

Alberto Mario Cirese

"If I think about the beginnings of my cultural itinerary, I would mention my father, the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris, and the socialist peasants of the Rieti plain."

Alberto Mario Cirese was born in Avezzano in 1921. He studied at Campobasso, Rieti and Rome, taking his degree in the History of Popular Traditions with Paolo Toschi. In this discipline he first obtained an adjunct position (1956), and then a regular teaching assignment (1957-1961), and finally the chairmanship (1961-1971) at the University of Cagliari.

Cirese continued his academic career by moving on to teach Cultural anthropology at the University of Siena (1971-1973), and then at Rome (1973-1992), where he was also the first coordinator of the doctorate of research program in Ethno-anthropological Sciences (1988-1993). In 1997 he retired. He is now Professor Emeritus of the University of Rome 'La Sapienza'.

He has recognized for himself no less than five homes -- places of affection and work -- that compete to make up his identity: that of his birth in the Marsica region of the Abruzzi, that of the Molise of his father, that of the Sabina in Latium, that of Sardinia, and finally that of Mexico where he spent intense study and teaching sojourns in Mexico City, Colima, and Toluca.

To the years before his university career date his encounter with Raffaele Pettazzoni at the school of Ethnological Sciences at the University of Rome, a sojourn for study at the Museum of Man in Paris, and folklore and folk music fieldwork activities. This research, some of which in collaboration with Diego Carpitella, was carried out in the Molise and Sabina areas, partially under the auspices of the National Center for the Study of Popular Music (Centro Nazionale Studi di Musica Popolare), and in part for the journal "La Lapa," which Cirese edited along with his father Eugenio, who was the editor of collections of Sabine and Molisano folk poetry and the author of volumes of dialect verse.

An examination of the distinctive writings of Alberto Cirese can help discern some of the research themes to which he dedicated himself.

Certainly we have in Cirese a historian of scholarship. Taking up and innovating upon the tradition begun after the war by Giuseppe Cocchiara, Cirese contributed review articles, reconstructions of local histories (Molise, Sardinia), studies on specific themes (his studies of folk poetry), not to mention numerous contributions on individual scholars, collectors, and authors, to Italian folklore studies.

It is no accident that in his writings one finds themes leading toward a history of Italian intellectuals during the last two centuries. Another of his interests, pursued especially with regard to the circulation of texts, concerns the diffusion of cultural information, and the relationships between educated people and non-educated people, that is, between hegemonous and subaltern culture. In this case, the closest theoretical comparisons can be made with the positions of Giuseppe Vidossi, Vittorio Santoli and Antonio Gramsci.

Cirese did not study questions of "popular literature" (folkloric texts, written or not, produced for, or by, a popular audience and therefore understood and used by them) only in historical, philological, or class terms. They were also prime territory for the study of forms and structures and the creation of models. For this kind of work, Propp and his *Morphology of the Folktale*, and Lévi-Strauss and his

Elementary Structures of Kinship, were among the seminal figures Cirese discussed and elaborated upon in a dialog with semiotics and logic. He made experiments in formal analysis and modeling that took as their subjects kinship relations and proverbs, or ideological constructions and traditional metrical forms, but always working carefully on circumscribed objects of study and with clearly defined documentary corpuses.

Underlying his interest in these methodologies was the idea that both comparison among cultural facts, and modeling carried out based upon them using abstract metalanguages, could return an idea of a world of people united at a deep level by common membership in a single species -unity and membership not only of a biological nature. Cirese did not want to give up upon the theme of unity of mind and human experience, already present in Tylor, in Frazer and in Lévi-Strauss, hoping to recapture for anthropology the possibility of the study of universals alongside that of differences, and of the consideration of the Other, not as separate Self, but of an Other Self.

Cirese accompanied his predilection for logical reckoning of the form of possible worlds with the systematic use of the computer. Dating between the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s were his computer based experiment in the analysis of a group of texts from the Barbi collection, the beginning of his collaboration with the National University Center for Electronic Calculation at Pisa (Centro Nazionale Universitario di Calcolo Elettronico di Pisa) in a project to create a computerized folklore catalog, and his analysis with the computer of popular poetic texts published by Niccolò Tommaseo. The first versions of programs Cirese himself wrote for the analysis of kinship relationships date from the 80s.

There remains to be mentioned at least one other of the areas of Cirese's work, one in which the computer saw ample use: the census, cataloging, classification and conservation of the folkloric heritage. Cirese concerned himself with this both in theoretical terms - writing, for example, about peasant and folklore museology - and in practical terms - to mention only the Sardinian Folklore Inventory and Atlas, begun during the period of teaching in Cagliari, and work conducted between 1968 and 1975 with the National Recording Library (Discoteca di Stato), which led a large group of researchers to the systematic discovery and cataloging of an ample body of non-sung oral tradition from all Italian regions.

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