

The exhibition of otherness. The travels of an Eskimo and her impresario in France, Italy and the Habsburg Empire in the first half of the 19th century

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Abstract: Azil was a young Eskimo who featured in a singular European tour organized by Signor Paganini between 1827 and 1843. She was exhibited in courts, salons and scientific cabinets, and also starred in a stage play in which she appeared as herself with a troupe of actors. In this article we try to reconstruct the modalities of exhibition of Azil taking as a reference a small pamphlet, republished several times in the years 1827-1843. The story of Azil makes a very interesting addition to the studies that have recently established the dimensions of the ethno-anthropological phenomenon of the exhibition of otherness. It emerges that in the Kingdom of Italy, above all in the liberal and fascist periods, this phenomenon was quite considerable and can take its place in the broader panorama of ethno-exhibitions featuring living human beings in Europe during the colonial and imperialist age. The episode we have reconstructed certainly does not suffice to be able to state that the exhibition of living human beings was common practice in Italy in the first half of the 19th century, but it does show how instances that originated in other European nations, where spectacles of this kind were more familiar, could readily find fortune in Italy.

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In this article we try to reconstruct the modalities of exhibition of Azil: the principal source is a small pamphlet, republished several times in the years 1827-1843, called “Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato e sulla giovane Esquimaude arrivata in Francia il 27 luglio 1827 in compagnia degli Indiani selvatici venuti dall’America.¹ (Curious and interesting information on the inhabitants of the Frozen Sea and the young Eskimo woman who arrived in France on 27 July 1827 in the company of the wild Indians from America²)”. It is the precious record of an unusual journey, including a short résumé of ethnographic information on Eskimos

1 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del mar gelato e sulla giovane esquimaude arrivata in Francia il 27 luglio 1827 in compagnia degli Indiani selvatici, venuti d’America, e presentati a sua Maestà Carlo X nel suo palazzo di S. Cloud il 15 Agosto 1827 e che il sig. Paganini espone alla pubblica vista. Compendio della Nascita e Costumi di questa giovane Esquimaude ed altre particolarità degne di rimarco e dell’attenzione pubblica*, (Havre: Stamperia del Commercio di A. Chouret, undated). We can note that the author of the pamphlet uses a number of French forms: Groenland, esquimaude, etc.

2 Citations and titles translated by M. W. Weir.

and an account of Azil's life. We learn that while still a baby she was taken into the care of a tribe of Osage Indians; she was subsequently adopted by an American sea captain who undertook to educate her. Taking her with him on a business trip to Europe, he put her into the care of Signor Paganini in France, who then took her on a long European tour.

The pamphlet was published in 1975 with the title *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese riguardante gli eschimesi*.³ Its editor, Silvio Zavatti, president of the Istituto Geografico Polare in Civitanova Marche, explorer and Arctic scholar, explains that he came across it by chance in a bookshop and purchased it for the museum's library, where it is now kept.⁴ Zavatti supplied the verbatim transcription with a short introduction and an ever more cursory conclusion. His approach had something of the geographer and ethnologist, the scientist and the historian. He commented more than once on the pamphlet's unscientific nature: the brief overview of ethnographic information is littered with succinct notes in which the Zavatti rectifies numerous inaccuracies concerning the geography⁵ and customs of the Eskimos.⁶ Even though Zavatti calls the account a "fantastic hotchpotch, put together who knows where",⁷ he does give a certain importance to the story, and in fact poses a number of questions. In what circumstances did Paganini encounter the Eskimo? Was she *lent* to him, as the pamphlet implies, by Captain Hunt, or was she in fact sold to him? As we shall see, the solution to these questions involves going beyond the text, and in fact Zavatti did not undertake any research. Convinced he was dealing with an authentic rarity – ignoring the fact that it exists in a number of editions – he concluded his article with an invitation to

i polaristi e gli storici francesi – specialmente il prof. Jean Malaurie [...] – a compiere accurate ricerche negli archivi francesi per tentare di gettare nuova luce su questo poco onorevole episodio [...] che, se non investe la storia politica della Francia e dell'Italia, è pur sempre un aspetto del costume dell'epoca.⁸ (*French polar scholars and historians – in particular Prof. Jean Malaurie [...] – to carry out painstaking research in the French archives to try to cast new light on this rather dishonourable episode [...] which, if it does not actually concern the political history of France and Italy, is in any case an aspect of the custom of the period.*)

3 S. Zavatti, "Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese riguardante gli eschimesi", *Miscellanea di Storia delle esplorazioni geografiche*, I, (1975), 199-211. The article bears this title because the pamphlet Zavatti acquired was published in Genoa, with no date specified.

4 "Nel 1970 ebbi la fortuna di acquistare, [presso la Libreria Antiquaria Soave di Torino] per la Biblioteca dell'Istituto Geografico Polare di Civitanova Marche un opuscolo che risultò poi rarissimo" ("In 1970 I was fortunate to acquire [in the Libreria Antiquaria Soave, Torino] for the library of the Istituto Geografico Polare of Civitanova Marche a pamphlet which proved to be extremely rare"): Zavatti, *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese*, 199.

5 "la localizzazione geografica della Groenlandia è quantomeno fantasiosa ed estensiva" ("the geographical localization of Greenland is particularly fantastic and extensive"): Zavatti, *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese*, 200.

6 "altra informazione fantasiosa. Gli Eschimesi parlano ad alta voce e ridono molto forte" ("another fantastic piece of information. The Eskimos speak at the top of their voices and laugh very loud"): Zavatti, *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese*, 201.

7 Zavatti, *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese*, 205.

8 Zavatti, *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese*, 211.

Forty years on from the appearance of Zavatti's article, the subject is still intriguing. It is quite extraordinary that the author made such a limited use of the text, and that the publication led to no further enquiries. Yet as matter of fact the explanation is simple: it is only in recent years that the exhibition of human otherness – and the particular context of human zoos – has attracted academic interest, as is seen in the numerous publications, exhibitions and congresses devoted to the topic.⁹

Our enquiry has a dual aim: on one hand we pursue Zavatti's research in order to gain a clearer idea of this episode, which as we shall see was significant in terms both of its duration and its geographical scope; and on the other hand it is important to place it in the much broader panorama of the exhibitions of *the Other* and in a specific historical context. By inserting this case study into a long series of analogous episodes, some features will emerge which, we hope, can provide a contribution to this field of studies. Before taking up the thread of our research we must review the phenomenon of human exhibitions in Europe in modern times, which is undoubtedly the appropriate context for the story of Azil.¹⁰

I. THE EXHIBITION OF OTHERNESS

The first exhibitions of *exotic* otherness in the modern Western world can be seen to coincide with the first voyages of discovery to the New World. Among the “booty”, explorers took good care to bring back from the *Indies* there were new plant species, fruits with inebriating and outlandish colours and tastes, bizarre animals, and also new human beings. The latter, whose status for a long time remained in a limbo between the animal kingdom and the human race, were paraded round the European courts for the delectation of the royal and aristocratic households, together with the black coffee beans and multi-coloured parrot feathers.¹¹ As Abbattista recalls in his

⁹The following books offer a rich and complex overview of the state of the art in studies of human exhibitions, with a vast bibliography in the appendices: *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales. 150 ans d'inventions de l'Autre*, eds. N. Bancel, P. Blanchard, G. Boëtsch, E. Deroo, S. Lemaire, (Paris: La Découverte, 2011); *Human zoos : the invention of the savage*, eds. N. Bancel, P. Blanchard, G. Boëtsch, E. Deroo, S. Lemaire, (Paris: Actes Sud Beaux-Arts/Musée du quai Branly, 2011); *Zoos humains. Au temps des exhibitions humaines*, eds. N. Bancel, P. Blanchard, G. Boëtsch, E. Deroo, S. Lemaire (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).

¹⁰In its various forms the exhibition of *the Other*, a particular phenomenon intrinsically linked to the identification of difference, can be traced throughout human history. As well as forming part of the identity of the self, *the Other* has always been the object of specific exhibitions. The exhibition of human otherness has characterised all civilizations, responding to different goals and purposes. We shall limit ourselves here to a brief description of the phenomenon, concentrating on the period of our case study. For an overview of the history of the phenomenon of human exhibitions from the Stone Age through to the present, including the colonial expositions, see the works cited in the previous note.

¹¹“Bien que les navigateurs italiens étaient à la solde d'Espagnols et de Portugais, ces ‘butins humains’ ne parvinrent que très marginalement en Italie. De ce fait, et contrairement à ce que les écrits nous relatent pour une grande partie de l'Europe sur l'exhibition des diversités humaines en provenance de mondes exotiques, l'Italie a été quasiment exclue de cette ‘tradition systématique de l'exposition du différent’, même si les riches et puissant familles de Venise, Gênes, Rome, Naples, Palerme étaient entourée de domestiques originaires du Proche-Orient, d'Afrique du Nord e du Sud saharien.” (“*Although the Italian navigators were in the pay of the Spanish and Portuguese, these ‘human booties’*”

reconstruction of an extensive period of human exhibitions in the modern age *Trophying human 'otherness'*¹²:

In the first two decades of its discovery natives were repeatedly carried off from the New World in one form or another [...] mostly but not exclusively to Europe. Columbus, Vespucci, Sebastian Cabot, Magellan, Thomas Aubert, Ponce de Leon, Fernando de Soto, Panfilo Narvaez, Nernan Cortéz, Francisco Pizarro, Jacques Cartier, Walter Raleigh – to name just a few – are all reported to have abducted natives for reasons which did not necessarily have anything to do with procuring forced labor.¹³

This did indeed amount to a long list of deportees; we can recall the Tupi Indians presented to the King of France in 1550, the savages collected by Wilhelm V, Duke of Bavaria (along with an extraordinary collection of dwarves and cripples), the natives of Haiti brought to Europe by Bougainville in 1769, and a whole tribe of Africans exhibited in the 1780s at the instigation of Friedrich II, Duke of Hesse-Cassel, showing an interest in both their customs and their morphology.

We should note that, as Abbattista points out, the natives of the newly colonised territories were not brought to Europe merely to be put on display; many of them served as interpreters, mediators and living witnesses to the discoveries that had been made in far off places; and later as catechumens, actors and diplomats.¹⁴ More often than not, however, even when fulfilling one of these roles they were nonetheless singled out for special attention and, like it or not, became part of the exhibition of otherness.

Live or dead specimens, and more commonly reproductions, had a prominent place in scientific cabinets, the latest version of the *chambres des merveilles* and precursors of museums, whether of natural history or art.¹⁵ They were exhibited alongside objects from the animal and mineral worlds held to be unusual and hence worthy of attention, and various items representing the most singular human deformities. In fact, in modern times the exhibition of the savage brought back from the latest

only very occasionally found their way to Italy. As a result, and contrary to what written records tell us about much of Europe concerning the exhibition of human diversities coming from exotic worlds, Italy was almost entirely excluded from this 'systematic tradition of the exhibition of difference', even if the rich and powerful families of Venice, Genoa, Rome, Naples and Palermo were surrounded by servants coming from the Near East and North and sub-Saharan Africa) : A. Guerci, "Le corps des autres comme curiosité", *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales*, 161. On the same topic, cfr. G. Abbattista, "Trophying human 'otherness'. From Christopher Columbus to contemporary ethno-ecology (fifteenth-twenty first centuries)", *Encountering Otherness. Diversities and Transcultural Experiences in Early Modern European Culture*, ed. Abbattista, (Trieste: EUT, 2011), 19-41. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10077/4297>>

12 Abbattista, *Trophying human 'otherness'*.

13 Abbattista, *Trophying human 'otherness'*, 23. See also A. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Indians and Europe: an interdisciplinary collection of essays*, ed. C. F. Feest, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); D. Wernitznig, *Europe's Indians, Indians in Europe: European perceptions and appropriations of American native cultures from Pocahontas to the present*, (Lanham, MD: The University Press of America, 2007).

14 Abbattista, *Trophying human 'otherness'*, 23.

15 G. Boëtsch, "From Cabinet to the Passion for the 'Savage'", *Human zoos: the invention of the savage*, 78.

frontiers of geographical exploration can be considered as the evolution of another form of exhibition of diversity (which nonetheless continued to exist) featuring physically deformed humans and animals.¹⁶ A complete history of the exhibition of human otherness has to take into account these two different approaches to diversity, above all because there are many demonstrations that they actually overlapped in different times and places, from the Egypt of the pharaohs to the period we are dealing with, and also because, as we pointed out above, the exhibition of exotic otherness could be juxtaposed in scientific milieu – and not only – with the exhibition of monstrosity.

During the 18th century the specimens became the province of the emerging anthropological sciences, and their observation, whether direct or indirect, contributed to the formation of theories of race. At a time in which anthropology was still practised in the study, adepts were keen to study specimens without undertaking lengthy and costly voyages which in any case were not always feasible. While numerous and sometimes contradictory motivations can be adduced for the capture and deportation of natives from the new continent,¹⁷ there is no doubt that, in the natural science museums, their bodies became part of an ongoing anthropological process. This is how one should view the relationship in the natural sciences between monstrous and exotic otherness: the presence of the former – together, of course, with many other factors – made it possible for the latter to emerge, and for both to take their place in the same discipline.

We should not, however, imagine that the presence in Europe of people drawn from the four corners of the globe was due merely to their deportation by voyagers and merchants. If in the first decades following the discovery of the Americas, with the exploration of the Asiatic and African continents, their inhabitants were regarded as part of the new booty of exotic wonders, in the 18th and 19th century

délégations royales, visiteurs princiers, esclaves-artistes affranchis, voyageurs-négociants venus des différentes parties du monde se croisent (et se fixent) en Occident, donnant à voir un « exotisme » qui émerge dans les images comme dans les imaginaires.¹⁸ (*royal delegations, princely visitors, freed slaves with a vocation as artists, voyagers and merchants coming from all over the world encountered one another (and settled) in the West, exhibiting an « exoticism » which transpires in both images and the collective imagination.*)

In the period going from the arrival of the first savages in Europe brought back by Columbus to the Haitians transported by Bougainville in 1769 and beyond, there were substantial changes in the venues and exhibition modalities concerning these specimens. One significant modification in the exhibition of otherness was the democratization of the phenomenon, which was formerly reserved exclusively either for collections or for the entertainment of royal and aristocratic households. As the venues gradually opened their doors to an ever wider public, using a variety of modalities, the spectacle of otherness became accessible both to the populace and to

16 On the exhibition of deformed bodies see the exhaustive account *Cultural Spectacles of the extraordinary body*, ed. R. Garland-Thomson, (New York: New York University Press, 1996); R. Garland-Thomson, “Du prodige à l’erreur: les monstres de l’Antiquité à nos jours”, *Zoos humains. Au temps des exhibitions coloniales*, 65-76.

17 See in this connection Abbattista, *Trophying human ‘otherness’*, 22 ff.

18 Bancel, Blanchard, Boëtsch, Deroo, Lemaire, “Introduction”, *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales*, 13.

men of science. The appearance of the ethnological museum, the transformation of the private menageries of the royal courts into public parks, and the creation of botanical and zoological gardens in the heart of cities can all be seen as part of a single movement which – surely nurtured by the principles of the French Revolution – affected all the capitals across Europe and in the United States.

Si les différents espaces zoologiques sont mis à la disposition des savants – pour qu'ils étudient, acclimatent ou se familiarisent avec des bêtes curieuses ou sauvages, mais aussi pour confronter ou infirmer les théories d'organisation du vivant –, ils ouvrent rapidement au public, pour le distraire tout en l'éduquant.¹⁹ (*Not only were the various zoological spaces made available to scholars so that they could study, acclimatise and become familiar with curious wild beasts, and also confirm or disprove the theories of how the living world was organised, they also were soon opened to the public, who could be entertained while being educated.*)

The *raison d'être* of these venues were apparently entertainment and instruction, and access was often either free or very inexpensive. Zoological gardens and ethnological museums thus became the prime locations for the exhibition of otherness.²⁰

One significant aspect of the process of democratization of such places was the dissemination of new modalities and the creation of totally new environments. We can recall the importance of the attention paid to the exhibition of otherness in the press. Even when the savages were not actually exposed to the crowds, people could learn of their appearances from the newspapers. Thus in 1827 the visit of six Osage Indians to the King of France, during which they went on numerous outings to the theatre, to libraries, and to dine with families of the aristocracy, was amply reported in the press, with dozens of articles, pictures and detailed descriptions. Thanks to the media the general public was able to participate in the exhibition of savages, whereas previously this had been the privilege of the aristocratic élites. While in the late 18th and early 19th century attendance at theatres had been possible for only quite a small portion of the population, there were whole districts in Paris, London and other European capitals in which acrobats, musicians and wild animal tamers entertained a very mixed public.²¹ In these venues, forms of exhibition of human phenomena and examples of anthropological otherness took their place alongside fire eaters and tightrope artists.

19 Bancel, Blanchard, Boëtsch, Deroo, Lemaire, "Introduction", *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales*, 11.

20 This process was somewhat different in the United States: here, in modern times, otherness (exotic and otherwise) was staged primarily in fairs and travelling circuses. In terms of entertainment there is little to differentiate the two institutions of the circus and zoological garden (or ethnological museum), but the former had no scientific and/or pedagogical aims. We can note nonetheless that America preceded Europe by at least a quarter of a century. «Freak shows» – not to be confused with the more general phenomenon of the exhibition of deformed bodies of humans or animals, a practice which, as already recalled, has very ancient origins – and «ethnic shows» emerged and spread rapidly in America from the second quarter of the 19th century. This is why they are considered "la première mise en forme populaire d'une représentation systématique de la différence humaine." (*"the first popular version of a systematic representation of human difference."*): Bancel, Blanchard, Boëtsch, Deroo, Lemaire, "Introduction", *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales*, 12.

21 For this case study of Azil the following works have been consulted: B. Nicolas, *Chroniques des petits théâtres de Paris*, (Paris: Allardin, 1837); H. Beaulieu, *Les théâtres du boulevard du Crime*, (Paris: H. Daragon, 1905); G. Cain, *Anciens théâtres de Paris : le boulevard du temple, les théâtres des boulevards*, (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1906).

C'est au cours du XIX^{ème} siècle que s'élaborent, sur le vieux et le nouveau continent, les paradigmes d'une mise en norme du monde dont la partie visible devient à la fois un spectacle populaire, une leçon de choses scientifiques (à travers l'émergence des sociétés savantes) et une démonstration explicite du bien-fondé des hiérarchies coloniales ou des distinctions raciales.²² (*It was during the 19th century that the paradigms were established, on both sides of the Atlantic, for a normalisation of the world whose visible part became at once popular spectacle, a lesson in scientific facts (through the emergence of learned societies) and an explicit demonstration of the intrinsic validity of colonial hierarchies and racial differences.*)

Starting in the second half of the 19th century, the exhibition of human otherness became increasingly a mass phenomenon, closely bound up with the spread of European imperialism. Human specimens, which could be exhibited in numerous groups and not just as individuals, became standard features in the grandiose industrial, commercial and artistic exhibitions held throughout Europe. These colonial, international or universal exhibitions were

“periodici appuntamenti che nei maggiori paesi europei, a partire dalla metà del secolo XIX, si posero come occasioni autocelebrative e propagandistiche della potenza, del progresso e delle risorse economiche, culturali, tecnologiche e scientifiche [delle varie nazioni]”²³ (“*periodical events which, from the middle of the 19th century onwards, took place in the major European nations as occasions for propaganda and self-glorification of the host nation's power, progress, and resources, whether economic, cultural, technological or scientific?*”.)

Gigantic Chinamen, negroes, Inuits, hairy women, Osage Indians, Siamese twins, infants with tiny heads, Hottentots, obese girls, pygmies who may have been violently abducted from their homelands or else were acquiescing actors, were offered as gifts to queens or displayed to crowds numbering thousands. Both physically and symbolically, the exhibition of human otherness characterised the old world and the new alike up until the middle of the 20th century.²⁴

This then is an overview of how the contents and the forms of exhibition changed significantly in this period, becoming a mass phenomenon in the second half of the 19th century. The episode we are investigating took place between 1827 and 1843, that is to say some time before this massification. However, in line with the forms of the exhibition of human otherness we have outlined in this introduction, it

22 Bancel, Blanchard, Boëtsch, Deroo, Lemaire, “Introduction”, *Zoos humains et expositions coloniales*, 15.

23 G. Abbattista, “Dagli Ottentotti agli Assabesi. Preambolo a una ricerca sulle esposizioni etniche in Italia nel sec. XIX”, *Cromohs*, 9, (2004), 1-9.

<URLhttp://www.unifi.it/riviste/Cromohs/9_2004/abbattista_ottassab.html>

24 Human zoos went into a progressive decline from the beginning of the 1930s. The characteristics of the ethnic exhibitions within the great expositions changed as the colonial experience itself changed; the First World War, with the presence of indigenous troops from the colonies in Europe, was already a major turning point. The indigenous native could no longer be exhibited as a savage: the colonial expositions became a venue for highlighting the benefits of conquest; the savage is turned into a good soldier, Christian, craftsman, and so on. (Exposition de Paris, 1931). This process did not have the same development in all countries: for example, in the great expositions in Portugal (1934, 1940) and Italy (1940) African villages continued to be one of the main attractions; the same goes for Germany and Switzerland, where nonetheless ethnic-based expositions were increasingly disapproved by public opinion. The last avatar of this process was the Belgian exposition held in 1958. For an in-depth study of this decline see *Human zoos : the invention of the savage*.

too can be included among the precursors of the subsequent phenomenon of “human zoos”.

II. A VERY RARE GENOVESE PAMPHLET?

Our research began at the point where Zavatti left it. It has to be said that the pamphlet we are going to analyse is neither very rare nor from Genoa, even though this was how Zavatti titled his article. It was republished several times in the years 1827 - 1843,²⁵ and we know of eight examples (conserved in libraries in Europe and beyond) which differ in place of publication, language, and in part also in contents.²⁶ The textual variants found in the successive editions and the fact that the pamphlet was republished several times and in different languages are fundamental characteristics which – even more than the contents – throw light on the history of this unusual journey. We shall come to these differences later; for the moment we shall focus on the contents.²⁷

The pamphlet comprises three quite distinct parts: a picture of the Eskimo girl, the text proper, and a fulsome eulogy in praise of her protector. The publication is anonymous, but it is not difficult to suppose that the narrating voice and author are in fact Signor Paganini.²⁸ All we learn about him from the text is that he was an impresario who exhibited animals and human beings considered to be of particular interest – which he himself calls “fenomeni” (“*phenomena*”) or “oggetti” (“*objects*”) – and that the tour in the company of Azil was probably not an unusual experience for him:

Il Sig. Paganini che ritornava in Francia con altri fenomeni e desiderando di ritornare in Italia con qualche oggetto interessante profitto di questa occasione [...] Cominciò a fare delle ricerche per venire ad un trattato, a fine di condur seco questa figlia, ed il

25 This is the most recent edition we have been able to identify, although we cannot exclude further editions.

26 Below the different editions identified, not all of which bear a date. The list is in chronological order, and further on we describe how it was possible to order the various editions and how they differed.

1. Le Havre: Stamperia del Commercio, undated; in Italian, now in the library of the Museo del Risorgimento, Turin.

2. Genoa: Tipografia Fassola, undated; in Italian, now in the Museo polare etnografico, Civitanova Marche and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

3. Ferrara: Gaetano Bresciani, undated; in Italian, now in the Biblioteca Civica Bertoliana, Vicenza.

4. Vienna: 1834; in German, now in the library of Columbia University, New York.

5. Pesten: 1836; in Hungarian, now in Ghent public library (Belgium).

6. Cremona: Tipografia Manin, 1840; in Italian, now in Ghent public library.

7. Turin: Tipografia Zecchi e Boni, 1841; in French, now in Ghent public library.

8. Graz: 1843; in German, now in Ghent public library.

27 Hereafter, except when otherwise stated, we refer to the first edition.

28 We can point out a blatant error that occurs in many catalogues: the Signor Paganini in question, whose first name was given by Zavatti as Vincenzo, was confused with the composer and musician Nicolò Paganini.

Capitano Hunt accettò le proposte [...] accondiscese a questa convenzione ed incaricò particolarmente il suddetto Sig. Paganini della direzione e condotta di questa giovane in tutti i luoghi che avrebbe stimati convenienti, onde esporla alla pubblica curiosità.²⁹ (*Sig. Paganini, who had returned to France with other phenomena and wished to go back to Italy with some object of interest, took advantage of this opportunity [...] He began making enquiries so as to reach an agreement and take this girl off with him, and Captain Hunt accepted his proposals [...] he agreed to this arrangement and gave particular instructions to the aforesaid Sig. Paganini concerning the management and conduct of this young woman in all places he might consider opportune, so as to display her to the curiosity of the public.*)

Paganini himself explains who Azil was:

La giovane donna Esquimaude che il signor Paganini espone alla curiosità pubblica è nativa del Groenland. Essa aveva due anni e mezzo allorché i di lei genitori essendo alla pesca delle Foche, in una navicella leggiera [...] furono gettati da una orribile procella sulla spiaggia del Canada, la quale era allora devastata da molte nazioni selvagge con le loro sanguinose lotte; furono fatti prigionieri dai guerrieri della tribù dei grandi Osages. La di loro figlia fu confidata, per cura di un capo degli Osages ad uno de' suoi soldati, il quale sentì pietà di lei, quantunque fosse avviluppata fra una pelle di un mostro marino, nella quale appena poteasi scorgere essere una umana creatura. Tanto il padre che la madre furono uccisi dai selvaggi, per evitare in questo modo il carico di nutrire i loro prigionieri; quanto poi alla giovane fu essa condotta sulle sponde del fiume Missouri. Essa avea un serpente vivo della specie di cui que' popoli si nutriscono, il quale ritiene ancora quantunque gli sia morto.³⁰ (*The young Eskimo woman whom Signor Paganini exhibits to public curiosity is a native of Greenland. She was aged two and a half when her parents, out seal hunting in a little boat in rough seas [...] were cast up on the shore of Canada, at the time riven by the bloody combats of many tribes of savages; they were taken prisoner by warriors of the Great Osage tribe. On the initiative of an Osage chief, the baby girl was given into the safe keeping of one of his soldiers, who took pity on her even though she came wrapped in the skin of a sea monster, scarcely resembling a human infant. Both the father and the mother were killed by the savages to avoid the burden of having to feed their prisoners; as for the little girl, she was taken to the shores of the Missouri River. She had a live sea serpent with her, of the sort those peoples use for food, which she still keeps with her even though it is dead.*)

According to Paganini's account the baby Azil was taken in by a more charitable tribe of Osage Indians and grew up on the banks of the Missouri³¹ until the day when a certain Captain Hunt, "il quale andava per scambiare coi popoli di quelle regioni, della polvere, del piombo, delle coperte di lana e del minio, con delle pelli d'orso, di castori, dei topi muschiati" ("*who went around trading powder, lead, woollen blankets and red lead with the peoples of those regions for the skins of bears, beavers, muskrats*"), was struck by the appearance of the little girl and asked the chief of the tribe to be allowed to take her off with him.³² In this way, Paganini goes on, Azil had the chance to go on a first voyage to France with the captain (who we understand to have been a fur trader who travelled regularly between the two continents); during the journey,

29 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 15. For the numerous incongruences concerning geographical locations, the Eskimos' fishing activities and the Osage settlements see Zavatti's article.

30 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 10-11.

31 Paganini informs us that, "ella conserva ancora il colorito olivastro perché essa abitò molto tempo i caldi paesi degli indiani selvaggi" ("*she still maintains her olive grey complexion because for many years she lived in the hot climates of the native Indians*"): *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 12-13.

32 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 12.

“essendosi Hunt fermato in questo regno [la Francia] oltre il termine prefittosi”, Azil was “battezzata nell’anno 1806”³³ (“since Hunt had remained in this kingdom [France] beyond the time intended”, Azil was “baptised in the year 1806.”) After recrossing the ocean the girl was taken to *Luigiana*³⁴ where she lived for several years in the company of the captain’s wife and was able to learn French, the language spoken in what was at the time the French colony of *Nouvelle Orléans*. In 1827, the chief of the Great Osage, Kihegashugah, asked Captain Hunt to take him to France with him on his next business trip, because he wished to visit this kingdom like one “de’ suoi avoli [che] era stato alla Corte di Luigi XIV” [...] “il capitano vi accondiscese, e la giovane Esquimaude fu parimente annoverata fra il numero di questi nuovi viaggiatori.”³⁵ (“of his ancestors [who] had been at the court of Louis XIV” [...] “The captain consented, and the young Eskimo woman was included in the party of these new voyagers.”) This is how Azil presented herself in 1827:

Questa giovane Esquimaude ha 23 anni; i suoi capelli sono castagni, le ciglia castagni – biondi, gli occhi bruni e grandi, il naso regolare, la bocca alquanto grande, le labbra prominenti, il mento largo, il viso ovale, il colorito bruno ed alquanto vaiorolato.³⁶ (*This young Eskimo woman is 23 years old; her hair is brown, her eyebrows chestnut, her eyes large and dark brown, her nose regular, her mouth quite large, her lips protruding, her chin broad, her face oval shaped, her complexion swarthy and much pox marked.*)

Having made the acquaintance of the two protagonists, Azil and her impresario, we can take a closer look at the contents of the pamphlet.

“L’istoria dei popoli chiamati Esquimaudi, è interessantissima e assai curiosa per noi altri Europei avidi di conoscere le particolarità straniere per paragonarle co’ nostri costumi inciviltà.”³⁷ (“The history of the people called Eskimos is very interesting and curious for us Europeans who are keen to know the peculiarities of foreigners in order to compare them with our own civilised customs.”) The first six pages of the pamphlet³⁸ are taken up with a summary ethnographic description of Eskimo customs, clearly designed to satisfy the curiosity of the impressionable European public. Paganini provides information on the territories inhabited by the Eskimos, their probable origins, physical constitution, eating habits and manner of survival. He includes details of their marriage rituals, clothing and the local fauna and flora. Zavatti was quick to point out that the information contained in Paganini’s text was mostly incorrect. If we compare it with one of the best known Italian ethno-anthropological works of the early 19th century, *Le Costume ancien et moderne* by Giulio Ferrario,³⁹ we see that Paganini’s ethnographic outline was indeed very imprecise.⁴⁰ Certainly, Paganini was

33 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 13.

34 What is now Louisiana.

35 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 13.

36 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 15.

37 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 5.

38 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 5-10.

39 J. Ferrario, *Le Costume ancien et moderne, ou Histoire du gouvernement, de la milice, de la religion, des arts, sciences et usages de tous les peuples anciens et modernes*, (Milano: impr. de l’éditeur, 1827).

40 Only the two physical descriptions coincide in some points.

not a “man of science”, and his account made no pretence to being scientific; the text itself said that it was merely intended to give information about Azil.⁴¹ Where did she come from? What does she eat? How does she dress? At what age will she marry? All these questions are answered in the six pages. What makes this information so sensational is the presence of a live specimen of an Eskimo, as Paganini points out several times.⁴²

The vocabulary is totally devoid of any negative connotations concerning the condition of the Eskimos. Like his contemporaries, Paganini views remote, exotic peoples through the lens of his own innate superiority. But in this case, the sense of superiority does not give rise to any denigration of the inferiority of the *Other*: the emphasis is on their innate simplicity. The fact that “gli Esquimaudi non conoscono alcuno dei vantaggi della civilizzazione, vivono ancora secondo la legge di natura”⁴³ (“*the Eskimos know none of the advantages of civilization, living still under the law of nature*”) is seen in the essential nature of their dress and food and the simplicity of their wedding rites: “fra tutti i popoli cogniti, niuno ve n’ha che sia sì semplice nella scelta di una moglie quanto gli Esquimaudi.”⁴⁴ (“*among all the known peoples there are none that have such a simple way of choosing a wife as the Eskimos.*”) The author praises the Eskimos’ skill and ingenuity, for example in facing up to the rigours of the climate and their environment. Thus they build boats which are particularly suited to the conditions: “s’egli incontra cammin facendo un campo di ghiaccio, ei prende sulle sue spalle la leggerissima sua nave, e si rimette in mare dopo aver superato l’ostacolo a piedi.”⁴⁵ (“*if he comes across an ice field, he hoists his light craft onto his shoulders and takes to the sea again after crossing the obstacle on foot.*”) This practicality is in no way detrimental to the security and comfort of this type of boat: in fact the Eskimo “vi sta assiso con pari sicurezza quanta ne sarebbe se stasse sopra un vascello che fosse in miglior modo fabbricato”⁴⁶ (“*sits in it just as safely as if he were in a better built vessel.*”) And again:

Gli Esquimaudi, per evitare gli effetti d’una grandissima luce, portano seco degli occhiali fatti con un piccolo asse di legno sottilissimo, forato con due fessure, a traverso delle quali essi distinguono gli oggetti, senza essere abbagliati dalla neve, che quasi tutto

41 Although, in view of the discipline and context within which we have undertaken this analysis, it is not essential to establish the sources Paganini used in providing his ethnographical summary, the question does nonetheless have a certain importance. Comparison with Ferrario’s text enables us to rule this out as a likely source. In the pamphlet Paganini cites the English explorer Captain William Edward Parry (1790-1855) as knowledgeable about Eskimos and Captain Samuel Hearne (1745-1792) as knowledgeable about the Indian tribes in Canada. However, the names of these two explorers are often incorrect: the Genoan edition has Parry and Stearne; the edition we indicate as the oldest, published in Le Havre, has Carry and Stearne; and the most recent, Torino 1843, Carry and Héarn. This suggests that Paganini did not pay any great attention to the successive editions, correcting what in the first can appear as a mere printing error. We believe that, far from being the product of painstaking and exhaustive preparatory studies, the ethnographical information was hastily put together from comparable contemporary publications that were conveniently to hand.

42 For example in the title of the paean, “Anacreontica in lode del conduttore Italiano della giovane viva” and in the picture caption, “L’Esquimaude vivante”.

43 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 6.

44 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 8.

45 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 7.

46 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*.

Panno ricopre quelle regioni.⁴⁷ (*To avoid the effect of the dazzling light, the Eskimos carry with them spectacles made of a very slender piece of wood with two slits in it, through which they can make out objects without being blinded by the snow which covers those regions almost the whole year round.*)

In Paganini's account the physical differences between Europeans and Eskimos are not so pronounced:

le donne particolarmente sono poco più poco meno come le nostre⁴⁸ [...] i lineamenti del volto allungati gli [al capitano Parry] hanno fatto credere che vi fosse stata qualche unione tra questi popoli selvatici e la razza dei Danesi o Scandinavi [...] le donne Esquimaudi avrebbero potuto essere credute per donne Europee bellissime.⁴⁹ (*the women in particular are more or less like our own [...] the elongated features made him [Captain Parry] think that there must have been some union between these savages and the Danish or Scandinavian peoples [...] the Eskimo women could be taken for particularly beautiful Europeans.*)

In addition, Paganini says of Azil that "in tutta la sua figura non vi è nulla che la renda spiacevole."⁵⁰ (*"in all her figure there is nothing to make her disagreeable."*)

A very different picture is given of the native Americans, who present the true characteristics of the savage. As was seen in the attack on the Eskimos, their brutality emerges in acts of gratuitous violence and their inability to comprehend the European's humane attitude to their victims. However, such brutality and violence are not presented as natural and permanent features of the North American natives, for the Indian is endowed with freedom of choice. Thus we encounter the chief who has the Eskimo prisoners put to death so as not to have to feed them – and one can imagine the resentment felt by Paganini's readers – but also the generous warrior who saves the infant Azil by entrusting her to the care of a more benevolent tribe.

The central part of the text⁵¹ tells Azil's story from the moment when a storm at sea cast her family up among the Osage Indians until her arrival in France. Dates and chronology are quite confused prior to the crossing, but as soon as she sets foot in Europe Azil seems to enter into a precise historical narrative which can be related to real events. Nonetheless, there is also an unexpected revelation. In 1827 six Indians of the Osage tribe did indeed arrive in France; they were received by King Charles X in the palace of Saint Cloud on 15 August, but Azil was not with them. For the moment we shall concentrate on the voyage of Kihgashugah and the other five Indians. Then we shall consider why Paganini combined the two stories and whether Azil was or was not present.

III. INTERLUDE: THE SIX OSAGE INDIANS

The account of this party of Indians shows all the features of many episodes, both previous and contemporary, in the history of human exhibitions. Their trip was widely reported in the newspapers of the day. They were received by numerous aristocratic families and by the King of France in person; they also showed

47 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato.*

48 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 5.

49 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 6.

50 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 15.

51 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 10-13.

themselves in public, and graced with their presence theatres and libraries in the cities they visited. Their stay in France gives a clear picture of the transition of the exhibition of otherness from an event behind closed doors – restricted to a prestigious élite – to a public spectacle, albeit not yet standardised as a mass phenomenon in the context of specific institutions, viz. the future universal and colonial exhibitions. This episode would merit a substantial treatment which would be out of place here; we can just offer a few general considerations before citing some excerpts from the contemporary press and comparing them with the account given by Paganini.

Obviously the newspapers gave a lot of space to the original customs of this striking group of exotic tourists; nonetheless, in the reports, as in Paganini's text, we find no derogatory or offensive labels or comments. The six Indians are described using a series of adjectives pertaining to the vocabulary of sensation and spectacle. The perception of otherness is precise and constant: the Indians are simply men and women who are different: simple-minded, ingenuous human beings who are nonetheless proud representatives of their race.

If on hearing the occasional anecdote the reader, like the "assemblée" gathered for the occasion, "ne put s'empêcher de sourire" ("could not suppress a smile") concerning the unfamiliarity of these savages with French etiquette;⁵² and if some observers sought to emphasise their ingenuity, "l'élégance des uniformes leur fait croire qu'ils ne voient que des *commandans*." ("the elegance of the uniforms convinces them that all the troops they see are commanding officers"), the newspapers were fulsome in their admiration for their costumes:

Nus jusqu'à la ceinture, ils portent aux bras de larges plaques en argent, l'une au haut du bras, l'autre près du poignet ; leur cou est orné d'un collier à plusieurs rangs de perles ; le milieu est garni d'une plaque en argent de forme ronde ; leur coiffure consiste en une pièce d'étoffe rouge, surmonté de plumes de différentes couleurs.⁵³
(Naked to the waist, they wear large silver plaques on their arms, one at the top and the other at the wrist; their necks are adorned with a necklace made up of several strings of beads; the middle one being adorned with a round silver plaque; their headdress consists in a piece of red material adorned with multi-coloured feathers.)

On several occasions attention is drawn to the positive aspects of their character:

Ils paient toutes leurs dépenses et paraissent fort généreux.⁵⁴ (They pay all their expenses and appear to be very generous.)

Ils sont très affables, et ils reçoivent sans marquer aucune impatience les nombreux visiteurs qui se succèdent pour les voir.⁵⁵ (They are very affable, and receive the stream of visitors wishing to see them without any sign of impatience.)

On a pu reconnaître que les Indiens s'étaient déjà familiarisés avec les usages de l'Europe et avec notre manière de vivre. Le vin de Madère et nos fruits ont paru être particulièrement de leur goût. Ils parlent et gesticulent avec vivacité. Un contentement parfait régnait sur leur physionomie, et leur santé paraît excellente.⁵⁶ (It was apparent that the Indians were already familiar with the customs in Europe and our way of living. Madeira wine

52 "Le constitutionnel", 14 August 1827.

53 "La Gazette de France", 14 August 1827.

54 "Le constitutionnel", 14 August 1827.

55 "La Gazette de France", 1 August 1827.

56 "Le moniteur universel", 20 August 1827.

and our fruits seemed to be particularly to their taste. They talk and gesticulate with vivacity. Their expressions showed perfect contentment, and their health appears to be excellent.)

In all the articles the correspondent never fails to report the crowds and the kindnesses that greeted the Indians: when invited to dinner by the foreign minister,

ces étrangères ont été l'objet des attentions les plus délicates. M. le baron de Danias avait bien voulu permettre que les employés attachés à son ministère, ainsi que d'autres personnes, assistassent à ce déjeuner. La salle et les pièces adjacentes en étaient complètement remplies.⁵⁷ (these foreigners were treated with the utmost consideration. M. le Baron de Danias was so kind as to permit the employees in his ministry, together with other people, to be present at this dinner. The hall and the adjacent room were completely full.)

At Rouen on August 9th,

ils ont été en calèche découverte à l'Hôtel de ville, où on leur avait préparé rafraîchissements dans le grand salon du premier, que remplissait en grand nombre des dames les plus marquantes de la société. De là ils ont monté visiter la musée, ainsi que la bibliothèque, et sont repartis comme ils étaient arrivés, en traversant le jardin public, au milieu d'une foule immense.⁵⁸ (they went in an open coach to the Hôtel de Ville, where a refreshment had been prepared in the grand salon, crowded with many of the foremost society women. From there they went up to visit the museum and the library, and left as they had come, crossing the public gardens amidst an immense crowd.)

Certainly some details concerning their habits may have given rise to indignation and fear but, even when revealing some of their most "terrible" customs, the journalist did not indulge in personal considerations. Everything seems to be recounted simply with a view to astonishing: "Kihégashugah ou le petit chef, prince du sang ; il s'est distingué dans plusieurs combats et a enlevé plusieurs chevelures à ses ennemis."⁵⁹ ("Kibegashugah or the little chief, prince of the blood; he has distinguished himself in several combats and secured the scalps of several of his enemies.") One comment accurately sums up the sense of this event: "Leur présence au milieu de nous est vraiment un spectacle extraordinaire et bien curieux."⁶⁰ ("Their presence in our midst is indeed an extraordinary and most curious spectacle.")

Paganini, who may have been among the numerous eye witnesses, was undoubtedly an attentive reader of the French press, as we can infer from the fact that his account of the stay of the Osage Indians in France is quite simply a *collage* of various newspaper articles:

Questi indiani arrivarono nel porto di Havre-di-Grazia, in Normandia, sopra la nave americana la Nuova England, e sotto la condotta del colonnello Delaunay; essi sbarcarono unitamente alla giovane Esquimaude il giorno 27 luglio 1827 in mezzo a una folla di cittadini e di popoli circostanti, accorsa per godere di uno spettacolo alquanto nuovo, altrettanto straordinario.⁶¹ (These Indians arrived in the port of Havre de

57 "Le moniteur universel", 20 August 1827.

58 "La Gazette de France", 12 August 1827.

59 "La Gazette de France", 4 August 1827.

60 "Le moniteur universel", 20 August 1827.

61 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 13-14.

Grâce, in Normandy, in the American vessel New England, led by Colonel Delannay; they disembarked with the young Eskimo woman on 27 July 1827 in the midst of a crowd of citizens and people from nearby who had come to enjoy a spectacle that was as novel as it was extraordinary.)

There is confirmation of their arrival in the “*Bulletin de Rouen, journal commercial et maritime*”,⁶² which on 27 July 1827 mentioned the American ship *New England* among the ships putting in to Le Havre. The dates and places given by Paganini correspond to those reported in the press; even the anecdote he recounts, concerning the journey undertaken by an ancestor of the Osage chief, features in the papers. There is only one element that does not coincide, and it is hardly a secondary detail, namely the presence of the young Eskimo woman: no newspaper report makes any mention of her, while Paganini includes her in the events in which the Indians were the protagonists, viz. his account of their presentation at court:

Essi furono quindi condotti nel salone di Marte. Il Re di Francia Carlo X sortendo dalla messa permise che questi stranieri gli fossero presentati, e nel medesimo tempo gli fu pure presentata una Giraffa viva. S.M. rispose graziosamente ai complimenti che il capo dell’Indiani gli indirizzò e finì con farli alcune interrogazioni su i costumi dei popoli dell’Indiani, non che degli Esquimaudi.⁶³ (*Then they were led into the Hall of Mars. After attending mass the King of France, Charles X, allowed these foreigners to be presented to him, and at the same time he was presented with a live Giraffe. His Majesty made a gracious reply to the compliments addressed to him by the Indian chief, and concluded making some enquiries into the customs of the Indian peoples, and also of the Eskimos.*)

IV. THE DEAL

We do not in fact have any evidence that Azil was present at the court of Charles X, and this detail appears to have been the invention of the impresario. In order to find out why we must return to the text of the pamphlet. After describing the Indians’ journey with Azil in their entourage, Paganini states that she was put into his charge by Captain Hunt himself. In some editions this took place in Paris, in others directly at Le Havre before they went to the capital. There are also discrepancies concerning what happened straight after the deal. In some versions Paganini claimed that he exhibited Azil in Paris, while others state that the impresario and the Eskimo woman left directly for Italy.⁶⁴ While these details are relatively

62 “Bulletin de Rouen, journal commercial et maritime, annonces légales et avis divers”, 192, (XXVI^e).

63 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 14. It is only from the second edition onwards, published in Genoa, that we find a description of Azil: “[...] presentando Azil [...] vestita con abiti ad uso della Nazione, cioè tutta coperta di pelo, come ora si fa vedere nei Gabinetti, portando seco delle armi, dei frutti, degli archi e delle frecce tutti oggetti stranieri non conosciuti all’Europa, e questi furono trovati nell’atto che fu fatta prigioniera sulle coste del Canada, e questi sono li spogli, che furono trovati a suo padre, che ora questi oggetti si mostrano al pubblico nei Gabinetti dove essa si fa vedere [...]”, (“[...] *presenting Azil* [...] dressed in the clothing customary to that Nation, that is, wholly covered in fur, as is now displayed in Cabinets, carrying weapons, fruits, bows and arrows, all foreign objects unknown in Europe, found as she was taken prisoner on the coast of Canada, and remains found with her father, such objects as are displayed to the public in the Cabinets where she is to be seen [...]”): *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, (Genova: Tipografia Fassola, undated), 12. This description is echoed in the pictures: in all of them Azil appears “coperta di pelo” (“*covered in fur*”), but only in the editions published in Vienna, Pesten, Turin and Graz “portando seco delle armi” (“*carrying weapons*”).

64 In the editions published in Vienna, Pesten, Cremona, Turin and Graz, Paganini says that he

insignificant, it is interesting to ask why the impresario felt the need to include Azil in the narrative of the six Osage Indians. What was Paganini's broader purpose in writing the pamphlet?

In the first part his goal is clear: to satisfy and indeed enhance the curiosity of spectators concerning the human specimen being exhibited, illustrating the customs of the tribe she was from. The next operation, consisting in combining the story of Azil with that of the six Indians, reflects another of the impresario's goals: to exploit the interest aroused by the visit of the Osages to France to lend veracity to his story, which begins just as the story of the six Indians finishes, or at least when it stops receiving daily coverage in the newspapers.

Azil was in all likelihood the object of a business transaction. We should not forget that Paganini was an impresario: his occupation consisted in exhibiting phenomena and curiosities from the world of nature. Yet there is no trace of payment or contracts in the pamphlet. Although it was a common and popular phenomenon, by the early years of the 19th century the exhibition of human beings had begun to attract criticism from those who saw in it an occult form of slavery. A famous example of this was the attack mounted by the British *African Society*, involving public opinion and a court case, on the owner of Saartjie Baartman, the celebrated Hottentot Venus who was exhibited in England and France in the years 1810 – 1814.⁶⁵ It thus comes as no surprise that Paganini makes no mention of any contract, and that Azil is presented as being fully consenting. The account of her journey in the company of the six Osage Indians in fact has a dual function: not only does it claim some of their fame for Azil but, more importantly, it makes the presence of Azil with Paganini more acceptable than any talk of a venal act of buying and selling. After being a protagonist of this fantastic voyage from America to the court of the King of France, taking in the salons of the aristocracy and the leading theatres, the young woman had been lucky enough to be put in the care of a magnanimous tutor who accepted responsibility for “della direzione e condotta di questa giovine in tutti i luoghi che avrebbe stimato convenienti, onde esporla alla pubblica curiosità.”⁶⁶ (“*the management and conduct of this young woman in all places he might consider opportune, so as to display her to the curiosity of the public.*”) It is no coincidence that this part of the pamphlet was clearly modified in subsequent editions of the text, in order to reinforce the idea of the girl's free will and allay any suspicion that she was being kept in semi-slavery. In the editions brought out in Cremona in 1840 and Turin in 1841 we read:

[...] della direzione e condotta dell'Esquimaude in tutti i luoghi ove giudicherebbe opportuno di mostrarla al Pubblico, sotto condizione che questa giovine non sarebbe mai trattata come schiava, e che godrebbe della libertà che desiderasse: ben inteso però che il sig. Paganini n'è responsabile per tutto il tempo che la giovine Esquimaude è contenta di farsi vedere.⁶⁷ ([...] *the management and conduct of this young woman in all places*

organized an exhibition of Azil in Paris, in Boulevard du Temple (see note 14), whereas in the editions published in Genoa and Ferrara he says that Captain Hunt exhibited Azil in the French capital.

65 G. Boëtsch & P. Blanchard, “La Vénus hottentote ou la naissance d'un ‘phénomène’”, *Zoos Humains et exhibitions coloniales*, 96-97.

66 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, 15.

67 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, (Cremona: 1840), 11-12; (Torino: 1841), 10.

he might consider opportune to display her to the curiosity of the public, on condition that this young woman would never be treated as a slave, and would enjoy all the freedom she wished: it being quite clear, however, that Sig. Paganini is responsible for her for as long as the young Eskimo is happy to let herself be observed.)

Currently we are unable to say whether Paganini – like the manager of the Hottentot Venus – was the object of criticisms, pressure or complaints. What is clear is that, following numerous exhibitions, Azil’s impresario felt it necessary to emphasise that the young woman was not a slave and enjoyed all the freedom she desired.

It is the last part of the text that clarifies the function of the pamphlet in full. Unlike the previous parts, characterised by minor variants, the final section underwent significant modifications. This enables us to establish the chronology of the successive editions⁶⁸ and thereby reconstruct the course of Paganini and Azil. The successive exhibitions of Azil were accompanied by re-editions of the pamphlet, and the location of the edition gives us tangible evidence of the places visited on their tour. In some editions, furthermore, the author states explicitly that spectators could procure the pamphlet recounting Azil’s story, revealing the economic aspect of the enterprise: we know that it was on sale during the exhibition,⁶⁹ probably together with an entry ticket, although we have found no evidence of the latter.

The text in the pamphlet is prefaced by an engraving with a portrait of Azil and completed by verses (an “anacreontic”).⁷⁰ While neither is of any real artistic merit, they both merit attention. The picture and verses enrich the description of Azil with elements that include her in that particular family of human otherness, as it occurs in European culture, represented by good and noble savages.⁷¹ In the poem Azil is referred to as a “selvaggia modesta, casta e saggia” (“*modest, chaste and wise savage*”), who arouses in the spectator feelings of love and compassion, as the product of an all powerful nature capable of surprising mankind with the variety of its creatures. She testifies to the fact that, even amidst a hostile nature of perennial snow and episodes of barbarianism, one can find a creature who is fully endowed with humanity. Through Azil “una nazione selvaggia rende in se stessa nota” (“*a savage nation reveals itself*”): the animal skins enveloping her body demonstrate the primitivism of her fellows, and yet Azil distinguishes herself for the ingenuousness that “a lei rifulge in volto.” (“*shines out of her face.*”) She has an “mirabile” (“*admirable*”) dress; she carries around “ignoti” (“*unknown*”) specimens of fruit; she has a “lancia folgorante” (“*devastating spear*”); and she is honoured by all and sundry in France and Italy. From the third edition the idea that the young Eskimo offers a pure image of

68 We can recall that not all the editions are dated.

69 “E chi bramassero la sua Istoria si vende nel suddetto Gabinetto” (“*And for anyone eager to know her story, it is sold in the aforesaid Cabinet*”): *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, (Vienna: 1834), 13; (Pesten: 1836), 14; (Graz: 1843), 13. “On pourra se procurer, au salon, l’histoire de cette jeune Esquimaude, en allemand, en italien, en français, et en Polonais” (“*In the salon one can obtain the story of this young Eskimo woman in German, Italian, French and Polish*”): *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, (Pesten : 1836), 16.

70 The anacreontic does not figure in the first edition published in Le Havre; in the second and third, published respectively in Genoa and Ferrara, it is in Italian; in the subsequent editions, it appears in the language of the pamphlet and also in Italian and French.

71 As we shall see, however, not all the specimens were treated in the same manner.

mankind's natural condition is clearly used for propaganda purposes, inviting the public to make the most of this sight: "Tutto interessa, appelli/A contemplar la figlia/Che la natura mostravi/Qual nuova meraviglia"⁷² ("All is of interest, I urge you/To contemplate the maiden/Which nature is displaying/As a newfound wonder".)

V. THE TOUR

By combining the information Paganini gives in the last part of the text with the place and date of the editions of the pamphlet, it is possible to reconstruct the itinerary of the tour, even though it has not always been possible to ascertain the actual presence of the Eskimo, either in the exhibition venues or in the cities in which the pamphlet was published. We cannot rule out the possibility that some of the places mentioned in the text which have no counterpart in the series of editions we have identified may have been deliberately added by the author to enhance the scope of his enterprise.

The presence of Paganini and Azil is attested at Le Havre by the first edition, published there, and it was presumably here that the Eskimo was given to Paganini. Thereafter the first stage in the tour appears to have been Caen, "Dipartimento di Calvados in Normandia come rilevasi da attestati presso di se esistenti"⁷³ ("Department of Calvados in Normandy as results from attestations in his possession.") After crossing from France into the Kingdom of Sardinia the impresario was able to exhibit the Eskimo in Turin, where they arrived on 17 November 1828.

Azil fu esposta in quell'occasione in un Gabinetto in contrada Po' dirimpetto il Teatro sotterra, dove ha soggiornato fino al giorno 17 Dicembre detto anno. Indi si diresse a Genova colla speranza di ritrovare S. M. Carlo Felice Re Sardo, dove che la dimora una porzione dell'anno; ma datasi la circostanza, al suo arrivo in Genova S. M. era partito.⁷⁴Cogliendo dunque di questa occasione, che sua Maestà Maria Teresa dimorante in Genova, fu presentata la sopraindicata Giovane il giorno 30 Dicembre 1828 dove fu accolta di vera clemenza. In seguito Azil fu presentata a S. M. Maria Luigia Arciduchessa di Parma il 16 aprile 1829,⁷⁵come pure a Sua Altezza Imperiale il Duca di Modena il giorno 18 aprile 1829 che si è compiaciuto di accoglierla con tutta soddisfazione rimarcando minutamente la sua semplicità e connotati che la distinguono.⁷⁶ (*On this occasion Azil was exhibited in a Cabinet in the Po' quarter, opposite the Teatro sotterra, where she stayed until 17 December. Then she set off for Genova in the hope of encountering H. M. Carlo Felice King of Sardinia, and stayed there for part of the year; but it so happened that H. M. had left when she arrived in Genova. Taking advantage of the fact that Her*

72 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, (Vienna: 1834), 13; (Pesten: 1836), 1; (Cremona: 1840), page unnumbered; (Torino: 1841), 14; (Graz: 1843), 13.

73 "Dipartimento di Calvados in Normandia come rilevasi da attestati presso di se esistenti" : *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, Genova and subsequent editions.

74 The circumstance was the anniversary of the death of King Vittorio Emanuele I; the celebrations were held in Turin, the capital of the kingdom, where the king had presumably gone.

75 The presence of Paganini is attested in Parma on 16 April 1829. As Zavatti duly noted, "in the Gazzetta di Parma of Saturday 18 April 1829 under Varietà one reads: 'Parma 16 aprile. Il Viaggiatore signor Vincenzo Paganini ha ieri sera avuto l'onore di presentare a S.M. una giovane Esquimese di anni 23, vestita nel suo naturale costume' (*Parma 16 April. The Traveller Signor Vincenzo Paganini had the honour yesterday evening to present to H.M. a young Eskimo woman aged 23, dressed in her natural costume*") : Zavatti, *Un rarissimo opuscolo genovese*, 209.

76 *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, Genova and subsequent editions.

Majesty Maria Teresa was living in Genova, the above-mentioned young woman was presented on 30 December 1828, and received most gracefully. Thereafter Azil was presented to H. M. Maria Luigia Archiduchess of Parma on 16 April 1829, as also to His Imperial Highness the Duke of Modena on 18 April 1829, who was good enough to receive her with great satisfaction, taking the greatest interest in her simplicity and the features that distinguish her.)

This is how the second and third editions end, published respectively in Ferrara and Genoa.

Paganini pursued his tour in the direction of the Habsburg Empire, with one important stop at the Teatro Vendramin San Luca in Venice. Now known as the Teatro Goldoni, this theatre was founded in 1622 and was made famous by Carlo Goldoni. In 1830 it enjoyed a considerable reputation in the cultural life of the city and beyond; in 1826 it became the first theatre in Italy to have gas lighting. On the evening of Tuesday 23 February 1830 the playbill announced *Le avventure di Azil giovane esquimese del Groenland* (*The adventures of Azil, a young Eskimo woman from Greenland*). The poster for the show and a four-page libretto are conserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The latter features the engraving from the frontispiece of the pamphlet on the front, and the following notice on page two:

SIGNORE:

Se la viva Giovane Esquimese degli abitanti del Mar gelato ammirabile si rende nei Gabinetti quasi fenomeno della natura deve tale considerarsi nelle sue stravaganze e vicende.

Il Viaggiatore Italiano che seco la conduce, per dar campo alla curiosità degli spettatori di conoscerla sotto questo secondo aspetto, che assai più gradito si rende della semplice osservazione in una stanza, ha dato alla compagnia una drammatica production nella quale la stessa Giovane Esquimese comparirà sulla scena vestita de' suoi costumi facendo anche vedere al public molti oggetti curiosi propri del clima che la vidde nascere.

LADIES:

If the living Eskimo young woman from the inhabitants of the wonderful Frozen Sea visits Cabinets as a phenomenon of nature, this is surely how she is to be considered in all her extravagant attributes and deeds.

The Italian Traveller who takes her around with him to cater for the curiosity of spectators wishing to become acquainted with her in this latter aspect, in a much more appealing fashion than mere observation in a room, has supplied the company with a dramatic production in which the Young Eskimo appears in person on stage, clothed in her own costumes and showing the public many curious objects pertaining to the climate where she was born.)

Following a résumé of the pamphlet, as outlined above, the libretto goes on:

Dagli avvenimenti strani a cui fu soggetta questa Giovane esquimese fu tratta adunque una Rappresentazione storica che esposta fu in tutte le principali Scene d'Italia, come Milano, Genova, Torino, Bologna ec.

A seguire perché l'intrattenimento sia completo CIO' CHE PIACE ALLE DONNE

Se riesce interessante il vedere cotesta Giovane in un Gabinetto offerto alla vista dello Spettatore, come oggetto di curiosità, quanto non sarà per essere maggiore l'interesse per conoscere la di Lei Storia, non che l'avere un'idea dei costumi del Groenland, e delle altre Terre da Essa precorse.

I Capi Comici hanno aderito di cedere in tal sera quei Attori necessari per tal produzione, onde il Pubblico possa godere di questo nuovo trattenimento e contribuire al vantaggio di questa Giovane Selvaggia.

Il costo del biglietto è di 75 centesimi.

(From the strange events that befell this young Eskimo woman a Historical Play was devised which has been given on all the leading Stages in Italy, including Milano, Genova, Torino, Bologna etc.

Hereafter why the entertainment is entirely WHAT LADIES WILL ENJOY

If it is interesting to see this young woman in a Cabinet, put on view for the Spectator as an object of curiosity, how much more interesting will it be to learn her History and gain an idea of the customs of Greenland and the other lands she has travelled.

The Managers have agreed to make available for this evening the Actors required for the production, so that the Public can enjoy this new entertainment and make a contribution to the wellbeing of this Young Savage.

The cost of the ticket is 75 cents.)

A copy of the text of the show, published in Udine in 1837, is conserved in the library of Ghent in Belgium. This shows that Udine was another city on the itinerary and venue for a further performance. But prior to Udine Paganini and Azil had been to Vienna in 1834 and Pesten in 1836. Later we know that they were in Cremona in 1840, Turin in 1841 and lastly Graz in 1843. The edition of the pamphlet in French, published in Turin in 1841, testifies to this long tour through the heart of Europe:

[...] Elle fut ensuite présentée à la cour du duc palatin d'Hongrie, au duc de Cambridge, vice-roi de Hanovre, au grand-duc de Hesse-Darmstadt, et à sa famille, ainsi qu'à différents autres princes d'Allemagne. Tous ces hauts personnages admirèrent sa simplicité native, et ses autres qualités aimables. Cette jeune Esquimaude est âgée de 30 ans [...].⁷⁷ ([...] *Then she was presented at the court of the Palatine Duke of Hungary, the Duke of Cambridge, the Viceroy of Hanover, the Grand-Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt and his family, as well as various other princes in Germany. All these distinguished personalities admired her native simplicity and other agreeable qualities. This young Eskimo woman is aged 30 [...].*)

VI. CONCLUSIONS

We wish to emphasise two aspects of this tour; in the first place the exhibition's geographical extent. On leaving France, Paganini and Azil travelled all over northern Italy and through some of the most important cities of the Habsburg empire, including the capital Vienna. At that time Italy was divided up into different political entities. This political and territorial fragmentation obviously went hand in hand with the permeable nature of state borders in terms of cultural and spectacular phenomenon such as the exhibition of human otherness which, in the first half of the 19th century, also exerted its appeal in pre-unitary Italy, albeit to a lesser extent than in the rest of Europe.

Moreover, the story of Azil makes a very interesting addition to the studies that have recently established the dimensions of the ethno-anthropological phenomenon of the exhibition of otherness. It emerges that in the Kingdom of Italy, above all in the liberal and fascist periods, this phenomenon was quite considerable and can take its place in the broader panorama of ethno-exhibitions featuring living human beings in Europe during the colonial and imperialist age.⁷⁸ The episode we have reconstructed

⁷⁷ *Notizie curiose ed interessanti sugli abitanti del Mar Gelato*, (Torino: 1841), 11; original version in French.

⁷⁸ We can recall the main works on this topic: G. Abbattista, "Africains en exposition (Italie XIX^e siècle) entre racialisme, spectaculaire et humanitarisme", eds. G. Abbattista e R. Minuti, *Le problème de l'altérité dans la culture européenne*, (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2006); Abbattista, "Gli interessi antropologici di Carlo Marchesetti", eds. G. Bandelli e Montagnari Kokelj, *Carlo Marchesetti e i Castellieri 1903-2003*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, (Trieste: Editreg, 2005); Abbattista, "Torino 1884: Africani in mostra", *Contemporanea*, 73, (2004); Abbattista, "La rappresentazione dell'altro", eds. U. Levra e R. Rocca, *Le esposizioni torinesi, 1805-1911. Specchio del progresso e macchina del consenso*, (Torino: Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, 2003); N. Labanca, "Le passé colonial et le présent de l'immigration dans l'Italie contemporaine", *Migrations société*, 81-82, (2002); Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione*

certainly does not suffice to be able to state that the exhibition of living human beings was common practice in Italy in the first half of the 19th century, but it does show how instances that originated in other European nations, where spectacles of this kind were more familiar, could readily find fortune in Italy.

The state of the documentation concerning our case study does not enable us to respond to all the questions that arise in such enquiries:⁷⁹ what were the reactions of the public, how was the young Eskimo woman treated what comments greeted the exhibition? What were the material conditions of her stay, in terms of environment, climate, food, hygiene, health, physical contact with both paying spectators and the more privileged observers? What sort of relationship grew up among the actors, promoters and spectators when the exhibition took to the stage?⁸⁰ And lastly, what were the young woman's emotional and psychological reactions?

Our reconstruction of Azil's long European tour, made possible by the pamphlet that accompanied its successive stages, nonetheless enables us to highlight one significant aspect in relation to the more general phenomenon of ethno-exhibitions. Azil was put on show at just about the same time as Saartjie Baartman,⁸¹ the event that has come to symbolise the "temps des exhibitions de peuples exotiques de sauvages et d'indigènes qui viendront en Europe entre 1874 et 1940 distraire et surtout éduquer de vastes foules."⁸² ("time of the exhibitions of exotic peoples of savages and indigenous tribes who came to Europe between 1874 and 1940 to entertain and above all educate vast crowds.") The Hottentot Venus gave rise to a particular modality in the process of the discovery of the *Other*: put on display because she was exotic, this Venus drew both scientists and the public at large: "elle était la bête curieuse emblématique d'un continent et d'une race"⁸³ ("the curious creature that was emblematic of a continent and a race.") There was already a considerable body of scientific literature on the Hottentot population, and following the studies carried out on the body of Saartjie Baartman both alive and after her death, it expanded enormously:

objets de fascination, ces Hottentots étaient tout désignés pour remplir à la fois la fonction de chaînon manquant et fournir les preuves des possibilités de dégénérescence au sein de l'espèce humaine. Une sorte de résidu des temps préhistoriques.⁸⁴ (*objects of fascination, these Hottentots had all the requisites for both supplying the missing link and providing proof of the possible degeneration in the condition of the human race. A sort of relic from prehistoric times.*)

In the modalities and language used, the exhibition of the Venus was imbued with these convictions: Saartjie Baartman was presented with an emphasis on her kinship with the animal world – the "missing link" in evolution – and her phenomenal

coloniales Italiana, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002) ; Labanca, *L'Africa in vetrina. Storie di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia*, (Treviso: Pagus Edizioni, 1992).

⁷⁹ We here partially echo the questions posed by Abbattista at the end of his article *Dagli Ottentotti agli Assabesi*.

⁸⁰ Abbattista, *Dagli Ottentotti agli Assabesi*.

⁸¹ Hottentot Venus we have mentioned; as in the case of Azil, the 'Hottentot Venus' was a stage name given to Saartjie Baartman by her owner.

⁸² Boëtsch & Blanchard, *La Vénus hottentote*, 96.

⁸³ Boëtsch & Blanchard, *La Vénus hottentote*, 96.

⁸⁴ Boëtsch & Blanchard, *La Vénus hottentote*, 95.

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physical features alluding to the sexual sphere. For this reason she was subject to various forms of reification, and in general her reception had marked racist connotations. From what we can learn from the available documentation, the case of Azil is not strictly comparable. There is no doubt that the exhibition of *the Other* derives from the particular viewpoint adopted, fundamentally ethnocentric and nurtured by a specific image-making which assigns the exotic creature to the realm of nature and thus extraneous to European civilization. All these considerations underlie the exhibition of Azil. But as we have seen, this exhibition did not actually involve the vocabulary of racial difference, inferiority or bestiality. Even though the available documentation cannot be considered to be complete, we can say that Paganini's presentation of Azil showed no explicit racial connotations. True to his calling as impresario, he sought to appeal to the public's curiosity, but the terms he employed to do so show that he was more intent on encouraging Europeans to come and observe the young Eskimo woman than on highlighting her extraordinary otherness.