



The Americas in Italian Literature and Culture, 1700-1825

Stefania Buccini

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The curiosity with which Europeans approached the New World was reflected in the writings of Italian historians, missionaries, travelers, and explorers, who described with fascination the customs of the peoples they encountered in their travels. In this study Stefania Buccini examines the representation of the Americas in Italian literature during the Age of the Enlightenment.

She begins by analyzing the motivations and circumstances behind the emergence of the myth of the "noble savage." Eighteenth-century Italy had a strong orientation toward the more "advanced" American societies of the Incas and the Aztecs, and these pre-Columbian civilizations became the preferred myth, dissociated from any notion of wildness and easily compatible with illuministic canons of progress. However, a new America—revolutionary and democratic, animated by noble principles of liberty and equality—was soon formed, onto which the old Europe projected its dreams of renewal. As the New World came to be associated with the English colonies, Benjamin Franklin, scientist, writer of political and moral works, and founder of the new republic, gained the stature of an illuministic myth in Italy. Buccini finds that the myths of the old and new Americas meshed and created a more complex image of the New World for the Italians.

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