

AN ACADEMY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

I. THE ITALIAN ACADEMY: THE CHARTER

In December of 1990, the President of Columbia University, Michael Sovern, and the Consul General of Italy in New York, Minister Francesco Corrias, signed in New York a document of 80 pages that defined in detail the charter of an Italian Academy for Advanced Studies, unique of its kind in America not only for Italy, but for Europe as well. Thus some American and Italian scholars realized their dream legally with an international agreement. They had envisioned and worked on the project since 1986, transforming through the years an institute of Italian studies into a pluridisciplinary academy dedicated to research.

The agreement foresaw on the part of the Italian government the acquisition of a seven-story Florentine palace, situated between the School of Law and the School of International Affairs. The building was called Casa Italiana. According to the agreement, Columbia committed itself to creating, with the sum received from the acquisition, an endowment fund for the Academy. Columbia was assigned the administration of the Academy, having subleased the building from the Italian government. The Italian government, on the other hand, committed itself to the restructuring of the Casa, thereby transforming it from a university building into a palace worthy of decorously receiving 20 fellows, creating a worthy seat for the first research Academy that Italy has abroad.

The charter foresees also the essentials of an administrative structure. The president of the Academy is the president of Columbia University, who is thus responsible for its functioning. The honorary president is the president of the Republic of Italy. The executive director is a professor with tenure at Columbia. Twelve guarantors—six Italian and six American—are responsible for the good functioning of the agreement. Twenty senior fellows—ten Italian and ten American eminent scholars—are the guardians of the quality of the scientific research of the institute. Their names are proposed by the director to the president for approval after having obtained a favorable opinion from the guarantors.

II. GENESIS AND MISSION

In the memorandum which precedes the charter, the ultimate mission of the Academy is defined as, “to offer a privileged view of Europe to America from an Italian prospective.” Such a mission is carried out mainly by taking advantage of the resources of the University of which

the Academy constitutes an integral part, while maintaining at the same time a form of autonomy within the university.

In a deeper sense, through the realization of a research program that is carried out mainly by 20 scholars in residence in the restructured Casa, the Academy must offer the occasion for a dialogue between two cultures. It must offer the ideal environment, physically and spiritually, that allows Americans and Europeans to "come close to each other" in a new way. According to those who conceived of the idea, a guarantee that the Academy will realize this philosophy is first and foremost the choice of the two partners: Italy as a country, Columbia as a university.

The idea of the dialogue as *pensare insieme* inspired the periodic reunion of a group of scholars in different disciplines (the author of the present essay being one of them). Americans and Italians gathered between 1986 and 1990 in an apartment of Columbia on Riverside Drive, at the Italian Consulate in New York, and among the woods of Gressonet in the Catskills. These meetings were occasions for an exchange of ideas in reaction to a sequence of events: a world was disappearing without any other world in sight to replace it. These events awoke among the scholars a common enthusiasm and an anguishing apprehension. We thought then that Italy as heir to a most ancient civilization could offer, because of its uninterrupted creativity for millennia, not only an arena for the debate of ideas connected with the problems of a world without borders, searching for new references for its survival, but a word of wisdom as well, to help us face the new millennium. Italy could do so by taking advantage of resources and the international opening of one of the most prestigious American universities.

"Italy," declared in 1988 one of those American scholars, the mathematician E.R. Lorch, "is a country which is and has been for centuries an inexhaustible source of ideas, a laboratory for the invention of hypotheses and for their proofs. The intelligent considers the world around him as his own laboratory. Therefore the Italians and not the French or the Russians or the Germans constitute our ideal partners for that *pensare insieme*, a dialogue at a high level across the Atlantic, which today is more necessary than ever."

Columbia, on the other hand, counts on a long history of dialogue with Italian culture. It was Lorenzo da Ponte, writer and librettist (among others of Mozart and Salieri), teacher, impresario, merchant, historian, an intellectual in the most comprehensive sense of the word, who created the first American bridge with Italian culture with deftness and *con foga*. In 1805, fifty years before Italian unification, da Ponte began working his way into Columbia through a purely casual meeting with Clement Moore, son of the president of the then Columbia College, Nathaniel

Moore. One hundred years later in the 1920s a group of Italo-American philanthropists, inspired by a student of Columbia college, Peter Riccio, saw to it that a building should be erected on university ground, and with the support of the university, a seven-story Florentine palace with a Renaissance theater, a library, and a loggia, dedicated to the study of Italian civilization was erected. The Casa Italiana of Columbia University was inaugurated in 1927, as a gift to Columbia University, by Guglielmo Marconi. It was directed for the first ten years by Giuseppe Prezzolini, an intellectual who was a spokesman of Italian culture different from da Ponte but an equally genial interpreter of his time. The Casa continued up to 1990 to fulfill decorously its function as an institute dedicated to Italian studies.

The revolutionary events that mark history between 1986 and 1990 suggested the transformation of an institute of Italian studies into a pluridisciplinary Academy, an arena for the Italo-European and American contribution to the study of problems of the world of tomorrow. On May 7, 1991, hardly two centuries after the arrival of Lorenzo da Ponte to Columbia, the Academy marked its inauguration with two events: an exhibit of material in great part unpublished on da Ponte, "A vision of Italy from Columbia College 1805-38," and a congress co-sponsored with the Center for Ciceronian studies in Rome, "Cicero in American Culture and Political Life." These two events marked the nature of the new Academy. Two years after the inauguration the Academy Research Coordinator, a young Italian sociologist, and an enthusiastic collaborator of the program for about a year, wrote in a letter to the director, "[b]eyond everything what attracts me most to the Academy is the opportunity of working at a project which has its roots in the past and projects itself audaciously into the future—I see already two years from now the first research scholars expressing their reaction to the restructured building—I believe we are doing the right thing by presenting to them and to the world, through this building an ambitious, warm, and stimulating image of a new Italy."

III. THE FIRST STAGES OF THE DIALOGUE (1991-93)

The first stage climaxes with the approval of the international agreement between Italy and Columbia after four years of dialogue by the scholars who envisioned the Academy. The second stage was completed during the two years that followed the inauguration, 1991-93, along a double track. First the director, supported by the president and the provost of Columbia, who chairs the committee of guarantors, worked for two years with the Italian authorities for the clarification and completion of the second part of the agreement that regulates the relation

between Italy and Columbia on the execution of the restructuring of the building. This stage was concluded with success during the summer of 1993. On the other hand, given the forced delay above mentioned of two years in respect to the original plans (the inauguration of the real Academy will take place in 1995 instead of 1993), the director felt obliged to create an interim program fitting to the mission of the Academy.

The dialogue with the architects offered the Academy a splendid and almost unexpected occasion of transposing "ideas" into a physical space. The Italian architect Italo Rota became in July 1991 the winner of a competition that Columbia was asked by Italy to sponsor. He and his American partner, Sam White, grandson of the architect who completed the Casa Italiana in 1927, acquired during these two years of obliged pause in the evolution of the original project (1991-93), a deeper awareness of what the Academy would become. They did so through a constant dialogue with the director of the Academy. In fact, the dialogue between director and architects and more recently between architects, the director, the Columbia administration, and the representative of the Ministry of Public Works enlightened areas of development of the future Academy which could not have been discovered on their own by the scholars who envisioned the institution. The architectural project changed in consequence of this most productive intercourse.

As for the program, the two years of forced pause in the execution of the original plan allowed the Academy to explore the resources of Columbia, not only through the two chairs of International Journalism with the School of Journalism and European Law with the School of Law (both Academy Chairs), but through seminars, congresses, and workshops. These events were designed in general to support research in courses obviously connected with Italy or to research conducted by Italians.

It was precisely in the process of exploring this area of interest between Italy and Columbia that the Academy succeeded in obtaining its first recognition in America and thus a specific identity. The recognition of this identity will allow it to further develop in the future a dialogue at a more coordinated and deepened level with analogous institutes in New York, Rome, Washington, Brussels, Strassbourg, Paris, Los Angeles and Toronto, and also perhaps with the European Community, the Renaissance Society, the American Assembly, the Belles Lettres, the Vatican Archives, the Woodrow Wilson Institute, the Indiana University School of Law at Indianapolis, the American Academy of Political Science, and the American Society of Forensic Psychology.

From the beginning of the work it was realized that the key to success was the stability of an active, vivacious, human, and ambitious

dialogue not exclusively, but especially with Columbia University, of which the Academy is a part. Those who planned the Academy had foreseen what the relation of the Academy to Columbia University should be: "The Academy," said in 1989 one of the Italian founders, the historian Massimo Salvadori, "should entertain with the University that houses it an organic relation as defined in the charter. However, the nature of the specific character of this relation *remains to be defined step by step in the realization of a specific program*. The language of the charter should inspire us, both Italians and Americans, to *pensare insieme* in the right direction, overcoming, in view of the work in common, the difficulties deriving from the different approaches to *pensare*, typical of each of the two cultures. Moreover, it should prompt us to transfer ideas into specific committees taking into account their interrelation and their tasks. We must mostly rely on very particular individuals from both shores of the Atlantic. . . . The autonomy of the Academy depends on its capacity to allow the merging of new frontiers. It depends on its opening to a reciprocal understanding of the two societies in question, the Italian-European and the American. This element *should not constitute a generic presence in the life of the institution but should be articulated in the structure itself of the Academy*." The Academy's ultimate aim should be to reach a harmony in the *pensare insieme* of the representative of the two cultures.

In this sense, a very laborious stage of the dialogue among guarantors, especially the Italians, which was successfully concluded after two years of debate, was the agreement reached in February 1993 on a list of members of the scientific committee or committee of Senior Fellows. They in turn at their first reunion in New York in April and in Rome in May suggested among other things the creation of a Planning Committee and of a wide and flexible Advisory Board that should support the work of the director.

Inside the Academy, called for by the execution of the program, a skeleton of an internal administration was reinforced. It includes an assistant to the director with an administrative assistant and a public relations officer. A coordinator of research was given the first fellowship of the Academy. The Rotary NW of Rome generously contributes annually, for the duration six months, a young Italian journalist to maintain as a liaison with the Italian press. A group of Columbia students and, when possible, of Italian graduate students in New York supports the administration with enthusiasm. "The experience that I have obtained contributing to the creation of this very new Academy," wrote a non-Italian speaking Korean student after two years of work, "has become for me the essential factor in the education I receive at Columbia College."

In consonance with this philosophy, the planning of the Academy is now characterized by a more clear definition of the cultural directives pursued until now, by the opening of a substantial program of research, and by creating a structure for the realization of the programs (research seminars, Academy Lecture Series, roundtable, workshops, etc.). While we keep open the possibility of individual lectures, we are inclined to favor a deeper commitment, both in content and methods, to a more cohesive and coordinated program. The paradigmatic model for a research seminar will be the one directed in the spring of 1994 by Professor Branca and coordinated by Barolini, Lorch, and Ossola on "Philology and Criticism." This seminar offers the opportunity for experts in a given discipline to relate to each other through the results of their research. All the Italian and American participants will be able to put to use through their contribution their own knowledge of the subject. They will do so by offering examples of different methodologies in the results of their own research. This seminar will profit from the fruitful dynamics of the seminar. Another research seminar throughout the semester will deal with today's Italy in its political, economic, social, scientific humanistic evolution within the European context.

IV. BEYOND 1995

The same opening, flexibility, and variety which has characterized the first years of existence of the Academy will continue to underline its philosophy. In the future, the Italian Academy, the product of a model international agreement between a European government and an American University, will exist from 1995 on, within a new building (the old Casa Italiana restructured as a 'statement' of a new Italy) the mission for which it has been created. A treasure conceived by a group of visionary scholars—including some politicians and diplomats—at the end of the second millennium, the Academy must succeed in diffusing through America as a precious heritage to the third millennium. This image of Italian *pensare*—curious, human, warm, stimulating, ambitious—will be open more than ever before to the *pensare* on this shore of the Atlantic.

Maristella de Panizza Lorch
Director, Italian Academy
Columbia University, New York
February 4, 1994