadence lay in an aggressive foreign policy, and, if possible, a gloriously victorious war".⁸⁵

Crispi also believed that the lack of respect for Italy in foreign policy stemmed from the little credibility enjoyed by the country in the handling of its internal affairs, and especially the poor treatment of the masses, especially the southern ones. A thought that preoccupied him was that, twenty-odd years into the unification of the country, the Italian people had not yet undergone a true political education. He wrote to a fellow deputy, "We are heading towards decadence without ever having scaled the heights of greatness...in twenty-four years no one has known, indeed no one has ever thought what education to be given to a people that has emerged from despotism and must advance down the path of liberty[...]".⁸⁶ Crispi therefore advocated the renewal of the Italian character, which in his opinion lacked steeliness and vigour, having been damaged by centuries of authoritarian rule and by the church. Regeneration could only be attained by practicing manly activities, and

⁸² Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, p. 391.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Let us think of the influence that freemason and anti-catholic poet Giosue' Carducci had on Italian bourgeois culture through his journal *Cronaca Bizantina* (Byzantine Chronicle), or the contributions of journalist Edoardo Scarfoglio, of scholars Pasquale Turiello and Guglielmo Ferrero and of the, already cited, 'School' of Cesare Lombroso. At the same time, also ideas from Spenser, Darwin, and from the study on the 'psychology of the masses', by French Sociologist Gustave Le Bon, were informing this 'decadence' debate in subtle but solid ways. See Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, pp. 412-415, and Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices*.

⁸⁵ Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, p. 401.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

once he took office as prime minister in 1887 Crispi actively fostered military education and activities such as sharpshooting and physical exercise—prompting associations with classical culture and national mythology.

Crispi believed that a cult of the fatherland and a devotion to its institutions needed to be instilled in the Italians. The militarization of the masses served, Crispi believed, to purge Italians of their innate sense of dislike of authority. His ‘nationalistic’ concept of education sought to divert the veneration that Italians felt for Catholicism or, as Marcella Bencivenni has demonstrated, for anarchism and socialism, and incline them towards the cult of the fatherland. He sought the worship of ‘Secular saints’, like Giuseppe Garibaldi and other heroes and martyrs of the *Risorgimento*, while advancing the cult of the monarchy.⁸⁷ Only by going through this kind of regeneration, Crispi believed, would Italy be able to “fulfil its mission in the world”, a mission which, informed by the ideology of ‘the primacy of Italy’ (essentially based on mythical images of Rome and Latinity), entailed a quasi-messianic role for Italy as the dispenser of civilization in Africa. Crispi’s *La Riforma* declared: “We should show those barbarians, who have regarded force as something negative that there is a people that has been placed on earth specifically to demonstrate...that force and right can come together to produce justice and prosperity”.⁸⁸

After failing to take control of Tunis and then Egypt, the Italian government developed a plan to seize strategic areas of Africa, particularly those offering access to the Red Sea. The chief goal became Ethiopia, but to reach it, Italian forces would have had to penetrate through Eritrea, first, and then Somalia. The government therefore resorted to sly techniques to infiltrate in the Horn of Africa. In 1869, the Rubattino merchant company from Genoa had acquired the port of Assab, in an effort to gain benefits on the route trades connecting with the Suez Canal. Assab was a coaling station for ships bound for India, and by 1882 it was governmentally run.⁸⁹ In 1885, under pressure from imperialist MPs such as Crispi and Sydney Sonnino, the government also purchased the harbour of Massawa. The official foundation of

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 449; Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, pp. 134-135.

⁸⁸ Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, p. 435 and p. 442.

⁸⁹ Giuseppe Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism, 1860–1907: Europe’s Last Empire* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 46-49.

the Eritrean colony took place on the 1st of January 1890—a momentous time, and also the month in which Buffalo Bill and his troupe landed in Italy.⁹⁰

Massawa was initially chosen as the capital, and within four years the colony went from military to civil. About two thirds of the fertile land—the Eritreans' only means of sustenance—were being confiscated and given to Italian settlers, in a sort of Manifest Destiny of Latin civilization. Italians, many of whom at the beginning of the 19th century had condemned the treatment of Native Americans, once they had become a unified nation, could not help becoming oppressors themselves, for reasons to do with vanity in the face of other European nations. This irony was seldom, if ever, evident in Italian public opinion, as the country continued to venture further into African territories, guided by the aggressive Francesco Crispi who was now prime minister as well as minister of foreign affairs. Wanting to demonstrate that Italy was a powerful country, Crispi therefore plunged Italy into further reckless, costly, colonial missions to the ancestral land of King Solomon.

In January 1887, still under the Depretis administration, Italy tried to reach Abyssinia (the part of the Ethiopian Empire that Italy longer for), by advancing towards the town of Saati, violating a treaty in force between Abyssinia, Egypt and Britain. Notified of the possibility of a defensive attack by the Ethiopians, Italy reinforced the garrison at Saati, but ruler Ras Alula, alerted in advance by spies, sent thousands of soldiers to retaliate, outnumbering the Italians and defeating them at Dogali.⁹¹ This was a slap in the face to Italian imperialist pride, yet Crispi believed the most sensible way to avenge this shame was through further aggression against Ethiopia. He was fervently supported by the Italian Monarch, King Umberto, who rejoiced at each irrelevant victory of the colonial army, in an attempt to boost national morale. In May 1889, the treaty of Wuchale (Ucciali in Italian) was signed between Italy and Negus Menelik. In a devious and at the same time grossly naïve manner, the treaty established a de-facto Italian protectorate over Abyssinia, unbeknownst to the Abyssinians themselves who, due to the many incongruences that the Amharic translation presented, had interpreted the contract as an accord to use the help of Italy, if and when they wanted, to negotiate with other European countries.⁹² This manoeuvre is highly representative of the paternalism and cockiness

⁹⁰ Alessandro Triulzi, "Adwa from Monument to Document", in Jacqueline Andall, Derek Duncan (eds.), *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 149-151.

⁹¹ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, p. 21.

⁹² Alessandro Aruffo, *Storia del colonialismo italiano: da Crispi a Mussolini* (Roma: Danews, 2003), p. 35.

which characterized the Italian political class of the time, and particularly Crispi. It took until 1893 for Menelik to realize the ruse and reject the treaty, which eventually led to the first Italian-Ethiopian war in 1895-96. Menelik swiftly put together a number of alliances with different local Ras, and, with the help of French arms and ammunitions, crushed the Italian army at Adwa in 1896.⁹³ This defeat signalled the political demise of Crispi and ended Italy's colonial ambitions for years, administering yet another blow to Italy's self-confidence.

National character debates and colonial adventures are relevant to the reception of Cody's show in Italy. The images of the white man's domination of supposedly savage Indians, which the show fostered, weighed on Italy's (especially its bourgeois ruling class) desire to equate itself with other European countries through African colonial achievements. Indeed, the message of Buffalo Bill's Wild West—that not only European nations, but America too, this new country, had succeeded on the colonial front—may have thus revived feelings of inferiority in the Italian middle and ruling classes. This attitude certainly appears to have motivated the defensive tones of some of the show's reviews. Furthermore, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show highlighted the dichotomy between American modernity and the Old World's decrepitude. For Americans, the path towards 'regeneration' was centred around the West, the 'civilization' of Native tribes, and maintaining an enduring connection with their creational 'frontier myth'; for Italians, 'regeneration' was thought to come about by fighting and acculturating Africans, reconnecting in this way with ancient myths of 'Imperial Latinity'. Notably, the second coming of Cody's show in Italy in 1906 coincided with the resurgence of the colonial drive, under the administrations of Sydney Sonnino and Giovanni Giolitti. It is indeed conceivable that the new 'Rough Riders of the World' show format, in which splendid representatives of exotic foreign armies were displayed under the banner of Cody's Americanism, encouraged Italian public opinion to shrug off past international humiliations and rekindle an interest in colonial enterprises. After all, the newspapers of Rome made no secret of the fact that many ministers of the Sonnino-Giolitti governments witnessed several performances of the Wild West from the tribune seats, and that during the 1890 tour there had been a steady presence of deputies from Crispi's ministry—and assiduous attendance by Crispi's wife, Lina.⁹⁴

⁹³ Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, p. 97.

⁹⁴ See the newspaper *Don Chisciotte della Mancina*, Rome, 05/03/1890.

Cody's other influence may have been to encourage sustained Italian migration to America. Even though Italian institutions tried hard to channel emigration into new African colonies, the pull of the Americas remained powerful. Emigration to North America was so persistent that Italy was forced to turn it to its best advantage.⁹⁵ Some of the liberal ministers believed that rather than complaining about the loss of young blood and vitality, the Italian nation should be thankful to emigrants: since the country could not provide for them, the *émigrés* would provide for Italy through their work abroad.⁹⁶ Italian state rhetoric then began to support the idea that "instead of exploiting foreign populations by force, Italy's 'colonies' of emigrants would voluntarily maintain ties with their mother country, at a less expense and with much less bloodshed".⁹⁷ Emigration to North America represented an opportunity to open new commercial outlets for Italy, alleviating some of the burden that the agricultural crisis was creating, especially in the south of the country.⁹⁸ Emigrants were therefore considered as "an organic part of the nation and part of the expanded state, linked through a shared cultural background", and emigrant communities were given the name of 'spontaneous colonies'; thus, the idea of a 'Greater Italy' was formed.⁹⁹ Emigration began to be conceived as a form of cultural colonialism as well as an economic extension of Italy around the globe.¹⁰⁰

After the *debacle* of Adwa and the realization that African colonialism was not so profitable, nor sustainable, the government encouraged emigration to the Americas in more or less direct ways: regulating the space available on board ships, the quality of water and nourishments available, establishing emigration information bureaus at home and strengthening diplomatic services abroad.¹⁰¹ America began to be seen, in the words of Senator Francesco Nitti, as an opinionated advocate for emigration, as "the only potent safety valve against class hate [...] and the great and only salvation for a country barren in resources and fertile manpower".¹⁰²

The American West, which some understood as having been the great safety valve of the United States, offered for some Italian migrants a valid alternative to the

⁹⁵ Aliza J. Wong, *Race and the Nation in Liberal Italy 1861-1911* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 116.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, p. 8.

⁹⁸ Aliza J. Wong, *Race and the Nation in Liberal Italy 1861-1911*, p. 116.

⁹⁹ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, p. 8 and p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Choate, "The Frontier Thesis in Transnational Migration: The U.S. West in the Making of Italy Abroad", in Jessie L. Embry and Brian Q. Cannon (eds.), *Immigrants in the Far West: Historical Identities and Experiences*, p. 365.

¹⁰¹ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, p. 42.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

overcrowded eastern slums and the racially charged atmosphere of the southern states. Mark Choate has observed that the western frontier featured strongly in the expansionistic vision of Italians: “the vineyards, orchards, fields, mines, and cities of the Rockies and the Pacific coast emerged as destinations connected to a web of personal, social, national and commercial interest tying North America to the *madre patria*”.¹⁰³ Of all the western American territories, California exerted a particular appeal, as somewhere Italian emigrants would enjoy the most success in viticulture, construction and banking, and where Italian-language publications and newspapers kept alive the connection with Italian culture. It is not a coincidence that the earliest Italian re-appropriations of the Western myth were set in California. One thinks of Giacomo Puccini’s opera, *La Fanciulla del West* (The Girl of the Golden West) (1910), the very first ‘Italian Western’ films made in the silent era, *Due Vite per un Cuore* (A Sister’s Ordeal) (1912), *Sulla Via dell’ Oro* (The Human Bridge) (1913), and *Nel paese dell’oro* (In the Land of Gold) (1914), and some of Emilio Salgari’s Western novels. While the Great Plains powerfully resonated within the American imagination, for Italians it was precisely California which was relevant to their collective imagery, because it offered a model of both adventure and success. These works and their significance will be assessed in the last section of this work, dedicated to the Italian renderings of the ‘Western myth’.¹⁰⁴

Chapter 4.5. The Italian Middle Class and Leisure: Opera, Circus, International Expositions, and Cinema.

While the conditions of the Italian proletariat remained grim and—borrowing the definition from Richard Slotkin—pushed many desperate men to find their social redemption through violence, emigration or venturing on (doomed) colonial expeditions, the steady march towards the industrialization of the country ensured the prosperity of a new social class, *il ceto medio*, the Italian bourgeoisie. It is, perhaps, worth noting that a merchant and commercial middle class had existed in Italy since the age of the municipalities, but that only after the industrial revolution this class expanded, becoming progressively more inclusive.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Mark Choate, “The Frontier Thesis in Transnational Migration: The U.S. West in the Making of Italy Abroad”, p. 366.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Eight.

¹⁰⁵ Alberto M. Banti, *Storia della Borghesia Italiana: L’età Liberale* (Roma: Donzelli, 1996).

The nascent 19th-century Italian bourgeoisie was initially characterised by its alleged ‘poor productivity’ compared to its European counterparts; this was due, fundamentally, to the agrarian nature of the Italian Kingdom, which allowed bourgeois landowners to prosper idly through revenue from land annuities rather than through the profits of industrial activities.¹⁰⁶ After the agrarian crisis of 1887 brought a general tightening of taxation, landownership lost its profitability and with it its ancient prestige, and the bourgeoisie turned to new occupations—conceived to be more modern. Bourgeois became an umbrella term, which grouped together an upper middle class dedicated to banking, finance, and manufacturing industry, a cultured class made of lawyers, academics and other intellectual professionals, and a *petite bourgeoisie*, composed of retailers and office workers.¹⁰⁷ The social glue which connected the higher ranks of economic bourgeoisie with an educated middle class consisted mainly in the shared sense of belonging to the same cultural milieu, characterized by values such as the importance of individual performance, social respect and political influence.¹⁰⁸ Within this context, exclusive associational activities flourished. From the second half of the nineteenth century a multitude of clubs, *circoli* and academic societies surged; there were meeting points where the elites would spend their free time conversing and engaging in cultural, scientific or political debate. All these activities were intended, outside of mere leisure, to maximise social interaction and consolidate relations between different spheres of bourgeois life.¹⁰⁹ Other leisurely activities of the social elite included manly sports: fencing, shooting and gymnastics, but also mountaineering and, with the advent of motor cars, racing.¹¹⁰ The *petite bourgeoisie* remained just above the masses.¹¹¹ Industrialisation meant that leisure pursuits, once the preserve of the aristocracy, were available to all those with the means to spend their free time on recreation.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66

¹⁰⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Fernando Salsano, “Da borghesia a ceto medio: trasformazioni sociali, sviluppo economico e rappresentanza politica nell’ Italia contemporanea”, in Benedetto Coccia (ed.), *Borghesia* (Roma: Editrice Apes, 2010), p. 115.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p 71.

¹¹⁰ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 167.

¹¹¹ As Thorstein Veblen explained in his *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), the component of manual labour which characterised the activities of the *petite bourgeoisie*, rendered it inherently weaker and inferior to the eyes of the upper-middle classes. For more information on the role of the lower-middle class in Europe refer to: Geoffrey Crossick, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence* (London: Routledge, 1995), (1998).

¹¹² Alain Corbin, *L’avènement des loisirs* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), (2009), p. 17.

One of the most popular sites of Italian middle class leisure was the theatre, where operettas and melodramas ruled. The importance of this type of entertainment in the socio-cultural landscape of 19th century Italy was highlighted by Antonio Gramsci, an incisive neo-Marxist critic of Italian society, suggesting that in Italy melodrama performed the same unifying function that the popular novel had in France.¹¹³ Such overwhelming popularity, which involved both the upper-middle and the lower-middle classes, stemmed from the idealisation of humble characters from the fringes of society, as well as from the dramatization of patriotic and civil feelings, associated especially with the events of the *Risorgimento*.¹¹⁴ Dramas like Verdi's *Nabucco*, Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* and the *Guglielmo Tell*, which staged a conflict between oppressors and the oppressed, all struck sensitive chords with the Italians of the second half of the 19th century, ultimately contributing to the construction of a sense of national identity and ideology. Their attractiveness also owes a great deal to the moderate cost of the shows' tickets, which progressively decreased during the second half of the 19th century, and to the construction of auditoriums in small towns and in provinces, which allowed for the theatre to become another inclusive space of leisure, concurrent with the circus, but targeted at a different societal rank.¹¹⁵ The Italians' unrestrained passion for melodrama, and, in particular, for any dramatic representation loaded with civil, moral, and nationalistic undertones gives us a clue as to the fertile ground that Cody's Wild West show found among them: emotionally charged dramatizations, such as "The first scalp for Custer" and "The attack on the settler's cabin", no doubt filled Italian audiences with pathos, as well as enthusing them with the novelty of Western American elements, so exotic to their eyes. A chief example of the immediate success of this combination must be found in *La Fanciulla del West* (The Girl of the Golden West), which merged the Western aesthetics and setting—a fad undoubtedly imported by Buffalo Bill—with the melodramatic afflatuses of the *libretto*—a staple of the Italian dramatic tradition.¹¹⁶

In addition to theatre, another quintessential place of 'mass' leisure was—up until the last decades of the 19th century—the circus. This was especially true of Italy, where the circus was, in accordance with Bakhtin's definition, a favoured

¹¹³ Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e Vita Nazionale*, cited in Stefano Pivato and Anna Tonelli, *Italia vagabonda: il tempo libero degli italiani dal melodramma alla pay-tv* (Roma: Carocci, 2001), p. 22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ See Chapter Eight

setting for the ongoing performance of the—traditionally Italian—carnavalesque spirit, and therefore it occupied the role of a democratic site of social gathering: the showcase of the subversion of social order, appealing equally to low-brow and high-brow spectators.¹¹⁷ The Italian circus tradition is one of Europe’s most ancient. The word “circus” comes from Latin, meaning “circle” or “ring”, and in the Roman Empire it defined the public space used for horse races with chariots. Modern Italian circus incorporated the leisurely elements of the Roman and classical world and superimposed them on the fashion of travelling sideshows of musicians, jugglers and acrobats that regularly crossed the Italian peninsula from the Middle Ages all the way to the present.¹¹⁸ The founder of modern Italian circus, Alessandro Guerra, had entertained Italians from the 1820s to the 1860s with “acts of equilibrium on the horse, of juggling with swords and daggers [...] horsemen armed with spears, darts javelins, swords, guns, presented themselves at the tournament to hit heads and shoot the target”.¹¹⁹

It was not surprising, therefore, that the Italians’ long-term acquaintance with the circus tradition, and especially the familiarity with these particular acts, ensured that on some occasions the Wild West show was described as an “American Circus” by Italian audiences, rather than the instructional and historically accurate spectacle that it was considered to be by Cody. As we shall see later in this study, many newspaper articles heralded the “arrival of Buffalo Bill’s Circus”. This reaction was also triggered by the fact that Cody’s second Italian tour was put together with the assistance of his new business partner, the circus impresario James A. Bailey. It was logistically structured in a very similar manner to a circus, with very short but widespread stopovers, and used a structural apparatus aesthetically reminiscent of a circus.¹²⁰ The Italian middle class played a leading role in the Wild West show’s reception, and most of the newspaper reviews and personal accounts that survive were written by, and for, members of this class. Journalists, novelists, and others who

¹¹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, cited in Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp.8-9.

¹¹⁸ On early itinerant shows in Italy, see Guido Ceriotti, *Storia Sociale e Culturale D’Italia*, Vol. 3 (Milano: Bramante editore, 1987) and Massimo Medica, *Le Stanze della Musica: artisti e musicisti a Bologna dal ‘500 al ‘900* (Milano: Silvana edizioni, 2002). For a comprehensive history of Italian Circus, see Alessandro Cervellati, *Questa Sera Grande Spettacolo: Storia del circo Italiano* (Milano: Edizioni Avanti, 1961) and the excellent chapter, “Appunti Sulla Storia del Circo in Italia”, by José Pantieri in *Cinema e Circo in Italia*, (Roma: Edizioni, C.E.C.S., 1992), pp. 19-31.

¹¹⁹ José Pantieri, *Cinema e Circo in Italia*, p. 22.

¹²⁰ Even current historiography in Italian language has maintained the tendency to define Cody’s Wild West Show as a circus. See previously mentioned works by Alessandro Cervellati and José Pantieri and Mario Verdone, *Feste e spettacoli a Roma* (Roma: Newton Compton, 1993).

left their comments in writing, have provided their *bourgeois* outlooks on Cody's show for a similarly middle-class readership. This rather one-dimensional perspective is the only one upon which present historiography concerning Cody's Wild West shows in Italy—especially the works of Reddin, Warren and Lottini—has been based.¹²¹ It is with this intrinsic bias, and without any consideration to class, regional or gender differences, that scholars have explained how Italians, as a whole unspecified entity, received Cody's show. Due to the high rate of illiteracy at the time, it is in fact harder to establish how the lower classes received the Wild West show, as their perspective was rarely documented in writing. However, during the 20th century, 2nd and 3rd generation accounts have appeared, as well as representations of Cody's show in popular culture, which prove that the oral histories about Cody's Wild West were being transmitted from parent to child, from generation to generation, and were, indeed, sources of deep fascination.¹²² This leads to the realisation that, although the populace was voiceless during the enactment of Cody's show, it displayed a very different reaction in relation to the show, itself, from that of the upper classes. The rising interest in the different manifestations of the Western genre in films and comics that surfaced in Italy in the second part of the 20th century, must not be considered a casual occurrence, but it must be seen as strictly related to the reception of Cody's show by that muted social class.¹²³

Other entertainments that played a key part in the burgeoning leisure market of late 19th century Italy were ethnographic exhibitions and trade fairs, whose golden age occurred precisely in those years. These exhibitions were crafted and promoted as cultural and instructional products, in that they conjugated representations of industrial advancement with elements of leisure, socialisation, and, especially, entertainments aimed at stimulating popular curiosity for the 'other'.¹²⁴ Previously, *otherness* could only be experienced by physically going to exotic places, but with the advent of world fairs and anthropological shows, alterity was being catered for within reach and was accessible to everyone. A vast series of international and national fairs and exhibitions took place in Italy during the years that concern this

¹²¹ See Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, especially the chapter, "To esteem us better", pp. 103-110; Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; and Irene Lottini, "When Buffalo Bill Crossed the Ocean: Native American Scenes in Early Twentieth Century European Culture," pp. 187-203.

¹²² In conclusion, see memories of contemporary Italian writers and other personalities, such as Alessandro Baricco and Enrico Bo, about hearing their grandparents' enthusiastic recollections of attending Buffalo Bill's Wild West show.

¹²³ See Chapter Eight.

¹²⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, p. 220. On World Fairs and the birth of mass culture in America, see Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*.

part of my study (1880-1906).¹²⁵ These events, from the successful 1884 Turin general exposition to the lavish 1906 Milan international exposition (convened for the inauguration of the Simplon Tunnel, which connected by rail Paris and Milan), all unfailingly accommodated areas dedicated to the ethnographic display of non-European settings and peoples, starting with the exhibit of the six *Assabesi* at Turin's fair, and going on to include the setting up of 'Indigenous Villages' like the 'Little Cairo' in Milan in 1906.¹²⁶ This reflects how, also on this front, Italy was striving to conform to a larger European trend.¹²⁷ In fact, as the Italian Kingdom's interest in African territories grew bigger, the more Africa featured within national and international expositions and trade fairs. As Italian scholar Guido Abbattista points out, it was through these events that Italy, for the first time, publicly staged a colonial discourse which introduced the "rudiments of ethnographic, geo-naturalistic and economic colonial knowledge", features which unquestionably served as the catalysers for public consensus.¹²⁸

Therefore, if Melodrama and Circus catered to the collective need to unlock the imagination, exhibitions satisfied the necessity for authenticity and validation which coexisted with the desecrating carnivalesque spirit within the mind of Italians of that epoch—and these collective desires were certainly shared by Americans. Cody's show capitalized on this need for realism and solid certainties, in Italy just as it did in America. For example, the exhibition of Native Americans within his show—and the constant reminders of their authenticity (even though the Natives in the show often performed as members of tribes other than their own) represented a novelty, or at least a refreshing diversion for Italians.¹²⁹ For many of them it even meant, according to Richard Francaviglia's thesis, enjoying a different kind of *Orientalism* from the one already experienced in the Italian fairs, which—as obvious

¹²⁵ Milan's 1881 National Exposition, Turin's 1884 General Exposition, Rome's 1887 World Exposition, Palermo's 1891 National Exposition, Genoa's 1892 Italian American Exposition, Milan's 1894 'Esposizioni Riunite', Turin's 1898 General Italian Exposition, Turin's 1902 International Modern decorative Art Exhibition, and Milan's 1906 International Fair. On representation of the 'Indigenous other' in Italian World Fairs and Exhibition see the excellent study by Guido Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013). For an English language study on Italian World Fairs, see Cristina della Colletta *World's Fairs Italian Style* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

¹²⁶ *Assabesi* refers to inhabitants of the Eritrean port of Assab, which became the first Italian overseas territory. Six rural inhabitants from areas near Assab were brought to the 1884 Turin's World Fair and misrepresented as a delegation of Royalty from Eritrea by the colonial agents, the fair's organization and the Italian press. See Guido Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, pp. 122-190.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.107.

¹²⁹ Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), pp. 72-74. See also chapter 7.4.

manifestations of the colonial policy—primarily focused on the exhibition of African races and the re-creation of Middle Eastern sceneries.¹³⁰ Cody was also able to exploit the Italians’ startling curiosity concerning the racial *other* during his second tour of Italy, when the parade of soldiers from various continents, “The Rough Riders of the World”, was explicitly celebrated as a carousel of anthropological diversity.¹³¹ Cody was mindful of the success achieved during the Chicago World Columbian Exposition in 1893, where the Wild West occupied the space adjacent to the fair’s entrance. He replicated this arrangement during the 1906 International Exhibition in Milan, a choice which proved to be, yet again, unfailingly lucrative.¹³²

In such a multifaceted leisure scenario as that of Liberal Italy, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West must be envisioned, therefore, as a hybrid middlebrow spectacle, which evoked the exciting allure of a circus show and, at the same time, aimed at the respectability of a theatrical representation with its historical re-enactments. In Italy, as in America, its function was to unify and consolidate ideological and social ties among spectators (this, as we shall see, did happen in Italy, but not always in the ways that Cody had foreseen). Its acts aimed for audience participation and identification with the show’s values: individual courage and patriotism were enacted by Cody himself or his best cowboy performers, while democracy and anti-elitism were reflected in the rather affordable ticket prices.

At the dawn of the new century, the ‘moving picture revolution’ meant that the popularity of these types of exhibition/theatrical entertainments would progressively fade, especially in the case of the melodrama, and the *Café Concert*.¹³³ As scholar Gabriella Turnaturi points out, audiences quickly realised that the moving picture conveyed a stronger form of emotional participation and identification than they were used to experiencing inside theatres and variety shows.¹³⁴ Within a few years the crowds that filled *Café Concerts*, international fairs and exhibitions would attend cinemas. According to Italian cinema scholar Giovanni Lasi, in 1908 Milan

¹³⁰ On the theme of the American West conceived as a ‘new Orient’ see Richard Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Provo: Utah State University Press, 2011).

¹³¹ See the show brochure for Genoa in 1906, in chapter 7.1.

¹³² “Buffalo-Bill”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 30/04/1906.

¹³³ Robert M. Lewis (ed.), *From Travelling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America 1830-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), (2007), p. 17.

¹³⁴ Gabriella Turnaturi, “Les métamorphoses du divertissement citoyen dans l’Italie unifiée (1870-1915)”, in Alain Corbin (ed.), *L’avènement des loisirs*, p. 243.

already had over 80 cinema halls, Rome and Turin had 50, while Naples had 30.¹³⁵ This indicates how cinema's incredible draw and its indisputable claims as a pastime affordable to all played a strong levelling action in the leisure market of Italy, as it did in other industrialised countries, significantly blurring the gap between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' entertainment.¹³⁶ Buffalo Bill himself would be among the first subjects to feature in several Italian cinema halls, thanks to a cinema pioneer, Filoteo Alberini, who filmed the Wild West show in 1906 Rome, covering the arrival of the troupe's trains at the station up to the actual show performance.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Giovanni Lasi, "La produzione cinematografica nel sistema economico-industriale italiano tra il 1908 e il 1914. Il caso della Milano Films" (PhD diss., University of Bologna, 2012), p. 100. Online http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/4921/1/Lasi_Giovanni_Tesi.pdf. Last accessed 09/02/2020.

¹³⁶ Gabriella Turnaturi, "Les métamorphoses du divertissement citadin dans l'Italie unifiée (1870-1915)" in Alain Corbin (ed.), *L'avènement des loisirs*, p. 249. On cultural hierarchy in America, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), (2009).

¹³⁷ See chapter 7.6.

Chapter Five: Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Birth of a 'National Entertainment' and the First Tour of Italy (1890)

Chapter 5.1. William F. Cody as Buffalo Bill: the man and the showman.

The late 1800s, at the height of the positivist spirit, were globally perceived as an age of epochal and rapid changes. The shared sense of belonging to an imminent new era in the history of humanity, hastened the frenzy to immortalize the last living remnants of a fading reality, before they would be completely overcome by modernity. Technological inventions such as photography and, later, cinema, undoubtedly contributed to fuel this penchant for the memorialisation of passing time; live shows, such as fairs and ethnographical exhibitions, served a similar purpose: to offer a real-time display of waning traditions and declining civilizations before they would become lost at the civilizing hand of Western Empires.

Turn-of-the-century American West was also hit by this irrepressible tide of technological progress and urbanization, to the point that, in the eyes of Americans and Europeans, it was starting to represent the ghost of a bygone era, in the same way that the press and popular literature thought Indians and buffalos were vanishing. William F. Cody, universally known as Buffalo Bill, was one of the earliest characters to recognize this trend, and to artfully capitalize on it. The Iowa-born pony-express-rider-turned-show-impresario ventured to merge such traditions, through memorialisation of the past and didascallic entertainment, in his eponymous *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, which he ran from 1883 until 1913, and took from north to south of the USA and several times to Europe. Thanks to the ingenious conception of this show, Cody managed to become, according to scholar Joy S. Kasson, “arguably the most famous American of his time”.¹

Growing up in Kansas to a family of Scot-Irish descent, Cody was orphaned at age eleven—his father, an advocate of abolitionism, was badly injured at the hands of a pro-slavery mob, and died later on as a consequence of that assault—he was required, therefore, to subsidize for the rest of his family. Young Bill soon started working as a Pony Express and railroad messenger, alternating this activity with occasional gold-digging and trapping ventures. Still in his late teens, he volunteered to serve in the Civil War by enrolling in the Kansas Regiment of the 7th Cavalry: “I was so drunk I did not know what I was doing”, he would later admit in his

¹ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, p. 5.

autobiography. Soon after the war's end he married in 1866 Louisa Frederici, an Alsatian-American woman from Missouri, whom he had briefly courted during an army stopover in St. Louis. Later on, as a married man, he undertook several business activities such as running a hotel and settling, unsuccessfully, a town in Kansas, that he named Rome—not by chance, given, as will be seen, Cody's growing penchant for the glories of imperial antiquity. In order to support his own growing family, Cody eventually fell back on the occupation of prairie scout and buffalo hunter, activities which earned him the lifelong nickname of 'Buffalo Bill'. In 1868, his extensive scouting skills led him to be appointed as Chief Scout of the 5th Cavalry by General Sheridan and, subsequently, to his receipt of a medal of honour in 1872.²

It could be argued that Cody 'rehearsed' for his future career as a showman, precisely during his scouting occupation. On the prairies, he often offered demonstrations of his hunting prowess to other Army scouts, local spectators and even tourists. This activity prompted the creation of the so-called 'Celebrity Buffalo Hunts' which, at the expense of the animals' lives and indigenous tribes' subsistence, provided new frontiers of excitement against the perpetual *ennui* of European nobility and *haute-bourgeoisie*, while at the same time enhancing Cody's status and fame as an insuperable plainsman. Cody's growing reputation also benefited from the positive echo he received from Ned Buntline's dime novels. This professional pulp-fiction writer had met Cody in 1869 during a hunting event, and soon afterwards published the story, *Buffalo Bill King of the Border Men*.³ According to Don Russel, Joy Kasson and Louis Warren, who have produced the most extensive biographies and social histories of Cody and his era, the narrative, published in the magazine *New York Weekly*, did not substantially differentiate Buffalo Bill Cody from several other *feuilleton* frontier heroes; however, it did meet exceptionally well the taste and expectations of the proletarian readership to which it was addressed—who were looking for an array of traditional border heroes who could evocatively assure them of the survival of the old frontier ways amid the looming advance of modernization.⁴ This success is evidenced by the fact that, in order to match the ever-growing audience demand for Buffalo Bill adventures, new writers—such as Prentiss Ingraham (who would later co-write Cody's autobiography and work as an advance man in the *Wild West Show*) continually approached Buffalo Bill as a narrative

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20; and Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 116.

subject. More importantly, Ned Buntline's publications were quickly turned into lucrative plays, which were at first interpreted by vaudeville performers, until Buntline managed to persuade an initially hesitant Cody to perform as the eponymous protagonist—which would have added claims of veracity to the dramatic piece.

Cody's theatrical career officially started during the season of 1872, in the play *Scouts of the Plains*, along with Ned Buntline, cowboy 'Texas' Jack Omohundro, and Italian exotic dancer Giuseppina Morlacchi.⁵ Initially, however, Cody did not fully devote himself to showbusiness, alternating for an entire decade theatrical seasons in winter and summer scouting. Kasson reasonably argues that it is likely to be during these early stage experiences that Cody mastered the art of sensationalism which he later employed in public appearances and interviews for his own show, and also, to an extent, in his own private correspondences and recollections.⁶ This appears to be the moment when his real self became inextricably merged with the fictionalized persona that was being superimposed on him by the hype of dime-novel adventures. His acting career had taken off and his popularity grew by the day but, unfortunately, Cody was not happy to be considered more of a vaudeville star and dime novel hero than a real plainsman. His desire to get his scouting deeds legitimated and to gain prestige and respectability in the eyes of society was such that he began to dissociate himself from melodrama and pulp-fiction tradition and started to trivialize them in public discussions, interviews, and especially in his putative autobiography.⁷ The decision to write the latter was yet another endeavour to celebrate his frontier exploits in such a way as to muffle the resonance of his recent theatrical career. Notably he sought endorsement from reputable and high-ranking personalities who he had met in the past in order to authenticate his personal account: "A scrupulously correct... record of actual daily life", wrote General Philip Sheridan, in the introduction. Cody, therefore, soon found himself torn between his ambitions and his interests: on the one hand he yearned to be credited as a factual protagonist of Western history; on the other he realised he

⁵ On the fascinating, albeit understudied, character of Giuseppina Morlacchi, see the excellent article by Andrea Harris, "Sur la Pointe on the Prairie: Giuseppina Morlacchi and the Urban Problem in the Frontier Melodrama", in *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, vol. 27, No.1, 2015. Online. <https://jadtjournal.org/2015/03/06/sur-la-pointe-giuseppina-morlacchi-and-the-urban-problem-in-the-frontier-melodrama/>. Last accessed: 09/01/2020.

⁶ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, p. 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27. Within Cody scholarship, there are contentions as to whether his autobiography was penned by Cody or ghost written by some of his show partners. See Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, pp. 19-20; and Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, pp. 271-72.

could not turn his back on the entertainment industry which had made him so popular. His ceaseless striving to offer authenticity, and his desire to widen and raise his target audience, eventually set the basis for his new enterprise in show business, the creation of the *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*: a spectacle which intersected acts of vaudeville, equestrian circus, historical re-enactment and ethnographical exhibitions. Hence, by incorporating and juxtaposing elements of working-class leisure with conventionally bourgeois past-times, Cody's show bridged the chasm between elitist and popular types of entertainment and produced a multifarious middlebrow exhibition which could effectively and democratically appeal to all.

Chapter 5.2. Genesis of the Wild West's Show and its significance for America

Joy Kasson believes that “the Wild West's show is something new in the history of show business, but it was also the creation of his own time”; there is a great deal of truth in her words.⁸ The show, indeed, featured performances which could be regarded as idiosyncratic of the post-Reconstruction era: feats of marksmanship, horse races, Indian dances and hunting scenes, enactments of Western American settlements, as well as episodes from Cody's scouting past which had become part of recent history (such as his participation, though marginal, in events leading to Custer's last stand). These acts presented the American West as a lost Arcadia, which was structured, as most of the historiography on Cody's shows concurs, in such a way as to assert America's exceptional national character, at a crossroads in the country's process of self-definition.⁹ America was setting out to compete with Europe's major colonial powers, but still suffered from a cultural cringe, in that in some areas of society, chiefly the arts and culture, America did not deem itself worthy to compete with European centuries-old tradition.¹⁰ Americans, Warren argues, “were profoundly conscious of their culture as an imitation of Europe's original. America [...] in music, literature and drama remained indebted to Europe”.¹¹ The ongoing formation of a national literature was led by authors such as Irving, Longfellow, Fenimore Cooper, Melville, James and Twain—all of whom, as

⁸ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, p. 42.

⁹ See Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*; Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*; Sandra Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on Stage*; Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*; and Julia S. Stetler, ‘Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Germany’.

¹⁰ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 292.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

previously mentioned, had travelled extensively in Europe and who, in their writings, tried to weigh up the merits and flaws of the old world's culture against those of the fledgling American Republic. The popularity they received in Europe helped to slowly combat the inferiority complex and reinforce America's collective self-esteem.¹² However, as the 19th century was coming to an end, the United States had yet to assert its culture in a powerful and distinctive way.¹³

Cody's show was among the forces which offered a remedy: it advanced the claim that the defining character of America had its roots in the settlements of the western frontier, a theory which comfortingly reassured audiences of the abiding centrality of the Founding Fathers' agrarian dream. Hence, the *Wild West*, as well as catering to that longing for historicity and memorialisation, also exorcised the fear of an 'uncertain future', that historian David Wrobel reinterpreted as 'frontier anxiety', officially externalized by Frederick Jackson Turner in his landmark essay, *The Significance of the Frontier in US History*.¹⁴ Turner's thesis—first exposed in his 1893 lecture to the American Historical Association in a pavilion next to the Wild West Show arena at the Columbian World Exposition—asserted:

The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and advance of American Settlement, explain American development [...] American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.¹⁵

Turner believed the Frontier to be the defining energy "of most rapid and effective Americanization", as well as the 'safety valve' which had allowed America to prosper until then, a condition which, since Frontier land had allegedly run out, was destined to change. In his seminal work, *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin suggested, notwithstanding the popularity of Turner's thesis in the 20th century, "Turner's immediate contemporaries did not perceive the 'Frontier Thesis' as revolutionary in either method or content".¹⁶ A few years before, Theodore Roosevelt, in the first volume of his bestselling book, *The Winning of the West*, had pre-empted Turner's to a great extent. The only possible divergence was that, unlike

¹² See Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book*; Henri Wadsworth Longfellow, *Outre-mer*; Herman Melville, *Mardi*, "At the Hostelry", "Naples in the time of Bomba"; J. Fenimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe*; Henry James, *Italian Hours*; Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, and *A Tramp Abroad*.

¹³ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 292.

¹⁴ David Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism*, p. 14.

¹⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company 1953), (1920), p. 3.

¹⁶ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), (1998), p. 29.

Turner, for whom it was primarily the environment which moulded the American frontiersman, Roosevelt believed it was race and bloodline which defined ‘the American Character’. While, for Turner, the Frontier was the power which turned European immigrants into American settlers, for the soon-to-be president, American settlers were ‘genteel’ individuals who ‘descended into savagery’ in order to espouse progress, and returned ‘regenerated’ into civilisation; such heroic deeds, he argued, became embedded in their blood and were then transmitted to future generations.¹⁷ Both men, the former through an interpretation of geography and natural science, the latter via Social Darwinism, were legitimating as well as ‘inventing’ American tradition, to quote Hobsbawm.¹⁸ Their arguments offered sanitized and ethically-backed etiological theories of ‘essentialist American-ness’, which concealed critical matters, chiefly violence and racial supremacy, underpinning the very nature of ‘Manifest Destiny’. This undoubtedly facilitated their reception and unchallenged assimilation into mainstream American thought. Yet, William F. Cody had been mastering this device since the beginning of his *Wild West* venture in 1882.

Cody’s show encapsulated and intersected creation myths and ideas of white supremacy—via aptly named acts such as ‘The Drama of Civilization’ or ‘The Attack on the Settler’s Cabin’—while simultaneously positing them in a leisurely playful perspective which blurred their implicit uncomfortable implications and rendered them not only acceptable, but enjoyable, by most western audiences. So, if we are to agree with what Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga elaborated in his influential study, *Homo Ludens*, that “in its earliest phases culture has the play-character, in that it proceeds in the shape and the mood of play”, then we understand why this ideological apparatus was so appealing to a mass-audience first, and was then embraced by higher culture, and translated into discourse and treatises by American academics and statesmen.¹⁹

The dynamic employed by Cody’s show worked for the American public, but all the more so for European audiences, who with limited awareness of American history, found it harder—though, as we will see, not impossible—to challenge the messages portrayed by the Wild West show or to contest its claims of authenticity. This was certainly one of the reasons for Cody’s extraordinary European success. However, it would be wrong to put forward the idea that turn-of-the-century

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), (2012).

¹⁹ Johan Huizinga *Homo Ludens* (London: Routledge, 1949), (2002), p. 46.

European audiences were a homogeneous stack of passive receptors of American Western mythology. The responses to Cody's performances were quite diverse, depending on the area touched by the show, and each European country negotiated the ideas of Cody's American West to different degrees and in relation to their own histories and national heritage.²⁰ This is an important aspect that American historiography on Cody's Wild West has persistently overlooked. Studies such as those of Jill Jonnes, Julia Stetler, and the recent work by Emily C. Burns, have started to buck this trend by devoting their attention to specific European countries.²¹

Chapter 5.3. The Transatlantic Enterprise: Buffalo Bill's Wild West's in Europe

It is unclear whether the idea of bringing the Wild West to Europe was entirely part of Cody's own original plan or was suggested to him by some of his notable connections. Louis Warren claims that "Cody designed the show to travel to Europe".²² It is likely to be a combination of both. It appears, indeed, that Cody had been toying with this idea as far back as 1873 when, in a letter to his sister Julia, he avowed the desire to visit Europe during the following show season.²³ Later, in his 1879 autobiography, he proclaimed that he would soon carry his theatre play, *The Knights of the Prairie*, to Europe; but perhaps the stigma associated with melodramas dissuaded him, so that he eventually ceased acting in such productions.²⁴ What he was looking for was validation from distinguished personalities who could heighten the perception of his show's status; something which he ultimately accomplished, at least on paper. Records show that in 1882 he began recruiting statements of support for his new brainchild, 'The Wild West's Show', from notable individuals with whom he was acquainted (often superficially) during his career as a plainsman. Civil War veterans and Indian fighters General Nelson Miles and General Philip Sheridan and even future president Teddy Roosevelt, wrote credential letters for his *Wild West*, which Cody, under the guidance of his press manager Burke, eventually

²⁰ Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, p.112.

²¹ See Jill Jonnes, *Eiffel's Tower*; Stetler, *Wild West In Germany*; Christopher Dixon, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Barcelona", Ph.D. diss., University of Strathclyde, 2013; Emily Burns, *Transnational Frontiers: The American West in France*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018).

²² Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 293.

²³ William F. Cody, *The Wild West in England*, Frank Christianson (ed.), (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. xv.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 292.

included in the show's American as well as European brochures. In 1884, flattering advocacy of the Wild West show arrived in the form of a personal letter to Cody from Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). The popular American author wrote:

Down to its smallest details, the show is genuine—cowboys, vaqueros, Indians, stage coaches, costumes and all; it is wholly free from sham and insincerity[...] It is often said on the other side of the water that none of the exhibitions which we send to England are purely and distinctively American. If you will take the Wild West show over there you can remove that reproach.²⁵

Twain, however, as Warren compellingly suggests, was far from bestowing unrestrained praise on Cody's show.²⁶ Twain's proverbial fondness of satire and *bouleversement*—let us think in particular of what he writes in his pamphlet *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses*, deeming the *Leatherstocking* author the forefather of 'Frontier imposture'—invites us to discern a different subtext concealed in his letter to Cody. It is likely that Twain applauded the Wild West show for its artful deception, rather than its actual authenticity. He believed it to be more than anything a genuinely persuasive make-believe on an elusive subject (the frontier), which would have enormously appealed to Europeans, precisely because they were already accustomed to a purely imagined frontier. The extent to which Cody was aware of this subtle meta-narrative is unknown, but whatever the case, he seemed to have taken this proposal to heart; just three years after receiving this letter, the show was ready to sail to England to take part in the American Exhibition in London.

Given the enormous diversity in the socio-economic circumstances which affected each European country, it is natural to assume that the reaction to Cody's show was dissimilar and varied. In Great Britain, for instance, Cody was received in grand style by adoring audiences, including British and international royalty. Queen Victoria's golden jubilee was taking place at the time of his first visit, in 1887, and the sovereign abandoned the mourning demeanour she had maintained for 30 years, since the death of her husband Prince Albert, especially to attend Cody's performance. This could only gratify Cody's sense of self, as well as sweep away the self-doubt and fear that his show would not match British taste and expectations, which he had manifested during his boat-travel to Europe.²⁷ Cody firmly wanted his show to improve the image of the USA abroad, and in particular in Britain, which

²⁵ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 295; William F. Cody, *The Wild West in England*, p. xv.

²⁶ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 296.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 286; Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, p. 80.

Americans regarded as the most influential European power, as well as a land of ancestral kinship. He stated in *Story of the Wild West and Camp-Fire Chats* (1888): “I am convinced that our visit to England has set the population of the British Islands reading, thinking and talking about their American kinsmen to an extent before unprecedented. They are beginning to know of this mighty nation beyond the Atlantic and consequently to esteem us better”.²⁸ This sentiment was echoed by statements from personalities such as former prime minister William Gladstone, who affirmed: “God Almighty made Englishmen and Americans kinsmen, by ancestral connection and they ought to have affection for one another”—or British popular press which stressed that the United States was “intimately connected with us by social sympathies, by a common language and literature, ancestral traditions and many centuries of a common history, by much remaining similarity of civil institutions, laws, morals, and manners”.²⁹ Cody’s first British show, as well as the following ones in 1891-92 and 1904, were astoundingly successful. Mild critiques occasionally arose but British audiences were generally well pre-disposed to welcome him as an ‘unofficial ambassador’ of American culture, precisely because they perceived that new-fangled culture to be, essentially, a flourishing offshoot of their very own.

Cody’s reception in France, a country with which America had held complicated relationships, was also largely positive.³⁰ The Wild West show was introduced in the context of the 1889 Universal Exposition, France’s extremely successful world fair which celebrated the centenary of the French revolution and witnessed the inauguration of Gustave Eiffel’s landmark tower. Cody did his best to modify the show to render it appealing for French audiences, chiefly by bowing to French nationalism in different ways: from the opening performance of *La Marseillaise*, to the emphasis on French-Canadian culture in America, exemplified by a feat of fur-trappers.³¹ Cody and his entourage, on the whole, were well aware of France’s fascination with *bon sauvages* and they consciously leveraged on the most novelistic aspects of their version of the frontier myth in order to lure the public to the show; it proved to be a most effective tactic. The French press often compared Cody to other “heroes of the printed paper” such as their very own trapper-turned-

²⁸ Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian 1776-1930*, p. 233; Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 88.

²⁹ *Illustrated London News*, 16/04/1887, in Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, pp. 94-95.

³⁰ See Henry Blumenthal, *France and the United States: Their Diplomatic Relations, 1789-1914*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970).

³¹ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 98.

feuilleton-writer Gustave Aimard, and the ubiquitous Fenimore Cooper.³² Cody's collaboration with French painter Rosa Bonheur eventually resulted in the creation of a number of landmark posters, first and foremost the one which placed Napoleon Bonaparte side-by-side with Cody. This comparison flattered on both sides of the Atlantic, given that Americans got to see Buffalo Bill in juxtaposition with a figure of such immense historical and political significance as Napoleon, while Cody represented for many French people a longed-for model of reinvigorated 'cadet' masculinity, which contrasted with the softened dandyish male type, which was at its apogee in Belle Époque France.³³

As the company collected accolades in northern Europe, news of Cody's triumphs quickly reached the United States through American press correspondents. Cody and his press agents often told stories about how he had "held a Royal flush" in his Deadwood coach in London, and about Queen Victoria's acknowledgement of the Star-Spangled Banner. American press reports from France focused on enhancing the supposed contrasts between American and French culture, the first pure and childlike, the second morally debauched.³⁴ Such accounts, recognizing American accomplishments and positioning them on a higher rank than those of Europeans, were tailored to serve a threefold function: they bolstered Americans' confidence, they confirmed the essential validity of Manifest Destiny, and they ultimately validated Cody's role as a distinguished, though informal, ambassador of US culture.

Concerning southern Europe, the case of the Wild West show's reception becomes more problematical. The tendency of American public opinion to coalesce around certain perceptions of a whole nation is confirmed in the case of the Spanish stopover of Cody's Wild West, where recent scholarship has shown that the bad American press coverage that the Barcelona show received was largely due to the negative influence of strained international relationships between the two countries in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. Even though the Catalan press reported Cody's financial successes and audience satisfaction in Barcelona, it appears that political events conditioned the accounts of the contemporary foreign

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101. See, as examples of Gustave Aimard's novels, *Les Trappeurs de l'Arkansas* (1858) and *Jim l'Indien* (1867).

³³ Jill Jonnes, *Eiffel's Tower*, p. 97; Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 350; Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 101.

³⁴ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 101, Louis Warren *Buffalo Bill's America*, pp. 347-351.

press, and even the opinions and recollections of show stars such as Annie Oakley and Cody, himself, upon which previous scholarship has relied.³⁵

The appreciation of Cody's Italian shows (1890 and 1906) is as complicated as it is misconstrued, in this case both by English- and Italian-speaking scholarship. There is, therefore, the evident necessity of further discussion, clarification, and negotiation of a middle ground which would take into account the points of view of both scholarly traditions. The following section therefore aims to fill this gap in scholarship, by looking specifically at the Italian branch of the tours, and placing them in the greater framework of the history of international cultural relationships between the two countries.

Chapter 5.4. The Arrival of Cody's First Show in Italy (1890)

The transatlantic crossing of the Wild West show was a move very carefully and strategically planned by Cody and his *entourage*, in which gaining the support of the European middle and upper classes played a vital role. Cody himself fervently desired the stigma of "circus" to be finally lifted from his show and "to be treated like a gentleman" in Europe. The approval of the Old World's higher ranks would, therefore, provide such validation and, in return, it would also greatly enhance the resonance, and the reputation of the Wild West show back in America.³⁶

Thus, Cody tried to respond to the cultural inferiority complex that had been afflicting America since, one might argue, the age of the Enlightenment. It was a leading figure of the French Enlightenment, the Abbé Raynal, who, in 1770, stated that "it is a cause of amazement but until today America has not produced one good poet, not a skilled mathematician, not a single genius in any art or science".³⁷ For decades to come, European commentators on America intensified these remarks, by claiming, for example, that Americans "have done absolutely nothing for the Sciences, for the Arts, for Literature" or that "the lamp of artistic truth burns with a feeble flame [...] in no department of art, has any work, drama, novel, poem, painting or musical composition been produced which could justly be placed in the first

³⁵ Chris Dixon, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Barcelona". See also Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*.

³⁶ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 292.

³⁷ Abbé Raynal, cited in Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 11.

class”.³⁸ Even during the Gilded Age, when the country was clearly asserting itself as an economic and industrial power, America’s alleged inability to be culturally independent from Europe continued to be source of apprehension. For writers, artists, performers, and anyone interested in producing culture—or simply in becoming cultured, such as the offspring of the *nouveau riches*—travelling to Europe remained a mandatory rite of passage towards social validation.

Therefore, in the context of this struggle for America’s cultural affirmation, Cody’s Wild West show stood out as an original effort to present an aspect of American culture that was considerably distinctive from that of Europe. Until the start of the 20th century, in fact, the West represented the epitome of America, especially abroad, and was therefore seen as the quintessential breeding ground for “true” and “authentic” American culture; an “exceptional realm”, detached from Europe’s sphere of influence.³⁹ Yet, even if the West truly embodied the spirit of American Exceptionalism, the Old World undeniably retained its role as the ‘Cradle of Civilisation’, the ancient originator and curator of culture and progress.

In this sense, Italy represented more than any other European country the veritable ‘Cradle of Civilization’: a receptacle for all of the Old World’s culture, a place where the imprint of the most ancient civilizations was, thus far, before everyone’s eyes. For this reason, even if *fin-de-siècle* Americans held very negative opinions of Italy’s present circumstances—as shown in the previous chapter—the country’s epic legacy and material of centuries of civilisation, and its continuing status as a producer of culture (theatre, opera, fine arts, architecture), ensured that it would remain a prestigious and coveted destination for those wishing to engage in the field of arts and entertainment. Given the authority of its ancient tradition and the powerful symbolic significance it exuded, Italy represented a challenging testing ground for Cody’s show and, culturally speaking, also for the whole of America. Approval from the rulers and the élites of such a venerable tradition—which included the Pope (the legitimate heir of the Roman Empire, in a sense), the house of Caetani-Colonna (descendants of the *Gens Iulia*, and therefore connected to Julius Caesar), and the Primoli Family (related by blood ties to Napoleon Bonaparte)—would mean, for Cody, acceptance into the Pantheon of all-time greats, and would, at the same time, indicate that “America herself had finally arrived at the World stage”,

³⁸ Sydney Smith, 1820, quoted in C. Vann Woodward *The Old World’s New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1992), pp. 47-48.

³⁹ Richard Slotkin, ‘Nostalgia and progress: Theodore Roosevelt’s myth of the frontier’, *American Quarterly*, (1981), vol. 33, issue 5, p. 609.

as Louis Warren aptly puts it.⁴⁰ Besides, beginning in 1887, the International press had pushed Cody to realise “the design attributed to him of running the Wild West show within the classic precincts of the Colosseum [sic] at Rome”.⁴¹ As a matter of fact, the pressure to take the show to Italy, and specifically Rome, was coming from multiple directions, all within the English-speaking world. A British journalist, for example, published a comical ode to “Buffalo Bill in Rome”, which exhorted Cody to conquer the eternal city, as he had just done with Britain; pointing out that he had “done more than Julius C./ He could not down the Briton!”, and that taking his “stalwart Indians braves/ Down to the Coliseum/ The old Romans from their graves/ Will arise to see’em”. Although humorous, this is telling of how classical culture was still held in high esteem by Anglo-Saxon societies; yet, at the same time, there was the hope that an Anglo-Saxon empire might now be able to match it.⁴²

Cody, therefore, arrived in Italy with plenty of conflicting expectations about the country, and not without a fair dose of awe and trepidation: “This has been the trip of my life”, Cody wrote from Naples to an American acquaintance. Taking “such a big outfit into strange countries” was considered, in fact, an audacious move on Cody’s part, even by his own extravagant standards.⁴³ He was certainly well aware of his show’s triumph in England, and elated after the excellent season at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. For that reason, and for the pressure he was receiving from international public opinion, Cody was eager to equal, and possibly better, those achievements in Italy. The presence at the Paris Exhibition of Count Giuseppe Primoli—a keen photographer of the Wild West show in Rome, and constant presence in the Roman social events in which also Cody took part—is worthy of note.⁴⁴ In his personal diary, Primoli describes the Parisian event in ecstatic terms:

[...]c’est une preuve merveilleuse de la richesse de la France et je dirais plus une superbe manifestation de la puissance de l’homme [...]à l’exposition je n’ai pas seulement fait une course autour du monde, j’ai fait aussi un voyage à travers les

⁴⁰ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, pp. 293-299.

⁴¹ *The Times*, London, 01/11/1887, quoted in Don Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, p. 337.

⁴² John M. Burke, *Buffalo Bill from Prairie to Palace* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1893), p. 247, quoted in Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, pp. 298-299.

⁴³ William F. Cody, ‘Letter from William Cody to Doctor’, Naples, 15 February, [1890], McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, MS6.0068.

⁴⁴ Count Giuseppe Primoli, an Italian aristocrat, related on his mother’s side to Napoleon III Bonaparte, was a pioneer of photography. He spent half of the year in Rome and the other half in Paris. He was known in Roman aristocratic circles as “Gegè” and had the reputation of leading a ‘dandy’ lifestyle. He was a keen admirer of Buffalo Bill, as the photographic archive housed at the Primoli Foundation bears witness, and, according to the *New York Herald* (Paris edn., 11/03/1890), he celebrated Cody’s Roman success by organizing a reception in his palace on March 10, 1890.

siècles[...] J'ai assisté tour à tour à l'histoire de l'habitation depuis la hutte jusqu' à la Tour, et à l'histoire du travail depuis Adam et Eve, jusqu'à Edison et Eiffel.⁴⁵

Although the surviving fragments of his diary do not record opinions on the Wild West show in Paris, or in Rome, his presence at both shows is confirmed by the beautiful photographs in the Archive of the Primoli Foundation in Rome of John Burke and of the Native performers parading under the Eiffel Tower (with Sitting Bull in first row), and by the hundreds of pictures that he took at the Roman show—some of which show him with Annie Oakley.

The 1890 tour of Cody's Wild West visited only six major Italian cities: Naples (26th January to 17th February); Rome (20th February to 9th March); Florence, (12th March to 20th March); Bologna (23rd March to 31st March); Milan (2nd April to 13th April); and Verona (14th April to 16th April). The Wild West show company had brought their own railway wagons and carriages from America and travelled through the European continent by rail. In order to cross the Italian peninsula, Cody's company had to hire the tracks from the private companies which owned each different tract of the railroad, as the full nationalization of the railways was not implemented until 1905. In 1890, the Italian railway network had been developed in only about two thirds of the country, with most southern regions and the isles only partly covered, or undergoing railway construction at that very time. Hence the company's decision to visit only certain cities, namely those most populated and most efficiently served by the railroad and to cut out of the show routes much of the South. Scholarship on Buffalo Bill has occasionally speculated on a performance of the Wild West show in Venice, which in fact never happened, not even during the second tour of Italy in 1906.⁴⁶ This speculation is because of the popularity of a number of pictures portraying Cody and the Native performers on a gondola and near other Venetian landmarks like the Doge's palace and St. Mark's Cathedral. The pictures were actually taken during a short holiday trip just before the show in Verona in 1890.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "It is a wonderful proof of the wealth of France and, I would say more, a wonderful manifestation of the power of man [...] at the exhibition I have not only made a race around the globe, I also took a trip through the centuries [...] I attended, one at a time, the history of housing from the cabin up to the Tower [Eiffel, n.d.t.], and the history of human enterprise from Adam and Eve, until Edison and Eiffel". Giuseppe Primoli, Personal Diary Manuscript, Paris, 1st June 1889, pp. 27-31. Courtesy of Fondazione Primoli, Rome. English translation mine.

⁴⁶ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 344.

⁴⁷ See the collection of pictures taken in Venice at the McCracken Research Library, in the MS 006 William F. Cody collection. Online <http://cdm17097.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/search/searchterm/venezia/order/nosort>. Last accessed 08/01/2020.

Chapter 5.5. Show Preparation and Advertisement

In the locations where the Wild West show was scheduled to appear, its arrival was heralded by the colossal advertising apparatus that the company had affixed in each city's most strategic corners. Local newspapers, theatres, "billboards and the walls of the most beaten tracks [were] being covered with multicoloured posters-*réclame* announcing the coming of the celebrated company of the Wild West".⁴⁸ Cody himself supervised the advertisements' production. His intuitions were reflected in the posters' life-size dimensions, and the variety and quality of the design, ultimately determining the Wild West show's enduring sensation.⁴⁹ The Italian press stood in awe of the magnitude of the show's billboards, of which—predictably—Cody, himself, was the highlight.⁵⁰ A Roman newspaper defined the show's posters as "sesquipedalian" because of the extended length of the advertisements, made up of at least four large panels—which could be compared to the one depicting Cody's visit to Queen Victoria, currently on display at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.⁵¹ A newspaper from Bologna reported that "more than one woman's jaw dropped while watching the head and the colossal proportions of Colonel Codey (sic.)".⁵² Matilde Serao—a key figure in the literary and journalistic scene of turn-of-the-century Italy—explained in *il Corriere di Napoli* that "the large half-bust portraits, on foot and horseback, of the captain William Cody, nicknamed Buffalo Bill; those romantic portraits where you can admire the brave wild buffalo hunter with a sloping head of hair, with a masterful moustache, [and] a hat like that of Edgar Ravenswood, impressed the good Neapolitan public so much that several thousand people came over to see the show".⁵³ The show's gargantuan publicity had,

⁴⁸ "Le Tabelle d' annunci e i muri delle vie più battute vanno coprendosi di multicolori manifesti-*réclame*, annuncianti la venuta della celebre compagnia del Wild West", Emilio Salgari, quoted in Claudio Gallo (ed.), *Emilio Salgari, Arriva Buffalo Bill!*, (Zevio: Perosini Editore, 1993), p. 8.

⁴⁹ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* According to Reddin's interpretation, this signified that Cody was the epitome of the Wild West, himself.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Reddin notes that some of the show's posters measured up to 150 feet. For a picture of this poster, see <https://centerofthewest.org/2014/04/21/wild-west-posters/>. Last accessed 05/12/2016.

⁵² "Più di una donna rimase a bocca aperta guardando la testa e le proporzioni colossali del colonnello Codey (sic.)", "Divertimento Gratis, Esposizione permanente", *La Rana*, Bologna, 20/03/1890.

⁵³ "I grandi ritratti a mezzo busto in piedi e a cavallo, del capitano William Cody, soprannominato Buffalo Bill, quei ritratti romantici dove si ammira il valoroso cacciatore di bufali selvaggi con una testa di capelli spiovente, con un paio di mustacchi magistrali, con un cappellaccio da Edgar Ravenswood, hanno impressionato il buon pubblico napoletano tanto che varie migliaia di persone sono accorse". Matilde Serao, "Api, Mosconi, e Vespe", *Il Corriere di Napoli*, 28-29/1/1890. Edgar Ravenswood, the hero of Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), was shown in Charles R. Leslie's illustrations wearing a wide brimmed hat. The novel inspired Donizzetti's tragic opera, *Lucia*

therefore, the desired effect of surprising and attracting crowds of Italians. In particular, Cody's brightly-coloured mural portraits, with their limited use of text, proved very successful at captivating the attention of illiterate spectators, which in 1890 Italy meant a sizeable portion of the audience.⁵⁴ At the same time, the show's intense advertisements overwhelmed Italians to an extent, as never before had they been exposed to such media hyperbole. Italian reporters often referred to the Wild West show's promotional campaign as: "réclame all'Americana" (American-style advertisement), given the origin of the earliest examples of advertisement.⁵⁵ A newspaper from Milan, *La Lega Lombarda*, informed readers that the city was "plastered with the tremendous posters of Buffalo Bill", and in Rome *L'Opinione* stated that the company's "advertisement has invaded all the placards".⁵⁶ *Il Corriere Italiano*, from Florence, instead straightforwardly announced, "the advertisement, for us non-Americans, has been excessive [...]", while the Roman *Il Messaggero*, admitted that the campaign was "alluring, provocative", but also "overconfident" and "obsessive", eventually posing a challenging question to its readers: "was all this sensational publicity really justified?"⁵⁷ This suggests that in Italy advertising turned out to be a double-edged sword for Cody. The Wild West show's advertising managed to catalyse the attention of a multitude of show goers—pulling in crowds who would normally not attend live shows—but it also rocketed audience expectations sky-high. An article in the Roman *Capitan Fracassa* stated: "The crowd which gathered, attracted by curiosity and by the huge publicity, was truly overflowing, but with this I would also note that, of the attractions promised by the show, only some have matched the expectations".⁵⁸ A newspaper from Florence was

di Lammermoor (1835). Matilde Serao (1856-1927) was a notable writer and journalist, as well as the first Italian woman to direct a newspaper; she directed both *Il Mattino* and *Il Giorno* in Naples.

⁵⁴ John Agnew, "The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe", p. 29.

⁵⁵ The newspaper, *Bologna*, stated that the show displayed a "real American-style advertisement, of which we did not know before"/ "una vera réclame all' Americana di cui non avevano idea". See "Buffalo Bill", *Bologna*, 13-14/03/1890. The first advertising agency was in fact American, Volney B. Palmer, established in Philadelphia in 1849, while the first Italian company devoted to commercials was Attilio Manzoni & C., founded in Milan in 1863 and still in business. On the history of advertising in America, see Edd Applegate, *The Rise of Advertising in the United States: a History of Innovation to 1960* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012); and in Italy, see Daniele Pitteri, *La Pubblicità in Italia: dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Bari, Laterza, 2006).

⁵⁶ "Una réclame che ha invaso tutti i cartelloni destinati alla pubblicità", "Buffalo Bill", *L'Opinione*, 21/02/1890.

⁵⁷ "La réclame, per noi non americani è stata eccessiva [...]", "Buffalo Bill", *Corriere Italiano*, Florence, 18/03/1890.

⁵⁸ "La folla accorsa, attratta dalla grande curiosità e dall' enorme réclame, è stata addirittura strabocchevole, intendo però dire, insieme, che delle attrattive promesse dallo spettacolo solo qualcuna è stata pari alle aspettative", "La prima rappresentazione di Buffalo Bill", *Capitan Fracassa*, Rome, 21/02/1890.

even more radical in its insinuation that the show's extravagant advertising served as what might today be called "bait and switch", to make up for the poor quality of the performance: "[...]advertising is like the title of certain books, it only serves the purpose of putting the product on the market, even when it is rotten".⁵⁹ This evidence suggests the Italian audience, boasting a millenarian heritage in live shows ranging from gladiatorial contests down to modern circuses, was perhaps one of the hardest to please in Europe. Cody soon realised that he had to resort to new performative strategies in order to win favour with this public. For this reason, as this study will analyse in due course, he arranged contests and challenges which would actively engage the spectators, and generally fostered audience participation in his show: an element which from that moment on became an increasingly distinctive feature of American spectacles.

Not all Italian comment on Cody's marketing was negative, however; despite finding it threatening, several middle and upper-middle-class Italians were receptive to Cody's "American" advertising strategy, eventually recognizing its effectiveness and admitting to being inspired by its example. A writer in *Il Messaggero* acknowledged:

The amazing *réclame* which accompanies the Buffalo Bill's is a great lesson for the rest of us Italians, in that the great majority of us believes to be making a bargain when saving a few extra cents that would be enough to give a little sponsorship to some of our shops, some of our industries. Yet, in the meantime we remain unknown, and broke. The immense crowd gathered yesterday at the Prati di Castello proves the miracles of publicity, which, when it is made without cheapskating, it is sufficient to move an entire population.⁶⁰

Chapter 5.6. "The Most Elegant of all Cowboys": Italy welcomes Buffalo Bill

As Paul Reddin has noted in his study of Wild West shows, "Italians celebrated Buffalo Bill in particular".⁶¹ This is especially true of the first Italian tour of the show. The Italian press welcomed Cody enthusiastically, and described him in the most flattering tones: "a strong man, of a manly and proud handsomeness, accustomed to privations and hardships, who mastered the language and customs of

⁵⁹ "La *réclame* è come il titolo di certi libri, non serve che a far passare la merce anche quando è avariata", "Buffalo Bill", *Corriere Italiano*, 18/03/1890.

⁶⁰ "La strepitosa *réclame* con cui Buffalo Bill lo accompagna (lo spettacolo n.d.t) è un grande insegnamento per noi altri Italiani che nella grande maggioranza crediamo di fare un'economia quando ci teniamo in saccoccia le poche lire che basterebbero per dare un po' di pubblicità a qualche nostro negozio, a qualche nostra industria. E intanto restiamo sconosciuti e in bolletta. La sterminata folla accorsa ieri ai Prati di Castello sta a provarvi i miracoli della *réclame*, che fatta bene, senza spilorcerie, basta a muovervi tutta una popolazione", "Compagnia di Buffalo Bill ai Prati di Castello", *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 21/02/1890.

⁶¹ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 104.

the Red Skins, an intrepid hunter, despising the danger and, at the same time, a worldly man and a true gentleman”.⁶² Italians found his physical appearance striking and at the same time majestic, particularly during his “grand entrance” at the beginning of the show. On 14th March 1890, in Florence, *L’ Opinione Nazionale* reported: “Applause enthusiastically greeted Buffalo Bill, manly figure and elegant knight”, and a month later, *Il Commercio*, wrote that: “Buffalo Bill, also known as Colonel Cody, appears mounted on a beautiful white horse and in a Mexican hunter’s dress with a large white hat. He is a man with a romantic figure and a haughty demeanour, accustomed to leadership”.⁶³ Such admiring descriptions, intermingled with others which commemorated his outstanding accomplishments, were common, probably thanks to the brochures that general manager “Major” John M. Burke and other press staff circulated in the newspapers’ head offices soon after the arrival of the troupe in town. Cody’s masculine cowboy image was particularly appreciated by the audience in Bologna—who loved his style so much that after the run of his show, they started to manufacture reproductions of the Stetson hat that Cody wore, which quickly became a highly fashionable item—the “Buffalo Bill hat”, as it was initially called—along with the characteristic “Texan cravatte”—which was also named the “Buffalo Bill tie”. Also, it appears that a Bolognese businessman-distiller, Sir Torquato Gardini, started producing the alcoholic drink, “Buffalo Bill Rosolio”, which had a huge success and was advertised in most Italian newspapers at the turn of the 20th century.⁶⁴ *La Gazzetta dell’ Emilia* wrote about Cody: “Colonel Cody is a man in his fifties, with a long sloping greying mane, with an almost white goatee: tall, squared shoulders, dry, nervous, denoting strength and power. The billboard portraits have not lied!”⁶⁵ The aura of Buffalo Bill as a “fine man” preceded him in every Italian city he visited, and was relentlessly projected in the media thanks to Burke and Nate Salisbury, the show’s master of ceremonies, and backed by the letters of endorsement from men like Sheridan and Sherman that Cody incorporated into the

⁶² “[É] un uomo robusto, d’ una bellezza maschia ed altera, rotto alle privazioni ed alle fatiche, che conosce l’ idioma e gli usi dei pelli rosse, cacciatore intrepido e sprezzatore del pericolo e in pari tempo uomo di mondo, un vero gentleman”, *Il Secolo*, Milan 2-3/04/1890.

⁶³ “Applausi entusiastici salutarono Buffalo Bill, figura maschia ed elegante di cavaliere”, “Buffalo Bill a Firenze”, Firenze, *L’ Opinione Nazionale*, 14/03/1890. “Compare Buffalo Bill, ovvero il Colonnello Cody, montato su un bel cavallo bianco e vestito da cacciatore messicano, con un largo cappello bianco in testa. É un uomo dalla figura romantica e dal contegno altero, uso al comando”, “Buffalo Bill”, *Il Commercio*, 4/04/1890.

⁶⁴ Athos Vianelli, *Bologna in controluce: storie e curiosità fra un secolo e l’ altro* (Bologna: Inchiostri, 2001), p. 107.

⁶⁵ “Il colonnello Cody è un uomo sulla cinquantina, con una lunga chioma grigia, con un pizzetto quasi bianco: spalle alte e squadrate, asciutto, nervoso, denota forza e potenza. I ritratti non hanno mentito!”. “Buffalo Bill”, *La Gazzetta dell’ Emilia*, Bologna, 24/03/1890.

show brochure. As a result, Cody's artfully fashioned image impressed Italians from the beginning: a Neapolitan newspaper defined him as "the most elegant of all cowboys who brings to the jaded Europeans[...] the spectacle of civilization opposing barbarity, of the white race subduing and destroying the copper-skinned one".⁶⁶ A Roman journalist praised him as a man "full of energy, of vigour[...] his ways are far from being rough, as his life would make one suppose, he is instead courteous and possesses much wit in conversation". The construction of a gentlemanly profile ensured that his merits, authority, and reputation were rarely questioned in 1890. Indeed, the cultural value of Cody's show was generally perceived, at that time, as a genuine and instructive counterpart to the other famous spectacle of that era, Barnum's Circus. A Roman newspaper unceremoniously wrote:

If Colonel Cody is very much appreciated, Barnum, who emulates his advertising profusely and with profit, has instead nothing in common with him: between Buffalo Bill and Barnum there is the same difference between an authentic Indian and an Indian from Liverpool, between a stuffed buffalo and a wild one. Barnum is a notorious charlatan, Buffalo Bill is an old-school pioneer; he has been a valiant soldier and has actually risked his life hundreds of times, before pretending to risk it in mock fights.⁶⁷

Cody's media ascendancy propelled him within Italian high society, particularly in Rome. It was precisely by attending the most prestigious Capitoline salons that he was able to open a lot of the doors which guaranteed the popularity of his show for years to come. During a toast at a gala night which had him as the special guest, Cody reassured the hosts that "we do not intend to present to you tomorrow anything in the nature of a circus performance".⁶⁸ Cody was determined to impress the upper classes, by distancing himself and his show from the ill-repute which circus shows had gained. In Florence, too, Cody found the right chance to reassure the bourgeois audience of the high quality of his show and, at the same time publicise himself and his fictional persona. Cody's remarks at a gala banquet organized in his honour by the Florence Club (a gentleman's club of Anglo-American expatriates), were recorded in *La Nazione*:

[He t]hanked all the gentlemen who gathered to celebrate him and he said: ' I would like to explain to the Florentine audience that I offer, not a tasteless ordinary show,

⁶⁶ "Buffalo Bill's Wild West", Kean, in *Il Paese*, Naples, 28-29/02/1890, p. 2.

⁶⁷ "Se il Colonnello Cody piace assai, Barnum che imita volentieri e con profitto la réclame, egli non ha, però, niente a che fare con lui: fra Buffalo Bill e Barnum c'è la stessa differenza che esiste fra un indiano autentico e un indiano di Liverpool, fra un buffalo impagliato e un buffalo selvaggio. Barnum é un illustre ciarlatano, Buffalo Bill é un pioniere dell'antico stampo; é stato un valoroso soldato ed ha arrischiato cento volte la vita sul serio, prima di arrischiarla per celia in finti combattimenti". Magolli, *La Riforma*, Rome, 20/02/1890.

⁶⁸ *Galignani's Messenger*, Paris, 14/03/1890.

but a real-life picture of the original wild west life; a picture that shows how civilization has managed to triumph, struggling against the barbarians and nature itself [...]the meeting lasted until late hours; the gentlemen who invited Cody wanted to hear many anecdotes of the strenuous life on the frontier, which they had already read about in Cooper's and Gustave Aimard's books, but also in many other adventure novels, some of which have Buffalo Bill himself as the hero.⁶⁹

The same *La Nazione* columnist arranged a long interview with Cody for the following day. Cody sent a delegation composed of chief Rocky Bear, another unnamed Indian member of the troupe, two cowboys and a trapper, to notify the journalist that he was welcome to interview him in his hotel room as well as in his private tent in the camp. The columnist noted that Cody was “an affable forthright man, who, curiously, shared a striking physical resemblance to the Florentine anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza”—one of the first Italian promoters of Darwinian theories in anthropology.



Figure 8: Paolo Mantegazza.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_Mantegazza.jpeg. Accessed 20/12/2016.

The resemblance between the two men increased the sympathy of the Florentine public towards Cody's persona.⁷⁰ The interview continued as a kind of hagiography of Cody's life in the Wild West, in which he gave an inflated and sensationalised account of the famous fight with Chief Yellow Hand in 1876 at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska. Cody, now at the peak of his self-mythologizing, declaimed Yellow Hand's challenge and his own valiant response:

'I know you Pa-he-has-ka: great chief you have killed many Indians. I, great chief, have killed many pale faces: come now to fight with me.' [...] – 'I'm ready', I cried, 'I will fight with you.' I ordered that the Indians and the white men to stay on the sidelines and watch the Red Chief and me duel with the rifle! [...] I approached

⁶⁹ *La Nazione*, Florence, 12/03/1890

⁷⁰ Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910) was an Italian anthropologist and politician. He founded the first University Department of Anthropology in Italy, in 1869, in Florence.

within about fifty yards of my enemy and we both then launched the horses into the race ... We made fire ... The Indian's horse fell wounded, but my horse put his leg in a pit and fell over. I found myself standing ... About twenty steps from my opponent. We fired again, almost at the same time, but the Indian did not catch me: I hit him in the chest. As he laid on the ground, I was on him with my knife and I cut a part of his scalp and the ornament of feathers on his head ... It is the greatest insult that can be done to those savages: the greatest symbol of victory... All savages then advanced to make me undergo the same treatment, but General Merrlitt (sic.) ordered the cavalry to cover me.⁷¹

When talking about his visit to the Vatican, Cody for once was straightforward about his relationship with religion: “Are you Catholic Colonel Cody?” — “I don't claim any particular religion, I believe in God”.⁷² Despite this, he resumed his smooth-talk concerning the Indians: “Almost all the Indians are Catholic. Their priests have instructed them about the Pope and the magnificence of the Vatican, when the Pontiff received them they were immediately ecstatic.”⁷³ Also, according to the article, in Cody's tent there were many pictures one would not expect to find in the home of an American (especially an American of the 1890s): the Pope, Mazzini, King Umberto I, The Prince of Naples, Garibaldi, Jesus's Sacred Heart; all these elements seem to endorse the idea, which had already appeared in some of the Florentine press, of Cody as a fabulist and a crowd-pleaser at all costs.⁷⁴

⁷¹ “Io vi conosco Pa-he-ha-ska: voi Capo, avete ucciso molti indiani: Io gran capo ho ucciso molti visi pallidi, venite ora a combattere con me [...] -Sono pronto-gridai-mi batteró con voi – che gli indiani stiano in disparte per vedere il Capo Rosso e me battersi alla carabina! [...] Io mi inoltrai a una cinquantina di metri verso il mio avversario: e tutti e due quindi slanciammo i cavalli alla corsa... Facemmo fuoco...Il cavallo dell'indiano cadde ferito: ma il mio cavallo pose un piede in una buca e si rovesció. Mi trovai in piedi... a una ventina di passi dal mio avversario...Facemmo fuoco di nuovo..., quasi nello stesso tempo, ma l'indiano non mi colse: io lo colpí nel petto. Mentre era steso a terra, gli fui addosso con il coltello gli tagliai una parte del cranio e l'ornamento di pelle che aveva sulla testa...É il Massimo sfregio, che si possa fare a quei selvaggi. É il massimo segno della vittoria...Tutti selvaggi allora si mossero per farmi subire lo stesso trattamento, ma il generale Merrlitt (sic.) avea dato l'ordine alla cavalleria che mi coprisse”. *La Nazione*, Florence, 13/03/1890, p. 3. Yellow Hand was a common mistranslation; the chief's correct name was Yellow Hair.

⁷² In Rome, Cody declared to the press that he was Catholic, possibly to increase his chances to get a papal audience.

⁷³ *La Nazione*, Florence, 13/03/1890, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *La Lotta* Milan, 12/03/1890.



*Figure 9: Buffalo Bill on horse, Bologna, 1890.
Courtesy of Museo Civico del Risorgimento, Certosa, Belluzzi Fund, photo n. 71.*



*Figure 10: Buffalo Bill in Bologna, 1890. Cody is photographed in front of his tent with Mr. Zappoli, owner of the Hippodrome Zappoli where the Wild West show encamped.
Courtesy of Biblioteca Salaborsa.*

Louis Warren has noted that in France and England, “there were surprising applications of Cody’s image to contemporary politics”; the same is true of Italy.⁷⁵ Cody’s already ubiquitous effigy and other subjects exposed to public attention by the Wild West show easily lent themselves to being used by the Italian press as a pretext to make political satire of recent news events, as well as of the latest parliamentary measures. For example, the newspapers of the time found a fruitful association of the figure of Buffalo Bill with that of the Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, who was involved in several scandals during his time in office.



Figure 11: Don Chisciotte della Mancica 15/02/1890. "Do we need to shoot Giusso or Nicotera?" - "You must do this: take one shot... but don't hit either of them." Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Italian Scrapbook.

This cartoon refers to the beginning of the Banca Romana scandal, which would fully come to light only in 1893, involving six national banks which were authorised to issue credit.⁷⁶ In 1889, an initial parliamentary inspection started to uncover a number of wrongdoings and illicit transactions, and Crispi, heavily involved in the scandal, tried to delay bursting the bubble as long as he could. The first manoeuvre he made in order to avert the worst criticism was the dissolution of the Bank of Naples and the Bank of Sicily, which had until then seemed unaffected—which

⁷⁵ Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, p. 349.

⁷⁶ For an in-depth insight into the scandal, see Alexander De Grand, *The Hunchback's Tailor: Giovanni Giolitti and Liberal Italy from the Challenge of Mass Politics to the Rise of Fascism 1882-1922* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), pp. 33- 46, and Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, pp. 146-153.

seriously alarmed Bank of Naples director Senator Girolamo Giusso, who called for a parliamentary discussion on this seemingly unjustified measure. What was still hidden was that the Bank of Naples, like several other Italian banks, had lent lumps of money—interest free—to finance real estate speculation and the electoral campaigns of local politicians, including Deputy Giovanni Nicotera. The cartoon therefore depicts Crispi in Buffalo Bill’s shoes. Just as Cody stage-managed the tricks of the band of cowboys in his troupe, Crispi is shown orchestrating his parliamentary cowboys. Given the label of “Wilderness years” that many historians have given to this decade of Italian politics (see, for example, Christopher Duggan and Alexander De Grand), the Wild West context of this cartoon seems particularly fitting.⁷⁷ Two members of Crispi/Cody’s troupe, representing two Italian ministers—possibly Luigi Miceli (minister of industry, who ordered the eventual parliamentary enquiry) and Giovanni Giolitti (minister of treasury and finance)—ask Crispi/Cody for instructions on which politician’s effigy to shoot, to which he answers: “You must do this: take one shot... but do not hit either of them”, meaning, in effect, “Dissolve the Bank of Naples, but do not harm the two malefactors on a personal level”.

⁷⁷ See Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, chapter “The Wilderness years”, and Alexander De Grand, *The Hunchback’s Tailor*.

BUFFALO BILL POLITICO



Figure 12: Il Cicerone 23/02/1890. “Crispi and the Emperor of Germany are actively throwing the lassoes so as to surprise the buffalo, but this one knows the game all too well, so it might be that the political Buffalo Bill will be a fiasco just like the American one”.
Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

The second cartoon, entitled “The Political Buffalo Bill”, depicts Prime Minister Crispi, again as a cowboy figure, along with the Emperor of Germany, Wilhelm II. The two men are busy trying to domesticate the savage beast of “Socialism”—represented by the buffalo in the cartoon. Their lassoes represent article 40 and 41 of the “draft law on the public safety officials” for Crispi, and the “Imperial Rescripts” for the German Emperor.⁷⁸ The cartoon employs the now-fashionable Western

⁷⁸ Crispi introduced these two articles to heighten the repressive powers of generic ‘public officials’ by allowing them to ‘recall citizens to appear in their office’ in order to ‘remove dangers or avert serious disorders’, a power which until then had been a prerogative of judges and ‘tribunal authorities’. Crispi intended to cripple any attempt of socialist agitators, by starting from the grassroots. See the parliamentary debate on <http://storia.camera.it/regno/lavori/leg16/sed499.pdf>. Last accessed 20/02/2017. The Kaiser’s imperial rescripts were supposed concessions by the German emperor Wilhelm II to the socialists in order to quieten them, given the turmoil which followed the

framework to criticise the Germanophile and authoritarian turn of Crispi's government, and the Kaiser's manoeuvre to ingratiate himself with the labour movement.⁷⁹ Both the Kaiser's and Crispi's measures were regarded suspiciously by public opinion, as they appeared disingenuous and disproportionate, and at the same time ineffective in preventing the awakening of the working class and the rising tide of popular opposition, represented by the labour movement—which, in any case, was already underway.⁸⁰

repressions enacted by the anti-socialist laws of the 1880s. See Cecil Lamar, *Wilhelm II: Prince and emperor, 1859-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

⁷⁹ Cody's "fiasco" refers to the first day of opening the show in Rome, when exceptionally bad weather prevented a lot of spectators from coming and the show's premises were half empty.

⁸⁰ An article from the Milanese magazine *Il Secolo Illustrato* expressed considerable scepticism at the news of the Berlin 1890 Conference: "This conference, organized by the German emperor to regulate and settle many issues on labor legislation, has not met the welcoming reception that the government circles in Berlin may have hoped for. First of all, an emperor who commands the most powerful army in the world, which has fifteen million Marks in his civil list, can only inspire a very relative trust, when he lowers himself to deal with taking care of the wages and the lives of the workers, who earn two, three, four lire per day, and are at risk of death, and indeed die by the hundreds, asphyxiated or burned in the mines or mutilated and crushed by machines. This imperial tenderness is suspicious. Why did the belligerent emperor, the man of the military reviews and parades, do violence to himself and care about the working question? Who knows!" / "Questa conferenza, bandita dall'imperatore di Germania per regolare e risolvere molte questioni della legislazione operaia, non ha incontrato tutta quell'accoglienza che forse si sperava nei circoli governativi di Berlino. Prima di tutto, un imperatore che comanda al più poderoso esercito del mondo, che ha quindici milioni di marchi di lista civile, non può ispirare che una fiducia molto relative, allorché discende ad occuparsi del salario e della vita degli operai, che guadagnano due, tre, quattro lire al giorno, e che sono esposti a morire e muoiono a centinaia, asfissati od arsi nelle miniere o mutilati e stritolati dalle macchine. Questa tenerezza imperiale è sospetta. Perché mo' l'imperatore belligero, l'uomo delle riviste militari e delle parate faceva violenza a sé stesso e si occupava della questione operaia? Chi lo sa!" *Il Secolo Illustrato*, Milan, March 1890, p. 76.



Figure 13: *Don Chisciotte della Mancia* 05/03/1890.

Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

In the third cartoon, Crispi is represented as one of the Native American performers. This is a reference to the Italian idiom of *fare l'indiano* which translates into English as 'playing the Indian'—an expression which offers an additional transnational layer of meaning to the discourse of Philip Deloria—and indicates the attitude of those who, for their own convenience, pretend not to hear what they are told, or not to understand, or do not take interest in a question in order to avoid problems.⁸¹ The expression refers to an early stereotype of the Native American as conveying, in the popular imagination, an attitude of indifference and apathy, typical of those who do not understand what is happening or is being said around them. The cartoon therefore represents Crispi as avoiding a number of pressing matters like the financial reform

⁸¹ Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

and the railway development—committed to taming certain wild horses, which have equine bodies but the faces of a number of ministers of his government: the compliant Alessandro Fortis (in the first panel), who was undersecretary at the Minister of Interior; the sometime-rebel Francesco Sprovieri (in the second panel), who, despite being part of the majority, on a couple of occasions had voted against Crispi's measures; and (in the third panel) the indomitable Minister of Finance, Federico Seismidt-Doda, a firm believer in irredentism and therefore opposed to the Crispi government's expenditure on colonial expansionism in Africa.⁸²

As the Wild West show's appeal grew bigger in Italy, so did the people's familiarity with the figure of Buffalo Bill. Cody's persona was therefore employed to manufacture humorous observations on the social mores of *fin-de-siècle* Italians—so that his image became at times, as scholar Kate Flint noted “detached from its transatlantic associations”.⁸³ In particular, Italian women's unabashed appreciation of Cody's good looks was often used as an excuse to joke about sensitive topics such as female adultery.⁸⁴

⁸² Alexander De Grand, *Hunchback's Tailor*, p. 24.

⁸³ Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, p. 238.

⁸⁴ On this subject, let us not forget that the 'Honour Killing' was still very much practiced at the time in Italy; it was officially banned only in 1981.

BUFFALO BILL A FIRENZE



— Bell' uomo, non c'è che dire.
— Bellissimo; se lui delle bestie cornute da domare portale a lui e in pochi minuti te le rende mansue come agnelli.
— Proprio? Allora gli porterò mio marito.

Figure 14: Il Vero Monello, 09/03/1890.

-“What a good looking man, there is nothing else to say”.

-“Very Handsome, if you have horned beasts to tame you shall carry them to him and in a short time he will make them as meek as lambs”.

-“Very well then, I will bring my husband then”.

Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

The “horns” of the American Buffalo triggered an instant connection to cuckoldry in the minds of Italians, given that animals’ horns are an ancient symbol of marital infidelity in Italian folklore, a topic explored humorously in the cartoon below.

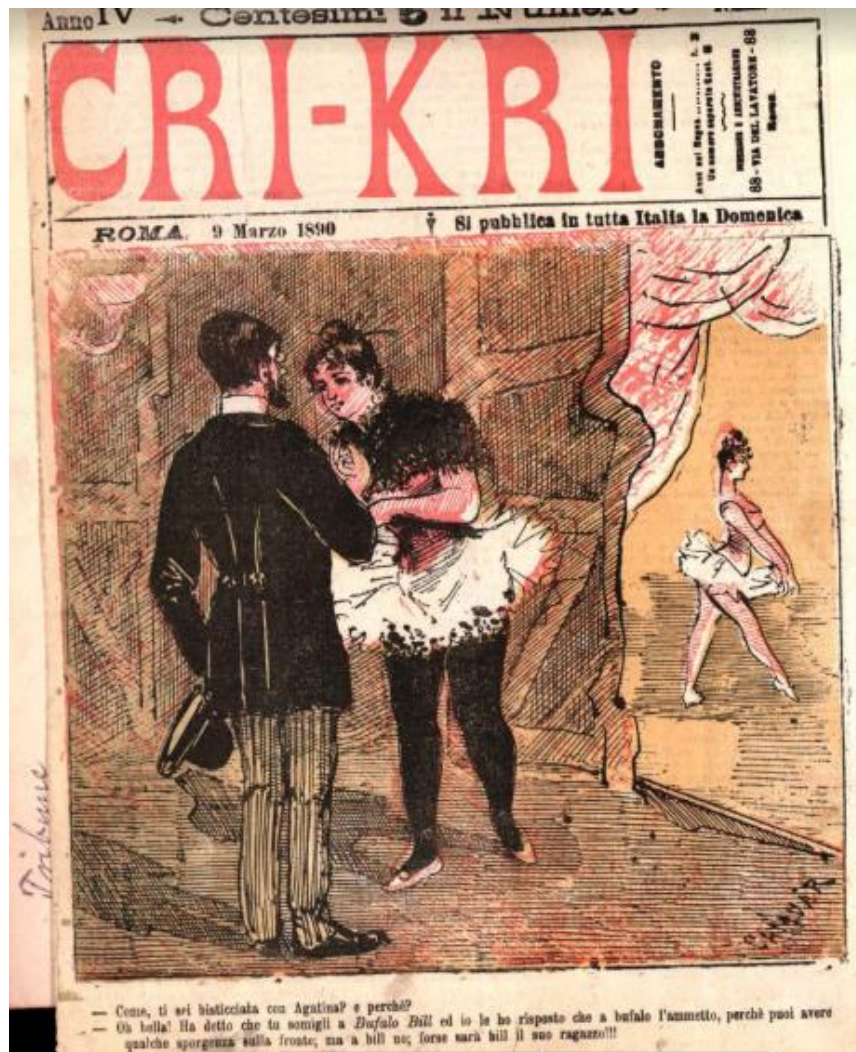


Figure 15: CRI-KRI 09/03/1890.

-“How come have you fallen out with Agatina? and why?”

-“Oh dear! She said that you look like Buffalo Bill and I have told her that yes, you could look like a buffalo because you might have certain bumps on your forehead; but you don’t look like Bill; maybe Bill is her boyfriend!!!”

Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

This type of humour conveys—in a tongue-in-cheek way—Italian society’s concern about the looming subject of female emancipation, the so called ‘questione della donna’ (the woman’s question), which found, in more libertarian sexual mores, a perilous, but at the same time intimidating, form of expression. The ‘woman’s question’ therefore became a subject of much public attention precisely that same year with the publication of Anna Kuliscioff’s speech “Il Monopolio dell’uomo” (The Monopoly of Man), which sowed the seeds for the birth of the feminist movement in Italy.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Anna Kuliscioff, *Il monopolio dell’uomo* (Aprilia: Ortica Editrice, 2011). Anna Kuliscioff, born in Crimea in 1855, was an anarchist feminist thinker close to Mikhail Bakunin’s thought, who became a naturalized Italian after being exiled from Russia. She was involved with socialist politician Andrea Costa, with whom she had a daughter, and then with Filippo Turati. At the 1892 Columbian

The rapid popularity that Cody and his show earned in Italy is self-evident in these cartoons. The Italian press quickly recognized the potential that Cody's image had for captivating the attention of a large number of readers and, at the same time, serving well as a metaphor for the Italian socio-political situation of the time.

Chapter 5.7. Annie Oakley: "Fragile little creature, who proves to be a perfect sniper".

In relation to the significance of the 'woman's question' in Italy, it is interesting to see how Italian newspapers described the character of Annie Oakley, the stage name of Phoebe Ann Mosey. Annie Oakley was not renamed "Little Sure Shot" by Chief Sitting Bull by mere coincidence; she was in fact one of the ablest sharpshooters in Cody's Wild West show, and, in the case of Italy, she was certainly the most admired performer, right after Cody. As Christine Bold explains in her introduction to Walter Havighurst's biography of Oakley—a study which, over 60 years on, still remains a staple piece of scholarship on Oakley's life and times—her performance "is alive with suggestive paradoxes".⁸⁶ Indeed, the character of Annie Oakley stands out as an oxymoron, in that she embodied many of the contradictions of American society in the Gilded Age. She represented the vitality and vigour associated with frontier life—even if, ironically, she was born in Ohio and had never travelled to the "Wild West" before joining Cody's show—fulfilling, at the same time, the standards of moral sobriety required of Victorian femininity. This peculiar stage persona was attained, as Bold maintains, through a process of desexualisation, infantilization and domestication.⁸⁷ It was sustained in equal parts by the press, as well as being consciously crafted by Oakley, herself. For instance, the illusion of her everlasting youthfulness—which she reinforced by persistently hiding her real age in interviews, by dyeing her greying hair back to its natural colour and by wearing unrevealing stage costumes—served the purpose of expurgating her image of every connotation

exposition of Genoa, she founded, along with Costa and Turati, the Italian Socialist Party. Along with the cause of women's suffrage, she worked for protection of women workers' rights and drafted a law against child labour. See Maria Casalini, *Anna Kuliscioff: la signora del socialismo italiano* (Roma: Editori Riuniti University Press, 2013).

⁸⁶ Christine Bold, introduction to Walter Havighurst, *Annie Oakley of the Wild West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. ix.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xi.

related to sex or violence, rendering her child-like and tame.⁸⁸ Her apparent youth also enhanced her “natural” skilfulness, and passed on a message of safety to men, in a period of anxiety concerning female emancipation: by appearing to be a “prodigy” in her prowess with the rifle, or even “a freak of nature”, she gave out the reassuring message that most women could not possibly become like her, even if they trained.

The portrayals of Annie Oakley in the Italian newspapers echo the ones that can be found in the American press, in their tendency towards infantilization, and in the fact that her genteel traits of femininity are stressed over the obvious vigour she expressed when she embraced the rifle. It comes as no surprise to find the Italian press picking up on such attributes; the theme of the “infantilism of the feminine mind” was, in fact, an extremely topical subject in the early 1890s, when leading criminal anthropologists Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero dominated the academic and public debate, in Italy as well as abroad. The works of a small number of proto-feminists (the aforementioned Anna Kuliscioff, as well as Anna Maria Mozzoni), represented a public, but only feeble, backlash.⁸⁹ These extracts, from three different Florentine newspapers in 1890, show remarkable similarities. *Il Fieramosca*, declared:

Annie Oakley, famous sharpshooter, as the program that I have before my eyes says. A young girl, lean, elegant, pale and agile, who shoots with rifles in a way that seems really surprising. She is the most applauded by the audience, who admires this little creature, flexible and fragile, who proves to be also a perfect sniper. She never misses a shot. Wherever she aims with her lively eye, the bullet reaches the target securely. If only she had a less difficult name to pronounce, she would be perfect.⁹⁰

L' Opinione Nazionale reported ecstatically:

Miss Oakley is simply marvelous; she is a prodigy. She handles her rifle with a grace, a rapidity, a really admirable precision; she throws the chalk balls in the air, whether she shoots aiming the shots, or shoots with her back turned, holding the mirror with one hand, the balls always get hit and fall to the ground pulverized. At

⁸⁸ A newspaper from Naples reported that her age in 1890 was 20 when, actually, she turned 30 in August of that year. *Il Piccolo*, Naples, 30-31/01/1890, p. 2.

⁸⁹ On the role of proto-feminists such as Kulishioff and Mozzoni, see Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia, 1892-1922* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1974); on Lombroso's theories, reception and fame, see Paul Knepper and Per Jørgen Ystehede (eds.), *The Cesare Lombroso Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁹⁰ “Annie Oakley, celebre tiratrice al volo, come dice il programma che ho dinanzi agli occhi. Una giovinetta magra, elegante, pallida, flessuosa che tira con la carabina in un modo addirittura sorprendente. È la più applaudita dal pubblico che ammira codesta creaturina, flessibile e tenue, la quale si rivela un bersagliere coi fiocchi. Non sbaglia un colpo, non perde un tiro. Dove mira col suo vivo occhio, ivi giunge sicuro il proiettile. Se avesse un nome meno...difficile sarebbe perfetta”. “Buffalo Bill ai prati della zecca vecchia”, *Fieramosca*, Florence, N.D.

the end of this interesting exercise the public gave a grand ovation, to this magnificent and talented sharpshooter.⁹¹

And *La Domenica Fiorentina* was equally impressed:

She [Annie Oakley] is a fine petite woman, of a perfect elegance, graceful movements, extraordinarily friendly features, in her eyes there is something sentimental, affectionate and at the same time so adamant that she imperiously commands admiration. She shoots in flight the glass balls with a phenomenal assurance, with an unattainable precision, with a surprising quickness: she shoots on each side, forward and backward, with her left hand and with her right, with both hands, and with a single one, aiming or not; she always catches the target relentlessly. She was greeted by the whole amphitheater with a long cry of enthusiasm.⁹²



Figure 16: Michelina di Cesare, one of the famed brigand women studied by Cesare Lombroso. Online, <http://www.viselli.it/brigantaggio.htm>. Last accessed 04/04/2017.

Even though Annie Oakley is depicted as a frail and delicate creature in these articles, her innate shooting proficiency is never denied; on the contrary, because of the poised and lady-like manner she adopted during her shooting performance, this traditionally mannish skill was transformed into an “acceptable” and even “admirable” feature of her persona. Her supposedly juvenile appearance and her canonical femaleness, as well as her performance in an artificial and controlled environment like that of the Wild West show, averted any understanding of her passion for firearms as a symptom of possible “deviance”, ensuring that she would not be compared to “the delinquent woman” type upon which Cesare Lombroso had already formed his conjectures, and in which the figure of the rifle-embracing female

⁹¹ “La signorina Oakley è semplicemente meravigliosa; è un prodigio. Ella maneggia la sua carabina con una grazia, una rapidità, una precisione ammirevole; le palle di gesso lanciate in aria, sia che Ella spari mirando, sia che spari colle spalle voltate, con una mano, e tenendo coll’ altra lo specchio, sono colpite e cadono a terra polverizzate. Al termine dell’interessante esercizio il pubblico fece una grandissima ovazione alla simpatica e bravissima tiratrice.”, “Buffalo Bill”, *L’Opinione Nazionale*, Florence, 14/04/1890.

⁹² “[Annie Oakley] è una donnina dal personale fine e d’ una eleganza ideale, graziosa nei movimenti, straordinariamente simpatica di viso, ed ha nello sguardo qualche cosa di sentimentale, di carezzoso e nello stesso tempo di così risoluto, che comanda imperiosamente l’ammirazione. E tira, a volo, delle palle di vetro, con una fenomenale sicurezza, con una precisione inarrivabile, con una sveltezza sorprendente: tira dritta e per parte, in avanti e indietro, colla destra e colla sinistra, con tutte e due le mani e con una sola, mirando o senza mirare; e coglie sempre, inesorabilmente. Tutto l’anfiteatro l’ha salutata con un lungo grido d’ entusiasmo.”, “Buffalo Bill”, *La Domenica Fiorentina*, Florence, 16/03/1890.

brigand was a major target of his invective.⁹³

Instead, Oakley embodied the opposite of a *brigantessa*: the combination of her undeniable talent and her gracious femininity inspired awe in the Italian reporters—who, apart from a couple of notable exceptions, were all men—to the point of overshadowing comments on other sharpshooters in the cast, who, although as gifted as Oakley, by being male marksmen, appeared ordinary next to her. *L'Opinione Nazionale*, from Florence, commented:

Compared to [Annie Oakley], the other sharpshooters have the downside of belonging to the other half of humanity, the less beautiful and less interesting half; but as for their shooting skills, they are not inferior in anything...nor superior to Miss Oakley: those are the four gods of the shooting range.⁹⁴

The reporter from the Milanese *La Lega Lombarda*, evidently taken aback by Oakley's performance, was almost oblivious to celebrated Wild West sharpshooter Johnny Baker:

We have seen several times pigeon shooting competitions run by valiant marksmen, but we do not recall of seeing marksmen with such a quick eye, such an unflinching blow, as the young Annie Oakley, *and another shooter whose name escapes us*.⁹⁵

And, again, *Il Commercio*, also from Milan, commented in fascinated terms:

We had seen the famous Swiss and American marksmen, but we confess that a musketeer like this *miss* far exceeds everything imaginable for the firing speed, which the eyes can barely glimpse, and the precision with which she hits the target. *Miss Oakley* is certainly the most interesting character of Buffalo Bill's *troupe*, and her success was dazzling and undisputed.⁹⁶

As in America, the Italian press made little comment on her husband, Frank Butler, to whom she owed a great deal of her success.⁹⁷ His role, when mentioned at all in

⁹³ Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta, la donna normale*, (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1908) (1894). The university lectures about the topic of female delinquency had started already in the later 1880s. See also chapter 1.3 of this work. For more information on the debate about Italian women bandits, see the excellent essay on the *brigantessa* Maria Oliverio, by Marjan Schwegman, "Horrible Heroines: Female Brigandage, Honour and Violence in Post-Unification Italy, 1860-1870", in Katharine Mitchell and Helena Sanson (eds.), *Women and Gender in Post-Unification Italy. Between Private and Public Spheres* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp.111-31.

⁹⁴ "Gli altri tiratori hanno sulla precedente lo svantaggio di appartenere all' altra metà del genere umano, meno bella e meno interessante; ma quanto ad abilità del tiro, non sono in nulla inferiori... né superiori alla signorina Oakley: quelli sono i quattro iddii del tiro a segno". "Buffalo Bill", *L'Opinione Nazionale*, Florence, 14/04/1890.

⁹⁵ "Abbiamo assistito più volte a gare di tiro al piccione eseguite da valentissimi tiratori, ma non ci ricorda d'aver visto tiratori dall' occhio pronto, dal colpo immancabile, come la giovine Annie Oakley, e l'altro tiratore di cui ci sfugge il nome." Emphasis mine. "Al Circo Buffalo Bill", *La Lega Lombarda*, 02/04/1890, p.3.

⁹⁶ "Avevamo visto dei celebri tiratori svizzeri ed americani, ma confessiamo che una moschettiera come questa *miss* supera di gran lungo tutto quanto si possa immaginare in ordine a colpo d' occhio, a celerità di sparo ed a precisione di bersaglio. Miss Oakley è senz'altro la più interessante personalità della troupe di Buffalo Bill e il di lei successo fu brillantissimo e incontrastato." Emphasis Original. "Buffalo Bill", *Il Commercio*, 04/04/1890.

⁹⁷ Walter Havighurst, *Annie Oakley of the Wild West*, p.16.

the news, was relegated to that of a ‘helper’, or as a generic ‘cowboy’, as this example from *Il Commercio* shows: “After the field is cleared out, there comes Miss Annie Oakley, who amazes the audience with the marvellous precision of her rifle shots against a number of objects thrown into the air by two assistants located about twenty feet away from her.”⁹⁸ The Roman newspaper, *Don Chisciotte della Mancia*, gives another example: “Two cow-boys, by means of a special mechanism, throw the chalk balls in the air and Miss Annie hits all of them [...]”⁹⁹



Figure 17: Georgie Duffy and Della Ferrell riding in Bologna, 1890.
 Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, Golden, CO.

Italian reporters also proved to be very attentive to the performances of the cowgirls, or “American Amazons”, as they were referred to by the press, among whom were Georgie Duffy and Della Ferrell.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to what was happening with Annie Oakley, their act attracted a lot of public attention among the Italians precisely

⁹⁸ “Sgomberato il campo, viene la signorina Annie Oakley, che sbalordisce il pubblico colla meravigliosa precisione dei suoi tiri di carabina contro una quantità di oggetti lanciati in aria da due aiutanti situati a una ventina di passi da lei”. “Buffalo Bill”, *Il Commercio*, Milan, 04/04/1890.

⁹⁹ “Due cow-boys, col mezzo di un apposito meccanismo, gettano in aria le palle di gesso, e miss Annie le colpisce tutte[...]” Emphasis original. “La Prima di Buffalo”, *Don Chisciotte della Mancia*, Rome, 21/02/1890.

¹⁰⁰ Ferrell, the wife of cowboy performer Johnny Baker, died of pneumonia in 1896, aged 26 years.

because of the perceived sensuality of the two female performers who, riding the broncos in tight corsets and cinched waistlines, stirred not exactly wholesome thoughts male members of the audience, as this Neapolitan newspaper illustrates:

What most pleased the eyes, and with arrogance snatched an applause of admiration, is the European women's silhouette, honed by the tough American life, standing out grandiosely against the artistic roughness of the rest of the show. What did you expect? Over here we are a bit degenerate, we are like the soldiers of Hannibal in Capua.¹⁰¹ We appreciate all, but we like one thing that we never grow tired of admiring in real life, of praising in our songs, or portraying in our art. For this reason, having admired everything, I recall the knightly final salute of W.F. Cody, I greet him and ask him to pass on my compliments of admiration to the women of the American frontier. I am sure I represent the opinion of all the spectators.¹⁰²

As will be seen in the chapter about the perceptions of Italy by the members of Wild West show, the judgements that Annie Oakley would reserve for Italy, and in particular the city of Naples which had appreciated her so much, are not at all as flattering as those expressed by this journalist.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ This refers to the siege of Capua in 211BC, during the second Punic war against Rome. Hannibal winter quartered his troops in Capua, where they were corrupted by the comforts of urban settlement, particularly banqueting and women. This 'Capuan retreat', as the Latin historiographer Titus Livius called it, was said to have weakened the Carthaginian army, leading to its defeat.

¹⁰² "Ma ciò che più ha fatto piacere alla vista, e con prepotenza ha strappato l'applauso all'ammirazione, è la linea femminile europea, sveltita dalla vita rude americana, spiccante *au grand èclat* sulla rozzezza artistica di tutto il resto. Che si vuole? Da noi si è un pò' degeneri, siamo come i soldati d' Annibale a Capua. Sappiamo apprezzare tutto ma ci piace una cosa sola, che non ci stanchiamo di ammirare dal vero, di cantare nella nostra canzone, di riprodurre nella nostra arte. per questa ragione, ammirato di tutto, ricordando la cavalleresca scappellata finale di W. F. Cody, saluto lui e lo prego di passare il mio saluto ammirativo alle Americane della frontiera. Sono sicuro di rappresentare il parere di tutti gli spettatori". "Buffalo Bill's Wild West", *Il Paese*, Naples, 28-29/01/1890, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Oakley's opinions were recorded some thirty years after her Italian visit and were affected by a degree of anti-Italian bias that the political situation of early 20th century America had instilled. See chapter 5.11.

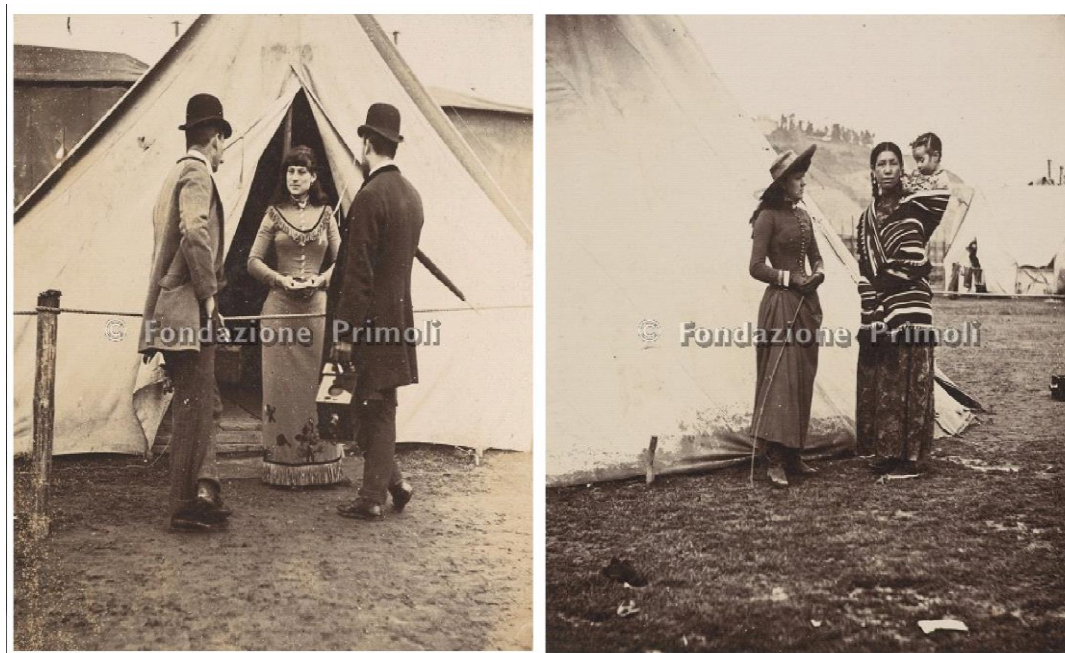


Figure 18 and 19: Left, Annie Oakley talking to Italian Journalists. Right, Cowgirl Della Ferrell with a female Native American Performer (possibly Spotted Elk). Both photos taken in Rome, 1890. Courtesy of Primoli Foundation.

Chapter 5.8. Native American Performers in 1890 Italy: The Noble Savage meets the Modern Indian

As Sam Maddra has pointed out in *Hostiles*: “None of the white performers in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was ever put under the same scrutiny as the Indians”.¹⁰⁴ Precisely so, the Native performers triggered the utmost inquisitiveness in Italy, where they were received with a range of diverse attitudes which will be further examined in this chapter. First of all, it is difficult to determine the exact number of the Native performers who were in Italy with Cody. Italian newspapers, possibly prompted by the overblown figures that the Wild West show’s publicists were providing, reported various statistics on the number of show members. In Naples, it was believed that the show included “100 Indians, 100 cowboys, and a total of 200 buffalos and horses”, while in Milan, newspapers seemed to rely on more plausible information gathered first-hand by visiting the show’s encampment: “the show’s troupe is composed of 55 Indians, 16 American musicians, 170 horses and 20 buffalos”.¹⁰⁵ The Italian press was also often imprecise in transcribing the Native

¹⁰⁴ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles: The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), p. 151.

¹⁰⁵ “Ci sono 100 indiani, 100 guide (cowboy), e 200 tra cavalli e buffali”, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West’s”, *Gazzetta Teatrale*, Naples, 26/01/1890, p. 3. “La troupe, propriamente detta, si compone di

performers names, sometimes due to the language barrier which generated mistakes in the translations, while on other, rarer, occasions the Native performers' names were completely distorted by the journalists, and even made up into exaggeratedly primitive, puerile or whimsical names for comedic effect. For instance, the Native performer No Neck, was often presented as "Low Neck" in Italy, the performer Goes Flying, who died of smallpox in Naples, was called "Green Ink" and was dubbed the son of "Blue Ink and White Dove", while in another Italian publication the Ute tribe became "the Usti", and were said to be led by an obscure chief, "Zibtlé".¹⁰⁶

It is probable that at the time of the arrival of Cody's show in Naples, in January 1890, the following Native performers were still touring with the troupe: Little Chief, Brave Bear, Eagle Horn, Dogs Ghost, Plenty Horses, Stands Still, Shade, Charging Crow, Kills the Enemy, Scares the Wind, Left Hand, Eagle Man, Runs Close, One Side, White Horse, Little Wolf (annotated as Long Wolf in Sam Maddra's book), Red Shirt (who, according to Maddra, is said to have left the show in Barcelona, although Emilio Salgari, writing in *L'Arena*, in April 1890, claims to have met him), Yellow Hair, No Braid on Eye, Has No Horses, Rocky Bear (often misspelled as Rockey in the Italian press, sometimes even called "Hard Bear"), Prairie Chicken, Yellow Bear, Eagle Blouse, Hollows Behind, Kills First (who would die during the summer of 1890 in Germany), Wounds One Another, Kills Plenty (sometimes called Strikes Plenty, who would die at the end of 1890 on his return to America), Black Hawk, Not Afraid, Kills White Weasel, Kills Backward, Blue Shield, Hollow Horn (sometimes featured as Short Horn), Wooden Face, Bear Pipe, Blue Rainbow, Little Lamb, Running Creek, No Neck, Black Heart, Goes Flying (who died of smallpox in Naples on the 15th of February, 1890), Little Ring (who succumbed to a heart attack in Rome on the 3rd of March, 1890), Piece of Iron and Yellow Horse (said to be brothers of Little Ring), Uses the Sword (who also died while touring Germany, in Bremen), Spotted Elk (Uses the Sword's sister), and the 'half-blood' interpreter Broncho-Bill (whose real name was William Irving).¹⁰⁷

55 indiani, 16 americani musicisti, 170 cavalli e 20 buffali", "Buffalo Bill a Milano", *Il Secolo*, Milan, 2-3/04/1890.

¹⁰⁶ *L' Osservatore Romano*, Roma, 23/02/1890 and *La Gazzetta dell'Emilia*, Bologna, 20/03/1890.

¹⁰⁷ An official or definitive list of all the Native American performers who came to Italy with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1890 does not seem to be available. I have therefore attempted to put together this tentative list, through a combination of different sources such as those found in the books of Jordi Marill Escudé, Sam Maddra, L.G. Moses, Tom F. Cunningham, Philip Deloria, and in a range of Italian newspapers of the time.

It appears that Black Elk—who is commonly believed to have toured Italy with Mexican Joe and to have visited Naples, in particular—according to a well-documented theory by writer Tom F. Cunningham, never actually went south of Switzerland. Indeed, as the findings of my research indicate, there is no documented evidence that Mexican Joe was ever in Italy. Therefore, as Cunningham maintains, the stories about seeing the Vesuvius and Pompeii that are reported in *Black Elk Speaks* are to be attributed to either a translation error by Ben Black Elk, a wrong annotation made by John G. Neihardt, the book’s author-editor, or even to a willing ‘embellishment’ that Black Elk made to render his account more colourful after his return to Pine Ridge, after having heard stories about Naples from his fellow-performers who had visited the city with Cody. Another possibility that Cunningham offers is that he had seen a play about Pompeii in 1887 in London, when he was there with Cody’s show, and that, decades after seeing that dramatic piece, he eventually came to believe his own version was the truth.¹⁰⁸

According to the information that I gathered for this study, there are strong doubts even about Cody’s Native performers’ excursion to Mount Vesuvius in 1890. On the 4th of February, 1890, the Neapolitan newspaper, *Il Corriere di Napoli*, announced: “Today the company of Buffalo Bill left Naples to ascend the crater of Vesuvius, the wild men want to see up close the nature so akin to themselves”.¹⁰⁹ But, according to the following issue of same newspaper: “The trip to Vesuvius which was meant to take place the day before yesterday, after the performance, did not do so because of bad weather [...]”.¹¹⁰ Yet, John Burke, in the memoir, *Buffalo Bill the Noblest Whiteskin*, claims that “there were memorable moments when Chief Rocky Bear and his braves stared into the molten crater of Vesuvius [...]”.¹¹¹ Unfortunately, there is no further evidence in the Neapolitan newspapers that the excursion to Vesuvius actually took place. Instead, all that was confirmed by witnesses was that, at the sight of the volcano’s fumes and crackling fire, ritual dances were performed by the Natives, but only within the show’s encampment, as Matilde Serao’s account for the *Corriere di Napoli* illustrated:

¹⁰⁸ See Tom F. Cunningham, *Black Elk, Mexican Joe & Buffalo Bill: The Real Story* (London: English Westerners' Society, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ “Oggi la compagnia Buffalo Bill’s è partita da Napoli per ascendere al cratere del Vesuvio, gli uomini selvaggi vogliono vedere da vicino la natura omonima.” “Ascensione-monstre”, *Il Corriere di Napoli*, Napoli, 4-5/02/1890.

¹¹⁰ “La gita al Vesuvio che doveva aver luogo ieri l’altro, terminata che fosse la rappresentazione, non seguì per la minaccia del tempo [...]”. “Gl’ Indiani di Buffalo Bill”, *Il Corriere di Napoli*, Napoli, 6-7/02/1890.

¹¹¹ John Burke, *Buffalo Bill the Noblest Whiteskin*, (London: Cassel and Company, 1973), p. 193.

These last cold and tiresome days have had a rather depressing effect on the Redskins, who do not leave their tents all day, curled up on their mats smoking cigarettes by the fire. A few nights ago, one of them, who was walking about the camp, saw the fire from Vesuvius turning the sky red and alerted his companions. All went out, enchanted by the spectacle, and prostrated themselves on the ground to adore that sacred flame, smouldering in the night. The following day one of the tribal chiefs asked, on behalf of all his companions, to be allowed to go up on the mountain, to dance and to let the prayer songs resonate around the crater. Certainly, this spectacle would have been truly folkloristic. Buffalo Bill's Redskins need to do something truly in accordance with their character and their customs [...].¹¹²

What seems evident from the descriptions of Native performers found in *Corriere di Napoli* is that they were still affected by those stereotypes borne out the age of the Enlightenment, of the Indians as 'savage' wild men, who were, at the same time, children of nature. This legacy of the Indian portrayals in the early travel narratives, and romantic novels of French influence, had spread in cultivated Italian readership.¹¹³ Similar examples are provided by other newspapers, describing the Indians "looking at Vesuvius which had put a white strip of smoke across the sun, with an intense stare of a mental prayer. Where nature manifests itself with one of its forces, there is the Great Spirit. Indians are, in their monotheism, savage in that way!" Another writer commented that "civilization is not for those men, for those sons of the prairie, born and raised in freedom. As soon as they breathe it, it can be said that they die".¹¹⁴ This evidence indicates that this was, indeed, still a widespread trope in the Italian writing at the end of the 19th century.

¹¹² "Questi ultimi giorni freddi e uggiosi hanno un po' ammalinconiti i Pelli Rosse, che non escono tutto il giorno dalle loro tende, dove se ne stanno accoccolati sulle stuoie fumando la sigaretta accanto al fuoco. In una delle notti passate qualcuno di loro, che passeggiava per l'attendamento, vide il fuoco del Vesuvio rosseggiare sul cielo e ne avvertì i compagni. Tutti uscirono, incantati dello spettacolo, e finirono per prostrarsi e adorar quella fiamma sacra, palpitante nella notte. Il giorno appresso uno dei capi tribù chiese, a nome di tutti gli altri compagni, di poter recarsi sul monte, ove attorno al cratere si sarebbe fatta fantasia, e sarebbe risuonati i canti di preghiera. Certo questo spettacolo sarebbe stato veramente caratteristico. I Pelli Rosse di Buffalo Bill hanno bisogno di far qualcosa che sia veramente nel loro carattere e nei loro costumi [...]". "Gl' Indiani di Buffalo Bill", *Il Corriere di Napoli*, Napoli, 6-7/02/1890.

¹¹³ See section 1 of this study, in particular relating to Luigi Castiglioni and Costantino Beltrami.

¹¹⁴ "[...] guardava il Vesuvio che aveva messo una striscia bianca di fumo nel sole, con una fissità intensa di preghiera mentale. Dov' è la natura, nella manifestazione d' una delle sue forze, là è il Grande Spirito. Gl' indiani sono, nel loro monoteismo, selvaggi a quel modo!", "Buffalo Bill a Napoli", *Il secolo illustrato della domenica*, Milan, 09/03/1890; "[...] la civiltà non è fatta per quegli uomini, per quei figli della prateria, nati e cresciuti in piena libertà. Appena la respirano si può dire che muoiano.", Emilio Salgari, "Buffalo Bill a Verona", *L'Arena*, Verona, 14-15/04/1890.

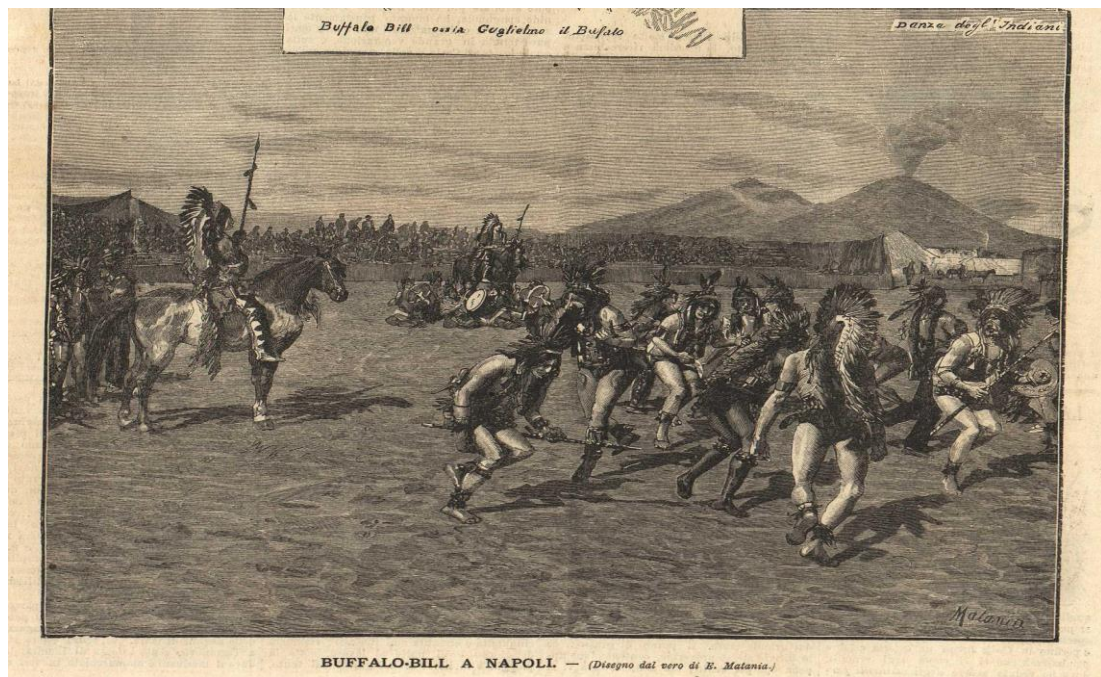


Figure 20: “Buffalo Bill at Naples,” *Il Secolo Illustrato*, March 1890, p.77.

Therefore, when Cody’s show arrived in Italy, the Indian narrative celebrated in the Wild West show became superimposed on the substratum of knowledge earlier divulged in Italy via the travel narratives, which essentially emphasised the exoticism of the Indian ‘other’ without necessarily charging those portrayals with the features of innate brutality, villainy or antagonism typical of the American dime novel tradition.¹¹⁵ This gap between different fictionalised images of Indians caused conflict in some Italian commentators on the Wild West show. In particular Emilio Salgari, the great Italian adventure story writer—whose Western fiction will be analyzed more thoroughly in the last section of this study—appeared to be bewildered by the absence of the performers’ “manifest manners”, to use the critical expression coined by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor.¹¹⁶ When confronted with flesh-and-blood Native Americans, Salgari, writing for the Veronese newspaper, *L’Arena*, questioned the truthfulness of the Indian narrative presented in the dime novel tradition, which underpinned Cody’s show:

We looked closely at all these different types. There is nothing ferocious in the faces of these redskins even though they made themselves so infamous, in all ages, for their cruelty, and we find nothing fearful in their war cry, even though it has been

¹¹⁵ See Section 1, Chapter Three. This occurred more during the 1906 tour, when the Native Performers were depicted distinctly as ‘colonial objects’, see Chapter 7.4.

¹¹⁶ See Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

written so many times that they put so much fear in the minds of the great adventurers of the great west[...] We find nothing horrific in their headpieces.¹¹⁷

This was, however, not the case for every Italian journalist who wrote about the Wild West's show's Native performers. It must be considered that at this time, the 1890s, the novels of authors such as Mayne Reid, Gustave Aimard and Gabriel Ferry had been translated into Italian and had been circulating for a number of years, often appearing as feuilletons in magazines and newspapers. These stories were therefore beginning to disseminate among Italians an Indian narrative more attuned to that of the Wild West show, characterized by Eurocentric outlooks and colonialist attitudes towards the Indian 'other'. The other grand influencer of the Indian image/stereotype in 19th century Italy, was inevitably James Fenimore Cooper, whose novels, as we saw in Section One of this study, had been circulating in Italy since the late 1820s, and exercised a remarkably powerful and lasting impact on their Italian readership, as they did on others in Europe and America.



Figure 21: A Native American performance in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, Bologna, 1890. Courtesy of Museo del Risorgimento, Certosa, Belluzzi Fund.

¹¹⁷ “[...] osserviamo attentamente tutti quei diversi tipi. Nulla di feroce troviamo nei volti di quelle pelli rosse che pur si resero così celebri, in tutte le epoche, per la loro efferatezza e nulla troviamo di spaventevole nelle loro grida di guerra che pur si scrisse tante e tante volte che mettevano così gran paura nell’ animo dei più coraggiosi avventurieri del grand ovest [...] Nelle loro acconciature nulla di orribile. “Buffalo Bill In Arena”, *L’Arena*, Verona, 16th/17th April 1890.

Other descriptions of Cody's Indians started to be based on stereotypes that the Italian readership had just begun to pick up from those popular novels. As the newspaper extracts below demonstrate, the Cooperian concept of the "vanishing race", was ubiquitous also in Italian descriptions of the show Indians. Firstly, from *Il Secolo illustrato della Domenica*, (Milan):

The Indians welcome the spectators with stern faces, impassive, without the harshness of the yellow paint made for the representation. The Indians can joke around with each other, but no one laughs at jokes, or smiles. They have, even in their own moments of amusement, a tragic pride. Seen from a close distance the Indians seem overwhelming. They are tall in stature, lean-limbed, quick and agile. They are also, no one would suspect after such a first impression, friendly. They have a proud, but good eye, of the goodness of a dying race[...] It is understandable that they have nostalgia for the rivers, the woods, the Arizona buffalo which is disappearing along with them.¹¹⁸

And, also from *Il Corriere della Sera*, (Milan):

Within 50 or 100 years, there will be a legend telling the bizarre and bloody events of this great struggle between the white man and the redskin man fighting in the north and south of the American continent. The struggle over which the acquired rights of the invaders weighted more than the innate rights and secular traditions of a race. So I was thinking while coming out of a visit to the Buffalo Bill camp after seeing before me, with the painful and sad faces of those ill with nostalgia, those Indians who no longer preserve their ancient grandeur, other than in their still majestic and aloof poise and in their colourful hairstyles. In that mixture of majesty, anxiety, and thoughtful sadness, I thought I had seen summarized the history of the conquest of the Wild West, by the Anglo-Saxon race, of that conquest which, before it became apparent as is the case today with emigration and with the extension of the railroads, was confirmed by military power and extermination. The savage, who once was the master of the continent, today he finds his last refuge in the Far West, where, as Burke wrote, the act of the law can only be asserted with the revolver and where the filibuster and the nomadic white man are as dreadful as the redskin. Novelists, Mayne Reid above all, have left us guessing something about the existence of the man of the Rocky Mountains and prairies; travellers gave us some curious details, but no one has made us aware of the vicissitudes of the pioneers of European civilization among the American redskins, of the explorers who knew, during the war of colonization, how to overthrow the ruse of the Indians and fight with them in the struggle, enduring toil and privations.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ "Gl'indiani accolgono i visitatori con facce serie, impassibili, senza la crudezza del giallo della toilette fatta per la rappresentazione. Gli indiani possono scherzare tra di loro, ma nessuno ride delle facezie, o ne sorride. Hanno nella stessa comicità una alterezza tragica. [...] Veduti d'appresso gl' indiani vantaggiano. Sono alti di statura, asciutti di membra, svelti ed agili. Sono anche, nessuno lo sospetterebbe dopo una prima impressione, simpatici. Hanno l'occhio fiero, ma buono, della bontà mesta di' una razza che muore. [...] Si comprende che abbiano nostalgia dei fiumi, delle boscaglie, del buffalo dell'Arizona che va scomparendo con loro", "Buffalo Bill a Napoli", *Il secolo illustrato della domenica*, Milan, 09/03/1890.

¹¹⁹ "Fra 50, fra 100 anni al più vi sarà una leggenda la quale narrerà le vicende bizzarre e sanguinose di questa gran lotta fra l'uomo bianco e l'uomo dalla pelle rossa, combattutasi e nell'america del nord, e in quella del sud, lotta i cui valsero più i diritti acquisiti della città invaditrice, che non i diritti innati e le secolari tradizioni di una razza. Così pensavo uscendo da una visita all' accampamento di Buffalo Bill, dopo aver veduto passarmi davanti coll' aspetto sofferente e triste di ammalati di nostalgia, quegli indiani che della loro antica grandezza più non conservano, se non l' 'incedere ancora maestoso e altero e le acconciature dai colori vivaci. In quel misto di maestà, di alterigia, e di pensosa tristezza in cui pareva di vedere riassunta la storia della conquista del Wild West, da parte della razza anglo sassone, di quella conquista che prima di esplicarsi, come oggi avviene coll' emigrazione e coll'

Finally, from *La Voce della Verità*, (Rome):

The natural scenes of the life of those Indo-American peoples, were immensely appreciated, and certainly from today, Roman and non-Romans, will enjoy watching the show and seeing before their eyes “the last of the Mohicans”.¹²⁰

These portrayals, loaded with sentimentalism and suggestive literary references to “stoic” and “dignified” Indians, represent well the so-called “Noble savage dichotomy”.¹²¹ This “flexible ideology”, as Philip Deloria suggested in *Playing Indian*, postulates the white man’s “urge to idealize and desire Indians and a need to despise and dispossess them”.¹²² Indeed, a number of Italian newspapers counterbalanced such romanticised depictions and critiques of Western progress by emphasising the primitivism and the wildness of the Indians, demanding, and at the same time justifying, white dominion over them. Certain negative stereotypes, which had sometimes featured in travel narratives, rematerialized in the media reports about the Wild West show, entrenching them in the Italian imagination, as had happened in other European countries.¹²³ *Il Secolo* of Milan, for example, dwelled on the Indians’ perceived indolence and lack of industry, which was “compensated” by their love for gambling:

Indians are wild, lively, emotional, suspicious, brave, unkempt, avid enthusiasts of gambling and of bodily ornaments. For them the woman is a slave, condemned to the most improper jobs. Their main nourishment is buffalo meat and hunting for the buffalo is therefore the main occupation. They despise work and even the buffalo skin industry has remained for them in the primitive state. The few survivors of the massacres of colonizers and emigrants resign themselves to cultivating land, but the regret of wild life in the prairie and in the mountains, the craving for murderous struggles, remain alive in them and shorten their days. [...]Indians were lying in the straw in the sun, gazing upwards without expression. Others were avidly playing silver coins in an incomprehensible gamble. The pastime of gambling is a feature of these savages, as well as the passion for exercises of dexterity.¹²⁴

estensione delle ferrovie, si affermò colla potenza militare e collo sterminio. Il selvaggio, che dapprima era padrone del continente, oggi trovava appena un ultimo rifugio nel Far West, dove come scrisse il Burke, l’azione della legge non si sostiene che con il revolver e dove il filibustiero e il bianco nomade sono temibili quanto il pelle rossa. I romanzieri, Mayne Reid in testa, ci hanno lasciato indovinare qualcosa sull’ esistenza dell’ uomo delle montagne rocciose e nelle praterie; i viaggiatori ci hanno dato particolari curiosi, ma nessuno ci ha fatto conoscere le peripezie dell’ esistenza dei pionieri della civiltà europea fra le pelli rosse americane, degli esploratori che hanno saputo, durante la guerra di colonizzazione, sventare le astuzie di guerra degli indiani e con essi lottare in furberia, in resistenza alle fatiche ed alle privazioni.”, “Buffalo Bill e il Wild West Americano” *Corriere della sera*, Milan, 03-04/04/1890.

¹²⁰ “Le rappresentazioni al naturale delle scene della vita di quei popoli indo – americani piacque immensamente, e certo da oggi, romani e non romani, andranno a godersi lo spettacolo e a vedere da vicino gli ultimi dei Mohicani”. “Al gran circo Buffalo Bill”, *La voce della verità*, Roma, 21/02/1890.

¹²¹ Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, p. 75.

¹²² Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian*, p. 4.

¹²³ See Chapter One and Two.

¹²⁴ “Gli indiani sono veri selvaggi vivaci, impressionabili, sospettosi, coraggiosissimi, noncuranti dell’ avvenire, appassionati del giuoco e degli ornamenti della persona. Per essi la donna è schiava, condannata ai più improbi lavori. Il loro principale nutrimento è la carne di buffalo e la caccia al

Along the same lines went the judgement of the Catholic newspaper, *La Voce della Verità*, of Rome, which also stressed the Native performers' lack of control over their "atavistic" impulses, thus legitimising the necessity of the white man's discipline:

The majority of the Indians receive \$80 a month, or about 400 lire. However, there are a few who get \$70, while the chiefs receive up to \$40, or 200 lire *per week*. Not everyone, however, has all the money delivered to them; part is poured into a savings box, so that at the end of the contract, the members of the company find a decent sum guaranteed to their advantage. This is a necessary measure, since both the Indians and the cowboys tend to spend carelessly what they receive, as games of cards, wine, liqueurs and cigarettes have a powerful hold on all of them.¹²⁵

Primitivism also featured in Emilio Salgari's description of Indian life for *L'Arena*. Contrary to other reviewers, he envisioned their de-humanised condition, their loss of vitality and faith, as a consequence of the deprived existence forced upon them by American governmental policies:

A large part of those Indians lives within their narrow territories, called reservations, given to them by the government of the Union, and are always fighting the hunger caused by the extermination of the great buffalo herds, which now no longer cross their lands. Embittered by their fate, no longer following the path of war and of bloody reprisals, or tying victims to the stake, a food for their liking of primitive men, they have degenerated to the point that they do not care about anything else other than drinking[...] The redskin of the present day, once so proud, has become a common drunkard who stultifies himself by dint of liquor and who unleashes the last of his instincts against his poor wife, whom he mercilessly beats and often, cowardly, kills. He also gave up his bright costumes adorned with colorful feathers and his religion.¹²⁶

The Indians' relationship with religion was a topic that stirred a lot of interest from several Italian newspapers; Catholic publications commented most on this subject. A

buffalo è quindi la principale occupazione. Sprezzano il lavoro ed anche l'industria delle pelli di buffalo è rimasta per essi allo stato primitivo. I pochi scampati alle stragi dei colonizzatori e degli emigranti si rassegnano a coltivare la terra, ma il rimpianto della vita selvaggia nella prateria e nella montagna, la smania della lotta omicida, rimane ad onta di tutto ed abbrevia i loro giorni. [...] Parecchi indiani se ne stavano sdraiati nella paglia al sole lo sguardo smarrito in alto senza espressione. Altri giocavano avidamente monete d'argento ad un incomprensibile giuoco d'azzardo. La smania del giuoco è una caratteristica di questi selvaggi al pari della passione per gli esercizi di destrezza". "Buffalo Bill a Milano", *Il secolo*, Milan, 02-03/04/1890.

¹²⁵ "Il grosso degli indiani hanno 80 dollari al mese, circa cioè 400 lire. Ve ne sono però pochi che hanno settanta dollari, mentre i capi arrivano ad avere fino a 40 dollari, ossia lire duecento la settimana. Non tutti però i danari vengono loro consegnati, ma una parte si versa in una cassa di accumulazione, affinché terminando il contratto, gli appartenenti alla compagnia trovino una discreta somma assicurata a loro vantaggio. É questa una misura necessaria, giacché sia gli indiani che i cowboys tendono a spendere spensieratamente quanto ricevono, ed il giuoco alle carte, il vino, i liquori e le sigarette hanno su questi indiani o cowboys indistintamente, potenti attrattive". "Buffalo Bill", *La voce della verità*, Rome, 28/02/1890.

¹²⁶ "Una gran parte di quegli indiani erano entro gli angusti loro territori, concessi dal governo dell'unione che si chiamano riserve, sempre in lotta con la fame da che le grandi mandrie di bisonti, ora distrutte non attraversano più le loro terre. Avviliti inacerbiti dalla loro sorte, non trovando più sul sentiero della guerra e delle rappresaglie sanguinose, nella scena del palo da tortura, un alimento per i loro gusti di uomini primitivi, sono degenerati a tal punto che non si occupano più che di bere". "Buffalo Bill a Verona", *L'Arena* 14-15/04/1890. Salgari was one of the writers most influenced by Italian travellers' narratives, which were largely sympathetic to the Natives' oppressed condition.

particular example comes from *La Voce della Verità*, which differentiated Cody's Native performers according to their beliefs, passing different moral judgements depending on whether the Indians had been evangelized or not, and taking a particularly dim view of those who, rather than embracing the doctrine of the Roman Catholic church, had remained 'pagans' or converted to Protestantism:

Half of the Indians are Catholics, fewer among them are Protestants, while others retain their ancient religion of Fetishism [...] It is certain that both among the Protestants and the pagan performers in this company, the absence from their native land, the restless life of travel, and the contact with all sorts of people, supposedly civilized, but not of the most sophisticated nature, has spread a veil of indifference and scepticism among them. By contrast, the Catholic Indians, who keep alive their faith, love to consecrate themselves to religious practices [...] Since the company first met in New York, these Indians came to hear the Mass on the Festive days, attending the church and the sacraments. They have repeated this practice here today in Rome, where they visited the basilicas and the churches, stopping to pray and often showing a great desire to see the great father, that is, the pope. [The pope] gave them holy rosaries and blessed medals. Likewise, yesterday, the nuns of charity, who have missions in North America, bought sacred mementos that they distributed to the Indians at the Prati di Castello [the show encampment], and personally spent their good words in confirming the faith of those Indians. Not only them, but also their fellow pagans, surrounded the Catholic sisters, and vied with each other to have those little Roman souvenirs for which they were very grateful. One of the rare Indian women belonging to the company, wears a golden cross around her neck. Asked if she was Christian, she answered no, but that she kept that cross as a precious memory of her mother, who had received it from a missionary. No less interesting is the answer to a question made to an Indian chief, perhaps the oldest in the troupe. He was asked what impression Rome had made on him, and he replied that it was great, for he had, in his tribe, never heard of London and Paris, but of Rome he had heard repeatedly, from a missionary who was with them when he was a child, and that the missionary would not stop describing the wonders of this city, putting in his heart a great desire to see it! These Indians, all things considered, when they are guided and treated properly, and when one knows how to curb the natural instincts that sometimes overcome them, are people of great heart and are generally docile and submissive. But the continuous contact with the Protestants is certainly not beneficial to them. For example, the latter have taught the Indians some songs of which there is much to complain. It is true that they pronounce them in their dialect, and without fully understanding the meaning of some expressions, since after all their education is very relative, and they cannot have quite clear ideas on certain subjects.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ “gli indiani, metà dei quali sono cattolici, qualche raro caso fra essi, protestante, e gli altri conservano la loro antica religione di feticismo.[...] Però è certo che tanto sui protestanti quanto sugli altri acattolici che trovansi in questa compagnia, l'assenza dai luoghi nativi, la vita irrequieta dei viaggi, ed il contatto con ogni sorta di gente, così detta civilizzata, ma non delle più ricercate condizioni, ha steso un velo d'indifferenza e di scetticismo. A differenza, gli indiani cattolici, i quali conservano viva la loro fede, amano consacrarsi alle pratiche religiose[...] Fin da quando la compagnia si riunì per la prima volta a New York, questi indiani si recavano ad udire la messa nei dì festivi e frequentavano la chiesa ed i sacramenti. pratica questa che hanno compiuto anche attualmente qui in Roma, dove hanno a turno visitato le basiliche e le chiese fermandosi a pregare e mostrando spesso il grande desiderio di vedere il gran padre, cioè il papa. [il papa] ha fatto tener loro corone e medaglie benedette. Altrettanto compirono, ieri mattina, le suore di carità che hanno missioni nel nord America, e che personalmente, insieme ai devoti ricordi che si recarono a distribuire ai prati di castello, spesero buone parole in confermare nella loro fede quegli indiani. Questi non solo, ma anche i loro colleghi, pagani, attorniate le suore, fecero a gara per avere quei piccoli ricordi di Roma dei quali si mostrarono gratissimi. Una delle rare donne indiane che appartengono alla compagnia, porta una crocetta d'oro attaccata al collo. Interrogata se fosse cristiana, ha risposto di no, ma di tenere preziosissima quella crocetta come ricordo di sua madre, cui avevala regalata un missionario. Né meno singolare ed

This example clearly illustrates the agenda of the Catholic press, which focused on promoting the redeeming effects of Catholicism on the “natural disposition” of Indians and, in turn, fostered the idea that, through the hard work of the evangelizers in the foreign missions, the majesty of “Papal” Rome had remained unrivalled. Such confidence-enhancing remarks were necessary after the 1870 Capture of Rome.¹²⁸ After being dispossessed of its temporal power, the Papacy experienced deep insecurity—incited by the antagonism of the Savoy Monarchy and the advancement of freemasonry—and feared also the loss of its spiritual ascendancy over the newly-unified Italian people. In the 1890s, the rapid rise of the United States as a global power certainly did not reassure the Holy See—especially considering the increasingly high number of Italians emigrating to what was regarded as a ‘de-christianizing society’. Americanism was deemed “detrimental and damaging to the church, to God, and to America itself”.¹²⁹ Missions in North America represented, therefore, a means of exercising the Pope’s soft power in a Protestant land. At a time of intense proselytism against Americanization, of which the Wild West show in Italy was perceived as an agent, the missions’ importance had to be even more emphasized in Catholic organs of propaganda. As the above extract indicates, religious publications deliberately employed a paternalistic attitude towards the ‘Indians’. The primitivism of the Native performers is clearly stressed in order to justify evangelization, as is the tendency to infantilize them in common with most European journalism of the time. *Il Corriere della sera*, for instance, points out that

interessante è la risposta ad un interrogazione fatta ad un capo indiano, forse il più vecchio della comitiva. Domandatogli che impressione gli avesse fatto Roma, rispose che grande, giacché egli mai, stando nella sua tribù, aveva sentito parlare di Londra e Parigi, ma di Roma sì e ripetutamente, per parte di un missionario, che trovavasi co laggiù, quando egli era fanciullo, e che non rifiniva di descrivergli questa città, mettendogli in cuore una gran voglia di poterla vedere! Questi indiani del resto, quando sono condotti e trattati a dovere, e se ne sappiano frenare gli istinti naturali che talvolta anche in essi tentano di prendere il disopra, sono gente di ottimo cuore e generalmente docili e sottomessi. Però il contatto continuo con i protestanti, non è certo loro giovevole. Ad esempio questi ultimi hanno appreso agli indiani a cantare certe canzoni, sulle quali vi è molto da eccepire. Vero è che essi pronunzianle nel loro dialetto, e senza comprendere totalmente il significato di alcune espressioni, giacché dopo tutto la loro educazione è molto relativa, né possono perciò avere idee del tutto chiare in certe materie”. “Gli Indiani di Buffalo Bill”, *La voce della verità*, Rome, 28/02/1890.

¹²⁸ The Capture of Rome in September 1870 culminated Italian unification (*Risorgimento*) under the House of Savoy and ended the reign of the Papal States. See Patrick Keyes O’Clery, *La rivoluzione italiana. Come fu fatta l’unità della nazione* (Milano: Ares, 2000).

¹²⁹ *Rerum Variarum*, 1900, pt. II, n.5, Americanism Documents, quoted in Matteo Sanfilippo, “I complicati rapporti fra la Chiesa cattolica statunitense e la Santa Sede, 1880-1918”, in Daniele Fiorentino (ed.), *Gli Stati Uniti e L’Italia alla fine del XIX secolo*, p. 65.

in the ledger art which adorned the chiefs' tepees "horses, people, are painted in the same way that our children do".¹³⁰

However, it must not be taken for granted that the entire Catholic press would unanimously consider the Native performers as redeemable 'noble savages' in dire need of religious conversion. Notable exceptions include the *Verona Fedele*, which projected its critique of Cody's Americanism onto his Native performers, in particular, judging them as faithless "barbarians" and using vicious racial remarks concerning their "ugly faces".¹³¹ This type of derogatory commentary on the Native performers featured to a greater degree in Italian newspapers representing bourgeois and aristocratic opinion. These publications tended to emphasize the superiority of the "civilized" white man over the "savage redskin" by belittling the physical appearance of the 'other', to exorcise what Kate Flint calls "anxieties about human development and degeneration" that the Native performers evoked.¹³² On the same vein, *Il Piccolo*, from Naples, reported that the show featured "a bunch of ugly Mexican faces, a few wild buffalos, which are never quite as ugly as those Indians", while the Roman *Il Cicerone*, in a staggeringly de-humanising game of words, and attempt at humour, declared, "go ahead, whoever is interested in seeing the Adonis-like beauty of Buffalo Bill and the red-flesh of the dirty-skins".¹³³

The satirical press ridiculed even more the unfamiliar physicality of Cody's performers. The mere epithet "savage", a term still used by Italian newspapers to define the Native performers, inspired immediate connections to bestiality and lack of hygiene—notwithstanding the fact that most homes in late 19th century Italy did not have running water, it was nevertheless employed as a device for 'othering'. The reporter from Rome's *Don Chisciotte della Mancina*, sneered upon visiting Cody's show:

It seems that those heroes of the prairie spend their lives hunting bison as much as the greasy ones. The savages are not cleaner, but contrarily to the cowboys, they can mask their filth underneath a good layer of vividly coloured body-paint. So one can see, among those savages not only the redskins, but also the yellow skins, the blue skins, the purple skins, and the mahogany skins. Among the non-savages, instead, there are only skins needing a good soap.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ "[...] cavalli, personaggi, disegnati come disegnano tra noi i bambini". "Buffalo Bill a Milano", *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 02-03/04/1890.

¹³¹ "Bravi i pellirosse", *Verona Fedele*, Verona, 18/04/1890, quoted in Claudio Gallo (ed.), *Emilio Salgari, Arriva Buffalo Bill!*, p.10.

¹³² Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930*, p. 241.

¹³³ "qualche bruttissimo viso messicano, qualche buffalo selvaggio, mai abbastanza brutto in confronto a quelle pellirosse", *Il Piccolo*, Napoli 26-27/01/1890.

¹³⁴ "Si direbbe che quegli eroi delle praterie passino la vita a dar la caccia tanto agli unti che ai bisonti. Né sono più puliti I selvaggi (più puliti dei cowboys n.d.a.); i quali, però, riescono a mascherare la

Unlike what had happened in England and France, where Cody's Native performers were generally perceived to be not only handsome, but also exceptionally virile, the Italian press, tended to see them as unattractive, as well as feminized.¹³⁵ This particular interpretation stems from the theories of Enlightenment philosophers such as the Abbé Raynal, who envisioned the scarcity of body hair in the Indian as a sign of racial weakness, and it was reiterated, as we are reminded in the first section of this study, in the descriptions of Indians provided in the accounts of Italian travellers in the American West.¹³⁶ In such terms, *Il Resto del Carlino*, from Bologna, commented that the Native performers "all look like women—very ugly women I mean—because of their facial features, and their long hair, very black and shiny, parted in the middle and falling down to their shoulders", while *Il Fieramosca*, from Florence, expressed doubt and confusion at their appearance: "The wind blew in the thick, long black hair of these savages, *I do not know whether females or males*, and in their multicoloured robes".¹³⁷ Similarly, Emilio Salgari describes chief Rocky Bear as "a fine piece of man measuring nearly six feet, but with a very ugly face".¹³⁸ The negation of the Indians' masculinity, as well as the elimination of any sensual element in their depiction, enabled Italian public opinion to control anxieties over the weakening of the national character or the domestic model of masculinity, and at the same time play down danger of miscegenation, which was considered taboo. Also, as scholar Max Carocci has pointed out, the Indian became the epitome of the defeated subject in the 1890s. Therefore, according to the master-narrative applied to Cody's Wild West, the feminising and sexually ambiguous descriptions of the Native performers were meant to subtly inspire ideas of inferiority, subordination, and passivity in the Italian readership.¹³⁹

sudiceria sotto una buona mano di vernice dai colori vivissimi. Così si possono vedere, tra quei selvaggi, non solo le *pelli rosse*, ma anche le pelli gialle, le pelli azzurre, le pelli violacee, le pelli amaranto. Al contrario tra i non selvaggi non si vedono che delle pelli...che avrebbero bisogno di una buona insaponatura". "Ancora Buffalo Bill", *Don Chisciotte della mancia* Rome, 23/02/1890.

¹³⁵ Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, p. 239.

¹³⁶ See Antonello Gerbi, *La Disputa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 66-68.

¹³⁷ All' apparenza sembrano donne, per i lineamenti, donne bruttissime s' intende: e per i capelli lunghissimi, nerissimi, lustri spartiti da una scrinatura che s' apre nel mezzo della fronte, e ricadenti sulle spalle". "Circo Buffalo Bill", *Il Resto del Carlino*, Bologna, 27/03/1890. "il vento soffiava nelle folte lunghe brune chiome di questi selvaggi, non so se femmine o maschi, e nei loro mantelli multicolori, *Fieramosca*, Florence, N.D.

¹³⁸ Emilio Salgari, quoted in Claudio Gallo (ed.), *Emilio Salgari, Arriva Buffalo Bill!*, pp. 29-30.

¹³⁹ Max Carocci, "Sodomy, Ambiguity and Feminization, Homosexual Meanings and the Native American Body", in Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Rebecca Tillet (eds.), *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming* (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), pp.73-75.

Despite such reactions, it is important to remember that during the tour the Native performers did not simply conform to the passivity attached to them by the Wild West show's narrative. Cody had, in fact, allowed them to wander about European cities freely, and act as tourists, which meant that in addition to historical sites like the Colosseum, the Vatican, the Pantheon in Rome, the Doge's Palace and St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, they were allowed to attend mundane places and events, like the café-chantant *Alhambra* in Florence, and a ride in a Venetian gondola. In perfect touristic style, most of these events were immortalized in photographs, some of which have become extremely famous.



Figure 22: Cody and Native performers on a gondola.
Courtesy of the McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY.

This choice was not casual, the Wild West show's management had long realised the impact that having a group of "ornate visitors" about town, as Rita Napier called them, could have on the show's publicity and gross takings, and decided to exploit this to the full in Europe, where the Indians represented a much bigger sensation than in America.¹⁴⁰ The Native performers were therefore allowed to roam Italian cities for shopping, buying fine goods to take home from several artisan craftsmen. Seeing the Native performers, not just in the guise of tourists, but also shoppers, was source of profound curiosity and sometimes bewilderment for Italians, who had imagined the Indians spending their leisure time in quite different ways. In Florence, renowned

¹⁴⁰ Rita Napier, "Across the Big Water: American Indians' Perceptions of Europe and Europeans", p. 386.

for the leather industry, the newspapers reported that Cody's Indians went out "in groups of three and four[...] to saddle shops, where they bought whips, feathers and other ornaments for their horses".¹⁴¹ In Rome, they bought "scarves in the shop of Amadori, umbrellas at Gilardini's, some photographs, pastry and candy from several patisseries" and furs in one of the finest shops of the city, Bocconi. Their unfamiliarity with the language and the local currency caused them some small misunderstanding, which *Il Messaggero*, Rome's major newspaper, promptly reported:

The other night, five Indians of the Buffalo Bill company went into Bocconi and bought some furs worth 700 lire. Yesterday, another four Indians bought clothes and fabrics, spending a good sum. The curiosity is that they did not know our coin: they all got ten-lire bills, and the cashier, after many attempts to explain to them that he wanted 700 lire, eventually settled on the table seventy of the ten-note bills, indicating that he wanted just as much to sell them the stuff. The Indians understood and paid up with the air of being very surprised that in Italy one can buy warm furs with pieces of paper.¹⁴²

For the first time, Italians were encountering "Indians in unexpected places", to use Deloria's words. This represented, as the Dakota historian maintains, tangible proof of their existence in modernity—a cause for which Cody was advocating, in his own way, through his Wild West show—even though, as we have just seen, this image often appeared unsettling to Italians, who were just transitioning from the idea of the Noble Savage, to that of the dime-novel "Redskin".¹⁴³ From this perspective, it becomes clear that what scholars, such as L. G. Moses and Reddin, have interpreted as malice or misappreciation towards the Native performers by the Italians must be understood as simply disbelief at being confronted by modern Indians, without having been prepared for the encounter.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ "Ieri molti indiani del circo erano a zonzo per la città. Ne abbiamo veduti a gruppi di tre o quattro in vari negozi a fare delle compere. Gl' indiani affluivano, specie nei negozi di sellerie, ove si provvederono di frustini, penne ed altri oggetti di ornamento pei cavalli". "Buffalo Bill's", *L' Opinione Nazionale*, Florence, 18/03/1890.

¹⁴² "Alcuni indiani di Buffalo Bill alla mattina escono dal circo e vanno a fare degli acquisti nei negozi del corso e di via nazionale. Hanno comperate delle coperte da bocconi e delle sciarpe romane da Amadori degli ombrelli da Gilardini, delle fotografie, delle ghiottonerie, da vari pasticceri. "Buffalo Bill", *Fanfulla*, Rome, 28/03/1890.

"L' altra sera cinque indiani della compagnia Buffalo Bill sono entrati da Bocconi e acquistarono delle pellicce del valore di settecento lire. Ieri altri quattro indiani comprarono abiti e stoffe, spendendo una bella somma. Il curioso è ch' essi non conoscevano la nostra moneta: sono tutti provvisti di biglietti da dieci lire, ed il cassiere, dopo molti tentativi per spiegare loro che voleva 700 lire, finì con lo schierare sul banco settanta biglietti da dieci, indicando che ne voleva altrettanti per cedere la roba. Gli indiani capirono e pagarono avendo l'aria di essere molto sorpresi che in Italia si possano comprare delle calde pellicce con dei pezzetti di carta". "Gli Indiani spendono", *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 26/02/1890.

¹⁴³ Philip Joseph Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (University Press of Kansas, 2004), p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Reddin, *Wild West's Shows*, p. 107 and L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians*, p. 90.

Through the Native performers' touristic experiences, the show management was hoping, as Sam Maddra has argued, to alleviate their boredom and at the same time inspire awe at the white man's civilisation, as an object lesson to them.¹⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, the humbling effect was not always accomplished. As Rita Napier has argued, most of the Native performers were not particularly enthusiastic about Europe, nor were they moved by the splendour of the Eternal City, or by any other city of Italy—the country so often defined as the “cradle of western civilisation”.¹⁴⁶ In 1890, there appears to be no consistent record of interviews with Cody's Indians by Italian journalists, mostly due to the difficulty in communication. Most Native performers spoke Lakota or had superficial knowledge of English, while most Italian reporters had only their own indigenous language.¹⁴⁷ In Milan, it appears that a journalist of the *Corriere della Sera* who spoke some English asked an eight year-old “half-blood” boy to act as an interpreter. The boy, whose name was not revealed, informed him that the Indians were “complaining about the cold weather and that the train journey had fatigued them”.¹⁴⁸

More experiences of the Native performers in Italy are filtered from foreign newspapers which had correspondents in Italy. A particularly controversial testimony can be found in the Parisian edition of the *New York Herald*, where the newspaper's “special correspondent” reported a discourse that Chief Rocky Bear had allegedly delivered to a group of fellow performers inside the Coliseum in Rome. Several works of scholarship on the Wild West show have taken for granted the reliability of this account, which I would like to question.¹⁴⁹ First of all, the reporter claims to have heard the Chief “explaining to his followers what a dusty old time folks used to have when the Caesars were alive”.¹⁵⁰ If so, in what language was Rocky Bear speaking to his men? We know from other interviews that Rocky Bear spoke a somewhat broken version of English. Why would he want to deliver such an extended speech in a language that he did not master, moreover in front of an audience of Lakotas, who were no more proficient in English than him? If the speech

¹⁴⁵ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁶ Rita Napier, “Across the Big Water: American Indians' Perceptions of Europe and Europeans”, p. 386.

¹⁴⁷ At the time, Sam Lone Bear—the polyglot Native performer who spoke French, German and English and would act as interpreter in the 1906 tour—had not yet joined the spectacle.

¹⁴⁸ “Il ragazzo faceva dunque sapere che i suoi compagni si lamentavano del freddo e dicevano che il viaggio li aveva stancati”. “Buffalo Bill a Milano”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milano, 02-03/04/1890.

¹⁴⁹ See, in particular, Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 107, and L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the images of American Indians*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁰ “Roman Society”, *New York Herald*, Paris edn., 16/04/1890.

was given in Lakota, did the correspondent have an interpreter who dictated the translated speech to him? This is not known, but there are many details in the article that suggest that, whatever truth there was in the rendition of Rocky Bear's alleged speech, it was twisted and embellished to fit the newspaper's agenda.¹⁵¹ The article opened in a brash and confrontational tone which conveyed a strong sympathy with the message that reformers critical of Buffalo Bill's use of Indians wanted to promote: "Many a time I have seen downhearted red men in Dakota but a more disgusted set of Indians never ate free Government rations than the Sioux of the Wild West show in Rome".¹⁵² Assuming that Rocky Bear really did pronounce these words, perhaps this article is best understood in light of the evidence about the tour that Italian newspaper coverage provided.

The *New York Herald* piece continued with Rocky Bear's words: "The more I see of other countries the more I like America. The [Italian] cab drivers are very bad men. When you give them one piece of money they hold out their hand for more. Everyone holds his hand out for money here. That makes my heart heavy. It is not so in the land where the sun goes to sleep".¹⁵³ Given the Native performers' supposed difficulties with the Italian coinage, they may have attempted to pay the wrong amount of money to cab drivers, who demanded the exact sum, perhaps protesting in a way—given the notorious ordinary loudness of the speech of Italians—which the Indians perceived as threatening; hence, negative perceptions allegedly described by the Indian Chief. Rocky Bear, who may also have struggled to understand why Italians would ask for hand-outs, as in Lakota society the distribution of wealth was equal and there would be no need to beg.¹⁵⁴ In other words, aspects of their experience outside the showground did not show Italians in a positive light in the eyes of Cody's Indians. Cultural differences were generating bias in a reciprocal way: just as the Indians seemed "strange", "exotic" as well as "savage" and "barbarian", to Italians, Italians appeared equally bizarre and uncivilized, according to the Native performers' standards. As expected, the article in the *New York Herald*

¹⁵¹ This is a likely possibility also credited by Linda Scarangella McNenly in her article "Foe, Friend, or Critic: Native Performers with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and Discourses of Conquest and Friendship in Newspaper Reports", *The American Indian Quarterly*, Volume 38, Number 2 (Spring 2014), pp. 143-176.

¹⁵² *The New York Herald*, Paris Edition, 16/04/1890.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Rita Napier, "Across the Big Water: American Indians' Perceptions of Europe and Europeans", p. 393.

did not leave room for such understanding, instead representing Rocky Bear as systematically criticising Italy:

My people, I want you to remember that these men who ask money from us, and these small boys who follow us through the streets and laugh at us will all die like the people who used to live here and their houses will fall down like these you see around you [...] This country is no place for an Indian. The Government gives no rations and there are too many soldiers. I have seen the iron clothes that people used to wear. That would have been very bad for the Indian, but the soldiers are worse now [...] We will be very glad to go home. We throw our tobacco on the ground here, and I don't care if we lose it. In our country we did not do so. Then why do we waste the tobacco of this city? It is because the tobacco is not good. That is all I have to say, my people.¹⁵⁵

In his speech, Rocky Bear subverted the rhetoric of the ‘vanishing race’ and reflected it so that it applied to the people of “the Eternal City that led the civilization of the world”, to use Cody’s own words.¹⁵⁶ The reference Rocky Bear made to tobacco also hints at its usage as a sacred element in the Lakota ceremonial of the Sacred Pipe, and the act of throwing it to the ground suggested a symbolic form of disrespect to the white man. These words would appear as an alarming message to critical reformers such as US Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan. They indicated that the Indians were not in awe of the white man’s civilization, nor did they show respect to it, and, worst of all, that they were retaining their tribal rituals, such as that of the Sacred Pipe. This, therefore, signalled that the educational scope of Cody’s Wild West show was failing for the Indians. As Sam Maddra has shown in her study, in the previous months the *New York Herald* had already given an array of bad press to Cody, about his supposed ill treatment of show Indians.¹⁵⁷ So it seems plausible that, also in this case, it suited the newspaper’s agenda to pass on further tendentious messages against Cody. At the same time, the article used Rocky Bear’s words to foster the idea, which would appeal to a White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant readership, that if even the Indians were left underwhelmed by Rome, it must really not be that impressive. As the first part of this section illustrated, a vision of Rome and Italy arrested in a state of everlasting decay and regression was a rhetoric exploited by American formers of public opinion during most of the 19th century and even more so during the Gilded Age. The occasion of the Wild West show in Italy was evidently employed by American commentators to confirm messages of this kind, about the triumph of modernity over antiquity which

¹⁵⁵ *New York Herald*, Paris Edn., 16/04/1890.

¹⁵⁶ “Buffalo Bill in Italy”, *Galignani Messenger*, 14/3/1890/, also quoted in Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 106.

¹⁵⁷ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 68.

underpinned the rise of America as an international power. Ultimately, the Native performers were not spared from being actors in this narrative.

The reactions of Italians to the Native performers in 1890 had thus been mixed, as audiences from the most diverse social strata and walks of life (Catholics, bourgeoisie, working-class) had different understandings of *Indianness* and gave their own interpretation to Cody's Indians, in particular. Certainly, L. G. Moses's observation that the Italians were "not so much fascinated" by the Native performers appears as a generalising overstatement when examined against the evidence to be found in documents and newspaper articles that showed the keen interest taken by certain groups of Italians.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Cody's Indians represented a rich source of inspiration for a number of artists, among whom we find the notable composers Giacomo Puccini and Alberto Franchetti. Puccini had visited the Wild West show in Milan in 1890 and was so positively impressed that he wrote to his brother, "The Buffalo Bill's was here, and I liked it. The Buffalo Bill's is a North American company with a number of Indian Redskins and buffaloes, who make beautiful shooting tricks and reproduce real scenes that happened on the Frontier".¹⁵⁹ The play, *The Girl of the Golden West*, by David Belasco which Puccini attended in 1907, brought back to his mind the memory of Cody's Wild West and of his Indians, and motivated him to turn it into an opera, *La Fanciulla del West*, first performed in 1910 in New York. Interestingly, both play and opera are set in California during the Gold Rush, yet the (few) Indian characters that feature bear a resemblance to Lakota Indians, indicating the extent to which images of Cody's Indians had already shaped collective imaginations on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹⁵⁸ L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the images of the American Indians*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁹ "C'è stato qui Buffalo Bill che mi piacque. Buffalo Bill è una compagnia di americani del Nord con una quantità di indiani pellerosse e di bufali, che fanno dei giuochi di tiro splendidi e riproducono al vero delle scene successe alla frontiera". "Lettera a Michele Puccini, 24 aprile 1889", Giacomo Puccini, *Epistolario* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori editore, 1982), p. 34.



Figure 23: 'Indian character' in the *Girl of the Golden West* opera. Performed at the New York Symphony hall with Enrico Caruso, 1910. Courtesy of Metropolitan Opera Archive.

Similarly, Alberto Franchetti found inspiration for the representation of Indians in his opera *Cristoforo Colombo*, which was conceived to celebrate the 400 years since the discovery of America, by attending Cody's show in Florence. Franchetti aligned his art to the trend of "Verismo", which was based on real-life observations of people and situations.¹⁶⁰ It seems only natural, therefore, that Franchetti would visit the Indian encampment to draw direct insights for representation of the Native characters in his opera. Indeed, as the Florentine newspaper, *Il Corriere Italiano* reported, he was spotted there, accompanied by a portraitist, observing the Native performers with particular care, and taking notes on their appearance.¹⁶¹ As a result, the masculine Native American characters in his play do not look like the Taino Indians, who Columbus had met, nor they remind us of the 'savages' of the Enlightenment tradition, which had been staple figures in Italian collective imagery until that moment. Rather, their iconography resembles quite closely that of the warriors from the Lakota tribes.

¹⁶⁰ Verismo was based on analytical observation of reality and the use of natural colours. It developed concurrently with the "Macchiaioli" trend. Florence hosted many "Veristi" painters and became the capital of this artistic trend. See Giuseppe Nifosì, *L'Arte Svelata: arte svelata. vol. 3. Ottocento Novecento XXI secolo* (Bari: Laterza, 2008).

¹⁶¹ *Corriere Italiano*, Florence, 14/03/1890.



Figure 24 and Figure 25: Butios and another Indian character from Alberto Franchetti's play. Original sketches by Adolf Hohenstein. Courtesy of Associazione Alberto Franchetti.

When we compare their images with those of the female Indian characters in Franchetti's opera, the resemblance with Buffalo Bill's Native performers appears even more striking. As we can see, the female Indian characters in *Cristoforo Colombo* appear distinctly different from the male ones, the women's portrayals suggesting their belonging to a different tribe or even a different ethnicity. How can such a huge dissimilarity in the representation be possible, if Franchetti used real-life models from Buffalo Bill's Wild West?



Figure 26 and Figure 27: Anacoana and Iguamota. Original sketches by Adolf Hohenstein. Courtesy of Associazione Alberto Franchetti.

The reason is that Cody's show only had a very limited number of female Native performers in this tour—possibly only two, although some sources say four—who often stayed inside their tepees making beadwork to sell on the show's stalls. Therefore, it is very likely that Franchetti and his portraitist could not see nor take inspiration from them, as they could do with the male Native performers, and had to resort to the illustrations provided by canonical sources, such as those found in Giulio Ferrario's *Il Costume Antico e Moderno*, which portrayed Native women in a more neo-classical fashion.¹⁶²

Chapter 5.9. The Wild West at the Vatican

“While in Rome the Wild West was invited to visit the Vatican, and the day set apart for it was the Anniversary of the Pope's coronation”.¹⁶³ In these terms, Nate Salsbury described the Wild West show's Papal visit in one of his manuscripts, which the monthly *Colorado History* published in small excerpts about 50 years after his death. Even though Salsbury's text was penned shortly after the Wild West show's Roman visit, it would be truer to say that the Wild West show invited itself to the Vatican.

Cody had toyed with the idea of a Papal audience long before the Wild West show was due to arrive in Italy. As a clever impresario of his own persona, as well as of his show, Cody—who, despite what the press reported, was never a Catholic—had promptly recognized the high potential of such a meeting. By envisioning himself as Columbus's vicar, he would finally accomplish the mission of his predecessor, and bring a delegation of Indians to the court of God's vicar. This thought further motivated Cody into promoting his image as America's cultural ambassador during his European tour—a status which a Papal hearing would have publicly authenticated. The request for a hearing was aided by Monsignor William O'Connell of the American College in Rome and Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York.¹⁶⁴ Ultimately, the possibility of a private audience was discarded due to the great number of the Wild West crew members. The only slot of time considered compatible with the show's size and the Vatican premises, was during a public

¹⁶² See the tables and illustrations in Giulio Ferrario, *Il Costume Antico e Moderno, l' America*, Vol.1 (Firenze: Vincenzo Batelli, 1826).

¹⁶³ Nate Salsbury, “Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea”, *Colorado Magazine*, Vol. 32, n.3 (July 1955), p. 211.

¹⁶⁴ “Wild West in Rome”, *Galignani Messenger*, 04/03/1890, also quoted in L.G Moses, *Wild West Shows and the images of American Indians*, p. 87

meeting in the Sistine Chapel, on the 3rd of March 1890, for the anniversary of the Pope's coronation. The company, therefore, begrudgingly settled for that solution—and, in fact, Cody and several of his crew members managed to speak directly, albeit briefly, with Leo XIII.

The Italian press coverage described the event in the smallest detail, focusing primarily on the Pope's reactions. Among many newspapers that chronicled the event, the Milanese publication *Il Corriere della Sera* reported:

Yesterday, in the solemn Sistine Chapel, took place the commemoration of the Pope's coronation [...]. First came the cardinals, the generals of the orders of the Capuchins, of the Dominicans, of the knights of Jerusalem, of the Cistercians. At eleven o'clock the Pope, who had blessed Buffalo Bill's Indians in the ducal room, entered in the *Sedia Gestatoria* with the cardinals, preceded by the *Mazzieri*, the noble guards, the Prince Orsini. The Pope, descended from the chair, laid down the tiara, put the gold mitre, kneeling on the genuflector, reciting prayers. Then the singers intoned the takeover onto the mass. The Pope listened sitting on the throne surrounded by the cardinals and their caudators. The epistle was read by the youngest bishop in Christianity, the 25-year-old son of Austria's ambassador Count Revertara. When he was raised, the Pope returned to the genuflector, then in a loud voice blessed the attendants. There followed the traditional embrace of the cardinals and then, once mounted atop his chair, the Pope left the room. Buffalo Bill's Indians had gifted to the Pope a bunch, and a large pillow, of flowers with the pontifical symbol. The Pope was kind to the Indians, stopping to speak with their Colonel Cody, and with the company leaders.¹⁶⁵

Interestingly, Italian newspapers did not report on the content of the discussion between Cody and Leo XIII, while the English language press coverage reported Cody saying to the Pope: “Holy Father, we went to Spain because from that country Christopher Columbus started to discover America. We come to Rome to make history, and because it is the most ancient and glorious city in Christendom”.¹⁶⁶ As these words point out, the meeting between Buffalo Bill, the Native performers, and the Pope, confirmed Cody's vision of himself as a modern counterpart to Columbus. This analogy was promptly reaffirmed by Burke in an interview with a correspondent of the *New York Herald*: “You see”, he said, “the Wild West is fulfilling its mission

¹⁶⁵ “ieri alla cappella Sistina solennissima riuscì la commemorazione del papa[...] giunsero primi i cardinali, i generali degli ordini dei cappuccini, dei domenicani, dei gerosolimitani, dei cistercensi. Alle undici il Papa che prima, nella sala ducale, aveva benedetti gli indiani di Buffalo Bill, entrò in sedia gestatoria coi cardinali, preceduto dai mazzieri, dalle guardie nobili, dal principe Orsini. Il Papa, disceso dalla sedia, depose la tiara, si mise la mitria d' oro, inginocchiò sul genuflessorio recitando delle preghiere. Allora i cantori intonarono l'introito alla messa. Il Papa ascoltò seduto sul trono circondato dai cardinali e dai loro caudatarii. Lesse l'epistola il più giovane vescovo della cristianità, il venticinquenne figlio dell'ambasciatore d' Austria conte Revertara. All' elevazione il papa tornò al genuflessorio, poi con voce sonora benedisse gli astanti. Seguì il tradizionale abbraccio dei cardinali, quindi rimontato in sedia il Papa uscì. Gli indiani di Buffalo Bill avevano presentato al Papa un mazzo e un grande cuscino di fiori con le armi pontificie. Il Papa fu gentilissimo con gli indiani, fermandosi anche a parlare con il loro colonnello Cody, e coi capi compagnia”. “Buffalo Bill”, *Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 04-05/03/1890.

¹⁶⁶ “Wild West in Rome”, *Galignani Messenger*, 07/03/1890.

of civilizing the Red man. From Barcelona, the country whence Columbus embarked to discover America, to Italy, his native land, our warriors and cowboys have been most kindly received by the public".¹⁶⁷ As will be seen, this powerful trope resurfaced periodically in the turn-of-the century American press, in appraisals of Cody's show, and other commentaries about America's rising cultural influence.

Cody's publicists spread the false information that Cody was a devout Catholic, so as to give him an aura of integrity in the public eye, but the great media coverage about the papal audience led to some scepticism even in the Italian press—usually unsuspecting and well-disposed towards Buffalo Bill—and fostered suggestions that the event had little to do with faith.¹⁶⁸ In an irreverent statement, which would prove to be nothing short of prophetic in the coming century, a reporter from the satirical newspaper *Don Chisciotte della Mancia* remarked that: "[...] Colonel Cody, the tamer of Indians, proudly entered the Vatican, among the stiffest nobility, and fiercely took his place as a representative of a new and modern power: the advertisement".¹⁶⁹ Indeed, this awareness of the advertising strategies mastered by Cody's publicists is astounding considering that, at the end of the 19th century, publicity was still a relatively new field. As on other occasions during the Italian tour, the Vatican audience enjoyed transatlantic media reverberations, thanks to the strenuous work of John Burke and Nate Salsbury, who relentlessly spread the most flattering information on the Wild West show to a diverse range of newspapers around the world. The chronicles of the event given by Cody's publicists, consistently amplified the impression that the Papal ceremony was more about the celebration of Buffalo Bill and his Indians, rather than the company paying homage to His Holiness. In the words of Nate Salsbury:

It was a curious sight to watch the expression on the faces of the people from the frontier of America as they gazed in awestruck wonder at the magnificence displayed on all sides, and marked the exhibition of respect shown His Holiness, as borne aloft, he waved his blessing to the worshipping throng. As he passed the spot where Cody and myself were standing, he looked intently at Cody, who towered a head and shoulders above everyone else, and who looked a picture in his dress coat and long hair. [...] As Cody bowed his head reverently, His Holiness spread his hands in token of his blessing, and the good Catholics around us looked with envy at Cody during the rest of the ceremonies.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ "Wild West at the Vatican", *New York Herald*, 04/03/1890.

¹⁶⁸ "Italy", *American Register in Paris*, 15/03/1890.

¹⁶⁹ "Contemporaneamente il colonnello Cody, l'ammaestratore di Indiani, entrava superbamente in Vaticano, tra la più rigida aristocrazia Romana e vi pigliava fiero il suo posto come il rappresentante di una forza nuova e moderna: la *réclame*". "Barnum in Vaticano", *Don Chisciotte della Mancia*, 04/03/1890.

¹⁷⁰ Nate Salsbury, "Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea", p. 212.

John Burke also described their participation in the event as “attending a dazzling fête given in the Vatican by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, and receiving the exalted pontiff’s blessing”.¹⁷¹ Burke had been in charge of instructing the Native performers on the appropriate behaviour at the ceremony. Unaware of this, Nate Salsbury admitted in his chronicle that he was worried that “some of the Indians, not appreciating the sanctity of the Vatican, would utter an approving war whoop before the ceremonies were ended”. Salsbury maintained, however, “when they caught sight of the variegated colours that make up the uniforms of the Swiss guards, their faces took on a broad grin, which deepened into guttural shouts of laughter, when told that the men who wore uniforms were soldiers in the pay of His Holiness. They could not imagine anything clad in such outré costume to be a soldier”.¹⁷² Despite Burke’s and Salsbury’s educational efforts, some of the English-speaking press regarded the Native performers’ behaviour inside and outside of the Vatican’s premises as primitive and even ‘pagan’. The *New York Herald*, London edition, reported that the Native performers:

...were painted in every colour that the Indian imagination could devise. Every man carried something to present to the ‘Medicine Man’ sent by the Great Spirit. Rocky Bear rolled his eyes and folded his hands on his breast as he stepped on tiptoe through the glowing sea of colours. [...]The Pontiff leaned yearningly towards the rude group and blessed them. He seemed to be touched by the sight. As the train swept on the Indians became excited and a squaw fainted. They had been warned not to utter a sound and were with difficulty restrained from whooping.[...] When the Indians went back to their camp, within sight of the grim castle of San Angelo, they found the only warrior who did not go to the Vatican dead in his blanket. Rocky Bear told his followers that the Great Spirit had done it. Tonight, the Indians have temporarily relapsed into Paganism and are howling over the dead brave, some of them tearing their flesh and sprinkling the funeral tent with their blood.¹⁷³

Portraying the Native performers as barbaric, credulous and puerile was a customary reaction of the Eurocentric press of the time, as well as of much of the historiography that was published on this topic in the first half of the 20th century.¹⁷⁴ As Rita Napier has explained, “these interpretations indicate a lack of knowledge about the religious beliefs or value of the Indian themselves”.¹⁷⁵ Seeing the Pope as a ‘Medicine Man’, to Europeans suggested an association with the term witch doctor, whereas for the

¹⁷¹ John Burke, *Buffalo Bill from Prairie to Palace*, Chris Dixon (ed.), (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 255.

¹⁷² Nate Salsbury, “Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea”, p. 213.

¹⁷³ “Indians at the Vatican”, *New York Herald*, London ed., 04/03/1890.

¹⁷⁴ Rita Rita Napier, “Across the Big Water: American Indians' Perceptions of Europe and Europeans”, p. 397.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Native performers, ‘Medicine Man’ showed the deepest respect, as well as the only dignified term they could use to define the intermediary of the Great Spirit.¹⁷⁶

This meeting represented for Cody’s performers, indeed, a grand occasion, and in theory, this was also supposed to be a good opportunity to strengthen the Native performers’ faith in the White man’s religion.¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the visit did not have the outcome expected. If the sight of the ‘Great Spirit’s vicar’ had the Native performers in awe, what seemed to bother them, instead, was the ‘Vatican code of etiquette’, or, in other words, the perceived atmosphere of ‘inhospitality’ that they sensed inside St. Peter’s Cathedral. The Native performers were greatly disappointed by having been denied the privilege of exploring the cathedral and other Vatican palaces on their own.¹⁷⁸ In Lakota culture the wishes of guests had to be fulfilled in order to demonstrate hospitality and generosity in every respect; therefore, the Holy See’s restrictions were interpreted by Cody’s performers in the most negative way. When asked for their impressions of the Pope, some of them responded that “they did not think much of God’s Representative if his house was too good for anybody to go into”.¹⁷⁹ A further blow to the Native performers’ faith in Christianity was dispensed shortly afterwards, on that same day, when the company returned to the Wild West show’s camp and found their fellow performer, Little Ring, dead in his tepee. The man—who according to L. G. Moses was 38 years of age (historian Sam Maddra believes he was 33)—had been left behind on the company’s visit to Leo XIII, due to an indisposition.¹⁸⁰ According to the post-mortem examination that Consul Augustus O. Bourn referred to in his letter to the Assistant Secretary of State, dated March 12 1890, the cause of death was “heart failure”.¹⁸¹ Italian press reports that Little Ring’s passing was caused by “cerebral fever”, a terms used for any deadly brain inflammation from meningitis to scarlet fever, appear to have been hasty speculation.¹⁸² Finding their companion dead upon their return from the ‘Great Medicine Man’ triggered further doubt in the Native performers—who had already lost several companions that season, with the most recent death of a member of their crew taking place only a few weeks before when

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Nate Salsbury, “Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea”, p. 213.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 66; L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Image of American Indians*, p. 89.

¹⁸¹ L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Image of American Indians*, p. 299.

¹⁸² Diego De Miranda, “La Scommessa di Buffalo Bill”, *Don Chisciotte della Mancina*, Rome, 05/03/1890.

the show was performing in Naples.¹⁸³ The Native performers lamented that the man who had been sent by God on earth should have “protected their comrade”, rather than punishing him with death for not having attended the Vatican meeting.¹⁸⁴ This was interpreted as a sign that the ‘White Man’s God’ was not a good one, as well as, as Rita Napier has argued, that his vicar was not endowed with any real power whatsoever coming from God.¹⁸⁵ Nate Salsbury reported that the Native performers were so displeased they informed John Burke that “God should send another man to represent him if he expects the Indians to believe anything the missionaries might tell them in the future”.¹⁸⁶ Given the rise of the Ghost Dance movement at that time, and its suppression the following year at Pine Ridge, it is possible that the disappointment at the lack of real power of the Pope contributed to the willingness of some performers to accept the teachings of Lakota holy men such as Kicking Bear and Short Bull, rather than continue practicing Christianity.¹⁸⁷

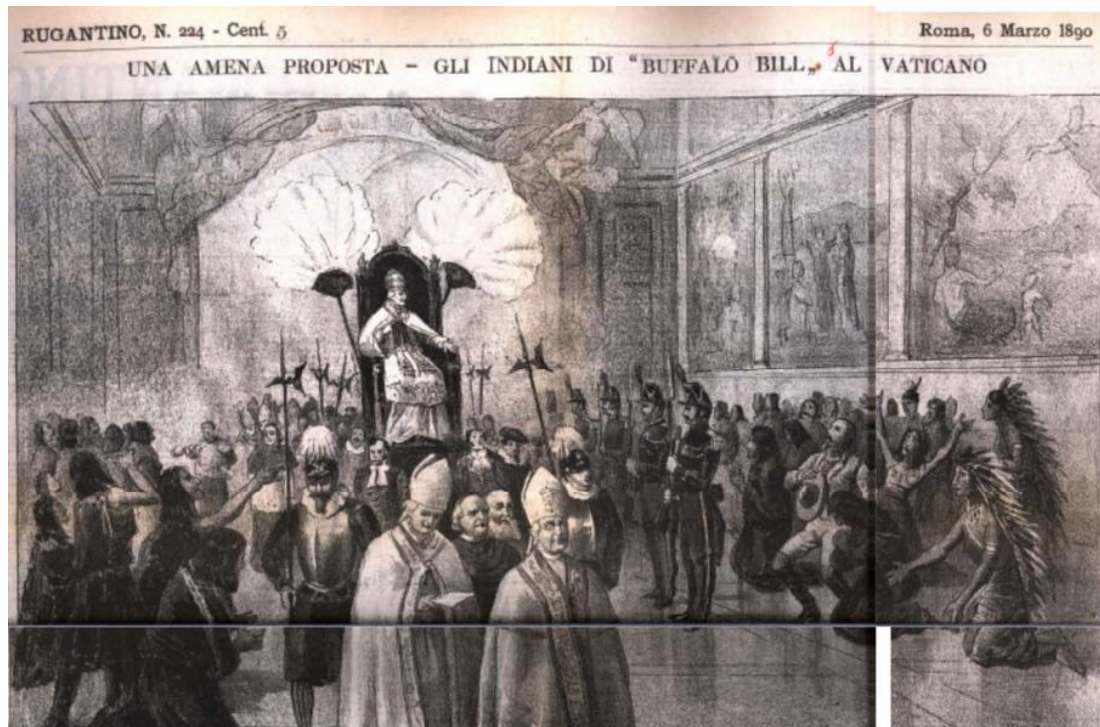
¹⁸³ Goes Flying, who died at Naples on 15th February 1890 at the age of 45, had contracted smallpox. All the English-speaking scholarship (Warren, Maddra, Moses) is based on the letter from the consul in Naples, Edward Camphausen, to American authorities, which misspelled the Neapolitan hospital where Goes Flying had been treated as “Cotugoro”. The *Cotugno* hospital was and still is, specialised in the treatment of infectious diseases. Goes Flying’s personal effects were burned to avoid further contagion. The Italian press reported Goes Flying’s death, but fabricated his name and lineage, calling him “Green Ink...son of Blue Ink and White Dove”. See “Buffalo Bill’s”, *L’ Osservatore Romano*, Rome, 22/02/1890.

¹⁸⁴ Nate Salsbury, “Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea”, p. 213.

¹⁸⁵ Rita Napier, “Across the Big Water: American Indians’ Perceptions of Europe and Europeans”, p. 399.

¹⁸⁶ Nate Salsbury, “Nate Salsbury Originated Wild West Show Idea”, p. 213.

¹⁸⁷ On the Ghost Dance movement and the involvement of Cody’s performers see chapter 5 of Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?* and Louis Warren, *God’s Red Son* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).



*Figure 28: Illustration from Il Rugantino, Rome, 6th March 1890.
Courtesy of McCracken Research Library, Willian F. Cody Collection MS6.3777.043.01*

Chapter 5.10. Buffalo Bill and the challenge with the Roman Butteri

The Roman stop of the 1890 tour was undoubtedly the most drama-laden. Adding to the sensation created by the Papal visit, a series of competitions were arranged with the effect of having the spotlight constantly on the Wild West show as well as focusing public attention on Cody's personal feats. One of these was the match Cody organized between American cowboys and Italian herdsmen, the so-called *butteri*, which was conceived to silence rumours that the Wild West's bucking broncos had been trained to act wild.¹⁸⁸ Already, in Naples, the local press had announced that "Buffalo Bill invites anyone owning an indomitable horse to leave it with him for five minutes, promising to return it... as a lamb".¹⁸⁹ No one came forward there, but the right opportunity for Cody materialized in Rome. By visiting the salon of Count Giuseppe Primoli—an Italian pioneer of photography and cousin of Prince Jerome Bonaparte—Cody met a great lover of horses, Onorato Caetani, Duke of Sermoneta, and his British wife, Lady Constance Adela Bootle-Wilbraham, who, after they both attended the first performance of the show in Rome, accepted the challenge. The

¹⁸⁸ Mauro Nasi, *I Butteri di Cisterna e dell'Agro Pontino* (Roma: Palombi, 2006), p. 76.

¹⁸⁹ "Buffalo ecc. ecc.", *Il Piccolo*, 30-31/01/1890, p. 2.

Caetans were convinced that their Italian horses would have been much harder to conquer than the American broncos, so they invited Cody over for breakfast to discuss the contest's arrangements.¹⁹⁰ It is likely that Caetani took inspiration for the challenge from the boldness with which the American cowboys were presented by the company's advertising as "the most skilled riders in the world"—a motto echoed during the second European tour of Buffalo Bill (*The Rough Riders of the World*). Given the pride that Onorato Caetani, as well as many other Romans, placed in their *butteri* tradition—which dates back at least to feudalism—this title seemed to awaken a sort of parochial resentment on their part. Caetani thus gave in to this feeling by publicly betting with Cody that his American cowboys would not be able to saddle two of his own horses of the Cisterna estate.

The Duke of Sermoneta wanted to gain prestige within Roman aristocratic society by testing Cody's skilled riders with horses that had never been "broken". Despite the great media interest in the bet, the story is not clear cut: the events, in fact, were much more complex than a simple match between *butteri* and cowboys, which took place over several rounds. The match should have taken place on the 28th of February, but was postponed at the last minute after a ban imposed by the Roman police due to a lack of security measures for the audience in the stands.¹⁹¹ The challenge was held, eventually, on March the 4th, and the large crowd included Count Giuseppe Primoli and the family of the prime minister, Francesco Crispi.¹⁹² The Milanese newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* gave a detailed report:

Accompanied by the Butteri, two of our own colts came on the track, the audience seemed thrilled. They were two lively beautiful black horses. The Butteri were left to guard the colts until they delivered them to the cowboys. Along with the colts, fifteen cowboys on horseback, led by Buffalo Bill, came out in the circus. Buffalo Bill this morning had to quarrel with his men, who all wanted to tame the colts: a real dare. To prevent any further issue, Buffalo Bill decided that the names of the two riders were to be chosen by lot. And so he did. The other cowboys had to settle for throwing the lasso and saddling the two colts. This chase was really nice. Buffalo Bill himself took a considerable part in it. More than five times, the cowboys had to throw the lasso: the colts, making huge efforts, always managed to escape or break the rope. At one point some of the audience began to jeer, but this uncivil attempt was quickly suppressed by the rest of the public. In the end, the cowboys resorted to the *loop to the feet* technique, and trying again and again, they managed to take the feet of horses in the snare, which were thrown to the ground for three or four times, and three or four times still managed to rise, neighing and ramping up. The cowboys, some on horseback and others on foot, tried in vain to get closer to the two hot-blooded animals to tie them up and then saddle them. But finally, amid the applause of the public, they managed to have victory. One after the

¹⁹⁰ Vittoria Colonna Di Sermoneta, *Memorie* (Milano: Treves, 1937), p. 221.

¹⁹¹ *Il Corriere della Sera* 01-02/03/1890, quoted in Marco Brasa, "Buffalo Bill a Bologna: Viaggio all' interno di un mito" (Master's thesis, University of Bologna, 2001), pp. 125-127.

¹⁹² Marco Brasa, "Buffalo Bill a Bologna: Viaggio all' interno di un mito", p. 125.

other, the two colts were on the ground, harnessed at the foot and head. Buffalo Bill dismounted from his horse, put the bridle and then the saddle onto one of the horses. That done, he whipped the horse, which rose to its feet. Quickly, one of the cowboys was on top of it. The excitement and the expectations of the audience were immense. And the audience was not disappointed: because the rider remained firmly in the saddle despite the fact that the horse did raise hell, and so he received the applause and cheers of the audience. The second horse suffered the same fate, except that at one point the maneuver was different: this second colt was saddled when he was already standing, and the cowboys showed skill and a fearless confidence beyond any praise. And such confidence was admired throughout the long maneuver: the brave riders approached the horses with a great indifference, dodging the kicks and pawing with quick pulls of the bridle. The cowboys sat on two horses for another six or seven minutes, lashing and pushing them with the spurs to tame them completely and let them gallop twice around the circus. The other cowboys were jumping out of joy and throwing their hats in the air. The Indians, clinging to the entrance of the circus, sent cries of praise to their companions. In short, if there was really a challenge, Buffalo Bill won triumphantly. They say that the bet was worth 12,000 liras.¹⁹³

The victory of Buffalo Bill's men was promptly echoed in the American press with overtly sensationalistic tones: "Buffalo Bill's cowboys made Rome howl with delight last Tuesday by conquering in five minutes two of the wildest horses to be found in all Europe[...]"¹⁹⁴ The Roman edition of the *New York Herald* wrote:

The animals came from the Duke's farmhouse [...] he declared that no cowboy on earth could ride one. The cowboys laughed at the boast [...]. Those wild animals stood out in great leaps in the air, sprang in every direction and twitched in every way, but in vain. Every man, woman, and child expected that two or three men would be killed in the experiment. The pressure was at its peak. More than two thousand carriages were parked around the show fence, while another twenty thousand people were grouped along spacious enclosures. In five minutes, the cowboys had caught the colts, saddled, subdued and tamed them. Then the cowboys brought them trotting around the arena among the thunderous applause of the audience.¹⁹⁵

The American press failed to report the follow-up to this popular challenge between Italian *butteri* and American cowboys. The following day, while the Wild West cowboys were intent in the usual lasso performance, a man turned up in the show arena demanding to speak to Cody. He asked the permission to mount one of his allegedly indomitable horses. This was Guglielmo Bedini, who came forward because he had read an advertisement in *Il Messaggero*, wherein an American who had seen the great success of the previous challenge (and the relative ease with which Buffalo Bill's crew won it) and offered 100 dollars to anyone with the nerve to mount one of Buffalo Bill's broncos and could stay on top of it for at least five minutes.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 06-07/03/1890.

¹⁹⁴ "Buffalo Bill's Cowboys", *The Meridional*, 29/03/1890, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ *New York Herald*, 05/03/1890.

¹⁹⁶ Marco Brasa, "Buffalo Bill a Bologna: Viaggio all' interno di un mito", p. 128.



Figure 29: Guglielmo Bedini.

Image publicly available online: <http://www.equilibrando.it/>. Last accessed 28/05/2013.

The *Corriere della Sera* commented on the 8th of March, 1890:

Buffalo Bill held a sort of congress with his men and agreed to let Bedini try. He showed a courage out of the ordinary, because as soon as the horse saw an unfamiliar person coming forward, started kicking and squirming, and when the other horses moved away, the horse tried to join them, dragging Mr. Bedini behind, so that eventually he was forced to drop the reins of the horse and fell in the mud, in the middle of a jungle sound of boos. But then, once he managed to capture the horse once again, he put the bridle on, and he mounted it with a leap worthy of a gymnast and waved his hat. Then the audience applauded frantically, and many waved their handkerchiefs to salute the winner.¹⁹⁷

The Italians had avenged the earlier defeat. Interestingly, Bedini was not a *buttero* but, as the above picture shows, was a circus worker and a former sergeant of the Italian army's 13th "Monferrato" Cavalry Regiment.¹⁹⁸

On the 8th of March, following a pattern which by then had become extremely popular, the match between Buffalo Bill and the Duke of Sermoneta was repeated: this time, the Italian Duke not only brought along another two colts from his ranch, but also his *butteri* from the Pontine Marshes. This second challenge between Cody and Sermoneta was marked by a series of disputes and grievances between adversaries: the reason most frequently reported in the newspaper accounts is that, according to the Italians, the cowboys used unorthodox methods in plying the wild

¹⁹⁷ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 08-09/03/1890.

¹⁹⁸ Marco Brasa, "Buffalo Bill a Bologna: Viaggio all' interno di un mito", p. 129.

horses. Some journalists reported that the cowboys, just before mounting, tied a string to the genitals of the horses, so that the animals were forced to stand still since on every movement the string would pull and cause them pain.¹⁹⁹ According to an article from *La Gazzetta dell'Emilia*, another brutal American technique was to “fit the bridle-bit so tightly that would hurt their tongue, so that the colts could not move their head properly and the ‘bits’ would make their mouths bleed, causing them fever”.²⁰⁰ The crowd protested, so that Cody had to release the horses from the bridle, and thereafter the cowboys fell to the ground, failing to tame and saddle the animals. Once it was the turn of the *butteri*, “one of them was quickly unhorsed, but the second one, Augusto Imperiali, remained in the saddle until the animal, finally tamed, lowered his muzzle to the ground. The crowd applauded frantically, and Buffalo Bill chivalrously celebrated the winner”.²⁰¹ This is the version that appears the most plausible and complete.²⁰²

Given the existence of so many different versions of this event and given the lack of objectivity in many of the reports, it is rather difficult to say how things exactly went in this challenge. What appears most important, however, is that such uncertainty only contributed to the legendary aura which keeps interest alive in an event that happened well over a century ago.

¹⁹⁹ See “Al circo Buffalo Bill”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 06/03/1890; “Buffalo Bill ai Prati di Castello” *Il Messaggero* 08/03/1890; “Da Buffolodate”, *Don Chisciotte della Mancia*, 09/03/1890.

²⁰⁰ *La Gazzetta dell'Emilia* 08/03/1890, quoted in Marco Brasa, “Buffalo Bill a Bologna: Viaggio all'interno di un mito”, p. 130.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² See, for example, accounts of the challenge by Joy Kasson, Louis Warren, Paul Reddin, Don Russell, Blackman and Sell, and Rydell and Kroes in their books about the Wild West show.

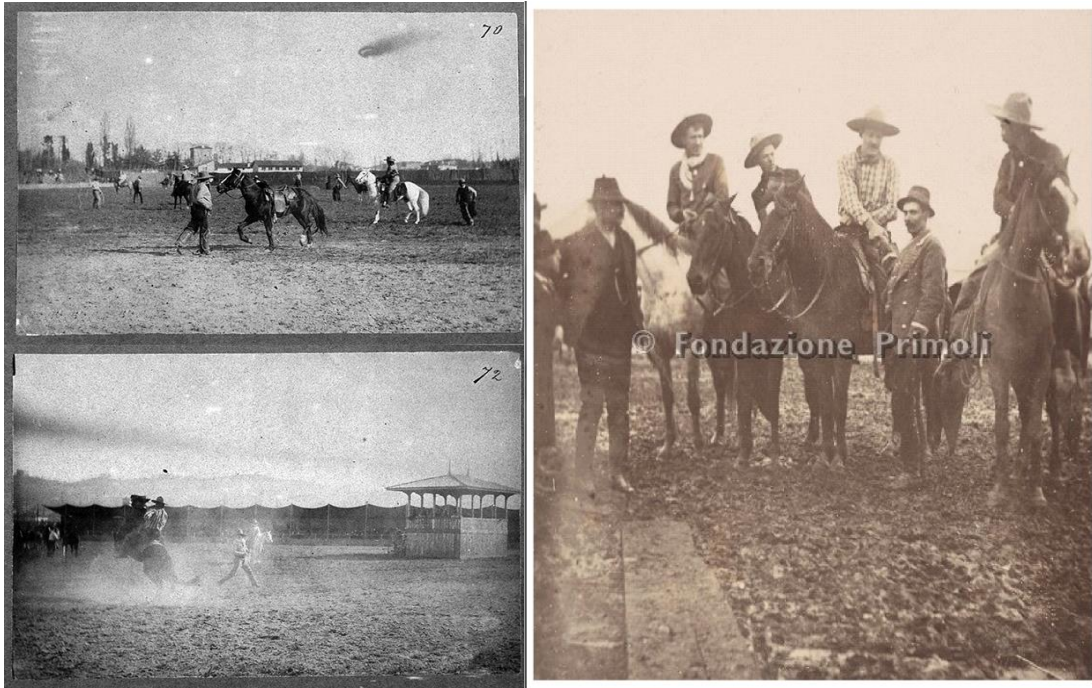


Figure 30 (left): Wild West Cowboys breaking Broncos in Bologna 1890.
 Courtesy of Museo del Risorgimento, Certosa, Belluzzi Fund, pictures 70 and 71.

Figure 31 (right): Augusto Imperiali (on foot) at the end of his victorious challenge, shaking the hand of an American cowboy from the Wild West show, Rome, 1890.
 Courtesy of Fondazione Primoli.

Chapter 5.11. Italy and Italians in the eyes of Wild West show members and in foreign press reports.

As previously mentioned, the victory of Buffalo Bill’s men over the Italian *butteri* was promptly echoed in the American press with sensationalist statements such as, “Buffalo Bill’s cowboys made Rome howl with delight last Tuesday by conquering in five minutes two of the wildest horses to be found in all Europe...”²⁰³ The *New York Herald* further explained, “The animals came from the Duke’s farmhouse [...] he declared that no cowboy on earth could ride one. The cowboys laughed at the boast... Every man, woman, and child expected that two or three men would be killed in the experiment.”²⁰⁴ Cody made sure to reprint the full version of the latter article in the Wild West show’s brochure for the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, along with a letter from the US vice-consul in Rome about the illustrious lineage of the ‘great lordly family of the Caetans’, and the ‘wildest and most unmanageable’

²⁰³ ‘Buffalo Bill’s Cowboys’, *The Meridional*, 29/03/1890, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ “Roman Wild Horses Tamed by Cowboys”, *New York Herald*, 05/03/1890.

nature of their Cajetan breed of horses.²⁰⁵ Cody was intent on exorcizing lingering fears of cultural inferiority by reminding Americans of the esteem with which his show's triumph in the 'Cradle of Civilization' was received. The international press continued to monitor Cody's Roman movements and feats: from sightseeing at the Coliseum, to the tribute to the tomb of King Victor Emmanuel II in the Pantheon, to the attendance in full regalia at a papal audience in the Sistine chapel. Major international newspapers also covered Buffalo Bill's Roman stay and, in particular, his papal audience: from the French *Le Figaro* to the Dutch *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, the Canadian *Daily Colonist* and the Australian *Brisbane Courier*.²⁰⁶ In the minds of many Americans, eager to become 'the new Romans of the West', this must have equated to a virtual conquest of the landmarks of Old World civilization.

While American newspapers sang the praises of Colonel W. F. Cody and his Wild West show's success in 'the cradle of civilization', they also found it the right occasion on which to highlight the discrepancy between Italy's olden days and the current state of affairs of the country. As illustrated in previous chapters, turn of the twentieth century Italy was considered, by many Americans, to be a backward nation lying in the ruins of its ancient greatness.²⁰⁷ Such rhetoric of cultural supremacy employed by US (and, at times, British) newspapers was partly aimed at enhancing the confidence of Americans. Still insecure about their cultural position in the western world, Americans feared that the cross-fertilisation of cultures that mass-migration was bringing about—especially contamination by certain groups of migrants, considered inferior—would endanger their national character.²⁰⁸ As part of the context in which the Wild West show was played out, these cultural tropes created biased attitudes, especially in the press coverage that followed the Wild West show in Italy, and also in Cody, himself, and the members of his crew.

Cody was eager to perform in Italy because of the symbolic prestige attached to the peninsula. He was aware of the importance of the country's ancient history, just as he was conscious of the fixation of America's high society with European

²⁰⁵ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West's and Congress of Rough Riders of the World*, (1893), p. 29. Original Brochure, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, MS.32.

²⁰⁶ Matteo D'Arcangeli, *Papa Leone XIII & Buffalo Bill* (Carpineto Romano: istituto comprensivo Leone XIII, 2013), p. 66.

²⁰⁷ Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'Italia alla fine del XIX secolo*, p. 35.

²⁰⁸ Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 17; Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d'Italia: 1848–1901*, (Roma: Gangemi, 2013), p. 311.

antiquity.²⁰⁹ Keen as he was to redeem his image as a ‘Frontier Melodrama’ performer and be recognized by American elites as an American cultural ambassador—he strongly harboured the ambition to perform inside Rome’s Coliseum and be talked of as a gentleman, rather than a showman. In order to see such aspirations come true, Cody liaised with the highest personalities of *fin de siècle* Rome and attended prestigious Capitoline salons.²¹⁰ At a gala night at which he was the special guest, he appeared to be so charmed by Rome that he pledged to bring the “Roman mud” attached to his equipment back to America, as a memento “of the Eternal City that led the civilization of the world”.²¹¹ Thus America’s fascination with classical culture had seemingly affected even Cody, who appeared almost morbidly attached to the antiquity of this country. In fact, the dramatic affectation of Cody’s words reveals another ruse of the showman Buffalo Bill, always determined to flatter local elites and gain the favour of crowds.

Carrying “Roman mud” back to America would have been scant consolation for eventually failing to secure the Coliseum as a venue for his show—possibly the greatest blow to Cody’s pride, especially after the gargantuan anticipation that the international media had displayed. His attempt to secure the amphitheatre was discussed even in New Zealand’s *The Press* (25 March 1890) and *Evening Post* (5 April 1890).²¹² For Cody, such a stunt would have been the crowning achievement in the epic myth-making of his show: the conqueror of wild Indians crossing the arena where the gladiators once tamed wild beasts. For the American public, occupying this ancient venue might have been a major leap forward in the affirmation of their own culture, as a performance of the New World graced the hallowed ground of the Old. When his hopes were dashed, the American press invented reasons such as that the amphitheatre was “too small for this modern exhibition”, and that “his request for it has aroused an indignant protest from the clericals who claim that it is sacrilege to give an exhibition on ground saturated with the blood of Christian martyrs”.²¹³ The real reason was far less glamorous, and concerned public safety. The Flavian amphitheatre was in a poor state of preservation and it would have been too risky to

²⁰⁹ See C. Vann Woodward, *The Old World’s New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²¹⁰ For a list of aristocrats and high-profile personalities that Cody met in Rome, see “Buffalo Bill in Italy”, *The Sportsman Journal*, 15/03/1890.

²¹¹ “Buffalo Bill in Italy”, *Galignani Messenger*, 14/03/1890, also quoted in Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 106.

²¹² Matteo D’Arcangeli, *Papa Leone XIII & Buffalo Bill*, pp. 34-35.

²¹³ “Wild West at the Vatican”, *New York Herald*, 04/03/1890, also quoted in Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, p. 300; “Buffalo Bill’s Latest”, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 29/01/1890, p. 1.

allow large gatherings, let alone bulky animals such as horses and buffalos. Cody was forced to settle for the much smaller, but better preserved, Diocletian arena of Verona, without having affixed the star-spangled-banner to the Coliseum of Rome.

When still in Rome, Cody heaped praise on Italy in his public speeches and interviews. An article from the *Galignani Messenger* showed Buffalo Bill as positively impressed, and declaring:

Without exceptions we had a better class of people at Rome than in any other city we have ever visited. The Roman aristocracy, great lovers of horses and sport, especially the ladies, were not deterred even by the heaviest rains from coming day after day and remaining through the whole performance.²¹⁴

However, in an interview with the *New York Times*, conducted after the Roman stopover, Cody commented on the nature of the Italians in different terms: “We like the Italians of the upper classes, who are very polite, but the lower classes are mean and not to be trusted”.²¹⁵ Cody went on to stress the poverty and ignorance of Italians, eventually comparing their customs with those of the Native Americans: “the method of building the tombs is the same, the custom of decorating the outside of the habitations with paintings is the same, the cloaks the Italians wear wrapped about closely resemble the blankets of the Indians”.²¹⁶ In this bizarre theory, Cody casually created a parallel between the believed ‘primitivism’ of the Native Americans, and that of the ‘decaying’ and ‘regressive’ Italians, orphaned by the demise of their great civilization.²¹⁷ Indeed, during the 1890 tour, it appears the most flattering attribute that Cody could bestow on the places he had just visited—Spain and southern Italy—was that they were “strange countries”—as he wrote in personal correspondence from Naples.²¹⁸

According to other English-speaking commentators on the Italian tour, it was not just the poor people who were devious and corrupted in decadent Italy, but also the rich. A British newspaper recounted the forgery in Naples of “four-thousand five francs banknotes”, which

were passed at the door of his (Cody’s) show by well-dressed Neapolitans, indeed the elite of Neapolitan society [...] this implies that some hundreds of the highest class [...] lent themselves to a fraud to cheat Buffalo Bill. There must have been a

²¹⁴ “Cowboys in Old Verona”, *New York Times*, 18/05/1890, p. 17; also quoted in Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 106.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ This rhetoric draws cues from racial theories of criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his disciples, which were starting to gain traction in America. See Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque*, p. 72.

²¹⁸ William F. Cody to “Doctor”, 15/02/1890, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, MS6.0068.

combination to swindle, and *that* among the members of the aristocracy at Naples. The Italian papers did not mention this in a tone of disgust, but rather in one of surprise that Italians should have been able to over-reach a Yankee.²¹⁹

In fact, as Annie Oakley's autobiographical testimony bears witness, the problem with forged money was not peculiar to Italy. The Wild West's show encountered the same problem during the previous stopover in Barcelona. (There, Oakley commented on the inefficiency of Spanish institutions and the twisted ethics of the local community—including the middle and upper classes.)²²⁰ American newspapers also referred to Italy as decadent, self-indulgent, and degenerate. The *Meridional* from Abbeville, Louisiana, commented in lofty language about the horse-bucking challenge with the *butteri*: "It is claimed that there was never so much excitement in Rome since the days of the Gladiators. *There is a dim suspicion in the public mind, however, that in such an effete country as Italy, horses cannot be very wild, and that they cannot buck with the same earnestness of purpose as the Texas plug*".²²¹ Of Naples, Oakley wrote in her *Autobiography*:

We arrived in the beautiful bay at daybreak, a sight never to be forgotten. Mt. Vesuvius loomed in the background, the bay was filled with ships of the Italian navy. But a peep through some of the narrow streets was not so beautiful. *The scum of Italy was gathered there. They lived in cellars and came out at the approach of a stranger. And the beggars! They told me that children were purposefully deformed when very young to make them good cripples for begging purposes.*²²²

Such claims, as Paul Reddin has noted, were often made to contrast Anglo-Saxon traditions and values of the American West with Italy's "hoary antiquity" and served to glorify America's righteous and progressive national character.²²³

And yet, however wretched the present state of the country and its people, the epic of Italy's ancient past continued to captivate American visitors, and even the members of the Wild West show could not resist this appeal. A gushing appraisal of Italy's archaeological remains and sights can be found in a letter that Grant Vincent, a virtually unknown cowboy rider in Cody's show, wrote to his father, H. H. Vincent, from Rome:

You have herd [sic.] the expression when you are in Rome do as the Romans do so it has come to pass for me well after leaveing [sic.] Barcelona, Spain we came to Napals [sic.] Italy while we was their [sic.] I went and saw the Ruins of Pompei the city that was destroyed as you know by the explosion of Mt Vesuvius *that was a great sight to see a city that had been burried [sic.] that long and dug out people*

²¹⁹ *Troubadour Land*, 13/02/1892, p. 1. Original emphasis.

²²⁰ See Annie Oakley, *The Autobiography of Annie Oakley*, Marilyn Robbins (ed.), (Greenville, OH: Darke County Historical Society, 2006), (2012), p. 40.

²²¹ *The Meridional*, Abbeville, La, 29/03/1890, p. 2. Emphasis mine.

²²² Annie Oakley, *The Autobiography of Annie Oakley*, p. 41. Emphasis mine.

²²³ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, pp. 106-107.

*and animals had turned to real stone and looked very natural I can not commence to tell you anything to compare with what I have saw [sic.] we came to this city from Napals this is a great sight seeing city old ruins buildings that was [sic.] erected before Christ it looks incredible but never the less true.*²²⁴

It is significant that such a genuine outpouring of admiration came from a barely literate cowboy from Arapahoe, Nebraska. As one can suppose from his rural social background, Grant Vincent was likely to be less familiar with the master narratives which lay beneath comments such as Oakley's, Cody's and those of the press representing middle America. In some respects, Vincent was reacting to Italy with the same innocent surprise and lack of preconception with which many poor Italians reacted to the Wild West show. As it was often the case with the Italians' reception of the Wild West show, the main source of criticism—against the Native performers, against Cody and his cowboys or against America as a whole—stemmed from the organs of the (petite) bourgeoisie, almost never from the working classes—who got wholly absorbed in this never-before-seen 'Wild West' experience.²²⁵ A glimpse of this can be drawn from another passage in Grant Vincent's letter, where the description of the fervour arising from the crowds in Rome suggestively merges with the wide-eyed enthusiasm of the author:

We have had a full house every day in this city I can not explain the diferant [sic.] acts but if you could see this show it would make you think that Cow Boys and Indians amounted to something people in Europe thinks it is the greatest thing on earth in the shap [sic.] of a show and they are just right the first day I was to the show I was one of the audiances {sic.] and to my nolege [sic.] it was the best thing I ever saw in my life to see horses men and indians you have no idea of what a show this is²²⁶

Annie Oakley also enjoyed sites of historical interest, but, despite being simple descriptions, her musings could be problematic, as her understanding of 'Old World' reality was regularly slanted by her mid-western background. As she travelled through Italy, she noted her rather detailed impressions in a diary which, during her later years, was edited in autobiographical form. She wrote about Pompeii:

²²⁴ Grant Vincent to H. H. Vincent, 01/03/1890, Denver Public Library, Western Heritage Collection, Box 1. Emphasis mine.

²²⁵ This was mainly due to the high rate of illiteracy among Italians from lower social ranks, which limited their acquisition of background knowledge about the West and influenced their experience of Cody's show. Also, the spread of socialist and anarchist thought, which began in the late 1870s, was still relatively moderate, reaching only certain social circles and areas of Italy. Class-consciousness was not yet widespread among rural and provincial labourers—it would proliferate at a significantly faster rate after 1892, when the Italian Socialist Party was founded—and therefore the experience of "capitalist leisure" such as the Wild West show (iso defined in a 1906 newspaper from the labour movement) could still be lived relatively guilt-free by many working-class Italians.

²²⁶ Grant Vincent to H.H. Vincent, 01/03/1890.

Pompeii interested me. One house had undoubtedly been the home of a sportsman, as every inch of the wall was covered with the finest paintings representing a game scene. They had been there for centuries and were in a good state of preservation. One picture seemed to be set in a large fireplace. It represented a marsh scene with rushes out of which birds that looked like English snipe were rising. In the background was a sportsman in the act of aiming at the birds with a queer gun. I also observed several old pistols in the museum of Pompeii which had been taken from the ruins. They are encased with lava and would crumble away if the lava were ever removed. There was also a large rabbit taken out of an oven just as it was being cooked when the city was destroyed. It was encrusted with lava but it looked quite natural. A beautiful girl with a *psyche* [sic.] knot lay on her left side with her head pillowed on her arm. The terror had overtaken her so quickly that there was not a sign of struggle. Her dainty night robe stood out plainly under the lava.²²⁷

It appears likely that Oakley referred to the large fresco in the *triclinium* part of the so-called ‘House of the golden bracelet’ (Casa del bracciale d’oro), known and studied since the excavations undertaken during the Bourbon era (1770s).²²⁸ Her interpretation of the subjects is revealing. The mural featured Egyptian themes and figures and the man in the backdrop could not possibly have held a gun. Evidently, Oakley was convinced that firearms had existed since ancient times, since she also appears to have seen them on display at the archaeological museum—leaving every contemporary reader of her memoir with the unsolved dilemma of what Pompeian artefacts she must have mistaken for guns.

Given the high number of erotic images and symbols scattered around Pompeii, due to the importance of fertility rites in Roman culture—and the numerous brothels unearthed in the inner-city—the question arises as to why Oakley made no comment on that peculiar aspect. It is quite possible that she did not see them because, due to the perceived obscenity of the depictions, they were censored for general visitors and only disclosed upon special request. However, even a *domus* with a solemn aspect such as Sallust’s house and the House of the Faun featured occasional licentious images of mythological or apotropaic type, which were not necessarily censored. If exposed at all to such relics, Oakley decided to conveniently glide over the more salacious details of Pompeii in order not to tarnish the work of a lifetime: crafting her image as a respectable, folksy lady. Her clumsy appreciation of ancient artworks and—as we will see—her cursory Shakespearian citations and blurred understanding of European geography were functional affirmations of her identity as a middle-class, mid-western American. She continued:

²²⁷ Annie Oakley, *The Autobiography of Annie Oakley*, p. 42. The Psyche knot was a round bun, sometimes with a curly fringe. Modelled on classical styles, it was popular in the Edwardian Era.

²²⁸ See Rosaria Ciardiello, “Alcune riflessioni sulla Casa del Bracciale d’ Oro a Pompei”, *Annali dell’Università Suor Orsola*, n.5. p.171. Online. https://www.unisob.na.it/ateneo/annali/2011-2012_5_Ciardiello.pdf. Last accessed 12/01/2018.

Fifteen hours after bidding goodbye to Vesuvius we were in Rome. Our route lay over the beautiful mountains of Switzerland, where we picked dainty flowers under the snow. Lovely Switzerland, home of the grottoes where the tired wayfarer may rest! In Rome I studied the fine old paintings finished by the old masters, many centuries ago. I stood in awe as I saw the cathedral of St. Paul, the Partheon [sic.] and the Vatican. I visited the latter on February 26 and witnessed the celebration of Pope Leo the 13th on the anniversary of his coronation. It was a great sight to see that finely chiselled face as he distributed his blessings to the thousands there. [...] I went to the Coliseum, *where once the uncivilized kings held sway*. [...] Our guide said: 'it was one la grande sight when the victim came forth on the arena'. I felt like yelling 'My kingdom for a gun' but held my peace. Statesmen as well as the elite enjoyed our Wild West during the stay in Rome and *dinners and receptions were given in my honor*. We left Rome March 12, 1890 arriving in Florence after a six hour run. There was a good pigeon club there. Then we hied on to Bologna and Milan but what a difference! There was a beautiful clean city with no beggars and one of the finest shooting grounds in the world dating back to an old stone arena more than 1425 years old! [...] We finished our Italian tour in the old city of Verona, giving our performance in an old stone arena honeycombed with underground passages. [...] And what a reception! I fancy I felt like the gladiators who stood there victorious centuries ago. Old Verona! The home of Juliet, where from her balcony she looked down upon her sweetheart Romeo. But where was the water on which the moonbeams fell for Romeo was thus pictured standing in his purple-cushioned gondola as he sang to his only and the nearest water is some 30 miles away! But fancy sometimes helps us out in this big round world.²²⁹

Oakley's description of Italy is redolent of an uninformed sense of entitlement, perhaps typical of the turn-of-the-twentieth century American middle-class. It is also filled with basic errors, from her belief that she was in Switzerland as the troupe was crossing the Apennines on the route to Rome, to her obliviousness to the river Adige running through the centre of Verona. Another paradox arose when she further commented on the barbarity of ancient Roman culture, for when her turn to tread the ground of a Roman amphitheatre finally came she willingly identified with a winning gladiator. Finally, her overt preference for modern and clean Milan over older and allegedly decadent cities like Naples and Rome suggested a middle-class American desire for modernity and hygiene. Perhaps Oakley's inflated sense of importance within the show—interestingly, there is no record of receptions in her honour—hints at a conflict of personality with Cody, previously documented by scholars of the Wild West shows.²³⁰

Frank Butler, Annie Oakley's husband and manager, also publicly expressed his opinions about Italy. Unlike his wife, who annotated her judgements in a sketchbook and several years later edited them into a memoir, Butler swiftly published them in a popular American magazine, *Shooting and Fishing*, which changed its title to *The American Rifleman*, the National Rifle Association's official publication. In the article, entitled "Three Months with Italian Sportsmen", Butler

²²⁹ Annie Oakley, *The Autobiography of Annie Oakley*, p. 42-43.

²³⁰ See William F. Cody, *The Wild West in England*.

manifested contrasting opinions about Italian cities and peoples, depending on the geographical location he visited, reflecting some of the perceptions his wife also held. Like Oakley, he was unimpressed by Naples and Rome; wealthier northern cities like Florence, and especially Milan, exerted a greater appeal to him—revealing a loathing for the poor and an ill-concealed feeling of anti-meridionalism on his part.

My first impression of Italy was a very favourable one. There was the beautiful bay with Mt. Vesuvius smoking in the background, the sun just climbing over the top made a scene that will remain fresh in my memory. Had I then went away without seeing anymore of Naples, I might have thought it a beautiful place, but after a four weeks' sojourn there I came to the conclusion that it is one of the dirtiest cities in the world, that is if dirty people, dirty houses and dirty streets go to make it such. *While there I was told that nearly all the Italians who go to America go from Naples, and judging from those seen generally in America, I am inclined to believe it, only I think the best go and the worst remain.*[...] I left Naples with little regret, and after a ride of fifteen hours arrived in Rome[...]Although the Romans are a much better class than is generally found in Naples, yet I think if the old games and brutal contests were again revived in the Coliseum, the Romans would flock to witness them.[...] From Rome a ride of six hours and I am in Florence, a very pretty city, containing a great many Americans. There I found the people much better than either Naples or Rome. [...] Leaving Bologna by fast express, a ride of three hours brought me to Milan. How can I describe the city? If I attempted it, should say among other things it is a city of 100,000 people, 20,000 of whom shoot more or less; a city where there is no poor; a city where everyone drinks, but no one gets drunk; a city where everyone from the highest of the nobility to the humblest cab driver is a gentleman. Milan the home of all that is artistic and beautiful and the home of good pigeon shots. [...] Milan! Milan! I leave you with regret. I hope some day to return to that beautiful city, and as the train carried me away I could not help wondering why the King of Italy will live in Rome when he could live in Milan.²³¹

Oakley's and Butler's remarks once again echoed the prejudice and anti-Mediterranean sentiment that popular literature and the press instilled in *fin-de-siècle* Americans. Whatever was modern, clean and affluent was also deemed dynamic, attractive and morally wholesome; and vice versa, wherever poverty and antiquity were spotted, negative judgements arose. The naiveté of these observations and at the same time the reification of the supposed traits they perpetrated are bordering on caricature, so much so that one could almost mistake them for inventions in Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*.

These narratives, therefore, corroborate the Americans visitors' plan to become novel protagonists in the landmarks of ancient civilizations—and perhaps represent an embryonic hint of cultural imperialism.²³² It is, therefore, safe to say that, just as Italians displayed a sketchy knowledge of the American West and Native

²³¹ "Three Months with Italian Sportsmen", *Shooting and Fishing*, clipping, Annie Oakley Scrapbook, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

²³² Giuseppe Sergi, and Cesare Lombroso's studies laid the basis for Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*. The anthropological debate at that time mainly dwelt on conflict between 'Northern supremacists' (Lombroso and, later, Grant, in terms of Anglo-Saxonism and Aryanism) and 'Southern supremacists' (Sergi).

American cultures, several members of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show appear to have had a biased, and, at best, confused understanding of Italy's people and their past and present customs. The testimony of Cody and his cast members was undoubtedly fuelled by the master narratives of cultural supremacy, which the press fostered and which Burke and Salsbury reiterated on and off the stage. This helped Americans to revise the role of Europe as the unique producer of culture and affirm instead the vitality of their own country through the Wild West show, which now, many appear to have believed, stood out for the first time as an international agent of potent Americanism.

Chapter Six: The ‘Wild West’ and Italy in Context (1890-1906): Business Challenges, Domestic Reforms, and International Diplomacy

Chapter 6.1. Buffalo Bill’s involvement in the Ghost dance suppression, the Death of Sitting Bull, and the impact of Wounded Knee Massacre on his business

After the Italian stopovers of the tour, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West’s set out for Germany, and later Britain, where the company achieved further fame and success, but where they also found no shortage of trouble—including more deaths among the Native performers.¹

In mid-November 1890 Cody returned to the United States, not as the hero who won over European crowds with his charm and showmanship, but to defend himself and the reputation of his business from accusations of mistreatment of his Native performers. These charges were brought against him by reformers and government officials who were critical of the employment of Native Americans in travelling shows, in particular Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morgan.² The news of the deaths of five Native performers during the 1889-1890 season had reached a number of American newspapers; when another group of Natives were sent home in poor health and one died in New York, the question further escalated and was used by the assistant superintendent of immigration in New York, James O’Beirne, to publicly criticize Cody’s business for the ill-treatment of its Native performers.³

To counteract this blow, John Burke arranged an interview between a ‘loyal’ Native performer (Chief No-Neck) and a reporter from the *Illustrated News*, but provoking the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) risked being denied recruitment of other Native performers for the next show season. Cody, his associates, and a group of Native performers returning from Europe, were called to testify in Washington in front of BIA officials on working conditions of the Wild West show. The Native performers, among them Chief Rocky Bear, provided officials with sufficiently

¹ On separate tours, see Stetler, *Buffalo Bill in Germany*; Tom F. Cunningham, *Your Fathers the Ghosts: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Black and White, 2007); Allan Gallop *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West* (Celtenham: History Press, 2009).

² From the late 1880s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs attempted to restrict employment of Native Americans, but Cody, Burke and Salsbury recruited performers direct from reservations. See Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, pp. 184-185.

³ The *Washington Post* raised initial complaints in “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Indians”, *Washington Post*, 05/08/1890, p. 6. Other newspapers followed up: “Show Indians Badly Abused”, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10/11/1890, p.1; “Arrival of Buffalo Bill’s Indians”, *Sun*, 14/11/1890. These articles, transcribed and digitized, are at the William F. Cody Online Archive: <http://codyarchive.org>.

convincing proof of fair and equitable treatment in the show, and assurances that this type of employment was not causing them to relapse into savagery—which allowed Cody to carry on hiring Native performers directly from the Dakota reservations in the years to come.⁴ The adroit John Burke, as usual, used this evidence to his advantage to restore the good name of the Wild West show in the press.⁵ A few weeks later, Cody was involved in a military action concerning the arrest of Chief Sitting Bull (with whom he had worked from 1885 to 1889) and the suppression of the Ghost Dance movement.⁶ The reasons for his participation in this mission have been eloquently illustrated in Sam Maddra’s study *Hostiles? The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*. She argues that due to “the bad press his Wild West exhibition had been receiving, Cody may have been understandably anxious to secure some good publicity. What better way to get the American public and even possibly the Bureau of Indian Affairs back on his side, than to capture the old adversary of the U.S. government and help quell the present crisis?”⁷ Along with Joy Kasson, Maddra also puts forth the idea—which remains unclear from the official records—that Cody might have solicited the help of his friend, General Nelson Miles, who feared an imminent Indian uprising, to have this task entrusted to him. Cody had been aware of Sitting Bull since the battle of the Little Big Horn, but he got to know him only when he secured his appearances in the Wild West show’s 1885 season. Since then, Cody was thought to have established a proven and solid relationship with the Lakota chief, which in the eyes of most people, gave him the right credentials for this operation. Thus, after a couple of days of talks, on the 24th of November 1890, Miles gave permission to Cody “to secure the person of Sitting Bull and... deliver him to the nearest com’g officer of U.S. Troops, taking a receipt and reporting your action”, and granted transportation for himself and a “small party” that accompanied him.⁸ The news of Cody’s involvement in this plan reached even

⁴ According to a survey conducted by scholar Jason Heppler in the National Archive and Records in Kansas City, 576 contracts for Native show performers were made by Cody’s companies (records available until 1913). See list at <http://www.codystudies.org/showindians/database/>. Last accessed 15/03/2018.

⁵ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, p. 185.

⁶ The Ghost Dance was a religious movement born out of the teaching of Northern Paiute spiritual leader Wovoka, who preached that the dance practice would bring back spirits of dead ancestors to help the living with their own fighting. His teachings reached many reservations, particularly Pine Ridge among the Oglala-Lakota, but were deemed dangerous by U.S. authorities, leading to the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek, SD, in 1890. See Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, chapter 13.

⁷ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 92.

⁸ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 89. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, p. 182.

an Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, from Milan, which reprinted a dispatch from the *New York Herald* from the 24th of November 1890:⁹

[...]Buffalo Bill had a mission to go settle the troubled Indians. [...] “I will be in Omaha on Monday. Then, I’ll probably go to Rushville, 32 miles from Pine Ridge. Since we are in a season where everything is against starting a revolt, no Indian who still has some common sense will want to wage war, given he has enough to eat for himself and for his horse. As for the Sioux fanatics who dance from dusk to dawn, that is another matter. They believe they are serving the Great Spirit and celebrating the coming of the Messiah. If the dances are not stopped, there will be turmoil. What seems more serious to me is the influence of the Messiah movement, which is expanding. Indians do not telegraph each other or write letters. Yet, all the western tribes from the banks of the Mississippi to British Columbia, to Arizona, now dance the dance of the Spirit and wait for the coming of the ‘Great Chief’”. They will dance until their desire has been raised. Then they’re going to scalp the skull of the defenceless settlers. On the other hand, the intervention of the soldiers can precipitate the war, so that there is trouble on both sides. Of all the Indian rebels Sitting Bull is the worst [...] Sitting Bull will always be with the disturbing elements, and if there are none, he incites them. He is a dangerous Indian, and his current conduct does not bode well”.¹⁰

The words Cody used against Sitting Bull seem particularly harsh, especially considering the fact that the Lakota chief had dutifully worked for him until the previous season of the Wild West show. However, this concerned an official mission, and Cody also had an interest in continuing to support the narrative which had been so deftly engineered in his show: that of the fierceness of this Lakota leader and the threat that he posed as an unrepentant ‘hostile’, so that Cody’s exploit as a mediator would figure as another act of bravery on his part, rather than as mere diplomacy.

As it turned out, Cody had a number of enemies in military and government circles, other than Commissioner Morgan. The agent at the Standing Rock reservation in North and South Dakota, James McLaughlin, had a profound dislike of Cody, who, with his offers of employment in show business, was believed to be

⁹ This article is compelling evidence of the lasting impact of Cody’s show in Italy. News about Native Americans in Italian newspapers prior to Cody’s arrival was negligible; the press would not have carried this story if not for the impression recently left by the Wild West show on the Italian public.

¹⁰ “[...] Un dispaccio da Chicago, 24, all’agenzia Dalziel, reca che Buffalo Bill ha avuto missione di andare a comporre i torbidi indiani. Egli è partito per Omaha. [...] Io sarò a Omaha lunedì. Quindi, probabilmente mi recherò a Rushville, a 32 miglia da Pine Ridge. Siccome siamo in una stagione dove tutto è contrario a fare una rivolta, nessun Indiano che abbia ancora un po’ di buon senso vorrà far la guerra, a meno che abbia da mangiare per se e pel suo cavallo. Quanto ai Sioux fanatici che ballano dal tramonto all’aurora è un altro affare. Essi credono di servire il Grande Spirito e di celebrare la venuta del Messia. Se le danze non sono arrestate, ci sarà del torbido. Quel che mi sembra più serio è l’influenza del movimento pel Messia, che va allargandosi. Gli Indiani non telegrafano, né scrivono lettere. Ma pure tutte le tribù occidentali dalla costa del Mississippi alla Colombia Inglese, all’Arizona, ballano la danza ‘dello Spirito’ e aspettano la venuta del ‘Gran Capo’. Essi balleranno sinché non se ne siano levata la voglia. Quindi andranno a scotennare il cranio dei coloni indifesi. D’altra parte, l’intervento dei soldati può precipitare la guerra, sicché c’è del guaio da ambedue i lati. Di tutti gli Indiani ribelli Sitting Bull è il peggiore [...] Sitting Bull sarà sempre con gli elementi perturbatori, e se non ce ne sono, egli li fomenta. È un Indiano pericoloso, e la sua attuale condotta non lascia presagire nulla di buono [...]”. “Un insurrezione Indiana negli Stati Uniti- Quel che ne pensa Buffalo Bill”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 27/11/1890 p. 2.

working against the BIA's project of assimilation. McLaughlin longstanding resentment, as Joy Kasson explains, dated to when Cody first went to Standing Rock to hire Sitting Bull in 1885.¹¹ McLaughlin did all he could to thwart Cody's mission in 1890, including ordering some of his men to meet Cody on the route and get him exceedingly intoxicated so as to render him incapable of fulfilling his task. However, Cody could handle his drink and, although still inebriated, the next day he was back on the road towards Standing Rock. McLaughlin eventually managed to stop him by getting Morgan to mobilize the secretary of the interior, the secretary of war and even President Harrison, who ultimately countermanded the order of General Miles, instructing Cody not to continue.¹² Rather than have Buffalo Bill interfere in this BIA matter, McLaughlin sent the Indian police to arrest Sitting Bull. McLaughlin continued to see Sitting Bull as a menace, and as Louis Warren explains in his most recent book about the aftermath of the Ghost Dance suppression, *God's Red Son*, "since Sitting Bull had allowed Ghost Dances to take place at his camp, McLaughlin hoped to exploit the tumult to have him removed from the reservation".¹³ On the 15th of December 1890, a delegation of the Indian police arrived at Standing Rock and took Sitting Bull captive. Some members of his band opened fire and the Indian police retaliated by shooting Sitting Bull; in the affray another eight members of Sitting Bull's group and six Indian policemen were killed.¹⁴

The death of Sitting Bull reverberated throughout Europe, where he continued to be seen more as a living dime-novel figure, the antagonist to Buffalo Bill, rather than as the architect of Custer's death, which is how he was considered in America. Italian major newspapers, such as *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, from Turin, spread the momentous news by offering their take on dispatches from American newspapers, which stressed the belligerency of remaining bands of Sioux, and anticipated the involvement of U.S. troops to repress any seditious tendencies. For instance, *La Stampa*, reported word-for-word a typically Anglo-Saxon overstatement about a looming war of annihilation: "It is feared that, in order to avenge their leader, the Sioux will rise up in mass; other tribes of the Red Skins would imitate them and a war of extermination would begin. Four cavalry regiments are currently on their way to the Bad-Lands where the Indians are assembled. They

¹¹ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, p. 181.

¹² Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, pp. 89-93.

¹³ Louis Warren, *God's Red Son*, p. 48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49; Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 93.

maintain their intimidating attitude”.¹⁵ As the historical evidence would reveal, these statements could not be further from the truth.

The assassination of Sitting Bull instilled panic in his remaining followers. Fearing for their lives, they fled from Standing Rock and sought refuge at the Cheyenne River Reservation, with Chief Big Foot’s band (who was also meant to be arrested by U.S. troops). The group of Lakotas tried to reach Chief Red Cloud for protection, but were arrested on the way to Pine Ridge and taken to Wounded Knee Creek.¹⁶ There, on the 29th of December, the U.S. artillery began searching for weapons inside the Sioux lodges. Shots were accidentally set off from a rifle that was being confiscated from a Lakota man and the troops opened fire against the largely unarmed Sioux, including elderly men, women, and children. Some Lakotas tried to defend themselves with a few pistols and whatever weapons they could find, including knives and stones. The army took thirty-eight surviving Sioux men with them, leaving the wounded to die of exposure that night and the corpses to freeze—they were buried by returning U.S. troops only three days later. According to Louis Warren: “The gravediggers lowered the bodies of eighty-four men, forty-four women, and eighteen children into the ground. More had died, but many had been taken by kin or managed to leave the field before dying, perhaps in another camp, or alone on the darkling plain”.¹⁷

The death of Sitting Bull and the Wounded Knee massacre inflicted serious damage on Cody’s business: in a matter of weeks he lost the spearhead of his show as well as several ‘Indian Braves’ who had been long employed with the Wild West’s show. But, as was not uncommon for Cody, he managed to turn a tremendously negative situation to his best advantage. In a moment of increased shortage of Native performers, Cody now faced the arduous problem of continuing to maintain the narrative of the brave and indomitable Indians which was vital for his Wild West show. Given the clamour that the Ghost Dance had stirred across America and the fact that most Native tribes were at that point being subjected to (forcible) assimilation—including boarding school education which sought to wipe out any remnant of tribal culture—the only group of Native Americans who would not

¹⁵ “[...] Si teme che, per vendicare il loro capo, i Sioux si Sollevino in massa; altre tribù delle Pelli Rosse li imiterebbero ed avrebbe principio una guerra di sterminio. Quattro reggimenti di cavalleria sono attualmente in cammino alla volta dell Male-Terre over sono concentrati gli indiani. Questi serbano la loro attitudine minacciosa”. “L’ uccisione del capo dei Sioux, 18/12/1890, p. 1.

¹⁶ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 93.

¹⁷ Louis Warren, *God’s Red Son*, pp. 49-50.

appear completely subdued, and who could still, to a degree, claim the label of ‘indomitable’ were the over twenty Lakota Ghost dancers who had not been involved in the events surrounding Wounded Knee and Sitting Bull’s death, but who, in the aftermath, had been detained at Fort Sheridan. Cody decided to hire precisely them, since, as Maddra argued, they represented “the Hostiles”, and were the ones who could still provide the authenticity that his show badly needed.¹⁸ Despite stubborn governmental reluctance to allow Native Americans to perform in Wild West shows, and the active efforts Commissioner Morgan took to prevent this from happening, Cody eventually succeeded in hiring the Ghost Dance prisoners at Fort Sheridan, and took them across the Atlantic for another successful season touring Central and Northern Europe in 1891-92.¹⁹

Chapter 6.2. “All Roads lead to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”: Cody, the ‘Old World’, and narratives of triumph at the Columbian Exposition

The last leg of the European tour began in Strasbourg on the 19th of April 1891; the company rather rapidly moved on to Belgium and eventually undertook another tour of Britain, with a grand finale in London on the 12th of October 1892. This date was not casually picked, as it fell on the exact day of the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America. This was an event that Cody and his associates had planned for a long time, at least since 1890, for the purpose of boosting the Wild West show’s inherent grand narrative about America’s *traslatio imperii*. The Wild West company knew that playing the Columbus card would dramatically boost the image and the prestige of their show. Indeed, that year and throughout 1893, the name and the deeds of the Genoese voyager reverberated throughout the world thanks to the grandiose hosting of the Chicago World Fair, also known as Chicago’s Columbian Exposition.

As Joy Kasson asserted in her study of Buffalo Bill’s celebrity, both the Columbian Exposition and Cody’s show “shared historical assumptions and show-business ambitions”.²⁰ This intuition was crystal clear in the mind of John Burke, who, in his celebratory account of Cody’s Euro-American success, *Buffalo Bill from*

¹⁸ Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, p. 100.

¹⁹ See Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?*, pp. 100-106. See the works of Tom F. Cunningham, and James Noble, for information on the 1891-92 tour of Britain.

²⁰ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, p. 99.

Prairie to Palace, published in 1893, made the association between Cody, the American West, and the Italian navigator more than obvious, by stating, “As Columbus was the pilot across the seas to discover a new world, such heroes as Boone, Fremont, Crockett, Kit Carson, and last, but by no means least, Cody, were the guides to the New World of the mighty West, and their name will go down in history as ‘Among the few, the immortal names/ That were not born to die’”.²¹ Also, that same year, Cody’s company stressed that connection by designing official correspondence paper which displayed the portraits of both Columbus and Cody along with the captions, “Pilot of the Ocean, 15th Century—the First Pioneer”, and “Guide of the Prairie, 19th Century—the Last Pioneer”.²²

The rhetoric of the new course of westward empire was already widely known to the American press, and frequent comparisons between the Old World’s obsolete empire and America’s modernity featured around the Exposition’s premises as well as in the news about it. For example, the New Orleans *Times Picayune*, reported a speech by Senator John Sherman (R-Ohio) on the arrival of the “three caravels”, a historical re-enactment at the Exposition of Columbus landing on the shores of San Salvador Island.²³ The article, beyond celebrating the glory of the historical event in itself, stressed that,

America is no longer open to European conquest. The people who inhabit each part of America are able to defend themselves against foreign aggressions. Their institutions, freed from feudal law, are founded upon the consent of the governed. [...] Happy in our isolation, content with our free institutions, proud of our growth and rich in the bounties of heaven we wish for all the nations of the world like happiness and prosperity. [...] As Americans and especially as citizens of the United States, we fully comprehend the great advantages of older countries in the higher development of art, science and literature. We claim an inheritance in these as the work of our common ancestors. We wish to gather lessons from the experiences and skill of all nations, and to show by our handiwork in every department of industry that we are trying to keep up with them and possibly to excel them.²⁴

Such reports often included descriptions and accounts of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, situated just outside the legitimate precincts of the Exposition, but considered to all intents and purposes part of it. For instance, in the official guide map to the Fair *The Handbook of the World’s Columbian Exposition*, produced by Rand McNally, the location of Cody’s show was highlighted by a new spin on a trite phrase about

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Sherman was a former Secretary of the Treasury and later Secretary of State. He was the younger brother of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman.

²⁴ “The Three Caravels Arrive at Chicago”, *Times Picayune*, New Orleans, 03/07 or 08/07/1893, Clipping, Nate Salsbury’s Papers, Western Heritage Center, Denver Public Library.

ancient Rome, “All Roads lead to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”.²⁵ In press accounts, the illustrious episodes of the show’s European seasons were a yardstick for both the show’s and Cody’s personal status, such as in the article in July 1893 in the *People’s Press* (a Populist newspaper from North Carolina), wherein Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was defined as the “Biggest on Earth”: “The Wild West show is a greater attraction than a Spanish bull fight, or even an American prize fight [...]. It interests the scientists, the lovers of the horse-flesh and the masses of the people equally. It is the only real show of the kind that ever existed or will ever exist”.²⁶ The article carried a laudatory sermon on Buffalo Bill and his European achievements, which bordered on parody:

Buffalo Bill himself, now the most celebrated figure before the public on either side of the water [...] Buffalo Bill on the stage became immediately master of his part, demonstrating his astonishing versatility in accomplishing whatever he undertakes.[...] Nothing smaller than a World Fair, it seemed, was sufficient to recall our hero, Buffalo Bill, from the Old World, where he has been lionized as no other mortal man ever was lionized. Frederick was honoured by Germany, Napoleon by France, Buffalo Bill by the whole world.²⁷

Behind this kind of report, it is not difficult to imagine the masterminds of press agent John Burke and manager Nate Salsbury, who, at the time were testing new forms of publicity—in order to keep alive interest in the show, which was beginning to lose its novelty. They consolidated a sensationalistic narration about Buffalo Bill with photographs and illustrations drawn from episodes of his personal life and his career as a showman. In this way, fact and fiction merged indissolubly in a new hybrid form which hinted, simultaneously, at the dime novel tradition and at the widespread late-19th century passion for photography and memorialization.²⁸ An example of this is the booklet, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West—Historical Scenes*, an illustrated guide to the show, first printed in Britain in 1892, which during the 1893 Columbian Exposition appeared in an improved version entitled *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Congress of Riders of the World*. In these brochures, pictures and references to Italy abounded, extending over three pages. The language used in the description of locations such as Rome, Florence and Verona, was imbued with a familiar rhetoric which combined double-edged observations of awe and reverence for Old World’s culture, with remarks on the superiority of the Wild West show and

²⁵ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, p. 99.

²⁶ *People’s Press*, “Biggest on Earth”, 14/01/93, n.p., Nate Salsbury’s papers, Denver Public Library, Western Heritage Center.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, p. 110.

the values and culture it represented:

Then the “famed of the famous cities” of the world, Rome, was next visited, to be conquered through the gentle power of intellectual interest in, and the reciprocal pleasure exchanged by, its unusual visitors[...]*The Company were photographed in the Colosseum, which stately ruin seemed to silently and solemnly regret that its famed ancient arena was too small for this modern exhibition of the mimic struggle between that civilisation (born and emanating from ‘neath its very walls) and a primitive people who were ne’er dreamed of in a Rome’s world-conquering creators’ wildest flights of vivid imaginings. Strolling through its arena, gazing at its lions’ dens, or lolling lazily on its convenient ruins, hearing its interpreted history—of Romulus, of Cæsar, of Nero—roamed this band of Wild West Sioux (a people whose history in barbaric deeds equals, if not excels, the ancient Romans), now hand in hand in peace and firmly cemented friendship with the American frontiersmen—once gladiatorial antagonists on the Western Plains. They, listening to the tale on the spot, of those whose, “Morituri te Salutant” was the short prelude to a savage death, formed a novel picture in a historic frame! The Wild West in the Colosseum!!! Artistic Florence, practical Bologna, grand and stately Milan, and unique Verona were next added to the list. Verona’s superb and well preserved “Aréna,” excelling in superficial area the Colosseum and holding 45,000 people, was specially granted for the Wild West’s use; and the home of Shakespeare’s love-lorn heroine placed another picture in the Red man’s tour of the native land of his discoverer.*²⁹

The cunning talent of Cody’s publicists, not only yielded provocative statements which fed the narrative of Italy’s waning civilization in opposition to America’s waxing one—such as the one about the Colosseum’s ruins being unable to contain the Wild West show, or that the Sioux were even more barbaric than the Ancient Romans—but also twisted established facts, such as those about the size of Verona’s Arena (in reality significantly smaller than the Colosseum), in order to unashamedly aggrandize their show. Their philosophy was clear: no matter what the actual truth was, the Wild West, in its self-invested function of America’s cultural emblem, had to appear greater than the greatest relic of the Old World’s bygone empire.

Indeed, the Old World’s diminished prestige became a trope in several publications that the show company released in the following years.

²⁹ Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, Col. W. F. Cody, Historical Scenes, Stafford, 1892, pp. 59-60. Available at: <http://codyarchive.org/memorabilia/wfc.mem00279.html>. Emphasis mine.

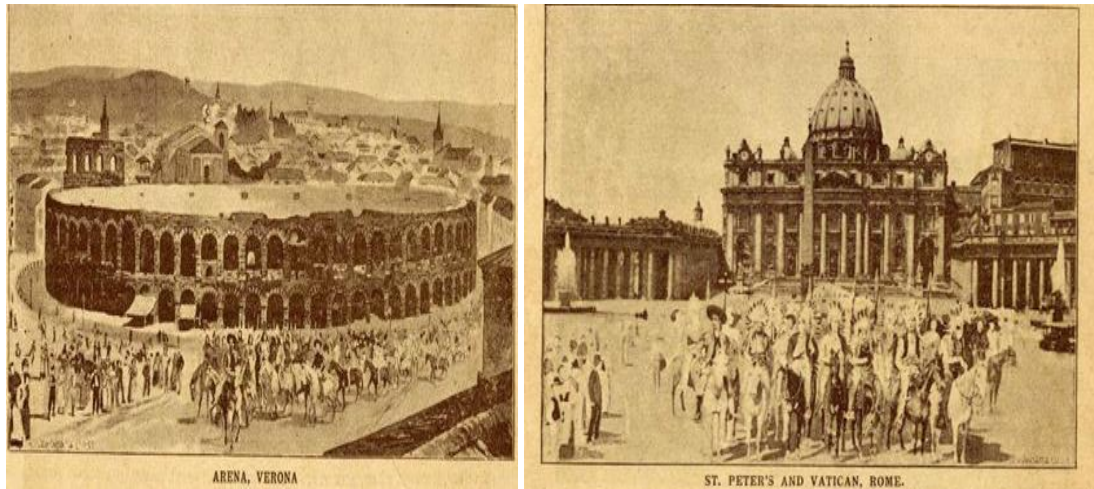


Figure 32: Examples of the illustrations found in the 1892 *Wild West* show brochure, pp. 59 and 61. The original photographic background was enhanced with drawings of Buffalo Bill, Native performers and other members of the show. Original held in the McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

In particular, the periodical, *The Rough Rider*, issued in 1899—echoed by the homonymous book by Theodore Roosevelt, also published in the same year—presented an illustrated poem by William Lightfoot-Visscher, entitled “Buffalo Bill, a Knight of the West”, whose stanzas selected episodes from Europe’s historic, and even pre-historic eras, to contrast them strikingly with the vitality of Cody’s American deeds. This chasm is particularly straightforward in the verses about Britain, in which the obscure poet dwelt on its long-gone Druidic past: “Where the altars of the Druids and ancient abbeys lie/Neath forest-covered ruins, marking centuries gone by/And in places that are cobwebbed with history as old/As Britain’s first traditions, lying deep in must and mold/There the chieftain and his riders went, and held their hardy games/To plaudits of the multitudes, lords, kings, and royal dames. [...]”.³⁰ Expressions such as “cobwebbed with history” and “lying deep in must and mold” truly convey the idea that Cody and his show associates unashamedly advocated, that anything belonging to a bygone era was also intrinsically obsolescent and decaying, and was now superseded by “This knightly man [who] led dauntless men and empire to the West”.³¹

³⁰ “A Knight of the West” by William Lightfoot Visscher, in *The Rough Rider*, 1899, p. 15. Available online at: <http://codyarchive.org/memorabilia/wfc.eph00007.html>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

BUFFALO BILL

A KNIGHT OF THE WEST
TO COMPOSE BY
WILLIAM LIGHTFOOT VISSCHER

From the canyons of the mountains to the canyons of the deep,
And to where the Eastern nations close guard, and jealous keep,
The monuments and tokens of their ancient rule state,
There the gallant Western chieftain rode among the titled great,
A fellow-prince among the kings, a sovereign by the right
Of honest manhood, bred beneath high Liberty's clear light.

Who is this gallant cavalier that rides in from the West?
His horse, and gun, and trappings are the truest and the best:
He strides his noble thoroughbred with manly, easy grace,
And sits the saddle like a sheik, and rides a rattling pace.
His hair falls white and long down his shoulders strong and wide,
And all his bearing has the poise of manliness and pride.

Where the altars of the Druids and ancient abbeys lie,
'Neath forest-covered ruins, marking centuries gone by,
And in places that are cobwebbed with history as old
As Britain's first traditions, lying deep in rust and mold,
There the chieftain and his riders went, and held their hardy games
To plaudits of the multitudes, lords, kings, and royal dames.

A sovereign born and citizen of this fair Western land,
He rose among his fellows in the custom of command;
His boyhood heard the wailing that was echo of the yell
When the savage made the border seem the environs of hell;
With his dying father's spirit, his hunting-knife and gun,
He drove the bronze barbarians into the setting sun.

By the Tiber, 'neath the shadow of St. Peter's lofty dome,
The mighty pile that canopies the hierarchy of Rome;
'Mid monuments and masonry, that, crumbling in decay,
Teach the vanity of empire, how weak and fleet its sway,
Here rode the knightly platoon, and his cavaleros sang
Where oft, in centuries ago, acclaim to Caesar rang.

'Mong the willows by the river, on mesa, hill, and plain,
They fell beneath his horses' hoofs, and 'fore his leaden rain,
Full well he wreaked his vengeance, and he blazed a Western path
With the weapons of his prowess and the scolding of his wrath,
From Missouri's murky waters to the white Sierra's crest
This knightly man led dauntless men and empires to the West.

'Mong potentates and powers, in the cities of the kings,
From where Mahomet's crescent across the Orient swings
To where the North sea booms against old Denmark's rugged shores,
And back to where dear home-land opened wide to him her doors,
Went and came the dashing horseman, and he bore the banner high
That Freedom's heroes, for its weal, will dare, and do, and die.

To save the name, and legends, and traditions of that land—
The wilderness that blossomed—and its story, strange and grand,
To the wondering sight of millions, and to sing its passing song,
He led toward the Orient his motley, nomad throng,
With their singing, and their dancing, their weapons and their ways,
Their riding and their fighting in their tribe to tribe's affrays.

When by this mighty, inland sea, the great White City gleamed
As radiant as mountain snows, the chieftain's banners streamed
Above his wide encampment, and from every clime and land
Came men to do him honor, and to grasp his manly hand,
Even yet he leads his riders, and his season's high and strong,
And so, saluting him, I sing this hearty, homely song.

Figure 33: "A Knight of the West" by William Lightfoot Visscher, in *The Rough Rider*, 1899, p. 15.

Original held at the McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Centre of the West. Available online at: <http://codyarchive.org/memorabilia/wfc.eph00007.html>.

The poem's stanza and vignette about Rome are also highly significant, as they further some of the assumptions outlined earlier. In the lines, "Mid monuments and masonry, that, crumbling in decay/Teach the vanity of empire, how weak and fleet its sway", lies the core of the Wild West's meta-narrative: that traditional empires provide an outdated model for modern times, which is instead to be sought in the unbound vision of Americanism.³² The illustration epitomizes this concept by showing Cody entering Vatican City on horse with a group of Lakota warriors by his side, in a renewed, metaphorical, Capture of Rome. The vainglorious message inherent in this image is as manifest as the destiny America had advocated for itself: Cody was letting himself be compared to Popes, kings and emperors who, throughout the centuries, had conquered the city of Rome to show their cultural supremacy. Thus, when it came to the Wild West show, Rome and its landmarks—namely the Vatican and the Coliseum—amounted to trophies to be attained, in the quest to gratify America's self-image, along with Cody's own.

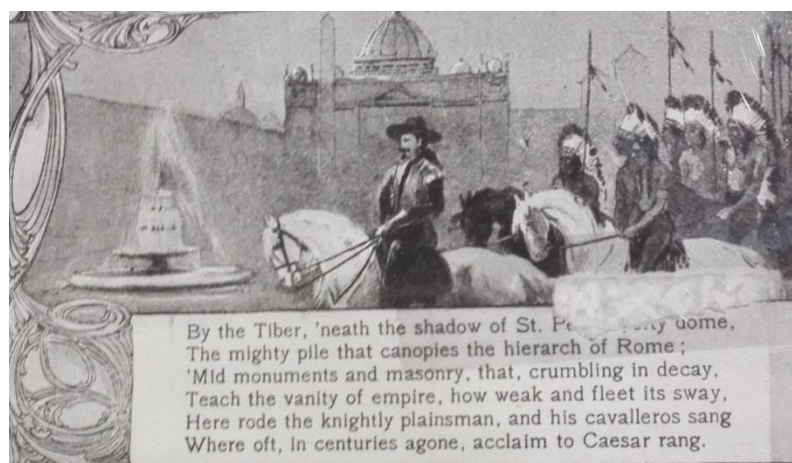


Figure 34: *The detail is from a different copy of The Rough Rider. Denver Public Library, Western Heritage Center.*

This type of narrative employed by the Wild West show in relation to the Old World and specific European countries (among which Italy was a central target) does not differ much from certain ideas that American historian Frederick Jackson Turner had presented at the Columbian Exposition. As Richard White has noted, Turner's lecture "conceptualized what was already conventional".³³ The aforementioned examples offer further evidence that Cody and his entourage had already mastered themes such as American cultural ascendancy, Europe's desuetude, Indian ferocity, and white victimisation, years before Turner publicly exposed them in Chicago. By 1893 those

³² "A Knight of the West" by William Lightfoot Visscher, in *The Rough Rider*, 1899, p. 15.

³³ Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill", p. 26.

ideas had become somewhat commonplace in America. Turner's speech and Cody's show, in such a feted location as the Columbian Exposition, respectively gave voice and a stage to the anxieties of Gilded Age Americans, confronted with the gradual disappearance of the American West, and with the inherent idea of 'progress' associated with it. Cody had sensed the coming of this epochal change and, beginning in 1892-93 and for several future seasons, decided to play down the nostalgic revival of old Western battles and his self-celebratory narrative as the 'last real cowboy'. He accomplished this by shifting the focus of his show into a new format which privileged international militarism: "The Congress of the Rough Riders of the World". Here was a transnational gathering of armies and special corps, all under the authority of Cody and subjected to American supremacy and order.

Chapter 6.3. Buffalo Bill's emulators and imposters in Italy: S. F. Cody and bogus sideshows.

The fame of Buffalo Bill continued to live on in Italy after the Wild West show departed in 1890, in a way that it almost took a life of its own.³⁴ Since its early days touring America, Cody's Wild West opened up a niche in international show business and many imitators, some from Italy and other parts of Europe (but many more from America), seized the opportunity to make a living out of the Wild West fad that was sweeping across the peninsula.³⁵

Perhaps the most successful of this crowd, both in passing as the real Buffalo Bill and in earning substantial profits through his performances, was S. F. Cody, who shared a number of biographical details with William F. Cody. Born Samuel Franklin Cowdery—in Iowa, just like the real Buffalo Bill—he changed his surname to Cody once he began his showbiz career with Adam Forepaugh's circus in 1888. In Forepaugh's Wild West show he became known as 'Buffalo Bill junior' and often claimed to be Buffalo Bill's younger brother or a blood relative of his, sometimes

³⁴ In the USA, Cody developed new ventures after the Columbian Exposition. On the patronage of Viola Katherine Clemmons, see Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, p. 433.

³⁵ See, for instance, the most famous competitors: the Doc Carver show, Captain Bogardus show, Mexican Joe's, and Pawnee Bill's. Cody's imitators were innumerable; Broncho John's Wild West appeared in Austin, TX, as late as 1906 (*Boston Sunday Post*, 02/04/1906), and during the same year an obscure Buckskin Bill performing across France. See folder 4, box 1, Buffalo Bill Collection, Accession Number 264, av American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, available at <http://digitalcollections.uwyo.edu/luna/servlet/detail/uwydbuw~60~60~1398347~231460:Legal-And-Financial-Records--Barnum>. Last accessed: 19/07/2018.

even boasting to be his son—allegations which appeared quite believable given the startlingly physical resemblance between the two men.³⁶

After touring the USA with Forepaugh's, S. F. Cody made the transatlantic move and arrived in London in late 1890 to work for a 'Wild West' burlesque act at the Olympia music hall. In 1891, he took part in an outdoor pantomime called *The Wild West*, in Putney, and became embroiled in a legal battle with the representatives of the real Bill Cody, for the misuse of the name 'Wild West' and for claiming to be Buffalo Bill's son. To avoid his judicial obligations, he sailed for France, where he performed at the Casino de Paris and at different *Belle-époque* venues across the country.³⁷ It was there that S. F. Cody came up with the idea of putting together a show which combined horse riding and bicycle races, taking advantage of the craze for cycling which had infected Europe in the mid-1890s. Rather than an actual show, this was a performance designed to be a real bait and switch for gamblers, upon whom S. F. Cody—a keen gamester himself—capitalized. Beginning in 1893 he toured major cities in France, Germany, and Switzerland, challenging local cycling champions to compete against him in endurance contests at the racetrack: S. F. Cody would be allowed to change his horses a given number of times during the contest, while the cyclists could rely solely on their own stamina. This virtually guaranteed S. F. Cody victory: he would never have to pay up the high stakes agreed before the match, which attracted public and prospective contestants in droves, and he would make his profit through the sales of the show tickets, as well as the bets placed by members of the audience. He arrived in Italy in 1894 and toured the country extensively until 1896—going to perform in places where Bill Cody had never even been, like Sicily.³⁸

Unlike the real Buffalo Bill, S. F. Cody's arrival was not greeted with enthusiasm. Instead, growing scepticism, swindling rumours, and allegations of animal cruelty marred his Italian visit. *L'Indipendente*, a newspaper from the north-eastern city of Trieste, defined S. F. Cody's show as "a mystification" while *Il Corriere della Sera*, from Milan, labelled it "a sad and disgusting spectacle", adding:

The match in question is nothing more than the repetition of what took place recently in Paris, between Cody and (the cyclist) Meyer. [...] Of the eleven horses that formed the crew of Cody [...] one died on the spot, three of them had to be put down shortly afterwards, six were *claqués*, and only one resisted the terrible

³⁶ Jerry Kuntz, *A Pair of Shootists: The Wild West Story of S. F. Cody and Maud Lee* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), pp. 30, 64.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

torment[...]. The impression produced in Milan by this match was very unfavourable, not only to the layman, who might well harbour overwhelming pity towards the animals, but to the very experts and breeders of horses. [...] It is therefore a show which reeks of much brutality[...].³⁹

Despite the protestations of the Lombard Society for Animal Protection, which tried to get local authorities to ban the show, S. F. Cody's performance took place without interruption in the Trotter racecourse of Milan, where the Central Station currently stands. For the occasion, the local champion, Milanese cyclist Romolo Buni, came forward publicly accepting the challenge launched by S. F. Cody in the *Corriere della Sera*. It was agreed that the challenge would take place for 3 days in a row, on the 9th, 10th and 11th of March, 1894, and each day the competitors would run for three hours in a row, the one who covered the most overall kilometres would win; the stake was set at 8,000 liras, and it was decided that S. F. Cody could change up to ten different horses.⁴⁰ The challenge also contemplated a return match when two cyclists would compete against the American jockey on a *tandem* bicycle.⁴¹ As was easy to imagine, S.F. Cody was constantly ahead; at the end of the first day he rode for 104 km while Buni managed 99, and for each day of challenge he earned over 4000 liras in ticket revenue alone. Despite the commercial success, local newspapers were critical, with one commenting, "the monotony of the spectacle greatly bored the audience also yesterday, many of whom did not have the patience to wait for the end".⁴²

On the last day of the challenge, an accident unsettled the public: one of the horses that S.F. Cody was riding became frisky and started to gallop into the crowd that stood cramped in front of the entrance of the Trotter. The audience began to flee in a human stampede, while the horse, despite the numerous lashes inflicted by S. F. Cody, careered dangerously into the masses, who screamed and loudly protested against the recklessness of the American jockey. Eventually he managed to bring the horse back onto the track and avoid any casualties, but in a burst of audacity he

³⁹ "Il match Cody-Jörns", *L'Indipendente*, Trieste, 18/9/1894, p. 1.

"Il *match* in discorso non è altro che la ripetizione di quello che ebbe luogo recentemente a Parigi, fra Cody e (il ciclista) Meyer. [...] Degli undici cavalli che formarono l'equipaggio di Cody [...] uno morì sul colpo, tre dovettero essere poi abbattuti, sei furono *claqués*, ed uno solo resistette al terribile supplizio [...]. L'impressione prodotta a Milano da questo *match* è stata sfavorevolissima, non soltanto ai profani, che potrebbero essere sospetti di soverchia pietà verso le bestie, ma agli stessi conoscitori ed allevatori di cavalli. [...] Si tratta dunque di uno spettacolo che sa di brutale assai. [...]". "Il match Cody-Buni", *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 08/03/1894, p. 3.

⁴⁰ "Il Match Cody-Buni-Cantù", *Il Corriere della sera*, Milan, 1-2/03/1890, p. 3.

⁴¹ Romolo Buni and another Milanese cyclist, Luigi Cantù, in the tandem challenge but were replaced by cyclists Ferrario and Camminada. See *Il Corriere della sera*, Milan, 1-2/03/1890.

⁴² "la monotonia dello spettacolo tediò non poco anche ieri gli spettatori, molti dei quali non ebbero la pazienza di attendere la fine". "Il match Cody-Buni", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 11/03/1894, p. 3.

gestured mockingly towards the same audience that he himself had just endangered.⁴³ This certainly did not help S. F. Cody to be seen in a positive light by the Milanese public, which had disliked him since his arrival. At the end of the day, S. F. Cody predictably won, riding for a total of 132 km, beating the 124.50 km cycled by Buni. However, it was the Milanese cyclist who was “exposed to a long and protracted demonstration of affection” and celebrated as the real winner by the public.⁴⁴ In order to keep up with the pace of S. F. Cody’s horses, Buni had gone beyond his limits, so much so that the audience became concerned for his safety, and began shouting “molla Buni!”, “give up Buni!” (i.e., for your own sake), during the match.⁴⁵ This eventually became a catchphrase around Milan and was used to yell out at someone who was being overwhelmed by hard work and fatigue. Though people rapidly forgot about its original context, it remained in use for several decades in the local jargon.⁴⁶

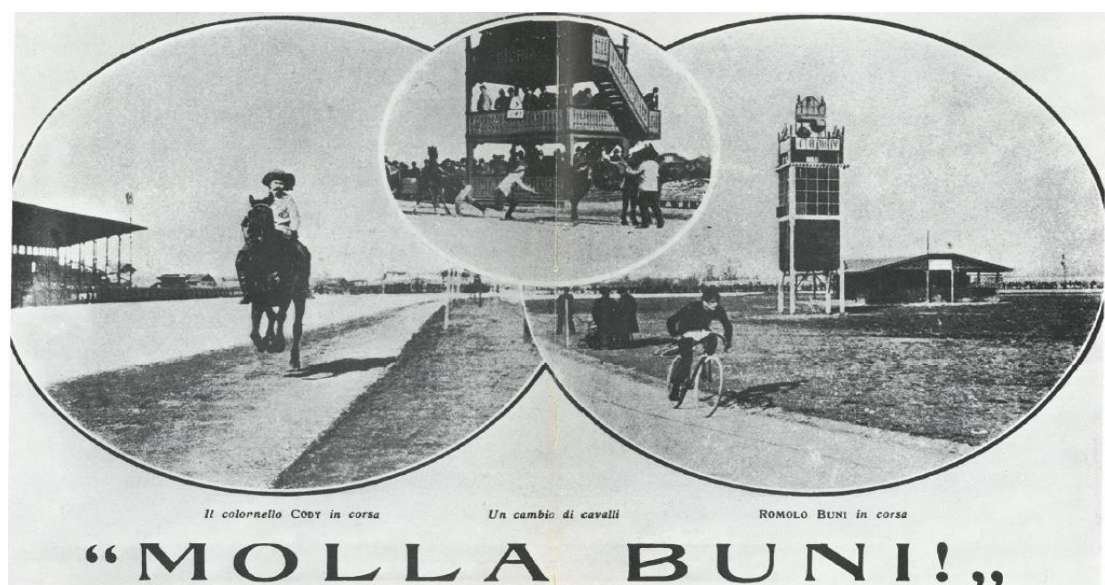


Figure 35: Poster documenting the challenge between S. F. Cody and Romolo Buni, in Alberto Lorenzi, Milano in Carrozza (Bestetti, Milano), 1973, p. 36-37. Original source of the poster not locate. Pictures by the local photographer Carlo Crivelli. See article in Corriere della Sera, 11/04/1894 p. 3.

After Milan, S. F. Cody repeated his challenges in Bergamo, Turin and Genoa—where he competed against cyclist Arturo Nuvolari, the father of the legendary

⁴³ “L’instancabile ciclista, fatto segno ad una dimostrazione commovente e prolungata, venne portato in trionfo dal pubblico”. “Il match Cody-Buni”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 12/03/1894 pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴ “Il match Cody-Buni”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 12/03/1894 pp. 2-3.

⁴⁵ Alberto Lorenzi, *Milano in Carrozza*, (Milano: Bestetti Editore, 1973), p. 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Italian racing driver, Tazio Nuvolari.⁴⁷ He toured other towns in central and southern Italy and then returned at the Trotter racecourse in Milan in November 1895, with an elaborate new show which included the riding of two horses at one time, Roman chariot races, and a challenge against a marathoner—probably Carlo Airoidi, a professional runner from a town close to the Swiss border, who had risen to popularity by running from Milan to Athens.⁴⁸

The problem with S. F. Cody's performances in Italy is that, although some newspapers of the time simply addressed him as Cody—perhaps aware of his legal troubles in the UK—other sources give evidence that the American performer was informally advertising himself as the other, more famous, Cody, the real Buffalo Bill.⁴⁹ This strategy was clearly designed to sell as many tickets to his show as possible. Italians, who had seen a still relatively young and vigorous Buffalo Bill a few years earlier, were easily tricked into believing it was the same person. For a relatively unlearned public, with a vague and fanciful knowledge of the American West, the illusion was easily created; after all, S. F. Cody emulated Buffalo Bill in the smallest details: from the style of clothing and accessories, to the haircut and goatee. In this way, the negative reputation that S. F. Cody created with his bogus riding challenges and his insolent behaviour towards the paying audience, actually stuck to the name of Buffalo Bill, with problematic further implications for the latter.

⁴⁷ “Il match ippo-ciclistico di Genova”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 06/05/1894, p. 3. Many Italian newspapers would only realise in 1906, when their editors spoke to Burke, that the true Buffalo Bill had never challenged the cyclist Nuvolari. See chapter 7.2. of this thesis.

⁴⁸ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 07/11/1895 p. 3; Manuel Sgarella, *La Leggenda del Maratoneta: A piedi da Milano ad Atene per vincere l'Olimpiade* (Varese: Macchione Editore, 2005), p. 131.

⁴⁹ Alberto Lorenzi, *Milano in Carrozza*, pp. 34-36; Manuel Sgarella, *La Leggenda del Maratoneta*, p. 130.

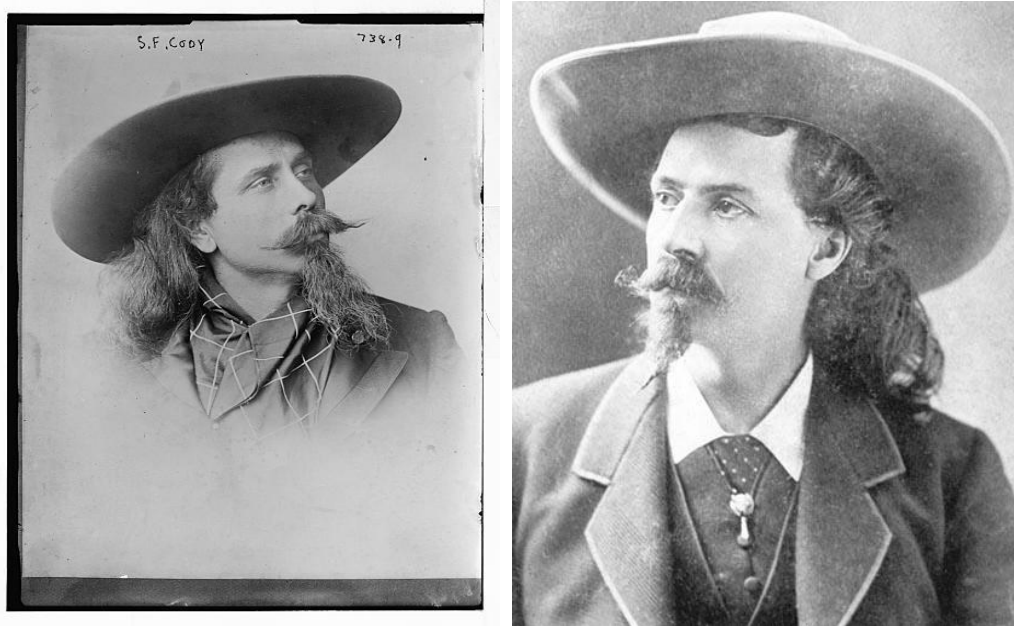


Figure 36: S. F. Cody and W. F. Cody in comparison.
 Courtesy of Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection, and Buffalo Bill Center of the West, McCracken Research Library.

To make matters worse for the real Buffalo Bill, S. F. Cody was not the only imitator who came to Italy during the 1890s and 1910s. By 1900, ‘Wild West’ shows had become a lucrative business and people in small provincial towns, which had been omitted by the original Buffalo Bill’s Wild West tour, also wanted to experience this fad. Therefore, several companies and showmen travelled Europe extensively to meet this demand. Being at the periphery of Europe, and not boasting the most efficient infrastructure, Italy was not touched by this type of business as much as countries like France, Belgium, or Germany.⁵⁰ However, a number of dubious characters still ventured in the *Bel Paese*, eager to exploit an unsaturated market for profits and united by a common goal: capitalizing on the name of Buffalo Bill. Newspapers from Milan reported that a showman who called himself Texas Jack, just like Buffalo Bill’s old partner in frontier melodrama, was offering a horse versus bicycle challenge like S.F. Cody’s, in July 1895.⁵¹ In 1897, in a small town south of Turin, the presence of a self-declared daughter of Buffalo Bill was reported at a local fair. She was advertised as “an Indian of North America, remarkable for the tattoos on her body. Word has it that she is also a good shooter and horse rider[...]”.⁵² A few years later, another bogus Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show appeared in the village of

⁵⁰ Tom Cunningham has shown that Mexican Joe was never in Italy. See Cunningham, *Black Elk, Mexican Joe & Buffalo Bill - The Real Story*.

⁵¹ *Il Corriere della Sera*, 14/07/1895, p. 3.

⁵² “Indiana dell’America del nord, notevole per le tatuazioni del suo corpo. Dicesi che sia anche una brava tiratrice e cavallerizza. [...]”. *La Lanterna Pinerolese*, 23/04/1898, p. 2.

Omegna, eastern Piedmont, billed as, “Buffalo Bill: great acrobatic, mime and dance circus”. The invitation ticket, now held by the philatelic society of Omegna, informed the public that it was an indoor show, which took place in the community theatre (built in 1902), on the 20th of February. The ticket also says that it was meant to take place on Shrove Saturday, and a look at the calendar reveals that the only possible date would have been 1904.⁵³ The ticket displayed a completely different iconography to the one used by Bill Cody’s promotion, yet it is signed by “the owner: Buffalo Bill”. Rather obviously, it was a pretty coarse sham since W. F. Cody did not return to Italy until 1906. The local newspaper, *La Vedetta*, also reported that in 1908 the “company Buffalo Bill” appeared in Intra, a town a few miles away from Omegna, and that it was composed of the “strong acrobats ‘Les Siegfrieds’ from the ‘Moulin Rouge’ in Paris”.⁵⁴



Figure 37: Invitation to the “Buffalo Bill Circus” in Omegna.
Courtesy of the Società Filatelica Omegnese.

This evidence reveals that, even in a relatively peripheral country like Italy, an active microcosm of emulators and imposters blossomed right after William F. Cody’s first tour of Italy and that it endured—though in smaller contexts and provincial venues—well beyond his last visit to the country in 1906. The fact that these questionable shows, and the pretenders who led them, cashed in on the name of Buffalo Bill

⁵³ Shrove Saturday is the traditional day of Carnival celebration in areas of Lombardy and the Piedmont which fall under a particular rite, called ‘Ambrosian’ (from Saint Ambrose). It differs from the canonical Roman rite celebrated elsewhere in Italy, which marks Carnival on Shrove Tuesday.

⁵⁴ “Formano parte della compagnia gli acrobati di forza ‘Les Siegfrieds’ che provengono dal ‘Moulin Rouge’ di Parigi”. “Teatro sociale”, *La Vedetta*, Intra, 29/08/1908, p.1.

supports the conclusion that such sideshows definitely played a part in tarnishing the reputation of the real Wild West show and the Buffalo Bill brand, which W. F. Cody and his promoters had so successfully constructed during the 1890 tour. Italian audiences were eventually led to consider the Wild West more as a circus show rather than as a historical re-enactment, as Cody wished, and to regard the real Buffalo Bill as a cunning character who made cowboy promises, rather than one of nature's noblemen.⁵⁵ A clear indication of the damage these shows caused to the status of W. F. Cody's Wild West is given by the reception given the 1906 tour, which appears sometimes less enthusiastic than during the previous visit, and which will be examined in later chapters of this work.

Chapter 6.4. Italian society between the two Wild West shows (1890-1906): progressive reforms in the early 'Giolittian era' and fluctuating international relations with the USA

In the sixteen years that elapsed between the first and the second tour of Cody's Wild West show, the social situation in Italy gradually shifted from the stagnating atmosphere of Francesco Crispi's parliamentary regime into an age of progressive reforms and measures of pragmatic nation-building. Corruption and scandals, however, dogged the Italian political scene at that time, beginning with the Bank of Rome scandal—which came to light between 1889 and the early months of 1890 (when Cody was touring central Italy) and then fully broke out between 1892 and 1893, leading to the fall of the first government led by Giovanni Giolitti. He had succeeded the conservative premiers Crispi and Di Rudiní, after their respective governments also fell in 1891 and 1892.

Aware of the 'avalanche effect' that the banking scandal could potentially cause in Italian politics, and conscious that he, himself, had taken a loan from one of the banks implicated in the scandal, Giolitti tried his best not to launch a parliamentary inquiry. Former premier Francesco Crispi, who was also heavily involved with the fraudulent banks (through personal loans taken out by him and his wife, Lina), backed Giolitti's attempts to put off investigations, but an inquiry went

⁵⁵ For instance, mentioning some unfulfilled promises made by a local politician the newspaper *L'Azione Novarese* addressed it as "Buffalo Bill promises". *L'Azione Novarese*, Novara, 05/03/1909, p. 3.

on, bringing to light that the six Italian banks which had the right to issue money had done so by exceeding the legal limit by several millions of lire. In particular, the Bank of Rome had wildly overindulged, with its director, a sinister character called Bernardo Tanlongo, going all the way to Britain to get the extra notes printed, in any quantity desired. Tanlongo's bank was discovered to have circulated 60 million lire in excess the legal limit, with over 40 million in false duplicate notes.⁵⁶ Some of the money lent by the fraudulent banks had been used in public works to improve the living conditions of overcrowded and insalubrious neighbourhoods in Rome and Naples.⁵⁷

After years of reckless expenditure in foreign politics, pursuing elusive glories in colonial ventures, Giolitti's government(s), started to implement a policy of internal reforms. Colonialism was never really abandoned, but it took a secondary place in Italian politics, compared to the one it enjoyed during Crispi's governments. After the banking scandal, reforms to reduce the number of issuing banks and regulate note circulation were introduced. Among the progressive reforms Giolitti implemented were regulations concerning workers' rights during his second and third governments. In particular, the working hours of children and female labourers were significantly reduced, and precise rules for the compensation of elderly and disabled citizens were established. Giolitti also worked to improve state finances. One of the reforms implemented a few months after his tenure was a revaluation of the rates of government bonds, which involved a significant increase in assets in the state funds. This new system began to produce wealth for the state and the new revenues were used in part to strengthen the railway lines, which would finally be nationalized, beginning in 1905. Also, new revenues were coming from industrial growth, which came close to 7% annually during the first half of the 'Giolittian era'; the leading contributors were the chemical, metallurgical, mechanical, and textile sectors, especially in the north of Italy. Special laws to encourage the growth of the south of Italy were also launched in those years. In particular, measures to encourage the modernization of agriculture in Basilicata and to help Naples begin industrialization were taken, by means of state funding and financial and fiscal concession. These laws were a partial help to the problems of the mezzogiorno, but came nowhere close to healing the never-ending 'southern question'.⁵⁸ Giolitti also

⁵⁶ Denis Mack Smith's, *Modern Italy*, p. 148.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵⁸ Alexander De Grand, *The Hunchback's Tailor*, pp. 85-141.

raised the minimum leaving age of compulsory education for children, from nine to twelve years of age, and, under pressure from ministers close to Freemasonry, he established that education in state schools would have to be secular. In addition, almost universal suffrage for men (Giolitti was rather contrary to women's suffrage) did not occur until 1912.⁵⁹

Despite the gradual introduction of progressive reforms, social unrest was growing in *fin de siècle* Italy. Peasant revolts plagued the agricultural south, especially Sicily, and a new socio-political force was on the rise, the Socialist party, which was founded in 1892. Though initially an expression of a group of left-wing elites, the intellectuals Filippo Turati, Andrea Costa, Leonida Bissolati and proto feminist thinker Anna Kuliscioff, the movement rapidly involved growing masses of urban industrial workers and also reached out, though to a lesser extent, to agricultural labourers, especially by means of workers' unionization. During the late 1890s, socialism made a clear-cut breach from the anarchist movement, which had intensified its activities around the turn of the 20th century and was becoming demonized worldwide. This separation helped Italian socialism to gain further traction among the working classes. Before the reduction of taxation on basic food products, such as the grist tax on flour and the tax on sea salt—which Giolitti eventually abolished—the economic crisis of the late nineteenth century had seriously tested the Italian social fabric. The years between 1898 and 1902 were particularly tumultuous in terms of social unrest. The situation worsened significantly in 1898, during the Spanish-American war, when the cost of bread rose drastically, causing riots in Milan. Two policemen were killed in the agitations, which were eventually repressed in bloody manner by General Bava-Beccaris who, under orders from the Italian monarch (Humbert I), fired rifles and cannons at the unarmed mass of protesters, killing 80 people. The belief that the Milan riots had been fomented by socialists led to the arrest of party leaders Bissolati, Costa, and Kuliscioff. A few years after the incident, in 1901, Italian anarchist Gaetano Bresci (radicalised in Paterson, New Jersey), avenged the innocent victims by murdering King Humbert I—who, meanwhile, had conferred on Bava-Beccaris a medal of honour. A series of strikes also shook the country in the early 1900s, with 629 recorded strikes taking place in agriculture and 1,042 in the industrial sector, after which Giolitti launched his labour reforms and expanded the access of socialist

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-159.

cooperatives to public works contracts. Giolitti recognized that socialism was a force that needed to be channelled and utilized, rather than repressed, as Crispi had attempted to do. Believing that the masses could be less dangerous if they became organized instead of being left unorganized, he fostered the unionization of workers as a means to control them.⁶⁰

The unsettled atmosphere that dominated Italian domestic politics at the turn of the 20th century was somewhat reflected, though for very different reasons, in foreign affairs. Although still linked to the Triple Alliance, Italy began to re-establish relations with France, coming to an agreement on both nations' respective influence in Tripolitania and Morocco in 1902. This settlement left Italy in an ambiguous position which became more pronounced a few years later, during the Moroccan crisis, and then at the Algeciras conference in 1906. Assured of French disinterestedness over Tripoli, Italy began to push for its ambitions regarding Libya, encouraged by Germany and by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which sought to prevent Italy from expanding into the Balkans. This ultimately resulted in the Italian-Turkish war, and then in the conquest of Libya in 1911. On the Asian front, Italy also feared it was lagging behind the colonialist projects of other European powers. For this reason, in March 1899, the Italian government tried to get a lease on a strategic port in China, which—after the fall of the Japanese empire—was being divided between Russia, Germany, France, and Britain. The Chinese authorities, however, decided against the concession of the San-Mun Bay, south of Shanghai, and Italy, after a brief diplomatic dispute, dropped its demands at the end of the same year.⁶¹

On the Atlantic front, relations between Italy and the USA went through a critical phase at the end of the 19th century, due partly to disputes about the regulation of mass immigration, but also due to lynching episodes which took place in New Orleans and Tallulah in Louisiana, in Colorado, and in Florida, which shook Italian public opinion as well as its diplomatic legations in America. These incidents stemmed from the climate of diffuse xenophobia which characterized North American society in the Gilded Age and which also filtered through some of the statements that the cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show issued when touring Italy and Europe.⁶² Lynching, although formally condemned by most American politicians, churches and newspapers, was widely considered an understandable

⁶⁰ Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History*, pp. 172-192.

⁶¹ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, pp. 48-49.

⁶² See Chapter Five and Seven of this work.

punishment for certain categories of individuals and crimes, especially in the southern and western states. After black Americans, Mexican and Chinese immigrants, the Italians were the next largest group affected by lynching in the USA.⁶³ The New Orleans lynching of 1891 was the most outrageous, both in terms of casualties (eleven Italians were massacred, eight of whom had already become naturalized Americans, and seven out of the eleven had no criminal records, either in Italy or in the US), and in terms of the reaction of American public opinion and authorities—which remained relatively cold and indifferent to the case, until a diplomatic crisis with the Italian government erupted. The triggering factor was the killing of a police captain, David Hennessey, who colluded with the underworld of New Orleans, formed in part by Italian immigrants and by Italian American citizens. Their trial, which was also undermined by the corruption of judges, acquitted some of those accused of Hennessey's murder; others still waited to be sentenced when the lynch mob—composed of lawyers and other local white Anglo-Saxon professionals—burst into the prison and massacred them. An investigation carried out by the Italian embassy revealed that if the authorities of New Orleans had moved the defendants to a different location after the trial, instead of leaving them detained in the city prison, it would have avoided the lynching. Therefore, the act appeared deliberate on the part of the local community, which decided to get rid of uncomfortable individuals (because Italians were so considered in New Orleans) in such a brutally cursory way.⁶⁴ Italian authorities could not accept that such an unjust affront could remain unpunished, especially when an agreement in 1871, just before the beginning of mass migrations, guaranteed that Italy and America would provide mutual assistance to their emigrant citizens. In the US, the crime of lynching was regulated by state laws concerning murder rather than federal ones, and the state of Louisiana had juridical freedom in the handling of such cases, so much so that the Grand Jury did not indict anybody from the New Orleans lynching mob, although the ringleaders were well known. The president of the United States did not possess the authority to interfere in individual state affairs and force them to apply international treaties. This legislative impasse effectively rendered the 1871 agreement of reciprocal aid null; Italian authorities therefore pointed out this legislative flaw, calling on the US Government for a change. This irritated American institutions and

⁶³ See Nicholas Villanueva, Jr., *The Lynching of Mexicans in the Texas Borderlands* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017).

⁶⁴ Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d' Italia*, p. 297.

especially public opinion, which perceived this plea as a threatening act of intrusion from a foreign state, especially since it came from a nation which enjoyed such a low status as Italy. As a consequence, diplomatic relations between the two countries reached a breaking point in April 1891, when the reciprocal ambassadors were recalled. The United States feared retaliation by Italy (which was considered—not unreasonably—a feistily aggressive nation) and was especially anxious about a direct threat to their coasts, given the strength of the Italian naval fleet at that time. This prompted a smear campaign against Italy in the American press, with newspapers such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *New York Herald* publishing derisive news reports and cartoons against Italian institutions as well as Italian immigrants.⁶⁵ Diplomatic relations were re-established only when a fair compensation to the families of the lynched Italians was offered, and when the new president, Benjamin Harrison, publicly denounced the incident. The interests of Italy in America were substantial and, therefore, the Italian government had to settle for this meagre outcome, at the price of leaving the culprits unpunished. This, once again, consolidated the idea that respect for Italy on an international level was slight, and instilled in the Italians a general sense of distrust, both in Italian institutions and, as in the case of immigrants, also in American ones.⁶⁶

With the beginning of the 20th century, and the long presidency of Giolitti, diplomatic relationships between Italy and America resumed. President Theodore Roosevelt (who had publicly sided with Harrison in denouncing the New Orleans mob), though himself not always immune from the stereotyping of Italians, recognized that Italy was a useful partner for America. Italy was a crucial player in the question of immigration, meaning that it could offer cheap labour for the burgeoning economy of North America. Italy also provided different areas of the world (from actual colonies in Africa to the emigrant communities of Latin America) with loans as well as with skilled workers possessing cutting-edge technological knowledge. Italy was also becoming a valid trade partner, and its goods were getting steadily exported to Germany, Britain and, of course, the USA; and yet, despite these assets, Italy often appeared as a case of failed modernization.⁶⁷ Roosevelt, however,

⁶⁵ Patrizia Salvetti, “Il linciaggio di New Orleans del 14 marzo 1891 e i rapporti tra Italia e Stati Uniti”, in Daniele Fiorentino (ed.), *Gli tati Uniti e l’Italia alla fine del XIX secolo*, p. 132-133.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117-139.

⁶⁷ Daniele Fiorentino, “Ambasciatori e Aristocratici: Stati Uniti e Italia durante la presidenza di Theodore Roosevelt”, Daniele Fiorentino, Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Stati Uniti e Italia nel nuovo scenario internazionale, 1897-1918*, p. 24.

understood that Italy occupied a strategic position in the Mediterranean, and that by being a secondary power, it stood as a “perfect observatory for European issues, in particular regarding colonial tensions”.⁶⁸ At the same time, Italy began to see America as an ally, capable of mediating international issues on their behalf, and even as an enabler of Italian foreign policy. This sense was encouraged by the role of American mediation in the Russo-Japanese war, which had projected outwards a positive image of the US, and of Theodore Roosevelt in particular, as a balanced international leader.

Roosevelt’s politics, firmly based on the ideology of the virility of the nation, found an ample echo in Italy, which at the time was still being accused, both on the foreign and internal front, of being decadent, effete and effeminate. The American president, famous for a speech on “The Strenuous Life” in 1899, offered a positive model of masculinity for Italians, one that celebrated healthy vigour, which had an appeal even among the moderates. It lacked the excessively aggressive militaristic tones which had characterized the previous political era of President Crispi, and relied on a relatively peaceful image, and on ideals of international brotherhood, prompting Italians to re-imagine the original principles of Mazzini and the Risorgimento.⁶⁹ Even King Victor Emanuel III seemed to appreciate Roosevelt, and had established apparently good relations with the US ambassador in Rome, George Meyer, and particularly with his successor, Henry White, who Roosevelt entrusted with a leading role in the negotiations at Algeciras.⁷⁰ If, in the 1890s, the politics of isolationism from European matters had lain at the core of US politics, with Roosevelt’s presidency, America was now assuming a new role as potential arbiter of the great European powers, pursuing an ‘open door’ policy, and seeking access to a share of the African and Asian markets. According to scholar Daniele Fiorentino, Roosevelt’s model was indeed well-received because it showed a universal potential.⁷¹ President Roosevelt’s cowboy air struck a familiar chord in the imagination of Italians, who connected him with the other famous American of the time: Buffalo Bill. The two men knew each other and undoubtedly shared both a love

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ Giuseppe Monsagrati, “Theodore Roosevelt e l’Italia”, Daniele Fiorentino, Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Stati Uniti e Italia nel nuovo scenario internazionale, 1897-1918*, p. 63.

⁷⁰ Fiorentino, “Ambasciatori e Aristocratici: Stati Uniti e Italia durante la presidenza di Theodore Roosevelt”, p. 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

of frontier life and hunting and an imperialistic vision of America's future.⁷² The latter was true to such an extent that Roosevelt took the sobriquet 'Rough Riders', that Cody had coined for the gathering of miscellaneous world armies in his new version of the show, and applied it to the troops he led on the battlefield in Cuba.⁷³ Articles about Roosevelt often appeared in major Italian newspapers, with his personal life and achievements shining through in the reports, to the point of almost overshadowing the news about his politics.⁷⁴ Indeed, despite a number of thorny diplomatic conflicts, the Italian press seemed to have a penchant for Roosevelt above all previous American presidents.⁷⁵ Perhaps this was due to the fact that a number of prominent writers, journalists, and historians, such as Antonio Fogazzaro and Guglielmo Ferrero, were among his strongest, and most strongly opinionated, admirers.⁷⁶ Ferrero, moreover, in a popular article for the *New York World*, entitled "Is America to meet the fate of Ancient Rome?", made a connection between present day America and the Roman Empire at its peak moment, comparing Roosevelt to Cesar Augustus. These flatteries did not go unnoticed by Roosevelt, himself, who, also nourished a passion for the ancient history of Italy as well as for its literature, and who, in turn, described Ferrero as the greatest living historian.⁷⁷ Comparisons between the United States and Ancient Rome had already been crystal clear in the visionary minds of Cody, Burke and Salsbury who, as this work has examined, had already turned this hyperbolic analogy into a real workhorse for their show, during (and after) the 1890 tour of Italy.

Therefore, during the years of Roosevelt's presidency in America and the era of Giolitti in Italy, it became ever more apparent that the United States was becoming actively internationalist in outlook, while Italy was tending towards a degree of Americanization, and it was at this precise point that Buffalo Bill was ready to exploit this trend for a second time.

⁷² On the relationship between Cody and Theodore Roosevelt see Jeremy Johnston, "Two Rough Riders: Buffalo Bill and Theodore Roosevelt's Enigmatic Relationship" (PhD diss, University of Strathclyde, 2017).

⁷³ As Richard Slotkin explained in his celebrated *Gunfighter Nation*, Roosevelt always publicly denied having borrowed the term from Cody, despite evidence to the contrary. See Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 83.

⁷⁴ Such as *Il Corriere della Sera* from Milan and *La Vita* from Rome.

⁷⁵ On diplomatic issues with Chile, Venezuela, and the Vatican, see Daniele Fiorentino and Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Stati Uniti e Italia nel nuovo scenario internazionale, 1897-1918*.

⁷⁶ Giuseppe Monsagrati, "Theodore Roosevelt e l'Italia", p. 58.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 69.

Chapter Seven: Buffalo Bill's 'Second Coming': 'The Congress of Rough Riders of the World'.

Cody's Wild West show returned to Europe after a hiatus of ten years during which Cody dedicated himself to land reclamation and settlement building in Wyoming, without ceasing to perform throughout North America. In 1902, the show embarked on a long two-year tour of Britain, and from 1904 to 1906 the company toured continental countries beginning in France, before progressing to Italy, Austria and the Austro-Hungarian empire (as far as Ukraine), Romania, Germany, eventually terminating in Belgium in September 1906.

During the first European tour, the Wild West show was perceived by many to be a temporary amusement fair, with stopovers in larger metropolitan areas of up to three to four weeks. Beginning in 1895, James A. Bailey, of the Barnum and Bailey circus, took over the management of the Wild West show from Nate Salsbury, whose precarious health had left him unable to carry on such an onerous task. The association with Bailey ensured that the show took on a form more akin to that of an actual circus. During the 1906 tour of Italy, the company travelled to 36 cities in about two months, beginning in Genoa on the 14th of March and ending in Gorizia and Trieste (which at the time belonged to Austro-Hungary) in mid-May. This entailed shorter stopovers, but covered the territory in a more capillary way than in the previous tour.

In 1890, the longer stays in big cities meant that after the urban audiences had run out of interest in the show, an influx of provincial audiences would supplement the crowd, having had enough time to make arrangements to travel (and perhaps stay overnight) from rural areas into the cities. During the 1906 tour, the Wild West show arrived directly in the conurbations and in provincial towns, spending on average one to two days in each city, with exceptions made for bigger centres like Rome, Milan and Turin (which, thanks to widespread industrialization had now become a large urban centre) where the stopovers lasted from five to six days. On each day, there were two scheduled performances, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The evening performance was a new addition, made possible by the installation of electric light, a novelty which attracted the public in its own right. This organizational change was enabled by the systematization of time that accompanied the advancement of industrialized societies in Europe, just as in America: entertainments had become more affordable and were now well within the reach of

factory workers and labourers. However, leisure time was now more structured as a consequence of the division of labour into shifts and turns. Whether consciously, or simply as a consequence of a standardized routine imposed by Bailey's administration, Cody's show now catered to this wider audience through its regimented new schedule.

Chapter 7.1. Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in Italy, 1906: programme, preparation, and advertising

Just as the route of the 1906 tour differed from that of 1890, so did its programme. While the 1890 tour primarily focused on the dramatization of events that occurred in Frontier territories, and on eulogizing distinctly American values, the Wild West show now offered the 'Congress of the Rough Riders of the World'—which Cody had tried out for the first time while touring England and Scotland in the 1891-92 season and refined during the 1893 Columbian Exposition. This new show format, as scholar Janet M. Davis notes, "capitalized on the growing visibility of America's global frontier".¹ Indeed, as Christine Bold has amply documented in her research about the "Rough Riders at Home and Abroad", at this point in U.S. cultural history "the domestic frontier myth was adapted [...] to create a heroic image of America's role in the international scene", so that "American imperialism became part of the heroic tradition stemming from her unique landed frontier".² These elements were skilfully embedded into Cody's new show, which came to represent a soft power counterpart to McKinley's and Roosevelt's imperial policies. Cody's new show sanitized once again problematic aspects of American global colonialism by transforming it into entertainment; this ensured that colonial conquest stood as "evidence of liberal progress and democratic equality", rather than a symbol of America's aggressive expansionism.³

Indeed, after 1893, Cody's show programme began to be regularly altered, firstly, as a general strategy of self-renewal, in order to lure a new public with the dramatization of recent colonial events, and, secondly, as a way to better cater to

¹ Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). p. 206.

² Christine Bold, "The Rough Riders at Home and Abroad: Cody, Roosevelt, Remington and the Imperialist Hero", *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 18, n. 3 (1987), p. 322.

³ Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age*, p. 207.

different local audiences. For instance, the 1898 season paid homage to the events of the Spanish-American War by introducing into its line-up “The Battle of San Juan Hill” and the addition of African-American Rough Riders to the show crew.⁴ Then, in 1901, the “Battle of Tien-Tsin” was added to the show, with the Lakota performers playing the role of the Boxers.⁵ In the same year, during the American leg of the tour, Cody’s Wild West featured the re-enactment of the battle of the Transvaal, siding with the Boer pioneers. This addendum was removed in the following British season, 1902-03, in order not to displease the local audience. In the 1905-06 tour of continental Europe, these relatively new acts were effectively removed as the programme reverted to a more conventional and established line-up. Perhaps the management believed that European audiences had more traditional preferences, or perhaps it was done to avoid any accusation of parochialism that the re-enactments of specific battles and colonial events would have aroused in such a heterogeneous setting as was early 20th century Europe—where each country harboured multiple colonial ambitions, as well as antipathies towards neighbouring nations. Therefore, the programme was kept rather neutral, an exception being made for its blatant Americanism. The long-standing cavalry acts were given a new spin with the addition of Mexican, Cossack, Zouave, Arab, and Japanese performers, who were employed altogether as well as in singular ethnic groups, especially when it came to exercises of prowess with weaponry. At the same time ‘evergreens’ like “Cowboy fun”, “the last scalp for Custer”, the assault on the “settler’s cabin” and on the “Deadwood mail coach” remained staple features of each performance. Cody expanded his leading role with the direction of different military parades, including that of the 6th Cavalry veterans, and with the re-enactment of his Pony-Express days. The new sharp-shooting star in the making, who replaced the already legendary Annie Oakley, was the cowboy, Johnny Baker.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210; and see Christine Bold, “Where Did the Black Rough Riders Go?”, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, n. 3 (2009), pp. 273-297.

⁵ Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age*, p. 213.

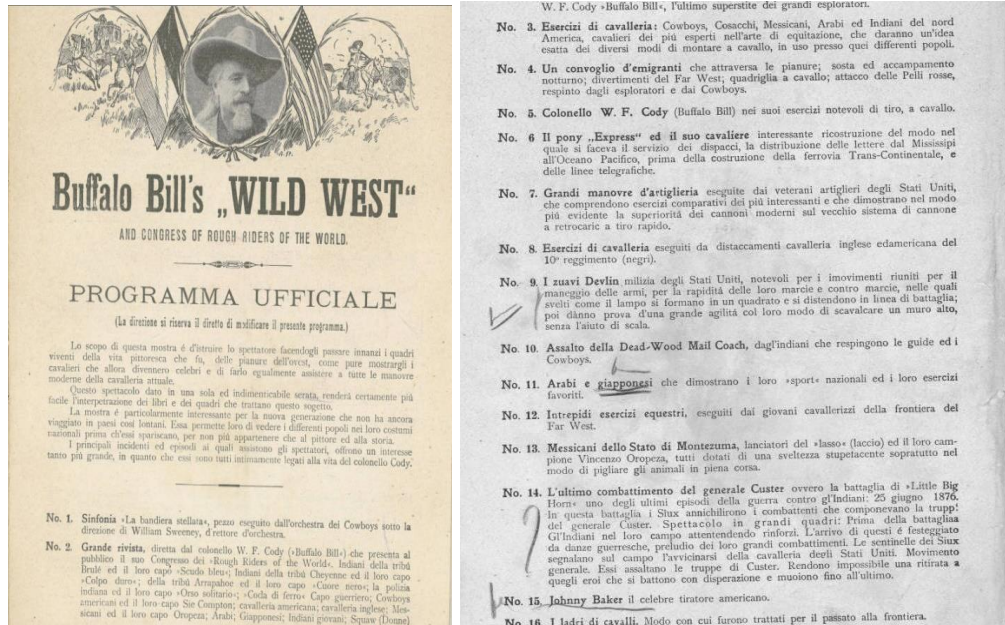


Figure 38: Pages 1 and 2 of official programme of the Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, showing the line-up of individual acts. The programme relates to Milan, 1906. Courtesy of McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.

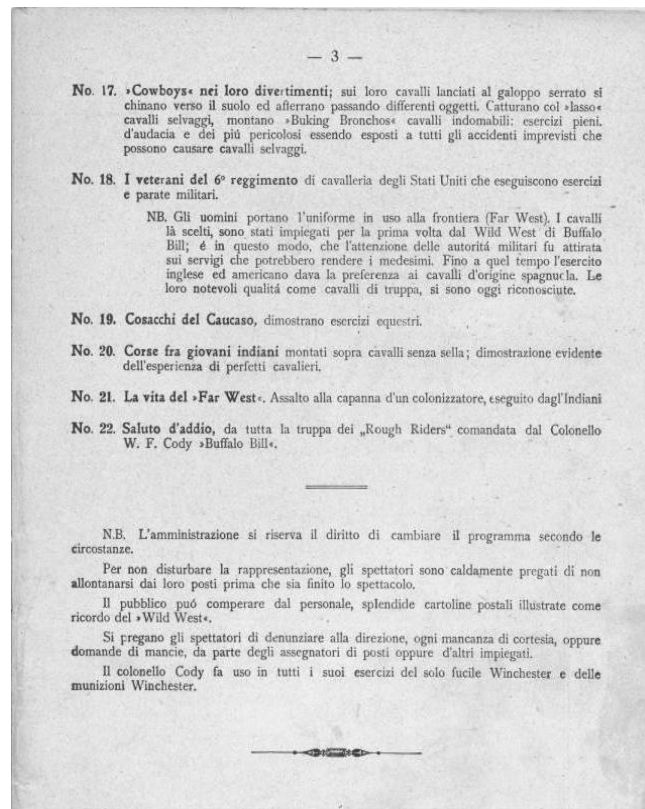


Figure 39: Page 3 of the 1906 Milan programme. Courtesy of McCracken Research Library.

The merger of military elements and ludic acts in the new Wild West show programme struck a very sensitive chord with early twentieth-century Europeans and the Italians in particular, who suffered from a crisis of character and were trying to

get back on track with the colonial scramble before it was too late. Cody's new show exploited on another element of paramount interest for Italians: curiosity for the 'alien other', an ancient appeal which had often been satisfied through travel. This fascination reached mass levels in the decade and a half between the first and second Wild West show's tours of Italy. This was true to the point that live shows and exhibitions increasingly included Ethnographic and Anthropological sections in their line-ups. For instance, the 1892 Italian American Exposition in Genoa incorporated a Catholic Missions Pavilion, and the Palermo National Exposition of 1891-92 recreated an Abyssinian village, while the Turin Colonial Exhibition in 1898 featured the reproduction of an Eritrean village. Also, the 1906 Milan International—which ran during the same weeks as Cody's Milanese show—hosted a reconstruction of a Cairo street. It was in this period that the first Ethnographic museums were founded in Italy, thanks to scholars Paolo Mantegazza, Lamberto Loria, and Ferdinando Martini, and by 1911 official Ethnography Congresses were organized. The belief that the study of 'exotic peoples and races' would ease the path to colonial occupation and territorial administration was a strong scientific conviction at that time in Italy, and Cody undoubtedly took advantage of this anthropological turn in culture for the promotion of his 1906 show. This is testified to by the pamphlets that the company distributed in shops and places of public interest in the days before the show was set to commence, which show an acute awareness on the part of the show's managers of the anthropological dimension of the "Congress of Rough Riders of the World", and at the same, a mastery of the techniques of audience appeal. The one circulated in Genoa, for example, which survives in the private collection of Piergiacomo Pesce of Morsasco (near the city of Alessandria), stated that:

[...]this exhibition offers a magnificent field of study to scientists, anthropologists, and a wonderful opportunity for those who cannot travel, to admire on site the different types which compose the great human family[...]. A large gathering of 800 men, belonging to all the countries, true representatives of the different races coming from all parts of the globe and forming an absolutely unique ensemble, a true anthropological collection without equal, that all the inhabitants of Italy can see in one session equivalent to a whole life of travel.⁶

Therefore, just like real ethnographic expositions, Cody's show now offered a 'factitious' version of an intercultural encounter, as a surrogate of actual travel for the general audience. As had happened during the 1890 tour of Italy, the elements of pure entertainment were placed in the background, to emphasize the supposedly

⁶ Quotation from the 1906 promotional brochure for the city of Genoa, inner page, courtesy of Collection Piergiacomo Pesce.

scientific interest of the show, which now resided in its anthropological framework—referencing a science that offered an authoritative legitimization of the narrative underlying the Wild West show.



Figure 40: The cover of the 1906 promotional brochure for the city of Genoa. Courtesy of Collection Piergiacomo Pesce.

UNO SPETTACOLO SENZA PARI, UNICO AL MONDO!

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST.

And Congress of Rough Riders of the World.
 RIUNIONE DI CAVALIERI I PIÙ ARDITI DEL MONDO.
 Diretto personalmente dal celebre esploratore dell' armata americana.
 Il colonello W. F. Cody (BUFFALO BILL.)

Farà durante l'estate del 1906 il suo giro artistico d'addio in Italia entrando in questo paese rideando dopo le sue rappresentazioni a Nizza in Carnevale.

La Compagnia che viaggia con i suoi treni speciali composti di 50 vagoni, si fermerà in tutti i grandi centri ed in tutte le città importanti, dell'Italia Settentrionale e Centrale, dove si accamperà ed esibirà la sua numerosa ed importante riunione di personaggi autentici di tutti i paesi del mondo, composta di cavalieri che la storia ha reso tanto celebri che leggendari e che sono i più notevoli dell'universo per le loro prodezze equestri. Tra essi sonvi

UOMINI DI RAZZE PRIMITIVE E SELVAGGIE
 che cavalcano senza sella e senza briglie vertiginosamente.

COWBOYS DEL FAR WEST
 gli unici che sono capaci di domare il cavallo selvaggio delle praterie.

COSACCHI, ARABI, MAROCCHINI, BEQUINI, GIAPPONESI, MESSICANI, CUBANI, PELLI ROSSE.

Col. W. F. CODY
 "BUFFALO BILL"

Una numerosa riunione di 800 uomini appartenenti a tutti i paesi, veri rappresentanti delle differenti razze venute da tutte le parti del globo e che formano un assieme assolutamente unico nel suo genere. Vera collezione

Antropologa senza pari che tutti gli abitanti d'Italia possono vedere in una seduta equivalente ad

Una vita intera di viaggi. Questa numerosa truppa comprende pure

Cinquanta Bronchos selvaggi tra i quali solo alcuni possono essere sellati e montati dai Cowboys; e

Cinquecento cavalli che permettono alla direzione di rappresentare tutti i modi di montarli come pure tutte le maniere di condurli.

Una riunione simile mai si vide fino ad oggi in nessuna scuola d'equitazione del mondo intero

L'USO DEL „LASSO“ (LACCIO)

Figure 41: Show description in the inner page of the promotional brochure for the city of Genoa. Courtesy of Collection Piergiacomo Pesce.

In other promotional material, such as a poster circulated in the Tuscan city of Arezzo, all the emphasis was laid on the militaristic element of the show, as an educational tool, rather than entertainment, which, despite remaining at the core of Cody's show, appeared to have become an unmentionable word:

To increase the attraction of this exciting spectacle, many exercises of handling all modern and ancient weapons are performed, from the bow and its arrow, to the rifle and the quick shooting cannon. The picturesque, historical and educational sides reach the paroxysm of interest for an exhibition inclusive of savage and modern warriors of all the cavalries of the world.⁷

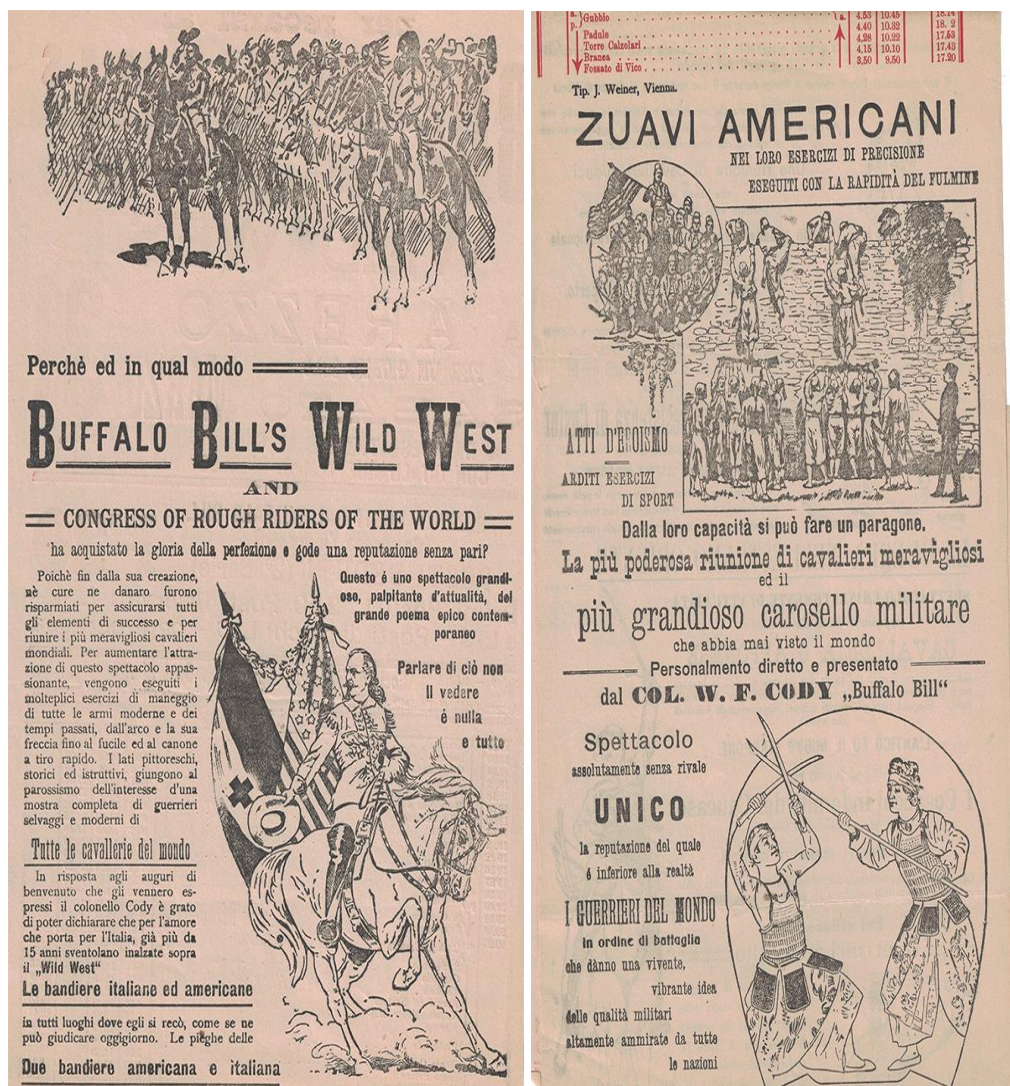


Figure 42 and Figure 43: Page four and two of the Arezzo promotional Poster, 1906. Courtesy of collection Sergio Susani, B361.

⁷ “Per aumentare l’attrazione di questo spettacolo appassionante, vengono eseguiti i molteplici esercizi di maneggio di tutte le armi moderne, e dei tempi passati, dall’ arco e la sua freccia, fino al fucile e al cannone a tiro rapido. I lati pittoreschi, storici ed istruttivi giungono al parossismo dell’interesse d’una mostra completa di guerrieri selvaggi e moderni di tutte le cavallerie del mondo.” *Buffalo Bill poster*, Arezzo, 1906, p. 4. Courtesy of Collection Sergio Susani, Arezzo, B361.

However, the dynamic illustrations and the boisterous announcements about “the warriors of the world [...] giving a living, vibrant idea of the military skills that all nations greatly admire”, exhibited in the above poster and brochure, inevitably flagged up the prominent role that entertainment played in Cody’s show, while providing, at the same time, noticeable titillation to the minds of Italians, who—emboldened by the recent colonial foothold established in Somalia and hopeful of an advantageous outcome at the Algeciras conference—were eager to re-establish their national character, now more than ever.⁸ And yet, despite Cody’s clear reluctance to openly market the Wild West show as mere amusement, it is undeniable that he would not have had the same impact and reach without the fierce promotion to which the show was subjected—in common with other popular entertainment shows (first and foremost Barnum’s, with which Cody’s show was now associated).

Promoting the Wild West show required a complex machine, which was set in motion several months, and sometimes years, before the show was due to take place in a specific European nation. This multifaceted apparatus had already reached, as author Joe Dobrow has recently illustrated in his work *Pioneers of Promotion*, a surprisingly advanced degree of refinement for the time, owing to the remarkable intuitions of press agent John M. Burke.⁹ The digitized archive held at the University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center, offers a vast array of unpublished documents, which provide invaluable insights into the core operations of the Wild West show’s promotional engine. It also sheds further light on the genius of John M. Burke, and the painstaking organization and efficiency of his team, which included agents, advertisers, translators, legal consultants, and even bureaucrats.

This is the first study of its kind to look at the documents in the Italian language housed in the collection, and to provide a commentary, analysis and partial translation to an English-speaking scholarly audience. These documents were produced ahead of the 1906 tour of Italy, and they clearly demonstrate, among other things, how nothing was left to chance or negotiated at the last minute—despite what one might expect of life on the road in a travelling show. Indeed, in the case of

⁸ “I guerrieri del mondo [...] danno una vivente, vibrante idea delle abilità militari altamente ammirate da tutte le nazioni”. Buffalo Bill poster, Arezzo, 1906, p. 2. Courtesy of collection Sergio Susani, Arezzo, B361. See figure 36.

⁹ See Joe Dobrow, *Pioneers of Promotion: How Press Agents for Buffalo Bill, P.T. Barnum, and the World’s Columbian Exposition Created Modern Marketing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018).

Cody's Wild West, which had been roaming Europe almost incessantly since the 1901-2 season, scrupulous organization was more crucial than ever.

The oldest document in the collection is a letter from December 1904, over one year before the start of the Italian tour, from the Italian Ministry of Finance to Clarence L. Dean, addressed as "General Agent" of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, which was delivered to him at the American Consulate in Rome.¹⁰ The letter explained the bureaucratic procedures, especially customs regulations, that the company needed to take care of before entering Italy with the entire troupe and equipment. What is interesting in this document is that Busca also gives tips on how to avoid paying some custom duties. The English translation prepared for Dean [see Figures 44 and 45] stated: "the enterprise shall have the right to introduce into the Kingdom without paying nor depositing any amount for duty, besides the animals, all effects instruments and paraphernalia used for the show upon the only condition that all said effects be recognized as having been used before".¹¹ However, a veterinary tax of four liras had to be paid for each of their horses, and the company needed to pay a tax on the train carriages, considered as "temporary import items" by Italian authorities. Also, a special permit to carry arms and ammunition had to be requested from the Italian police authorities.

¹⁰ Dean's letter is not in the archive. He previously worked for Barnum circus, always in Europe. See Charles Eldridge Griffin, *Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, Chris Dixon (ed.), (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), p. 103.

¹¹ From the English translation of the document originally attached to the letter and signed by Busca. This is the only document of the Italian 1906 tour which came with an attached English translation. Courtesy of, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Legal and Financial Records, Box 1, Folder 6.

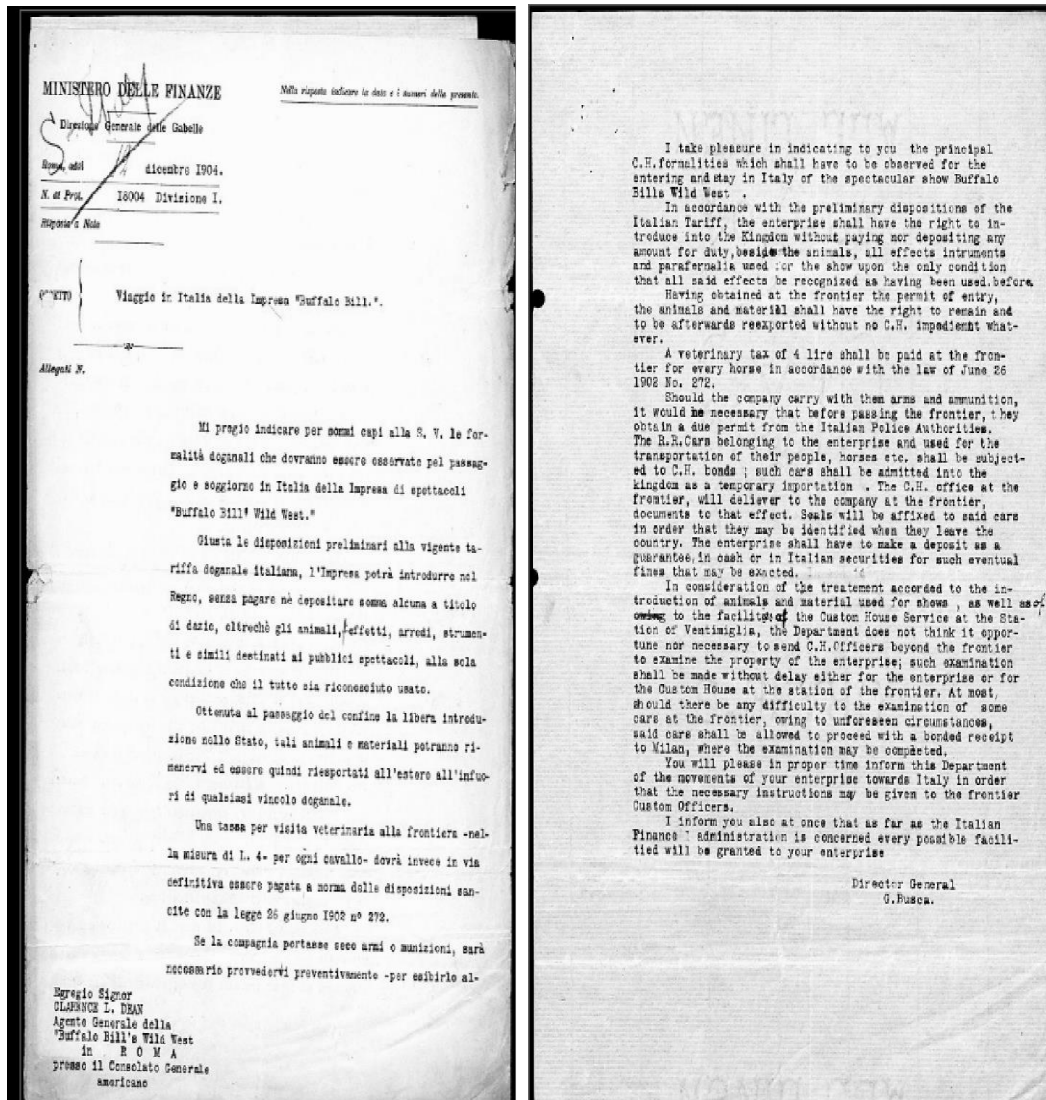


Figure 44 and Figure 45: Original document from the Italian Ministry of Finance and the English translation attached to it. Courtesy of, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Legal and Financial Records, Folder 6, Box 1.

Letters of inquiry, such as the above, proved a real asset for Cody's enterprise. Just over 40 years into the creation of the state, Italian bureaucracy had already become a byzantine institution, and without compliance with the official directives it would have been very difficult for the Wild West company to navigate through Italy without incurring sanctions.

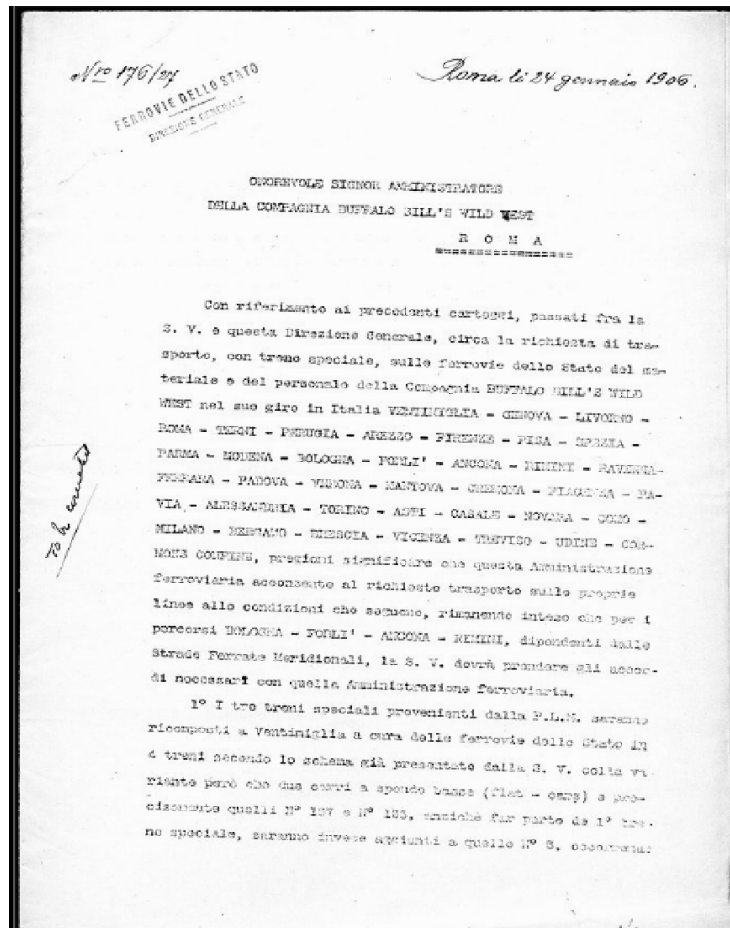


Figure 46: Railway rental agreement with Ferrovie dello Stato, p. 1.

Courtesy of University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center, Buffalo Bill Collection, Accession Number 264, Folder 6, Box 1.

The Wild West enterprise also moved well in advance to secure the rental of the railway lines, essential for travelling through Italy. The documents sent on stamped paper by the Ferrovie dello Stato (Italian State Railways), demonstrate that a ten page-long agreement was struck on the 26th of January 1906. The agreement comprised twenty somewhat draconian clauses that the company had to comply with, which included: that the track rental payment was to be paid, not in one whole transaction, but in instalments to each single train station at the moment of departure (point n. 10), the rental cost was of 0,45 lira cents per km for the carriages transporting people, and 0,20 lira cents per km for the ones transporting goods and animals, the speed of travel could not be below 20 km/h and not above 40 km/h. The

document also dictated that the company travelled with four trains and that the weight of each of them was between 300 and 330 tons.¹²

Securing spaces dedicated to encampment and performance was, obviously, of vital importance. Because of the nature of the performance, which included the use of firearms, the designated public spaces were the “piazza d’armi”, the parade grounds which also had the function of public shooting ranges. These were under the superintendence of the Minister of War, Conte Luigi Majnoni d’ Intignano, who Dean contacted in advance, and who provided the company with the specific information and contacts to reach in order to secure the public shooting range in each location where the show planned to stop.¹³

However, the Wild West show had specific necessities concerning the space needed for the performance, and some public shooting grounds were too small to contain the full show apparatus. In such cases, Cody’s company considered struck private contracts with owners of hippodromes or racetracks (as in the case of Bologna) or civic arenas (in Milan), with the advantage, in some cases, of more favourable prices. Private sector arrangements were initiated by a letter that the Wild West company sent to the mayors of each Italian city scheduled, specifying that the company needed an area of “40,000 square meters, arranged with for 200 meters at each side, 250 metres for length and 160 metres of width; or 400 metres in length for 100 metres in width. In case such lands do not exist within those belonging to the council, we would invite your lordship to indicate the private properties which can match our wishes”.¹⁴

¹² University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center, Buffalo Bill Collection, Accession Number 264, Folder 6, Box 1. A few days later Ferrovie dello Stato also agreed to the concession of a special carriage dedicated solely to advertising material, which was added as the company entered Italy from Fance, in the station of Ventimiglia, see document dated February 1906, *ibid*.

¹³ Luigi Majnoni d’ Intignano (1841-1918) was Minister of War during the second government of Alessandro Fortis and the first government of Sydney Sonnino.

¹⁴ “Ci occorrebbe un’area di 40.000 metri quadrati, disposti sia 200 metri per lato, sia 250 metri per lunghezza e 160 di larghezza; oppure ancora 400 metri in lunghezza per 100 in larghezza. Nel caso tali terreni non esistessero tra quelli appartenenti al Comune, pregheremmo la S. V. Illma di volerci far indicare le proprietà private che rispondano al nostro desiderio”. Letter from Buffalo Bill’s Wild West to Italian mayors, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Accession Number 264, Folder 6, Box 1.

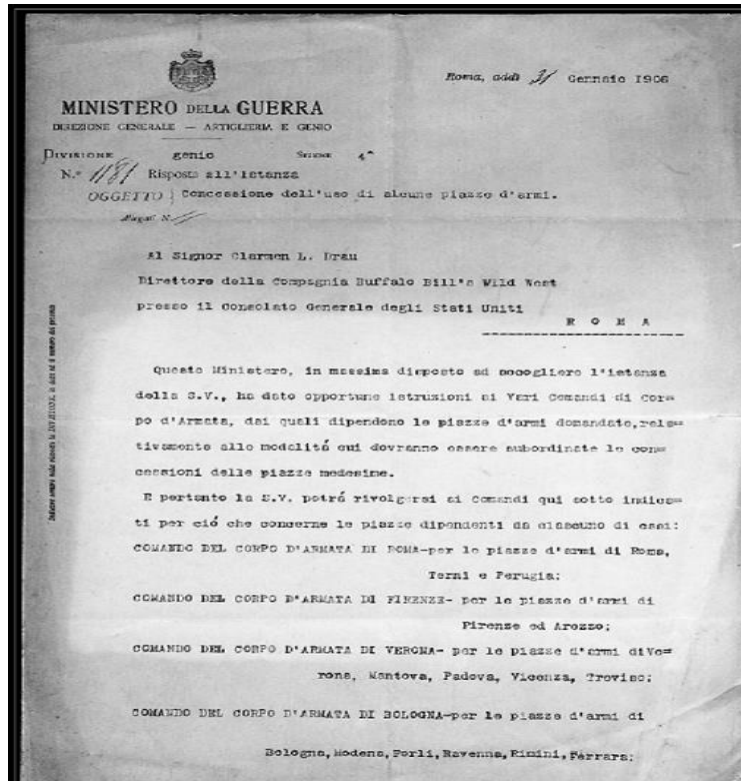


Figure 47: Letter from the Ministry of War, 31/01/1906.

Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Accession Number 264, Folder 6, Box 1.

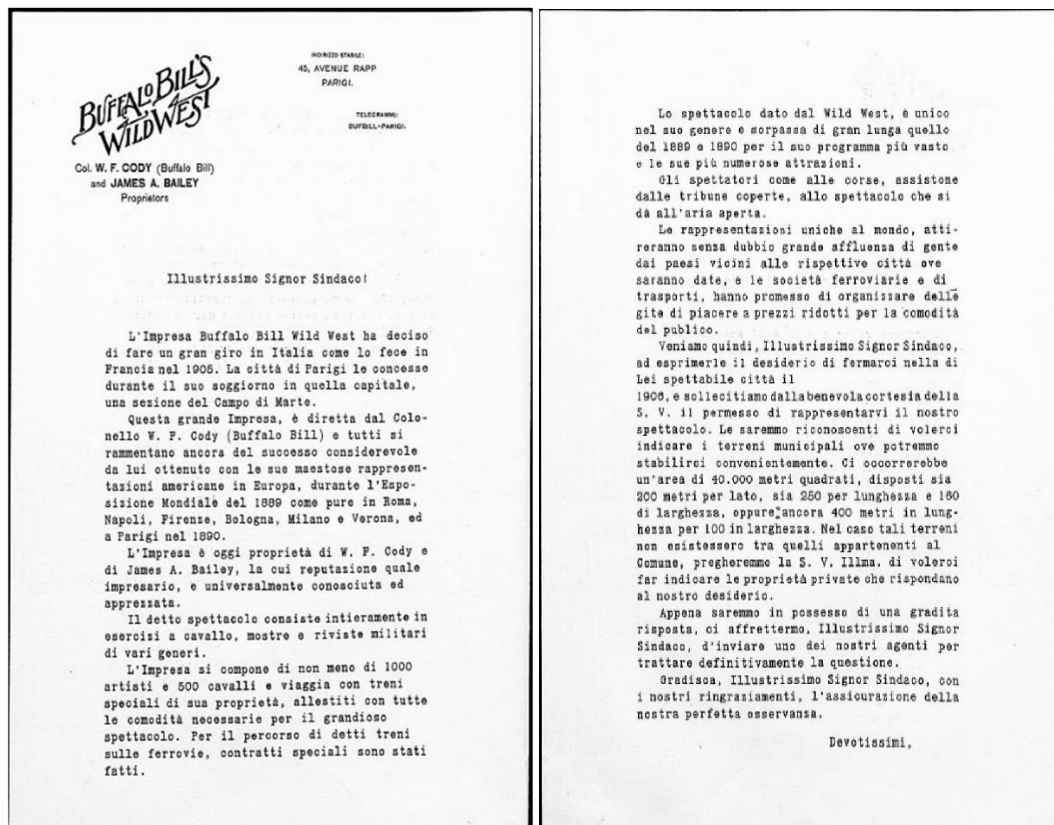


Figure 48: Wild West Company blank letter to Italian mayors.

Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Accession Number 264, Folder 5, Box 1.

Cody's enterprise was also highly efficient at securing public space for advertising in each of the Italian cities scheduled. This was arranged to obtain the monopoly on a city's most prominent buildings, offering greatest visibility to the company's broad and colourful posters. They were often exposed in places such as railway stations and city walls, but, above all, in shop windows, hotel doorways, and in other central commercial businesses.¹⁵



Figure 49 and Figure 50: Mirandola, Modena, 1906. Both approaches to the station. Courtesy of Collection Al Barnadon.

¹⁵ See pictures below, figures 49, 50, 51.



Figure 51 Rimini, posters.

Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, Golden, CO, image archive, photo id #302.

To ensure that the posters were effectively and continuously displayed in such glamorous locations, the company never relied on simple verbal agreements with the merchants or the owners of the businesses, but rather submitted them to a contract which meticulously regulated the terms of billboard postings and designated the amount that the company would pay businesses for their advertising service. In the standardized version of this contract—also held in the Buffalo Bill collection at the American Heritage Center—alongside the total duration of the display of the posters, it was stipulated that the owner of the business would “not display other posters than those belonging to our [Cody’s] company”.¹⁶ As competition was rife in the Wild West show business—as previously seen—owners of the designated businesses were also forbidden to display posters of “other similar companies or enterprises” until the end of the Buffalo Bill’s Wild West season.¹⁷ They were also bound to the upkeep of the area in which posters were displayed, and their replacement in case of damage. They were also required to provide “the glue, the manpower, horses and cars to attach the posters as soon as they arrive”, and all of this process was meant to happen under the supervision of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West’s own billposters.¹⁸

¹⁶ See the document below “Contratto D’Affissione”, figure 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

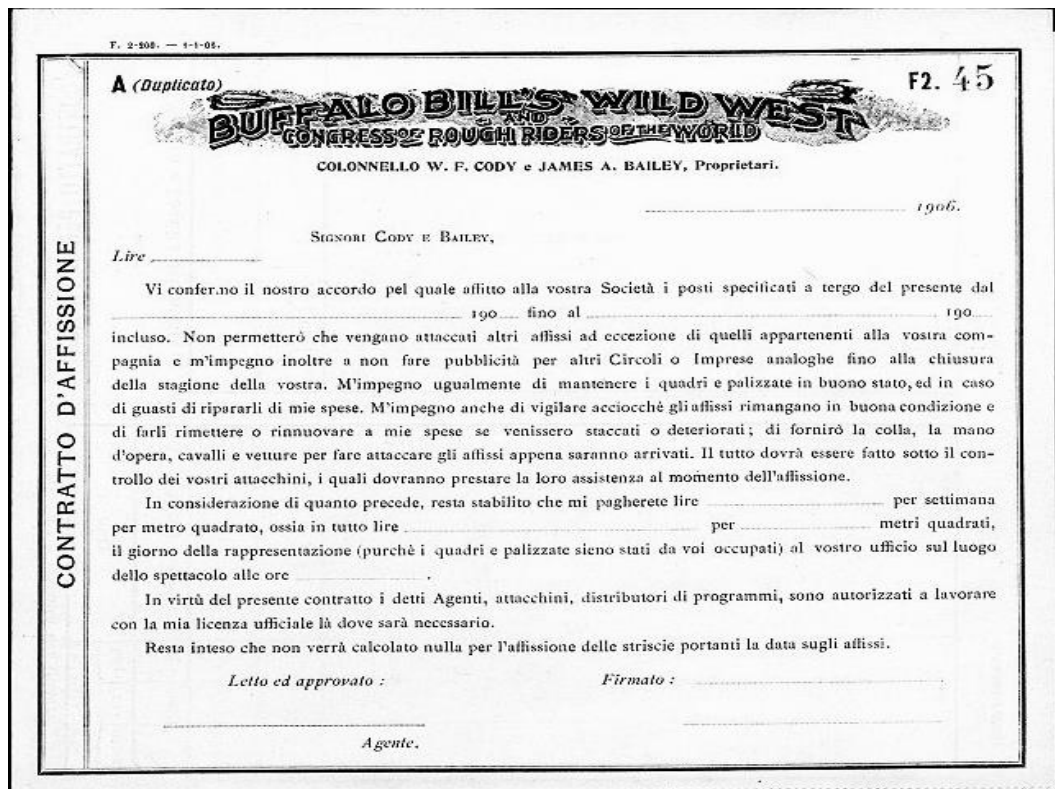


Figure 52: Contract regulating the advertisement billboards.
Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.

Even though the advertising process started weeks before the arrival of the show in each city, business owners or merchants would only be able to collect the agreed money at a specific office, the “vettura cassa” (cash coach), during the day(s) of the performance in the show encampment. Once the payment was settled, Cody’s enterprise issued a special receipt, “quietanza” in Italian, in which they guaranteed that they were satisfied with the sum and would not seek further payments from the company (see figure 53).

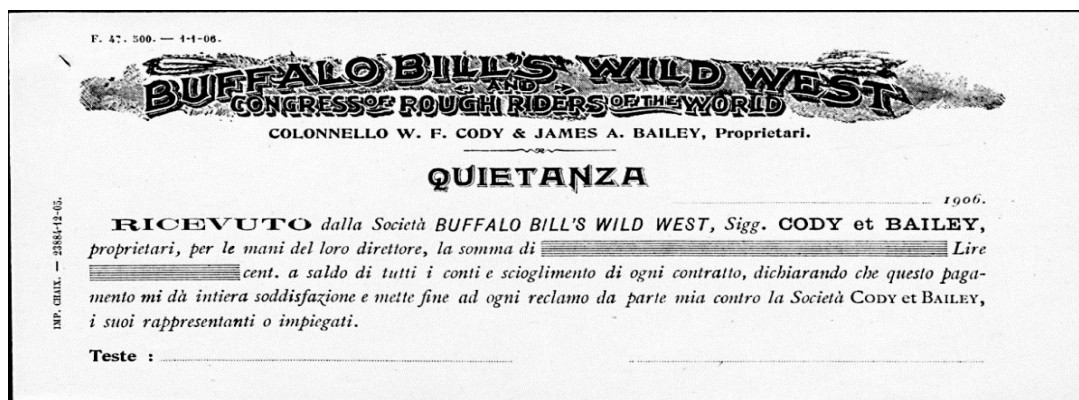


Figure 53: “Quietanza”, receipt of payment that various businesses contracted by Cody’s company received at the end of their service.
Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.

The company's billposters and press agents (the latter promoted the show through press conferences and other mundane events with the local press), who had come to different Italian cities ahead the arrival of the actual show, stayed in several hotels until the rest of the company reached them. Unsurprisingly, their stay was also strictly regulated by contracts to be signed by both the press agent and the hotelier. Worthy of note is the statement at the top of these accommodation contracts, which cautioned that "it is absolutely forbidden for our press agents to promise favoured tickets".¹⁹ Instead, part of the compensation for a correct advertisement display included a number of ordinary tickets for the show, as indicated in figures 54 and 55.

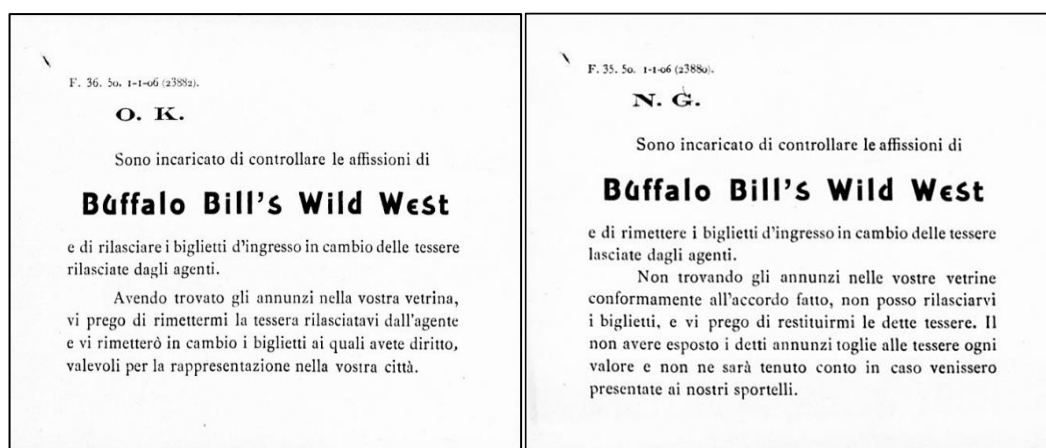


Figure 54 and Figure 55: "O.K." and "No Good" (N.G.) cards that Buffalo Bill's Wild West's press agents distributed after their routine checks to shops designated for the company's advertisement, which granted (or denied) show tickets to the merchants. Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.

Press crew members were, therefore, sent to the designated shops to check whether the affixion had been carried out correctly, and only then would they grant the authorisation to the merchants/owners to collect their show tickets. If something had gone wrong down the line, such as if the posters were not present or visible in the windows or had been damaged and not replaced, they would withhold tickets. During these checks, the crew used specific pre-printed cards.²⁰ The need for these cards, contracts, and procedures, implies that the members of the press crew could not speak Italian (nor, as far as can be established, any other Continental language, as the archive holds analogous documents in several other European languages) and that likely no interpreter was normally with them.

¹⁹ See Figure 58.

²⁰ See Figures 56 and 57.

È ASSOLUTAMENTE PROIBITO AI NOSTRI AGENTI DI PUBBLICITÀ, DI PROMETTERE BIGLIETTI DI FAVORE. F. 1 45

B

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST
AND
CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD

Colonnello W. F. CODY (Buffalo Bill) e JAMES A. BAILEY, proprietari.

SIGNORI, _____ 1906.

Io, sottoscritto, _____ proprietario
dell'albergo _____ di questa città, m'impegno con la presente ad alloggiare
soltanto gli **Agenti di Pubblicità** di BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST.

Cioè, circa _____ persone, in ragione di lire _____ per pasto (compreso il pasto della mattina
e quello della sera, caffè o tè, o burro) e lire _____ per l'alloggio, se fornito. A partire da questo giorno, i
detti Agenti verranno di quando in quando fino al _____ 1906.

Nei prezzi menzionati, non sono comprese bibite, lavatura di biancheria né gli extra. I pasti non ordinati
e non presi non saranno calcolati. Tutte le somme dovranno essere specificate a dorso del presente bollettino
dall' Agente medesimo, e da lui firmate.

Letto ed approvato _____ Agente _____ Alberatore.

PAGABILE ALLA VETTURA CASSA ALLE 2 P. M. SUL LUOGO E NEL GIORNO DELLA RAPPRESENTAZIONE

E. 14.000.10.106 1° 283 12-15

Figure 56: Contract regulating the stay of press crew members in Italian hotels. Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.

When press agents visited local newspapers ahead of performances of the show's promotional sessions, they shared general information, historical anecdotes, and illustrative material about Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and offered show tickets to chief editors—in a tacit exchange for reviews, coverage, and further visibility (see Figure 57).²¹

**BUFFALO BILL'S
WILD WEST**

SERVIZIO STAMPA

Signore,

Ho l'onore di presentarLe gli ossequi del Colonnello
W. F. Cody, Buffalo Bill, il quale La prega di fargli l'onore di
assistere ad una delle rappresentazioni del

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST
and
CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD

a

All'ingresso principale dello spettacolo, saranno rimossi
due biglietti per posti riservati sia al redattore in capo o ad
uno dei redattori che si presenterà munito della presente.

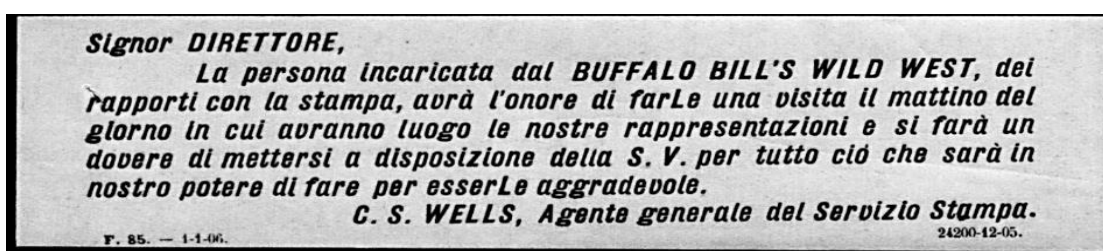
AGENTE.

F. 116.1.000.1-0-00 10922-11945

Figure 57: Letter of invitation to the show sent to Italian newspapers. Courtesy American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.

²¹ The letter in Figure 57 reads “PRESS SERVICE Sir, I have the honour to bring you the greetings of Colonel W. F. Cody, Buffalo Bill, who begs you to give him the honour of attending one of the performances of the BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST and CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD. At the main entrance of the show, two ticket reservations will be dispensed, either to the chief editor or to one of the editors who will exhibit the present letter. AGENT.” Unsigned—like the other documents, it is a blank standardized copy—Figure 58 shows a certain C. S. Wells as “general agent of the press crew”.

These meetings took place in the newspapers' editorial offices, when the show visited smaller towns, while in larger cities with several newspapers, the company held press-conference-style meetings in hotels. Events like an "Indian Breakfast" and "Cowboy Roast Dinner", were also organized and held directly in the show encampment.²² According to the document in Figure 58, visits to newspapers' offices would be scheduled for the morning of the day of the show performance, when "the person in charge of press relations[...] will be compelled to make himself available to your lordship in order to do anything in our power to be agreeable to you".²³ This document, much like the ones considered above, exhibited the verbose language, that was still common protocol for official communications in early 20th century Italy. It is likely that in drafting these documents, as well as translators and language specialists, the company had legal consultants to help them.



*Figure 58: Paper slip informing newspaper editors about the visit of the Buffalo Bill's Wild West press agent.
 Courtesy American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.*

The Buffalo Bill collection at the American Heritage Center also holds copies of the ticket reservations distributed to Italian journalists and editors, and probably to other special guests. The show had no fixed seating allocation for the Italian press, and the ticket (Figure 59) displays a blank space, to be completed by handwriting, in the seating 'sector' part of the card. Therefore, it is highly possible that a hierarchy in the distribution of these reserved tickets existed. Better seats were likely to be offered to

²² Julia Stetler, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Germany*, p. 189. When the show arrived in Genoa in 1906 a *dejeuner* was organized to meet the press at the Genoese restaurant "Gerolamo". See *L' Eco d' Italia*, Genoa, 13/03/1906, p. 2. In Rome they had a two-hour long breakfast at the "Café Valiani," *La Capitale*, Rome, 22/03/1906, p. 3. These types of press relationships were well established by 1906, and occurred in 1890, as German scholar Sybille Spiegel shows in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West in München*, cited in Stetler, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Germany*, pp. 194-195.

²³ Other than C.S. Wells, the press crew included Harrison H. Gunning (1861-1946), who, according to an obituary, oversaw and organized the Wild West's outdoor advertising throughout Europe in 1906. MS 006, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY. Available online: <http://library.centerofthewest.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p17097coll34/id/84/rec/4>. Last accessed: 21/10/2018.

the representatives of more prominent newspapers, and to invited authorities and officials, as the seating allocation undoubtedly influenced the show experience and its appreciation.

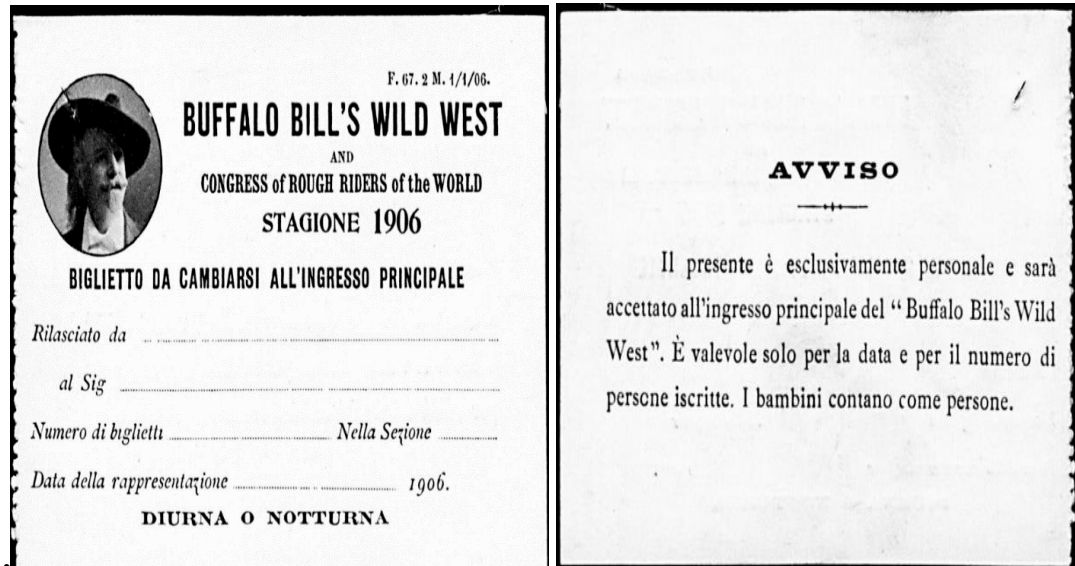


Figure 59 and Figure 60: Front and back of the reserved ticket for the press/ special guests. Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.

Comparisons with the 1890 tour spring to mind. Even back then, there had been a form of hierarchy in the spectators who received the privileged seat inside the Deadwood coach: they were almost exclusively politicians, aristocrats, and important newspapermen (like Emilio Salgari). This underscored who represented the holy trinity for Cody, Burke, and their associates: institutions, aristocracy, and the ‘fourth estate’—a pecking order which remained unchanged in 1906. The general population was a primary target audience, but recognising that the privileged had to be feted before they would publicly endorse the Wild West show was part of the Wild West team’s phenomenal intuition in understanding the cornerstones of modern communication and advertising mechanisms.

Most of the information about the 1890 tour has been recovered from a newspaper scrapbook, one of several assembled by John Burke and now housed in the McCracken Research Library. There exists no known scrapbook of newspaper clippings about the second and last European tour of Cody’s show; hence one purpose of part of this research is to collect and analyse primary and printed contemporary sources, mainly in the Italian language, about this under-documented leg of the tour. It is unclear whether a scrapbook for this European tour ever existed,

but archival evidence indicates there was the willingness to realize one, or at least that a collection of published news about the show was being retained. The document in Figure 61 shows an enigmatic paper slip in the Buffalo Bill collection, which reads: “NOTE: Would you please keep all the copies of newspapers containing announcements and news to be given to our press agent, who will come to pay your bill, on the same day of our morning visit to your office”.²⁴

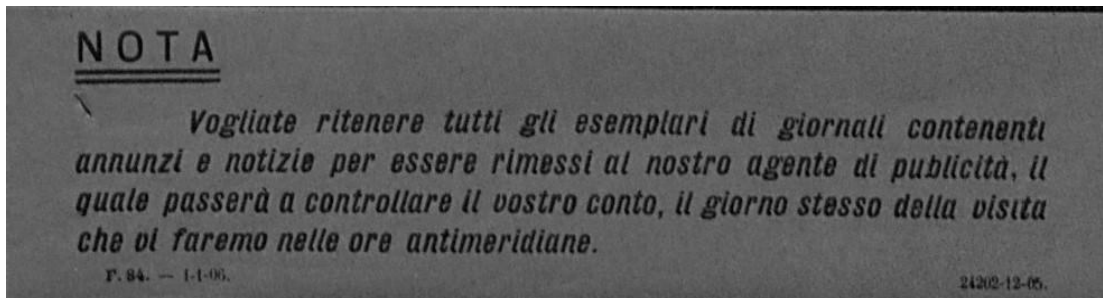


Figure 61: Paper slip requesting newspaper editors to retain copies of the publications containing news and adverts on the Wild West show. Courtesy of American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Buffalo Bill Collection, Folder 5, Box 1.



Figure 62: Press crew advertising the Wild West show in Rome, 11 March, 1906. Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Museum and grave, Golden, CO.

What was the effect of this mediatic echo chamber on the Italians? Their reactions were varied, much as they had been during the 1890 tour. Yet, this time press reports

²⁴ See Figure 61.

are less characterized by surprise and naivety, and more by a shrewd understanding of the workings of American advertising and of its effect on human psychology. In the sixteen years between the shows, the Americanization of advertising had spread like an oil stain, owing to the popularity of channels such as circuses, itinerant shows, and vaudeville (the latter having fleetingly appeared in Italy during the late 19th century). The Italian public had, therefore, become more and more acquainted with this kind of campaign—which artfully used, and sometimes abused (as in the case of the impostor S. F. Cody), the techniques which Cody, Burke, and Barnum had pioneered.²⁵

In Lombardy, the *Gazzetta di Pavia*, greeted Cody enthusiastically but knowingly: “welcome Buffalo Bill, announced by a prodigious promotion”.²⁶ The newspaper *L'Eco di Bergamo*, also from Lombardy, announced that “Buffalo Bill [...] blazing on the wings of publicity, is now known to everybody”.²⁷ For *Il Cittadino di Mantova*, the show posters were “impressive, attracting increasing audience interest”.²⁸ A significant number of newspapers, all over Italy, defined the Wild West show’s commercial campaign as “advertising, on a very large scale, made with American standards”, and recognized this as the key element in the growth of audience interest: “the real craving for curiosity does not cease, it is the fruit of a truly American publicity, American made”.²⁹ However, far from attracting unrestrained praise, this kind of promotion was often acknowledged as an alien element, a cultural import from America, which stirred an unhealthy “compulsive curiosity”.³⁰ In Perugia, Tuscany, *L'Unione Liberale* reported a campaign which had an overwhelming effect on the public: “[...] the whole of Perugia was *èpatée*, *étonnée* by the obsessive advertisement[...]”.³¹ Of a similar opinion was the

²⁵ See Joe Dobrow, *Pioneers of Promotion*.

²⁶ “Ben venga Buffalo Bill, preannunciato da una *réclame* prodigiosa”. “Buffalo Bill a Pavia”, *La Gazzetta di Pavia*, Pavia, 18-19/04/1906, p. 3.

²⁷ “Buffalo Bill, questo nome tanto suggestivo e caratteristico per il suo selvaggio significato [...] e per lo sfolgorio sulle ali della *réclame*, è ormai noto a tutti”. “Buffalo Bill a Bergamo”, *L'Eco di Bergamo*, Bergamo, 05-06/05/1906, p. 1.

²⁸ “Tutti i negozi sono inondati degli impressionanti manifesti di Buffalo Bill che attirano sempre più l’attenzione del pubblico”. “I manifesti di Buffalo Bill”, *Il Cittadino di Mantova*, Mantua, 08/04/1906, p. 2.

²⁹ “Dopo l’esperienza di Sabato nessuno saprà negare l’efficacia di una ‘*réclame*’ fatta su larghissime basi, con criterio Americano”. “Buffalo Bill’s Ecc.”, *Il Veneto*, Padua, 16/04/1906, p. 2. “Non cessa la vera smania di curiosità frutto della *réclame* veramente Americana ed americanamente fatta”. “Buffalo Bill”, *L'Eco d'Italia*, Genoa, 16/03/1906, p. 3.

³⁰ “[...]quasi morbosa curiosità solleticata maggiormente dall’ *americanissima réclame*”. “Chi è Buffalo Bill”, *La Libertà*, Padua, 12/04/1906, p.2.

³¹ “[...] tutta Perugia *èpatée*, *étonnée*, dalla ossessionante *réclame*[...]”. “L’arrivo della Compagnia”, *L'Unione Liberale*, Perugia, 30-31/03/1906, p. 3.

columnist of *L'Ordine*, from Como, who told of a town dominated by Cody's advertising and questioned the covetousness of merchants who became eager tools of publicity:

Buffalo here, Buffalo there, Buffalo inside our heads, before our eyes, in our ears, it was a magnificent conquest of the city, magnificently made, based on huge posters [...] a staggering amount of leaflets, sheets, brochures, pamphlets, widely distributed with a genuinely American profusion and prodigality [...] On the other hand we must recognize that these sons of America have got nerve, at least in subjugating our good merchants, who hurriedly plastered their shop windows with the grandeur of Buffalo, hoping for a good injection of free-tickets. Ow! Not in vain, you grocers, hoteliers, shoemakers, butchers, etc. etc. have converted your windows into exhibitions of ... human game.³²

Starting from an analogous perspective the left-wing newspaper, *Il Progresso*, from Mantua, offered a surprisingly lucid analysis of the power of the Wild West show's advertising, and of the colossal development of the marketing industry in America:

Buffalo Bill [...] manages to impose his name in such a powerful way, that the public is dragged even against its own will [...] Buffalo Bill is American and everything he does is affected by his origin. In America, advertisement has assumed hyperbolic proportions, unknown to us, for a very obvious reason: because in that country the fever of competition and the need to impose oneself onto the attention of the general public, distracted by a huge amount of diversions, have extraordinarily refined all the resources that human intelligence can suggest [...].³³

These comments are the sign of a heightened maturity of the Italian audiences, who—thanks to an increase in mass education, the influence of political doctrines such as socialism which exhorted the awakening of class consciousness, and the growth of behavioural sciences which fostered a reflective and ethical lifestyle—were becoming less and less the acritical, passive spectators described by previous scholarship on the Wild West show.³⁴

³² “Buffalo qui, Buffalo là, Buffalo in testa, negli occhi, nelle orecchie, é stata una magnifica conquista della città magnificamente fatta a base di enormi manifesti[...] una quantità sbalorditiva di foglietti, fogliettini, opuscoli, opuscoletti, diffusi a larga mano con una profusione ed una prodigalità veramente americana[...] Del resto bisogna riconoscere che han dello spirito questi figli dell' America, dimostrato almeno nel soggiogare i nostri buoni esercenti, che si affrettarono ad impiantare sui loro negozi le grandiosità di Buffalo, con la speranza di una buona iniezione di biglietti gratis. Ahi! Non invano, o salumai, albergatori, calzolai, macellai, ecc. ecc. convertiste le vostre vetrine in mostre di... selvaggina umana”. “Dà spettacolo a spettacolo”, *L'Ordine*, Como, 30/04/1906, p. 2.

³³ “Buffalo Bill [...] riesce ad imporre il suo nome in un modo così prepotente, che il pubblico ne é trascinato anche contro la sua stessa volontà [...] Buffalo Bill è Americano e tutto ciò che egli fa risente della sua origine. In America la *réclame* ha assunto proporzioni iperboliche, ignote a noi, per una ragione molto evidente: perché in quel paese la febbre della concorrenza e il bisogno d' imporsi all'attenzione del gran pubblico, distratto da una quantità enorme di occupazioni, hanno affinato straordinariamente tutte le risorse che l'ingegno umano può suggerire[...]”. “Buffalo Bill: Impressioni”, *Il Progresso*, Mantua, 19/04/1906, p.3.

³⁴ See, for instance, Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, and Julia Stetler's PhD dissertation.

Chapter 7.2. Buffalo Bill Cody and Major John M. Burke among the Italians: Shrewd Architects of the Congress of the Rough Riders of the World

In 1906, Cody's representation in the Italian press changed significantly from the image which had been carefully moulded during the 1890 tour. This time, most newspapers were aware that the real name of Buffalo Bill was Cody, although many remembered it for the wrong reasons. The memory of the bicycle versus horse contests organized by S. F. Cody still lived in the Italian public's mind and appeared to merge with older recollections of Buffalo Bill Cody, to form one hybrid character whose reputation was somehow suspended between authenticity and pretence. Alerted to this existing misunderstanding, Burke and W. F. Cody hastened to limit the damage and promptly rectify the story in press interviews, reassuring the public that they were presenting the original Wild West show with the true Buffalo Bill.

An analysis of the 1906 press reports reveals that the highly romanticized image of Buffalo Bill the frontier hero that had circulated in 1890 was replaced in articles during the second Italian tour with the authoritative title "Colonel Cody", to highlight his new militaristic status. On the rare occasions when the depiction of W. F. Cody as a prairie king did appear, it was charged with hyperbolic language and ironic undertones, and mostly used to elicit a comedic effect. For instance, the Rome satirical newspaper, *Sancio Panza*, facetiously designated Bill Cody as "the greatest scout in the world, indeed the last of the great scouts", to echo the title of the book published by Cody's sister, Helen, only a few years before. Adding: "[...] he is frightful and grandiose at the same time. He is the terror and the delight of America, the reclamer of the plains, the purifier of wild Indians [...]".³⁵ Although Cody was still an admired entertainer, and was even envied by the Italian bourgeoisie for his phenomenal entrepreneurial qualities, a scrutiny of the press coverage highlights that his star no longer seemed to be ascending. Cody, himself, had this foreboding in Italy, despite his optimistic tone in a personal letter to his other sister, Julia: "yes dear, I believe my luck has changed".³⁶ Several Italian newspapers wrote, in fact, of

³⁵ "É il più grande esploratore del mondo, anzi l'ultimo dei grandi esploratori, [...] è il più valente dei tiratori, la celebrità delle pianure[...] É un uomo spaventevole e grandioso allo stesso tempo. É il terrore e la delizia dell'America, il risanatore delle pianure, il purificatore degli indiani selvaggi", "Cody, Pony express, Burcke[sic.], Nube Rossa, ecc..", *Sancio Panza*, 24/03/1906 p. 1. Article signed by Yambo, pseudonym of Enrico de' Conti Novelli da Bertinoro (1874-1943), Italian science fiction writer.

³⁶ William F. Cody letter to Julia Cody Goodman, Alessandria, 1906, McCracken Research Library, William F. Cody collection MS6.0178.

an aged and stiff Buffalo Bill, who seemed to be a ghost of his former self. One such example is the sarcastic caricature published in the pages of the Turin newspaper *Gazzetta Torinese*:

The great Cody does not fear neither the sun nor the wind nor the rain! [...] But the majestic and robust old man, who sits in the saddle like a young man who knows how to stay up there, is subject like all mortals...to colds. And last night he had a terrible cold. What humiliation for a *king of the prairies* having to surrender in the face of a common and vulgar indisposition! And the strong old man, despite the pouring rain, as usual, presented himself to the public, and with the usual broad and solemn gesture, he took off his hat, exposing... the incipient baldness crowned by his long white hair sloping on his shoulders [...].³⁷

Comments of this kind were far from unique in the Italian press. Cody's age, physical appearance, and his once-rugged nature were relentlessly debated in 1906. The newspaper from Padua, *La Libertà*, observed that: "[...] Colonel William Cody, or rather Bill Cody, does not really look like a man who lived for so long among the savages, since he is used to surround himself with all the comforts[...], he is very accurately groomed, and he is also elegant [...]."³⁸ The same paper, in a lame attempt at singing Cody's praise, dispensed instead a back-handed compliment by accidentally aging him by fifteen additional years: "[...] Colonel Cody, his tall, upright figure despite the seventy-five springs [...]."³⁹ A more positive review came from a different newspaper from Padua, *La Provincia di Padova*, which, though remaining conscious of Cody's maturity, strove to highlight his youthful attributes: "[...]the copious hair flows on his shoulders, much more white now than gray: but he youthfully holds himself up in the saddle and greets the crowd with a gesture full of energy. You would not give him another fifty years, also because he would not know what to do with them! [...]."⁴⁰ Aware that the press was exposing a very human side

³⁷ "Il grande Cody non teme né il sole né il vento né la pioggia! [...]Ma il maestoso e robusto vecchio, che sta in sella come un giovanotto che sappia starci, va soggetto come tutti i mortali ...ai raffreddori. E ieri sera era terribilmente raffreddato. Quale umiliazione per *un re delle praterie* darsi per vinto dinanzi ad una sì comune e volgare indisposizione! Ed il forte vecchio, malgrado la pioggia cadesse a bigonciuoli, si è presentato, come al solito, al pubblico, e col solito gesto ampio e solenne, si è tolto, come di consueto, il cappello, mettendo allo scoperto...l'incipiente calvizie aureolata dai lunghi capelli bianchi spioventi sulle spalle [...]", Andrea Biscaro, *Buffalo Bill è arrivato a Torino*, p. 82. Original emphasis.

³⁸ "[...] il colonnello William Cody, o meglio Bill Cody, a vederlo non sembra davvero uomo vissuto per tanto tempo in mezzo ai selvaggi, giacché suole circondarsi di tutte le comodità [...], è accuratissimo nella sua toilette ed anche elegante [...]", "Chi è Buffalo Bill", *La Libertà*, 12/04/1906, p. 2.

³⁹ "[...] il colonnello Cody, la figura alta ed eretta nonostante le settantacinque primavere[...]", "La Rappresentazione di Cody", *La Libertà*, 16/04/1906, p. 1.

⁴⁰ "[...]la copiosa capigliatura gli fluisce per le spalle assai più bianca oramai, che grigia: ma egli sta giovanilmente fermo in arcione e saluta in giro la folla con un gesto pieno di energia. Non gli si darebbero cinquanta anni, anche perché non saprebbe cosa farsene! [...]", "Buffalo Bill a Padova", *La Provincia di Padova*, 15/04/1906, p. 2.

of his self (his aging and weakening persona), at the expense of his larger than life public image, Cody decided to grant a long interview with the English-speaking journalist of the Florentine newspaper, *La Nazione*, as a way of reaffirming his image as nature's nobleman:

“[...] I long to return to my country to rest. I live in the Rocky Mountains region. I have a palace in a city that is called, in fact, by my name, Cody. Do you want to see the photographs of my possessions? He gets out an album from the drawer of his desk.

– I have 10,000 hectares of land. My favourite hobbies are hunting and fishing ... Look! –

And we see photographed flocks of hundreds of reindeer.

– I live, sometimes, whole weeks in wooden huts. Here in Europe I never go to the hotel. I have my mobile home, which is transported and erected on wagons –

The house consists of a bedroom, a dining room, a living room, and the colonel has seven servants at his personal service [...]”⁴¹

In this extract Cody masterfully depicts himself as a fine specimen of cowboy royalty. Indeed, he systematically likened his lifestyle to that of European gentry: owning land in abundance, naming towns after himself, dwelling in “a palace”, hunting, and having domestic staff. At the same time, in order not to appear effete, Cody also preserved a halo of Western ruggedness by claiming to be living in wooden huts and refusing to sleep in sophisticated ‘Old World’ hotels—even though evidence proves that this was not always true, as some of his letters, particularly those from the 1890 tour, were actually written on the headed paper of luxurious Italian ‘Grand Hotels’.⁴² The juxtapositions with royalty continued. Through anecdotes and allusions, Cody repeatedly brought the focus of the interview back to his affiliation with nobility; a connection which he asserted on both a symbolic and a material(istic) level. Proudly mentioning the private performance held in Rome a couple of weeks earlier in honour of the Italian royal family, he announced: “[...] I received the most joyful welcome from the king of Italy. The princess Jolanda, seeing me amid all my men, asked [her father] His Majesty Vittorio Emanuele III: is

⁴¹ “[...] Anelo di tornare al mio paese per riposarmi. Io abito nella regione delle Montagne Rocciose. Ho un palazzo in una città che si chiama, appunto, dal mio nome, Cody. Volete vedere le fotografie dei miei possedimenti? Cava un album dal cassetto di un suo scrittoio. - Possiedo 10.000 ettari di terreno. I miei passatempi favoriti sono la caccia e la pesca... Guardate! - E vediamo fotografate a stormi centinaia di renne. Io abito a volte, settimane intere in capanne di legno. Qui in Europa non vado mai all'albergo. Ho la mia casa mobile, che si trasporta e si erige su vagoni. La casa si compone di una camera di una sala da pranzo di un salotto, e il colonnello ha sette domestici addetti al suo servizio particolare[...]”, “Un colloquio di Jarro con Buffalo Bill”, *La Nazione*, 03/04/1906, p. 2.

⁴² Letter from Grand Hotel Alfred Hauser, Naples, 15/02/1890, McCracken Research Library, William F. Cody Collection, MS 4, series 1b, box 2, folder 11, McCracken Research library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY.

he the king? Yes, answered your sovereign, he is the king of all these people [...]”.⁴³
And again, launching himself into a panegyric of rewards received from the crowned heads of half Europe, Cody declared:

His Majesty Vittorio Emanuele gave me a precious cigarette case and he sent me a very cordial letter [...] Once, in Monaco, the prince regent Leopold avowed to me the doubt that these horses were trained to act wild and asked me to allow him to approach some of them during an exercise. One of the horses which the prince had approached, not only threw the cowboy to the ground; but also hit the prince who fell flat. As a reward for the assurance and at the same time for the contusion he received, the prince removed this ring from his finger and gave it to me. It is the precious ring, with blue enamel, with the initials of the prince, that Buffalo Bill always wears in the middle finger of his right hand. On his tie he has a pin with initials given to him by the king of England; on the cuffs two buffalo heads, covered in gemstones, a gift from the grand duke Alexei of Russia [...].⁴⁴

These tales of gifts and endorsement from European aristocracy were essential to substantiate Cody’s importance as a ‘high-rank’ public figure, as well as being a way to restore his image as an honest and respectable showman, at a time when the press was working to diminish both his personal and professional profile.

On this matter, one way in which the newspapers tainted Cody’s image was by spreading recurrent allegations and doubts about the authenticity of the trick riding stunts and the crew he hired. Indeed, the Wild West show’s overall authenticity was questioned in the 1906 press reports with an unprecedented insistence. This, I argue, was likely to have been a consequence of the ill-repute that Italians associated with W. F. Cody’s name, because of S. F. Cody’s past exploits—although other causes were also at play, such as the rise in socialist and anti-capitalist thought. A debate on whether the “Congress of the Rough Riders of the World” was an authentic exposition of human races or should rather be considered a mere circus also arose in the press reviews. Similarly, the authenticity of the Native performers

⁴³ “Ho avuto dal re d’Italia la più lieta accoglienza. La principessina Jolanda vedendomi in mezzo a tutti i miei uomini domandò a S. M. Vittorio Emanuele III: E questo è il re? Sì le rispose il vostro sovrano, è il re di tutta questa gente”. “Un colloquio di Jarro con Buffalo Bill”, *La Nazione*, 03/04/1906, p. 2. This was the first time the Italian royal family attended the Wild West show, having missed the 1890 show due to the death of Archduke Amedeo of Aosta-Spain, son of King Victor Emmanuel II, a few days before the show’s arrival in Italy.

⁴⁴ “S. M. Vittorio Emanuele mi ha regalato un prezioso portasigarette e mia fatto indirizzare una lettera cordialissima. [...] Una volta a Monaco il principe reggente Leopoldo mi espose il dubbio che questi cavalli fossero ammaestrati e volleagli permettersi di avvicinarsi ad alcuni di essi, durante un esercizio. Uno dei cavalli al quale il principe s’era avvicinato, non solo gettò a terra il cowboy; ma urtò il principe che cadde disteso. Il premio della convinzione e della contusione ricevuta, il principe si tolse quest’anello dal dito e me lo donò. É il preziosissimo anello, con smalto azzurro, le cifre del principe, che Bufalo [sic.] Bill porta sempre nel medio della mano destra. Alla cravatta ha lo spillo con cifre donategli dalla re d’Inghilterra; ai polsini due teste di bufalo, in brillanti, dono del granduca Alessio di Russia[...]”. “Un colloquio di Jarro con Buffalo Bill”, *La Nazione*, 03/04/1906, p. 2.

was debated at great length in Italy (a matter which merits a special subchapter in this work).⁴⁵

All these rumours severely annoyed Cody, who undertook the interview with *La Nazione* to halt the spread of gossip: “In my show [...] there is nothing artificial. The Indians, the Mexicans, the Cossacks, the Japanese, they do what they were doing in their countries, I have not taught them anything”.⁴⁶ In fact, such statements did not always coincide with reality, Cody and his associates were not averse to slightly twisting the truth about some of the performers’ lives in order for them to better suit the roles in their pageant. For example, recent research has proved that the Cossacks were formed by a group of horsemen from the Guria region of Georgia, while the Native performers were sometimes advertised as belonging to tribes other than their own, such as Apache, Arapahoe, and Cheyenne, in order to display enhanced ethnic diversity in the show—not to mention the fact that some of the Native performers had been employed as extras in the ‘Battle of the Boxers’ on other occasions.⁴⁷ Given this was common practice in the show business of the era, it is easy to see how, for Cody and his staff, such twists would not be considered mystifications, but were rather condoned as legitimate simplifications or adaptations aimed at maximizing the appreciation of the acts by the public.

Another sign of Cody’s waning reception in 1906 can be detected in the press coverage which focused on his agent, John M. Burke. A scrutiny of the corpus of press accounts from the “Congress of the Rough Riders” tour reveals that, while Burke barely featured in the 1890 press reports, in 1906 he became much more visible. Bizarre as it might sound, rather than profusely celebrating the hero Buffalo Bill, several Italian newspapers instead dedicated a lot of attention, interviews and full columns, to promote his publicist. And, what is perhaps even more peculiar, some of the traits and attributes once employed to define Cody were now being projected by the Italian press onto Burke. The weekly publication, *Il Venerdì della Contessa*, from Turin, addressed him as: “Major Burke, manly soldier figure, a close

⁴⁵ See Chapter 7.4.

⁴⁶ “Nel mio spettacolo[...] non vie è nulla di artificioso. Gl’indiani, i messicani, i cosacchi, i giapponesi, fanno quello che erano abituati a fare nel loro paesi, io non ho ad essi insegnato nulla”. “Un colloquio di Jarro con Buffalo Bill”, *La Nazione*, 03/04/1906, p. 2.

⁴⁷ See Irakli Makharadze, *Georgian Trick Riders in American Wild West Shows, 1890s-1920s* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2015).

friend of the Colonel”.⁴⁸ *La Gazzetta di Pavia*, from Pavia, Lombardy, also provided a gallant, Cody-esque depiction of the Wild West’s press agent: “Burke is a handsome man, dashing, robust, strong; his masculine face is animated by two bright and vivid eyes, his sturdy mouth adorned with two curiously placed moustaches give him a nice and attractive physiognomy”.⁴⁹ Portraits of his face, which the Wild West’s press crew provided as advertisements to newspaper editors, were often published in conjunction with those of Cody. Yet, while many of Cody’s sketches had him on horseback, and were therefore rather small, so as to include his full figure, Burke’s images were close-up headshots, and were often published a day or two before those representing Cody, reflecting Burke’s early arrival to organize press conferences. This contributed to some confusion, or at least loosening, of the hierarchy of importance between the two men, in ways that favoured Burke.

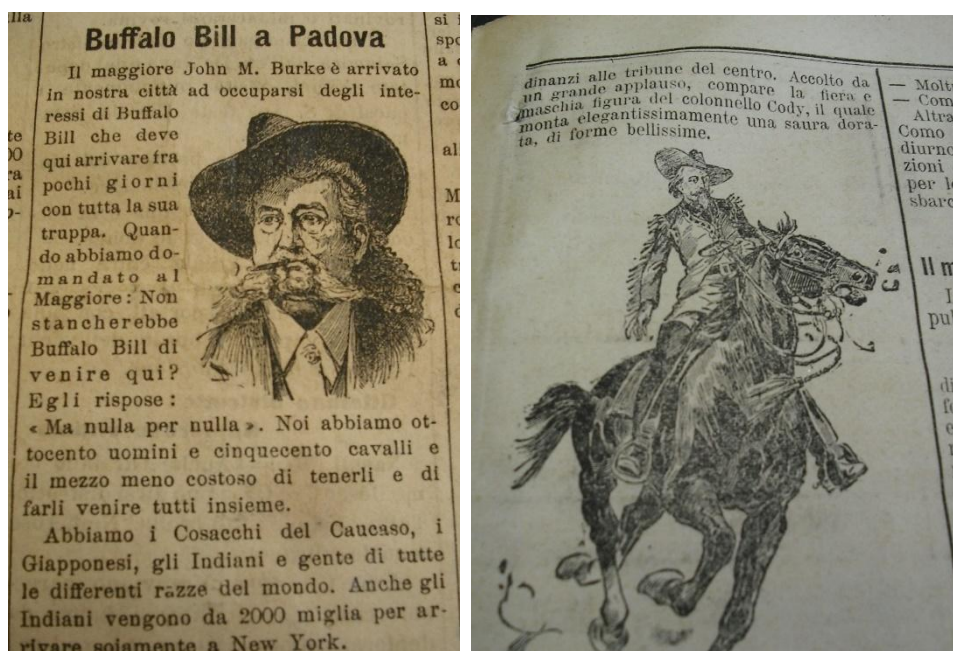


Figure 63 and Figure 64: Illustration of John Burke in *La Libertá*, Padua, 10/04/1906, and the illustration of Buffalo Bill in *La Provincia di Como*, Como, 27/04/1906.

As author Joe Dobrow defined him, Burke was an extremely shrewd agent, and though he was always better at promoting others rather than himself, he recognized that through these arrangements he could carve his own personal niche of myth,

⁴⁸ “Il maggiore Burke, maschia figura di soldato, amicissimo del colonnello”. “W.F. Cody Buffalo Bill”, *Il Venerdì della Contessa*, Turin, 21/04/1906, p. 6; also cited in Andrea Biscaro, *Buffalo Bill è arrivato a Torino*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ “Burke é un bell’uomo, aitante, robusto, forte; la sua faccia maschia animata da due occhi vivi e lucenti la sua bocca robusta adornata di due mustacchi poggiati a modo curioso fanno di lui una fisionomia simpatica e attraente”. “Burke”, *Gazzetta di Pavia*, Pavia, 15-16/04/06, p. 1.

while still legitimately promoting Cody.⁵⁰ And this is evident in tall tales circulating in the Italian press about Burke's alleged fight against Indians, and an even more improbable attack endured during the Civil War—despite the fact that “Arizona” Burke never served, at any point, in the U.S. military.

John Bruke [sic.] is a man in his sixties, with big shoulders, an athletic and nice figure. Two white whiskers descend along his cheeks, giving him the appearance, rather than of an old soldier, of a rich American shopkeeper. He does not know a word of Italian and he chatters badly in French, but the lawyer Mario Pettinati translated for us [...] John Bruke [sic.] is a brave man whose left cheek furrowed by a terrible knife stroke, lashed by a black man during the secession war, and a head scar earned while fighting the red-skins.⁵¹

Whether he was narrating Buffalo Bill's or his own deeds, Burke undoubtedly indulged in a good deal of fable. In this, Burke was his absolute best self, having had decades of practice behind him.⁵² This natural inclination was an aspect which the Italian newspapers did not fail to document: “when John Burke gets inflamed it is during the accounts he gives of the life of Colonel Cody, who was his youthful companion in dangerous war adventures against the Indians called ‘red-skins’”, commented *Il Messaggero* from Rome.⁵³ Burke's cordiality and mouthy charisma did make a visible impact in Italy, but his rhetorical tricks did not always beguile journalists as much as he wished. Some, like the columnist of *La Gazzetta del Popolo* from Turin, had caught on to him, and thus revelled in depicting Burke in a parodic key, by using his own sensationalistic style of speech to describe him:

Burke does not speak English, but he writes in all the languages and knows all sciences, he is a walking encyclopedia and a utopian genius. He dreams of the fraternity of nations and sings it while describing the parade of the Knights in his circus [...] he is a subtle humorist and a distinguished philosopher; he recognizes that it is better to avoid the Indians when they are tipsy with whiskey and cries over

⁵⁰ Joe Dobrow, “The Shrewd Press Agent Who Transformed William Cody Into Larger-Than-Life Buffalo Bill” *Smithsonian Magazine*. Online. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/shrewd-press-agent-who-transformed-william-cody-into-larger-than-life-buffalo-bill-180970591/>. Last accessed 28/11/2018.

⁵¹ “John Bruke [sic.] è un uomo sulla sessantina, dalle spalle grandi, dalla figura atletica e simpatica. Due favoriti bianchi gli scendono lungo le gote, dandogli l'aspetto, piuttosto che di un vecchio soldato, di un ricco negoziante Americano. Non sa una parola di Italiano e ciancia male il Francese, ma l'avvocato Mario Pettinati ci tradusse [...] John Bruke [sic.], è un valoroso che ha la guancia sinistra solcata da un terribile colpo di coltello, vibratogli da un negro nella guerra di secessione, e una cicatrice alla testa guadagnata nel combattere le pelle rosse [sic.]”. “Buffalo Bill a Roma, il Maggiore John Bruke [sic.]”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 22/03/06, p. 5.

⁵² In addition to Joe Dobrow's recent work on Burke, see Barbara Barker's *Ballet or Ballyhoo: the American careers of Maria Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli, and Giuseppina Morlacchi* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984).

⁵³ “Dove John Burke s' infiamma é nella relazione che fa della vita del Colonnello Cody che in giovinezza fu suo compagno nelle pericolose avventure di guerra contro gli indiani, detti ‘pelli-rosse’”. “Buffalo Bill a Roma, il Maggiore John Bruke [sic.]”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 22/03/06 p. 5.

the fate of the Sioux [sic.], exterminated by his own president; but he concurs with the pioneers of civilization that their destruction was an apostolical work.⁵⁴

In addition to being the subjects of such ironic portrayals in daily publications, Cody, Burke and other members of the Wild West show crew received a great deal of attention from explicitly satirical journals, which attempted to use their characters and images as analogies to explain socio-political issues of the time. In 1906, they were being targeted, in particular, in illustrated satire in the form of cartoons and vignettes, which, benefiting from the latest innovations in typography, had begun to be published in dazzling colours, and represented an eye-catching feature of many Italian publications. Because of the abundance of these visual sources there will be a specific sub-chapter dedicated to their analysis.⁵⁵

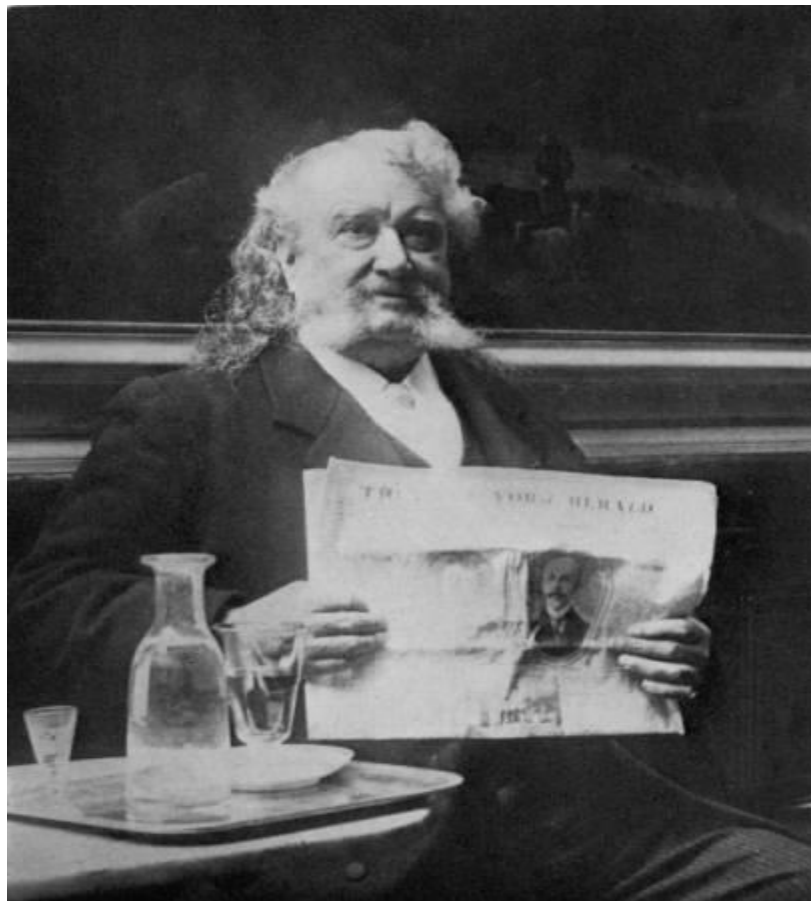


Figure 65: John Burke in the Caffé Greco in Rome 1906.
Courtesy of McCracken Research Library.

⁵⁴ “Burke non parla che l’inglese, ma scrive in tutte le lingue e conosce tutte le scienze, é un’enciclopedia ambulante e un utopista di genio. Sogna l’affratellamento delle nazioni e lo canta descrivendo la sfilata dei Cavalieri del suo circo[...] è sottile umorista e filosofo insigne; riconosce che è meglio evitare gli indiani quando sono alticci di whisky e piange la sorte dei Sioux [sic.], sterminati dal suo principale; ma acconsente coi pionieri della civiltà che la loro distruzione fu opera d’apostolo.” “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, Turin, 20/04/1906 p. 6, quoted in Andrea Biscaro, *Buffalo Bill è arrivato a Torino*, p. 46.

⁵⁵ See chapter 7.5.

Chapter 7.3. Show Cowboys and Rough Riders: role models, exotic curiosities, and reflections of ethnic rankings

Whether Cody wanted it or not, his role as the official leader of the Rough Riders required a modest gesture of abnegation, consisting in turning the spotlight away from himself—for once—to gallantly direct it towards other show members. After all, they were his recruits, who were meant to become rising stars in the entertainment business and pass on his tradition. Show cowboys and the motley group of performers that formed the Congress of the Rough Riders of the World were, therefore, presented as the show's highlights and naturally grabbed a great deal of interest from Italian crowds and the media. The once-popular horse-riding and broncho-breaking challenges had been tainted by the swindles of imitator S. F. Cody and were abandoned in this tour in favour of the theatricality of other equestrian tricks, and the pomp of the militaristic display. Thus, show cowboys were not catapulted into the whirl of media attention as they had been during the 1890 challenge with the Italian *butteri*, yet they still enjoyed a position of prominence in the show, which in turn influenced the audience's appreciation.

Cowboys endured as symbols of white masculinity and were, if anything, lionized on this tour more than they had previously been, which was partly an opportunistic response to Roosevelt's open glorification of the cowboy figure in American culture. Cowboys continued to be in fashion, in Europe as they were in the U.S. They also strongly appealed to Italians for their rustic masculinity which conveyed at the same time images of dexterity, spontaneity, and wit. The qualities had an enormous pull especially on the provincial audience of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, people of rural and petit bourgeois extraction, who struggled to identify with the inconsistent models of manhood of the time, that appeared to be split between a rigid dichotomy: rich-urban-effete-overrefined and poor-rural-tough-uncivilized.⁵⁶ Italian masculinity was also beset by the typecast of indolence and passivity, which, as scholar Silvana Patriarca maintains, intersected Italian manhood of every social class, at home and abroad.⁵⁷ The ruggedness and vitality of the Wild West show's

⁵⁶ Idea of wholesome/unwholesome masculinity were influenced, among other arguments by Lombroso and his acolytes, who in their treatises—such as *The Criminal Man* (Lombroso), *Speech in Normal Men, in the Degenerates and in the Criminals* (Niceforo), *Anthropology of the Poor* (Niceforo)—gave a 'scientific' backing to the stereotypes of the poor and rural man (often a southerner) as morally iniquitous, and labelled as 'normal' only those who mirrored the virtues of the liberal bourgeoisie.

⁵⁷ See Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices*.

cowboys offered an accessible and bracing example for many of them. Arguably, Buffalo Bill's cowboys also provided a revitalizing alternative model to the alienation of the recently-formed class of Italian factory workers, who, disregarding the warnings of left-wing propaganda organs, attended Cody's show in droves, and—to the Socialists' dismay—thoroughly enjoyed it.⁵⁸

The predilection that Italians nurtured for cowboys comes to the surface in news reports. Johnny Baker, who had been with the show for decades and had already visited Italy in 1890, was given full lustre with an individual stunt as an acrobatic sharpshooter—an act which had once belonged to Annie Oakley. Like Oakley, his youthful image was exploited in the show long after the culmination of his biological juvenility. Scholar Martin Woodside noted that, thanks to this role, Baker was framed as a “paragon of developing manhood”.⁵⁹ By 1906, at the tender age of thirty-seven, Baker had finally ceased to be advertised in promotional material as “the Cowboy Kid”, only to be re-branded with a slightly more nebulous sobriquet of “young marksman”.⁶⁰ In this tour, Italians revered him, demonstrating peaks of enthusiasm which rivalled, and often surpassed, those elicited by Buffalo Bill. *L'Eco d'Italia*, from Genoa, announced: “Great applause [...] to the famous American shooter Johnny Bacher (sic.), who gave proof of his amazing ability”.⁶¹ The performance of Baker consisted, according to Rome's *Il Messaggero*, of “[...]a sample of the pigeon shooting, how to shoot and how to hit in all possible and imaginable positions, even with the head on the ground and the feet up in the air”.⁶² For the Lombard daily, *L'Eco di Bergamo*, Baker “amazed the crowd with his precise shots, firing in the most uncomfortable positions. This was the most beautiful and entertaining number in the show”.⁶³ Ultimately, the northern newspaper, *La*

⁵⁸ *La Riscossa: Giornale Settimanale Socialista della Provincia di Como*, 06/05/1906, p. 1,

⁵⁹ Martin Woodside, “Wild West Children: Performing the Frontier”, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 10, n.1 (2017), pp. 40-61, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Official 1906 Milan program, p. 38, McCracken Research Library, William F. Cody Collection MS.6.

⁶¹ “Grandi applausi [...] pure al celebre tiratore americano Johnny Bacher (sic.) che diede prova di abilità stupefacente”. “Buffalo Bill's Wild West”, *L'Eco d'Italia*, Genova, 15/03/1906, p. 2.

⁶² “Johnny Baker fa vedere un campione del tiro al piccione, come si tira e come si colpisce in tutte le posizioni possibili ed immaginabili, anche con la testa per terra ed i piedi all' aria”. “Buffalo Bill a Roma- La prima rappresentazione”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 23/03/1906, p. 2.

⁶³ “Johnny Baker ha stupito la folla con i suoi colpi precisi, sparati nelle posizioni più disagiati. È stato questo il numero più bello e divertente”. “La prima rappresentazione di Buffalo Bill-lo spettacolo”, *L'Eco di Bergamo*, 07-08/05/1906, p. 3.

provincial di Brescia, decreed “Jonny Baker proves even superior to Cody, performing, in difficult positions, precision shots with the shotgun”.⁶⁴



JOHNNY BAKER, IL GIOVANE TIRATORE.

Johnny Baker nacque a O'Fallon's Bluff's, sulle rive del »South Platte River« nel Nebraska occidentale nel 1870. Suo padre è il celebre »Old Lew Baker« il proprietario della fattoria »Lew Baker's, O'Fallon's Bluff Ranch«, che abita presentemente alla frontiera. Quel luogo è uno di quelli spesso nominati dalla storia. Gli incidenti, gli episodi e gli attacchi degli Indiani si ripeterono infinitamente. Johnny là passò i primi anni della sua infanzia, noncurante dei pericoli temuti perfino dai più coraggiosi, ed i suoi primi allarmi non ebbero nulla d'immaginario, giacché erano causati dalle terribili minacce dei Sioux, i selvaggi dal cuor di pietra.

Dalla sua infanzia, allevato dai pionieri, e spesso seduto sulle ginocchia dei più celebri guerrieri, civilizzatori delle frontiere, egli assistette al decadere della caccia al bufalo ed all'arrivo di colui che lo sostituisce vantaggiosamente »The longhorn Texas steer« (il toretto del Texas, dalle corna lunghe), come pure a quello del suo inevitabile compagno, »Il Cowboy«.

L'apparizione di quei bravi e generosi »Rough Riders« delle pianure, che non conoscevano il loro dovere, sempre in sella, pronti a qualunque pericolo, a soffrire la fame, a rischiare la vita per la devozione verso il loro capo, fu per lui il primo concepimento d'un mondo nuovo. Questa rivelazione lo tormentò e gli fece nascere l'ambizione d'acquistare le numerose qualità, necessarie al vero Cowboy americano.

Allorché il »Pony express«, la Stage Coach (Diligenza) ed i carri furono atterrati dalla locomotiva, la stazione di Baker divenne inutile e »Old Lew«, dopo aver fatto bagaglio, si diresse verso North Platte, piccola città la cui situazione sulla via dei trasporti, fece rapidamente divenir fiorente. Là si fece fabbricare una bella casetta che divenne il quartiere generale degli »Old Timers« (quelli d'un tempo che fu) e più d'un »tender foot« (novizio) può rammentarsi i racconti commoventi che vi furono detti sopra incidenti della vita delle



JOHNNY BAKER TIRA COL SUO WINCHESTER.

Figure 66: Official 1906 Milan program, p. 38.

McCracken Research Library, William F. Cody Collection MS.6.

This special interest in Buffalo Bill's marksmen and cowboys went beyond the figure of Baker. Articles and interviews with other show cowboys became recurrent and much anticipated features in the news. During this tour, more Italian journalists could speak and understand English, which made these exchanges easier and more frequent than they had been in 1890. Tom Webb was another favourite cowboy in the show, a winner of much audience attention due to his striking individuality, beyond his dexterity with the lasso. In the memoir of John D. Young, a Texas cattleman acquainted to both Cody and Webb, he is described:

Although an uneducated product of the brush; he had a remarkable personality. He was tall and handsome; on horseback he was indeed a striking figure. The last time I saw Buffalo Bill he told me that Tom Webb always distinguished himself from other riders. Over in England, Buffalo Bill said, Tom would retire to his dressing room after the performance was over, take off his cowboy clothes, emerge in attire

⁶⁴ “Jonny Baker si rivela anche superiore a Cody, eseguendo, in difficili posizioni, tiri di precisione col fucile”. “Cowboys”, *La Provincia di Brescia*, 09/05/1906, p. 2.

of the latest fashion, including a bee-gum hat, and then mingle with the admiring nobility.⁶⁵

From these words, it is easy to see how the multifaceted character of Tom Webb would fascinate Italians, who could picture him as the quintessential cowboy who also possessed a somewhat European flair. A reporter from *Il Messaggero*, Rome's major daily newspaper, managed to snatch an interview with him. The lengthy conversation involved a discussion about horse culture, a favourite topic among Romans, along with a personal exposé of the dynamics between crew members and Cody behind the scenes of the Wild West show, resulting in a piece of journalism which is so revealing and detailed as to warrant an extensive quotation here:

This time, as it was back in 1890, Buffalo Bill is still fashionable, in public gatherings, in trams, in the omnibus everyone talks about him, about his company, and he is the starting point of a conversation between two friends who meet. Such is Rome, not even the span of years can change its atavistic admiration for all spectacles in which mankind would demonstrate its prowess, courage and maybe its temerity. One of the best champions of the company is Tom Webb; I find him near the farrier's tent busy choosing a pair of shoes for one of the colts that he will later saddle. It is by looking at these and through a careful examination of all mounts - he tells me - that the rider develops his sense of security. A buckle badly hooked, an iron that shakes, and man and horse are no longer themselves [...] Have you had good reception in the Italian regions that you have just crossed? –Excellent, apart from certain places on the Riviera, where we were kept at distance due to the rumor of the disease of our horses. -Indeed, I wanted to ask you something about them. Are they really untamed or are they trained to act like they are? – Some are, others are not; at present we have five totally wild, resisting bits and bridles. Others are accustomed to creating shows out of their rowdiness, but for Mexican, Indian and Yankee riders they can only be dangerous in case of imprudence. [...] Fascinated by the perfect order which reigns among this gathering of men of different races, I ask my kind respondent how the services are organized and how orders are communicated –As in the military– he replies –the Colonel is in charge, and since he is loved for his kindness, and he is feared for his disciplinary inflexibility, everyone obeys without asking for explanations; one carries out, however, one's duties to the best of one's ability –Did quarrels never happen among the members of the company? – Almost never, at least rarely; on the other hand, the greatest coefficient of disputes, alcohol, is forbidden here. And then we think of ourselves as being part of a family, Buffalo Bill is the great father; why should one aggrieve him with our brawls? Besides, before admitting new elements into his company, he carefully assesses their feelings- But not everyone's faces are reassuring... such as that gaucho – I dared say, pointing at a Mexican *mestizo* who groomed a horse–You mean Pedrito? He may appear as such for his bushy moustache, for his lively eye, but he is the best specimen of man and rider which ever existed. Robust, hard-working, intelligent, he has the laboriousness of the white race and the audacity and astuteness of the roughs [...].⁶⁶

⁶⁵ John D. Young and J. Frank Dobie, *A Vaquero of the Brush Country: The Life and Times of John D. Young* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1929), (1998), p. 176; Mary Brooks Picken refers to the bee-gum hat as “a colloquial term for high silk hat” probably a top hat in the *Dictionary of Costume and Fashion: Historic and Modern* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), p. 160.

⁶⁶ “Anche questa volta come nel 1890 Buffalo Bill è di moda, nei pubblici ritrovi, nei trams, negli omnibus si parla di lui, della sua compagnia, è lo spunto al discorso fra due amici che s'incontrano. Roma è così, nè il volgere di anni potrà cambiare la sua ammirazione atavistica per tutti gli spettacoli dove l'uomo dà prova della sua valentia, del suo coraggio e magari della sua temerarietà. Uno dei migliori campioni della compagnia è Tom Webb; lo trovo presso la tenda della mascalcia occupato a



*Figure 67: Buffalo Bill's Cowboys in England.
Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, ID# 72.0191.*

scegliere un paio di ferri per uno dei puledri che deve montare. —É da questi e dalla visita accurata ai fornimenti tutti — egli mi dice — che il cavaliere deve trarre la sicurezza. Una fibbia male agganciata, un ferro che si sposti e uomo e cavallo non sono più loro stessi. [...] Aveste buona accoglienza nelle regioni Italiane or ora attraversate? — Ottima, meno che in alcuni punti della Riviera, ove ci si guardava a vista, essendosi sparsa la voce della malattia dei nostri cavalli. — Ma su questi appunto volevo domandarvi qualcosa. Sono veramente indomiti o sono ammaestrati a fingersi tali? — Alcuni si, altri no; presentemente ne abbiamo cinque assolutamente selvaggi, renitenti a morsi e a briglia. Altri son avvezzi a dar mostra di loro sfrenatezza, ma per cavalieri come i messicani, gli indiani e i yankee non presentano pericolo che in caso di disattenzione. Ma venite, vi farò vedere i cavalli stessi e ne potrete giudicare[...] Ammirato dell' ordine perfetto che regna in quell' unione di uomini di razze diverse, domando al gentile interlocutore come venga organizzato il servizio e come vengano comunicati gli ordini— Come in un esercito- egli mi risponde- il colonnello comanda, e siccome egli è amato per la sua bontà, ed è temuto per l' inflessibilità disciplinare, ognuno obbedisce senza chiedere spiegazioni; ma realizzando nell' adempimento delle proprie incombenze, tutta quella potenzialità di cui è capace— E non succedono mai liti fra i componenti la compagnia?— Se non mai, almeno raramente; del resto il maggior coefficiente delle liti, l'alcool, è proibito qui dentro. E poi ci consideriamo tutti facenti parte di una famiglia; Buffalo Bill è il gran padre; perché addolorarlo con baruffe? Egli del resto, prima di ammettere elementi nuovi nella compagnia, ne vaglia accuratamente i sentimenti. — Però non tutti hanno facce rassicuranti... ad esempio quel gaucho — arrischiavi indicandogli un messicano meticcio che strigliava un cavallo. — Chi Pedrito? Quello là può sembrarvi tale per i suoi baffi folti, per il suo occhio vivace, ma è la miglior pasta d'uomo e di cavallerizzo che esista. Robusto, laborioso, intelligente, ha della razza bianca l'attività e della rozza l'audacia e l'astuzia[...]. “Un' Intervista con Tom Webb”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 24/03/1096, p. 4.



Figure 68: Tom Webb's portrait from *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 24/03/1906, p. 4.

The journalist's comment about the sinister air of the Mexican gaucho is a telling clue about who the Italians included in the category of "manifest manhood", to use the fitting definition coined by historian Amy S. Greenberg, and those who were excluded.⁶⁷ According to such logic, the North American cowboy appeared hierarchically superior, physically and hence morally, to the *mestizo* vaquero. This signals the extent to which the narrative of Anglo-Saxon supremacy had begun to gain ground also among Italians, themselves considered ethnically inferior outside of Italy. Such (seemingly self-defeating) rhetoric was enabled by recent scholarly works, such as Giuseppe Sergi's *La Decadenza delle Nazioni Latine* (*The Decline of the Latin Nations*) (1900), which had inexorably seeped into the national debate, percolating from highbrow to lowbrow channels.⁶⁸ Moreover, links to much-yearned, yet elusive, Celtic roots were frantically sought by Italian social anthropologists, particularly Enrico Ferri, in order to move away from—in the words of Lombroso's

⁶⁷ Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁸ After 1906, critiques of this model emerged. See the work of Napoleone Colajanni, e.g., *Latini e Anglosassoni* (1906), and the output of Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953).

disciple Alfredo Niceforo,—“the cursed race”.⁶⁹ That Cody’s show and its reception by some Italians reinforced this kind of narrative is beyond question, clear indications of this are to be found in newspapers like *L’Eco di Bergamo*, blatantly stating that: “the show that Buffalo Bill offers [...] is a glory of the Old World, the triumph of the white race”.⁷⁰ And yet, despite the disparagement of lower orders by the intelligentsia, the majority of Italians took their own whiteness for granted, therefore meaning that these words never appeared as troubling; if they resonated at all, it was as a means of *othering* different groups and nationalities.

Racial hierarchies existed also amid the other Rough Riders, and not only between cowboys and vaqueros. Buffalo Bill was certainly among the main agents of American cultural power (although such ideas of Manifest Destiny and legitimate Anglo-Saxon conquest were not as vehemently proclaimed as in, for example, Roosevelt’s frontier club circles).⁷¹ Cody employed the expression ‘Rough Rider’ as an umbrella-term for his sample of ethnically-diverse martial manhood, but the representations of some show members significantly changed after Roosevelt’s presidential appointment. As Christine Bold noted in her article on African American Rough Riders, for Theodore Roosevelt the ‘Rough Rider’ identity was a privilege of Anglo-Saxon cowboys, that in no way could be overshadowed by the accounts of Buffalo Soldier bravery—even those who had loyally served him in the battle of San Juan Hill. Cody, therefore, complied with Roosevelt’s policy by restricting, and successively halting, the re-enactments of the Cuban battle in his show.⁷² In the 1906 Italian show program, black Rough Riders gained a mere one-line mention within the act “Cavalry exercises”, being listed as “a detachment of the 10th cavalry negro regiment”.⁷³ Furthermore, even though they performed their stunts like every other group of Rough Riders in the show, their presence appears to have been erased from any article of promotional material. In the 80-page official Milan 1906 program, housed at the McCracken research library, no picture or illustration of them is present, while the images of other groups of Rough Riders—be they Cossacks, Japanese militia or Arab dancers—abound. In the one image portraying “Roosevelt’s

⁶⁹ See works of Enrico Ferri, *Delitti e delinquenti nella scienza e nella vita* (1889), and *La delinquenza in sardegna* (1897).

⁷⁰ “Lo spettacolo che ci offre Buffalo Bill [...] É una gloria del vecchio mondo, il trionfo della razza bianca”. “Buffalo Bill a Bergamo”, *L’Eco di Bergamo*, 05-06/05/1906, p. 1.

⁷¹ See Christine Bold, *Frontier Club: Popular Westerns and Cultural Power 1880-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷² Christine Bold, “Where did the Black Rough Riders Go?”, p. 274

⁷³ Official 1906 Milan program, p. 2, McCracken Research Library, William F. Cody Collection MS.6.

Rough Riders”, the soldiers all have Caucasian features.⁷⁴ Black Rough Riders are just not visible either in the Genoa promotional brochure, examined in the beginning of this chapter; nor are they featured in the poster from Arezzo, also previously considered.⁷⁵ Even the vignettes that Burke provided to the Italian press bear no trace of them, making it rather obvious that their portraits were not included in any of the promotional sketches that went to press. Yet, thanks to a couple of brief mentions in Italian newspaper articles, their presence in the show can be documented. In the daily from Bergamo, *L' Eco di Bergamo*, and *La Stampa*, from Turin, there appeared two similar articles, overall reviews of show performances. They both asserted: “The negroes of the 10th regiment have proved to be strong and brave cavalymen”.⁷⁶ This, however, is the only press acknowledgement of their performance, showing the effects of the lack of promotion on the part of the show which allowed the Black Rough Riders’ exhibition to pass somewhat quietly among the Italians.

Moreover, the Black Rough Riders are elusive in pictures taken during the 1906 tour, both by the company’s own photographers and by external professionals and amateur photographers—a significant sample of which I retrieved during the course of this research. Their absence can be easily noticed in the series of pictures taken in Milan in 1906, of which only the original negatives survive today, held at the Civic Photographic Archive of Milan, in the Bertarelli fund.⁷⁷ The series of seven snapshots captured different ethnic groups of Rough Riders, parading or performing; Native Performers, Cossacks, Zouaves, Vaqueros, and Japanese fighters are all immortalized from a close range, but yet again, there is no sign of the cavalymen from the 10th Regiment. No specific picture of them appears even in the largest repositories of Wild West show pictures, such as the Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, in Golden (CO) and the McCracken Research Library in Cody (WY). Photos in collections held at the McCracken do feature African American workers and performers, but they fail to acknowledge their status as performers of the 10th Cavalry Regiment. One such example is the picture below, held in the MS 006 William F. Cody Collection, and titled: “African American man mounted on a horse” whose modern description simply states: “An African American man mounted on a

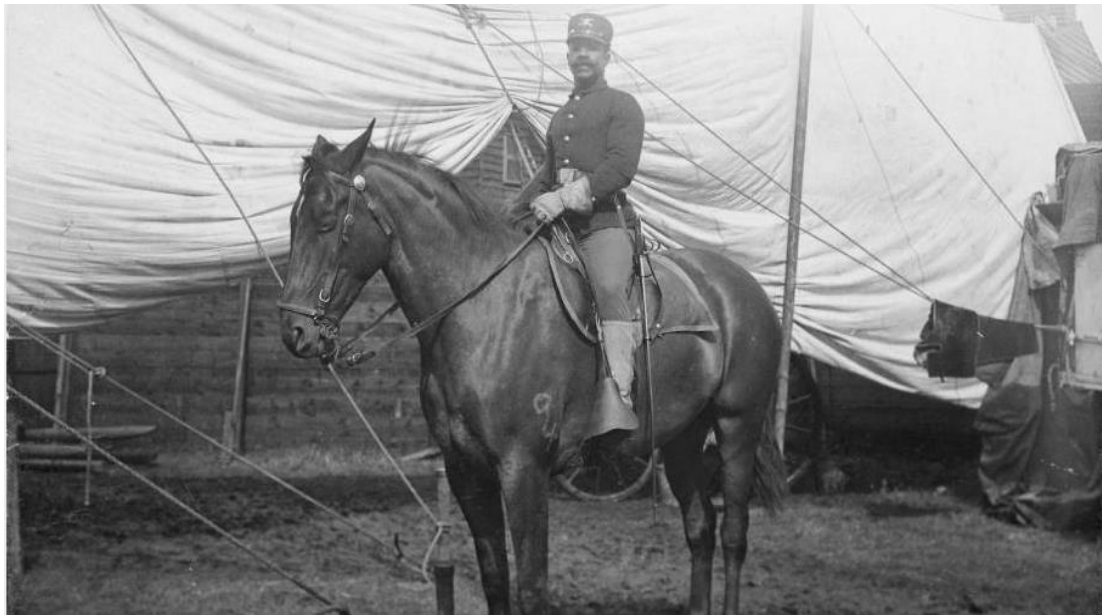
⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ See the posters in the collection of Piergiacomo Pesce and Sergio Susani, in Chapter 7.1.

⁷⁶ See *L' Eco Bergamo*, Bergamo 07-08/05/1890 and *La Stampa*, Turin, 23/04/1906.

⁷⁷ The whole series is currently unpublished.

dark horse in front of show tent in back lot of Wild West show. The man wears a hat with cavalry insignia, military uniform and gloves”.⁷⁸



*Figure 69: “African American Man Mounted on a Horse”.
Courtesy of McCracken Research Library, MS 006, William F. Cody Collections, photo id:
P.6.0097.*

If the Black Rough Riders were sidestepped by the show management and, in turn, under-appreciated by the Italian audience, the opposite happened to other groups of ‘ethnic’ Rough Riders. Mexican Vaqueros, Zouaves, Cossacks, Arab dancers and Japanese fighters aroused great interest in the Italians. This was for a very evident reason: being immortalized in their quirky attires and bright colours in all the sesquipedalian advertisements of the Wild West show, they were the acts that captured the public’s attention at first glance. Italian audiences were stunned and, at the same time, entertained by their peculiar stunts. More than anything, they were perceived as exotic oddities, somewhat akin to circus performers, their martial nature not always coming across straightforwardly.

In the newspaper reports, their reviews always appeared *after* the ones of the American cowboys and marksmen, which offers further proof of the racial hierarchy which, touted by the show’s master-narrative, permeated the Italian gaze. Curiously, different Italian cities expressed their specific preference for certain groups of Rough Riders. The newspaper *Il Cittadino di Mantova* lavishly complimented most of the performers:

[...] Before the eyes of the people from Mantua paraded, the most famous knights of the world, awakening in most of us, immense wonder [...] The agile Arab knights

⁷⁸ McCracken Research Library, MS.6 William F. Cody collections, photo identifier, P.6.0097

who gave excellent proof of their amazing ability, were greatly admired [...]the Devlin zouaves attracted the attention and applause of all the spectators, they were remarkable for the speed of their marches and counter-marches which they perfectly performed over a square in the middle of the enclosure. Then, in a very agile way, embracing rifles and having to climb a high wall—which stood at the back of the tent—they aroused the liveliest enthusiasm in the whole audience [...] Very well-liked were the gymnastic exercises of the Arabs and the Japanese. Remarkable was an athlete who alone upheld nine people. Also, the Mexicans were extremely talented in the throw of the lasso, and they distinguished themselves very much by successfully capturing the racing horses.⁷⁹

The local newspaper of Cremona, south of Milan, expressly praised the daring extravaganza of certain stunts:

A Bedouin has the nerve to spin for ten minutes by himself, two Japanese fiercely fight in a duel, and then there are deadly jumps, amazing somersaults, feats of strength, and so on. Highly entertaining is the catching of the horses with the lasso; the public applauds the ability of Mr. Oropeza “champion of the snare of Montezuma” as the program qualifies him.⁸⁰

The audience in Genoa, instead, seemed to take a particular liking for the Japanese performers and the lasso throwers:

[...] the Japanese also had an important part in the long program; perhaps, indeed, this was the best number. Fifty of them have shown truly amazing gymnastic abilities and the public here went into veritable frenzy, it was a long applause, unanimous, deafening. After the incomparable Japanese there came two competing horse-riders: one Indian and one European [...] About fifty lasso throwers performed characteristic exercises, demonstrating in all of them a perfect and singular precision.⁸¹

The “Russian” Cossacks elicited conflicting reactions in the Italians, as the events of the St. Petersburg ‘bloody Sunday’ and the repression of the Odessa revolt, occurring barely a year before, were still very much alive in the memory of the Italian working-classes, which—as socialist newspapers lamented—represented a sizeable portion of

⁷⁹ “[...] Dinnanzi agli occhi dei Mantovani sfilarono, i più famosi Cavalieri del mondo, dstando nei più, immensa meraviglia [...] Furono assai ammirati gli agilissimi Cavalieri arabi che diedero prova ottima della loro abilità stupefacente [...] attirarono l’attenzione e gli applausi di tutti gli spettatori gli zuavi Devlin notevoli per la rapidità delle loro marce e contro marce che eseguirono a perfezione sopra un quadrato in mezzo al recinto. In modo agilissimo poi, imbracciando fucili avendo la scalata ad un alto muro, che sorgeva in fondo alla tenda, suscitò il più vivo entusiasmo in tutto il pubblico[...] piacquero assai gli esercizi ginnastici degli arabi e dei giapponesi. Notevole un atleta che da solo sorresse nove persone. Anche i messicani abilissimi nel getto del laccio, si distinsero molto riuscendo a fermare i cavalli in corsa”. “Lo spettacolo di Buffalo Bill”, *Il Cittadino di Mantova*, Mantua, 19/04/1906, p. 3.

⁸⁰ “Un beduino ha il fegato di girare per dieci minuti su se stesso, due giapponesi si battono ferocemente al duello, e poi sono salti mortali, capriole mirabolanti, esperimenti di forza, ecc. Molto divertente è la presa dei cavalli col laccio; il pubblico plaude alla abilità del signor Oropeza “campione del laccio del Montezuma” così lo qualifica il programma”. “Buffalo Bill a Cremona,” *La Provincia di Cremona*, 17/04/1906, p. 2.

⁸¹ “[...] I giapponesi hanno avuto anch’essi una parte importante nel lungo programma; forse, anzi, è stato questo il miglior numero. Cinquanta di essi hanno dato prova di un’abilità ginnastica veramente straordinaria e qui il pubblico è andato in vero e proprio delirio: era un applauso lungo, unanime, assordante. Dopo gli inarrivabili giapponesi ecco scendere in lizza due cavallerizze: una Indiana ed una Europea[...]. Una cinquantina di lanciatori di laccio fanno esercizi caratteristici che ci dimostrano in tutti loro una precisione perfetta e singolare”. “La troupe di Buffalo Bill in azione”, *Il Corriere di Genova*, 13/04/1906, p. 2.

the Wild West show audience in 1906. In Rome, their performance was repeatedly booed by the audience. Rome's major newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, explained that:

The Roman public saw in the uniform of the Russian knights the symbol of autocracy and remembered the violent oppression of these brutal soldiers against the unarmed crowd and gave in to the temptation of booing. The crowd was wrong, all the Russians of Buffalo's company are natives of Georgia and are political refugees who have had to renounce their homeland, their family, fearing the infamous halter of Siberia. The boos of the Roman public have deeply grieved them. They wear, it is true, the Cossack uniform, but they do not possess the ferocious soul of the Cossacks. A polite greeting, a gentle farewell from the spectators, on this last day, would suffice to compensate them for the unintentional wrong.⁸²

The misunderstanding was resolved the following day in a Roman trattoria, where a socialist-republican association, named after the Italian patriot "Antonio Fratti", formally apologized to the Georgian Cossacks, by singing Italian and Russian revolutionary hymns. The Georgians, reported *Il Messaggero*, "sincerely thanked [them...] resolving, once again, to rebel against the yoke of the Russian autocrat, raising a toast for the freedom of the peoples subjugated by the Tsar and in the name of the great human brotherhood".⁸³



Figure 70 and Figure 71: Cossacks and Zouave in Milan in 1906.
Courtesy of the Civic Photographic Archive of Milan, Bertarelli fund.

Overall, Cowboys and Rough Riders appeared to be among the most appreciated acts in the 1906 tour of Italy. The former, because they provided the flesh and blood

⁸² "Il pubblico romano vide nella divisa dei cavalieri russi il simbolo dell' autocrazia e ricordò l'oppressione violenta di questi soldati brutali contro la folla inerme e si abbandonò alla voluttà del fischio. Ebbe torto, tutti i russi della compagnia di Buffalo sono nativi della Georgia e sono per la medesima parte profughi politici che hanno dovuto rinunciare alla patria, alla famiglia, per timore del capestro infame della Siberia. i fischi del pubblico romano li hanno vivamente addolorati. Essi vestono é vero la divisa del cosacco, ma del cosacco non hanno l'anima feroce. Basterà un saluto cortese, un addio gentile degli spettatori di quest' ultima giornata per compensarli ad usura del torto involontariamente fatto". "I cosacchi", *Il Messaggero*, 27/03/1906, p. 4.

⁸³ "I Georgiani ringraziarono sinceramente[...] affermandosi ancora una volta ribelli dal giogo dell'autocrata russo e brindarono alla libertà dei popoli soggetti allo zar ed alla grande fratellanza umana". "Una bicchierata", *Il Messaggero*, 29/03/1906, p. 4.

exemplars of a somewhat idealized model of modern, and at the same time rugged, masculinity coming from America. The latter because they represented the “exotic” ethnological element in the show and fed into the wave of popularity of so-called human zoos, even though, with the introduction of the military element, Cody’s show attempted to formally differentiate itself from other spectacles—always seeking to cultivate more highbrow perceptions. The other sensational element of the show resided in the Native American performers, in whom interest did not diminish at all in 1906, (although it was expressed in different tones than in 1890), which will be examined in the next section.

Chapter 7.4. Return of the ‘Vanishing’ Native Performers in Italy: ‘Colonized Others’ amid primitivism, infantilization and validation of authenticity

Despite the warnings of columnists and popular authors about the supposedly imminent doom of the American Indian race, profusely advertised during the 1890 tour of the Wild West show, Native performers reappeared in Europe and Italy sixteen years later, not only alive and well, but also highly skilled in their survivance and agency.⁸⁴ A group of performers of a similar size to the one from 1890 joined Cody on this European Tour. As had been the case sixteen years before, Italian newspaper sources offered inconsistent data on the number of Native Performers involved in Cody’s spectacle. *La Nazione*, from Florence, asserted that the show featured sixty-four Native Performers, while *L’Eco d’ Italia*, from Genoa, stated that there were seventy-five. *La Capitale*, from Rome, instead maintained that there were “about 40” of them in the troupe.⁸⁵

According to the “Show Indians Database” webpage, compiled by Dr. Jason Heppler as part of the digital scholarship of the “Papers of W. F. Cody” project, forty-eight Native Performers had their contract signed, or renewed, on the 31st of January 1906. The names on the contracts were: Good Horse, Isaac Holy Cloud,

⁸⁴ The act of Native resistance and “active survival” in the form of “renunciations of [...] victimry”, is theorized by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor in his seminal text *Manifest Manners*; the term ‘agency’ refers to its use in the post-colonial theory framework, in particular the interpretation given by scholar Bill Ashcroft as “the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power”. See Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, p. vii, and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (eds.), *Post-Colonial Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 6.

⁸⁵ “Buffalo Bill a Firenze”, *La Nazione*, Florence, 02/04/1906, p. 2; “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”, *L’Eco d’ Italia*, Genoa, 15/3/1906, p. 2; *La Capitale*, Rome, 22/03/1906, p. 3.

Wallace Imitates Dog, Iron Tail, Oscar Jealous of Him, Kills Enemy, Maggie Little Bull (Female), Henry Little Bull, Alex Lakota, John Long Bull, James Little Soldier, John Milk, Paul No Two Horn, Samuel One Bear, James Pipe on Head, Philip Poor Bear, Frank Poor Elk, Edward Plenty Holes, John Plenty Wolf, Thomas Pretty Back, Max Red Ear Horse, Red Horse, Philip Standing Soldier, Henry Standing Soldier, Jefferson Strikes Plenty, Charles Stinking Bear, Groover Short Bear, James Spotted Elk, Adam Tobacco, Mike Turning Bear, Under Standing Crow, James White Bear Claws, Leon White Bird, Lucy White Bird (Female), Whirlwind Horse, Jerome Wolf Ears, George Yellow Robe, Comes Out Holy, Jessie American Horse, John Bear Shield, James Black Bull, Charles Blind Man, Philip Blue Shield, Luna Comes Out Holy (Female), Philip Dripping, Joseph Elk Boy, William Ghost Bear, Good Voice Elk.⁸⁶ Italian journalists also identified and gave Italian translations of the names of the following performers: “Cuore Nero” (Black Heart, who had been contracted also for the 1890 show), “Orso Solitario” (corresponding to Sam Lone Bear, who had been with the show since 1899), “Scudo Bleu” (corresponding to Philip Blue Shield), “Coda di Ferro” (Iron Tail), and “Colpo Duro” (possibly referring to Jefferson Strikes Plenty). Florentine anthropologist Nello Puccioni also documented the presence of Philippe Huber (probably a corruption of Philip Poor Bear) and “Occhi Chiari” (possibly Jacob White Eyes).⁸⁷ A reasonable estimate of the number of Native Performers in the 1906 tour would therefore be at least fifty, possibly more.

The 1906 Italian news coverage about the Native Performers was affected by conflicting perceptions, ranging from primitivism and infantilization to *otherization*, and, ultimately, to a scientific validation of their authenticity. This denotes the entrenchment in the Italian collective imagination of the clichéd binary views of Native Americans. The ‘Noble Savage’ narratives of European heritage endured, although now they dwelled alongside imperial views imported by the American dime-novel tradition and Wild West shows, which resounded with condescending ideas of the white man’s burden—for which burgeoning disciplines such as (social) anthropology supplied scientific justifications—while working, at the same time, to keep “the American Indians [...] colourful and interesting but safe”.⁸⁸ These binary

⁸⁶ Jason Heppler, Show Indian database. Online. <http://www.codystudies.org/showindians/database/> retrieved from

<https://web.archive.org/web/20151116031028/http://www.codystudies.org:80/showindians/database/> Last accessed 23/01/2019.

⁸⁷ See “Gli Indiani di Buffalo Bill”, *Archivio per l’Antropologia e l’Etnologia*, vol. 36, fascicolo 1, 1906.

⁸⁸ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, p. 195.

understandings, though ostensibly conflicting, coexisted in parallel with one another in the collective imagination of 20th century Italians, and re-emerged according to the changing circumstances, contexts, and political ideologies involved.

Contrary to what happened in 1890, when the forced Native American assimilation was still poorly understood in Italy, at the beginning of the 20th century the Italian public had finally become aware of the allegedly subdued condition of Native Americans on the reservations.⁸⁹ This, along with the Wild West show's set up of the "Indian Village" as a small-scale colonial exhibition, fostered the perception of the Native Performers as colonized others, ready to be scrutinized within the context of the Wild West-human zoo by the colonial gaze of the Italians (many Italians, had not given up on imperial hopes and were thus still very much attracted to ideas concerning the white man's burden.) Yet, as evidence will show, far from complying to the subaltern condition which such a context imposed on them, the Native Performers devised ways to mediate that narrative.

After a visit to the "Indian Village", the columnist of Cremona's local newspaper, *La Provincia di Cremona*—in a remark that is as brief as it is telling— noted that "[...] the Red Skins [...] they shut themselves up inside their tents, annoyed by so much curiosity".⁹⁰ This glimpse illuminates the dynamics at play within such exhibitiv setting. As the fetishized objects on display in the Wild West-human zoo, the Native performers were tacitly expected to be constantly available to the prying eye of the Italian public, who, through payment of the extra fee that allowed them inside the village, had supposedly acquired the rights to the inhabitants' privacy. Yet, in spite of its overt colonial and commercial scope, the Wild West contact zone still contained grey areas which afforded the Native Performers a degree of negotiation.⁹¹ As the comment from the Italian journalist suggested, the discovery of the Native Performers' exercise of agency against the voyeuristic colonizing gaze of the paying public was a source of much disbelief and ill-concealed frustration. Yet, if anything, this further enhanced the Italians' curiosity

⁸⁹ Beginning in the 1900s, Italian newspapers, such as *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan, and *Il Messaggero*, Rome, documented on the conditions of Indigenous North Americans on the reservations.

⁹⁰ "[...] I Pelli Rosse [...] si rinchiudono nelle loro tende, come seccati da tanta curiosità". "Buffalo Bill a Cremona", *La Provincia di Cremona*, Cremona, 19/04/1906, p. 2

⁹¹ Contact zone was defined by Mary Louise Pratt as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict". See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 6. In the interpretation of Pratt's concept given by Linda Scarangella McNenly, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show is envisioned as a contact zone. See McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, pp. 10-15.

about the Native Performers in the “Indian Village”. A closer look at their descriptions in the press reveals the diverse discourses in which they became embedded.

A striking feature of the 1906 Italian reception of the Native Performers is the way in which several press reports displayed and circulated images and observations which reflected a dissecting gaze and a jargon which, albeit articulated in an uninformed and lowbrow key, parroted the lexicon of anthropological and (pseudo) social sciences. According to Padua’s main newspaper, *La Provincia di Padova*, the Native Performers were “strange types [...] with angular faces, of brown and olive color!”, while in the city of Cremona, the newspaper *La Provincia di Cremona* described them as having “faces with pronounced features”.⁹² From the perspective of Social Darwinism and other pseudo social sciences like physiognomics—widely recognized as authoritative at that time (in 1906, Lombroso, for instance, was receiving honours and awards even outside of the scientific community)—darker and olive skin complexions were associated with lower stages of human development, while the use of adjectives such as “angular” and “pronounced” to describe facial traits, bore undesirable connotations of “irregularity”, “coarseness” and “primitivism”.⁹³ Furthermore, according to Cesare Lombroso, when one’s “pronounced features” were so prominent as to become “protruding”, this was a manifest sign of “atavism” or, in other words, an exterior symptom of “inborn criminality”.⁹⁴ And so, in a remark that echoed a trivialized version of the theories of the Italian school of criminology’s founder, the columnist of the *Corriere di Genova* defined a group of Native Performers as: “five jailhouse faces [...] who mumbled incomprehensible words between them”.⁹⁵ On this matter it is interesting to observe how, in the same years that “Middle America” was using the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxonism and Social Darwinism as a way to *other* Italians in the United States, as the first part of this section illustrated, *Bourgeois* Italy employed a local version of the same discourse (i.e., the theories of Lombroso and his school, but also, to a lesser extent, the evolutionary theories of the Florentine school of anthropology led by

⁹² “Vi sono certi tipi strani [...] certe faccie angolose, brune, olivastre!”. “Buffalo Bill a Padova”, *La Provincia di Padova*, Padua, 15/04/1906, p. 2; “visi dai lineamenti pronunciati”. “Buffalo Bill a Cremona”, *La Provincia di Cremona*, Cremona, 19/04/1906, p. 2.

⁹³ See Patrizia Guarnieri, “Cesar or Cesare? American and Italian images of Lombroso”, in Paul Knepper and Per Jørgen Ystehede (eds.), *The Cesare Lombroso Handbook*, pp. 113-130.

⁹⁴ See Renzo Villa, “Lombroso and his school: from anthropology to medicine and law”, in Knepper and Ystehede, *The Cesare Lombroso Handbook*, pp. 8-29.

⁹⁵ “Cinque pellirosse biassicanti fra loro incomprensibili parole [...] quei cinque musi da galera”. “Buffalo Bill a Genova”, *Il Corriere di Genova*, 14-15/03/1906, p. 3. Emphasis mine.

Paolo Mantegazza) to marginalize and pathologize the Native Performers and advance ideals of Italian supremacy, much as they were doing with the indigenous Africans on display in Italian colonial fairs and exhibitions. Indeed, the point made by scholar Emily C. Burns about France, that “spaces of display in France that hosted American Indians and French colonial subjects [...] encouraged viewers to approach both groups through a similar lens” also matched the Italian context.⁹⁶ In Milan, in fact, Buffalo Bill’s “Indian Village” settled in the Civic Arena within the area of the Sempione Park, and was only a short walk away from the “Eritrean Village” and the “Cairo Street” reconstruction, which rose in the area of the “Piazza d’ Armi”.⁹⁷ Though in no way planned or scripted by the management of either events, these serendipitous “overlapping spaces of display” established a link between the three Indigenous groups exhibited. The inhabitants of the Horn of Africa, of the “Orient”, and the “Indians of the Wild West”, therefore, formed an imaginative continuum of conquest and subjugation in the colonial gaze of early 20th century Italians.⁹⁸

The Native Performers’ facial features were not only associated with primitive traits by Italian commentators; they were sometimes linked to gender ambiguity. Comments questioning the gender of the Native Performers resurfaced, once again, in the 1906 press reports, confirming this longstanding stereotype—dating back to the Enlightenment and revived in travel narratives, especially in those written by Italians—as one of the most ingrained in the Italian perceptions of Native Americans.⁹⁹ A candid example of this can be found in the irreverent query published by *La Provincia di Padova*, “Right now, who can say, at first glance, who are the men and who are the women? Mysteries of the Red-Skins!” and in the comment, from the same article “The Red-Skins marched on [...] with their faces all rouged [...] more decorated than a ballerina [...]”.¹⁰⁰

Irreverence and expressions of ridicule were, indeed, frequent features in the reception given to the Native Performers and represented the most light-hearted part of their *otherization*. In Padua a journalist reported that passers-by (particularly vendors from the nearby market) addressed the Native Performers with taunts such

⁹⁶ Emily Burns, *Transnational Frontiers*, p. 14.

⁹⁷ See the map of the 1906 Milan Exposition available from: <http://www.museomilano.it/1906-l-esposizione-internazionale-di-milano-nei-giornali-d-epoca/>. Last accessed 25/01/2018.

⁹⁸ Emily Burns, *Transnational Frontiers*, pp. 13-14.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 5.8.

¹⁰⁰ “Intanto chi può dire, così a prima vista, quali siano gli uomini e quali le donne? Mah misteri delle pelli-rosse!”, “Le Pelli-Rosse proseguivano [...] col viso tutto imbellettato [...] più dipinti di una ballerina”. “Buffalo Bill a Padova”, *La Provincia di Padova*, Padua, 15/04/1906, p. 2.

as “The Carnival is making a comeback at Easter” (evidently referring to their Lakota regalia as carnival costumes), “Faces to kiss” (an ironic comment on the perceived unattractiveness of the Native Performers—a typical aspect of the Italian gaze, whereas in many other European countries they were reputed to be undisputedly good looking), and “Are you, gentlemen, really Savages?” (a supposedly humorous comment on the chasm between the classical savage stereotype/role they were meant to act out in the show and civilized demeanours they displayed off stage).¹⁰¹ Yet, the contradictions surrounding the Italian reception of the Native Performers, were such that part of the press described them in more affirming terms, such as “friendly types” with “a very intelligent look” on their faces. Lamentably, these comments represented a noticeable minority in 1906.¹⁰²

The Native Performers’ dresses, art, and performances elicited in the Italians a set of reactions imbued with notions of infantilization and, as Emily C. Burns noted, “nationalist primitivism”.¹⁰³ Demeaning the culture and the art forms of the *other* was an instrumental act for the reaffirmation of the Italian national character at the beginning of the 20th century. Differently from France, which enjoyed a position of supremacy in the European colonial context, Italy was still struggling to confirm its status as a fully-fledged Western colonial power. By bringing the culture of the *other* down, Italian commentators were attempting to prop their own civilization up—which is the exact dynamic that writers in America had employed over a decade before, in its own time of cultural anxiety.¹⁰⁴ And so, in Florence, the local press bluntly declared that the Native Performers’ “shields are decorated in a very primitive artform”, while in Padua, the journalist of *La Provincia di Padova* stated that the “tepees feature bizarre drawings”.¹⁰⁵ In Milan, the columnist of the *Corriere della Sera*, announced that the robes and regalia of the Native Performers “made them look like strange winged animals” adding that “for a moment one has the impression that they wear coloured sweaters, only to find out later that they are

¹⁰¹ “[...] Camminavano muti, impettiti [...] E attorno a loro trotterellava un mugolo di monelli e si assiepava la gente curiosa. In Piazza delle Erbe, le ortolane abbandonarono i banchi per accorrere. Esi udivano le esclamazioni più gustose; -El xe el Carnevale che fa visita a la Pasqua!- Cari, che viseti da basi!-Ohé siori, i diga, xeli proprio selvagi?- Ma i Pelli-Rosse proseguivano seri [...]”. “Buffalo Bill a Padova”, *La Provincia di Padova*, Padua, 15/04/1906, p. 2.

¹⁰² “Fra essi vi sono tipi simpatici”. “Buffalo Bill a Como”, *La Provincia di Como*, Como, 29/04/1906, n.p.; “Tra codesti indiani vi sono tipi simpatici dallo sguardo intelligentissimo”. “Buffalo Bill a Firenze”, *La Nazione*, Florence, 02/04/1906, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Emily Burns, *Transnational Frontiers*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapters Four and Five.

¹⁰⁵ “[...] i loro scudi hanno disegni di un’arte molto primitiva”. “Buffalo Bill a Firenze”, *La Nazione*, Florence, 02/04/1906, p. 2; “[...] Il campo degli Indiani colle sue tende dalle pitture bizzarre [...]”. “Buffalo Bill a Padova”, *La Provincia di Padova*, Padua, 15/04/1906, p. 2.

naked and their skin is painted [...]”.¹⁰⁶ The war cries that the Native performers enacted as part of their performances were also compared with animal cries by Italian journalists; the most preposterous claims being made by *Il Messaggero*, from Rome, which argued that “the last representatives of the Indians emit strange cries, which range from the crowing of the rooster to the croaking of the frog”.¹⁰⁷

Such remarks are telling illustrations of how the Native Performers had lost their allure as savages and wild men in the eyes of the 1906 audience (a narrative which Cody’s show was still attempting to perpetuate) who now compared them to children, or animals. As *La Nazione* from Florence revealed, the public “noticed that, as they enter the arena, the Indians emit cries that appear odd, child-like, [and] exaggerated”.¹⁰⁸ Ethnohistorian Linda Scarangella provided compelling evidence which helps to shed light on the nature of these comments. She noted that, in the “Wild West-contact zone”, the Native Performers held the power to negotiate their performances; they adapted, therefore, the dances and cries as they wished. They were not always imitating war, but instead they often danced and performed merely for fun and to express a range of other feelings they experienced.¹⁰⁹ This palimpsest of “Native survivance” to use Gerald Vizenor’s words, was, however, hidden from 1906 Italian spectators, who interpreted the performances in line with the show’s imperialist meta-narrative. Primitivism, infantilization and domestication of the Native Performers became, therefore, inevitable reactions to their performances.¹¹⁰

It was the unreality of the expectations nurtured by Italians—who had been diligently instructed by decades of travel accounts and *dime-novel* narratives to expect childlike savages or fierce Indians, and were instead confronted with civilized, polyglot, and cosmopolitan Native Performers—that created sceptical reactions to assertions of their authenticity. Generally, the public on this European tour—as Kate Flint has observed with regard to Britain—had “an increased acknowledgement that Cody’s staging cannot, after all, entirely be said to be realistic”.¹¹¹ Indeed, in 1906 some members of the Italian audiences also recognized the Native Performers as a key part of this staging; as a journalist of Rome’s *Il*

¹⁰⁶ “[...]li fanno sembrare strani animali alati. Per un momento si ha l’impressione che indossino maglie colorate, si scopre poi che sono nudi e che la pelle è dipinta[...]”. “Il primo spettacolo di Buffalo Bill’s all’Arena”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 01-02/05/1906, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ “Gli ultimi rappresentanti degli Indiani emettono grida strane che vanno dal canto del gallo al gracidiare della rana”. “Buffalo Bill a Roma”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 23/03/06, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ “Buffalo Bill a Firenze”, *La Nazione*, Florence, 02/04/1906, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, pp. 72, 78, 79, 82.

¹¹⁰ See Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*.

¹¹¹ Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, p. 252.

Messaggero remarked, they “were giving themselves the appearance of wild people”.¹¹² In an era when vaudeville, circus, as well as early cinema, widely employed the practice of ‘Red-Face’, the cosmopolitan ways of the Native Performers left many Italian commentators wondering if the same technique had been employed by Cody in his show. After all, other bogus Wild West shows travelled around Europe at that time featuring white men in Indian drag, and even S. F. Cody, the most infamous fake Buffalo Bill, had used some of them during his Italian stay; hence the persistence of the rumours.¹¹³ The anecdotes published by Italian newspapers, such as the one found in *La Chiacchiera*, from Pisa, certainly did not help to challenge that narrative:

Someone had started saying that some of the Redskins were from Lucca! A man who had witnessed the performance, told me days ago that a person, certainly a cheeky type, approaching a Redskin, he had asked him ‘Do you speak Italian?’ To which the redskin had replied ‘we do not speak Italian’, we see that Buffalo Bill’s Redskins were a bit whitewashed at that time!¹¹⁴

A few weeks earlier the newspaper *L’Eco d’Italia*, from Genoa may have hinted at the same possibility by using a satirical cartoon which depicted a Native Performer reading an Italian newspaper and displayed the caption: “The most curious spectacle is to watch the famous Redskins... reading *L’Eco d’Italia*”.¹¹⁵

¹¹² “Gli Indiani, semi nudi[...] emettono grida gutturali per darsi la pretesa di gente selvaggia”. “Lo Spettacolo di Buffalo Bill a La Spezia”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 20/03/1906, p. 2.

¹¹³ Jerry Kuntz, *A Pair of Shootists*, p. 93.

¹¹⁴ Lucca is a town in central Tuscany. “Qualcuno aveva cominciato a dire che alcune pellirosse erano di Lucca! Un tale che aveva assistito alla rappresentazione, mi raccontava giorni fa che una persona, certo un bel tipo, avvicinando una pellirossa gli aveva chiesto ‘Parlate voi l’italiano?’ Al che la pellirossa avrebbe risposto ‘Noi non parlare italiano’. Si vede proprio che le pellirosse di Buffalo Bill’s in quel momento erano un po’ imbiancate!”, “Buffalo Bill’s al cinematografo”, *La Chiacchiera*, Pisa, 26/04/1906, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ “Buffalo Bill e le Pelli rosse nella nostra Genova”, *L’Eco d’Italia*, Genoa, 15/03/1906 p. 3.



Figure 72: The 'Redskins' reading the Italian newspaper L' Eco d' Italia. Illustration from L' Eco d' Italia, Genoa, "Buffalo Bill e le Pelli rosse nella nostra Genova", 15/03/1906 p. 3. Courtesy of National Library of Rome.

The persistence of these contentions led Florence's main newspaper, *La Nazione*, to publish an official denial: "Father Strickland [a Jesuit friar who visited the "Indian Village" with the journalist] got carefully informed and advises us that they are authentic Indians".¹¹⁶ Yet, rumours of the inauthenticity of Buffalo Bill's Indians continued to circulate, especially in Tuscany, going so far as to reach the Department of Anthropology of the University of Florence. The Native Performers constituted an especially desirable subject for Florentine anthropologist and researchers, who had undertaken ample research on the Indigenous peoples of Africa, Oceania and Latin America, but until then, not as much on the North American Natives.¹¹⁷ Though a somewhat artificial setting, the "Indian Village" at the Wild West show nonetheless represented a golden chance, conveniently located, to study Native North Americans. Professors Nello Puccioni and Aldobrandino Mochi therefore embarked on a study of Cody's Native Performers that was both scholarly and aimed at disproving speculations, in order "to provide ignorant sceptics with a scientific proof of the authenticity of those savages".¹¹⁸ A close look at their report reveals it to be an extremely thought-provoking source, in that it represented a scientific counterpart to

¹¹⁶ "Padre Strickland, s' é informato minutamente e ci informa che sono Indiani autentici". "Buffalo Bill a Firenze", *La Nazione*, Florence, 02/04/1906, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ See for an estimation the articles in the *Archivio Italiano per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, vol. 36, fascicolo 1, 1906.

¹¹⁸ "Per tentare di fornire agli scettici ignoranti una prova scientifica dell'autenticità di quei selvaggi". "Gli Indiani di Bufffalo Bill", *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, p. 88.

some of the popular reactions to be found in the press, revealing how the two were often intertwined and at times, I would argue, co-dependent. This is the first time this source (which, despite its relevance, has persistently been overlooked, possibly due to the relative inaccessibility of its language to English-speaking scholars) has been drawn on to inform research on Cody's Wild West show. For this reason, and because of its essential significance, I am providing extended translated quotes from the document, along with the text in the original language in the footnotes.

[...] Beyond the canvas curtain that closed the north side of the great amphitheatre, in front of the horse stables used in the representation, six tents rose; in the typical shape of the Indians of the North American prairie. It was in the morning, and some of the Redskins had gone out in the city [...] The Indians, with characteristic and intelligent features, almost immediately agreed to let themselves be photographed and measured, but they evidently showed the degree of their civilization, asking first of all for an adequate pecuniary compensation for each individual who would be measured and photographed.¹¹⁹

The report starts with a striking proof of the agency of the Native Performers. Puccioni informs us that not only were most of them out and about, exploring the sights and shops of Florence, but also that those who remained inside the “Indian Village” exerted their own agency—which the Florentine scholar, cemented in his evolutionary perspective (but perhaps also with irony), called “the degree of their civilization”—by negotiating an “adequate” price to lend themselves to the anthropological study. This proved the Native performers’ acute awareness of their worth, especially when it came to being examined by anthropologists. It is possible that, knowing the lucrateness of this exercise, they had demanded a higher sum of the two scholars than they would have requested from regular members of the audience and amateur photographers.

The four Indians measured by me are the head of the Brulé tribe Blue Shield, the warrior Iron Tail, a sort of head of the Indian police, the warrior Light Eyes, and the young Philippe Huber. They live in tents supported by poles pushed into the ground in a circle and gathered at the top in a common ligature, the tents are therefore conical, open at the top to let the smoke out, the air in and the light pass through; they have an irregular low opening on the front: they are made of canvas and not just that: according to what the travellers reported they are the original ones, made also with horse leather. The curtains are adorned with *unsophisticated designs* in

¹¹⁹ “Oltrepassato il sipario di tela che chiudeva il lato nord del grande anfiteatro, dinanzi alle scuderie dei cavalli impiegati nella rappresentazione, si alzavano sei tende; della forma tipica degli indiani della prateria nord americana. Era di mattina, ed una parte delle pellirosse era andata in città[...] Gli Indiani, dalle fisionomie caratteristiche e intelligenti, acconsentirono quasi subito a lasciarsi fotografare e misurare, ma dimostrarono in modo evidente il grado della loro civilizzazione chiedendo per prima cosa un adeguato compenso pecuniario per ciascun individuo che sarebbe stato misurato e fotografato”. “Gli Indiani di Bufffalo Bill”, *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, p. 85.

bright colours, mostly red or blue: the designs seem to vary according to the owner's hierarchy [...].¹²⁰

As mentioned earlier, Puccioni is likely to have examined the performers Philip Blue Shield, Iron Tail, Philip Poor Bear (who he mistakenly understood as Huber) and Jacob White Eyes ('White' erroneously translated as "Light"/ "Chiari" into Italian). The above passage of the document, with its reference to travellers' diaries, acknowledges how early 20th century Italian anthropology was still informed by first-contact narratives of the 18th and 19th century for sources of comparisons to use in their studies and scholarly dialogue. Moreover, the remark about the childlike decorations of the tepees reflects the claims of primitivism which the popular press was also expressing, in a dialectic that it is likely to have led one narrative description to inform the other.

They all wear the moccasins, their little deerskin shoes covered with glass beads: and on the arm and the forearm they carry, even over their shirts, silver or brass bracelets of a shape similar to those many other people use, especially the Ethiopians. [...]. They have quite mobile physiognomies and they are happy to joke. They smoked cigarettes already made, but some made them themselves; They carried postcards, matches, cigarette cases and purses.¹²¹

As this passage relates, the associations between indigenous Africans and Native Americans were very much alive in the imagination of the Italians, and anthropology undoubtedly provided further validation to such mental images. Both Puccioni, and Aldobrandino Mochi took scholarly interest in the populations of the Horn of Africa and were therefore inclined to link their reminiscences of tribal African gear to those of the Native Americans, in the same way that a British anthropologist might have established the same connection with populations from Punjab, for example. The report also confirms evidence, also discussed by Emily C. Burns, that the Native Performers—especially Jacob White Eyes—collected items and postcards from their “urban tours” in Europe, which was a clear sign of their cosmopolitanism and of their

¹²⁰ “I quattro Indiani misurati da me sono il capo della tribù Brulé Scudo Azzurro, il guerriero Coda di ferro, una specie di capo della polizia indiana, il guerriero Occhi Chiari, ed il giovane Filippo Huber. Vivono in tende sostenute da pali infissi nel terreno in circolo e riuniti in alto in una legatura comune, le tende sono dunque coniche, aperte in alto per lasciar passare il fumo, l'aria e la luce: hanno un'apertura bassa irregolare sul davanti: sono fatte di tela e non, come a detta dei viaggiatori sono quelle originali, in pelle di cavallo. Le tende sono ornate di disegni rozzi in colori vivi per lo più rosso od azzurro: sembrano variare i disegni a seconda del grado del proprietario[...]. “Gli Indiani di Buffalo Bill”, *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, p. 86. Emphasis mine.

¹²¹ “Hanno tutti i maucassins, le loro piccole scarpe di pelle di daino ricoperte di conterie: ed al braccio ed all'avambraccio portano, anche sopra la camicia, braccialetti di argento o di ottone di una forma simile a quella che usano molti altri popoli, e specialmente gli etiopici. [...] Hanno la fisionomia abbastanza mobile e scherzano volentieri. Fumavano delle sigarette già fatte, ma taluno le faceva da sé; Portavano cartoline postali, cerini, portasigarette e portamonete”. “Gli Indiani di Buffalo Bill”, *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, p. 87.

“identity construction as modern tourist(s)”.¹²² The report draws to a close with a description of one of the few Native women performers in the show, and with an anecdote which exposes power dynamics as well as indicating the *modus operandi* of a generation of Italian anthropologists:

As I said there was only one of the three women who follow the company of Buffalo Bill: we found it hard to recognize her: she wore a light blue and white cotton shawl over her shoulders; she had no very clear sexual differences, lacking those in the Dakota [sic.] due to the clothing and due to the absence of those differences in the features commonly appreciated among us. She did not want to let herself be measured, and when I wanted to photograph her, she pulled the shawl over her head and curled up at the base of the curtain, taking on the appearance of a bundle. Only later, without her knowledge, did I manage to photograph her.¹²³

As confirmed above, Native Performers held the power to negotiate their actions, including their (in)visibility within the “Indian Village”, even if this meant going against the requests of authoritative onlookers, such as Puccioni and Mochi. In the face of this disappointment, the Italian scholars nonetheless decided to force their colonial gaze upon the Lakota woman by photographing her without her knowledge or her consent. Evidently, as they were dealing with a female, Puccioni and Mochi deemed her refusal to be even more irrelevant than that of a male Native American. This indicates that despite the humanizing tones employed at times in the report, the Native Performers were ultimately being treated by the two anthropologists as colonized objects, as in the definition provided by Edward Said in *Orientalism*—which entails the act of robbing the colonized *other*: in this case the Italians figuratively robbed the female Native Performer of her pictured identity—something she clearly wished to withhold—as well as materially depriving her of the revenue she ought to have obtained from the shooting of the photograph.¹²⁴ As Said postulated in his work, the Italian anthropologists’ study of the Native Performers (gaining and divulging knowledge about them) can also be seen as a way of asserting their power over them. Proving or disproving their authenticity was indeed a twofold expression of authority: as westerners *and* as men of sciences, they held the power to define them, which, in line with what Said maintains, is an ultimate form of control.

¹²² Emily Burns, *Transnational Frontiers*, p. 120.

¹²³ “Come ho detto era presente una sola delle tre donne che seguono la compagnia di Buffalo Bill: stentammo molto a riconoscerla: portava sulle spalle, sopra al vestito, uno scialle di cotone azzurro e bianco; non aveva differenze sessuali molto nette, mancando nei Dakota e pel vestiario e per assenza dei quelle da noi apprezzate comunemente. Non volle lasciarsi misurare, e quando vollì fotografarla si tirò lo scialle sul capo e si rannicchiò alla base della tenda, prendendo l’aspetto di un fagotto. Soltanto dopo, a sua insaputa, riuscii a fotografarla”. “Gli Indiani di Buffalo Bill”, *Archivio per l’Antropologia e l’Etnologia*, p. 87.

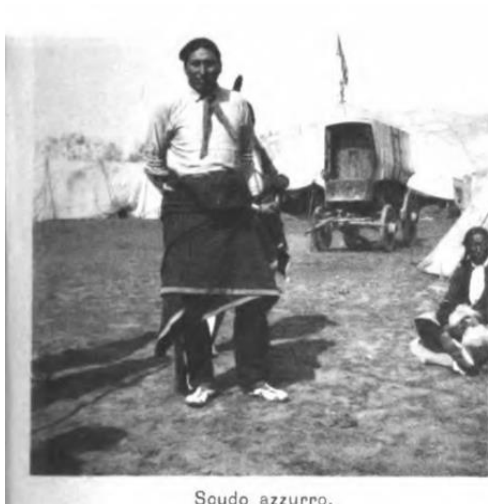
¹²⁴ See Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

Lastly, being still informed by ethnographic evidence from travel accounts, it is no surprise to find early 20th century anthropology giving scientific backing to such customary Eurocentric perceptions as the one that sees Native Americans men as indistinguishable from their women, as the passage above also suggests. The report closed with a chart of the measurements of each performer, decreeing, in the light of the evidence drawn from cranial and nasal taxonomies, the scientific authenticity of Cody's performers, and therefore "destroying the doubts of those journalists, who, basing their suppositions on the painted faces, come to the conclusion that Buffalo Bill exhibited fake Indians".¹²⁵

Nome	Altezza	Grande apertura delle braccia	Rapporto fra altezza e grande apertura	Diametro antero posteriore	Diametro trasverso massimo	Indice cefalico	Lunghezza nasale	Larghezza nasale
Scudo azzurro . . .	1924	1992	103.5	192	157	81.8	630	322
Coda di ferro . . .	1778	1808	101.7	191	156	81.7	612	430
Occhi chiari	1773	1832	103.3	195	157	85.5	635	378
Filippo Huber . . .	1769	1799	101.5	183	154	84.2	585	352
Medie . . .	1811	1872	102.5	190	156	83.3	615	395

Figure 73: Chart with the measurements of each performers and the average, taken by Puccioni, *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, Vol 36. Fascicolo 1, p 87. Digitized by Google, Original from New York Public Library.

¹²⁵ "distrutti i dubbi di quei giornalisti, i quali trassero ragione dalla pittura delle faccie per supporre che Buffalo-Bill presenti dei falsi Indiani". *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, p. 275.



Soudo azzurro.



Coda di ferro e la sua tenda.

Archivio per l'Antrop. e l'Etnol., 1906, fasc. 1°

TAV. I



Philippe Huber.



Occhi chiari.



Figure 74: The Native Performers examined by Puccioni, photographs taken by Prof. Aldobrandino Mochi.

Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia, Vol 36. Fascicolo 1. Table n. 1.

The reception of the Native Performers on the 1906 tour was affected by a heightened sense of awareness, by Italian audiences, that the 'Indians' were "Playing Savage" in the show. This reveals the loosening of an essential thread in the weaving

of the Wild West's show's meta-narrative. How could the solemnized tension between Savagery and Civilization still work if the supposed savage was now visibly domesticated? One of the possible answers lay, perhaps, in the fact that this was the last tour of Europe Cody ever did.

In 1890, the Native Performers had generally elicited polarizing reactions of awe and, sometimes, antipathy in the Italians, with descriptions that were highly reminiscent of literary debates on good and evil savages. In 1906, in contrast, the influence of the social sciences, particularly social and criminal anthropology, seemed to dominate the Italian debate about the Native Performers, in which how they were perceived was complicated by gradations of colonial undertones which were previously undetected. This mirrored the significant changes that occurred in Italian society during the decade and a half that preceded the second arrival of Cody's Wild West. These transformations principally concerned the development of Italian colonial ambitions and the debates surrounding them, which normalized the discourse on *othering* subaltern subjects, and thereby led it ultimately to become conventional shared knowledge, to the point of escalating it into what Gramsci defined as "cultural hegemony".¹²⁶



Figure 75: The Native Performers as tourists in 1906. Jacob White Eyes, John Burke and Iron Tail in Rome's Caffè Greco, posing with what appears as Mark Twain's statue and possibly Buffalo Bill's bust.

Courtesy of McCracken Research Library.

¹²⁶ Cultural hegemony is a form of cultural dominion of a class over another, where shared knowledge and beliefs are imposed and coerced until they become interiorized by the subaltern class. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, and Said, *Orientalism* (Said interpreted the term cultural hegemony in colonial context, outside of its original Marxist debate).



*Figure 76: In Rome's Caffé Greco: Jacob White Eyes, possibly the Café's owner, Iron Tail and John Burke.
Courtesy of McCracken Research Library.*

Chapter 7.5. Buffalo Bill and the Wild West show in Italian cartoons and satirical press

As shown in the works of Kate Flint, Louis Warren, David Huxley and, more recently, Emily C. Burns, the sensation that the Wild West show had created all over the Old World, during the course of its recurring tours, was put to good use by the illustrated and satirical press.¹²⁷ With remarkable alacrity, turn of the twentieth century European magazines seized on the figures of Cody and various members of his entourage, and put them in conversation with major political and cultural dignitaries as well as with momentous societal occurrences in ways that conveyed complicated meanings on a local, national, and sometimes transnational level. In 1906, Italian satirical newspapers and magazines also jumped at the chance to use themes, images, and characters from Cody's show as means to develop their own social and political satire, even more than they had done in 1890. In previous years, illustrated satire had begun to flourish, thanks to a series of technological improvements in typography—including, and perhaps most important, the use of colour—which enhanced the impact of cartoons on readerships, as well as sales, consecrating them as mass phenomena in all respects.¹²⁸ Certainly, the picturesque troupe of the Wild West show offered abundant food for thought to the satirists, helping them to create malleable allegories of events of their time, as well as enabling artists and illustrators to experiment with unfamiliar subjects, designs, and palettes. With these premises in mind, the association between the Wild West show and illustrated satire becomes a straightforward one: as the most sensational event in town, Cody's show was the perfect magnet for the cross-class readership of cartoon magazines, which was involved with political life while being, to a degree, also frivolous and bigoted. Unlike reports and show reviews in conventional newspapers, where Cody was framed as somehow losing his shine, Italian satirical publications elected Buffalo Bill as the highlight of their cartoons in 1906—though for purely humorous purposes. The character of Buffalo Bill was, therefore, frequently recognized as a fitting interlocutor through whom the cartoonist could ironize upon Italian social customs and traditions.

¹²⁷ See Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, Emily Burns, *Transnational Frontiers*, and David Huxley, "Buffalo Bill and William Gladstone: The 'Champion Scalper' and the 'G.O.M.' in Moonshine magazine, April–November 1887", *Early Popular Visual Culture*, vol. 9, n. 4 (2011), pp. 353-362.

¹²⁸ See, in particular, *La Rana*, *L'Asino* and *Il Mulo*.

Genoa was the first city touched by the Wild West show in 1906, after it entered Italy through France. Riding the wave of curiosity, the local satirical weekly *Il Successo* employed Cody and images of his show in two consecutive issues. The cartoon in Figure 77 depicts imaginary banter between Cody and a middle-class Italian spectator (with bowler hat and walking stick) directing his hand towards a shawl-wearing older figure looking aghast in the background. The cartoon reads:

“Excuse me, sir Buffalo, is it true that one of your Red Skins died?”

“No, why?”

“Because in that case my mother-in-law could have taken his place!”



Figure 77: *Il Successo*, Genoa, 18 March 1906, p. 4.

“Excuse me, sir Buffalo, is it true that one of your Red Skins has died?”

“No, why?”

“Because in that case my mother-in-law could have taken his place!”

The spectator was offering his mother-in-law to Buffalo Bill, in an unabashed attempt to get rid of her. The cartoon plays with the archetype of the mother-in-law, a burdensome figure in Italian society and culture—since the dawn of time, one could argue. As a long literary tradition, spanning Juvenal’s *Satires* to Carlo Goldoni’s plays, testifies, the character of the mother-in-law was often an execrated one and, as such, an ideal target for satire.¹²⁹ Frequently portrayed as an untamed shrew, the mother-in-law figure exhibited traits of wildness, as well as sternness, in her manners and appearance, and was thus fixed in the Italian collective imagination as a hostile battle-axe. These mental images, especially the latter, prompted the association with

¹²⁹ See Latin poet Juvenal *Satire number 6* and Carlo Goldoni’s play *La famiglia dell’antiquario* (1750).

the Native American performers, here addressed, derogatively to our modern understanding, but tolerably for the Italian context of that time, as Red Skins. In the minds of Italian humourists, a blanket-wearing hostile old hag—the typical mother-in-law like the one framed in the cartoon—could easily, and amusingly, have “played Indian” in the Wild West show.¹³⁰



Figure 78: *Il Successo*, Genoa, 18 March 1906, p. 4.

“Why are you so angry?”

“Well, you know, thinking that I’ve taken my wife to see Buffalo Bill, makes me bill...ious”

The second cartoon, Figure 78, plays on a pun between the name Bill and the adjective bilious. The cartoonist ironized on the clamour caused by the price of the show tickets, on average five lire, which according to newspapers had caused discontent among the audience for being perceived as exceedingly high. The annoyance of the cigarette-smoking character, therefore, stems from having given in

¹³⁰ See Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

to his wife's insistence on seeing the show, a shallow feminine whim as a number of newspapers defined it, and the feeling of having spent too much money on it.¹³¹

The third cartoon focuses on the show's encampment, targeting the procedures of assembly which had prompted reactions of collective amazement all over Italy (but also in other countries, such as Germany). A never-before-seen process, it was greatly appreciated for its regimented schedule and precision. The highly efficient scene appeared, therefore, as a fitting context for humorous comments about national, as well as local, shortcomings and embezzlements. The cartoon, entitled "Observing the Wild West" reads: "Among Planners: 'Here! This speed would have been useful in Calabria after the earthquake.' 'Or now, to build the 250 cottages in Albaro before they go to pot!'" The satire firstly makes reference to the 1905 earthquake which destroyed a large part of the southern provinces of Catanzaro and Reggio Calabria, where reconstruction was slow in taking place.¹³² The second line of the cartoon's text shifts the jest to local events happening in the Genoese neighbourhood of Albaro, where the much-publicised construction of 250 new buildings was also being delayed. The area was going through a process of redevelopment which had started in the last few years of the nineteenth century, as a consequence of a new urban development plan by the local administration.¹³³

¹³¹ See *Il Successo*, 18/03/1906, p. 3 and *El Fasoulin*, 28/04/1906, p. 2.

¹³² Other than lack of funding, and government instability, causes of delays in Calabria included new anti-seismic directives prohibiting construction with the quick and inexpensive *barate* technique, using mud and straw dried in the sun, which was typical building in Calabria. The directives demanded experimentation with reconstructive techniques using wood, concrete and iron, which inevitably took longer. See Federerica Scibilia, *Le costruzioni Antisismiche in Calabria tra la fine dell'800 e l'inizio del 900* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2016).

¹³³ See the blog "C'era una volta Genova", Online, <http://ceraunavoltagenova.blogspot.com/2015/07/genova-la-collina-di-albaro.html>. Last Accessed 02/02/2019.

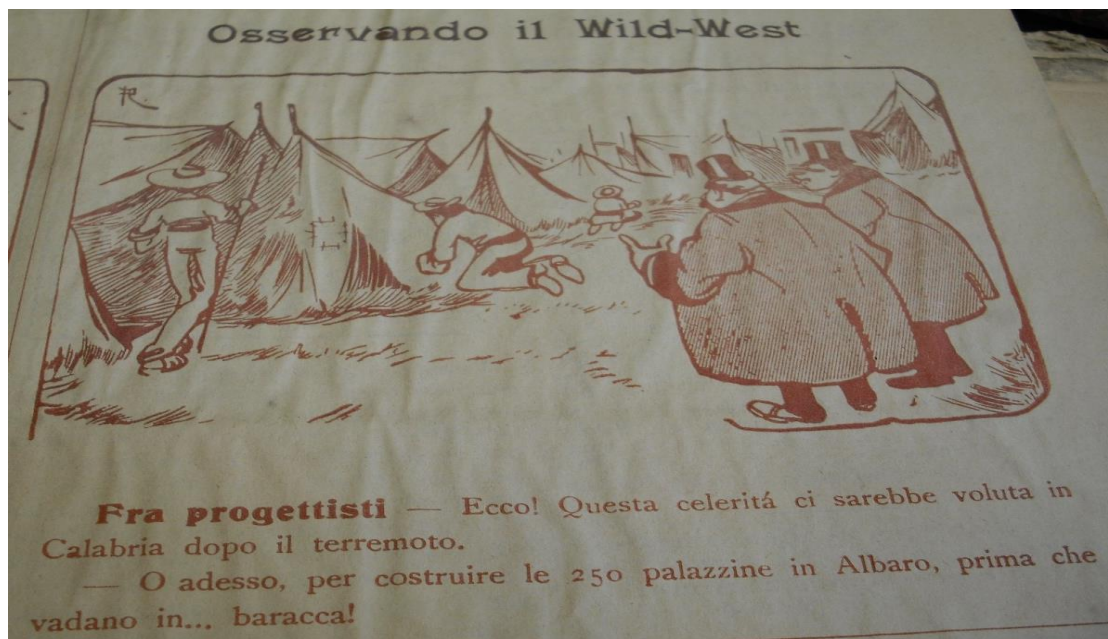


Figure 79: Il Successo, Genoa, 18 March 1906, p. 4.
Among Planners: “Here! This speed would have come of use in Calabria after the earthquake.”
“Or now, to build the 250 cottages in Albaro before they go to pot!”

Soon Albaro fell into the hands of land and housing speculators: private constructors competing to take advantage of the coming wave of gentrification. Construction works would begin, but when the initial capital ran out it would stop for a matter of weeks or a few months, and sometimes years, letting half-built structures deteriorate, which was what planners were portrayed as hoping to avert, wistfully longing for labourers as efficient as those within Cody’s troupe. The cartoonist ended the satire with a pun: the Italian expression, “going to the barrack” means the equivalent of “going to pot”, and in the mind of the magazine readers clearly evoked the tents and the military structure of the Wild West show’s encampment. A look at the caricature of the two planners/investors shows they are represented as morbidly obese and with swine-like facial features—distinctly noticeable in the character on the right. They are personifications of the insatiable greed and corruption of speculators with their snouts in the trough, and therefore embody the critique that the cartoonist wished to direct against both them and the local administration.



Figure 80: Il Successo, Genoa, 11 March 1906, p. 4
“At the end of the show, we shall see who will win the match”.

The last cartoon from *Il Successo*, like the previous ones, extrapolates the original context of the Wild West show to render issues of local relevance that were more light-hearted and suitable for parody. At first sight, the meaning of this cartoon is rather cryptic to anyone not acquainted with Genoese chronicles, beginning with its title: “Garaventa Buffalo Bill in the salon of Paxo”. A search in the archives of the Genoese historical society reveals that the word Paxo was the sobriquet with which Genoese citizens designated the Ducal Palace, which at the time housed many administrative offices.¹³⁴ Inside it, the area of the salon (salonetto in Italian)—which the cartoonist possibly employed to recall western saloons—was the room which accommodated the city’s court and judiciary headquarters. Garaventa, an aristocratic Genoese surname, in 1906 could only refer to Nicoló Garaventa, a philanthropist who spent his life taking urchins and neglected children off the streets to give them better life prospects by introducing them to a career in the navy. With great efforts and with capital mostly taken out of his own pocket, he had managed to establish his naval training school on a ship permanently anchored in the port of Genoa.¹³⁵ The

¹³⁴ See the acts of the Società Ligure di Storia Patria, Online, <https://www.storiapatriagenova.it/Docs/Indici.pdf>. Last accessed 10/02/2019.

¹³⁵ Carlo Peirano, Emilia Garaventa Cazzulo (eds.), *La nave scuola Garaventa: una scuola di vita* (Genova: De Ferrari, 2004).

chronicles of that year state that, between the end of February and the beginning of March 1906, Garaventa had been the target of vicious attacks (later shown to be baseless) by the newspaper *Il Caffaro*. The Genoese daily, voicing the opinion of opposition members of the local council, accused him of using public funds destined for the maintenance of the naval school for “personal and parasitic benefits”.¹³⁶ Adding insult to injury, the indicters also labelled Garaventa a “mattoid, charlatan, and swindler”.¹³⁷ To defend his good name, Garaventa was forced to take his critics to court in March 1906. The cartoon is, therefore, an allegory of the Garaventa trial in a fashionable Wild Western twist. Garaventa is recognizable in the guise of Buffalo Bill, with his trademark long pointy nose to distinguish him, striking back at the Indians’ attacks, on a horse stuck with arrows—symbolizing the blows inflicted on his reputation by the prosecutors. With the closing line “at the end of the show, we shall see who will win the match”, the cartoonist chose to make the link between the trial and Cody’s spectacle even more straightforward. Indeed, the court case was bellicose and so amply covered by the media that the comparison with a show of war-re-enactments made the analogy appear particularly accomplished.¹³⁸ Significant for the purposes of this study is also the recognition of the meaning attached to the characters’ roles in the cartoon. The cartoonist’s decision to portray the pugnacious accusers as hostile Indians, while investing the indicted Garaventa with the role of Buffalo Bill, the hero of the Prairies, exposes how illustrated satire could selectively unmask certain master-narratives, while at the same time—as in this case—blindly reinforce others.

If the satirical press in Genoa drew metaphors from the Wild West show to deride social conventions and local issues, Roman cartoonists were necessarily directing their humour onto matters of national relevance. The newly formed government, headed by Prime Minister Sidney Sonnino, was at the forefront of criticism in March 1906 for supposedly being of centre-right orientation yet implementing, in effect, markedly leftist policies. The first Sonnino government developed as a brief interval between the legislature of Alessandro Fortis and the third legislature of Giovanni Giolitti.¹³⁹ Curiously, it lasted only a few weeks more

¹³⁶ Carlo Peirano, Emilia Garaventa Cazzulo (eds.), *La nave scuola Garaventa*, p. 51.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51. The term “mattoid” was invented by Cesare Lombroso, to mean “semi-insane”.

¹³⁸ Many newspapers, also on the national level—such as *L’Illustrazione Italiana*—reported about the case.

¹³⁹ See Chapter 6.4.

than the Wild West's tour of Italy.¹⁴⁰ The newspaper *Sancio Panza* was one of the most eminent Roman satirical publications, and probably also the one which exploited Wild Western allegories to the fullest. Under the skilful direction of writer-illustrator Yambo, the newspaper systematically turned images, characters and specific stunts from Cody's show into witty metaphors for the political instability of Sonnino's government.¹⁴¹

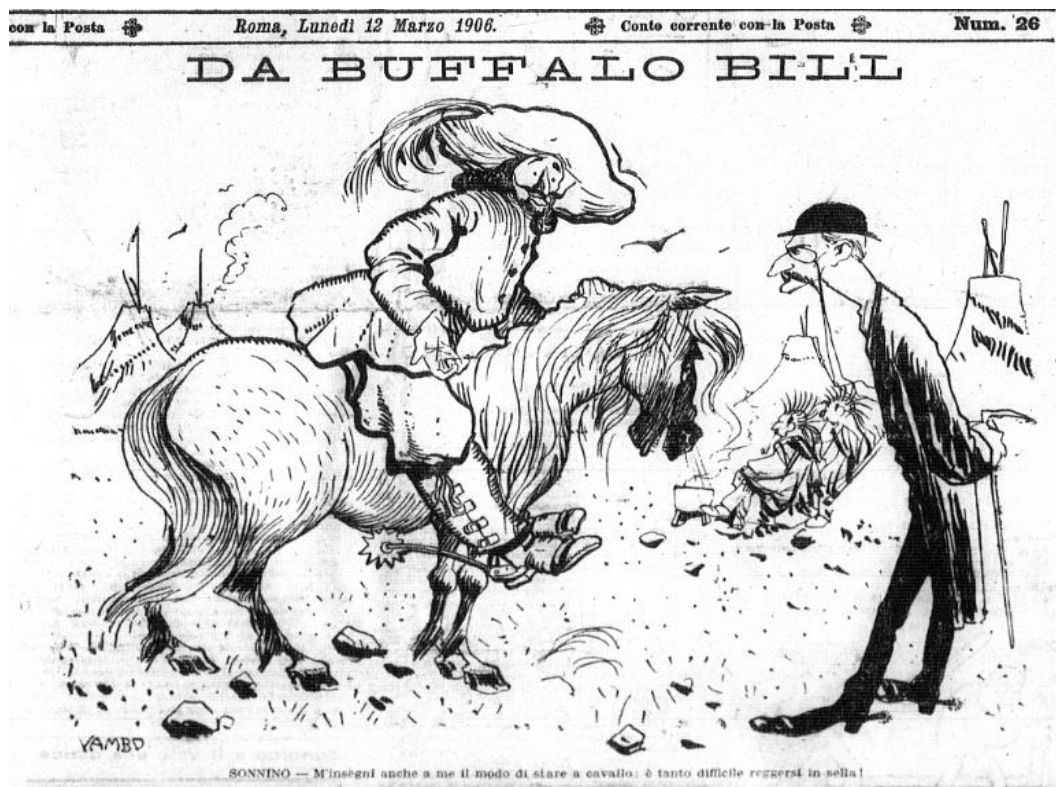


Figure 81: Sancio Panza, 12 March 1906, p. 1.
“Sonnino – Teach me how to mount up as well; It is so hard to stay in the saddle!”

It began with the cartoon in Figure 81, entitled “At Buffalo Bill’s”, in which Sonnino, in a bowler hat, asks a knightly (and somewhat perplexed) Cody, “Teach me how to mount up as well; It is so hard to stay in the saddle!”. With that statement, the cartoonist humorously emphasized the great difficulties Sonnino was experiencing in keeping the reins of the government, just over a month into his mandate.¹⁴² Sonnino had, in fact, been left with a problematic legacy by his predecessor, Alessandro Fortis: a diversified, cross-party majority, with which Sonnino strived to maintain a stable majority and pass necessary laws. Sonnino’s reformist plans involved finding a definitive solution to the nationalization of the

¹⁴⁰ The Sonnino government lasted from 8th of February to the 29th of May 1906, while Buffalo Bill’s Wild West left Italy at the beginning of May.

¹⁴¹ Yambo was the pseudonym of Italian science fiction writer Enrico Novelli (1874-1943).

¹⁴² Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell’Italia contemporanea: L’età giolittiana* (Bari: Laterza, 2011), pp. 88-90.

railway system, implementing tax relief, realizing liberal reforms of the justice system and, last but not least, an ambitious resolution of the ‘southern question’. The latter was a very dear matter to Sonnino, who believed that the core of this thorny issue was to be addressed through a major improvement of the agricultural system in the south, and, with it, of the social conditions of the agrarian masses. To find the support he needed to pass such critical social reforms, Sonnino was required to introduce into his cabinet some progressive (and leftist) figures. He chose the radical Ettore Sacchi as Minister of Pardon and Justice, and Edoardo Pantano, a republican and former Garibaldino, as Minister of Agriculture. The incorporation of these two elements into the administration caused pandemonium in his own right and in the conservative and liberal bourgeois press—even though the socialists were also suspicious of these appointments. Sonnino, who had embodied the antithesis of Giolitti for his uncompromising ethics, was suddenly branded by public opinion a traitor to his political creed, or at best a crafty opportunist.

The cartoon entitled “Sad Reflections/ Riflessioni Tristi”, in Figure 82, ridiculed Sonnino’s faltering figure in the face of the vexations from his parliamentary group—as well as the first cracks in the relations with the socialists, who, as essential elements for the stability of the majority, soon began to impose their demands. Sonnino is depicted chatting to a show Indian, who tells him: “I, as a rule, grab my enemies by the neck”, to which Sonnino resignedly answers “Mine, instead, take me by the collar”. The expression refers to Sonnino being in a position of subservience to the members of parliament.



*Figure 82: Sancio Panza, Rome, 24 March 1906, p. 1.
 “The Savage—I, as a rule, grab my enemies by the neck”
 “Sonnino—Mine, instead, take me by the collar”.*

As was customary in Italian illustrated satire, the Western characters acted as sidekicks to Italian personalities, upon whom weighed the greater comical potential of the vignette. The Wild West provided a suggestive platform for jocular debate over matters of national importance, albeit its function was often to serve as the backdrop. The cartoon entitled “Scenes of Semi-Wild-Life/ Scene della vita semi-selvaggia”, in Figure 83, illustrates this precisely. It parodies the Wild West show’s act of the “Buffalo Hunt”, with Italian politicians taking on the appearance of show performers. Sonnino is a cowboy on a galloping horse, who attempts to lasso a Mediterranean buffalo (from the peculiar shape of the horns), portrayed as a modern Minotaur with the facial features of Enrico Ferri—the prominent criminologist and secretary general of the Italian Socialist Party.¹⁴³ The vignette is an allegory of Sonnino’s dependency on the support of the Socialists to secure a majority in the parliament, and particularly on the opportunistic strategy he carried out to appease their leader, Ferri. The only way in which cowboy-Sonnino can catch the stubborn-

¹⁴³ Enrico Ferri (1856-1929) was an Italian criminologist, journalist, and politician. See Thorsten Sellin, “Pioneers in Criminology. XV. Enrico Ferri (1856-1929)”, *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*. Vol. 48, n. 5 (1958), pp. 481-492.

looking buffalo-Ferri is with a rope bearing the nametag “Grazia” (literally translates as “Grace” although the more precise meaning is that of “Pardon” in English). “Grazia”, therefore, stands for the newly elected Minister of Pardon and Justice, Ettore Sacchi, a man of the extreme left and an ally of Ferri. From this, the punchline of the cartoon can be deciphered: “Sonnino-Cowboy: Curious! How different the Buffaloes are here in our land! To capture this...one must give him freedom!” or in other words “to win the support of Ferri, one must give him Ettore Sacchi”. Freedom (libertá in Italian) is used as a metonymy for the term “Grazia”, meaning to receive pardon, to be freed—which prompted the reference to the Ministry of Pardon (Grazia) and Justice.¹⁴⁴



Figure 83: Sancio Panza, Rome, 24 March 1906, p. 1.
“Sonnino-Cowboy: Curious! How different the Buffaloes are here in our land! To capture this...one must give him freedom!”

The other leftist Minister whose appointment had raised intense objections among right-wing members of the parliament, as well as disbelief from left-wing ones, was Minister of Agriculture Edoardo Pantano, to whom Sonnino had entrusted the arduous task of the rehabilitation of the agrarian south.¹⁴⁵ Pantano had been a loyal ‘red-shirt’ during the wars of Italian Independence, and in the late 1860s he

¹⁴⁴ Ferri had been a firm opposer to the appointment of left-wing ministers to bourgeois governments in the past.

¹⁴⁵ The rural south of Italy was, indeed, the largest source of the ‘human capital haemorrhage’ caused by mass emigration. See Choate, *Emigrant Nation*.

embraced the ideals of Giuseppe Mazzini, joining him in the (unsuccessful) insurrectional upheavals for the occupation of Rome in 1869. He remained a fervent republican well after Mazzini's death, spending the rest of his political career in the Radical party.¹⁴⁶ The cartoon in Figure 84 parodies Pantano's turbulent youthful deeds by coining a metaphor which will grow in exponential popularity in Italy, being persistently repurposed in a variety of different contexts and mediums throughout the 20th century.¹⁴⁷



Figure 84: Sancio Panza, Rome, 24 March 1906, p. 2.
“Buffalo—I come to invite you to join our company...”
“Pantano—Huh! Don’t you know that I am a Minister of the King of Italy?”
“— (*background laughter*) But you have been Red...Skin too!”

The cartoon portrays a whimsical exchange between Buffalo Bill and Minister Pantano. Cody proclaims “I come to invite you to join our company...” to which Pantano answers “Huh! Don’t you know that I am a Minister of the King of Italy?”. A giggling background comment, expressing the cartoonist’s view, utters, “But you have been a Red...Skin too!”. The humour resides in the word play between Red

¹⁴⁶ Edoardo Pantano (1842-1932). See [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/edoardo-pantano_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/edoardo-pantano_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/).

¹⁴⁷ The Red Skin or Indians as a synonym of leftist political radicalism was adopted by a number of publications contemporary to this. Also, in the 1970s it was re-appropriated by left wing countercultural groups, “Indiani Metropolitani”, as a symbol of their resistance and insubordination to status quo and social order. See Giorgio Mariani, “Was Anybody More of an Indian than Karl Marx? The ‘Indiani Metropolitani’ and the 1977 Movement”, in Christian F. Feest (ed.), *Indians and Europe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), (1999), p. 585.

Skins—the name Italians commonly attributed to Native Americans—and Red Shirts—the regiment of volunteers which had supported Garibaldi during national unification, among whom Pantano had been prominent. The comparison equalized both roles on a logical level, given that they both entailed acts of insubordination towards colonial powers and pre-established order. Furthermore, red was traditionally the colour which represented groups of the radical left, rendering the connection between the red flag and red skin into a useful allegory for many of the events which would involve militant leftist groups throughout the 1900s—from early twentieth century proletarian revolts to countercultural events of the 1970s.¹⁴⁸ This proves the relevance and plasticity of Wild West context and elements, which outlasted fashions and became topical metaphors of 20th century culture, particularly in Italy. Yet, at the same time, it exposes the enduring Italian indifference to the colonial implications which the usage of the term “Red Skins” entailed for Native North American peoples. This is a significant marker which differentiates the Italian experience of the ‘Wild’ American West in the 20th century from that of other European countries—first and foremost Germany, where the discussion of Native American issues was, by comparison, especially considerate.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Giorgio Mariani, “Was Anybody More of an Indian than Karl Marx?”, p. 585.

¹⁴⁹ See Julia S. Stetler, “Painting the town Red: Buffalo Bill’s Indians in the German Media”, in Frank Christianson (ed.), *The Popular Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), pp. 207-208. Also see György Ferenc Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016).

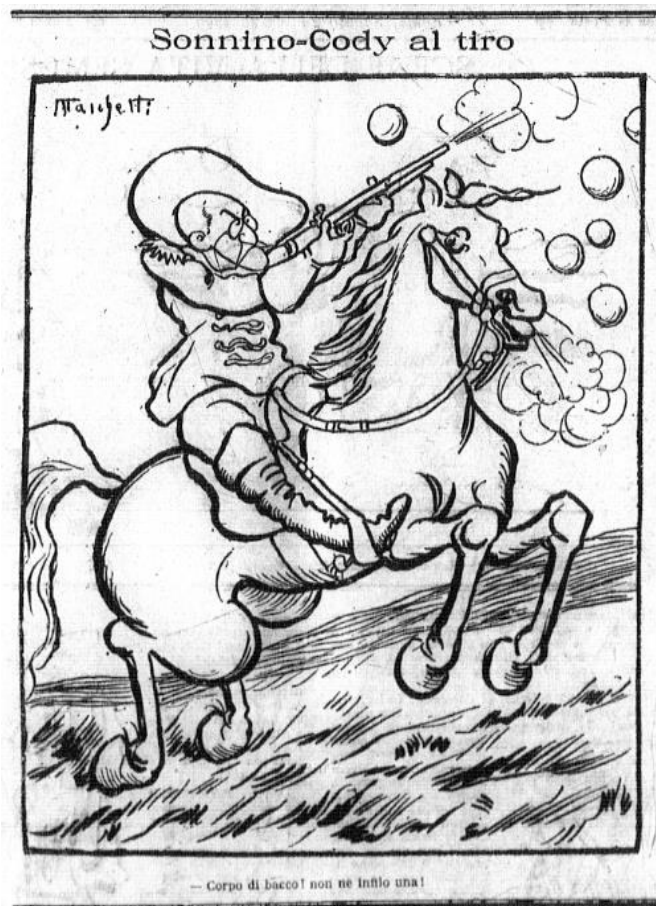


Figure 85: *Sancio Panza*, Rome, 24 March 1906, p. 2.
 “By Jove! I can’t seem to hit one!”

The last cartoon from *Sancio Panza*, Figure 85, a parody of Cody’s shooting stunt in the Wild West show, heralds the impending *debacle* of the Italian prime minister and his precarious government. Sonnino, in the guise of Buffalo Bill, shoots his cartridge without managing to hit any of the glass ball targets, symbolizing his political shortsightedness and gaucherie, which ultimately rendered his policymaking attempts vain.

The Wild West show and Sonnino’s government were confirmed as a winning humorous combination in satirical publications, not only in Rome, but across Italy. An outstanding example can be found in the satirical illustrated weekly, *La Rana* from Bologna, where an allegory of the “Wild West” within Sonnino’s legislature dominates the first page of the magazine’s issues of the 6th of April 1906. The magazine’s title, above all, reveals a metaphor. “La rana”—which translates as “the frog” in English—is an amphibian symbol of change and adjustment. Due to its two-phased metamorphosis, it also signifies duplicity, two-facedness.¹⁵⁰ In the

¹⁵⁰ Paola Puglisi, *Emeroteca satirica: istruzioni per l’uso*, in *Il travaglio delle idee. Un secolo di caricatura nella*

context of this illustrated magazine, first established in 1865, the frog indicated the epochal turn of events following the Italian wars of independence.¹⁵¹ Yet, due to Italy's enduring instability after the unification, the frog symbolism had remained topical as an emblem of *trasformismo*: the double-dealing strategy of a centrist government, aimed at cutting off the extremists, initiated by Cavour and mastered by Depretis, Crispi and ultimately Giolitti—who made it his political signature. Sonnino's short-lived 1906 government also implemented a particular kind of *trasformismo*.¹⁵² The appointments of the radicals Sacchi and Pantano as ministers were intended to dampen the extremism of left-wing groups by getting them to cooperate for the common good in an allegedly moderate government.¹⁵³

The lithograph in Figure 86, entitled “The successors of Buffalo Bill” can certainly be seen as a colourful allegory of *trasformismo* in a Wild West turn. Sonnino-Buffalo Bill, in a (certainly not casual) central-left position, escorts a group of Socialist Red-Skins. The role of Sonnino as heir of Buffalo Bill stands as a symbol of ambivalence.

comunicazione e nell'arte, Fabio Santilli (ed.) (Montelupone: Centro Studi Gabriele Galantara, 2008), pp. 48-71.

¹⁵¹ A further significance is to be found in Bolognese slang, which associated the color green with being broke. See the website https://www.senato.it/3424?categoria=128&active_tab_24952=511. Last accessed 02/03/2019.

¹⁵² Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream: Sidney Sonnino and the rise and fall of liberal Italy 1847-1922* (Firenze: Leo Olshki, 1999), p. 326.

¹⁵³ Francesco Leoni, *Storia dei partiti politici italiani* (Napoli: Alfredo Guida Editore), p. 330.

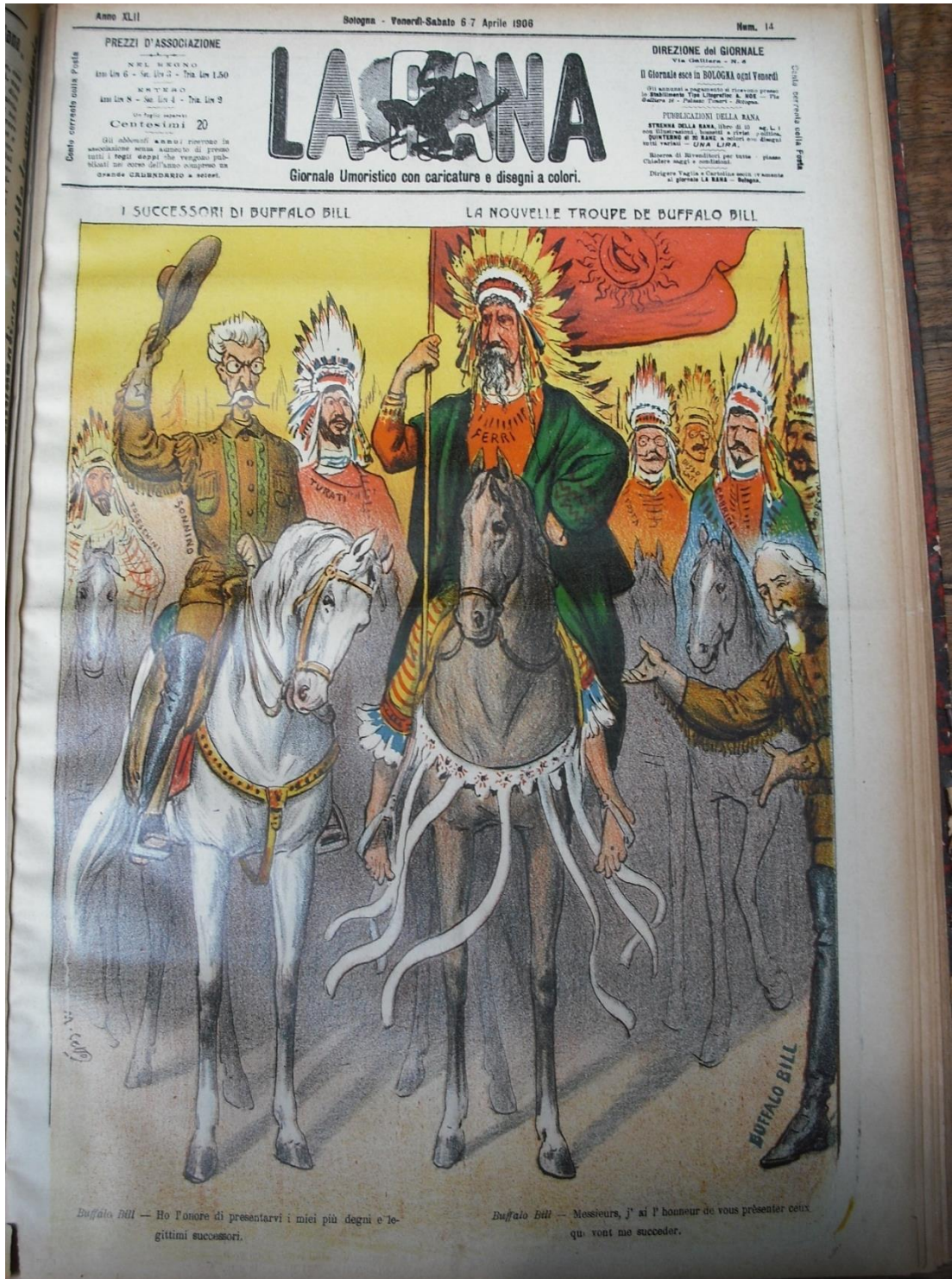


Figure 86: La Rana, Bologna, 6-7 April 1906, p. 1 courtesy of Biblioteca dell' Archiginnasio, Bologna.

"Buffalo Bill—I have the honour to introduce you my worthiest and rightful successors."

Like Buffalo Bill—who cultivated a double persona as Indian fighter and at the same time friend of the Indian—Sonnino had been an enemy of the Red-Skin Socialists, with whom he was now required to cooperate for the sake of the government's

survival.¹⁵⁴ The metaphor of the Red-Skins Socialists is reprocessed here, quite literally, in full regalia. They are led by the secretary of the party, Enrico Ferri—holding a red flag complete with the Socialist rising sun symbol. Ferri represented the integralist strand of the Socialist party, which had prevailed over the reformists, headed by Filippo Turati—positioned behind Sonnino in the cartoon. The two strands had a moment of temporary rapprochement in 1906, forming the Socialist parliamentary group which decided to support Sonnino’s so-called liberal government on the 9th of March. Given the pledges that they had made only a few years before (in 1904), never to join bourgeois governments, this change of course had left many astonished, making the group lose credibility, at least in the eyes of the revolutionary fringe of the party. Hence the parody of the *La Rana* cartoon: the Socialist parliamentary group—among them Andrea Costa, Leonida Bissolati, Angiolo Cabrini, Oddino Morgari, and Mario Todeschini—were thought to be opportunists, and depicted as performers who jumped on this somewhat farcical government bandwagon.¹⁵⁵ And so, the satire comes to a close with the real Buffalo Bill, in the bottom right corner of the page, legitimizing this group as “his worthiest and rightful successors”.

The Wild West remained topical in the pages of *La Rana* throughout the month of April, inspiring further socio-political allegories. As an openly anticlerical publication, *La Rana* extended the metaphors of the Wild West show to parody Vatican relations and their influence on Italian politics and culture. In 1906, Cardinal Merry del Val, secretary of the Vatican state from 1903 to 1914, was in the public eye for his uncompromising position towards the supporters of the so-called Catholic Modernism—members of the clergy, as well as Italian catholic intellectuals, who advocated innovative reforms within the church, in order for it to become less isolated and more accessible to the people. In the cartoon titled “Merry del Val in the Far West”, Figure 87, he is depicted as a cowboy in clerical garb, on the back of a rampant mare called “Intransigence”. He is attempting to tame wild horses named ‘Bonomelli’, ‘Don Sturzo’, ‘Don Murri’, ‘Don Jella’, ‘Fogazzaro’, who had established themselves as innovators, having taken progressive positions towards some recent church-state issues.¹⁵⁶ The comment at the bottom of the page: “The

¹⁵⁴ As we are reminded by his support to Pelloux’s ‘liberticide laws’.

¹⁵⁵ On press reports confirming the perception of Sonnino’s short lived government as opportunistic, see Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream*, pp. 326-327.

¹⁵⁶ Among these there were: the separation between state and church in France, which occurred the previous year, and was supported by Bishop Geremia Bonomelli; the support for the participation of

rope is still good! You and me now, my little unruly horses!” implied that the Vatican’s official stance was one of no compromise and that Merry del Val, lasso in hand, was going to restrain their disruptive doctrine.

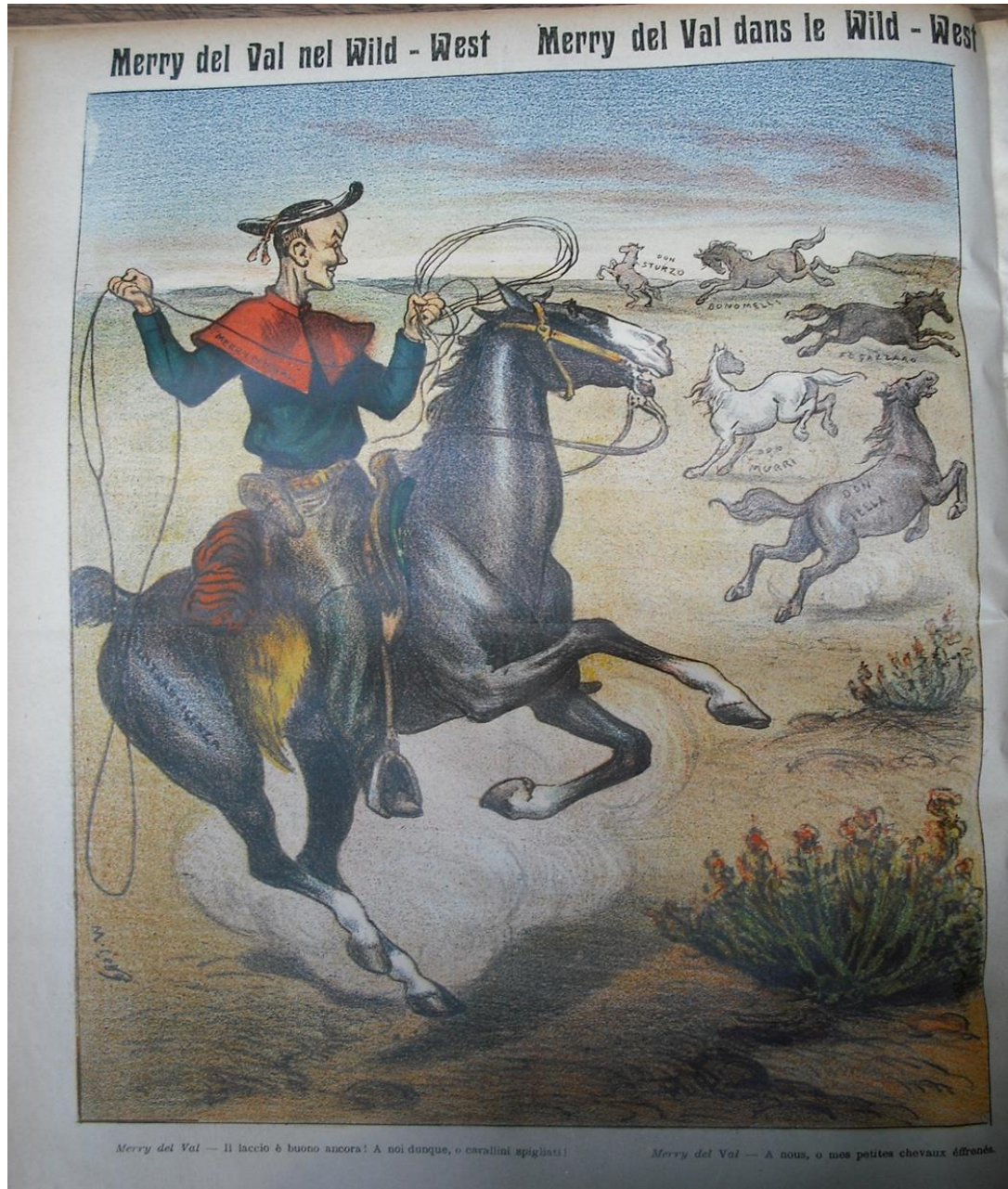


Figure 87: *La Rana*, Bologna, 6-7 April 1906, p. 4. Courtesy of Biblioteca dell’ Archiginnasio, Bologna

“The rope is still good! You and me now, my little unruly horses!”

In addition to connections with the national context, the *ensemble* of characters, images and symbols of Cody’s Wild West was also fittingly adapted to the

Catholics in Italian political life advocated by Don Romolo Murri and Don Luigi Sturzo; and the plea for a Church which would reach out to the population, contained in the 1905 novel *Il Santo/The Saint*, by Antonio Fogazzaro, and backed by his influent friend, Monsignor Lorenzo Jella.

international context by *La Rana*'s cartoonists. In the same April issue, they published an elaborate allegory of the Algeciras international conference, at which agreement was sealed the day after the publication appeared, the 7th of April 1906.



Figure 88: *La Rana*, Bologna, 6-7 April 1906, p. 6-7.
Courtesy of Biblioteca dell' Archiginnasio, Bologna.

The Algeciras conference took place in southern Spain between January and April 1906. Formally convened to discuss modernizing reforms for the Moroccan sultanate, its underlying aim was to regulate European presence in the country, and particularly to assess France's position of predominance there. The conference was meant as a conciliation after the Tangier crisis, which occurred the previous year and saw Germany oppose the French attempt to extend its power over the then independent Morocco. The several European powers involved in the negotiations, included France, Britain (aligned as a French supporter by virtue of the 1904 *entente cordiale*), Spain (supporting the Anglo-French stance), Germany (opposed to French control in Morocco), Austro-Hungary (the only true ally of Germany), and Italy. Italy's position at the conference was undeniably awkward. As a member of the

Triple Alliance, Italy was bound to support Germany and Austro-Hungary; however, given that Austro-Hungary had resisted Italian colonial ambitions in the Balkans, Italy had been naturally driven to seek closer relations with France and Britain, in order to obtain access to the other coveted territory, Tripolitania.¹⁵⁷ Because of this, Italy limited itself to a mediating position between the two powers at the conference. This stance ensured that no new fractures would be created between France and Germany, but was, first and foremost, an attempt to hide Italy's real position of holding with the hare and running with the hounds.¹⁵⁸ Among the non-European powers there obviously figured Morocco, which was trying to maintain as much authority and independence as possible, thus working to bring the conference to a deadlock; Russia, which remained somewhat neutral; and the United States, which also adopted a position of mediation in the conference.

This complex set of alliances, attitudes, and shifting spheres of influence was carefully reflected in this visually stunning *La Rana* cartoon. The “savages of the Wild West”, as the French title of the cartoon designates them, resemble each power's respective delegate at Algeciras. Furthermore, their feathered headdresses signposted their official stance at the conference. America, in the bottom left corner of the page, is represented by the Red Skin ambassador Henry White (with the distinctive nose), who wears a headdress with the German flag's colours, barely entering the picture. The English Red Skin, next to America in the picture, looks like ambassador Arthur Nicholson and wears French-flag-coloured regalia. The German Red Skin, on the black horse next to the English one, featuring Kaiser Wilhelm's trademark handlebar moustache, is pointing his spear towards the “Moroccan coach”; however, he is not shooting. Italy is represented by the Red Skin on the white horse, who wears German-coloured regalia, but conceals his true face behind the rifle as he shoots the coach; this symbolizes Italy's duplicitous stance in the negotiations.

¹⁵⁷ Italian treaty of 16 December 1900 with France Prinetti-Barrère, promised not to oppose French expansion in Algeria and Morocco, in exchange for the right to develop claims over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

¹⁵⁸ This stance would eventually prove unsuccessful.

Il finto attacco delle Pelli-rosse alla diligenza marocchina

Les sauvages



Le rappresentazioni di Buffalo Bill - Tra Sultano e Pretendente - Possiamo intanto stupellarci allegramente fra di noi dal momento che il loro non è che un finto attacco.

Figure 89: Closer depiction of the left side of Figure 89.



Figure 90: Closer depiction of the right side of Figure 89.

On the centre-right of the cartoon, the Austrian Red Skin sides with Germany, although he is without pants and has the Royal Hapsburg Eagle branded on his bottom—a lampooning caricature by the cartoonists of *La Rana* and a sign of a long-standing Italian antipathy towards former oppressors. The French Red-Skin, rather than wearing a feathered headdress, flaunts a rooster's comb on his head. This, other

than being the emblem of France, undoubtedly symbolized French cockiness in colonial enterprises, particularly with regard to the rights of supremacy arrogated over Morocco. In the upper part of the cartoon, the “Moroccan coach” uses the Wild West show’s imagery of the Deadwood stagecoach to symbolize Morocco’s situation among Euro-American superpowers. As the Deadwood stagecoach was the most popular act in Cody’s Wild West show, with members of the audience competing to get a ride on it, so it was with Morocco. Holding a strategic position between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, every European power wanted to control it. Curiously, the “Moroccan coach” is led by donkeys, rather than horses. The donkey, embodying stubbornness, symbolized the safeguarding impasse to which the Moroccans intended to lead the conference. At the same time, it was also a reference to the ongoing infighting within the Moroccan Sultanate, especially the threat to emperor Abdelaziz’s reign represented by the pretender to the throne Bou Hmara, whose nickname was “the man who rode donkeys”.¹⁵⁹ They are depicted fighting each other as they try to lead the stagecoach.¹⁶⁰ The caption at the bottom of the cartoon reads: “Buffalo Bill’s show between the Sultan and the Pretender – Since their attack is only a simulation we can continue to merrily disembowel ourselves!”, suggesting that the conference had only been staged to resolve conflicts among European powers, and not really to guarantee the independence or stability of Morocco, as was originally claimed.

From these cartoons it seems clear that the Wild West show’s imagery was received as a particularly appealing set of references with which to ironize on political events and circumstances perceived to be staged or farcical, both in the national and the transnational context. Ideas and images relating to spectacles resonated intensely in the minds of Italian cartoonists and those of their readerships, who had regarded the machinery of politics as a large and chaotic circus for decades.¹⁶¹ Cody’s pageant evidently brought a touch of vitality to such a well-established analogy. Indeed, the Italian politics + Wild West show-themed metaphors proved to be so popular among Italian satirists—a natural consequence to the huge success of the show itself, I argue—that they continued to be re-purposed in publications for a number of years following the show. One such example can be

¹⁵⁹ David M. Hart, *Tribe and Society in Rural Morocco* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 123.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Rydell and Mary Robinson, “A Leap, but not a Stretch”, erroneously designates the Moroccan Sultan as the Ottoman Sultan. See *Points West* (Summer 2015), p. 12.

¹⁶¹ For more circus allegories see, for example, *Il Mulo*, Bologna, 01/03/1908.

found in the satirical periodical, *Il Mulo*, also from Bologna, which was, however, positioned at the other end of the political spectrum from *La Rana*. Published with the subtitle “anti-rascal periodical”, *Il Mulo* (The Mule) was a clerical and anti-socialist weekly which twisted and ridiculed the cartoons of another important (socialist) satirical publication of the time, *L’Asino* (The Donkey), from Rome.¹⁶²

Il Mulo adopted Wild West metaphors on several occasions in the years 1907-1908, although for the purpose of this study only two examples will be taken into consideration.¹⁶³ The familiarity that *Il Mulo* exhibited with Wild West allegories offers further proof of the adaptability of the *repertoire* introduced by Buffalo Bill—which in Italy was exploited for satirical purposes from all political orientations, from left- to right-wing, reaching audiences from multiple social strata.¹⁶⁴ In the cartoon in Figure 91, Enrico Ferri is once again the protagonist of parody. In early 1908, Ferri found himself at the centre of criticism—from his political opponents, as well as from his socialist comrades (in fact, from 1909, he would no longer be a socialist)—for his decision to withdraw from party militancy and step down from the direction of the newspaper *L’Avanti*, to embark on a series of generously-paid lectures on socialism in the Americas. Ferri’s choice was deemed controversial, firstly due to his disaffection from active politics (which had stemmed from conflicts with other members of the Socialist Party, in particular Filippo Turati), and secondly because the fee he was being paid for lecturing (100.000 liras of 1908) was regarded as too high. This was perceived as a highly un-proletarian turn by the one who had been acting for a long time as the chief representative of the Italian working-classes. The conservative satirists of *Il Mulo*, therefore, took advantage of this circumstance to lampoon Ferri as a hypocrite, as well as a mercenary, and to caricature his lecturing tour as a vaudevillian pageant. And so, what better allegorical repertory could there be than the one offered by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West? The cartoon published on the 1st of March 1908 was entitled “Enrico Ferri in Buffalo Bill’s American caravan” and depicts Ferri as a Red Skin performing in front of an audience in a circus ring. The horse-riding Red-Skin-Ferri is portrayed hitting the target with his lance, represented as the symbol of the “socialist shining

¹⁶² Paola Puglisi, *Emeroteca Satirica*, pp. 48-71.

¹⁶³ Due to space constraints I have had to limit my study to the cartoons with direct reference to Cody’s show. See also *Il Mulo*, 17/05/1906, for further Western references.

¹⁶⁴ Most Italians, being poorly literate and of low social extraction, could not actively take part in political life (universal male suffrage was not introduced until 1912), but they nevertheless followed government developments through the humour of illustrated satire.

sun of the future” (il sole dell’ avvenire) and bearing the inscription “100.000 liras”. The caption at the bottom of the page reads: “Good old ‘Red-Skin’ Enrico never misses such targets”, suggesting that Ferri’s greed and self-interest were typical and renown traits of his personality.¹⁶⁵



Figure 91: Il Mulo, Bologna, 1st March 1908, p. 12. Courtesy of Apice Library, University of Milan “Statale”
“Good old Red-Skin Enrico never misses such targets”

In front of Ferri stood the caricature of his ‘agent’, who *Il Mulo* had defined in the pages of a previous issue as a “European Barnum who tried to export in

¹⁶⁵ The cartoon was part of a contest in *Il Mulo* for the best caricature of Ferri’s American tour, won by Mario Pozzati, brother of famous painter and sculptor Severo Pozzati (1895-1983). See Dante Forni, Romeo Forni (eds.), *Sepo: settant’anni con l’arte* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2008), p. 16.

America, as oddities, all sorts of living phenomena, to offer them to audiences, avid for emotions, in some theatre or equestrian circus”.¹⁶⁶

Both this description and the cartoon confirm the widely-held perception among Italians, spread mostly during the second tour of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (which was co-managed by a former associate of Barnum, James Bailey), that Cody’s show was little more than an equestrian circus with an ethnographic exotic twist, but always belonging to the world of variety, and therefore reputed to be a lowbrow less noble spectacle, especially by conservatives and the bourgeoisie.¹⁶⁷

On the eve of Ferri’s departure for the Americas, in June 1908, *Il Mulo* landed one last satirical blow on him. The cartoon on the cover of the 25th of June issue, entitled “Conquering the dollar (Melancholy on board)”, caricatures Ferri as a sad joker/circus entertainer, rather than the habitual Red-Skin. He wears a red onesie as well as the characteristic clownish stripy socks and shoes while sitting on top of a Jack-in-the-box bearing the “Socialist shining sun of the future”. Ferri’s vague resemblance to Buffalo Bill—his long greying hair, moustache and goatee—enabled the comparison between him and the American showman. Evidently aware of Cody’s emerging financial troubles—which motivated the choice to merge the Wild West with Pawnee Bill’s show that same year—*Il Mulo*’s cartoonists designated Ferri as the “Italian Buffalo Bill”: a declining entertainer who is trying his luck in the New World, just as Buffalo Bill had done before with the Old World. In the water, fish with huge open mouths can be seen surfacing. Called *boccaloni* fish in Italian, the word is also an idiom for gullible people who can be easily hooked by anything, and in the cartoon, they symbolize the easily impressionable audience attending Ferri’s American lectures. The caption at the bottom reads: “Hopefully it will go well this time! As long as I won’t find Bettolo trying to seize my revenue”. This is a reference to the lawsuit Ferri lost against minister Giovanni Bettolo in 1904, a consequence of a smear-campaign against the former naval admiral carried out by Ferri in the newspaper *L’Avanti*; Ferri was condemned for “repeated defamation in the press” and was still due Bettolo a lavish compensation.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ *Il Mulo*, 09/02/1908, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Surprisingly, the socialists shared a similarly conceited view, but for different reasons: they outwardly deplored the show as capitalist and exploitative—and therefore not inspired by noble ideals of brotherhood among peoples—although, as many newspapers indicated, the Italian working classes still attended it in overwhelming numbers

¹⁶⁸ See Saverio Cilibrizzi, *Storia parlamentare politica e diplomatica d’Italia da Novara a Vittorio Veneto: 1896-1909* (Milano: Albrighi e Segati, 1925), pp. 229-230.



IL MULO

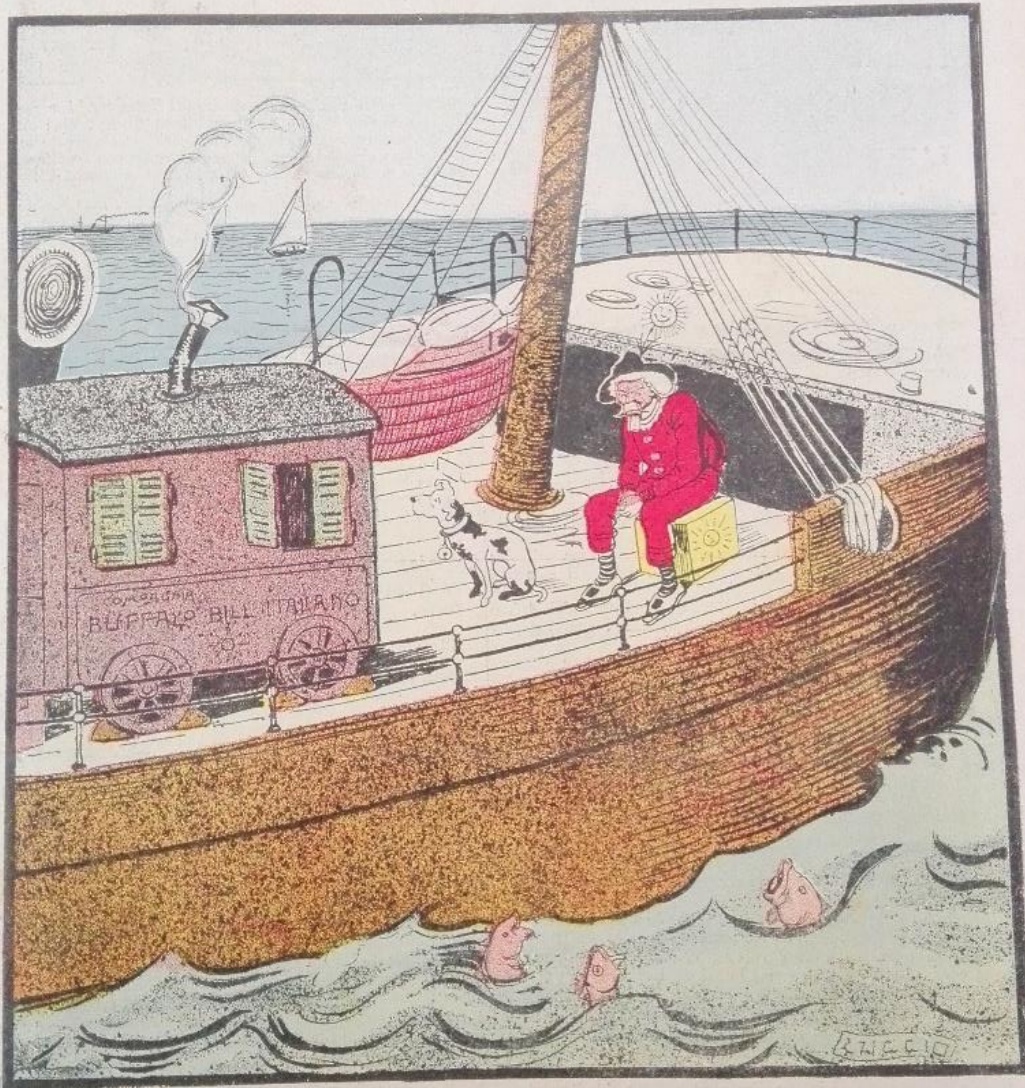
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ABBONAMENTI - Per l'interno: Anno L. 5 - Sem. L. 3.-
Per l'estero: * L. 8. * L. 4.50

Direzione e Amministrazione - Via Marsala, 8
Pubblicità - Haasensteln e Vogler - Cimarie, 1 - Bologna

Un numero separato: Cent. 10 - arretrato del 1907: Cent. 50 - arretrato del 1908: Cent. 20

ALLA CONQUISTA DEL DOLLARO
(Malinconie di bordo)



ENRICO FERRI: — Se m'andasse bene! basta che laggiù non trovi Bettòlo a sequestrarmi
gl' incassi.

Figure 92: *Il Mulo*, Bologna, 28th June 1908, p.1 Courtesy of Apice Library, University of Milan.
“Hopefully it will go well this time! As long as I won’t find Bettolo trying to seize my revenue”.

In conclusion, this thorough roundup of allegories proves that, regardless of the snobbery associated with the perceived lowbrow status of Cody’s show—which, as will be further assessed, was a symptom of a cultural clash stemming from fears of looming Americanization and nationalist ideals of a revival of Latinity—Italian satire

drew from the metaphorical repertoire of Buffalo Bill's Wild West in an immediate and systematic way. The imagery belonging to Cody's show, during and for a number of years after its Italian stay, were the instant go-to reference to parody current social and political events, locally as well as internationally. This ultimately demonstrates the real popularity and the unambiguous appreciation of Cody's western pageant, impact of which on the Italian collective imagination was deep and shaping, manifesting itself in different ways and fields (such as cinema, which will be assessed later in this study), throughout the course of the twentieth century.

Chapter 7.6. A fateful meeting between pioneering entrepreneurs: Buffalo Bill, Filoteo Alberini, and the genesis of 'Italian Westerns'

“The marks of Buffalo Bill's Wild West are everywhere on the film western”. With these words, American Studies scholar Joy Kasson concluded her landmark study, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity Memory and Popular History*.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, there is no doubt that the fame and impact that Buffalo Bill had on world-wide popular culture would not have been the same had it not been for the opportunity that cinema offered to him, and, in turn, by the place that the character of Buffalo Bill has occupied throughout its history.

At the beginning of the 20th century, cinema was a burgeoning business, in America as well as in Europe. Hundreds of amateurs experimented with trailblazing motion picture devices and rapidly became entrepreneurs, starting itinerant cinema businesses or opening up their own cinema halls—indeed in the first eight years of the 1900s over 160 film-theatres appeared in Italy's major cities, alone.¹⁷⁰ Interestingly, the birth of cinema reveals a somewhat inborn affinity between this medium and the notion of the “Wild” West, as it appears that the most celebrated pioneers of early cinema were all impressed by the pioneer of western entertainment, William F. Cody, and sought to immortalize his show in their experimental footage.¹⁷¹ Among them there was also the Italian Filoteo Alberini, a name that

¹⁶⁹ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, p. 268.

¹⁷⁰ See Giovanni Lasi, “La produzione cinematografica nel sistema economico-industriale italiano tra il 1908 e il 1914. Il caso della Milano Films” (PhD diss., University of Bologna, 2012), p. 100, and see Chapter 4.5.

¹⁷¹ Thomas Alva Edison first documented glimpses of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in his New Jersey studio in 1894. In the early 1900s, several cinema experimenters followed his example,

might mean nothing to most scholars outside of the cinema studies field, but historical records reveal that he was one of the forefathers of Italian cinema. He not only established Italy's first film production house, but was also one of the first in Italy to patent an original motion picture device. In 1894 Alberini, then an employee of the Geographical Military Institute of Florence, began to work on his own cinema machine, which he called *Kinetografer*, after trying out a model of Edison's *Kinetoscope* in a shop in Florence. The device could not only show "moving frames inside a box" but, through the aid of a lamp, it could also project them outwards, something which Edison's first device could not achieve.¹⁷²



Figure 93: Filoteo Alberini and his Kinetografo, early 1900s.
Source: <https://sempreinenombra.com>.

Sadly, even though his machine was ready in December 1894, Alberini only received (or requested) the copyright for his machine in December 1895, ten months after the Lumière Brothers had copyrighted their own *Cinématographe*.¹⁷³ Despite the unfortunate timing, the importance of Alberini's work is acknowledged by French cinema historian Georges Sadoul in his seminal book, *Les Pionniers du Cinéma (The Pioneers of Cinema)* (1948):

including the Lumière Brothers, William Dickson, and former Edison associates who went independent. See Sandra Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on the Silver Screen*, pp. 8-10 and pp. 22-23.

¹⁷² Filoteo Alberini, "Dalla prima sala cinematografica allo stereo cinema", *La Tribuna*, Rome, 01/02/1923, and José Pantieri, *Filoteo Alberini pioniere del cinema italiano* (Roma: Mics, 1994), pp. 21-22, both quoted in Giovanna Lombardi, *Filoteo Alberini, l'inventore del cinema* (Roma: Arduino Sacco, 2008), pp. 47-48.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.48.

Alberini had been one of the pioneers of the invention of cinema in Italy. He had patented in 1895, before the representation of the Grand Café, a cinetografo [sic.], for the shooting, the impression and the projection of the films. In 1904 he had managed one of the first cinemas in Rome, Cinema Moderno.¹⁷⁴

Without a doubt Alberini was one of the pioneers of motion picture devices, but the field in which he was able to make the most of his passion for cinema was entrepreneurship.¹⁷⁵ He worked all his life to establish the cinema industry in Italy, primarily by founding the Italian Cines Company, which is still currently active.¹⁷⁶ Like Thomas Edison and the Lumière Brothers, this pioneer of Italian cinema was also able to meet Buffalo Bill, in 1906. By this time, after managing cinema halls in Florence, Alberini had moved to Rome and was pursuing cinematography full-time, eventually expanding his business countrywide.¹⁷⁷ And so, when, in March 1906, Buffalo Bill arrived in the Eternal City for the second time, hoping to repeat the tremendous success his Wild West show had achieved there sixteen years earlier, Alberini was impatiently waiting for him. There was much anxiety to see Cody's Wild West that year, especially among those who had missed its previous incarnation, because this time the show was announced as "the last chance ever to experience the Grand Spectacle of the 'Wild West'".¹⁷⁸ What better opportunity for Alberini, then, to give everlasting life to this western icon through the means of motion pictures?¹⁷⁹ It seems only natural that Alberini used his Masonic affiliations to ease his way to reach Cody, who, unlike in 1890, was behaving in a rather precious manner towards the press and photographers.¹⁸⁰ Just like Buffalo Bill, who

¹⁷⁴ "Alberini avait été un des pionniers de l'invention en Italie, il avait fait breveter en 1895, avant le représentation du Grand Café, un cinetografo [sic.], pour la prise de vue, le tirage et la projection des films. Il avait, en 1904, dirigé à Rome une des premières salles de la ville, le Cinema Moderno", in Georges Sadoul, *Les Pionniers du cinéma: 1897-1909 vol. 2* (Paris : Denoël, 1973), p. 377.

¹⁷⁵ Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il cinema muto italiano*, (Bari: Laterza, 2008), p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ On Alberini's engagement in cinema business and the establishment of Cines, see Riccardo Redi, *La Cines: storia di una casa di produzione italiana* (Bologna: Paolo Emilio Persiani, 2009).

¹⁷⁷ Giovanna Lombardi, *Filoteo Alberini*, pp. 82-106. According to scholar Gabriella Turnaturi, between 1901 and 1907 the number of cinema halls in Rome escalated from three to twelve. See Turnaturi, "Les métamorphoses du divertissement citadin dans l'Italie unifiée (1870-1915)", in Alain Corbin (ed.), *L'avènement des loisirs*, p. 242.

¹⁷⁸ Anon., "Buffalo Bill", *L'Unione Liberale*, Terni, 20-21/03/1906.

¹⁷⁹ Alberini—who and kept up to date via specialised journals and attending expositions in Europe—knew of the films that Edison and the Lumières shot with Cody and wanted to emulate them.

¹⁸⁰ Cody acknowledged the hospitality of the Freemasonry in Manchester, "who muster very strongly in the district, and at whose lodges I was frequently an honored guest". Cody, *Story of the Wild West and Campfire Chats* (Philadelphia: Historical Publishing Company, 1888), p. 760. Welcoming Cody was a custom routinely repeated in the lodges of most European cities, so there is no reason to think that this did not happen also in Italy, where Alberini rose rapidly in the ranks of Freemasonry. The press reported that Menotti Garibaldi—son of Italian patriot Giuseppe, a deputy of the Italian parliament and, most of all, Master of the Grand Orient of Italy—had been a surprisingly frequent spectator at the 1890 tour of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, to the point of being criticized for

had joined the Platte Valley Lodge No. 32 in 1870 and was created Knight Templar in 1889, Alberini was a Freemason.¹⁸¹ Alberini had joined the Florentine lodge ‘La Concordia’ in 1897, becoming Master of IIIrd degree by 1908.¹⁸² Masonic connections certainly played a role in the two entrepreneurs’ agreement of 25.000 liras to be paid by Alberini’s motion picture business to Cody’s company “in order to secure exclusive [access] and the property rights for the shoots”.¹⁸³ Rome’s most prominent newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, confirms that Alberini filmed, on the 25th of March 1906, “the interesting operations of arrival of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”, which included the entrance of the company’s trains into Rome’s station and the process of encampment of the show. During the weeklong Roman stay of the Wild West, Alberini also filmed the show’s performance in its entirety. The footage was screened right away in Alberini’s Cinematografo Moderno, and a couple of days later at the other Roman theatre he managed, the Cinematografo Lumière, also known as Gran Salone Lumière.¹⁸⁴



Figure 94: Advertisement for Alberini’s films of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West in the newspaper *Il Domani*, Rome, 26/03/1906, p. 4.

At the screenings the audience was said to have: “wholly appreciated the spectacle and recognised among the crowds renowned citizens and familiar faces, and delighted themselves in identifying them aloud, especially those who were sitting in

parliamentary absenteeism., offering another clue to a bond between Italian Masons and Cody. See Anon., *Il Diritto*, Rome, 22/02/1890.

¹⁸¹ Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences, Volume I: A-C* (Altenmünster: Jazzybee Verlag, n.d.), p. 377.

¹⁸² Mario Musumeci and Sergio Toffetti, *Da la presa di Roma a Il piccolo garibaldino: Risorgimento, massoneria e istituzioni: l’immagine della nazione nel cinema muto, 1905-1909* (Roma: Gangemi, 2007), p. 14.

¹⁸³ Aldo Bernardini, *I film dal vero 1895-1914. Cinema muto italiano* (Gemona: La Cineteca del Friuli, 2002), p. 64. Author’s translation.

¹⁸⁴ Anon., “L’ arrivo a Roma di Buffalo Bill’s”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 26/03/1906, p. 4.

the gallery”.¹⁸⁵ The two motion pictures, initially entitled *L'Arrivo di Buffalo Bill a Roma* (*The Arrival of Buffalo Bill in Rome*) and *Rappresentazione completa della troupe di Buffalo Bill* (*The Complete Performance of Buffalo Bill's Troupe*) were subsequently joined together and released in several parts of Italy with the title, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*.¹⁸⁶ The press reports also reveal that, although the exclusive filmic rights had been sold to Alberini, later on in the tour Buffalo Bill would also be immortalized by another Italian filmmaker, the manager of the Edison cinema in Milan, Ercole Pettini.¹⁸⁷

Pettini, in the northern town of Brescia, filmed the encampment of the show, *L'attendamento di Buffalo Bill in Campo Marte, Brescia* (*Buffalo Bill's encampment in Campo Marte, Brescia*), as well as the show itself, *Lo Spettacolo di Buffalo Bill a Brescia* (*Buffalo Bill's Spectacle in Brescia*).¹⁸⁸ There is no information on how much Pettini was charged to shoot or even whether he was also a Mason. It is known that the films were screened for over a year around Italy by Pettini, who also had a successful itinerant cinema business in central parts of the North. Pettini's films of Buffalo Bill reached, for example, Tuscany, where a cinema catalogue states that he had cut them and incorporated them into a miscellaneous documentary film. For the occasion they were re-named *Vendetta Indiana* (*Indian Revenge*) and included scenes of “A punished Indian”, “The stagecoach leaving”, “The kidnapping”, and “The revenge of the Indians”.¹⁸⁹

While the American footage of Cody's Wild West have been preserved, restored and are now widely available through the Library of Congress, this was unfortunately not the case with Alberini's. Despite searching far and wide in cinema archives in Rome, and other filmic repositories in Italy, the answer I received from curators and silent cinema scholars has been consistent: out of the 227 motion pictures that Alberini shot during his lifetime, only fragments of one have survived,

¹⁸⁵ Bernardini, *I film dal vero 1895-1914*, p. 64, and Anon., *La sentinella Bresciana*, 24/06/1906. Author's translation. It is confirmed by cinema scholar Giovanni Lasi that Alberini's audiences went specifically in public places to be filmed, to then see themselves again in the screenings of the Cinema Moderno. Giovanni Lasi, “Filoteo Alberini e *La Presa di Roma*: Risorgimento e Massoneria nel primo film italiano”, in *All'Oriente d' Italia, le fondamenta segrete del rapporto fra Sato e Massoneria*, Massimo Rizzardini and Andrea Vento (eds.) (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2013), p. 272.

¹⁸⁶ Aldo Bernardini, *I film dal vero 1895-1914*, p. 65.

¹⁸⁷ For a closer look at the figure of Ercole Pettini and his business, see Giovanni Lasi, “La produzione cinematografica nel sistema economico-industriale italiano tra il 1908 e il 1914. Il caso della Milano Films” (PhD diss., University of Bologna, 2012), http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/4921/1/Lasi_Giovanni_Tesi.pdf.

¹⁸⁸ Aldo Bernardini, *I film dal vero 1895-1914*, p. 80.

¹⁸⁹ Renato Bovani and Rosalia Del Porro, *La “fotografia animata” a Lucca: memorie e cronache del cinema delle origini: 1897-1915* (Pisa: ETS, 2002), p. 165.

La Presa di Roma (The Capture of Rome), which coincidentally emerged from a collection belonging to the Masonic lodge of the Great Orient of Italy. Everything else is considered lost.¹⁹⁰ The same fate seems to have befallen Pettini's footage of the Wild West show.

Nevertheless, the films of Alberini, and the visibility given by Pettini's travelling cinema, undoubtedly amplified the impact that Cody's show exerted on Italian popular culture, as did the Buffalo Bill dime novels published by Milan's Casa editrice Americana since 1890, and in particular the western adventure novels written by Verona author Emilio Salgari—which often featured Buffalo Bill among the main characters, and which will be examined closely in the next section of this study.¹⁹¹ It may be added that Salgari's novelistic version of Buffalo Bill appears to have greatly influenced the vision of directors like Sergio Leone and Sergio Sollima, who—before embarking on the actual Spaghetti Western experience—began their careers as assistant director and screenwriter for TV adaptations of Salgari's short stories.¹⁹² In the case of Leone, though, the passion for the western genre evidently ran in the family, as both his mother and father respectively starred in and directed the 1913 silent picture *La Vampira Indiana (The Indian Vampiress)*.¹⁹³ The film syncretically blended together two genres: the western and the femme fatale. Despite its heterogeneous nature, the film was overall well received; perhaps predictably so, given that the beginning of the 1910s was when Italian productions of early westerns really took off, with audiences flocking to watch this riveting new genre on the silver screen, and the cinema industry catering to this demand by offering idiosyncratic westerns which struck sensitive chords among local audiences.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ I would like to thank Dr. Mario Musumeci and Aldo Bernardini for the precious information about Alberini's films they provided in our conversations at Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and in correspondence.

¹⁹¹ Emilio Salgari (1862-1911) wrote several novels and short stories—though some of them are considered 'apocryphal', as they were possibly written by ghost writers—which featured Buffalo Bill as a key character, the most notable examples being *La Sovrana del Campo d'Oro (The Queen of the Golden Field)* and *Il Re della Prateria (The King of the Prairie)*. In *La Scotennatrice (The Female Scalper)*, instead, Sitting Bull occupies a central role. Though a 'hostile', he nonetheless spends word of admiration for Buffalo Bill. On Salgari's Far Western cycle, see Luciano Curreri and Fabrizio Foni, *Un po' prima della fine?: ultimi romanzi di Salgari tra novità e ripetizione (1908-1915)* (Bologna: Sossella, 2009).

¹⁹² Aliza S. Wong, "Italian D.O.C.: American Cowboys, Malaysian Pirates, and the Italian construction of Other-ed Adventurers in Film" in *International Westerns: Re-locating the Frontier*, Cynthia J. Miller, A. Bowdoin Van Riper (eds.), (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2013), pp. 302-303.

¹⁹³ Christopher Frayling, *Sergio Leone: Once Upon a Time in Italy: The Westerns of Sergio Leone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), p. 15.

¹⁹⁴ In the 1910s, the first silent westerns arrived from America, but most of all autochthonous productions bloomed all over Europe; even in Scandinavia. On Nordic westerns, see Steffen Elmer Jørgensen, "Ideal or Counterimage? Aspects of the American Cultural Impact on Denmark 1776 to

This appetite for westerns had been kept alive by the prodigious circulation of Buffalo Bill's dime novels, which were among the most read by Italian youth and young adults at the time.¹⁹⁵ At a time when the pedagogy of nation-building was still being implemented within institutions, adventure novels such as those concerning Buffalo Bill—be it in dime novel form or those published by Emilio Salgari—had sparked a debate on the appropriateness of these readings. They were criticized for allegedly agitating the minds and spirits of the young and inspiring perilous ideas of flight and the rejection of family values—the pillars of *Italianness*—and thus accused of being detrimental to the making of wholesome citizens.¹⁹⁶ Italian cinema showed its engagement with this debate in a didactic way (which, arguably, bordered on indoctrination), by introducing western scenes into one of the most Italian tales of all times: Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*. In 1911, director Giulio Antamoro directed the first filmic version of *Pinocchio*, adding an extra scene set in the Far West, where the wooden puppet and his father Geppetto are kidnapped and almost cannibalized by a group of Indians. The scene was meant to be an admonishment to young people—the avid readers of Buffalo Bill's dime novels—representing the punishment meted out to those who ran away from home and ended up in trouble: the Far West being the place par excellence of danger, which was in turn personified by the Indians.

1995", in *Images of America in Scandinavia*, Poul Houe and Sven Hakon Rossel (eds.), (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), p. 73.

¹⁹⁵ Raffaele De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta: romanzi, fotoromanzi, rotocalchi cinematografici: il film e i suoi paratesti* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ Pino Boero and Carmine De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia* (Bari: Laterza, 2016), and Silvino Gonzato, *La tempestosa vita di capitano Salgari* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2015), p. 174. On *Pinocchio* and the Far West see Salvatore Consolo, "The Myth of Pinocchio: Metamorphosis of a Puppet from Collodi's pages to the Screen", in *Pinocchio, Puppets, and Modernity: The Mechanical Body*, Katia Pizzi (ed.), (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 166, and Raffaele De Berti, "Il Pinocchio cinematografico di Giulio Antamoro", in *Le avventure di Pinocchio: tra un linguaggio e l'altro*, Isabella Pezzini and Paolo Fabbri (eds.), (Roma: Meltemi, 2002), pp. 167-168.



Figure 95: The scene of Pinocchio in the Far West, from Giulio Antamoro's Pinocchio (1911). Courtesy of Cineteca Milano Archive, Milan.

The scene is set on the border with Canada and all the Indians are wearing a Lakota-style full-feathered regalia, a hint to another of Buffalo Bill's Wild West's legacy to the Italian collective imagination. Worthy of note is that the so-called Canadian soldiers that rescue Pinocchio from the Indian attack do not wear the classic Mounties' red outfit, but the colonial uniform of the Italian army in Libya, whose invasion had begun earlier that year. Within this early western scene lies, therefore, an understated yet clear message of colonialist propaganda to the young: the colonial troops are the heroes who can defeat Indigenous savages—the North American Indians being alter egos of the North Africans. The troops save Pinocchio—prototype of an Italian in the making—from barbarity. The peculiar ending of this scene proves how, even in children's film, Italians managed, once more, to tweak Wild West concepts and aesthetics and weave them in their own nation-building narrative.



Figure 96: 'Canadian Soldiers' attacking the Indians and wearing the Italian Colonial Uniform, from Giulio Antamoro's Pinocchio (1911). Courtesy of Cineteca Milano Archive, Milan.

Italian cinema industry continued to produce early western pictures throughout the 1910s, with a relatively high number released before 1916—when World War I put a halt on Europe’s filmic productions. Quite a few of these films were, in fact, produced by Alberini’s Cines. Perhaps the personal meeting between Buffalo Bill and Alberini a few years earlier motivated the Italian vanguard director-turned-producer to conclude that the western was a valid and prolific genre, prompting him to pursue it with enthusiasm. In 1910, a year before the release of Antamoro’s western *Pinocchio*, the film *La voce del Sangue* (The Voice of Blood), which dramatized a conflict between settlers and Indians, had been produced by Turin’s Itala Film and was immediately distributed in America.¹⁹⁷ In 1911, Cines released *Rivalità e Coraggio* (Rivalry and Courage), which staged the story of an Italian émigré settled in the Far West and his struggle to defend his ranch against jealous Anglo-Saxon cowboys.¹⁹⁸ A trend was developing: in 1912, Cines released *Due vite per un cuore* (A Sister’s Ordeal) which, after touring Italy, had also been circulated in America, Britain, France, Holland, as well as in German-speaking countries.¹⁹⁹

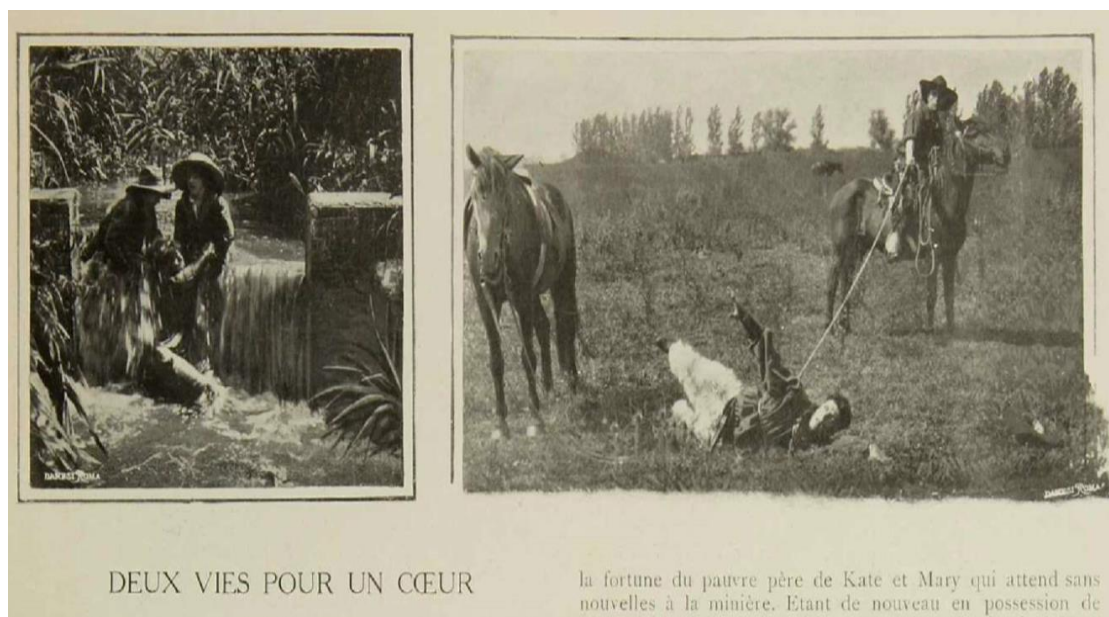


Figure 97: Scenes from *Due Vite per un Cuore*, in an article from the cinema magazine *La Cinematografia Artistica*, p. 27.
 Courtesy of Cinema Museum Archive, Turin.

The year 1913 proved extremely prolific for Italian-produced westerns. Following *La Vampira Indiana*, the film *Sulla Via dell’ Oro*, directed by Baldassarre Negroni and

¹⁹⁷ Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, *Il Cinema Muto Italiano: i film dei primi anni, 1910*, vol. 2 (Roma: Rai Libri, 1996), p. 443.

¹⁹⁸ Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, *Il Cinema Muto Italiano: i film degli anni d’oro, 1911*, vol. 2 (Roma: Rai Libri, 1995), p. 120.

¹⁹⁹ We know this from the film’s promotional material and billboard which displayed multiple languages, and from a copy of the film in the Desmet Collection of Amsterdam’s Eye Film Institute.

produced by Cines, was released. Set in the gold-rush era, it portrayed a family feud with a final love story and was distributed in the English-speaking world as *The Human Bridge*, being surprisingly well received in America.²⁰⁰ The following year, 1914, saw the Cines release of *Nel paese dell'oro* (*In the Land of Gold*), also set during the gold rush. Interestingly, the cowboy costumes featured in these early westerns resembled closely the outfits of the American Rough Riders who performed with Buffalo Bill in 1906, whilst the cowgirls wore fringed flared skirts similar to those of Annie Oakley.²⁰¹



Figure 98: Scenes from Sulla via dell' Oro (left), and Nel Paese dell'Oro (right).

Courtesy of Eye Film Institute Amsterdam.

Without a doubt these early westerns with an Italian twist made their mark on the tradition which, during the course of the 20th century, would eventually lead to the invention of the *Spaghetti Westerns*—notorious for the appropriation and distortion of themes and characters of classic American westerns. Furthermore, the transnational circulation of these films, and their fairly positive reception across the Atlantic, suggests an early cross-contamination between the European and the American strands of this genre. The fact that the primary producer of these motion pictures was the first Italian man to immortalize a real western icon, Buffalo Bill, is significant to the transnational history of this genre. Certainly, had Alberini not been

²⁰⁰ A review from *El Paso Herald*, described it as an “Astonishing picture [...] that will amaze everyone with its daring and sensational feats.” Anon., “Astonishing Picture at Bijou”, *El Paso Herald*, El Paso, TX, 28/10/1913, p. 12.

²⁰¹ Evident in the recently restored films, *Sulla via dell'oro* and *Nel paese dell'oro*, held by the Eye Museum in Amsterdam, which I was able to see at the 2017 Pordenone Silent Film Festival, in Pordenone, Italy.

so keen to endorse western screenplays for his Cines company, in the aftermath of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, the fortune of this cinematic genre would not have been the same in Italy.

*Chapter 7.7. "These people are so damn crazy wild to see something for nothing":
How the Wild West show saw Italy and how Italians received the show in 1906*

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Seven, the 1906 tour of Italy—with its new whistlestop format—represented for Cody and his crew lucrative arenas filled with fresh audiences, but also, most importantly, a renewed occasion on which to affirm American soft power—and chiefly its entrepreneurial and cultural success. The master-narratives of *translatio imperii*, that raged during the 1890s version of the show and at Chicago's Columbian exposition, continued to hover in the show's ideological script, although the Wild West's new focus was to prove the successful exportation of Americanization. The allure of Italy's olden days had endured in Cody's resourceful imagination—as he extended the endearing sobriquet of "Lucretia Borgia" to his wife, rather than just to his gun—regularly helped by Burke's extravagant claims; which now included boasting about a link between the Wild West show's horses and the polydactyl breed descending from Julius Caesar's horse.²⁰² And since Rome had long been conquered by Cody, American newsreels and commentators now described the Wild West's second passage through Italy as a picturesque idyll. Entering Italy from the French border, a correspondent from the *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, who travelled with the tour, reported that:

The entire trip was one long to be remembered by the members of the Wild West. All along the route along the right stretched the beautiful blue Mediterranean while on the left rose the snowcapped Alps. The plain along which the railway runs, was one continuous garden of flowers and fruits only broken by numerous well-built, clean and prosperous looking commercial and manufacturing towns and several most elegant looking seaside resort towns.²⁰³

Charles Eldridge Griffin, member of the Wild West crew, described this part of the journey in his memoir, *Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*—published shortly upon his return to America—in similar pastoral tones:

March 13 was cut out to make the run from Nice to Genoa, Italy, which, to my notion, was the most beautiful route ever traversed by a show train. On one side of

²⁰² Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, pp. 162, 514, 424-425.

²⁰³ *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, 11/04/1906.

us was the blue Mediterranean, and on the other were high mountains, full of snow. The almond trees were full of fragrant blossoms. During the run Colonel Cody sat on the observation platform of his private car and received a perfect ovation from immense throngs of people at every *stazione*.²⁰⁴

These sources certainly suggest that the picturesque side of Italy was the most prominent aspect of the *Bel Paese*, as well as the most longed for by Americans—who at that time were transforming themselves from Grand Tourists into modern ones. As Giorgio Bertellini argued in his study, *Italy in Early American Cinema*, “What sustained, naturalized and popularized the picturesque was the convergence of social practices (such as tourism, whether actual or vicarious), visual productions (both pictorial and photographic), and scientific discourse (such as anthropology)”.²⁰⁵ Evidently, the journalistic reports of Cody’s last Italian tour as well as Griffin’s published recollections—inset with photos, sketches, life drawings, and doused in amateur ethnology—further fed into the popularization of this debate by appealing to American audiences beyond eastern elites.

Genoa was a memorable stopover for the Wild West show’s crew, leading to profuse references to Christopher Columbus in commentaries and press accounts. Referring to epic characters of the Italian past was, in fact, deliberate and well thought-out. This approach had already been tested during the 1890 tour. But while in 1890 Italy was envisioned in the show’s masterplan as a relic to be seized by the ‘New Romans of the West’; in 1906 Italy served as a magnifying mirror through which the Wild West show, and, of course, America, would see themselves and the first effects of Americanization reflected and amplified. This sentiment comes across most strongly in the report of the *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*:

The trip from Ventimille to Genoa, about 100 miles along the beautiful Italian Riviera was a veritable triumphal march. At every station crowds were gathered amid the waving of flags (American and Italian) and the cheering of the populace [...]. All were greatly impressed [...] every man worked faithfully, and almost without exertion, the great place was put in shape. ‘How is it possible to get such help and produce such results so easily?’ was asked on every side. ‘It is American’ was the only reply, and that one reply served to answer all questions and satisfied all questioner [sic.]. The people seem to think almost anything possible to Americans, and the Wild West, the biggest thing of the kind they ever saw and it’s [sic.] success in every department, from the first announcement to the time of the final performance is most interesting to these people, and they say it is only what was to be expected of Americans. The first performance in Italy was given in Genoa, the birthplace of Christopher Columbus—a great town for an Indian show and rather likely to cause sentimental comment.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Charles Eldridge Griffin, *Four years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, p. 103.

²⁰⁵ Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*, p. 47.

²⁰⁶ *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, 11/04/1906.

These remarks speak eloquently about America's self-perception during the first decade of the 1900s. Clearly, the gratification to be had from disseminating American culture, and in particular from the spread of America's image as a larger-than-life land of possibilities was immense, and the fact that the main agent of the Americanization of Europe had been Cody's Wild West, this distinctively American pageant, was a source of further pride.



Figure 99: Cody, Burke and other crew members outside Genoa train station. Photo by Scitutto. Courtesy of Società Filatelica di Genova.

Another established strategy played out by the show's public relations team to reaffirm the Wild West's importance, was to use the connections formed with Italian nobility and with the Royal Family as a measure of the show's worth. New York's *Circus Billboard* commented, "The Colonel has been made the object of much personal attention from all the distinguished people of or living in Italy", but Griffin appeared to give a more detailed and balanced account of the links with aristocracy in his memoir:

Sunday, March 25, the Wild West was honored by a visit from the King and Queen of Italy, Count of Turin, Count and Countess Guicciardini, and the members of the court. After witnessing the spectacle throughout, King Victor Emanuel commanded a private performance for the following day. Punctually at ten o'clock their majesties arrived, accompanied by their children and suite. The royal audience heartily applauded the performance, and Colonel Cody received the personal congratulations of the king, also a gold cigarette case, with the royal monogram and

crest, studded with diamonds, and a beautifully worded letter, thanking him for both performances.²⁰⁷

The measurable success of this Italian season of the Wild West was intensely extolled in American press accounts, with several of them being directly informed by members of the Wild West show's crew. For instance, a number of articles appeared in *Circus Billboard*, in May and June 1906, recounting "Buffalo Bill's triumphant tour" and highlighting that the company's "business throughout Italy is simply phenomenal".²⁰⁸ In the same weekly, an account penned by press agent Frank A. Small flaunted, "The nine weeks in Italy was simply 'immense' and a truthful report of the success financially, and otherwise, would hardly be believed, yet it is safe to say that it will be hard for any other show in 1906 to duplicate in nine successive weeks the business done by Col. Cody's Rough Riders".²⁰⁹ A couple of months before, the *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, referring to the Genoese show, had raved, "The tent [...] holds only 12.000 people and at both performances it was filled to its utmost capacity, and the enthusiasm of the crowds was the greatest ever known anywhere by the oldest member of the Wild West Company".²¹⁰ The fulsome tenor of these statements exposes Cody and his publicists' preoccupation with the upkeep of the Wild West show's image as a prosperous and popular revue, probably as a way to counteract the gossip—spread a couple of months before—which had Cody in ill health and on the verge of a breakdown after the death of business associate James Bailey.²¹¹ The show's victorious winning over of the Italian crowds was also of particular significance to Americans, something that Cody and his PR crew clearly recognized. Buffalo Bill's triumph in Italian arenas was, in fact, directly connected to the rhetoric of the revival of the "Gladiatorial Contest", as Paul Reddin called it in his book *Wild West Shows*, which the show continued to advocate.²¹² The acclaim and recognition from a civilization accustomed to epic spectacles, such as Italy's, was a mark of the show's merit, which in turn reflected glory back onto America—as the Wild West show was an emblem of U.S. culture. These commentaries and news reports ultimately suggested to U.S. readerships the certitude that the Westward turn

²⁰⁷ *Circus Billboard*, "Buffalo Bill enters Austria", 09/06/1906, p. 23; and Charles Eldridge Griffin, *Four years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, p. 106.

²⁰⁸ *Circus Billboard*, 05/05/1906, p. 24.

²⁰⁹ *Circus Billboard*, 09/06/1906, p. 23.

²¹⁰ *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, 11/04/1906.

²¹¹ "Health of Colonel Cody is Shattered", *San Francisco Daily Call*, 21/02/1906.

²¹² See Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, Chapter 3.

of Empire had been accomplished and that American soft power had been successfully projected onto strongholds of Old World's culture.

Once again, the Italian shows marked a key period in the history of the Wild West. It also appears that Cody and his crew genuinely admired the country. In the article for the *Circus Billboard*, Frank A. Small reported a discourse given by Cody during a dinner in Udine, the last Italian stopover of the tour, which sounded very much like a loving declaration to the *Bel Paese*:

At dinner Colonel Cody called the 'boys at table' to attention and addressed them as follows: 'I know you will agree with me when I say that it will be hard for us to part from Italy. Her exceeding liveliness, her touching story, her misfortunes, her many heroic struggles, her grand achievements in literature, music and art, all combine to make her the most interesting country in the world. Her snow-capped Alps, beautiful valleys, blue skies, and almost perpetual sunshine remind me forcefully of my own beloved Big Horn Basin in Wyoming under the shadows of our snow-capped Rockies, and the Basin should be called the Italy of America. The Wild West has traveled and given performances in more countries than any other organization, but it remained for Italy to exceed all foreign countries in the warmth of her welcome to us, and the value of her patronage. We still have others to hear from as we go to six more countries before we return to our own beloved home, but they will have to 'get a lively move on' to beat Italy. Now, I propose three cheers for their Majesties, the King and Queen of Italy!!! (Three times three were given.) Now, boys, three more for the people of Italy!!!'. These also were given with a hurrah that raised the tent several inches. Every man in the Wild West enjoyed to the fullest extent the tour of Italy and honestly regretted the necessity for quitting the country.²¹³

Picture-perfect Italy was universally yearned for by tourists, and the members of the Wild West show were no different from other birds of passage. But behind the idealized impressions of Italy, as it often happens, stood certain indelible convictions about her people, culture and society. Personal records and behind-the-scenes incidents that occurred during the show's stay indicated the real feelings for the country of the Wild West crew. Beginning with Cody, it appears that this ostensible enthusiast of Italy appreciated Italians a little differently when communicating in confidence with other Americans. In one of the last letters Cody sent to James Bailey—who would die in April 1906, while the company was in Rimini—the warm welcome and the “exceeding liveliness” of the Italians that he had eulogized in the after-dinner speech turned out to be assets that wore out quickly in his eyes. “Excuse haste”, Cody wrote in smaller characters in the letter's *post scriptum*, “I am that busy these people are so d(amn) crazy wild to see something for nothing. They run all over us. I am going to kiss the first New York policeman I see. W. F. Cody”.²¹⁴ Cody

²¹³ *Circus Billboard*, 09/06/1906, p. 23.

²¹⁴ Letter from William F. Cody to James Bailey 25/03/1906, Rome, McCracken Research Library, MS.4, 1b, Box 2, folder 22.

was not new to such two-faced attitudes and this kind of remark, as his generalized dislike for the Italian populace had already surfaced during the 1890 tour.²¹⁵ However, his recent press statements had encouraged the—evidently misplaced—hope that the previous negative perceptions had improved. A Wild West show member whose opinion of Italians seemed heightened was Charles Griffin, who wrote in his book, “all kinds of bad things were predicted for us in Italy, and many of us had it down as a land of anarchists, with bombs and stilettos, but we found the people the most peaceable and more subject to police control than any country we visited outside of England”.²¹⁶ With this statement, Griffin demonstrated the persistence of anti-Italian prejudice in early 20th century America, preconceptions that abounded within the Wild West show’s troupe. By 1906, the heyday of anarchy in Italy had receded, owing to the intense repression carried on by armed forces after the murder of King Humbert I and in the aftermath of other anarchist deeds by Italians around Europe.²¹⁷ In addition, the Italian population was now generally under stricter police control than in the previous decade, in order to avert possible mass unrest incited by socialist agitators—which included factory strikes and public demonstrations. This program was carried out under the doctrinal principle elaborated by Lombroso’s school of criminal anthropology, which also influenced the policies of the military forces, according to which “prevention is better than cure”. It is therefore easy to understand Griffin’s surprise at the unexpected enforced docility of the Italians. However, Griffin’s judgement of Italy was not wholly positive, as in a different passage, ostensibly about Belgium, he subtly put forth the allegation that Italy and Spain were the places with the highest number of beggars and derelict people in Europe.²¹⁸

It would be accurate to say that, all in all, Italy was still recognized as a retrograde nation by American commentators. As Griffin had suggested, several members of the Wild West show’s crew still looked down on the country for its excessive poverty and social inequalities, as well as for the perceived hot-headedness of its people; and even though such critical statements were not as candidly reported in American newspapers as they had been published in the accounts from the 1890 tour, they were picked up by a resentful Italian press. A telling example comes from the Roman newspaper *Il Messaggero*, which decreed, “Do not trust the impunity of

²¹⁵ See Chapter 5.11.

²¹⁶ Charles Eldridge Griffin, *Four years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, pp. 108-109.

²¹⁷ See Chapter 4.3.

²¹⁸ Charles Eldridge Griffin, *Four years in Europe with Buffalo Bill*, p. 121.

pronunciation”. The title of the article referred to rude remarks that some members of the Wild West show uttered frequently and freely in particularly thick Yankee accents, safeguarded by the false conviction that their speech was completely unintelligible in Italy. However, in 1906 Italians still formed the majority of so-called new immigrants in the U.S., with New York being one of their most preferred destinations. Evidently more than a few of them, likely the ones who had already returned home after a time spent working in New York, understood the Yankee inflection. The article was, therefore, informed by one of these testimonies, and indignantly revealed that Italian paying audiences had been repeatedly insulted by low-ranking Wild West staff:

A regular reader of *Il Messaggero*, who was with his family last Saturday in one of those cages ennobled with the name of stages at the Buffalo Bill circus, writes that it is fortunate that the characteristic *yankee catharral twang* [...] cannot be understood even by English speakers, and it might be prudent, for those few who can understand this hybrid version of English, not to make their wives and daughters ill over it by not showing that they understand what they are hearing. And then he translated some of the sentences heard on that day addressed to the public, from some stable boy or from some clerk, not at all flattering to the Italians and their flag. Mr. Buffalo Bill, for whom we keep [our reader’s] letter, would be wise to warn his employees not to rely too much on the impunity of the American pronunciation, as there could always be among the public some Italian-American who knows how to retort an insult even in a New York accent.²¹⁹

Italy’s image was, therefore, instrumental to the master narrative of the Wild West show, yet Italy’s people still remained less important than what their country symbolized; even though they were literally buying into Americanization. In this rhetoric, an evident web of dynamics of cultural hegemony and domination was at play.²²⁰ As the above-mentioned sources reveal, Italians were “Orientalized” in the Wild West show’s grand narrative in an analogous process to that which Edward Said described in *Orientalism*.²²¹ Yet, during the course of the 1906 tour, Italians were seldom aware of this mechanism being played upon them. Indeed, the instrumentalization of Italy in the show’s scope was not choreographed

²¹⁹ “Un assiduo del *Messaggero*, che si trovava sabato scorso con la famiglia in una di quelle gabbie nobilitate col nome di palchi del circo di Buffalo Bill, ci scrive che é una fortuna che il characteristic *yankee catharral twang* [...] non sia compreso neanche da coloro che conoscono l’inglese e che quei pochi cui l’ibrido inglese é intelligibile, abbiano la prudenza, per non guastare il sangue alle loro mogli e figliuole, di non dare a vedere di comprendere ciò che sentono. E ci traduce alcune delle frasi udite in quel giorno all’ indirizzo del pubblico, da qualche scozzone di scuderia o da qualche commesso, niente affatto lusinghiere per gli Italiani e la loro bandiera. Il sig. Buffalo Bill, a cui disposizione teniamo la lettera ricevuta, sarà bene che avverta i suoi dipendenti di non fidarsi troppo dell’impunità della pronunzia americana, poiché potrebbe sempre trovarsi fra il pubblico qualche italo-americano che sapesse rimbeccare le insolenze anche con accento newyorkese”, *Il Messaggero*, Rome, 27/03/1906, p. 4. Emphasis original.

²²⁰ See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere* (1948).

²²¹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

straightforwardly to its people, but was instead directed outwards, to American audiences and to other English-speaking countries. At the same time, the hierarchies and nationalistic messages within the show's acts worked imperceptibly on Italian spectators, unconsciously passing on ideas of American supremacy which would reverberate only with the passing of some time.

In the immediate sense, the appreciation of the Wild West show by Italians revealed an admiration for the spectacle's undoubted financial success but also a collection of mixed feelings. A selective survey of Italian newspaper accounts giving overall judgements on the show can help the reader to better understand the reasons for this split reception. The show reviews expose, in fact, an array of viewpoints ranging from enthusiasm to heart- (and bank-)breaking disappointments, from high expectations to unwarranted scepticism, and only a few lucid analyses on the Wild West's commercial, and culturally imperialistic nature. One of the first reviews to appear in the Italian press, written in a newspaper from Genoa, *L' Eco d' Italia*, described Buffalo Bill's Wild West as "a varied and highly attractive show, truly worth seeing".²²² Of a similarly enthusiastic stance was the reporter from *La Provincia di Padova* (Padua), who declared that Cody's show offered "a once-in-a-lifetime chance of taking a world tour in two and half hours".²²³ In its positive evaluation, the Roman newspaper *Il Popolo Romano*, hinted at the democratic character of the show and claimed "the beautiful and original spectacle that Buffalo Bill's Wild West offers, continues and possibly increases—because it satisfies the taste of every class of people [...]".²²⁴ According to the columnist of *L'Ordine*, a newspaper from the city of Como, "all things considered the show was accomplished both ethnographically and in terms of the performances".²²⁵ Yet, alongside the initial praises, the first signs of audience dissatisfaction also appeared. Beginning with the sardonic review published by *El Fasoulin*, a satirical weekly from the city of Pavia written in the local dialect; the article ironized on the issue of the ticket's price not necessarily matching the expected show quality. The cost of the last available tickets was considered high by Pavia's standards; yet the hype for Cody's show pushed some

²²² "[...]uno spettacolo variato ed attraentissimo, degno veramente di essere veduto", "Buffalo Bill's Wild West", *L' Eco d' Italia*, Genoa, 15/3/1906, p. 2.

²²³ "La Mostra di Buffalo Bill[...] procura una volta tanto nella vita, il giro del mondo in due ore e mezzo", "Buffalo Bill a Padova", *La Provincia di Padova*, Padua, 14/04/1906, p. 4.

²²⁴ "L' Interesse per il bellissimo e originale spettacolo che offre il Buffalo Bill's Wild West continua e se possibile aumenta—perché soddisfa il gusto di ogni classe di persone [...]", "Buffalo Bill's Wild West", *Il Popolo Romano*, Rome, 24/03/1906 p. 2.

²²⁵ "Tutto sommato fu uno spettacolo riuscito sia dal lato etnografico quanto da quello degli esercizi eseguiti", "Buffalo Bill", *L' Ordine*, Como, 30/04/1906, p. 2.

people to attend the spectacle to show off their affluence and mundanity, and others to go beyond their means just to be able to attend, only to then regret it:

I enjoyed the most beautiful performance later when we went out. I studied the physiognomies of all those who had been inside, and I read in their faces a hardened and morose air, the expression of people who acted pompous while actually they were miserable, it was a pleasure to watch. There were some cocky types who had spent 8 liras per seat, only to show that for them 8 liras were not a big deal, they were saying: 'Oh well! It was not even that bad!' But the others, those who had pawned their coat only to go to the Buffalo Bill's, they came out quivering and saying, 'Alas, poor me and my money!'²²⁶

The Italian public was, therefore, divided, and some of the reasons for this polarization in the reception are addressed by the newspaper *Il Progresso*, from Mantua:

Perhaps there is no other show that can, like that of Buffalo Bill, arouse so disparate impressions and comments. We have heard proclamations, uttered with equal strength and color of convictions, that is the greatest swindle of the century as well as a marvelous spectacle. In reality it is neither one nor the other, and the difference in judgments depends on an external factor to the representation: the extraordinary advertisement that preceded it [...] But if this explains the ferocity of the criticisms it certainly cannot explain our enthusiasm, which, in our opinion, depends on different factors[...] the sight of red-skins, cowboys, gauchos, is more than ever apt to awaken in us the most vivid memories of our youthful readings [...] which aroused our first and long-lost enthusiasm. That is why Buffalo Bill[...] can laugh at the prejudices and criticisms, and pass through an entire region, reaping, if not glories, resounding money. Which, for him—an American and for others, even non-Americans—are worth much more than the barren green laurel.²²⁷

A report from *La Provincia di Cremona*, published on the same day, highlighted the negative comparisons between the Wild West show and regular circus performances, yet offered an overall favourable judgement on Cody's entrepreneurial skills, which were thought to be distinctly American:

The synthesis? An American extravaganza. You have to watch the show as a complex whole and admire the grandeur of the overall performance, the perfection

²²⁶ “La pussé bella rappresentazione l’ho goduta dopo, quando siamo andati fora. Studievo le fisionosue di tutti quelli che erano stati dentro e ghe ligevo in faccia un’aria tanto mucca e scagnuffa, una sprissione di gente che credeva di essere schionfa mentre si sintiva passa che l’era un gusto a vederli. Ghera dei beffalibroni che avevano speso otto franchi per posto che per far vedere che per loro otto franchi e niente sono l’istesso, dicevano: ‘-Peró! Non ghé nanca male!’ Ma quei altri che per andare al Buffalo Bill avivano impegnato il paltó d’ inverno, gnivano fora barbellando e disendo: ‘-Pora mi i mé diné!’”, “Buffalo Bill—Zepantoni e Minchina”, *El Fasoulin*, 28/04/1906, p. 2.

²²⁷ Forse non v’è nessun altro spettacolo che possa, come quello di Buffalo Bill, suscitare impressioni e commenti così disparati, noi l’abbiamo sentito proclamare, con forza e colore di convinzioni uguale, la più grande turlupinatura del secolo e uno spettacolo meraviglioso. In realtà esso non è né una né l’altra cosa, e la differenza dei giudizi dipende da un fattore estraneo alla rappresentazione: dalla straordinaria reclame che lo precede [...] se tutto questo spiega la ferocia delle critiche non riesce certo a spiegare l’entusiasmo, il quale dipende, a parere nostro, da fattori diversi.[...] la vista dei pelli-rosse, dei cowboys, dei gauchos, è quanto mai atta a risvegliare in noi i ricordi più vivi delle nostre letture giovanili[...] che hanno suscitato i nostri entusiasmi primi e lontani. Per questo Buffalo Bill[...] può ridersi delle prevenzioni e delle critiche, e passare a traverso un’intera regione, mietendo, se non allori, sonanti quattrini. I quali, per lui Americano e per altri, anche non americani, valgono molto più del verde lauro infecondo”. “Buffalo Bill, Impressioni”, *Il Progresso*, Mantua, 19/04/1906, p. 3

of the organization, the general choreography. Woe to the details. Taken one by one, the exercises and the performers are not worth as much as those seen in dozens of equestrian circuses [...] all these Indian knights, or Cossacks, or Americans, we have seen them a hundred times in the usual equestrian circuses, but never together. And yet America triumphs, in publicity, in organization, and more than anything in luck! Fame is now accomplished. Buffalo Bill does not have enough arms to scoop up the money. So, he must be right!²²⁸

The newspaper *Il Veneto*, from Padua, also addressed the cause of audience disappointment, and tried, at the same time, to provide a realistic outlook on what the Wild West show actually offered — dramatization:

For all those who went to the Buffalo Bill's with exceptional expectations the disappointment could not be avoided. But for those who attended with normal anticipation, other troubles were not possible. Buffalo Bill brought nothing supernatural here, as elsewhere, and it was a mistake to expect to witness a bloody battle or the assault on the 'Deadwood Mail Coach' with authentic deaths and injuries.²²⁹

Yet, the understanding of the fictional nature of the show did not satisfy the columnist of a newspaper from northern Italy. The reporter from Turin's *La Stampa* adamantly lamented the effective lack of realism in the execution of the show's acts, which clashed with the Wild West's much-advertised claims of authenticity:

In general, the anticipated acts [...] do not get much appreciation. Twenty-five horsemen fail to give the image of a battle and two cannons that shoot quietly are more cheerful than terrible [...] the greatest merit of the show is that of a successful ethnological exposition [...] therefore the show contains good moments, but overall does not produce the effect on the public which was supposed to.²³⁰

An insightful and compelling explanation of the dissatisfaction of Italian audiences is provided by Perugia's newspaper *L'Unione Liberale*. Its columnist argued that the disillusionment with the show was due to the Italians' lack of knowledge and

²²⁸ “La sintesi? Un' Americanata. Bisogna guardare lo spettacolo dal complesso e ammirare la grandiosità dell'insieme, la perfezione dell'organizzazione, la coreografia generale. Guai se si guarda ai particolari. Presi uno per uno, gli esercizi e gli esecutori non valgono quanto quelli che si vedono in dozzine di circhi equestri [...] tutti questi cavalieri indiani, o cosacchi, o americani, li abbiamo veduti le cento volte nei soliti circhi equestri, ma non mai assieme. Ma l'america trionfa, nella réclame, nell'organizzazione, e più che tutto nella fortuna! Ormai la fama é fatta. Buffalo Bill non ha braccia sufficienti per ammassare i quattrini. Dunque ha ragione lui!”, “Buffalo Bill a Cremona”, *La Provincia di Cremona*, Cremona, 19/04/1906, p. 2.

²²⁹ “Per tutti coloro i quali si sono recati al Buffalo Bill's con pretese eccezionali la delusione non poteva che mancare. Ma per chi intervenne con prevenzione normale, gli altri guai non erano possibili. Buffalo Bill non portava qui come altrove nessuna cosa soprannaturale, ed era un errore la pretesa di assistere ad uno scontro cruento od all' assalto della 'Deadwood Mail Coach' con morti e feriti autentici”, “Buffalo Bill's ecc.”, *Il Veneto*, Padua, 16/04/1906 p. 2.

²³⁰ “In genere i quadri d'insieme[...] non raccolgono grandi suffragi. venticinque cavalieri non riescono a dare l'immagine d' una battaglia e due cannoni che sparano sottovoce sono più allegri che terribili [...]il maggior pregio dello spettacolo è quello di una esposizione etnologica riuscita[...] lo spettacolo dunque contiene parecchi buoni numeri, ma complessivamente non produce sul pubblico quell' effetto che si supponeva”, “La prima rappresentazione di Buffalo Bill”, *La Stampa*, Turin, 23/04/1906, pp. 3-4.

consequent failure to self-identify with the American creational myths which Cody's show had been presenting them:

And our audience, in those reenactments, which are as authentic as we could wish, does not detect the most important and attractive side that tickles and moves the Americans. That is, the patriotic and historical memory, which excites them and moves them, as enthusiastically as the red shirt and the bold spandrels of the Bersagliere move us.²³¹

Unsurprisingly, the harshest criticism to Cody's show came from socialist newspapers. The show's focus on the glorification of militarism and on consumer culture—from Wild West show souvenirs to Popcorn stalls—and the initiation of such beliefs to the Italian masses, deeply unsettled local socialist political bodies, which, in turn, liberally voiced their condemnation in press reports. In Turin, *Il Grido del Popolo*, warned off its readers about the Wild West show with tales of the biting remorse “of those who rushed to pay extortionate prices for a show of jesters”, adding, dramatically, that:

While we pity those Indians, cowboys, gauchos, Cossacks, Arabs, all those shreds, more or less authentic of races, reunited under the common exploitation that forces them to be automatic repeaters of pantomime clowns, we have to dismantle this swindle held up with American expedients, and with whom the feeling of admiration for war scenes is promoted in the masses.²³²

For Como's socialist newspaper, *La Riscossa*, the rejection of Buffalo Bill's Wild West was even more categorical. Yet—to the columnist's dismay—this admonishment did not stem the attendance of workers and labourers:

Let's start with a small fact, which in such a serious subject should not even be remembered, but which also has a certain importance, as a symptom. The revolutionary organ shouts at once that the spectacle of Buffalo Bill was a swindle, a thing of no value, that the workers should be careful not to let their double lira be stolen; and to do it on purpose you never saw in Como greater turnout to a public show. May Day, which in past years took thousands and thousands of workers out parading in the streets, and was religiously celebrated by the organized and sympathetic, never had such a poor attendance.²³³

²³¹ “Ed il pubblico nostro, in quelle riproduzioni, fedeli finché si vuole, non rileva il lato più importante e più attraente che solletica e commuove gli americani. cioè il ricordo patriottico e storico che li entusiasma e commuove come entusiasmerebbe noi la camicia rossa ed il baldo pennacchio del bersagliere”, “Lo spettacolo di ieri”, *L'Unione Liberale*, Perugia, 31/03&01/04/1906, p. 1.

²³² “Noi, pur compiangendo quegli indiani, cowboys, gauchos, cosacchi, arabi, tutti quei brandelli, più o meno autentici di razze, riuniti sotto il comune sfruttamento che li costringe ad essere automatici ripetitori di pagliaccesche pantomime, dobbiamo smontare questa turlupinatura tenuta su con espedienti americani, e con cui si coltiva nella massa il sentimento di ammirazione per le scene guerresche”, “Buffalo Bill”, *Il Grido del Popolo*, Turin, 21/4/1906, quoted in Andrea Biscaro, *Buffalo Bill é arrivato a Torino*, p. 45.

²³³ “Incominciamo da un piccolo fatto, che in un argomento così serio non dovrebbe essere rammentato, ma che pure ha una certa importanza, come sintomo. L'organo rivoluzionario grida a perdifiato che la rappresentazione di Buffalo Bill era un trucco, una cosa di nessun valore, che gli operai si guardassero bene dal lasciarsi rubare la doppia lira; ed a farlo apposta non si vide mai a Como maggior concorso ad uno spettacolo pubblico. Il Primo Maggio, che negli anni passati traeva

Overall, this tour was perceived by the Italians to suffer from a general decline, “everything was no longer strictly authentic”, it was thought.²³⁴ A decade later, in a somewhat unfair memorial to Cody, *L'Illustrazione Italiana*—a popular magazine with high national circulation—would define the Wild West show of 1906 in these terms :

Buffalo Bill and his redskins delivered to us, enclosed and stylized into a belligerent choreography, a primitive world, colored with rude exoticism. We saw the stories of Mayne Reid in action, almost illustrated in vibrant colors. We were attending a performance in which the actors were not made up. Those copper skins were authentic. We approached an imaginative reality with fresh and curious pleasure. When Buffalo Bill first came to Italy, twenty-five years ago, we had fun like little boys. When he returned twenty years later, we had much less fun [sixteen years later]. Not just because we had grown old, but because they too were old, the Indians, the cowboys, their leader. For too long they had detached themselves from real life. The sap [of life] had dried up. They were galvanized mummies, moribund people that pretended to enjoy the party. And Buffalo Bill, who led them, looked as if he had the tired and withered air of a retired baritone.²³⁵

And yet, despite the array of lukewarm comments, the disappointment of Italian audiences, if at all genuine, was destined to be temporary. The negative show reviews were caused by the consternation that this new American mode of commodified culture had generated among a people little accustomed with such ways (of life and production). In other words, Italians found the Americanization represented by Cody unsettling and at the same time enticing; even if—in an age of resurgent nationalism—they struggled to openly admit it. This is easier to understand if we consider that most newspaper reviews—with the obvious exception of socialist publications—were written by and for the middle classes, which amplified the values of the ruling élites. Nationalism, the regeneration of the Italian character, and the magnification of Italian culture were still on the government’s agenda in 1906—as they had been since the late 1880s—so that unabridged acclaim of a spectacle such

sulla via in corteo migliaia e migliaia di operai, era religiosamente festeggiato dagli organizzati e dai simpatizzanti, non ebbe mai una così meschina accoglienza”, “La fortuna non è più con gli audaci”, *La Riscossa*, Como, 06/05/1906, p. 1.

²³⁴ Luciana Frassato, *Genova com'era 1870-1915* (Genova: cassa di risparmio di Genova, 1987), pp. 39-40.

²³⁵ “Buffalo Bill e i suoi pellirose, ci portarono, raccolto e stilizzato in una bellicosa coreografia, un mondo primitivo, colorito di rude esotismo. Rivedemmo in azione, quasi illustrate a tinte focose, i racconti di Mayne Reid. Assistevamo a una rappresentazione nella quale gli attori non erano truccati. Quelle carni di rame erano autentiche. Ci accostammo con piacere fresco e curioso a una immaginosa realtà. Quando Buffalo Bill venne la prima volta in Italia, venticinque anni or sono, ci siamo divertiti come ragazzi. Quando tornò vent'anni dopo, ci siamo divertiti assai meno. Non solo perché eravamo diventati vecchi noi, ma perché erano vecchi anch'essi, quelli indiani, quei cowboys, quel loro condottiero. Da troppo tempo s'erano staccati dalla vita vera. La linfa s'era seccata. Erano mummie ringalluzzite, moribondi che pretendevano d'andare al veglione. E Buffalo Bill che li guidava, aveva l'aria vizza e stanca di un baritono in pensione”, “Intermezzi”, *L'Illustrazione italiana*, 21/01/1917, p. 48.

as Cody's, openly fostering American supremacy, might have appeared unpatriotic. The majority of the press was measured in its coverage, but, in time, the legacy of the Wild West show on Italian popular culture would speak for itself, revealing that the connection that Cody established with Italy made its people feel flattered and privileged to have been able to meet the authentic Buffalo Bill and to have experienced his show first hand, thus creating an enduring bond in the national collective imagination and memory.²³⁶

²³⁶ Ultimately, this attitude reveals a somewhat underling cultural cringe on the part of Italians, which Cody, knowingly or not, managed to leverage with extraordinary success.

SECTION III: The Wild West in Italian Popular Culture

Chapter Eight: Buffalo Bill's legacy and the myth of the 'Wild' American West in 20th Century Italy

As the memorial in *L'Illustrazione Italiana* in 1917 indicated, from the late 1900s and throughout the 1910s Cody's career as a performer was in steady decline.¹ In Italy, however, his myth burgeoned. Buffalo Bill became a figure of devotion among early 20th century Italians, beginning with illustrious figures. Popular Italian actors, artists, composers, and opera singers had paid tribute to Buffalo Bill during his Italian stays, and continued to do so after he was gone. Among them must be remembered Adelaide Ristori, Italy's most famous theatrical actress at the turn of the 20th century, who died in 1906, who had met Cody during her 1874 American tour, in Nebraska. As a sign of renewed friendship, she attended the 1890 show in Rome and was received privately by him after the spectacle.² Gaetano Trentanove, a Florentine sculptor famous for the marble statue of Father Marquette (1896) in the Capitol in Washington D.C., the Kosciuszko statue in Milwaukee (1905) and *Soldiers' Monument* (1906) and Chief Oshkosh's statue (1911), both in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Trentanove had befriended Cody in 1893 at Chicago's Columbian Exposition where he was presenting another of his masterpieces, *The Last of the Spartans* (1892). Fortuitously back in his hometown during Buffalo Bill's Wild West tour in 1906, Trentanove attended the show and was greeted by Cody in the encampment, where they renewed reciprocal admiration.³ Giacomo Puccini had written enthusiastically about Buffalo Bill to his brother, after attending the show in Milan in 1890: "There was Buffalo Bill here, who I liked. Buffalo Bill is a company of North Americans, with a lot of Indians making splendid shooting games and

¹ Following the death of his show associates and some hazardous investments, including a failed cinema business, Cody joined forces with Pawnee Bill's show and in the last years of his life accepted a role with the Sells-Floto Circus, under particularly unfavourable conditions. See Don Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, pp. 453-459.

² *Don Chisciotte della Manica* 21/02/1890. On Adelaide Ristori's American and world tours, see Dino Piazza, *Con Adele Ristori nel giro del mondo 1874-75* (Milano: Italgoe, 1900).

³ See "Buffalo Bill a Firenze", *La Nazione*, 03/04/1906, p. 3 On Trentanove, see Oshkosh Public Library website

https://www.oshkoshpubliclibrary.org/sites/oshkoshpubliclibrary.org/files/Local%20History/Commemorative_History_of_Soldiers_Monument.pdf. Last accessed 05/06/2019.

reproducing real scenes that happened on the frontier.[...]”⁴ Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, as Emanuele Senici noted in his seminal study on Italian Opera, exerted (along with Bret Harte’s novels) a determining influence on the creation of *La Fanciulla del West* (composed between 1907-1910), and particularly on the conception of the landscape, which was, as an American critic of the time had pertinently commented: “the West as an Italian who has never seen the West imagines it” –precisely because Puccini’s mental image had been shaped by Cody’s sensational Wild West version, I would argue.⁵ And, speaking about *La Fanciulla del West*, one cannot fail to mention the world-acclaimed operatic tenor, Enrico Caruso, who premiered in New York, in December 1910 as Puccini’s co-protagonist, Dick Johnson. Caruso visited Buffalo Bill’s grave at Golden, Colorado, during his last American tour in 1920, less than a year before his own untimely death. Denver Public library holds an original photograph which immortalizes this moment.



Figure 100: Caruso in the role of Dick Johnson in *La fanciulla del West*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera.

Courtesy of New York Public Library.

⁴ “C’è stato qui Buffalo Bill, che mi piacque. Buffalo Bill è una compagnia di Nord Americani, Con una quarantina di indiani che vi fanno dei giuochi di tiro splendidi e riproducono al vero delle scene successe alla frontiera.

In undici giorni hanno incassato 120 mila lire!”, Giacomo Puccini to Michele Puccini, 24/04/1890, cited in Eugenio Gara, *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milano: Ricordi Editore, 1958), p. 38.

⁵ Emanuele Senici, *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 248-249.



Figure 101: Enrico Caruso at the grave of William F. Cody, 8/10/1920.
 Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Mazzulla Collection, id. 99.270.154.

In early 20th century Italy, expressions of devotion and admiration such as these, quickly spread across the masses, starting a collective emulation and appropriation of Cody's western canon. In this context, the outward dissatisfaction that appeared in the 1906 show reviews begin to look like sour grapes; indeed, within a handful of years Italians began to eagerly imitate all things western that Buffalo Bill had introduced to Italy, starting with the indiscriminate use of his name, employed as a hallmark of quality for a series of products, ranging from hats and cravats to liqueurs.



Figure 102: Advertisement for "Bitter Buffalo Bill's", produced in the town of Bra, in Piedmont, and published in *La Sentinella Delle Alpi*, Cuneo, 21/01/1907, p. 4.

As introduced in the previous section, one of the fields where Cody's legacy quickly and amply proliferated was Italian cinema industry. Just to give an idea, in the 1910s the lustre of Buffalo Bill's myth had reached the point where even cinema halls were being named after him, as in the case of Trieste's *Cinematografo Buffalo Bill* (established in 1914). Also, directors of films began using his name as publicity to attract specific audiences, as in the case of the silent trilogy *Buffalo e Bill* (*Buffalo*

and Bill), released between 1917 and 1920 by director Emilio Graziani-Walter.⁶ Though not really a western—it was in fact a showdown between two strongmen starring the Herculean actor Alphonse Troughé—the title of this series clearly proves that Cody’s moniker had already become an unquestionable symbol of rugged masculinity.⁷ For Italians, the advent of Western literature and Western live shows such as Cody’s (and that of his homonymous impostor, who, though a roguish character, was also a hardy sportsman) had negotiated, as professor Stefano Rosso claims, “the construction of twentieth century identities [...]at the very same time when a new ‘martial spirit’ and a new identification with male sport heroes were rising”.⁸



Figure 103: Façade of the old Cinema Buffalo Bill in Trieste, Italy. Converted into apartments, the building has preserved the original bas-relief showing Stetson-style cowboy hats, eagles, bear heads, and the date, 1914. Credits: Ottorino Magrin, 01/10/2017.

⁶ Christopher Frayling, *Sergio Leone: Something to Do with Death* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), p. 121; and Rudmer Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local Practices, Changing Forms, Cultural Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 195.

⁷ Cinema Advert, *Il Lavoratore*, Trieste, 26/07/1919, p. 6.

⁸ Stefano Rosso, “The Winning of the Western: Early Dissemination of a Literary Genre”, in Marina Dossena, Stefano Rosso (eds.), *Knowledge Dissemination in the Long Nineteenth Century, European and Transatlantic Perspectives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p. 42.



Figure 104: Billboard for the serial Buffalo e Bill by Emilio Graziani-Walter (1917-20). Courtesy of Cinema Archive of Milan (Fondazione Cineteca Italiana).

Thus, Buffalo Bill thrived as a popular culture icon in early 20th century Italy, and his legacy lasted untarnished throughout most of the so-called American century (certainly until the aftermath of the Vietnam War). As Christine Bold has demonstrated for America, “What remains the most familiar version of the western in print and on screen carries the imprint of the clubmen’s voice, action, landscape, and cultural agendas[...].”⁹ In the case of Italy, the cultural agenda of the frontier clubmen found its privileged channel of transmission through the character of Buffalo Bill—who, after all, in his insatiable need of validation from the high ranks of society, did all he could to become one of Roosevelt’s top emissaries. Indeed, as examined in this last section, Italian popular fiction, novels, cinema and later even comics, all credited Buffalo Bill as the genuine Western star—leaving other important characters in western history in the background for a long time—ultimately validating Cody’s popular version of the ‘Wild West’ as the true American West. Though the proliferation of this myth was coeval in different sectors

⁹ Christine Bold, *The Frontier Club: Popular Westerns and Cultural Power 1880-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 54.

(such as literature and cinema), and benefited of a large cross-fertilization, in order to thoroughly assess Buffalo Bill and his western legacy in Italian popular culture it is crucial to examine each field thematically, ordering them, as much as possible, chronologically. It is, therefore, necessary to start with the earliest propagation of the Wild West myth: Buffalo Bill's Dime Novels and adventures set in the Far West.

Chapter 8.1. In the beginning was Buffalo Bill (and his Dime Novels): Proliferation of Western Popular Fiction in Italy and its idiosyncrasies

As introduced in Part I of this study, western dime novels had entered the Italian literary marketplace in the second half of the 19th century, consisting, predominantly, of translations of foreign authors such as Gustave Aimard, Gabriel Ferry and Mayne Reid.¹⁰ Being relatively widespread and popular, along with travel accounts, they had predisposed the imaginative terrain of their readership/audience for the success of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. In Italy, the popularity of Cody's show, in turn, flung open "the market for cheap thrillers", to use Billington's expression, and elected the western as one of the earliest (and longer lasting) pillars of pulp mass-fiction.¹¹

The primacy belongs to editor Edoardo Perino of Rome, who published in 1890, with enviable speed and foresight (given that Cody was touring Continental Europe that year), the very first Italian issue of Buffalo Bill's dime westerns, known as *Il domatore delle pelli rosse: Buffalo Bill, terribili avventure fra i selvaggi indiani* (*The Tamer of the Red-Skins: Buffalo Bill, Frightful Adventures among the Savage Indians*). Perino, also editor of the satirical Roman paper *Il Rugantino*—which concurrently published many cartoons and reviews of the Wild West show—was an Italian pioneer in the business of colporteur dime publishing (also known as *dispense in abbonamento* in Italian) and had been a keen observer of foreign literary markets throughout his working life.¹² Aware of the existence of the Buffalo Bill narrative series, and conscious of the considerable success Buffalo Bill's Wild West show was experiencing in Italy, Perino jumped at the chance of releasing Buffalo Bill-themed *dispense* aimed for Italian audiences. Anonymously written, maybe by some of his

¹⁰ See Chapter Six.

¹¹ Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise*, p. 47.

¹² Maria Jolanda Palazzolo, Sara Mori, Giorgio Bacci (eds.), *Edoardo Perino. Un editore popolare nella Roma umbertina* (Roma: Franco Angeli, 2012), p. 86.

reporters employed in *Il Rugantino*, the stories in the forty *dispense* collection are original, but only as far as a *pastiche* of *leitmotifs* from previous European-made dime-westerns could go—being particularly affected by the influence of Gustave Aimard’s western prose.¹³ Buffalo Bill is represented as a young hunter and frontier hero of the likes of Davy Crockett rather than as the “Buckskin Royalty cowboy” popularized by Prentiss Ingraham in Smith’s dime novel library.¹⁴ With the creation of a frontier Buffalo Bill, Perino, therefore, offers Italians a transitional hero—as Billington and Bold defined the early, Ned Buntline’s Buffalo Bill—given that the future series of Buffalo Bill pulp fiction published in Italy, from 1908 to 1913, would be based only on Ingraham’s stories.¹⁵ In addition to trite plots, the fact that the series was hastily published—to capitalize on the Wild West’s tour sensation—is additionally proven by the presence of numerous misprints, even in the spelling of Cody’s name, who is sometimes addressed as William Coby and even Villiam Coby.¹⁶ The novelty factor in Perino’s Buffalo Bill dime novel resided in the fifty original illustrations, especially realized by renowned French artist Paul Philippoteaux, who had worked in America in the 1880s (and possibly saw Buffalo Bill), which enhanced the sensationalism and exoticism of the narration. Each number was sold for 5 cents and the entire series could be bought for 2,50 liras.¹⁷

The arrival of Buffalo Bill’s dime novels on the Italian mass market, in the last years of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, coincided with a revolution in the readerships for such material. Due to their low price and enticing images, a growing audience of young underprivileged readers, with two or at most three years of schooling behind them, practiced their literacy skills with the sensationalistic pulps of Buffalo Bill (as well as other American heroes, such as Nick Carter), which were often being read collectively, within the family and in other places of aggregation of rural and working-class life.¹⁸ Therefore, though marketed for boyhood, the real outreach of Buffalo Bill’s adventures extended to different age groups, and included women. The latter had been hitherto targeted by specific

¹³ See the recent comparative study in French on Aimard’s and Salgari’s westerns by Luca Di Gregorio, *Wilderness et Western. L’Ouest fictionnel chez Gustave Aimard et Emilio Salgari* (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2014).

¹⁴ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare: feuilleton, fascicoli, fotoromanzi in Italia dal 1870 ad oggi* (Latina: Tunué, 2011), p. 298; Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West*, p. 12; Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery Land of Promise*, p. 50.

¹⁶ See p. 48 in Figure 7.

¹⁷ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, p. 292; Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 53.

¹⁸ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, p. 130.

feminine *feuilletons* imbued with Catholic and bigoted moral codes, such as *Il calvario di una donna* (*A Woman's Ordeal*) and *La caduta* (*The Downfall*).¹⁹ In fact, female readers enjoyed westerns and longed for heroines who could go beyond the clichés of the patriotic home-maker vs. the *femme fatale*, which the national popular literature had since then fostered, particularly through acclaimed “feminine” writers such as Carolina Invernizio.²⁰ As it will be examined in more detail, Emilio Salgari recognised this audience and introduce in his western novels a number of female heroines, a real novelty in the western fiction circulating in Italy. First and foremost, in his *La Sovrana del Campo d' Oro* (1905, *The Queen of the Golden Field*), he conceived the wise and spirited shooter Annie Clayfert, moulded onto the figure of Annie Oakley (yet deprived of her Victorian mannerisms), while in *La scotennatrice* (1909, *The Female Scalper*) e *Sulle frontiere del far west* (1908, *On the Far-Western frontiers*), he launched Minnehaha and Yalla, red-blooded heroines, who are, *furthermore*, Indigenous.²¹



Figure 105: Perino's dime novels, 1890, dispensa n 1.
Courtesy of Princeton Collection of Western Americana.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

²⁰ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, pp. 98-99.

²¹ Donato Bevilacqua, “Oltre la frontiera: Il West di Emilio Salgari e i suoi eroi”, *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, Vol. 29, issue 2/3 (2011), pp. 141-160, pp. 152 -153.

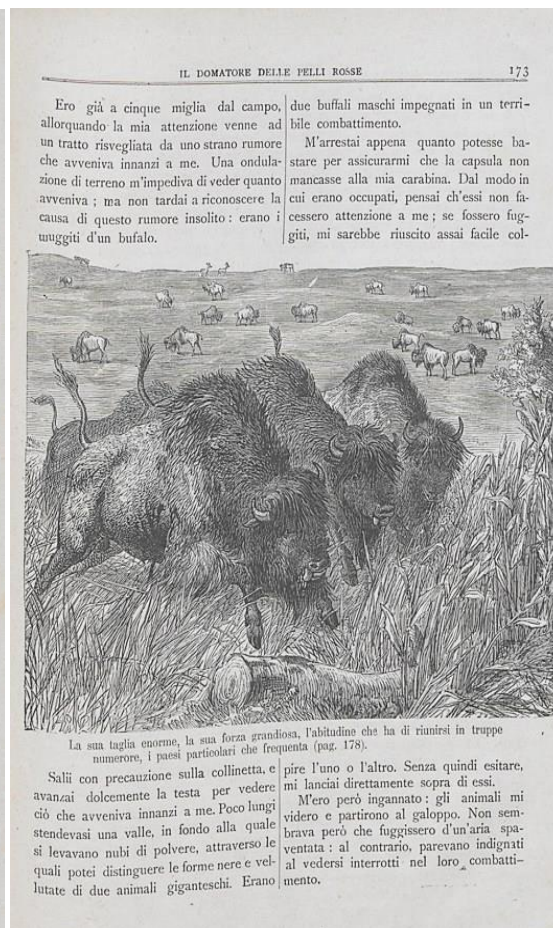


Figure 106: Perino's dime novel, 1890, dispensa n. 20.
Courtesy of Princeton Collection of Western Americana.

After Perino's successful adventures of Buffalo Bill, a western domino effect began to take over the Italian literary market. Within a few years several other Italian publishers were convinced that this was a profitable new genre and starting from the mid-1890s western popular fiction was issued steadily. In 1896 there appeared, also with editor Perino, a dime novel called *Drammi Americani* (*American Dramas*), written by Ulisse Barbieri, which conflated the South American setting among Indigenous Brazilians, with Native North American customs—or, rather, the clichés already spread by popular literature.²² This suggests that this kind of misperception was a persistent feature in the representation of Indigenous populations, and that popular fiction furthered this confusion, certainly in Italy but, perhaps also elsewhere. In 1896 Emilio Salgari's first western-themed book saw the light: *Il Re della prateria* (*The King of the Prairie*), published by the editor Bemporad of Florence. The story also began in Brazil, which was in those years, an exotic yet familiar land, with a very high migration rate especially of people from the Veneto,

²² Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 51.

like Salgari, and therefore it was a popular fanciful destination for numerous readers who fantasized about places dear to their distant loved ones.²³ With a remarkable narrative leap, Salgari moved the plot to the southwestern United States, among the Apaches, where the co-protagonist, the Brazilian Marquis Almeida, was finally reunited with his missing nephew, who had been kidnapped 10 years before, becoming the white leader of an Apache tribe, and now known as the King of the Prairie.²⁴ In the end, Salgari ingeniously flips the worn clichés of captivity narratives: he envisions no return to civilization for the white protagonists and allows the Marquis Almeida to live among the Apaches, alongside his newfound nephew.

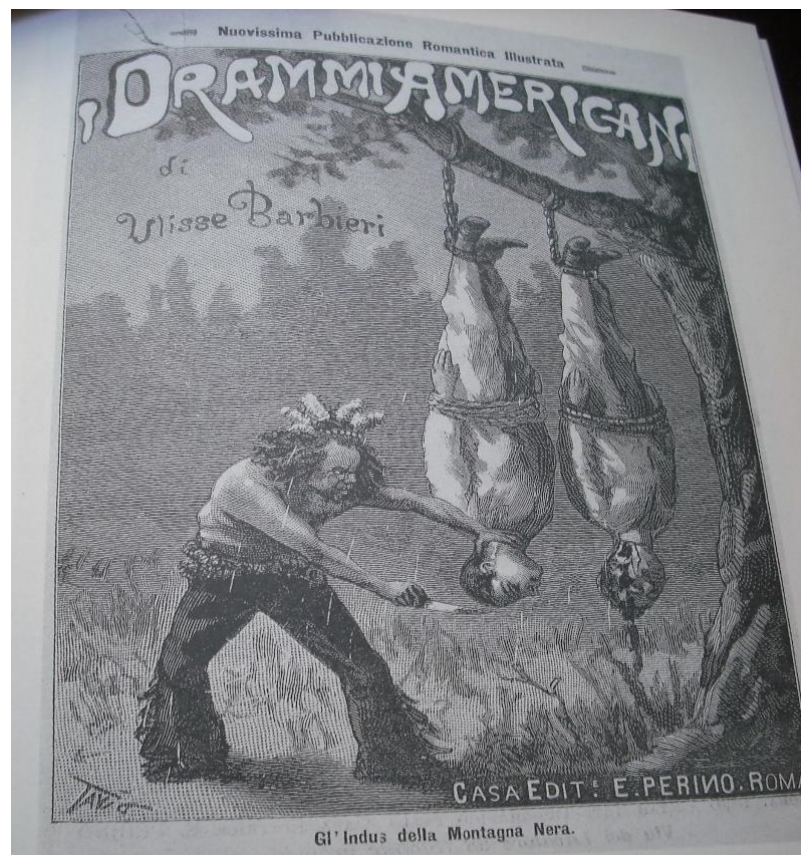


Figure 107: Ulisse Barbieri, Drammi Americani, Perino, Roma 1896, in Gallo and Bonomi, Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer, p. 57.

Such a convolute plot twist did not characterize the western adventure written in 1901 by Giulio Erpianis, pseudonym of the writer Giulio Speirani who was heir to a

²³ Salgari often used references which appeared familiar to his readers. On Veneto people migrating to Brazil, see Emilio Franzina, *Dall'Arcadia in America*, and Emilio Franzina, Mario Sabbatini, *I Veneti in Brasile nel centenario dell'emigrazione, 1876-1976* (Vicenza: edizioni Accademia Olimpica, 1977).

²⁴ This book, and other selected Salgari westerns, is tackled in more detail in the next sub chapter.

prominent Turin publishing family.²⁵ Entitled *Avventure nel Texas: un angelo bianco tra le Pellirosse* (*Adventures in Texas, a White Angel among the Redskins*), the story is in effect a captivity tale with an Italian protagonist, Viviana Coronelli, who is snatched by a group of Arapahoe from the protection of her betrothed and her immigrant family. She eventually manages to go back to them and altogether they return to the Old World.²⁶ Issued by Federico Pustet, a Catholic publisher of Rome, the story is steeped in the glorification of family values and in ideals of *Italianness*, portraying particularly favourably the phenomenon of return migration. The church and Italian institutions, encouraged the retention of family ties between migrants and families left behind; although migration was seen as a necessity when this story was written (early 1900s), it was hoped that it would only be a temporary one, so as to not bleed the country of too many able-bodied human resources.²⁷

In 1905, Salgari returned to western fiction with the novel *La Sovrana del Campo d' Oro*, (*The Queen of the Golden Field*), where the protagonists are characters of the Wild West show: Annie Oakley (Annie Clayfert), Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull.²⁸ Finally in 1908, Buffalo Bill reappeared as a fictional character in the pulp westerns of the Milanese publisher Casa Editrice Americana, who published 200 issues between 1908 and 1912, and reproduced Street and Smith's editions of Prentiss Ingraham's stories. On the front cover, under the colourful title, it was specified that this was "the only authentic version approved by Colonel William Cody, also known as Buffalo Bill".²⁹ Thus, the authenticity of Buffalo Bill's stories, in Italy just as in America, was emphasized first to entice readers and then to build loyalty. These adventures portrayed an adult Buffalo Bill who fought against white or mixed-race villains (when Ingraham wrote these stories, the Indian threat no longer existed). From that moment on Buffalo Bill was depicted as a friend of the Indian, just as the Wild West show's program leaflets stated, with the only exception of fighting Indian rebels who allegedly rejected (the white man's) progress.³⁰ The issues were published weekly at a cost of 25 cents and had thirty-two pages, although progressively Casa Editrice Americana, in order to cut costs and make the series last

²⁵ See the article by Felice Pozzo on Giulio Erpianis and the Speirani Editors, Online, <https://rivistasavej.it/giulio-erpianis-e-gli-editori-speirani-di-torino-27fdc6476bf2>. Last accessed 07/06/2019.

²⁶ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 51.

²⁷ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, pp. 226-227.

²⁸ The next subchapter assesses this novel in more detail.

²⁹ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 53.

³⁰ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, p. 299.

longer, cut it down to sixteen pages further lowering the price to 10 lira cents. Between 1913 and the end of WWI, the publication of Buffalo Bill's pulp westerns became more and more erratic, first due to the vicissitudes that afflicted Casa Editrice Americana—which abruptly went out of business and was taken over first by Società Industrie Tecnografiche, which issued Buffalo Bill's pulps for only two months, and subsequently by Società Editoriale Milanese which would issue twenty-six further episodes—and then due to the outbreak of war.³¹

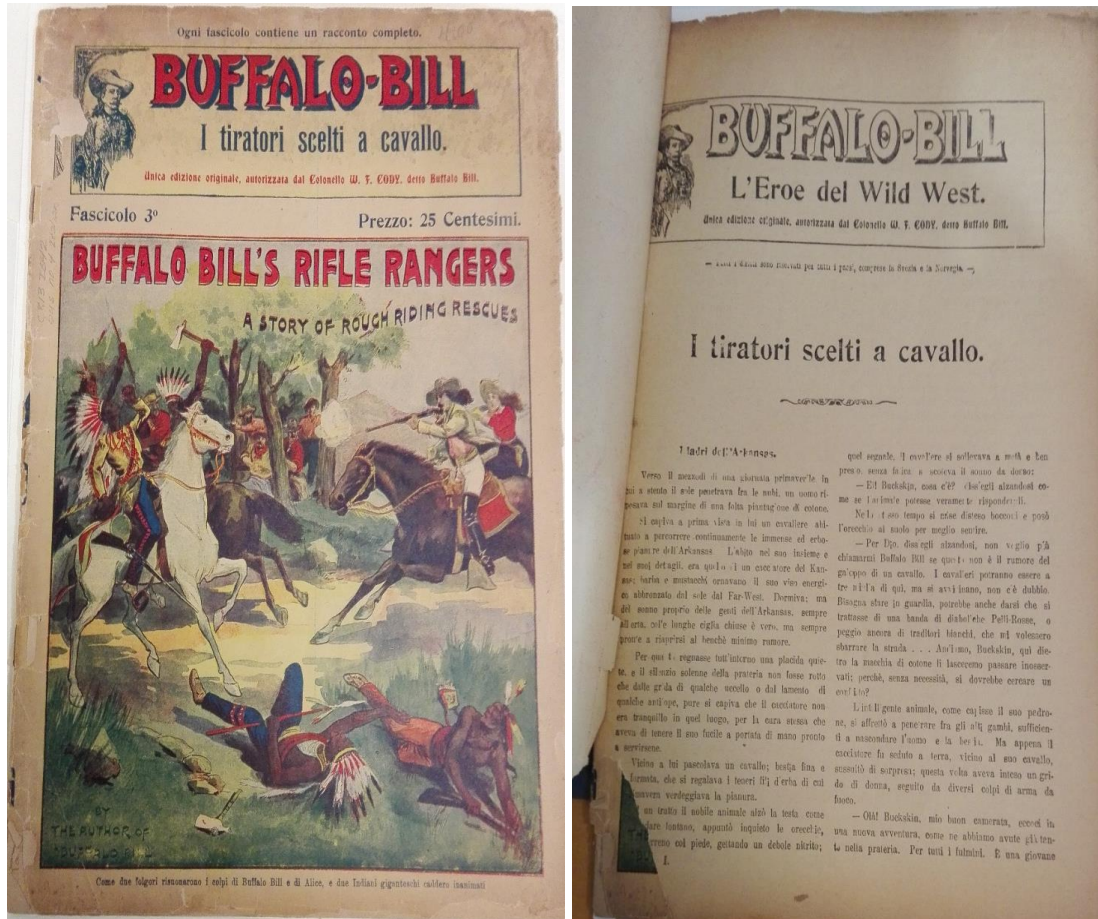


Figure 108: Buffalo Bill dime novel, *I tiratori scelti a cavallo/ Buffalo Bill's Rifle Rangers* by Casa Editrice Americana, n.3. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western Heritage Collection.

³¹ René Laegreid in her essay, "Buffalo Bill, the Italian Hero of the Prairies", in *Popular Frontier*, p. 265, wrongly states that Casa Editrice Americana took over the publication from Società Editoriale Milanese; it was the other way round. What Laegreid claims was impossible, since Casa Editrice Americana shut down after the sudden death of its editor in 1912. The original dime novel from 1908 I consulted in Denver Public library confirms that the publisher was Casa Editrice Americana. See also Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, p. 144, and Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 54, for more detailed information and an exhaustive bibliography on the Milanese dime novel publishers.

Buffalo Bill
racconta le sue avventure.

La notizia, diffusa dai giornali americani, che Buffalo Bill avrebbe pubblicato le vicissitudini e le avventure della sua vita nel selvaggio Far West, produsse un'enorme sensazione, e tutta l'America attese curiosa ed impaziente il grande avvenimento: era l'eroe il più amato e il più popolare degli Stati Uniti, quegli che si accingeva a pubblicare le sue memorie.

Ed era vero! Buffalo Bill ha raccontato le sue avventure nel selvaggio Far West. Mai pubblicazione fu accolta con tanto entusiasmo. Non v'è casa negli Stati Uniti ove non vi siano i racconti di Buffalo Bill. Ed il successo è ben meritato: se v'è al mondo un uomo che possa raccontare cose interessanti e palpitanti di una vita reale quest'uomo è certamente il celebre cacciatore del Far West, quegli che, con la sua presenza di spirito, la sua bravura, e la sua forza erculee, ha riportato tante e così strabilianti vittorie sugli indiani, l'uomo il quale è già ben conosciuto in tutto il mondo civile come il miglior tiratore e il più brillante cavaliere.

Buffalo Bill
l'eroe nazionale dell'America
l'orgoglio degli Stati Uniti.

Qual'è la ragione del successo letterario dei ricordi di Buffalo Bill?

Prima di tutto la certezza che questi racconti, così ricchi di avventure sensazionali e palpitanti, non sono che brani di vita reale; ma più di tutto la personalità stessa dell'eroe, che i suoi amici amano fino al sacrificio e i suoi nemici temono, che non fu mai visto trasalire in faccia al pericolo, ma sempre spiegare la sua magnanimità d'animo nelle lotte le più crudeli, simile al leone che conosce la sua forza e sdegnava di abusarne.

Buffalo Bill
racconta le sue avventure ai lettori italiani.

La „Casa editrice americana“ è riuscita ad acquistare, a prezzo di enormi sacrifici, il diritto esclusivo di pubblicare e di tradurre tutti gli scritti di Buffalo Bill. La parte letteraria è stata affidata ad eminenti scrittori, i quali, vissuti per molti anni nell'ovest e nell'est dell'America, hanno una conoscenza esatta degli uomini e delle cose di laggiù.

In questi racconti, il pubblico italiano avrà occasione di meglio conoscere quell'uomo che tanto entusiasmo sollevò con la sua famosa compagnia di Rough Riders e di guerrieri Indiani, allorchando diede le sue straordinarie rappresentazioni a Roma e in altre città della penisola.

Anche nella traduzione italiana i racconti di Buffalo Bill segneranno, senza dubbio, un notevole avvenimento letterario e giovani e vecchi saranno ben felici di ritemperarsi lo spirito al contatto di questa vita di un eroe audace e cavalleresco.

L'avvenimento del giorno!
Buffalo Bill e le sue avventure.

CASA EDITRICE AMERICANA
MILANO, 36 Via Monte Napoleone 36.
New York, 33 First Street. Londra E. C., 290 Old Street.
Parigi, 41 Rue Dauphine.

Settimanalmente verrà pubblicato un fascicolo contenente un racconto completo.

Rivolgersi a:

Buffalo Bill, capo degli Scout (esploratori) nell'esercito degli Stati Uniti.

Figure 109: Buffalo Bill's dime novel I tiratori scelti a cavallo/ Buffalo Bill's Rifle Rangers by Casa Editrice Americana, n.3. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western Heritage Collection.

In the aftermath of WWI, Florentine publisher Nerbini (father Giuseppe and son Mario), bought the publication rights of the American pulps from Società Editoriale Milanese, publishing first Nick Carter and then, from 1922 to 1942, Buffalo Bill's adventures (and many other American dime novels and comic strips, which would later get him into trouble, first with Disney's copyright issues and then with the

fascist censorship).³² Nerbini started by re-printing the first 100 issues published by Casa Editrice Americana and later hired the Italian writer Emilio Fancelli, who had a somewhat extravagant biography (he claimed to have fought along Pancho Villa in the Mexican revolution) to write fresh, original stories for the new issues of Buffalo Bill's pulp westerns.³³ Of these, at least forty-one issues are autochthonous, in that they do not match any of the American Street and Smith's versions, nor the German ones distributed by Eichler, a publisher from Dresden; fourteen issues out of forty-one are penned by Fancelli.³⁴ The illustrations of the new issues of Buffalo Bill's dime novels were realized by Tancredi Scarpelli, who in 1927 also illustrated one of Salgari's posthumous western novels, *Avventure fra le Pellirosse* (*Adventures Among the Redskins*). Scarpelli maintained a similar page layout to the original, in red and yellow colours, but changed the background settings and, most importantly, portrayed a younger-looking Buffalo Bill.³⁵ This was not a casual choice: the glorification of youth was, indeed, a paramount feature of the dominant fascist ideology of the time; such strenuous and action-laden adventures could have only suited a vigorous and young-bodied Buffalo Bill, rather than the more mature Cody—such as the one appeared on the issues of Street and Smith's dime westerns. A youthful Buffalo Bill was also seen by the publisher as a more captivating model for self-identification (an effective mean of audience-retention) in their teenaged readership. Furthermore, as the publication continued throughout the 1920s, Scarpelli progressively morphed the young buck-skinned Buffalo Bill into a more and more Italian-looking hero: dark haired and red-shirted with a blue bandana, reminiscent of a highly symbolic character: the founding father of Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi—a figure hailed by several fascist ideologues, including Gabriele D'Annunzio.³⁶

³² Pier Francesco Listri, *Il mondo di Nerbini: Un editore nell'Italia unita* (Firenze: Nerbini 1993), pp. 34-82.

³³ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, pp. 284-285.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

³⁵ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 47.

³⁶ On the link between the cult of Garibaldi and Fascism, see Roberto Malfitano, "La figura di Giuseppe Garibaldi nell'Italia fascista. Mussolini, Ezio Garibaldi e il 'fascismo garibaldino'", *Storia e futuro*, vol 15., no. 1 (2007), pp. 1-18. Tancredi Scarpelli was in those years, also illustrating dime-novels about Garibaldi's life; hence the similarities between Buffalo Bill and Garibaldi were not casual, but stemmed from careful editorial choices which aimed to satisfy the demands of the fascist regime. See the section on Scarpelli from the website <http://www.letteraturadimenticata.it/illustratori%20salgariani.htm>. Last accessed, 01/09/2019.

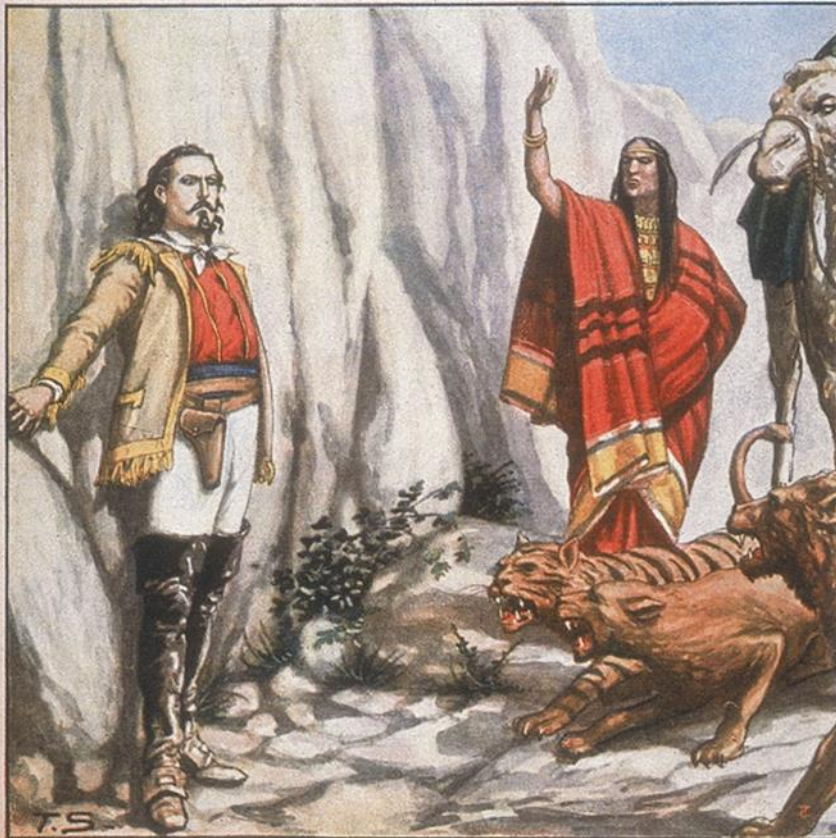
Publicazione settimanale — Firenze, 3 Giugno 1923 — C. C. con la Posta.



Ogni fascicolo contiene un racconto completo che può esser letto da tutti.

Yeso, la strega del Colorado.

Fascicolo 67 - Cent. 50 - Casa Ed. NERBINI, Firenze - Cent. 50 - Fascicolo 67



Buffalo Bill era in balia della megera e delle sue bestie....

Figure 110: The creative flair of Scarpelli is at work in this issue of Buffalo Bill: he introduced exotic, yet familiar 'colonial elements' such as camels and mountain lions/tigers. Author's Copy.



Figure 111: Two issues with a ‘Garibaldi-looking’ Buffalo Bill, illustrated by Tancredi Scarpelli. Author’s Copies.

This mutation can be attributed to the new leadership of the Nerbini publishing house: Mario Nerbini took over the management of the family business from his elderly father Giuseppe, in the early 1930s. As an enthusiastic supporter of the Fascist Party, Mario Nerbini felt compelled to change the tone and the look of his pulps in order to make them appear more patriotic, particularly in regards to his most popular subjects, Buffalo Bill and Nick Carter, who had obvious foreign origins and, as such, clashed with the increasingly restrictive censorship laws against harbingers of nefarious values for the youth.³⁷ Yet, for Nerbini, the Wild West was too profitable a place (of the imagination) to hand over to fascist expurgation. Instead, he continued the publication of new western-themed pulps and comics, but also gave a Wild West twist to some old evergreens. One such example can be found in the comic strips of Pinocchio, which Nerbini issued continuously since the 1910s. Perhaps remembering the western scene from the old film by Antamoro, Nerbini reversed the context so as to align it with the imperialist models of the *ventennio*

³⁷ Franco Cristofori, “Quando Buffalo Bill diventò un italiano,” Franco Cristofori, Alberto Menarini (eds.), *Eroi del racconto popolare, prima del fumetto* (Bologna: Edison, 1986), pp. 58-59. Significant is also the episode of the invented Italian roots of Buffalo Bill, brilliantly exposed in the book by Massimiliano Galanti, *Buffalo Bill, gli indiani d’ america e altri indigeni in Romagna*, pp. 44-58.

fascista in his 1938 comic strip *Pinocchio esploratore* (*Pinocchio the Explorer*) illustrated by Giorgio Scudellari.³⁸



Figure 112: Comic strip of Nerbini's Pinocchio Esploratore, Illustrated by Giorgio Scudellari, 1938.

Author's copy.

In this comic, Pinocchio, who has grown a moustache in the trendy fashion of Gabriele D'Annunzio, ventures into a North American Indigenous tribe followed by his faithful companion, Lampwick. This time, though, Pinocchio is an imperial observer and critic, rather than falling captive to the Indians, as allegorized in Antamoro's 1911 film.³⁹ The West was no longer the place of perdition for young Italian minds—as was believed in the first decade the 1900s—but was now a place

³⁸ *Pinocchio Esploratore*, Florence, Nerbini editor, issue 26, n. 8, 23/01/1938.

³⁹ See Chapter 5.6.

needing to be tamed, dissected, advanced. Moral codes and western clichés were, therefore, turned upside down to suit the logic and the demands of the regime; yet undeniably the lure of the West endured despite fascism, and Nerbini remained prominent among those accountable for it. During the mid-1930s, Nerbini further enhanced his dime western arsenal with a new pulp fiction, *Le avventure di Kansas Jack, il figlioccio di Buffalo Bill* (*The Adventures of Kansas Jack: Godson of Buffalo Bill*). This pulp heavily exploited the popularity of the Buffalo Bill brand by using its name in the title—by then tantamount to a guarantee of success in the world of publishing, as well as in that of cinema—and also by expending Buffalo Bill dime novel plots—which were translations of the New Buffalo Bill Library published by Aldine, from London. Dresden editor Eichler, holder of the translation rights, had craftily changed the name into Kansas Jack, thus creating a ‘new’ hero.⁴⁰

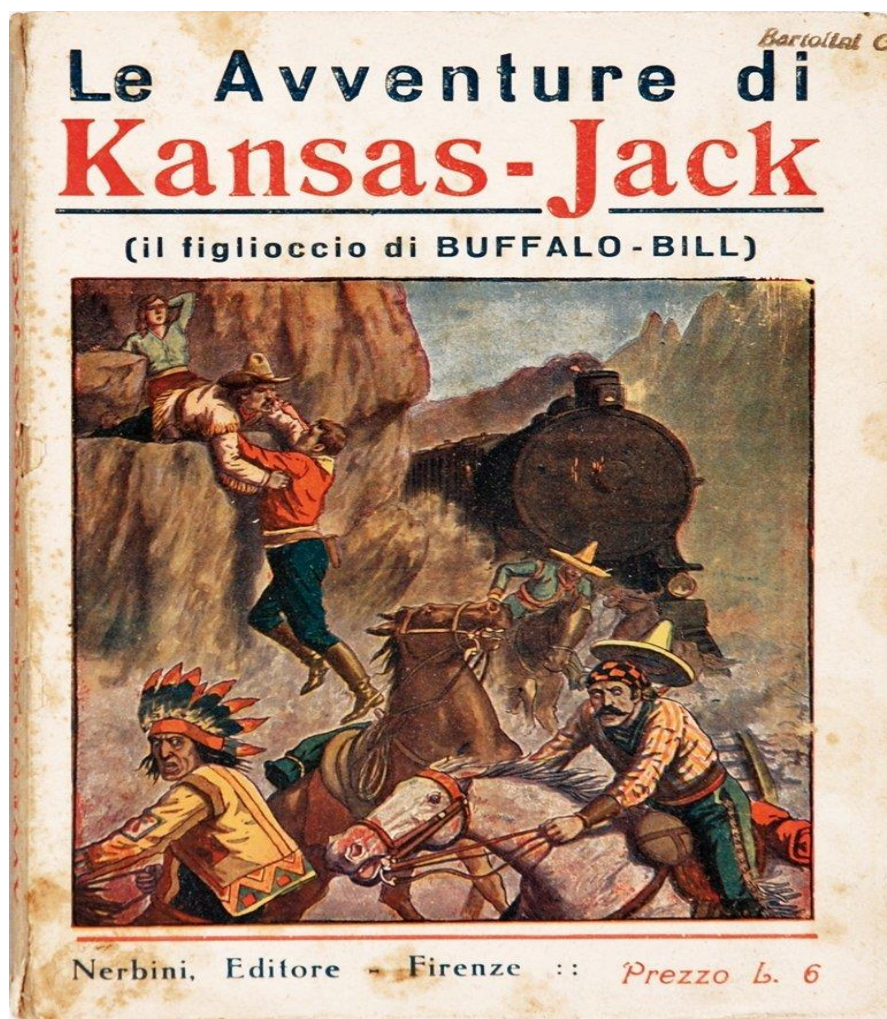


Figure 113: *Kansas Jack* by Nerbini, 1930, issue n. 11. Image freely available, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/20739066_le-avventure-di-kansas-jack-il-figlioccio-di-buffalo.

⁴⁰ Valentino Cecchetti, *Generi della letteratura popolare*, pp. 301-302.

Nerbini continued to publish Buffalo Bill and other western-themed dime novels until the beginning of World War II, when he was forced to shut down his business by the fascist regime—he eventually re-opened after the war and continued to publish comics and dime novel (several western re-issues and a few new series) until the 1960s.⁴¹

Therefore, it can be seen how, in Italy, between the beginning of the 20th century and the advent of World War II there appeared a constellation of western themed popular literature publications. It is not by chance that the figure of Buffalo Bill often featured in these, as his character was already deeply entwined with the myth of the ‘Wild West’. The name Buffalo Bill in a story or in the title of a publication, as well as in the title of a film, sufficed to boost the appeal of the western genre. Therefore, the already exciting western subject matter appeared even more enticing thanks to Buffalo Bill (and especially if Buffalo Bill was in it, too). There is no doubt that the familiar memories his name conjured up in the minds of Italians played a decisive role in the consecration of his fictional character in Italy.

The attractiveness of Buffalo Bill in popular literature endured for several decades and was not expended just in dime novels. It was, in a way, magnified by a group of writers who employed the character of Buffalo Bill as the flagship, not to say the epitome, of the West in a series of original novels. They were, primarily, Emilio Salgari, who was succeeded by his collaborators and epigones, Luigi Motta, and Calogero Ciancimino, examined together in the next subchapter.

Chapter 8.2. Western Myths, Italian Mythmakers. How the Western became an Italian genre thanks to ‘paraliterature’ authors: Emilio Salgari, Luigi Motta, and Calogero Ciancimino.

At the turn of the twentieth century, U.S. settler colonialism provided a popular model to several European novelists seeking to capitalize on the success of the Western genre. These authors employed this framework to tout values related to the supremacy of their own respective national cultures—which, at the height of ‘New Colonialism’, entered a phase of jingoistic exaltation. While western literary production from countries such as Britain, Germany and France have received ample

⁴¹ Pier Francesco Listri, *Il mondo di Nerbini*, pp. 63-95.

scholarly attention, the elaborations of American settler colonial popular culture produced in Italy remain significantly understudied. Emilio Salgari (1862-1911) and the work followed through by his literary disciples represent fruitful case studies in the quest to fill this gap.

Salgari's extraordinarily prolific body of work spans tales of Oriental swashbucklers, nautical fiction akin to that of Jules Verne, and a relatively small collection of novels set in the American 'Old' West, which, despite its modesty, places this Italian writer in the club of 19th century European myth-makers of the Western epic. What is peculiar about Salgari's Western narrative is that—in contrast to Karl May's literary production, which focused on an empathic understanding of Indigenous cultures—it celebrated the values of white settler colonialism by creating Italian-born heroes who embraced settler ideals and conduct against Native American or, at times, African American characters. These heroes and foes played a didactic role within the cultural panorama of early twentieth century Italy. Rather than being mere imitations of American dime novel protagonists, Salgari's trappers, cowboys and fierce Indians offered inspiring examples of powerful masculinity engaged in militaristic deeds to a young Italian readership, who would ultimately grow fond of Italy's own colonial enterprises against Africans.

Since the mid-19th century, Western-themed stories (in particular, the works of Chateaubriand, Cooper, and also—as introduced in Chapter Three of this work—Gustave Aimard and Mayne Reid) were being translated into Italian, and, despite the modest rate of Italian literacy, which was, at least until Unification in 1871, one of the lowest in Europe, the genre experienced steadily growing success. Marking an influential shift from his more classical buccaneer and proto-sci-fi subjects, the writing in these Western novels, which Salgari penned just a few years before he took his own life, was infused with the sudden popularity of all things Western that affected Italy at the time of the visits of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1890 and 1906. Indeed, Salgari's outlook was undoubtedly shaped by his first-hand experience of Cody's show, which he attended in 1890 as a reporter for the Verona newspaper *L' Arena*.⁴² Salgari was the kind of author who looked for audience satisfaction as well as for popular acclaim; therefore, there is little doubt that his decision to have a go at the Western genre was taken after he witnessed the tremendous success of Cody's show and the curiosity that it aroused in its audiences. Salgari's western

⁴² Claudio Gallo (ed.), *Emilio Salgari, Arriva Buffalo Bill!*, p. 9.

novels therefore started where, and when, Buffalo Bill had left off, by feeding the insatiable demand of the scattered fans of the Wild West with more food for their imagination. As it will be further explained, the show's meta-narrative had such an impact on his writing that he introduced Bill Cody as a staple character in his Western cycle. Salgari was indeed perceptive in recognizing legendary potential of the figure of Buffalo Bill, which continued to be employed serially by his epigones until the end of the 1950s and 1960s—when revisionist popular literature entered the Italian cultural market.

Salgari's brief, but incisive, engagement with Western fiction has exercised such a powerful impact on subsequent generations of Italian youth that the famous re-workings of the American Western myth that appeared in 20th century Italian culture can easily be regarded as one outgrowth of his writing. Indeed, the creative works of several notable Italians, from Gianluigi Bonelli, (the famous creator of Tex Willer comics) to Sergio Leone, to name but two, were deeply influenced by Salgari's novelistic version of the West.⁴³ In her essay in the collection *International Western Cinema*, scholar Aliza Wong argues that "Salgari, held an arguably urban and romanticized view of the narratives of ferocious Indians locked in constant struggle with brave, tough cowboys, against the back-drop of a panic-driven American Nature".⁴⁴ Precisely so; Salgari was the prototypical armchair traveller and, therefore, the urban sources for his romantic musings were mostly obtained in the Civic Library of Verona. There, the Italian novelist found translated copies of Cooper's *Leatherstocking tales*, and Mayne Reid's and Gabriel Ferry's novels, as well as the English version of Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*. He could also fall back on travel narratives for primary source documentation.⁴⁵ The works of these Euro-American authors, in particular, have provided, in many different ways, the foundations for Salgari's Italianized Far West. Salgari eclectically, though

⁴³ Aliza S. Wong, "Italian D.O.C., American Cowboys, Malaysian Pirates and the Italian Construction of Other- ed Adventures in film", in Cynthia J. Miller, A. Bowdoin Van Riper (eds.), *International Westerns*, pp. 312-313.

⁴⁴ Aliza S. Wong, "Italian D.O.C., American Cowboys, Malaysian Pirates and the Italian Construction of Other- ed Adventures in film", p. 309.

⁴⁵ Most important in this respect were works by Louis Figuier and Louis-Laurent Simonin, as Vittorio Sarti has established, but other documentary sources played a part, such as Giulio Ferrario, *il Costume antico e moderno*, 1817-34, which Salgari ruthlessly plundered, *Storia dell' America* by Giuseppe Compagnoni, and the Italian editions of the two principal travel magazines of the time, *Il giro del mondo* and the *Giornale illustrato dei viaggi e delle avventure*. See Flavia Busatta, "Emilio Salgari, a writer for armchair travelers", *Journal of Historical Archaeology and Anthropological Sciences*, vol.1, no. 2 (2017), pp. 38-41. Felice Pozzo also noted another source, Miss Allen Kemp, *Scene della vita in California*, used for the novel *La sovrana del campo d'oro*. See Felice Pozzo, *Il laboratorio magico di Emilio Salgari: avventure, fantasmi, magie* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2012), p. 49.

unceremoniously, picked and chose from these sources. For instance, he clearly borrowed from Longfellow the character of Minnehaha; one of Salgari's literary *bouleversements* reworked Longfellow's kind and delicate squaw into a fierce and daunting Indigenous queen, the heroine of three of his western novels: *Sulle frontiere del far west*, 1908 (*On the Far Western Frontiers*), *La Scotennatrice*, 1909 (*Minnehaha the Scalper*), *Le Selve Ardenti*, 1910 (*The Burning Forests*). In this trilogy, Minnehaha and her father, Chief Red Cloud, sought revenge against the white men who had killed her mother, Yalla, and her half-brother, Bird of the Night. The family feud quickly escalates into a struggle between Indian tribes and American soldiers, at which point Salgari interweaves the narration of the story with references to historical events such as the Sand Creek massacre and the battle of Little Bighorn, which give a legendary tone to the plot. Salgari's Minnehaha maintains the epic aura that also distinguished Longfellow's character, but she pops out of the backdrop to which the poet had relegated her and becomes, in the hands of the Italian novelist, a symbol of an empowered gender reclaiming justice for her family and tribe. The way in which Salgari decides to end Minnehaha's fictional life must also be considered as an unmistakable tribute to Longfellow, these passages in particular bear striking reminiscences:

Salgari: [Minnehaha] The scalper, riddled with bullets, dropped her shield and axe, uttered a wild scream like that of a fatally wounded beast, and fell on the ground, staining the snow and her big white cloak red[...] In a supreme effort, the terrible scalper wrapped herself in the cape she inherited from her mother. She seemed asleep; her proud and almost masculine features were softened by the throes of death.⁴⁶

Longfellow: Then they buried Minnehaha;

In the snow a grave they made her,
 In the forest deep and darksome,
 Underneath the moaning hemlocks;
 Clothed her in her richest garments,
 Wrapped her in her robes of ermine,
 Covered her with snow, like ermine;
 Thus, they buried Minnehaha.⁴⁷

With the trilogy of Minnehaha, Salgari simultaneously conforms to certain ordinary themes of the western genre and, at the same time, gives it a new spin by introducing

⁴⁶ “La Scotennatrice, crivellata di palle, lasciò cadere il suo scudo ed anche l'ascia, mandò un urlo selvaggio di belva ferita a morte e precipitò a terra, macchiando di rosso la neve ed il suo bianco mantellone [...]La terribile Scotennatrice, in un supremo sforzo, si era avvolta nel mantello ereditato da sua madre e pareva che dormisse. Perfino i suoi lineamenti fieri, quasi maschili, si erano raddolciti nello spasimo dell'agonia”, Emilio Salgari, *Le selve ardenti* (Milano: Fabbri Editori, 2006), pp. 278-9.

⁴⁷ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hiawatha: Longfellow's classic poem* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 60.

the novelty of an almost unprecedented character: the Indian warrior heroine. In the elaboration of this female protagonist, it is likely that Salgari found guidance and inspiration from the works of Mayne Reid, and in particular from the dime novel, *The White Squaw*. Nonetheless, the two writers differ substantially in several themes, in particular in their conceptions of miscegenation, which the Italian author condemned and tackled from a Darwinian point of view, while the Irish writer had the foresight to conceive of as regenerative.

Not all of Salgari's fictional Indians were as fierce and zealously avenging as Minnehaha. Generally, he polarized the figure of the Indian according to the Cooperian canon of noble versus ignoble savage, which by the end of the 19th century had become a literary commonplace of the western genre, both in America and Europe. Salgari's Indians are at times violent, bloodthirsty, and a threat to white man, while at other times they are presented as courteous guides, indispensable to those attempting to cross or settle an unknown and likely-to-be hostile land. In his first western novel, *Il re della prateria* (1896), Salgari pushes this dichotomy even further: the only 'good' Indian to be found in the plot is a white aristocratic man, the so-called King Of the Prairie, who, after being adopted by an Apache tribe and distinguishing himself for his valour and righteousness, is unanimously elected as their absolute chief. Even at first glance, it is rather obvious that historical accuracy was clearly not a priority for Salgari. Instead, he emphasised sensationalistic aspects of narration to move his impressionable Italian readership, which held limited knowledge of actual American, and especially Native American, issues. The novel comes to a close with a revealing statement from the King of the Prairie: "Yes, I love these poor red-skins that white men hate and persecute so much as wild beasts. I made myself a mission: the civilization of these Indians, and perhaps in time I will succeed".⁴⁸ This passage shows how in Salgari's western fiction, authenticity is often secondary to the plot's palatability for an Italian petit-bourgeois readership. In fact, it does not matter whether the King of the Prairie embraced Indigenous culture to the point of becoming an Apache chief; he remains first and foremost a white man, and in this he retains the irrepressible impulse, and implied right, to civilize. This reveals how ingrained in the writer's agenda were his colonial and nationalistic ideals, and the way in which he used the western framework as a tool to carry them forward.

⁴⁸ "Sì, [...] io amo queste povere pellirosse che gli uomini bianchi odiano così tanto e perseguitano come belve feroci. Mi sono imposto una missione: l'incivilimento di questi indiani e forse col tempo vi riuscirò". Emilio Salgari, *Il re della prateria* (Milano: Oscar Mondadori, 2004), p. 226.

This tendency is shared by most European-authored westerns: if we think of the way Karl May constructed his Indians (antithetically to Salgari, in fact) as an allegory of the subdued German nation, or the way Mayne Reid, an advocate of American exceptionalism, depicted Mexicans as foes, we see each of them inevitably reflecting their political credos in their works of fiction. And, as seen, Salgari is no exception. Further examples can be found in *Il re della prateria*, in which racialized references to Ethiopians and Abyssinians can be found. On page 122, Salgari has one of his characters, Colonel Sanchez, say that the Indians, akin to the Abyssinians and Ethiopians, can endure harsher tortures due to an innately lower sensitivity to pain than white men.⁴⁹ This clumsy social Darwinistic statement, coupled with the hostile description of Africans found in another of his western novels, *La sovrana del Campo d'oro* (1905), seems to convey Salgari's need to assert racial/nationalistic superiority in the face of the frustration and embarrassment after the disastrous outcome of the first Italian colonial expeditions in the Horn of Africa.⁵⁰ At the time that Salgari wrote these novels, the young Italian kingdom was, in fact, continuously trying to secure for itself a "place in the sun", which, around the time of the Algeciras Conference (1906) meant holding expansionistic aims also over north Africa and Libya.

Indeed, imperialism and, even more so, patriotism played a fundamental role in Salgari's writing, finding ample space also in his Western fiction. The inclusion of Italian elements, names, and references was Salgari's expedient to make the exotic places he portrayed look less alien, and instead more familiar and *heimatlich* to his readership.⁵¹ A prominent example of this can be found in the aforementioned novel, *La sovrana del campo d'oro*, where the first half of the book featured numerous references to the achievements of Italians in California:

Instead of claims, clusters of lands, feverish and ragged miners, the train ran among superb vineyards, kept with meticulous care, the work of all Italian emigrants, the true creators of California's wine fortune. "The gold has disappeared," said Harris, "but the earth has not stopped rendering." The wine has replaced the metal (p. 64).⁵²

⁴⁹ "– Ma che carni hanno questi indiani? – chiese il marchese, rabbrivendolo.

– Si dice che la loro sensibilità sia di gran lunga inferiore alla nostra, e che quindi provino molto meno dolore di noi. Ed infatti, se così non fosse, non ecciterebbero i loro torturatori a raddoppiare il martirio.

– Può essere – disse il marchese. – So che la razza etiope è molto meno sensibile di noi, e che gli abissini subiscono spaventevoli mutilazioni senza batter ciglio. Povero Gaspardo!... In quali mani sei caduto!", *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁵⁰ See Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*.

⁵¹ Loosely, 'homely', the German definition of a place where one has an enduring sense of belonging.

⁵² "Invece di claims, di ammassi di terre, di minatori febbricitanti e sbrindellati, il treno correva fra superbi vigneti, tenuti con cura meticolosa, opera tutta degli emigrati italiani, i veri creatori della

The vine has now won gold, after the Italians arrived, those admirable farmers who covered the Sacramento valley with vineyards, for which all the states of the Union envy us (p. 65).⁵³

Cartown is one of the most singular hamlets, indeed we can say, without fear of exaggeration, that there is not another in all parts of the world. The city of carts! ... The traveling city, which can move at the whim of its inhabitants! [...] The founder was not an American. The idea of founding that mobile city instead arose in the mind of an Italian emigrant, who did not lack a certain genius (p. 39).⁵⁴

Such frequent reiterations of the qualities and accomplishments of Italian immigrants (industriousness, talent, creativity) are far from casual, as it is Salgari's choice of California, and particularly San Francisco, as the initial setting of this novel. California contained one of the most prosperous colonies of Italian immigrants, and San Francisco was often remembered as the city which had been built by Italians.⁵⁵ Therefore, stressing these elements, and particularly the success of the Italian wine-making business in California—a territory which already evoked mental images of a Promised Land for Italians, which the reference to luscious vineyards undeniably reinforced—was yet another way in which Salgari elicited sentiments of pride and patriotism in his readers, establishing an emotional connection with the novel's subject.

Given these examples, it is easy to see how popular literature tapped onto the nationalistic ideals and aspirations of the young nation, playing in this way an understated and yet crucial part in the construction of Italian identity at the turn of the 20th Century. Those ideals were, in fact, hailed by a large portion of Italians, particularly the middle classes, which, as previously noted, read Salgari and had cheered Buffalo Bill Cody during the Italian tours of the Wild West show. Salgari, who had even managed to be a passenger of the Deadwood Stagecoach during the show's re-enacted assault in Verona in 1890, was initially not too impressed by the Wild West show. He wrote in a review, “We found the buffalo hunt rather poor, the

fortuna vinicola della California. – L'oro è scomparso, – disse Harris, – ma la terra non ha cessato di rendere. Il vino ha surrogato il metallo”. Emilio Salgari, *La sovrana del campo d'oro* (Milano: Oscar Mondadori, 2004), p. 64.

⁵³ “La vite ha vinto ormai l'oro, dopo che sono giunti gl'italiani, quegli ammirabili agricoltori che hanno coperta la valle del Sacramento di vigneti, che tutti gli Stati dell'Unione c'invidiano”, *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁴ “Cartown è una delle più singolari borgate, anzi possiamo dire, senza tema di esagerare, che non ve n'è un'altra in tutte le parti del mondo. La città dei carri!... La città viaggiante, che può spostarsi a capriccio dei suoi abitanti!... Il fondatore non è stato un americano. L'idea di fondare quella città mobile è sorta invece nella mente d'un emigrato italiano, che non mancava d'un certo genio”, *Ibid.*, p. 39

⁵⁵ Along with the Irish, many Italian laborers and carpenters built buildings and infrastructures in San Francisco.

animals appeared fatigued despite the Indian cries and Buffalo Bill's rifle shoots[...] We found nothing ominous in those redskins, and even though they claim to be the most ferocious tribes of savages[;] ...there was nothing fearsome in their war cries".⁵⁶ Salgari here seems to acknowledge that the flesh and blood heroes of the West could not live up to the high expectations that hundreds of pages of Western fiction had aroused in him.⁵⁷ Despite this rather sobering realisation, Salgari understood that the array of legends and imperialistic ideals that Cody embodied and publicised should not be discarded. The political agenda of the American showman did not clash with the nationalistic pride of Salgari; it provided instead a perfectly legitimate counterpart. While Salgari always condemned English colonialism, perceived as a close antagonist to Italy's own plans, he did not seem to be always critical of American imperialism, and indeed embraced the climate of racial division and hierarchy typical of late 19th century America. This attitude is particularly prominent in *La sovrana del campo d' oro* (1905) where Salgari indulged in racial invectives against Africans, while offering a more sympathetic outlook on the Indians. The plot revolves around the peculiar adventures of Annie Clayfert, also known as the queen of the golden field—so-named as she benefited from the profits of a Californian goldmine which belonged to her father. When her father mysteriously disappears, Annie loses her financial support and decides puts herself up for auction to find a husband who would marry her for a sum of money (which she will use to pay her father's ransom, it will be later revealed). The peculiar auction is won by Simone, an African American man who had enriched himself after marrying an elderly and rich widow, heiress to a flourishing crab trade business. Horrified at the idea of marrying a man of African descent, Annie decides to run away in the West and is aided by a group of friends who support her and her beliefs. The African American man and his knavish mixed-race followers are the fiends of this story. The novel is scattered with an explicit racial stereotyping of African Americans and black people in general. Among the most brutal remarks we find "Black as Uncle Tom and ugly as an African monkey" (p. 5), "Nigger... dog! I must kill you" (p. 86), "You are a miserable, a vile

⁵⁶ "Meschina la caccia ai bisonti che ci parvero molto fiacchi. Malgrado le grida degli indiani e i colpi di fucile di Buffalo Bill [...] Nulla di feroce troviamo nei volti di quelle pelli-rosse che pur si resero così celebri, in tutte le epoche per la loro efferatezza e nulla troviamo di spaventevole nelle loro grida di guerra che pur si scrisse tante e tante volte che mettevano così gran paura[...]"; Emilio Salgari, *L'Arena*, Verona, 16/04/1890, cited in Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi, *Arriva Buffalo Bill!*, pp. 38-42.

⁵⁷ Donato Bevilacqua, "Oltre la frontiera: Il West di Emilio Salgari e i suoi eroi", p. 158.

nigger, I wish I had you in front of me so I would whip you in the face” (p. 242).⁵⁸ This hard-hitting language might have been used by Salgari as a form of *couleur locale*, in order to recreate the realism of post-bellum American society. Yet, it would be naïve to think that this would be the only scope of Salgari’s prose. Those descriptions and that type of language certainly also resonated among Italian audiences for its connections to the colonial missions in the Horn of Africa. In this novel, the fact that blackness embodies absolute danger is also confirmed by the rather sympathetic view of Native Americans, which subverts the traditional set of values of the western genre. On page 269, Salgari imagines a critical commentary against white man’s society held by a tribe of Apaches:

“You have stolen from us the great prairies and chased us in the deserts of the great canyon, you have destroyed our buffalo herds[...]; you have destroyed our villages and tribes. How can you, pale face, act like a friend to us, since you belong to the damned race that will make the red man vanish”.⁵⁹

And so, along with the pursuit of nationalistic ideals, in Salgari’s western novels there coexisted a penchant for Cody’s sterilised version of a mythologised frontier and the civilising duties it entailed. Years after attending Cody’s show, the Italian writer decided to pick up his old notepad and restore the epic figure of Buffalo Bill by making him the hero-model of his western fiction; his character is particularly prominent in *La sovrana del campo d’oro*. In this adventure, the references to Buffalo Bill and his Wild West show are endless; starting with the heroine of the story, Annie Clayfert, moulded on Annie Oakley, the Wild West show’s leading female sharpshooter, whose public acclaim in Italy had almost surpassed that of Cody. Salgari had been mesmerised by this female gunslinger, such an oddity to the eyes of *fin-de-siècle* Italians, who certainly were not used to seeing a woman handling firearms. He transposed the traits of Annie Oakley that fascinated him into his fictional heroine: her dexterity with rifles, her youthful beauty, her courage and livelihood are constantly stressed in Salgari’s narration. The other performer from Cody’s show who Salgari revives in this novel is the cowboy Buck Taylor, who had featured in the Verona stopover of the Wild West show in 1890. In his journalistic report of the show Salgari had described him as “a truly gigantic young man who

⁵⁸ “Negro come lo Zio Tom e brutto come una scimmia Africana” p. 5, “– Cane d’un negro!... – ruggì. – Bisogna che t’uccida!”, Salgari, *La sovrana del campo d’oro*, p. 87, “Sei un miserabile, un vile negro! Vorrei avervi dinnanzi per frustarvi in viso”, *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁹ “Ci avete rubate le grandi praterie per cacciarci nei deserti del Gran Cañon, ci avete distrutte le mandrie dei bisonti [...] avete distrutti i nostri villaggi e decimate le nostre tribù. Come puoi tu, viso pallido, farti credere nostro amico, tu che appartieni a quella razza maledetta che finirà per disperdere l’uomo rosso?”, *Ibid.*, p. 269.

rode with surprising grace and skill”.⁶⁰ So impressed was he by Buck Taylor’s dexterity and imposing figure that in *La sovrana del campo d’oro*, Salgari elevates him to the role of Buffalo Bill’s loyal assistant and most skilled among his men; he is entirely dedicated to serving Bill Cody and executing any order he may give him. Concerning Buffalo Bill, himself, Salgari turns him into the true Deus-Ex-Machina of the adventure. He is depicted as a chivalrous hero who escorts his companions through their travels on the frontier, defending them from frequent Indian attackers, and rescuing Annie from captivity. The other characters appear at times to be fully dependent on him, to the point where, without Buffalo Bill’s intervention, the plot cannot seem to unfold. They say: “—What can we possibly do now? — Look for Buffalo Bill. Without his help we would soon fall prey to the Apache and we would not get out alive anymore”.⁶¹

Salgari also uses the character of Bill Cody to introduce the readers to an encyclopaedic amount of information he has gathered about the American West. This has the effect, in the novel, of rendering Buffalo Bill as almost a personification of the West, itself. In *La sovrana del campo d’oro*, therefore, Salgari resuscitates the best version of Buffalo Bill, the one from Ned Buntline’s dime novels, and inflates his depiction even more, so that it bears no resemblance to the underwhelming figure he had seen a few years back in Verona’s Roman amphitheatre. But, if not for Salgari’s fanciful rendition, the image of Cody as merely an aging showman who once brought a glimpse of authentic frontier life to Italy might have been the one that lingered, ending up relegated to little more than a minor character in the chronicles of local history.

⁶⁰ “un giovanotto veramente gigantesco che cavalcava con grazia ed abilità sorprendente”, Emilio Salgari, *L’Arena*, Verona, 16/04/1890, cited in Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi, *Arriva Buffalo Bill!*, p. 39.

⁶¹ “— Che cosa dobbiamo fare, adunque? — Cercare Buffalo Bill. Senza il suo aiuto noi non tarderemmo a ricadere nelle mani degli apaches e non ne usciremmo più vivi”, Emilio Salgari, *La sovrana del campo d’oro*, p. 271.



Figure 114: Emlio Salgari (Left) and Luigi Motta (Right), in a rare picture together, no date. Courtesy of Civic Library of Verona.

Instead, the vivid, potent version of Buffalo Bill continued to live in the imagination of those readers who come across Salgari's Far West novels, and in fact, not only his. One of Salgari's ghost writers, Luigi Motta (1881-1955)—realized that the character of Buffalo Bill, in the epic and larger-than-life rendition initiated by Salgari and then carried on by Nerbini's dime novels, was too popular among young readers to be abandoned to the possibility of oblivion.⁶² Motta therefore published in 1934 a novel in 12 episodes called *Il nemico di Buffalo Bill (The Enemy of Buffalo Bill)*, illustrated by the skilled, though little-known artist, E. Gallieni, while the front cover featured the work of illustrator Schilling.⁶³



*Figure 115: Original artwork for front cover of *Il Nemico di Buffalo Bill*, illustrated by Schilling. Courtesy of Sormani Library Milan.*

⁶² Motta began publishing novels under his own name a few years before Salgari's untimely death, after which he began to combine his name with Salgari's own for purely advertising purposes.

⁶³ More information on Schilling is unavailable; it is likely that this was a pseudonym.



Figure 116: Illustrations for *Il Nemico di Buffalo Bill*, by E. Gallieni.
 Courtesy of Sormani Library Milan.

The novel borrows some of the tropes that Salgari had used in his Far West novels, particularly in *La sovrana del campo d' oro*, such as the Californian setting and the inherent *Italianness* of some of the protagonists, but also builds a new saga with the introduction of western characters that had not been fully considered by Salgari before. For instance, the protagonists, Ines and Domenico, are presented as the children of General Custer, who, despite his importance in the history and in the epics of westerns, was barely acknowledged in Salgari's works.

En route to California, looking for fortune, the caravans of Ines and Domenico and that of Betsie and Maurizio Morison, are attacked by Sioux Indians. Buffalo Bill, much as in *La sovrana del campo d' oro*, plays a saviour role in

protecting common folk from Indian attacks. The arch enemy of Buffalo Bill, as the title reminds us, is the Sioux chief, Red Cloud, and, as the above picture shows, the young-looking Buffalo Bill is also confronted with feral and exotic animals.⁶⁴ The descriptions of corporeal struggles between man and beast were, indeed, much appreciated in the readership of the time. Among the reasons for this, I would argue, was the cultural and political climate of 1930s Italy, in which contests between an absolute hero, a superman, and super-human beasts, were seen as the ultimate renditions of the myth of virility, a founding principle of Fascism.

Motta continued to ride the wave of the ‘Buffalo Bill-brand’ with the novel, *Il figlio di Buffalo Bill* (*Buffalo Bill’s Son*), in which the usual role of the saviour-protagonist is shifted to Billy, the fictional result of a liaison between Cody—captured by the Sioux and re-named White Eagle—and Golden Gazelle, a squaw.⁶⁵ Billy is raised in the Indian tribe but takes up the heroic role of the father. The book was published in episodes by Grandi Avventure of Milan and released in novel form in 1934 by Aurora Editions of Milan, illustrated by the artists Sini and Pampaloni.

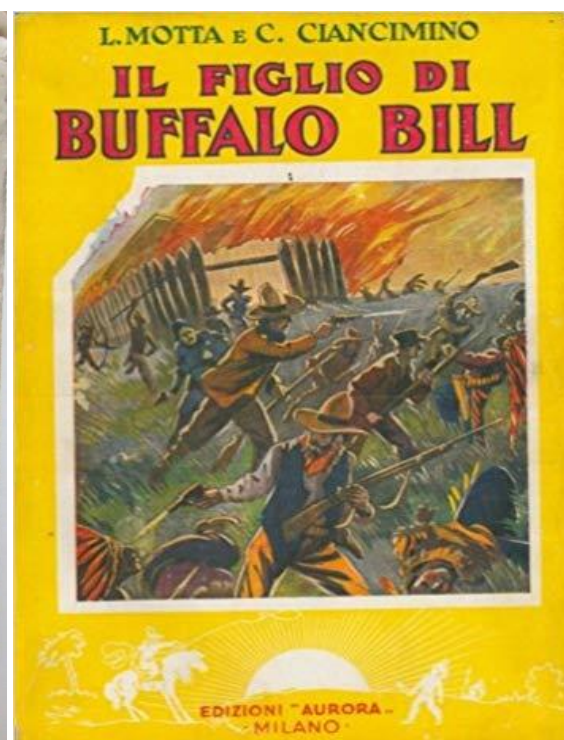


Figure 117: Calogero Ciancimino, *Il Figlio di Buffalo Bill*, reprint, year not available.

Figure 118: Luigi Motta, *Il Figlio di Buffalo Bill*, Calogero Ciancimino, 1934, Milan, Aurora Edizioni.

Author's copies.

⁶⁴ See Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 58.

⁶⁵ “Golden Gazelle”, probably refers to the American antelope, although it may be a conflation with the African animal. This happened in Salgari’s novels and Motta may have mixed the animals.

The novel was an ostensible collaboration with a Sicilian writer Calogero Ciancimino (1899-1936), whose contribution helped to refresh Motta's somewhat hackneyed prose.⁶⁶ In reality, it appears from the evidence found in the correspondence between the two authors held at the public library of Verona that Ciancimino wrote this novel entirely by himself. Motta exploited Ciancimino's premature death in order to continue publishing under both their names, even though he had privately agreed to publish the reprints with the name of the true author (Ciancimino).⁶⁷ Ciancimino added horror and science-fiction elements to the plot, with ghosts and supernatural creatures featuring in this story. These supernatural elements are further developed in the sequels of this new saga of the son of Buffalo Bill, *Fra gli scotennatori col figlio di Buffalo Bill (Among the Scalpers With the Son of Buffalo Bill)*—published with the sole name of Ciancimino by Grandi Avventure of Milan in 1935, and illustrated by E. Gallieni—and in *Il ritorno del figlio di Buffalo (The Return of Buffalo Bill's Son)*. *Il ritorno del figlio di Buffalo Bill* was initially published by Grandi Avventure in 1935, featuring the names of both authors: Motta and Ciancimino, but in a reprint only the name of Ciancimino featured.



Figure 119 (left): Calogero Ciancimino, Luigi Motta, *Il Ritorno del figlio di Buffalo Bill*, Milano: Grandi Avventure, 1935.

**Figure 120 (right): Calogero Ciancimino, *Il Ritorno del figlio di Buffalo Bill*, reprint, year not available.
Author's copies.**

⁶⁶ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 58.

⁶⁷ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi, "Lo strano caso dello scrittore Luigi Motta", in *Luigi Motta scrittore di avventure*, Claudio Gallo and Paola Tiloca (eds.), (Verona: Perosini Editore, 2007), p. 132.

Ciancimino continued the saga of the son of Buffalo Bill until his death in 1936 by publishing the following stories with Grandi Avventure: *Nelle praterie con il figlio di Buffalo Bill (In the Prairies with Buffalo Bill's Son)*, *Altre imprese del figlio di Buffalo Bill (Other Deeds of Buffalo Bill's Son)*, and *Ultime avventure del figlio di Buffalo Bill (Last Adventures of Buffalo Bill's Son)*.⁶⁸ After World War II, Luigi Motta revisited the saga of the son of Buffalo Bill as written by Ciancimino and offered it again to the public with the title *Buffalo Bill contro Nube Rossa (Buffalo Bill Against Red Cloud)*, published by editor Viglongo of Turin in 1950.⁶⁹ This demonstrates how Luigi Motta, despite being a less gifted writer than both his master Salgari and his collaborator Ciancimino, was perhaps a better editor, and surely an excellent advertiser. In keeping the Buffalo Bill saga alive, with publications scattered intermittently over three decades, Motta clearly recognized the powerful attraction that the myth of Buffalo Bill exerted on Italian readerships and duly capitalized on it, sometimes even in an unscrupulous fashion. This helped to allow the myth of Buffalo Bill and the Wild West to live on in the collective imagination of Italians for a long time—well beyond the arrival of Hollywood westerns in Italian cinemas—and allowed it to further enrich the Italian imagination with a new set of culturally-specific connotations, setting the stage for a true Italian strand of the western genre, which will be explored in various areas of popular culture from the end of WWII onwards.

Chapter 8.3. 'Buffalo Bill's History Lesson': the fortune of the Wild West myth in post-war Italian Comics and Popular Cinema

Beyond popular literature, the legacy of Salgari's western epic passed far from unnoticed by Gianluigi Bonelli (and later by his son, Sergio) and by Aurelio Galleppini, respectively author and illustrator of *Tex Willer*, a comic series that began in 1948 and which became the most popular western comic in republican Italy.⁷⁰ In *Tex Willer*, in fact, we find many characteristic elements of Salgari's

⁶⁸ Claudi Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 60.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ In this final part, I discuss the persistent legacy of the character and spirit of Buffalo Bill in 20th century Italian popular culture, because its extraordinary tenacity and adaptability are part of the history of the impact of the Italian tours of the Wild West show. A fuller study of the modern literary, graphic and cinematic presence of Italian versions of Buffalo Bill is something that future historians and cultural critics may wish to undertake.

adventurous narrative: firstly, the sidekicks, the Pardos of Tex, play roles that are anything but secondary, displaying valiant characteristics and a high moral code.⁷¹ An example of this is to be found in the character of Kit Carson, which is repurposed by Bonelli as Tex's trusted friend and displays heroic attributes. It is no coincidence that Bonelli chose Carson as Tex's companion and guiding figure. Indeed, this can be interpreted as a tribute to Buffalo Bill, this character so dear to the memory of the Italian public. Carson was in fact the inspiration and role model of William F. Cody, to the point that Cody called his only son—who died in childhood—Kit. Secondly, Tex's stories maintain the drama of Salgari's western adventure stories: the defence of vulnerable subjects (women, children and the oppressed, in general) is always present, as are strong passions, acts of heroism, and evil fiends.⁷² Another characteristic that Tex (and other Italian western comics of the 1950s and 1960s) drew from Salgari's narrative, is that of the timelessness of the western scenario, which never develops in a diachronic way but, on the contrary, it is always synchronic.⁷³ That is, the West of Tex is never about to disappear, never threatened by the advance of the frontier and therefore of civilization. Tex and his companions grow old, but the West expands into an apparently infinite present—just as it happened in the novels of Salgari, which were continued by the aforementioned epigones.

The influence that this local western literature has had on Bonelli and Galeppini, and in particular of the myth of Buffalo Bill that Salgari had lionized in more than one short story, resurfaces inexorably in a series of *Tex* numbers devoted explicitly to Buffalo Bill and his Wild West. Buffalo Bill in fact features for the first time in issue 82 of *Tex*, released in 1967, and entitled “La Sfida” (“The Challenge”). The title is certainly not accidental, given its echoes of the match between Cody's cowboys and Italian herdsmen (*butteri*) that occurred in Rome in 1890. However, the episode in the comic strip does not deal with this challenge, but instead invents a fantasy one: Tex and Buffalo Bill get into a friendly challenge to establish which of the two is more skilled with the rifle. The challenge is to shoot six coins on six poles, twenty steps away from the shooter, all while riding at a gallop. Buffalo Bill hits

⁷¹ Claudio Gallo and Giuseppe Bonomi (eds.), *Buffalo Bill e Tex Willer*, p. 64.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Matteo Pollone, “An anonymous setting for the adventure. Abstract space in the origins of the Italian western comic book (1935-1965)”, in *Spazi tra le nuvole. Lo spazio nel fumetto*, Eds. G. V. Distefano, M. Guglielmi, L. Quaquarelli, *Between*, vol. 8, no. 15 (May 2018), pp. 1-20, p. 10. Online, <http://www.betweenjournal.it>. Last accessed, 23/11/2019.

three coins out of six, while Tex, performing acrobatic horse-riding acrobatics, hits all six of them and is therefore applauded and revered by Buffalo Bill at the end of the episode. With this farewell, the authors of *Tex* seemingly declared that their paper hero had become the natural heir of Buffalo Bill, in a metaphorical passing of the baton from an old hero of popular culture to another.

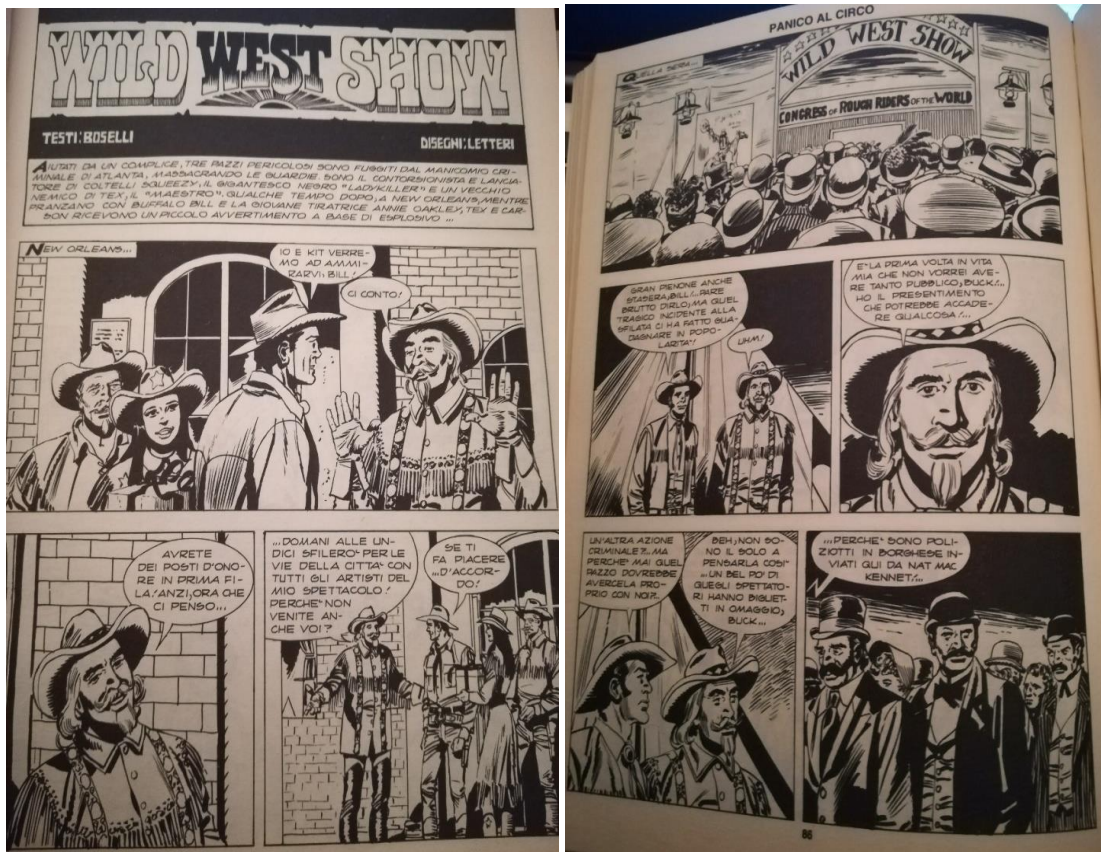


*Figure 121: Tex Willer, La sfida, issue 82, 1967.
Author's copy.*

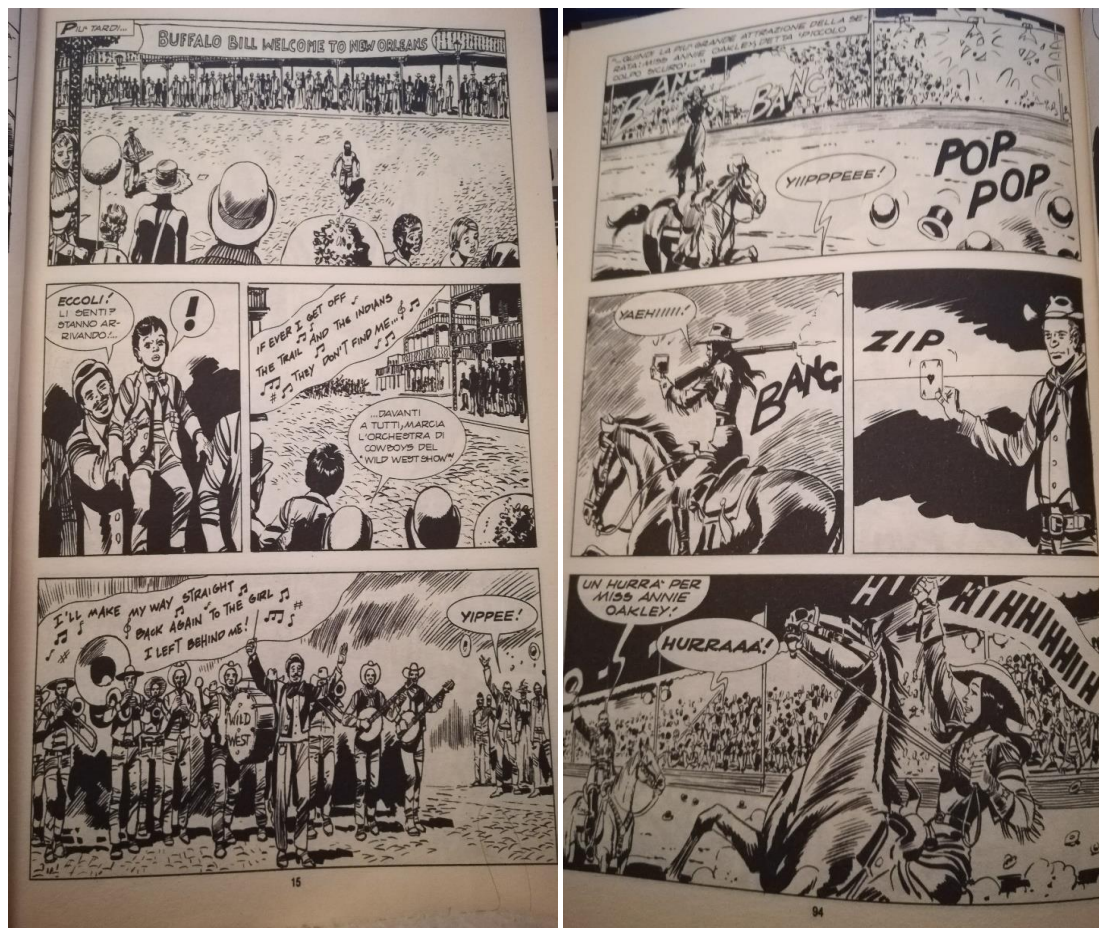
Buffalo Bill returns to be part of Tex's adventures only after a long time, in three issues released in 1997 and entitled *Il Prezzo della vittoria* (*The Price of Victory*), *Wild West show* and *Ombre Cinesi* (*Chinese Shadows*), by the new authors and designers Mauro Boselli and Guglielmo Letteri.⁷⁴ In these episodes, Buffalo Bill does not perform particular heroic deeds, but is celebrated as a great showman. Tex Willer and Kit Carson are drawn to New Orleans, where Buffalo Bill is performing, by a threatening letter which advises them to go there. Murders and abductions are committed in the city by a gang of criminals. The Wild West show is also affected by them. Cody's spectacle is disrupted by an attack by one of these criminals disguised

⁷⁴ Thanks to Mark Ellis and Nikos Katsillis of Olympia Mare, Kos, for providing me with the original issues of this comic which I employed for this study.

as an Indian, who fires real bullets at the audience during the Deadwood Stagecoach attack scene. Annie Oakley is then kidnapped by the criminal gang, who keep her segregated in the basement of a Chinese shadow theatre. Tex Willer, Kit Carson and Buck Taylor (who also features in these episodes) will finally release her, with great satisfaction and thanks from Cody who can finally resume his show.



Figures 122 and 123: Tex Willer, Wild West show, n. 436, 1997, p. 5 and p. 86



Figures 124 and 125: Tex Willer, *Ombre Cinesi*, n. 437, 1997, p. 15 and p. 94

Another area of popular culture which has not remained indifferent to the figure of Buffalo Bill and to the myths of the West that he promulgated, is undoubtedly the Italian cinema industry. Cinema invites particular consideration as it appears that the impact of the myth of the Wild West has not only helped the start of the western genre, but the Italian cinema industry has focused with particular attention on the figure of Buffalo Bill, so that within the western genre it has developed a share of the market dedicated to Cody's alter ego.

Starting from the silent film era, in addition to the influence on silent films studied previously we see that, between 1917 (the year of Cody's death) and 1920, three episodes of a silent film serial called *Buffalo e Bill* (*Buffalo and Bill*) were directed and released by a company from Turin.⁷⁵ Also, in 1922, the film, *La Reginetta dei Butteri* (*The Queen of the Butteri*), was produced by Andrea Uccellini, which echoed the deeds of the *butteri*, the Italian herdsmen who rose to the status of

⁷⁵ Christopher Frayling, *Sergio Leone: Something to Do with Death*, p. 121; Rudmer Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials*, p. 195.

folk icons after they were invited to ride Buffalo Bill's broncos during the 1890 Wild West Show.⁷⁶ The distribution of films about Buffalo Bill did not stop, even when the Fascist regime rose to power. For a few years, Italian productions are not recorded, but foreign-made westerns continued to feature in Italian movie theatres until the start of World War II, and it is interesting to note is that their original titles were often altered in order to include the two magic words: Buffalo Bill. For example, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Plainsman* (1936) appeared as *Buffalo Bill* in Italy; and after the war (from 1939 to the end of the regime, Mussolini put an embargo on a variety of "foreign cultural products" including films, comics and novels), the film was shown again. Also the film, *The Prairie* (1948), by German director Frank Wisbar was released as *Nella Terra di Buffalo Bill (In Buffalo Bill's Land)*; another example was Ray Taylor's *Son of Billy the Kid* (1949) which was translated as *Billy the Left-handed*, and whose promotional poster unfailingly displayed the statement "Billy the Kid, a legendary name as that of Buffalo Bill and Kit Carson".



Figure 126: American Poster for Frank Wisbar's *The Prairie*.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prairie_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prairie_(film)).

Figure 127: Italian poster for the same film.
<https://www.ivid.it/foto/film/1947/nella-terra-di-buffalo-bill/locandina-387609.html> Last accessed 01/08/2017.

⁷⁶ Christopher Frayling, *Sergio Leone: Something to Do with Death*, p. 121.



Figure 128: Italian poster for Ray Taylor's *Son of Billy the Kid*.

<http://www.internetculturale.it/jmms/iccuviewer/iccu.jsp?id=oai%3Awww.internetculturale.sbn.it%2FTeca%3A20%3ANT0000%3AFOG422586&mode=all&teca=MagTeca++ICCU>.

Figure 129: American poster for the same movie.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041896/>. Last accessed 01/08/2017.

The name of Buffalo Bill, therefore, literally became a brand, a marketing device, that was often used and abused. We can see, in fact, how the letter of a puzzled cinemagoer to a film magazine points out the discrepancy between the title of the film *Buffalo Bill*—DeMille's *The Plainsman*—and the real subject of the movie: Wild Bill Hickok. The film journalist—although admitting to a case of “deceitful propaganda”—candidly responds that it is “because the name Buffalo Bill holds a better value in advertisements”.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Cinema*, 10/8/1937, volume 2, issue 27, p.101.

MIMOSA (Biella). — Anche altre versioni del film LA CONQUISTA DEL WEST (*The Plainsman*), hanno il sottotitolo BUFFALO BILL, mentre si rievocano in questo film, come Lei dice giustamente, non tanto le gesta di questi quanto invece di Wild Bill Hickock. La ragione sarà ben quella da Lei supposta: che il nome Buffalo Bill ha maggior valore pubblicitario. Senonché la legge fondamentale di ogni propaganda è che non esista contrasto fra quel che si annuncia e quel che si offre. Gli effetti di una propaganda che delude sono effimeri e servono anzi a svalutarla in generale. Ci voleva uno pseudonimo così profumato per farmi questa domanda?

Figure 130: Article commenting on the misnaming in Italian of The Plainsman, from the magazine Cinema, 10/08/1937, p. 101.

Courtesy of Biblioteca del Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Roma.

The commercial value of the name of Buffalo Bill was recognised also by debutante director Giuseppe Accatino, who in 1949 wrote, produced and directed the film, *Buffalo Bill a Roma*, which once again represented in highly nationalistic tones, the bronco saddling challenge between American cowboys and Italian *butteri* during the 1890 tour of Cody's Wild West Show. Unfortunately, it appears that the film was so poorly made that even the usual promise of success which the label 'Buffalo Bill' offered, could not spare the director from utter financial and reputational collapse—a review from 1953 said: "Italy is really the happy land where everything is permitted in cinema industry: it is permitted to let someone who suddenly decides to make a movie, go ahead and ruin himself (and others) financially during the process, and it is permitted to screen this movie even if, after all the possible tinkering, it remains helplessly unwatchable."⁷⁸ More recently, this review has been re-evaluated and *Buffalo Bill a Roma*, despite its flaws, is now considered a precursor to the *spaghetti westerns*, given that the film does not passively reproduce Hollywood's clichés, but, in fact, uses the western framework to actively tackle issues concerning Italian national identity.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ A. Albertazzi, *Intermezzo*, 15/08/53, year 8, issue 15.

⁷⁹ Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), p. 21.

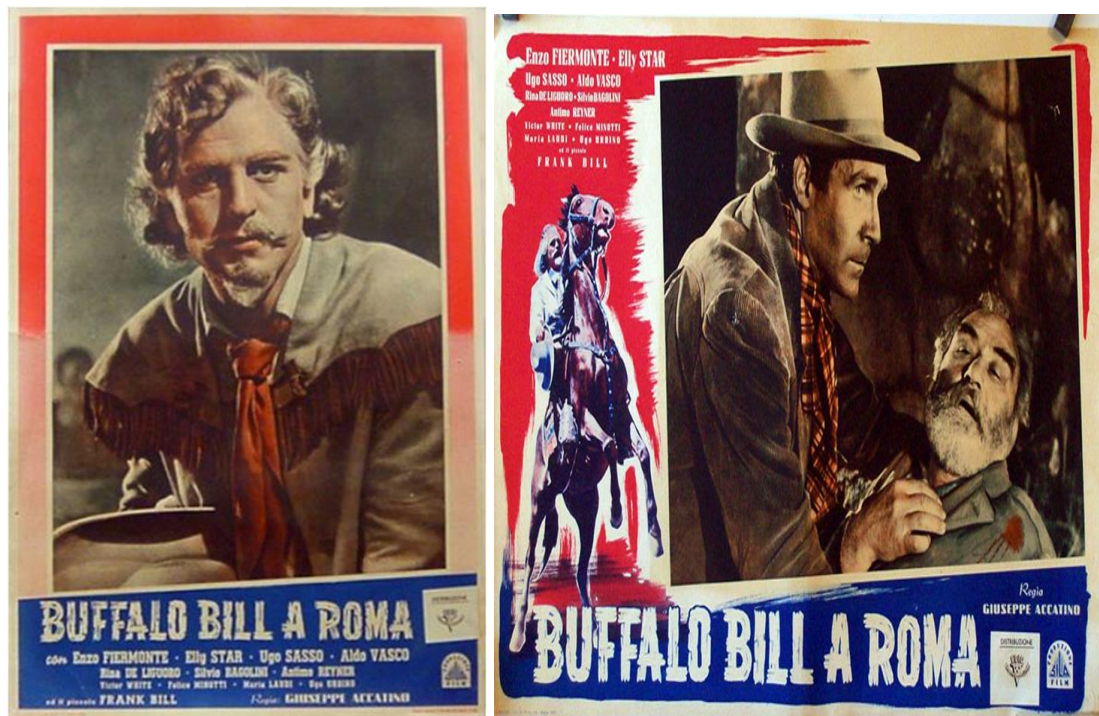


Figure 131 and Figure 132: Posters for Giuseppe Accatino's *Buffalo Bill a Roma*, 1949.
<http://www.benitomovieposter.com/catalog/buffalo-bill-a-roma-p-147410.html?osCsid=1i1pk48oduhqsp04217cftrnb1>
<http://www.benitomovieposter.com/catalog/buffalo-bill-a-roma-p-81516.html?language=IT>
 Last Accessed, 01/08/2017.

Loose echoes of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* show can be spotted in a comedic western of the 1950s: *La Sceriffa* (*The Female Sheriff*) (1959) by director Roberto Bianchi Montero. The film, an early parody of the western genre, starred the celebrated Neapolitan actress Tina Pica in the guise of a fearless female sheriff and sharpshooter. In the film she is Carmela, an Italian immigrant who married a sheriff in the far-western fantasy-settlement "Rio Ciuccio" (Italian for Rio Jackass) and takes up her husband's job after he is killed by a band of renegades. Despite her skill with weapons and her self-assured audacity, Carmela maintains her ladylike demeanour, not in the style of a young Annie Oakley which one might be inclined to link her to, but more in the garb of a mature Wild West matron. Indeed, in the film, Italian culture and norms are once again promoted; for instance, the deputy sheriff makes macaroni from scratch in the sheriff's office and Carmela is dismayed due to her nephew acting like a "femminiello", too effeminate for the Wild West. Ultimately, this being a parody, Italian values are touted to the extreme, to the point that the whole town functions like an Italian colony in the Far West.



Figure 133 and Figure 134: Stills from La Sceriffa, 1959, by Roberto Bianchi Montero.

In the 1950s, an astonishing number of American films finally arrived in Italy, heavily influencing audiences throughout the decade. The impact of American western films is particularly suggested by the impressive number of western adaptations that Italian directors would release between the 1960s and the 1970s. Published statistics tell us that in 1961 only three westerns were filmed in Italy, just one in 1962 and five in 1963. Suddenly, in 1964, thirty-two were recorded and from 1968 onwards the average annual number rose to seventy-three.⁸⁰ And it is precisely in 1964 that this western frenzy ensured that the myth of Buffalo Bill was restaged on the Italian big screens: the film *Buffalo Bill, Hero of the Far West*, was released by Mario Costa, and starred Gordon Scott, famous for playing Tarzan and the Herculean character, Maciste, and Mario Brega, who was to become one of Sergio Leone's favourite actors. The film echoed classic Hollywood productions, but lacked any personal style. The settings and the plot, which revolve around the conflict

⁸⁰ Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western*, p. 25.

between Buffalo Bill and Chief Yellow Hand, are thus considered predictable, and the characters' psychological makeup lacks depth, especially the character of Buffalo Bill, who, despite being represented as a great friend of the Indians, still kills an awful lot of them. The pseudonym behind which Mario Costa hid in order to render the film palatable to foreign markets was "John Fordson"—which conveys how Costa struggled to be original even when it came to picking a name. Nevertheless this is one of the few spaghetti westerns that, paradoxically, was more successful abroad than in Italy, perhaps because it was tapping onto the standards of canonical American westerns more than other spaghetti westerns—which used the western setting as a device to tackle Italy's own social problems in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹

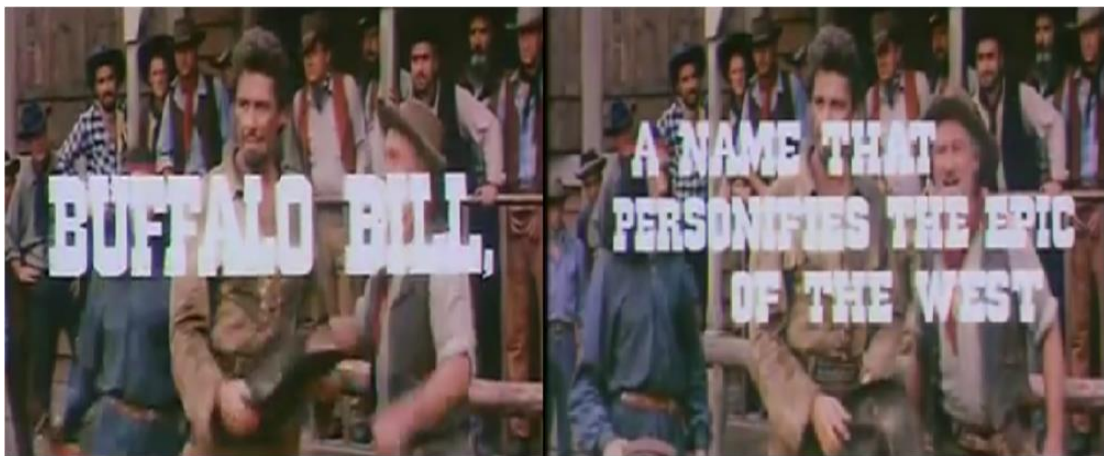


Figure 135: Stills from the promotional clip of Buffalo Bill by Mario Costa, 1964.

As cinema scholar Austin Fisher aptly put it, “Italy’s relationship [...] with the western (mythology) is [...] seen as a process of ‘cultural blending’[...] this was most clearly demonstrated in the 1950s and 1960s by the domestic film industry”.⁸² This general statement about the western genre rings true also in the specific case of the “cultural blending” applied to the character of Buffalo Bill, whose usage in Italian cinema, and popular culture in general, evolved through decades. Indeed, after the blast of excitement for the western genre in Italian cinema, during the 1970s, audience receptiveness shifted and an attitude of resistance and hostility grew towards the importation of American cultural products; an attitude which fits into the historical framework of counter-cultural contestation, which has also fostered a revised outlook towards Indigenous North American cultures. After the deluge of representations of the myth of the West in post-war popular culture, there came a backlash: the concept in the Italian mind of the figure of Buffalo Bill, together with

⁸¹ On the politically charged background of spaghetti westerns, see Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western*.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

that of other semi-mythical Western heroes such as General Custer, underwent a change from a long phase of enthusiasm and fondness to one characterised by critique and parody. Marco Ferreri's 1974 film *Non Toccare La Donna Bianca* (*Don't Touch the White Woman!*) a French-Italian production released in both languages, seeks to do just that. Ferreri represents in satirical and grotesque key, a crucial moment of the history of the West which, until then, had always been represented in serious and dramatic tones by U.S. cinematography as well as historiography: Custer's massacre at the battle of the Little Bighorn. Ferreri's desecrating irony lashes out with particular vehemence at the character of Buffalo Bill, played by Michel Piccoli, as someone who popularizes and sanitizes the myth of western expansion by re-enacting in his show Custer's last stand in the most melodramatic style, almost enveloped in an aura of sacredness. Far from being the hero of the Wild West, Cody is vilified and pictured as a true sideshow freak: a dull wimp with delusions of grandeur, who constantly attempts to steal the limelight from the equally egomaniacal General Custer (played by Marcello Mastroianni), who for this reason publicly despises him.

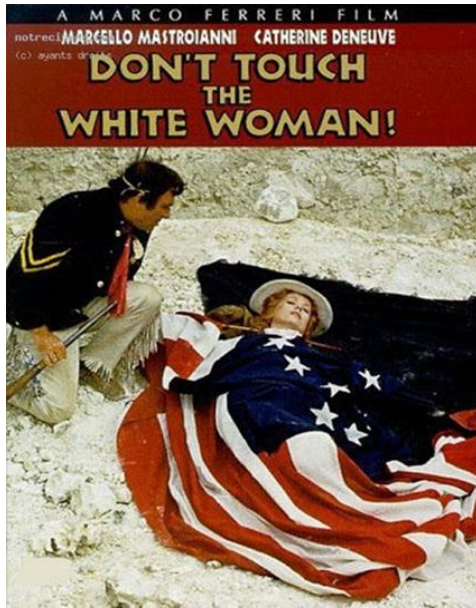


Figure 136: Promotional Poster for Marco Ferreri's *Don't Touch the White Woman*.
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072305/mediaviewer/rm825663232>. Accessed 15/02/2020.

Figure 137 and Figure 138: Stills from the film in which the character of Buffalo Bill appears.

The key to the interpretation of the film is the *bouleversement*: The West is restaged in the excavation of a building site in the centre of Paris, where the transcontinental railroad is under construction. This is a metaphor for the erection of the shopping mall, *Forum de Les Halles*, which required demolition of the historic medieval quarter of Les Halles de Paris (the subject of the Emile Zola's novel, *Le Ventre de Paris*). The Indians are the evicted residents of the old neighbourhood, who, unwilling to surrender to progress, decide to retaliate. Ferreri's criticism, envisions

the West as the deceitful creational myth of America and stretches his condemnation to embrace the effects of Americanization and global capitalism.

In this picture, we see how the figure of Buffalo Bill has influenced the reception of the myth of the West and of American culture in Italy throughout the 20th century, and the ways in which popular culture and cinema have voiced this. Italian authors and directors, having welcomed Cody's vision with wonder and enthusiasm, quickly moving from emulation to appropriation of his meta-narrative and aesthetics, finally reprocessing them for their own artistic, commercial and political needs. All this goes to show the resilience and flexibility of the character and of the endeavour of Buffalo Bill and his Wild West show, which has proven to be not only trans-national, but also trans-cultural and trans-medial, having managed to permeate a multitude of aspects of popular culture and of the communication industry around the globe.

Conclusion

In this work, I have tackled the Italian response to the myth of the American Wild West as presented by Buffalo Bill Cody. This response had deeper and older roots, which were laid down, as has been seen, in travel narratives and in the first wave of popular western literature coming into Italy from foreign countries.

Travel narratives offered a privileged outlook on the frontier and Far Western territories which emphasised their true, or alleged (depending on the account and on the epoch in which it was written) Wildness, and at the same time established comparisons with Italy, bolstering the assumed cultural superiority of the motherland and generally criticising American expansionism in the West. Foreign dime novels also circulated in Italy, emphasising the ‘Wildness’ of those territories, yet in sensationalistic ways, rather than with the realism claimed by the authors of travel narratives. This fostered a split imagination of the ‘Wild West’ in 19th century Italians: one was based on historical facts and characterised by critical outlooks on American Expansionism; the other was rooted in fantasy and shaped by enthusiastic (and sanitized) ideations about adventure, civilization and savagery. This imagination co-existed, I argue, until the advent of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show which would act as a homogenizer of the Italian imagination concerning the American West, decidedly fostering the sensationalistic side of the imagination of the West as a wild, adventure-laden environment, freed from the negative implications of internal American colonialism. From that moment on, the West became undisputedly a site of sheer escapism for Italians; the West was a wild place of the imagination, thanks largely to Buffalo Bill. This hold on the Italian imagination—reinforced by visual popular culture, such as comics, pulp fictions and cinema—would persist until the arrival of Native American revisionism in the 1970s began to alter such a deep-rooted set of ideas.

Italians, as this work has shown, have proven to be among the most avid consumers of this particular myth of the Wild West, bestowed on them by Buffalo Bill. Why was Cody’s version of the Wild West so openly received and so persistently retained in the Italian imagination in the 20th century? This is connected intimately with the personal and collective memories that this show has bequeathed to the Italian public. Collective memory amounts to a joint set of recollections and knowledge which is significant to a given group because it connects with its sense of

shared identity.¹ As sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has explained in his studies, collective memory is in continuous change; new memories adjust themselves onto the old ones as a group/society mutates. In this way, collective memory helps the member of a group/society to give meaning to their communal past, and, at the same time, to find meaning in the present and future. Personal memories, as well as family memories are extended onto the social sphere, “in such a way as to encompass recollections of our worldly life”.² The process of extending (and tweaking) personal and family memories onto a collective and social realm is, I argue, what motivated the enduring enthusiasm of the Italians for the Western imagery of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show.

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show exerted a tremendous impact on the memory of its spectators. In Italy, as this work has illustrated, this impact was particularly profound given that the show, such a colonial fun-fare (light-heartedly combining colonial, dramatic, ludic and consumerist elements within a sensational narrative of white supremacy), was generally received as an extraordinary novelty. It appeared to have had a particular grip on young spectators, who passed on their memory of it to their families and close ones. This occurred in the form of oral tradition as they were unable to provide written comments on the show at the time, and, most importantly, because, as youths, their imagination was still a largely blank canvas.

Even today, many Italians claim that their grandfather or grandmother not only saw the Wild West show, but even met Buffalo Bill during their childhood or youth.³ Given that these are what I would call third-hand memories, in that they have been passed on by at least three generations, it is extremely difficult to say which are truthful and which are not (and which details have been adjusted to fit a family memory or the collective one) and going through all of them would prove futile for the purposes of this work. I have decided, however, to briefly engage with a small sample of them: the most public ones, those which have been published or which come from interviews, and were, therefore, freely given to the community.

The first recollection comes from the celebrated contemporary Italian author, Alessandro Baricco, and was published in a book evocatively titled *Barnum*, which

¹ Aleida Assman, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des Kulturellen*, cited in William Hirst and David Manier, “Towards a Psychology of Collective Memory”, *MEMORY*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1999), p. 184.

² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 81.

³ A notable example comes from the Grand Master of the Italian Freemason Lodge, “Grande Oriente d’ Italia”, Claudio Bonvecchio, who, in a brief phone conversation with the author, asserted that his grandfather met Buffalo Bill in the city of Pavia.

deals with the society of spectacles in Italy and Europe of the 1990s. After attending a Wild West show re-enactment at Eurodisney Paris, the author recalled the collective memory of the show passed on to him by his grandfather. Through the transmission of this vague and imprecise memory (e.g., the allusion to Sitting Bull, who had died long before the show performed in Turin), the author claims he also felt and experienced the West:

Thus, from that orphan country of true professional dreamers [North America], I would not have come back with a *Barnum* in mind if, coming out, I had not come across the legendary, historic, unique *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show*, settled on the fringes of Eurodisney [...]. It even touched me a little because that show is the only subtle but real direct relationship with the West that I can boast. In the rather loose sense that my grandfather had seen him in Piazza d'Armi in Turin, when Buffalo Bill was there, himself, and perhaps also Sitting Bull (he was always a bit evasive about that), and so the transitive property that I was listening to my grandfather who had gone to see Buffalo Bill who had seen the West allowed me to think (and I never stopped thinking of it) that I had seen the West. From afar, but I had seen it.⁴

The next is a memory from local poetess and author Carla Porta Musa, from the city of Como, which was re-evoked by her daughter, Dr. Livia Porta.⁵ I discovered that Carla Porta Musa had witnessed the passing of Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1906 Como, during my visit to the Como library in 2013; the information was delivered to me casually in a conversation with the curator.⁶ The poetess had died the previous year (2012) at the age of 110 and had kept the memory of Buffalo Bill alive throughout her life, talking about it in a number of interviews with the press.⁷ Dr. Livia Porta revealed that her mother had numerous conversations with her about this character. Buffalo Bill inspired terror in her mother, so that when Carla's father wanted to take her to the arena where Buffalo Bill was performing, she refused. The circus was set up on a lakeside area near the Sailing Club of the city, and the Porta

⁴ “Così, da quel paese da sogno orfano di veri sognatori professionisti, non sarei tornato con un Barnum in testa se, uscendo, non mi fossi imbattuto nel mitico, storico, unico Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, attendato ai margini di Eurodisney[...]. Mi ha perfino un po' commosso perché quello show è l'unico sottile ma reale rapporto diretto con il West che io posso vantare. Nel senso, piuttosto labile, che mio nonno l'aveva visto, in piazza d'Armi a Torino, quando c'era Buffalo Bill proprio lui, e forse anche Toro Seduto (su quello era sempre un po' evasivo), e così per la proprietà transitiva io che stavo a sentire mio nonno che era andato a vedere Buffalo Bill che aveva visto il West potevo pensare (e non ho mai smesso di pensarlo) che io avevo visto il West. Da lontano, ma l'avevo visto”. Alessandro Baricco, *Barnum: Cronache dal grande show* (Milano, Edizioni Feltrinelli, 1995), p. 82.

⁵ I would like to thank both Dr. Livia Porta and Dr. Magda Nosedà. The latter is the vice-president of Como's Carducci association and acted as a bridge between me and Dr. Porta, sending her memory to me via email.

⁶ I would like to thank the curator of the Library of Como, Dr. Chiara Milani, for providing this useful information.

⁷ See journalist Claudio Bardaglio's blog and the interview given to *Il Corriere di Como*. <http://giorgiobardaglio.blogspot.com/2011/02/carla-porta-musa-e-il-testamento.html>; and <https://www.corrieredicomo.it/lil-carducci-fu-unopera-eccezionale-per-comor/>.

Last accessed 11/12/2019.

Musa villa was located very close to the circus. Young Carla saw Buffalo Bill, not at the show but circulating in the city on his horse, with very particular clothing and with a big hat. The appearance of this strange and eccentric man had frightened her so much that the image of that vision had always remained alive, lifelong, in her memory.

This memory indicates that Buffalo Bill's show elicited a range of different sentiments in its spectators, and especially in the very young ones, to whom Cody appeared a shocking character from a different planet, as this recollection suggests. The strength of this feeling, and the vividness of the image of Buffalo Bill associated with it, is what matters in the recollection, and indeed it is what remained in the family memory, which then became collective, connected to this character and to the event that he presided over.

The last recollection comes from author Enrico Bo, who in his 2017 book *E il vento dell' est continua a soffiare (And the East Wind Still Blows)*—a collection of posts from his personal blog—recounts with a little more detail than the aforementioned accounts (but using the wrong dates) the memories of his grandmother of the performance of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in the northern city of Alessandria:

If I am not mistaken it was in 1911 that, in Garibaldi square, the great space for the guests of the city, already surrounded by the uniform stage that a wise administration had created with a farsighted urbanistic design, there came, amid expectations of one of the most extraordinary possible events, the famous Buffalo Bill circus, directly from the distant Americas, land of fairy tales and exoticism.

[My grandmother] was just over 20 years old and the Belle Époque was in its full splendour, a period full of great carelessness that could certainly not portend the lurking horrors that the still young century was about to generate. She told it to me with dreamy eyes; for once, she let go of her grumbling expression, and she knew how to make that big coloured tent seem like it was showing a multitude of wonders coming from distant and unknown worlds. The Indians with large feathered hats that invaded the ring on wild horses, the attack on a coach, the shooting of rifles and the characters of that fairy tale universe that perhaps had generated unconfessed desires, delusions and forbidden emotions at the sight of those handlebar moustaches, those impetuous rides, those men with sculpted profiles coming from the boundless grasslands populated by bison and dangers. And above all, he, the hero with the long hair who galloped up on a big white horse, with the fringed yellow jacket, who was walking around the track waving goodbye to collect the applause and ecstatic cries of enthusiastic spectators. Buffalo Bill, with his gentle heart left his mark here, too, it certainly wasn't like those puppets that showed inside that little new piece of furniture that had just appeared at the local café. She never believed that the little men who saw themselves a little flickering in the black and white of the first television broadcasts, were real men in the flesh. Buffalo Bill, that was a real man.⁸

⁸ “Se non sbaglio fu nel 1911 che, in piazza Garibaldi, la grande sala per gli ospiti della città, già circondata dalle quinte uniformi che una saggia amministrazione aveva obbligato con un disegno urbanistico lungimirante, giunse, atteso come uno dei massimi eventi possibili, il famoso Circo di

Through the borrowed memory of his grandmother, the author not only lives vicariously the experience of the show, but he also re-lives his own childhood, when Hollywood westerns had begun to appear on the first televisions in Italy (around the late 1950s only cafés and pubs could afford to own a television). However enticing they might have been, Hollywood westerns did not equal the power of the memory of his grandmother's live experience of the show: for her and, as a consequence, for his grandchild, only the characters of the Wild West show were the real deal. No matter how fictitious Wild West show characters and acts might have also been, the bond, the emotional reaction created by the live experience of the show was stronger than historical truth. Indeed, this is a common denominator to most of the Italian memories of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and certainly to the ones seen above: having attended the show automatically conferred authenticity within the family history framework, but also within the social one with which these stories were passed on, ultimately merging with other collective cultural memories of this event.

The fact that Buffalo Bill chose to visit Italy with the Wild West show, spoke strongly to its people. In a time of diminished status among European powers, the fact that such a big enterprise as that of Buffalo Bill decided to visit Italy not once, but twice, signalled that the country was not as peripheral as it might have appeared. This fact alone was a source of pride for Italians, which mingled with the sensational atmosphere created by the "advance work" of the publicity crew of the Wild West company—that of attending a larger-than-life event—and helped to produce strong feelings and lifelong memories in the Italians. Such memories, given the importance of family ties in Italian culture, only became stronger with the passing of time and with the handing down of these recollections from generation to generation. These,

Buffalo Bill, direttamente dalle lontane Americhe, terre di favola e di esotismo. Lei aveva poco più di 20 anni e la Belle époque era nel suo massimo splendore, un periodo ricco di grande spensieratezza che non poteva di certo far presagire gli orrori in agguato che il secolo ancora bambino stava per generare. Me lo raccontava con occhi sognanti, per una volta dismesso il borbottio corrucciato e mi sapeva far apparire quella grande tenda colorata che andava mostrando una serie di meraviglie arrivata da mondi lontani e sconosciuti. Gli indiani con i grandi copricapi piumati che a rotta di collo invadevano la pista sui cavalli selvaggi, l'inseguimento alla diligenza, gli spari delle carabine e i personaggi di quell'universo di fiaba che forse aveva generato desideri inconfessati, deliqui e trasporti proibiti al vedere quei baffi a manubrio, quelle cavalcate impetuose, quegli uomini dai profili scolpiti giunti dalle praterie sconfinite popolate di bisonti e di pericoli. E soprattutto lui, l'eroe dai lunghi capelli che arrivava al galoppo su un grande cavallo bianco, con la giacca gialla sfrangiata, che girava per la pista salutandoci col grande cappello a raccogliere gli applausi e le grida estatiche degli spettatori entusiasti. Buffalo Bill dal cuore gentil lasciò il segno anche qui, certo non era come quei burattini che mostravano dentro quel piccolo mobile nuovo che da poco era comparso al bar. Non credette mai che gli omarini che si vedevano un po' tremolanti nel bianco e nero delle prime trasmissioni televisive, fossero uomini reali in carne ed ossa. Buffalo Bill, quello sì che era un uomo vero". Enrico Bo, *E il vento dell'est continua a soffiare* (e-Bo edizioni, 2017), pp. 222-223.

in turn, readjusted them to fit their (new) identities and collective meanings—as for instance, with the introduction of Sitting Bull in Baricco’s testimony, which could be due to the fact that the author lived his young adulthood immersed in narratives of the West, partly during the years of Native American revisionism.

The true reasons why William F. Cody and his associates took the Wild West show to Italy were mainly to do with soft power and practical show-business: Italy was a new market to be conquered by American cultural power, to which Buffalo Bill had proposed himself as the figurehead. Indeed, Cody took the show to Italy in a moment when both his own country and the *Bel Paese* were going through some crucial phases in their histories. Italy’s unified identity as a nation was being moulded in such a way as to defeat the prevalence of popular identification with regional cultures. America was in search of validation for its culture and identity.⁹ Italians were still very aware and attached to their glorious past of artistic, intellectual, and imperial supremacy (Ancient Rome, the Renaissance and, more recently the Enlightenment). In fact, as Italian scholar Domenico Buonomo affirms, the “past was never regarded as a closed chapter in Italy, but as an integral part of one’s heritage”.¹⁰ This past was, as a matter of fact, an “exquisitely vague mental construct” which determined the attitude according to which “foreigners were all more or less uncivilized” compared to Italians, which is a feature that often appeared in the Italian travellers’ narratives.¹¹ In fact, Italian culture and identity relied very much on the importance of classical culture, which was used as a yardstick for most things. The Italian reception of Cody’s show was often marred by such sentiments of cultural supremacy. During a moment of Italian “diminished standing in the World” this represented a sort of act of “vindication of its heritage”.¹² In the face of looming feelings of inferiority prompted by the decadence and social stasis that the political situation of the time caused, Italians (in a rhetoric employed by the middle classes which acted as the echo chamber of national ideology) compensated by reasserting the supremacy of their mores, inherited from their glorious ancient past.

On the other hand, most Americans, including many members of Cody’s show, often deplored Italy, because they saw it in the aftermath of its subjugation into colonial subalternity, which had lasted for several centuries and had left the

⁹ See Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill”, in Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, David Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism*.

¹⁰ Leonardo Buonomo, *Backward Glances*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

country on its knees, culturally, linguistically, and, some argued, even ethnically divided. In the 1890s, twenty years after the actual unification of the country, Americans had expected to see a country in a stage of revival and vivification; instead, Italy's situation was that of a country in a chaos. It seemed clear that despite Unification, the multitude of regional differences in the population made the establishment of a unified culture particularly difficult and time-consuming. Italy, it seemed, merely plodded along, and it was difficult for this newly formed nation to find its place among other European powers. The overly glorified classical past of Italy seemed to have become a burden. Italy clearly still bore the remnants of its lost Arcadian past and the grandiosity, which was thought to have instilled culture into humanity, but the grim present reality, in which over half the population was illiterate, was rather striking, not to say shocking to some. Other European countries had a recent history of colonial domination, yet by the 1890s they could enjoy moments of splendour: London, Paris (the "City of Light"), and Vienna. Yet, Rome appeared to be still stuck in a kind of Dark Age.

The effects of foreign colonialism (which included the state of cultural submission in which the Vatican state had kept most of central Italy for centuries), were particularly burdensome on Italians, especially from certain rural regions; after centuries of subjugation they were projected, almost overnight, from feudalism to modernity. Yet Italy appeared anchored in the past. Things and ideas often reached Italy indirectly, with substantial delay, and did not reach every region at once.

America was also highly regionalised at this time, and yet it was forward-looking, despite its own burdensome past. Italians were at the same time jealous and frightened of that modernity and emphasis on change; hence, the Italians' defensiveness regarding their heritage, and their dismissiveness of American modernity which is perceptible in the press reports of the Wild West show. There was a general scepticism towards America, and often Americans were not taken seriously, because they were considered too modern, lacking engagement with 'higher' classical culture. In the case of Cody's show, newspapers often published comments such as "the show is good but nothing that hasn't been seen before", or it was a show "without culture"—not worthy enough to challenge Italian heritage.

Americans arrived with an idyllic idea of Italy, since all they knew was its classical culture, or the Renaissance. They had little idea of the damaging effects of foreign colonial domination on the country and on its social fabric. For this reason,

they tended to distrust Italians and belittle Italy, which was seen as a place that could not live up to its reputation. These attitudes, as seen, were reflected in the opinions expressed by foreign journalists commenting on the Wild West show in Italy, as well as by several Wild West cast members, and first and foremost by Cody, himself.

Cody leveraged on these attitudes, in such a way as to prop up the status of American culture, of his show, and his own personal prestige, often publicly portraying himself as a specimen of nature's aristocracy. Cody, as Paul Reddin noted, "wanted the world to believe that he had a more serious purpose than sensationalism".¹³ Though Cody was appreciated in Italy, and only sometimes directly criticized (as in the aftermath of the challenge between *butteri* and cowboys), the whole idea of cowboys as nature's noblemen did not convince in the *Bel Paese*. Middle and upper classes (the true aristocracy) found this idea too radical, especially during the first tour of the show in 1890; cowboys still evoked the parallel of the Italian *butteri*, who enjoyed a very low social status in Italy. Sixteen years later, in the second tour of the show, cowboys started to become more appreciated, and envisioned as emblems of a new type of colonial masculinity. Furthermore, Cody had attempted to heighten the status of his show, by turning it from popular entertainment, into a didascallic spectacle, thanks to the reiteration of claims of authenticity. Italian audiences found this attitude problematic and often continued to call the Wild West show a circus, as the press reports bear witness. The seams of the Wild West apparatus were visible: the discrepancy between the show's factitious image and the performance, itself, did not escape the perception of Italian audiences.

In the new era of colonialism, Italian audiences started to change their outlook on the Wild West show; aspects that had been criticised during the 1890 tour were accepted during the 1906 one. For instance, racial hierarchies among the Rough Riders became accepted and internalized by Italian audiences, whereas the treatment of Native Americans developed from romantic visions inspired by western literature into attitudes of feminization, and Orientalization. In other words, the native performers went from being poetic subjects to colonized ones. This shift in attitudes can be interpreted as a collective response to the onset of colonialism.

The colonization of Africa—started by prime minister Agostino De Pretis, and then strongly pursued by Francesco Crispi—was propelled by Italy's sense of itself as the last of the great European powers to look for the so-called place in the

¹³ Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, p. 92.

sun. This recognition unleashed strong feelings of inadequacy and failure in Italians, who, whether they liked it or not, were always confronted with the heavy burden of the cultural legacy of the Roman Empire. Inevitably, in intellectual elites and in political classes, the question arose of why present Italy could not again match the glories of the past.

As noted above, this question was often asked by American journalists and members of the Wild West show who wrote about Italy. The tones of these articles, interviews and memoirs often focused on the gap between the present Italian derelict society and the golden age of Latin classicism. This became a form of self-glorifying rhetoric of America as a promising young nation on the rise, in contrast to the decrepitude of the old world, represented by the excessive claims of civilization of Italian society and culture. These opinions, outside of the framework of the Wild West show, were widespread also in the foreign press and in international political circles, which deeply frustrated the Italian intelligentsia. The political class therefore decided to put Italy to the test, launching it into the colonial conquest of Africa. Public opinion was initially split and until the last decade of the 1800s the impulse to colonization was never as strong as in other European countries. However, attempts were made to attract further consensus by justifying the enterprise morally through the idea of a duty to civilize, or 'the white man's burden' (a rhetoric also adopted by other major European colonial powers). This ideology had also underpinned western expansionism in America, having its roots in the religious ethics of missionaries, both Jesuits and Puritans, and continued to exist in the American institutions such as reservations and boarding schools. The myth of the 'good Italian people' (*Italiani brava gente*) in Africa was therefore created. However, the colonial initiatives did not go as hoped by their own supporters, and the defeats of Dogali (1887) and Adwa (1896) strongly projected feelings of inferiority back onto the Italians, covering them with ridicule. This frustration for the unfinished empire in Africa remained inherent in the Italian collective imagination for a long time, until it found violent outlet during Fascism.

The first tour of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, with its assorted militaristic manifestations of supposedly positive and necessary acts of violence, managed to touch sensitive nerves in the Italian public, as Italian colonial activity intensified. It was after the second tour of the Wild West show, which was enriched with distinctive new representations of colonial armies, that Italian colonization activities

resumed (after initial setbacks). It can be argued, therefore, that the Wild West show played an indirect part in validating this process through its conquistadorial ethos and enactments, which corroborated the impulses pushing Italy towards the Scramble for Africa, at least to the extent of legitimizing colonial militaristic interventions in the eyes of ordinary people as expressions of a healthy, vigorous and flourishing modern civilization.

After the 1906 tour, the myth of the Wild West was consecrated in the domain of popular culture with Buffalo Bill as its main hero. Buffalo Bill truly became the personification of the Wild West, thanks to an array of popular culture products which enhanced his myth—initiated by Ned Buntline and then masterfully constructed by Cody himself and his associates. Pulp fictions, short stories, novels, and later comics and cinema projected the myth of Buffalo Bill onto a diorama of new legendary adventures in Italy. This myth, however, can be differentiated from its American version. Italian popular culture pushed for an appropriation of this myth, trying to ‘Italianize’ this emblem of the American West. These efforts demonstrate that the Wild West show and his master narratives were not only understood and appreciated by Italians, they were internalized in the collective imagination to the point of appropriation of some of its meanings and aesthetic. This reveals an act of transculturation, which is perhaps the biggest legacy that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West left behind in Italy. Certainly, without this transculturation operated by Italian popular culture, Buffalo Bill, the Wild West and its myths would not have remained alive and relevant in contemporary Italy.

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