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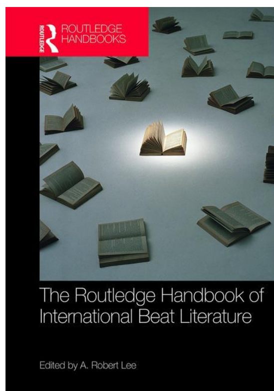

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Children of Anarchy

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7

CHILDREN OF ANARCHY

Shoulder to Shoulder with the Italian Beats

Maria Anita Stefanelli

Beat Italy. Italian Beats. How best to take soundings of the impact Beat has had on Italian authorship as an overlap of dissidence, beatitude, and the life-rhythm of jazz? We might start with the view of Gianni Borgna (1947–2014), politician, essayist, music critic, and an administrator responsible for culture both in Rome and the region of Latium, who if Beat was to be thought implying a *beaten* generation saw it also as a riposte to materialist culture. He opened the conference "Il 68, musica e contestazione" ("1968, Music and Protest"),[1] a forty-year anniversary at Roma Tre University, by recalling "Rock around the Clock," written by Max Freedman and James Meyers and a massive 12-bar blues hit recording by Bill Haley and his Comets in 1954.

Only this style of music, according to Borgna, could make everyone understand the changing times: it offered a stimulus for young people to acquire more consciousness of reality and bring a positive change in society. The song, it will be remembered, served as the soundtrack for Richard Brooks's iconic film of rebellion, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), which helped bring it into the mainstream and augment its global impact. Screened in Italy under the title *Il Seme della violenza* (*The Seed of Violence*) the film not only exposed some of the harsher realities of American schools, its exhilarating title-song chimed with the post-war anxiety and anger of youth. The rhythm, together with the uninhibited dance craze it unleashed, also deepened the generation gap. Its spontaneity, not to say exhilaration, pointed to hope, a call to liberation. Beat, if only by implication, had made its bow.

Other foretastes of Beat can be found in the *canzone d'autore* (author's song), a highly literary genre of popular music that came to the fore in Italy in the 1960s and 70s (Haworth 2015: 5, 14). Unlike traditional Italian melodies, it took on new rhythms with socially committed themes; it condemned hypocrisy and conveyed a typically Beat sense of unease. Inspired by the folk-beat compositions of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Donovan, Italian singer-songwriters were quick to take up countercultural issues. Among the earliest are Fred Buscaglione (1921–1960), Piero Ciampi (1934–), Enzo Jannacci (1935–2013), the jazz-pianist Paolo Conte (1937–), Bruno Lauzi (1937–2006), Luigi Tenco (1938–1967), Franco Califano (1938–2013), and Giorgio Gaber (1939–2003). Latecomers in the 1960s and 1970s include versatile artists like Fabrizio de André (1940–1999), Francesco Guccini (1940–), and Franco Battiato (1945–).[2] Quotations were sometimes borrowed direct from Beat literary texts and then translated into Italian (like Guccini's first line of "Dio è morto," "God is Dead," from Ginsberg's "Howl"). Others parodied Beat fashion trends as in Enzo Jannacci's "Lisa Beat" or, as in the case of De André, wrote songs about social outcasts, prostitutes, and rebels. Shakespeare also provided intertextual references.

The pop music of British rock bands (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Animals, and The Kinks to name a few) encouraged the emergence of new musical groups as well as having an impact on those already established. Among them were Rokes (a group of English expatriates who

found success in Italy), Equipe 84 ("Auschwitz" was one of their hits), Dik Dik (enthusiastic followers of the Beatles), Pooh (a revival album, *Beat ReGeneration*, with twelve covers of 60s songs came out in 2008), and, in the 1970s, Premiata Forneria Marconi (or PFM, a prog rock group "with extensive live experience abroad" [Croce 2013: 1, 330–335]).

Some of these were popular enough to be included in school anthologies. Music and song at the time seemed to mirror the malaise of young people better than literary work. Nevertheless there was also the impact of *On the Road*, published in Italian as *Sulla strada* in 1959. The Beat movement in Italy so started with music and became increasingly political; literature would follow.

A Historical Backdrop

> To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated at, […] To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed […]. It is […] to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, […] and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored.
>
> Pierre-Joseph Proudon, *The General Idea of the Revolution* (1851); Joll 1964, 78

Initially written in 1849, Proudhon's unrelenting, but precisely measured hammer blows were aimed at undermining governmental restraints as the precondition for social and political liberty. They can also be seen as a manifesto of anarchism as well in due course as anticipating the tenets of the Beats' social and political questioning.

After the piecemeal unification of Italy in 1861, there followed a period in which anarchist activism became intellectually so heated that it was in danger of falling apart. This coincided with uprisings in various Italian regions, directed at obtaining social reforms and better living conditions from the government, and a strike of 60,000 workers in Milan (the Italian financial center). General Fiorenzo Bava-Beccaris ordered a repression of the uprising, and responded to the barricades with firearms and the artillery. *The New York Times* reported that there were three hundred dead and a thousand wounded. It was at that point that an Italian immigrant from Paterson, New Jersey, the anarchist Gaetano Bresci, decided to travel home to avenge the victims. On July 29, 1900 Bresci shot and killed King Umberto I in the Lombard city of Monza. His gesture was condemned by most Italians, but praised in anarchist circles worldwide; Bresci was tried and given a life sentence. Following the regicide, strict measures against workers' demonstrations, strikes, and anti-military protests were relaxed. Punishment for Bresci's action, however, was conducted by the government with no respect for his and his family's human rights.

A case involving Italian anarchists, which took place in the United States but had worldwide reverberations, concerns a shame of mythic proportions. In 1927 – during the *ventennio fascista* (the Fascist period) – the movement would witness the execution by electric chair of two of their members, the Italian immigrants Ferdinando Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The sentence was revisited some fifty years later, in 1977, by the then-Governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, who officially stated that "any stigma or disgrace should be forever removed" from their names (Jackson 1981, 90).

With the fall of Mussolini a more democratic, if establishmentarian and largely Christian-Democrat, Italy emerged, in opposition to which there arose various dissident groups—all non-violent and as cultural in focus as they were political. Italian Beat was on its way.

Milan and Turin

The history associated with Sacco and Vanzetti, and the role of the American Supreme Court, were much to be recalled by a post-war generation of ideological anarchists and their sympathizers. In the

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mid-1960s a political shooting-star emerged in the person of Vittorio Di Russo, associate of the Dutch provos (he was deported from the Netherlands back to Italy), known sometimes as "the prophet," who would draw support in Milan from nothing other than the Sacco e Vanzetti anarchist club. Around him were others who helped establish the magazine *Mondo Beat* launched in November 12, 1966. These include the co-founder Umberto Tiboni, Melchiorre Gerbino, who would later edit the magazine, Gennaro de Miranda, a resident of the "Casa del Beatnik" ("The Beatnik's House") on the outskirts of Milan, and the then secondary school student Renzo Freschi. *Mondo Beat* drew from Bertrand Russell's pacifism, Ghandi's non-violence and the Provo movement's stance against consumerism and war. It was also stalwart in arguing for environmentalism. It constitutes a founding Italian Beat voice.

The first issue of this brilliantly improvised and anti-conformist publication reverberated with the anarchist spirit, and was mimeographed with the help of Giuseppe Pinelli in the Sacco e Vanzetti headquarters. Among the many sympathizers with *Mondo Beat* were "ecologists, supporters of divorce and abortion, conscientious objectors, animalists, supporters of macrobiotics, priests pleading for marriage, lesbians and gays who had come out of the closet."[3] The journal soon became identified with the *capelloni* (*longhairs*), and inspired the *tendopoli* (tent city) called *Nuova Barbonia* (New Barbonia or Barbonia City), a Beat community set up in via Ripamonti on the outskirts of Milan. This camping area accommodated Beat followers, many of whom were in young men and women who had moved on from home life.

The "Strage di Piazza Fontana" of December 12, 1969, the bomb massacre in Milan in which 17 people were killed and 88 wounded, was initially attributed to anarchists (and their Beat fellow travelers), but eventually to Ordine Nuovo, a neo-fascist group. The event would lead in the 1970s to the "anni di piombo" ("The Years of Lead"): a decade of left- and right-wing terrorism. Giuseppe Pinelli, one of the Sacco e Vanzetti club founders and a supporter of *Mondo Beat*, was detained by police as a suspect in the Piazza Fontana slaughter the day after the bomb attack. He was still being (unlawfully) questioned when he was reported to have "fallen" from the fourth floor of the police offices to the street below. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. Whether it was an accident, suicide, or murder was never established. On the following day another suspect, the anarchist dancer-writer Pietro Valpreda, also a name linked with the Beat "movement," was arrested. Slogans and graffiti proclaiming the dancer's innocence proliferated on the walls of university buildings throughout Italy. He would eventually be cleared of all charges and released. It became easy, however wrongly, to associate Beat with these developments.

Fernanda Pivano

As far as the impact of the American Beat movement on the Italian literary scene is concerned, it is hard to think of anyone more representative than Fernanda Pivano (1917–2009): "Signora Libertà Signora Anarchia" ("Madam Freedom Madam Anarchy"), as she was defined in her obituary, and which is also the title of a key biography (Bertelli 2009). Born into privilege, Pivano became a disciple of Cesare Pavese, who introduced her to American literature. An enthusiastic reader, translator, critic, and admirer of the Lost Generation writers, the modernists, and assuredly the Beats, she befriended and invited them to her home (Turin, then Milan).

On March 31, 1961, Nanda—as she was nicknamed—met Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky in Paris; subsequently, a kind of start-up company was established to put together the anthology that would be published some three years later by the left-wing publisher Feltrinelli. *Poesia degli ultimi americani* (*Poetry by the Most Recent Americans*) helped to dismantle the wall of censorship hitherto defended by a Christian Democrat party anxious not to offend the establishment and the Vatican. From then on, the largely insolvent Beat camaraderie was to further involve this intellectual and affluent young middle-class Italian woman. Despite Pivano's translations of American dissident writers undertaken as early as the mid-1950s, it was not until 1965 that the Beats got a firm foothold in Italy and inspired literary talent there. And this occurred nearly ten years after Pivano had

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met William Carlos Williams in Puerto Rico. Pivano had seen Ginsberg's energetic commitment to America's political and cultural wellbeing in terms of resistance to all possible neo-fascist actions. Her political awareness was again sharpened by Williams's encouragement for her to join underground groups linked with the Beat writers (Guida and Pivano 2000: 71–72).

In 1967 *Pianeta Fresco*, a situationist journal, was born as a sequel to *Room East 128: Chronicle*, which came into being in 1959.[4] Its origins can be dated back to Pivano's months-long stay in America with her artist-photographer and designer husband, Ettore Sottsass Jr., who was a patient at a Palo Alto hospital as a consequence of an illness that kept him in bed for some months. Pivano nursed him and helped him continue his creative endeavors. The magazine consisted of cuttings from American newspapers and pop magazines besides contributions harmonizing with Pivano's engagement with the American underground culture and Sottsass's look to the Eastern culture for examples of how to create a spiritual connection between form and meaning. While publishing literary texts by American and Italian writers, it chronicled the progress of Sottsass's health. As publishers, Room East 128 Editions were responsible for issuing Philip Whalen's "Monday in the Evening" (1963), Michael McClure's "Thirteen Mad Sonnets" (1964), Gregory Corso's "The Geometric Poem" (1966), and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Smoking Grass Reverie" (1968).

The enterprise led to a Pivano-Sottsass collaboration with Allen Ginsberg (the "irresponsible director" who promulgated his views on Zen philosophy) and who gave his cultural and moral support to the creation of *Pianeta Fresco*, "the spectacular hippie periodical" which five years later would be promoting pop graphics and avant-garde political aesthetics. In accordance with the hippie school of thought, its aim would be "liberare le anime da qualsiasi impedimento" ("to free souls from all constraints"; Guida and Pivano 2000, 73). The magazine gave voice to many young writer-protesters' denunciations of hypocrisy, social injustice, and sexual taboos, as well as their appeals for respect of human rights and non-violence. It supported divorce, sexual freedom, a clean environment, changes in the age of majority, and the creation of an educational system free of grades, lectures, and homework.

The first issue of *Pianeta Fresco* contained the Italian translation of Ginsberg's unpublished poem "Who Be Kind To" ("Con chi essere gentile")—a meditation on all the lost souls in need of kindness that led to his being taken to court for obscenity as did a number of other texts in translation. Among the contents was a conversation featuring Alan Watts, Timothy Leary, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg that focused on the desire for peace, respect for nature, and the psychedelic movement's spiritual search (in contrast to the tenets of the student movement). That, ran the argument, was to be brought about through a return to the simple pastoral and tribal life and with due accompaniment from song, flowers, songs, pictures, necklaces, acts of beauty, and harmony, and with respect for fertile soil and fresh water.

Additional contributions to that first issue included poetry by Philip Lamantia and texts by the Italianist Myriam Sumbulovich, translator of the communist writer and poet Manuel Vazquel Montalban, alias Manolo (Zanini 2013). A letter by the sculptor Piero Gilardi offered his idea of "tappeti natura" (nature carpets) as garments of one's imagination rather than mere external couture (*Pianeta Fresco* 1967–68, 1–39). Various texts by Italian friends and collaborators alternate with articles from *Civiltà Nazionale* (National Civilization) detailing the costs of the latest war, translations from *The East Village Other* (NY, June 1–15, 1957) and the *Herald Tribune*, and Sottsass's often-quirky graphics culled from world culture at large.

More names? They include the art critic Tommaso Trini, the translator Giulio Saponaro, and the young novelist Andrea D'Anna. The designer Giuseppe, "Poppi," Ranchetti contributed to *Mondo Beat* and also edited *I lunghi piedi dell'uomo* (*The Long Feet of Man*) in 1968. Others include the *Beat* critic Renzo Freschi, the migrant Jewish writer and translator Miro Silvera, the activist Angelo Pezzana, who would be among the founders of F.U.O.R.I. (*Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano*), the first Italian gay movement, and the informal artist Livio Marzot. Further names include the then-eighteen-year-old writer of surrealist stories, Piero Ferrucci Rossi, who was later to become a psychotherapist and an orientalist. Beautiful absorbing graphics by Sottsass appeared throughout the

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journal, sealing its importance as "radical design," and making the magazine an instrument of social, political and ethical criticism in keeping with "contestazione" (protest) against the Years of Lead. Beat was one of the many contributing subtexts.

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Gianni Milano

> It was Fernanda Pivano, the hippies' eccentric aunt who, through her stubbornness, sense of beauty and her cordiality, managed to introduce such exotic and exuberant, irreverent and outrageous overseas organic growth into the Italian literary garden.
>
> Bairo 2001

So recalls the poet Gianni Milano in an interview. Thus it was a woman who helped build a bridge between the American Beat poets and the Italian Beat poets. Most, if not all, of the latter were male, as it turned out. Gianni Milano (1938–), author of early "Beat" texts like *Guru* (1967), *Prana* (1968) and *Naked Guy* (1975), was symptomatic, a ready participant when the Beat phenomenon exploded in Italy in the mid-1960s. In later years he would sport long white hair and beard, full-rimmed round red spectacles, a T-shirt, and denim jeans held up by wide blue suspenders. Latterly he is to be seen and heard discussing the Beat adventure in five interviews (Manca 2013).

Milano worked as an elementary school teacher—a teacher-educationalist as he still calls himself. He shared the dissent against conformist lifestyles, the Vietnam war, consumer culture, and sexual repression; in contrast, the better goal, he and others like him believed, would be community spirit, anti-racism, anarchy, pacifism, and enlightened sexual politics. There would be widespread taste for Joan Baez's folk songs, Bob Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man* (with its marijuana subtext), hashish from India, sleeping bags, and a general *On the Road* ethos. The writers involved advocated dissent from literary conventions in favor of a revolutionary, spiritual, and vernacular poetics. Milano was among the very first Beat followers, although his mind and body were also rooted in his own inner culture and context.

What he aimed at was reaching an audience, to which end he took pains to deliver spontaneous, vibrant, and visionary writings to an accommodating publisher. *Off Limits*, *Guru* and *Prana* were all published by the Turin publishing house *Pitecantropus* between 1966 and 1968, one collection in each year. This was the first series to offer a voice to the Beat culture in Italy (Echaurren and Salaris 1999, 114). *King Kong* (Milano 1973) and *Uomo nudo* (Milano 1975) follow, the latter a hymn to vagrant life, nature, sexual freedom, alcohol and drugs, pacifism, and a rejection of consensual politics and the media. It sides with minorities, favoring solidarity and anarchy. Although written in 1966 *Uomo nudo* had to wait almost a decade for publication.

Following Michelangelo's sublimely intuitive comment to the philologist Benedetto Varchi, "I mean for sculpture what you make by *taking off*," Milano rejects the superfluous for the essential in poetry, thus liberating language from conventionality, and advocating the eradication of cliché and automatic or "lazy" usage. The process often results in surreal images: "I would never say that a horse neighs because the word horse implies neighing; I would rather write: a horse who smokes a pipe" (Manca and Labate 2014). In addition, the *surreal* itself quickly collapses and morphs into a profound transformation of consciousness, as in *Uomo nudo* (*Naked Man*) where he writes:

> la grande Voce ridesta i crisantemi
> sfarfalla i girasoli illumina i binari
> solleva i santi dalle loro nicchie
> […]
> uomo nudo
> UOMO CHE SEI
> ESCLAMAZIONE DEL CIELO CHE IN PRINCIPIO ERA IL VERBO

> [the great Voice awakens the chrysanthemums/flickers the sunflowers lights up railway tracks/raises the saints out of their lairs/[…]naked man/MAN WHO ARE/THE SKY'S CLAIM THAT IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD]

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"L'uomo nudo," the naked man, has nothing; yet, he *is*. He is in despair because the mainstream is dominant, all ideology is collapsing, and corporate interests are triumphing; yet he *is*. He is the freethinker, the objector, the resister. His being originates in nature, and his mind, like the shaman's, tends towards a fusion with that nature. He is the "claim" or statement contained in the "exclamation" that communication came first. He comprises the speaking word, i.e., the interface between the text and the reader.

Milano sets out his credo as follows: "la parola, libera, emissione organica, eiaculazione grafico-sonora, il Verbo appunto, aprì la porta che dava sul mondo antico-nuovo, generando stupore, frenesia, coinvolgimento" ("the word is free, an organic signal, a graphic-phonetic ejaculation, it is the Word, and it opened the door on the ancient-new world, generating wonder, frenzy, involvement") (Manca and Labate 2014). The Word is the Greek *Logos*, the lexical item for the logical order of things, or even the figure of wisdom from the Hebrew scriptures. The Word, Milano has stated in interview, is to be thought of in the following way: "Se sei, sei qualcosa. Questo è un verbo che prevede già un predicato") ("If you are, you are something. The verb *be* implies a predicate") (Manca and Labate 2014). The naked man, one surmises, is the poet—a noun of action, a speech act generating unexpectedness and involvement, wonder and discovery, inspiration and Kundalini freedom (as both Ginsberg and Kerouac also suggest—a point that Milano often mentions in interviews and recordings).

The visionary, the surreal, the sensual, the corporeal, the anti-military, the mystical, and the pacifism of oriental philosophies are some of the ingredients of the Beat canon. They each were filtered through the first Italian Beat followers, life and text, in order to counter the asphyxiation of what was defined as *il sistema*—the [rotten] belief system. The young welcomed the musical origins of Beat as well as its repackaging by Kerouac (*On the Road* had been translated for Mondadori in 1959). It was Kerouac who had interpreted Beat as a contracted form of *beatus*, that is, resistant to conformity, tending towards the indigenous and the folkloric, practising Zen disciplines and partaking in Gautama's enlightenment. The Queen of Queens, for them, was Poverty (it is a feminine noun in Italian), a Muse that presided over new perceptions and new social relationships.

Milano, especially, took refuge under its wings: his teacher's salary helped many of those who had embraced Saint Francis' philosophy, and when money was scarce, he and his co-thinkers found work as day laborers. When free of teaching, Milano ventured out *on the road* (and all that went with it), and given his anti-conformist behaviour often risking his certificate of good conduct (a dangerous hazard for a state employed teacher). Complaints about him were frequent, even court charges, that led to a number of jail sentences. Fond of the new trend of legitimizing what the establishment still perceived as *obscene* language, he brought together all the Beat elements, infusing them with honest ideological commitment, to create an outraged indignant language that he recited—and still recites—in the unvarying tones of liturgical chanting (*recto tono*).

In 1965 he had written "*L'orologio-delle-12* (*a Bob Dylan*)" (*The 12-o'clock-clock* [*to Bob Dylan*]), a poem with a possible reference to the Ten O' Clock Scholar, the "historic" coffee shop where Bob Dylan got his start (Milano 2009: 29–31). It is a sort of meta-poem preceded by Milano's definition of poetry as creative work that shuns definition and classification (Milano 2014). Anarchic and transgressive, poetry moves with the rhythm of the emotions, he maintains. He would agree with his mentor Ginsberg that

> poetry generally is like a rhythmic articulation of feeling. The feeling is like an impulse that rises within—just like sexual impulses, say; it's almost as definite as that. It's a feeling that begins somewhere in the pit of the stomach and rises up forward in the breast and then comes out through the mouth and ears, and comes forth a croon or a groan or a sigh.
>
> Clark 1966

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Milano slept in the open air, annoyed and shocked the establishment, demonstrated against the Vietnam War, and went to jail. He also believed, as Ginsberg said when he eventually met the Italian Beats in 1967, that "beat [was] dead" (Morriello 2014). Beat, then, was in need of rebirth into a new ethos, a new fostering of consciousness. He rarely speaks of God. Like the American Beats, he speaks of a spiritual community, the sense of mutual support, the vow to engage with the imagination, Buddhist aesthetics, Zen practice, psychedelic experiences, and overall, the role of the poet as shaman. Beat followers, he claims, should live out "tra un respiro e l'altro, tra un digiuno e l'altro, tra un foglio di via e l'altro, straccione, povero e senza ciccia" ("between an in-breath and an out-breath, between one fasting session and another, between one expulsion order and another; derelict, poor, and famished" Bairo 2015: 13).

He was early to join up with a young member of Turin's artistic avant-garde, Michelangelo Pistoletto, a champion of Arte Povera ("Poverty's Art") who was to achieve notoriety in 1967 for his "Venere degli Stracci" ("Venus of the Rags"). In response to the capitalist art scene, Pistoletto often stated that poor means a concentration on the essential (Pistoletto and Marzo 2010, 36). Arte Povera is against the superfluous. It seeks to promote a return to humbler materials, such as rope, newspaper, driftwood, i.e. the detritus of daily life. Meanwhile, a new group was forming around the artist, the Zoo, which aimed at freeing individuals from the cage in which they believed themselves kept. Its members came from various artistic disciplines. Milano participated, in the summer of 1968, in a collective street performance, *L'uomo ammaestrato* (*The Tamed Man*), a mixed media performative collaboration of "actors and viewers, makers and consumers" (Pistoletto 1969: 16). It was the triumph of collective action.

Milano saw himself as akin to St. Francis of Assisi—who he saw as a psychedelic type who talked to wolves and pigs—and to Poverty, Francis' sister-inspirer. He thought of himself as fraternizing with Buddha, the compassionate anarchist who is kind to all living creatures; with Einstein, a mad scientist who translated the messages of the Vedas into mathematical formulas; and, finally, with Ginsberg, the psychedelic guru, who sailed aboard his own *bateau ivre*. And Gianni, today? Asked "what it meant" to be a Beat poet, he replies that the Beat experience was great. In Italy the original stimulus for Beat was provided by the Vietnam war, a dramatic event that caused, he tells me in conversation, an "existential, radical, and anarchic pacifism." It created a crisis in the Italian society of that time.

Yet, he was a poet before Beat poetry, has been one since, and still is one. He does not like definitions, and does not follow fashion trends. He is against power, censorship, authority; he teaches freedom to his pupils. He has long committed himself to writing, like the native Canadian philosopher and pedagogue Wilfred Pelletier, in the field of children's education in favor of anti-dogmatic, community and tribal experiences (Bairo and Milano 2003). This was his only successful attempt, as he puts it, at an "existential, or structural, revolution," to be achieved through an inner journey leading to pure wonder and, eventually, to a federal anarchic tribalism.[5] Gianni Milano is still *on the road*, and, like Gary Snyder, he opts for an indigenous, territorial culture, hoping for a culturally appropriate alternative to the miasma of war, suffering, and death.

Rome

"Ivano Urban and Carlo Silvestro were the most prominent characters of the Roman beats," we read in a *Mondo Beat* 1967 issue. Both voices are full of rancor and rage and express their fury in verse. Silvestro's "BASTA" (Enough), written in block capitals, echoes Urban's "RABBIA" (Rage), also in block capitals, printed alongside. Towards the end, the poem reads:

> Famiglia proletaria cercando divent-
> are borghese.

Famiglia proletaria cercando afferma-
zioni SS (status symbol)

Sempre correndo rate frigorifero
Esaurendo comincia rate televisore 1
2 3 4 o più canali
[…]
"Basta" dice uno a un certo punto

[Proletarian family trying to become middle-class/Proletarian family looking for SS (status symbol) affirmation/Always on the go monthly payments on the fridge/Having paid them monthly TV payments 1/2 3 4 or more channels …/ "Enough" someone says at some stage]

"With all due respect"—as a prose piece by Silvestro placed just above the two poems puts it—just a word, or an act, that touches on sex (or even hygiene!) can offend the prigs. The message is: down with taboos.

Less angry, though artistically very active, avant-garde culture in Rome was nothing if not exuberantly musical (Liperi 2016, 258) and theatrical throughout the 1960s (Nicolini 2012, 253–264). The cultural climate differed greatly from that of Milan and Turin; traditionally cosmopolitan, Rome welcomed foreign artists and VIPs who mixed with leading Italians, the older of whom were veterans of the *dolce vita* years. As that sumptuous era was dissolving, the Spanish Steps were becoming crowded with *capelloni*, the long-haired, both local and from various Italian provinces. The nonconformist community, whether Italian or foreign, upper-class or middle-class, also found a welcome at the Spanish Steps from the Director of the Académie de France in the Villa Medici, the Polish-French painter and cultural patron Balthasar Klossowksi de Rola better known as Balthus.[6] Both colorful and ingenuous, these large groups of young people claimed their right to express their unease, their desire for freedom and their rejection of hypocrisy in what was being described as "la questione giovanile" ("the youth issue"). The 1960s student protests in Berkeley, California, campus and street activism against racism, protest against American involvement in the Vietnam War, and a rejection of homophobia, together with the rise of calls for human rights helped nurture equivalent student movements in Europe, and in particular in Italy. These energies have come to be summarized in the single year-reference of 1968.

In the early 1960s time for change was ripe for those in the performing arts. New theatrical space, a new language, and a new social function for literature seemed the order of the day, the more so given cultural impetus from abroad. Experimental art activities began in the Trastevere district, where Ulisse Benedetti and Fulvio Servadei organized readings and jazz evenings onwards from 1962. They eventually abandoned their small former coal cellar, moving to the elegant Prati quarter, where another larger cellar became Beat 72 (the address was "via Gioacchino Belli 72"), a venue for music, poetry, and theater. Simone Carella (1946–2016)—author, director, entrepreneur, performer, jack-of-all-trades—was the most revolutionary of the many innovators involved in the Beat 72 cultural ventures. Emerging artists were given space for their projects, as well as support, discussion, and criticism. On Saturdays and Sundays the premises were turned into dance club, with an entrance fee so that the organizers were able to pay the high rent.

Beat 72 was already established as a lively performance space for emerging artists when, a mile across the Tiber, the eighteen-year-old singer Patty Pravo was expressing the restlessness of young people at the new Piper club, founded by Giancarlo Bornigia (an entrepreneur) and Alberico Crocetta (a lawyer). The concern, in her song "Ragazzo Triste" ("Sad Young Boy"), is of dark malaise emerging from a society that stressed mere individual identity and wellbeing. "We must never be lonely": a new, dynamic collective identity was called for against too easy a self-preoccupation and which from a countercultural viewpoint had taken hold of whole swathes of Italian society. From a commercially run dance hall, the Piper club became the Beat temple of the

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so-called Italian "yé-yé" style of music. Italian and international pop art (Mario Schifano, Mimmo Rotella, Piero Manzoni, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol) was displayed, while music was accompanied by strobe lights. Besides Pravo, la "Ragazza del Piper" (The Piper Girl), whose open-minded "Beat" style was imitated by many Italian girls, the club attracted numerous groups (including, on April 18 and 19, 1968, Pink Floyd [Fitch (2017])[7] and stars from Italy and abroad; some jazz improvisation began to be heard. Among the many experimental Beat events at The Piper were the composer Tito Schipa Jr.'s Beat opera "Then an Alley," and the painter Schifano's direction of a psychedelic choreographic concert by Le Stelle di Mario Schifano. Both took place in 1967.[8]

At Beat 72, in 1966, Carmelo Bene's staging of his play adapted from his novel *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* (*Our Lady of the Turks*) echoed this widespread sense of isolation: its "plot" was a "non-plot" with no beginning and no end. Emphasis fell upon social oppression. In style it featured short-circuit sequences of wordplay and ambiguity. In this immensely controversial first work, Bene approaches the Beat idea of being "beaten." The emphasis is on self-defeat, degradation, powerlessness, fragmentation of the self, and the inability to fly and reach "Our Lady" (Bene and Dotto 1998, 209). She is the modern representation (played by actress Lydia Mancinelli) of Santa Margherita, the protagonist's protector, who was linked to the Ottoman invasion of Otranto (in the southern region of Apulia) in 1480, and the consequent execution of eight hundred "martyrs." Bene transforms the events of the protagonist's life into a pathway towards genius, not least as personified by Bene himself, the writer-artist who is misunderstood and rejected by society.

Bene's beginnings at Beat 72 did not earn him the Beat label; indeed, he considered *Our Lady of the Turks* an "anti-sixty-eight work," a counterblast to the despicable "Italian-Gallic May of 1968" and "all the socio-mundane Mays of history" (Bene and Dotto 1998, 271). It was Bene who largely inspired performer Cosimo Cinieri (1938–), a former disciple of Alessandro Fersen—whose school of dramatic arts was inspired by Stanislavsky—and an early member of the so-called "scuola romana" (Roman school). This was an avant-garde project that emerged thanks to Giancarlo Nanni (1941–2009)—and of dramaturg and script writer Irma Immacolata Palazzo, who would later act as assistant to directors Cinieri (1976), Bene (1979), and Nanni (1981).

With art critic Giulio Carlo Argan elected mayor of Rome in 1976, a left-wing architect, Renato Nicolini (1942–2012), became Assessore alla Cultura (Council member responsible for cultural activities). He created the Estate Romana (Roman Summer), a festival that mixed "high" and "low" in pop music, street theater and avant-garde events that were available to all, from intellectuals and students to those who lived on the abandoned outskirts of the city. Thanks to Nicolini, Beat later made an appearance at the Festival Internazionale di Castelporziano (June 28–30, 1979). Organized by Benedetti, Mario Romano, Franco Cordelli, and Vasco Are, the event was graced with the presence of Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovski, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, William Burroughs, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Joseph Brodsky, Bella Akhmadulina, and Yevgeny Yevtuschenko, among others. These foreign stars all became the unofficial godfathers for many of the largely unknown local underground writers, including the poets Victor Cavallo (a pseudonym of Vittorio Vitolo), Biagio Propato, and Aldo Piromalli as well as published writers like Dacia Maraini, Dario Bellezza, Antonio Porta, and Amelia Rosselli, to name but a few. The gist of what happened can be seen in Andermann's documentary film on the three nights of readings with an audience of 30,000 on the very beach where Pier Paolo Pasolini had been murdered four years previously (Andermann 1980).

Invoking Pasolini is not coincidental here. His enthusiasm for the Beat generation was clear and of longstanding. Towards the end of *Poeta delle ceneri* (*Poet of the Ashes*) he declares: "Io amo Ginsberg: era tanto che non leggevo poesie di un poeta fratello […] Egli è una vivente contestazione" (Pasolini 2003, 1267) ("I love Ginsberg: I have not read poems by a brother poet for a long time […] He is living protest"). The poem did not see publication until 1980. In a letter from Milan dated 1968, Pasolini had addressed the American poet as "Caro, angelico Ginsberg" ("Dear angelic Ginsberg") to let him know that he admired him for being so venturesome an American literary innovator (Pasolini

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1988, 631–632). In his poem "Le ceneri di Gramsci" ("The Ashes of Gramsci"), the speaker (the poet) approaches the tomb of the great Italian left-wing intellectual in the Protestant Cemetery of Rome situated in the Testaccio district and declares:

> Tra speranza
> e vecchia sfiducia, ti accosto, capitato
> per caso in questa magra serra, innanzi
>
> alla tua tomba, al tuo spirito restato
> quaggiù tra questi liberi.

> [Between hope and old mistrust/I approach you, as I happen/to come to this scanty orchard, before/your grave, before your spirit stilled/down here among these free souls.]

With these words Pasolini anticipates the wish Gregory Corso made in his will to be buried in that very cemetery, near Keats and Shelley, among the free spirits.

Before closing this section, mention should be made of a "manifestazione spettacolo" (permanent happening) that took place at Teatro Piccinni in Bari some time before the Castelporziano event, and provoked much interest among experts and the general public. It was called *La Beat Generation, show in versi—da una lettura in periferia dei versi e della prosa di Burroughs, Corso, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Kerouac, McClure* (The Beat generation, a show in verse—a reading from the outskirts of the poetry and prose of Burroughs, Corso, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Kerouac and McClure). Together, Cinieri and Palazzo paved the way to the theatricalization of poetry. Digging into the "periphery of memory," Cinieri–Palazzo (the latter as author, director, scenographer and costume maker) staged their spectacular "show in verse" to the chants of the American Beat bards, in Pivano's translation, interspersed with talks in "peripheral" languages, i.e., dialects and varieties of the Italian South. This "revitalized" poetic language was delivered in Cinieri's declamatory, passionate, irreverent, rhythmic style in a space where sound and music (rock, jazz, and commercial) songs and voices were an integral part of the event (Grande 1979). With a good dose of irony, and in response to the cultural and political revival of Castelporziano, Cinieri and Palazzo later recreated the show in Trastevere (Rome) and elsewhere in Italy. While unmasking the stereotyped myths behind the American Beats, they also hinted at the consumption of post-revolutionary illusions as something imposed upon the (Italian) "periphery" by an imperialist and dominant nation (Di Cori 1979).

Soon after the main Castelporziano event (in a sense, an Italian local Woodstock, with guitars, marijuana, and nudity), the Beat brand started losing its original significance and, as time and cultural tastes changed, Beat became post-Beat. In these and other respects Turin, Milan and Rome had marched together along similar lines.

Aldo Piromalli

> Affanculo con la piccola amministrazione quotidiana, un pezzo di pane per te un pacchetto di margarina, quanto hai guadagnato oggi.
>
> Affanculo con l'affitto e il padrone di casa, la città dove abiti, i debiti di ieri oggi e domani.
>
> Affanculo con il libro da pubblicare con i vari incontri al bar, l'attesa al telefono, lei si farà sentire più o meno.
>
> Affanculo con la pioggia, con la bella giornata di sole, con il consumo d'alcol marijuana piatto vegetale o carne in scatola.
>
> Affanculo con il viaggio in treno in aereo con l'urlo degli amici dispersi con i denti putrefatti e i gangli delle mani. [...]

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> [Fuck the small everyday concerns, a piece of bread for you, a pack of margarine, how much did you make today./Fuck the rent and the landlord, the town where you live, yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's debts./Fuck the book to publish after meetings at the pub, the wait for a call, she will turn up just about./Fuck the rain, the beautiful sunny day, the use of alcohol marijuana vegetable dish or canned meat./Fuck the train journey the howl of lost friends with rotten teeth and ganglion cysts on hands […]
>
> Andermann 1980

"Affanculo," according to its author, Aldo Piromalli, is "a spontaneous poem against philosophers and intellectuals." It won him an unexpected reputation (he had left Italy in the early 1970s) when it was first delivered at Castelporziano. Piromalli was quick to capture his audience's attention. His performance as "authentic Italian beat" aimed at resisting middle class values, protesting against censorship and liberating the word (Salvini 2015, 533). As one of various Italian artists who had taken up residence abroad, Piromalli is unique; his voluntary exile came about from his sense of social and existential insufficiency. The collections of his work, letters, drawings, paintings, and archival material—since 1978 a good portion of it at La Casabianca, a museum of graphic—is now considered eminently suited to the Museo dell'arte contemporanea italiana in esilio ("Museum of Italian Contemporary Art in Exile"), and was exhibited at the 2011 Venice Biennale (Girardello and Pellegrini 2013, 7–9).[9] In a letter to an art curator interested in his work, Piromalli nonchalantly expresses his poetic credo in the following terns: "I would not have written poetry to praise beauty, perfection, and health, but to cure the ugly, the imperfect, and the unhealthy" (Girardello and Pellegrini 2013, 8). As with other Beat writers, people may be offended by the obscenity in his language, and the average person would probably be repulsed rather than aroused by some of his material (as was the case with Ginsberg when "Howl" was censored). But Piromalli was ever his own man and always resolved to act upon his own uninhibited convictions.

Piromalli had traveled to Castelporziano from Holland where he had settled in the early 1970s. What of his life as a young Italian Beat poet? Born in 1946 of Calabrian family origins he grew up a native of Tufello, a Roman *borgata*. It would be hard to doubt his eventual Beat calling and credentials. His friends from around via Lanza called him The Poet, and that he undoubtedly has been. It is his creativity, originality, and art, and his nomadic character, that took him to Holland when he was just a few years into adulthood. This was not to find a job, but to be a poet. He had few requirements; he just needed support from the city. His life then and since has been that of a wanderer as much of mind as physical travel. He speaks of needing space for his thoughts, the search for the right word to use in his creative work, and he has long eschewed institutional prestige. His strategy is to solve problems through insight into the workings of language and the re-envisioning of things long familiar. Piromalli has been a man of prayer—his prayers he keeps in a booklet that he produces when he needs to address his God. He has been the inveterate observer-poet yet with a passion for book learning; both have fed his drive towards a life of uncorrupted anarchism. In these several respects, he can lay claim to having been one of the first Beat poets in Rome.

One evening, in 1970, when he was living in the Beat community with Fabio Ciriachi and other friends he went out and did not return home. He had been arrested and jailed in the Regina Coeli prison for the illegal possession of drugs. This experience is the theme of a poem in his collection *Uccello nel guscio* (*Bird in its Shell* 1971):

> Avevo lunghi capelli
> Quei miei pantaloni consumati
> Quei miei stivali e cintura
> Signor brigadiere
> A cosa le è servito condurmi qui
> Avevo forse fra le mani
> La formula per addomesticare il sistema?

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Libanese rosso
Vecchi problemi di razza
Roba d'anteguerra
Esseri improduttivi, capelloni…
E ormai più nulla mi tocca
Comincio a morire dietro un uccello intravisto
E per le mie orecchie che gentilezza i vostri stridii.
Voglio scrollarmi di dosso
Questa vecchia pelle
Non credere più alle fate.
Così sono andato all'inferno.
"A ritrovarmi qui" Piromalli 1971, 80–81

[I had long hair/My worn-out trousers/My boots and my belt/Mister Policeman/What was use of bringing me here/Did I hold in my hands/The formula to tame the system?/ A Red Libanese/Old race issues/Pre-war stuff/Being unproductive, longhair…/By now nothing gets to me/I start dying behind a half-seen bird/And how kind your screeching is to my ears/I need to shake off/ my old skin/stop believing in fairies./And so I went to hell].

At some point, he would say: "Enough!" and leave for "a corner of the world," where people and things would appreciate his qualities, and would tell him so.

'*Piromalli* is a Poet; a Poet in Hell' (Ciriachi 2014).

Women

Within the broad panorama of social and political freedoms opened up by the ideological demands of the 1960s, it is astonishing that such anti-authoritarianism did not attract women writers more willing to take on a Beat identity. The stimulus to step forward and get involved, or join in collective action, took the form of reporting, commenting, interpreting, and critiquing, rather than through literary or poetic adventures. No inspiring spirit, no literary demon seemed to possess them. That, in many ways, was Beat's loss. At Castelporziano two Beat-inspired poet-writers did manage to make their appearance, namely Amelia Rosselli and Dacia Maraini, both of them the daughters of the "thirties' generation." The former had long been an experimentalist in word and music, a researcher in ethnomusicology, and the translator of Sylvia Plath (whose tragic end she shared). The latter had won a reputation for her analysis of the Mafia and for speaking and writing against violence towards women. Both were intellectuals devoted, in different ways, to the need of a radical change for their country. They both had close associations with Pasolini, and their participation in the Beat Festival was above all first a way to honor their friend and fellow activist.

In Tella Ferrari, however, Beat women can be said to have found a luminary. She was one of the writers who were early to publish in a *Mondo Beat* 1967 issue (De Martino 2008, 8):

Qualcuno ha detto
Altri hanno scritto
Uno ha cantato
Alcuni hanno pianto
Troppi sono morti
Molti sperano
Gli altri stanno a guardare.

[Some spoke out//Others wrote/One sang/Some cried/Too many died/Many hope/The rest just look on.]

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That, in fact, expresses exactly what happened. Thank you, Tella, Beat literary incarnation, wherever you are.

Notes

1 All translations in brackets, unless otherwise stated, are mine.
2 Beat women artists in Italy were mainly singers: Rita Pavone, Patty Pravo, Caterina Caselli, Loradana Berté, Mia Martini, Mita Medici, Carmen Villani, Romina Power (Tarli 2005).
3 This list is from the official website of M. Gerbino, the first director of *Mondo Beat*, www.melchiorre-melgerbino.com/Mondo_Beat_Story/00homepage.htm.Here Gerbino discusses the history of the magazine he directed.
4 Other "Beat" magazines include *Gruppo Provo – Onda verde* (inspired by *Green Wave*, an American journal with a commitment to the environment), *Uomini* (Turin), *The Beatneaks* (Monza), *Noi la pensiamo così… e via* (Lucca), *Urlo Beat* (Milan), *Grido Beat* (Milan), *Il Ribelle* (Monza), *Stampa Libera* (Cisinello Balsamo), and *S* (Milan).
5 From the author's online chat with Gianni Milano, May 1, 2017.
6 Balthus (1908–2001) became director of the Académie de France in 1964.
7 For details of the controversial episode of the band's actual performance at The Piper, see Tarquini (1992).
8 See "Anni '60, Beat e dintorni," www.musicaememoria.com.
9 This started as a project by Cesare Petroiusti to set up an itinerant museum to be hosted by cultural institutions or associations abroad.

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