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***Impressioni d'America:*
Italia->America; Italians;
Americans;
ItalianAmericans;
Italians>I<Americans
Giacosa's Voyage of
Discovery of Self/Other**

Ben Lawton

Part One—*FROM OPERATION DESERT STORM TO THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND: Literature, Voyage, Quest*

During the Spring of 1991, my wife, Lorraine, and I had the questionable privilege and unquestionable displeasure of participating in the first postmodern war.¹ Life in the Arabian desert is not particularly enjoyable in the best of circumstances. While wearing a MOPP suit, an M-17 mask, a kevlar helmet, and an LBE,² with temperatures hovering around 120 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and dropping below freezing at night, with SCUDs popping overhead and terrorists lurking behind the dunes,³ it was downright unpleasant. In these less than paradisaical conditions, a double miracle occurred: We received a letter from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. The very fact that we received the letter at all constituted the first miracle. During the first months, when Operation Desert Storm was the hottest show on tv, every student in every class in every grade school in

the US wrote at least one letter "To Any Soldier." The result was a disaster of epic proportions. While we were desperately trying to get water, food, ammunition, and fuel to our forward deployed troops, we were suddenly overwhelmed by tons of mail. We didn't have enough mail handlers to separate the generic "any soldier" mail from that intended for specific individuals. We didn't have enough trucks to deliver it. Frequently, we simply didn't know where to send it. Units moved with disconcerting frequency from cities to villages, to log bases,⁴ to map coordinates in the desert. Inevitably, much mail simply sat on the tarmac of various airfields alternately baking and getting soaked.

The contents of the letter constituted the second miracle. It invited us to participate in a conference on *Literature, Voyage, and Quest*, to be held in Auckland, New Zealand, in July, 1992. Nothing, except an airplane ticket out of the Persian Gulf area immediately, could have come at a more opportune time or have been more perfectly antipodal to our existence there. Images of cool, rushing waters, towering snowy peaks, and green valleys flooded our minds. In the midst of chaos, violence, and balletic bureaucratic power struggles that would have put Louis XIV to shame, the pull of academia—which in our by then deranged fantasies we remembered as detached, serene, and contemplative—was irresistible. But, what were we to write about?

When we were suddenly jerked out of our normal existences by the midnight "Roaring Bull" message,⁵ we had been compelled to drop everything and report for duty. We had no idea how long we would be stuck in the desert. Our active component Commanding General was demanding that we, Reserve soldiers, be under his command for the duration or two years—whichever was longer. Knowing the Army, we assumed that our lives would be characterized by the usual bureaucratic inefficiency predicated on the availability of more bodies than brains. "Hurry up and wait" would be the order of the day, and our lives would consist of the usual mix of long hours of boredom interspersed with instants of sheer terror. To avoid complete brain death, and to remain, however marginally, involved in Italian studies, we took with us a copy of Giuseppe Giacosa's *Impressioni d'America*, a book which we had been thinking of translating for several years.⁶ As a result, the topic of our paper seemed self-evident and inevitable: We would speak of Giacosa's impressions of America.⁷ We weren't terribly worried about what we would say; the dream of New Zealand was more than enough to sustain our efforts.

What follows is an elaboration and a condensation of our work. The reflections which it engendered seem appropriate in this context. Giacosa's *Impressioni d'America* is one of the first records of the various phases of the Italian/American experience, from that of the most recent "greenhorn," fresh off the boat, to that of assimilated individuals who have been in America so long that they have forgotten everything about Italy but the tales about its proverbial beauty. It is also a reflexive work, one in which the author's comfortable assumptions concerning self and otherness are suddenly and completely subverted.

Part Two—*I'M THE OTHER? I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE OTHER:
GIACOSA'S DISCOVERY OF SELF/OTHER IN AMERICA.*

Literature, Voyage and Quest. The names of conferences are interesting in many ways and for many reasons. At times they establish the speakers' agendas. At others, they cause the speakers to reconsider what they had planned to say, and to recast their own essays from entirely different perspectives. Given the title of the conference sponsored by the University of Auckland, *Literature, Voyage, and Quest*, I titled my paper, somewhat glibly, I must confess, "I'm the Other? I Thought You Were the Other: Giacosa's Discovery of Self/Other in America." By and large I knew what I meant to say, but as I reread the title of the conference, a couple or three problems occurred to me. First, I am accustomed to speaking at Italian studies conferences where I feel free to assume that virtually everyone will at least recognize the name Giacosa. Second, I would be discussing a work, *Impressioni d'America*, which is virtually unknown on either side of the Atlantic and, presumably, equally, if not more so, in the middle of the Pacific. Third, the Conference title spoke of Quest, while mine dared mention Discovery. I felt, therefore, that it was imperative to dispose of these which might have been problems in my mind only.

1. What—as my students would say—is a Giacosa? Giuseppe Giacosa was born in Ivrea, in the foothills of the Aosta Valley Alps, on October 21, 1847. He studied law at the University of Turin, but quickly turned to literature after his first disastrous appearance in court. By 1891 he was a well-known dramatist. An early exponent of naturalism in Italy, he wrote several collections of short stories and sketches of his native Val d'Aosta, and numerous articles for newspapers and magazines. In the United States,

he is almost exclusively remembered as the co-writer of the librettos of Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madame Butterfly*.

2. What is/are his *Impressioni d'America* (*Impressions of America*)? At 10:00 am on a clear October morning in 1891, the luxury liner *Le Bretagne* left Le Havre headed for the United States. Suddenly, the unreliable North Atlantic weather changed. The passengers, terrified of the stormy seas and incapacitated by seasickness, took refuge in their cabins. Only one man continued to appear on deck and eat regularly at the Captain's table. His considerable girth and long flowing beard gave him an air of benevolent solemnity. But his dark eyes missed nothing. This was Giuseppe Giacosa, as described by Giuseppe Giacosa, already hard at work on *Impressioni d'America*, a little-known book which is one of the more important records of the Italian perception of the United States towards the end of the last century.

3. What is the difference between Quest and Discovery? The title of the Auckland conference is interesting because it reveals how completely politically sensitized we, in the academic community, have become. Not too many years ago this conference might have been about Literature, Voyage, and Discovery. After all, it is, or should be, lapalissian that if we were to be discussing Literature and Voyage in 1992, we would be, however obliquely, paying homage to Columbus's discovery of America. Oops. I just misspoke myself. Clearly none of the above is, in the deathless prose of the Nixon White House, "operational" any longer. In one sentence I mentioned Columbus (a dead, white, imperialist, colonialist male), discovery (a white, male, racist, imperialist, colonialist concept if ever there was one), and America (the culmination of the white male imperialist, colonialist, sexist, racist project)—three blasphemies in one. Or perhaps four, if we wish to pile on criticism of the signifier "America" to that of the signified. At the very least my language was politically incorrect. Ouch. Mentioning PC is not PC. Oh well. Perhaps the reader should simply consider everything I write here as being permanently under provisional or—more to the point, perhaps—potential erasure.

Trying to write or say anything that doesn't set off the hair-trigger sensitivities of the proponents of diversity and multiculturalism these days is almost as dangerous as being an agnostic during the Inquisition, or taking a stroll along Kuwait City's well-mined beaches. It's a dirty, dangerous job, but sometimes a man has to do what a man has to do. Joke, or complete lack of sensitivity? Does the former inevitably imply the latter? Is the slap in the

face of public taste artistic and revolutionary only when it is the other fellows' cows (or bulls, if you prefer) that are being gored? French revolutions always seem to lead to "terror" and mindless excesses—or should I say headless excesses, excesses which result in the decapitation—literal and metaphorical—of the class enemy. If we must go to the barricades (or "hit the mattresses"), and as intellectuals I don't see what other choice we have, I would recommend that we follow an Italian example and join Pasolini on the revolutionary artist's sadomasochistic firing line—rejecting, on the one side, the middle-class conventions and, on the other, the avant-garde POW camp which the erstwhile prisoners programmatically transform into a ghetto in which they all too willingly reside.⁸

My captatio benevolentiae (or was it *malevolentia* which was *capta*) may seem cute or be obnoxious, but it is not completely irrelevant. We have arrived at the point where—whether we are aware of it or not—there is a virtual interface between humanities and hard sciences. Chaos theories and the rejection of the notion that the mind exists, argue rather persuasively that the individual does not exist, that communication is impossible, and that there is nothing we can actually do intentionally to affect our world positively. In short, these notions would appear completely to undermine all master narratives and confirm the meaninglessness and futility of our existences—always assuming that we do in fact exist and that what we think we are experiencing and/or thinking are not merely biochemical reactions within our brains. If they exist. If we exist. If anything, including this text, exists.

Thus, I find it odd, when observing the contrast between the hard sciences on the one hand, and the humanities and social sciences on the other, that, while scientists have far more concrete evidence to support their pessimism, they are all, with varying degrees of conscious intent, actively engaged in an ongoing search for meaning and order, while we in the humanities seem to delight in what has been described as a postmodern bemoaning of the demise of literature, communication, values, and the self. It strikes me as somewhat ironic that we, the participants in the conference on "Literature, Voyage, and Quest," were, in other words, both physically (in New Zealand), and conceptually (in the post-modern era), at the antipodes of Columbus.

With Columbus's discovery of America, we have the beginning of the modern era. But—it is important to remember—

Columbus was still operating fully within the middle ages, the pre-modern era of faith and certainty. It was an age in which “nomina” were truly considered to be “substantia rerum”; an age in which the wrong word could get you hanged, drawn, quartered, and roasted in fairly rapid succession. Objectively. Subjectively, I am sure the perception of the passage of time was entirely different. It was a world that spoke of discovery, a world in which the perspective was solely that of Europeans. From their perspective, the inhabitants of the discovered worlds were perceived as the Other, and as such available for plunder, enslavement, rape, religious conversion, salvation, and extermination.

As the new worlds began to be populated by Europeans, the latter maintained their medieval perspectives. They continued to see themselves as self and the original inhabitants as the other. At the same time, however, modernity began to creep in, albeit slowly. The soon-to-become-former Europeans thought they were part of the old world—they saw themselves as British, German, French, Spanish, Italian, etc., but at the same time they also began to perceive themselves as different, if only because they were treated as the other by the mother country. Eventually, of course, this conceptual revolution was followed by politico-military revolutions, the American one preeminent among them.

With this first concrete gesture of establishment of self in the “New World” (not all the old world conceptual and linguistic baggage had/has been left behind), begins the modern era of America. And by modern here I mean a process of perception of self as different and a consequent process of introspection. The eternal verities—the theocentric, Ptolemaic universe, the authority of the Church, the entire hierarchical medieval social system—that had begun to crumble in so many ways around the time of the discovery of America were no more. In these new lands not only did different religions contend (not really a novelty—see the conflict between Christianity and Islam, and later between Catholicism and Protestantism), but, by and large—surprising though it must have seemed—they coexisted peacefully (for this there had not been much precedent). However, and this was absolutely unprecedented, in these new lands the rejection of external validation and authority was so complete that they institutionalized that which from the perspective of true believers must be the ultimate blasphemy, freedom of religion.

For us freedom of religion is such a given that we don’t even pause to reflect on it. But among medieval minds this was and is

(I add "is" because medieval minds are still with us) as traumatic as stating that the sun can rise wherever it wishes.

One anecdote. One day in April of 1991, as I was crossing the border from Bahrain into Saudi Arabia, a Saudi customs guard asked me if I was Christian. I said no, without much reflection (at most I might describe myself as an agnostic), not really thinking of the implications and impact of my words. He asked me my name. I said "Ben'hamin"—the generally South West Asian pronunciation of my name. "Ah," he replied, "you are Jewish." At this point I began to be a bit nervous. Granted, at that time I was allegedly one of the good guys and I was armed, but I was one and they were several and, in the conflict between a transient gratitude towards America and the perennial fratricidal hatred between Semitic tribes, I wasn't entirely willing to bet my life on gratitude. Then it occurred to me that for that guard there were only three acceptable possibilities: Muslim, Christian, and Jew. And frankly, in retrospect, I think I stood a better chance as a putative Jewish/American soldier than as an agnostic or as an atheist one. I say "I think," because I lost the courage of my convictions, I found a faith we could both live with—literally and metaphorically—and went on my relatively merry way.

As this anecdote suggests, the medieval world is still very much with us. I would argue, in fact, that the medieval and modern heritages are still very much at war in the US. On the one hand, we have those for whom anyone different from self is the Other: religious fundamentalists, America-firsters, pro-lifers, the Klan, the silent majority, the archetypal ugly American tourist, homophobes and male chauvinists, a vice president whose stupidity and meanness of spirit are surpassed only by his ignorance,⁹ Ross Perot, a Supreme Court which, against all Western diplomatic traditions, has legitimized the kidnapping of alleged criminals in other countries, and a president who invaded another country at the cost of hundreds of lives to capture an alleged drug trafficker—an event unique in the history of "civilized" nations. We have a president whose delusions of grandeur—he has stated that he has established a new world order—are ratified by intellectuals who apparently believe that the end of the Soviet Union is tantamount to the end of history. And—dare I say it?—among the troglodytes we have militants who allege to represent all ethnic groups, all minorities, all women, and all homosexuals—whether they wish to be represented or not.¹⁰

On the other hand—as a result of the identification with, or perhaps I should say, complete submission to the perspective of the Other, we have those who specialize in the denial of self. I am, of course, speaking of those whom Spiro Agnew described as the “nattering nabobs of negativism.” Originally left/liberal intellectuals, they preach a gospel of masochism and self-hatred. No matter what the United States does, it is bad. No matter what the “dominant culture” does, it is bad. In fact, if you are white, male, able-bodied, and heterosexual, given that you can’t change your race, you had best be willing to emasculate yourself, become differently challenged, adopt alternative sexual preference(s) or, perhaps, preferably, die.

Affirmative action, as Dinesh D’Souza has demonstrated beyond refutation, has gone to such extremes that it is grievously harming those very people it was intended originally to help.¹¹ It has become the code word for a new reverse racism and a new reverse sexism intended to serve only specific groups, regardless of need or merit. Not to put too fine a point on it, the children of Rumanian immigrants, the survivors of that workers’ paradise, are not eligible for any sort of affirmative action program, nor are the children of white West Virginia coal miners, nor are Asian Americans—with select exceptions predicated on race or national origin.¹² With the exception of New York State, neither are Italian Americans.¹³ But, the children of two of the most successful men in America are: General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces of the United States and occasional dream candidate for virtually all the highest offices in the land, and Dr. Bill Cosby, Ed. D., multimillionaire entertainer extraordinary.

There has been much disagreement and contention in the attempt to define the age in which we live. This age has been described as postmodern, but the definitions of postmodernism are as varied as those who have attempted to define it. The best definition I have read simply states that postmodernism “remains best seen as a complex map of late twentieth-century directions rather than a clear-cut aesthetic and philosophical ideology” (*Harper* 672).¹⁴ But, in the same way that there are two kinds of maps, political and physical, I would argue that there are two kinds of postmodernism.

1. Postmodernism can be seen as an extension of modernism in which the freedom of and from values simply leads to exasper-

ation and hopelessness. If God is dead, if there are no more grand, totalizing narratives, if all religions are equally valid, or not, if any text can be deconstructed and thus is at best internally contradictory, what else is left?

2. Postmodernism can be perceived as accepting the existence of different values and beliefs, while at the same time denying that everything is meaningless, or that we are trapped helplessly and hopelessly in the impossibility of any action. While there may be no grand narratives, there is an infinity of small narratives; while all texts are at best asymptotes of reality, while science will never find the mind, while we will never be able to predict weather beyond the next four or five days and while the butterfly in New York may well cause the hurricane in Peking, and/or vice versa, this does not mean that we should quit trying and retreat into a neo-Luddism of sorts and smash all our word processors (even though, on occasion, one might argue that the provocation is sufficient to call it justifiable machinicide).

Instead, perhaps we should heed the advice of Machiavelli who said that he was searching for the *verità effettuale*, the truth of reality as it is, rather than fanciful imaginings about it.¹⁵ Machiavelli, in other words, rejected the grand, totalizing Utopias in favor of small, limited, localized narratives. This is also Giacosa's choice, as I will show, returning to our albeit reordered topic sentence: Voyage, Quest, and, Literature.

Voyage. *Webster's Dictionary*, *inter alia*, defines a voyage as a trip of sufficient length to require carrying the *viaticum*—that is, food for the road. While the voyage might be by land or by sea, presumably it implied a certain danger and a certain thirst for adventure. In fact, one might argue that a voyage implies a quest—be it literal or metaphorical. While from our perspective I think one might argue that a trip to America in 1891 could be construed as dangerous and adventurous, Giacosa in fact traveled in first-class luxury and comfort. His adventure, in short, was certainly not physical. Rather, I would argue, it was an adventure in which it was his mind, rather than his body, that would eventually be put at risk, as any mind is when confronted with new, different, unexpected, contradictory truths.

Quest. Giacosa was engaged in a voyage, but was it a quest? On the one hand, it isn't clear that Giacosa undertook his voyage with any preconceived intention of finding anything in particular. Unlike Columbus, he was not searching for new trade routes, new

raw materials, spices, or gold. On the other hand, by the very fact that he started to write about his trip even as it began, it is clear that he was looking. But what was he searching for? America, for Italians, was the promised land, a land that existed in fantasy long before it became a geographical reality. Dante's *Divine Comedy* contains one of the earliest allusions to this promised land. If we follow his Ulysses past the Strait of Gibraltar, and keep on going long enough (it took Dante's Ulysses five months) we will find what he called the Mount of Purgatory, and what we know as the American continent. The characteristics of the two, for Italians, were not dissimilar. Both, in essence, offered a chance of escape from hell through toil. Both were perceived as paths to salvation, however different.

Giacosa was the product of the Northern Italian *borghesia*. As such, almost by definition, as a function of his heritage, he was well-educated in a traditional, classical sense; he tended to be conservative; he was inevitably and unconsciously, one might say naturally, both politically and culturally nationalistic, if not chauvinistic. At the same time, he was a writer and an intellectual. As such, I would like to believe, he was compelled to be more liberal, in the sense that he had to be more open to new perceptions, he had to attempt to achieve new syntheses from a variety of often contradictory data.

These traits manifest themselves in *Impressioni d'America*. As the voyage begins, he is the frame of reference, the perspective from which everyone and everything else is seen. Both the promise and failures of American life are seen from this vantage point in his book. America, in other words, is perceived as the Other, but with a caveat which announces itself in the very title of the book. These are "impressions of America," Giacosa's own subjective, always evolving, often contradictory perceptions. Looking at New York's harbor, he is overwhelmed by the city's power and energy: "no other body of water is so completely surrounded by factories, is so noisy . . . so full of life, so different in all its aspects and movements, so strongly strikes the imagination and the mind" (Giacosa 30-31). And yet, he cannot fail to notice that "all the neighborhoods by the-sea seem in incurable decay. . . . [They] are dark, filthy, poorly paved . . . virtually nobody sleeps there" (34). As he explores the city, from the exclusive suburbs to the Bowery, he perceives an American phenomenon: the separation of working and residential environments. Whereas in Italy the two are identical, in America one must travel some dis-

tance between them. He asks himself whether this does not "exacerbate the formidable American individualism" (41). He judges that the absence of the "mitigating influence of the home . . . accustoms the American to an almost complete doubling of his nature . . . to a separation of his emotions from his will and his intellect" (41). This causes him to "leave his loving, helpful humanity at home and to arm himself for business with a harsh, thankless selfishness" (41). Nothing seems to have any permanence; nothing stands as "witness to the past" (38). And yet, Giacosa observes that a product of this way of life, "the proud awareness of physical energy" (46), is at the root of a new "social aesthetic" which can contribute to "the progressive development of the human race" (47).

Giacosa perceives that both the good and the bad in Americans derive from their optimism. Freed from the shackles of tradition which hobble Europeans, they are more progressive, more creative, and better able to cope with a reality which they perceive to be ever-changing. American energy has, however, its less desirable corollary effects. Giacosa observes that the people are prone to incredible excesses: "Americans drink in silence because they enjoy being drunk more than drinking" (90). He observes the same intemperance in men who pay lip service to what he defines as the traditional European aesthetic. In describing the home of one millionaire, he writes: "The random collection of so many masterpieces produces a visual sensation identical to that of a strong fist in the eye" (68). And while he is astonished, at first, by the many laws regulating social behavior, he eventually comes to realize that they, too, are a result of the American temperament: "In the not too distant past [the Americans] must have been unrestrained and extremely violent" (153). It is, therefore, "comprehensible that . . . good manners be enforced by the policeman" (153). Americans, however, refuse to be easily pigeonholed. With candor surprising in a man of his nationalistic and artistic pride, Giacosa confesses that "anyone who has lived here for any length of time must acknowledge that the [American] people behave in a more civilized and more dignified fashion than ours" (153), and that he found "among the many men of . . . varied culture . . . a great originality in judging art and life" (95).

Chicago, in Giacosa's opinion, expresses the American paradox better than any other city. His admiration for its quintessentially American energy does not blind him to its ultimate

physical, social, and psychological consequences:

American life blossomed more naturally in Chicago: enormous factories, endless streets, fantastic stores . . . (202). At first sight [it] seemed abominable; upon further reflection I recognized that it was admirable beyond words . . . (204). [And yet] the people are anxious and frowning . . . (205). The chief characteristic of the city life of Chicago is violence . . . (206). I wouldn't want to live there for anything on Earth; but I believe that those who ignore it do not completely understand our century, of which it is the ultimate expression (203).

Giacosa notices and comments on differences in behavior, appearance, and customs. In this land of the Other, however, he also finds parts of his Self in the physical presence of fellow Italians. He is delighted to find Americans of Italian extraction who have lived in the United States for generations and can barely speak a word of Italian, but who are still, somehow, emotionally attached to their ancestral homeland. As the voyage progresses, he pays increasing attention to the newly arrived Italian immigrants. He observes them and, to an ever greater extent, the American reaction to them and is both pleased and distressed.

Almost half of Giacosa's book is dedicated to the activities and treatment of Italians in the United States. When he learns what confronts the newly arrived immigrant, he is upset: here he sees most clearly the two faces of America. With righteous indignation, he writes that even though the "chief of police of New York has stated publicly that of all the immigrant groups the Italian is that which produces the least number of assassins, thieves and trouble-makers of all kinds . . . (170) only the Chinese and the Blacks . . . are under them in the public opinion" (171).

What Giacosa cannot at first understand is why Americans, who admire hard work, ostracize Italian immigrants, for they are industrious and they willingly accept the most demanding and dangerous jobs. But then he sees that Italians do not live up to the ideal of prosperity. People who earn no more than Italian immigrants live in "nice, comfortable, solid homes, similar to those in which . . . almost only lawyers, doctors, and judges live in Italian towns" (180). He begins to perceive that while, for the Italian laborer, it is sufficient not to die, the American worker "considers prosperity to be an indispensable condition of life" (181). All Americans, regardless of social condition, share the "same vigorous feeling of social equality and personal dignity" (177). He is

particularly impressed by the gore-splattered butchers of the notorious Chicago slaughterhouses. He describes these people at length, covered with blood at work; and then, as they leave in their clean new clothes, "a crowd of 'gentlemen' which our dandies could take as an example of elegance" (183). These men do economize, he says, but their economies begin after they are well off, not at the poverty level. The privations and humiliations which the Italian immigrants accept are to them "the mark of an inferior, decadent race" (185).

Giacosa realizes that Americans do not and cannot understand the urgent needs—the often exploited, starving family left behind—which push the Italian immigrant to "heroic" extremes of self-sacrifice (195). He states that "it is we, who know our domestic conditions, who must judge our compatriots in an entirely different light . . . [and acknowledge] that the greatest part of their suffering is a manifestation of great . . . valor" (196). He has finally understood that the root cause of the tragic misunderstanding between the two peoples is, ironically, to be found in each nationality's best inherent qualities. How can a people "which is now writing its history" understand or be understood by one with a history of a thousand years of foreign oppression (49)?

What is Giacosa's final appraisal of America? He judges it by its effect of the Italian immigrant, more than by its technological wonders and great riches. While he is thrilled to find Italian Americans who remember the "*bella Italia*," he also recommends that the immigrants become Americanized. His hope is that the traditional Italian class barriers and social inhibitions which kept the poor spiritually enslaved will be broken. This attitude, which was shared by many at the time, is best expressed by the words of Rosa, an Italian peasant who came to the United States in 1884 at the age of fifteen: "They [the upper-class Italians] wouldn't dare hurt me now I come from America. Me, that's why I love America. That's what I learned in America: not to be afraid."¹⁶

Giacosa returned to Italy, but his impressions of America were not forgotten. The experience of America placed Giacosa in an odd construction *en abyme* (mirror construction). As upper-class Italian, Giacosa is located somewhere between wealthy America and the destitute Italian immigrants. Thus, for Giacosa, both America—because of his nationality—and the immigrants—because of his social class—are the Other. At the same time, they

are also both Self—given that he can identify with America’s ideals and potential because of his social class—and with the immigrants—because of his nationality. Giacosa, who had gone to America expecting to find the Other, suddenly, as a function of his nationality, is placed in the role of the Other. The result is a remarkable degree of empathy and concern for those Others less fortunate than himself.

Literature. And so, finally, we return to Literature, which has been so maligned of late. Notwithstanding the various fanciful imaginings of things as they should or might be, the *verità effettuale*, the “truth of things as they are,” is that it is only through the process of thinking—which can only happen with words, be they written or spoken—that a voyage can transcend **discovery**—understood here as the imposition of otherness on those different from self, predicated on an insurmountable barrier between self and other—and become a **quest**—that is a process of reflection which acknowledges our common humanity, regardless of race, gender, physical, and/or mental ability, nationality, national origin, and religious and sexual orientation.

Giacosa’s *Impressioni d’America* is the autobiography of his quest. And while a quest implies a desire for discovery—from a Western perspective one might argue that a successful quest must end with a discovery—what is important in a quest is not finding the object of desire, but the discovery of self. Clearly, when the discovery of others results in the discovery of the otherness in self, and of the self in others, the quest has been successful—if, to paraphrase the words of Rodney King, we are all to get along together.

Part Three—TEN YEARS LATER

Roughly ten years after his trip to America, Giacosa and his co-writer, Illica, began to write the libretto for Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. The male protagonist, Lieutenant Pinkerton fails as a human being because, notwithstanding his voyage, notwithstanding his discovery of the female protagonist, Cio-Cio-San, he never transcends his self(ish)ness and her otherness. His spiritual death is the instrument of her demise. Giacosa triumphs, instead, because, in a foreign land, in a new world, in (one of) the archetypal land(s) of the Other he discovers the identity of Self and Other. The resulting transcendence of his Self gives birth to his greatest work, *Madame Butterfly*, a work in which the failure to

identify Self with the Other is both lyrically beautiful and yet completely heartrending.

Part 4—12 MONTHS LATER . . .

On July 10, 1991, Lorraine died. Long after the American people had changed the channel and completely forgotten all about Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, and shortly before we—who got stuck with the clean-up detail, with Operation Desert Farewell, which no one here appears to have heard about—were supposed to return home, Lorraine was killed in a senseless car accident as she rushed off to take care of some of her soldiers. Lorraine was killed by macho posturings, by intolerance, by indifference, and by the absolute schism between Self and Other which seems to be the hidden beast at the core of too many people and too many nation states. Lorraine was killed by politicians' monomaniacal glorification of self, by their absolute indifference to the desires, fears, hopes, ambitions, cares, feelings, and lives of any Other.

In the past twelve months I have returned to the United States, I have been to Europe, I have voyaged to the antipodes, but I can't find my way home. My Other is no longer, nor is my Self. There is no beauty, only rending of the heart.

1. I grew up in the mountains of post-World War II Italy. I was raised on Homer, Livy, the Waldensian epic, centuries-long struggle for religious freedom, and the war stories of anti-fascist partisans. These lessons are, for me, synthesized in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, chapter 12, "Quot sint genera militiae et de mercenariis militibus." I served as Inspector General for the duration of the conflict. Lorraine served in various capacities, ranging from Assistant Secretary of the General Staff of Lieutenant General Pagonis (commander of all logistical forces during the conflict) to Headquarters Company Commander of the 3d Personnel Battalion.

For a useful overview of several of the contending factions in the ongoing debate on postmodernism, see: E. Ann Kaplan, *Postmodernism and Its Discontents* (London: Verso, 1988). Absolutely essential to understanding the evolving Italian contribution to the debate are the many seminal essays appearing in *Differentia* over the past several years and the important 1991 issue of *Annali d'Italianistica: The Modern and the Postmodern*, 9 (1991).

This is neither the time nor the place, nor is there sufficient space to position the Gulf War theoretically within (or without) postmodernism. For now a few observations and anecdotes will have to suffice. 1) The Bush administration was incapable or unwilling to position the war within any master narrative. Nor, in fact, were any of their small narratives capable of explaining convincingly why we went to war, why we terminated the war, and whether the objectives of

the war were achieved. These narratives changed on a weekly basis—with almost daily updates, corrections and revisions—and continue to change. 2) The government and the media did succeed in affixing nostalgic, sentimental, human images on a conflict whose military, technological, political and economic infrastructure was as incomprehensible to most (of us) as the internal workings of computers. 3) The execution of the war followed no pre-established rules: a) Logistical support bases were established far forward of the combat forces; b) Lieutenant General Pagonis, the son of a Greek immigrant, ran the logistics of the war (according to some the most successful such endeavor in recorded history) the way his father ran the family restaurant: he micromanaged everything down to the time off of the lowliest private using 3 x 5 cards (not unlike the order forms used by waitresses), with the help of small circle of *clientes*; c) There was no front or rear in any traditional sense. Virtually all the Iraqi SCUDs exploded over or among American soldiers in the rear; d) Soldiers who worked with sophisticated computers in air-conditioned offices frequently lived in tents and boxes, without access to indoor plumbing of any kind.

As for a discussion of the meaning of the war, it too will have to wait for another time. Suffice it to say, for now, that Machiavelli's *Principe*, IV, "Cur Darii regnum quod Alexander occupaverat a successoribus suis post Alexandri mortem non defecit" presents one criticism of the way in which it was prosecuted. For a very different perspective, see Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War* (Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1992).

2. MOPP suit: a charcoal impregnated rubber suit which allegedly protects one from chemical-biological agents for approximately 24 hours. M-17 mask: a rubber-and-plastic gas mask. It is not clear how long the filters are effective. A less than comforting corollary: when the filters begin to fail, assuming you are still alive, you must remove the mask to replace the filters—a process which in the best of conditions takes several minutes. Kevlar helmet: the teutonic-looking plastic helmet that has replaced the traditional metal helmet. It is not lighter. Allegedly it offers better protection. You can't use it to heat water. Load-bearing Equipment (LBE): a sort of harness from which hang the tools of the soldier's trade: weapons, ammunition, water, food, flashlight, first aid pouch, compass, etc.

3. The terrorist attacks on allied soldiers were, in fact, few and immediately suppressed by the Saudis, who allegedly offered astronomical rewards for information leading to the arrest and execution of the perpetrators.

4. Logistical bases scattered in the desert, frequently forward of the combat troops, which stored fuel, ammunition, water, and other supplies essential for the rapid prosecution of combat operations.

5. Over the years in the Reserves, I have received many "Grazing Herd" messages. These are practice alerts intended to test our readiness. A "Roaring Bull" is the real thing. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first time it has been transmitted to Reserve soldiers since the Korean war.

6. Giacosa, Giuseppe. *Impressioni d'America*. 2d ed. (Milano: Tipografia Editrice L. F. Cogliati, 1902). Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text.

7. A Canadian conferee warned me that she would be coming to listen to my paper because she was disturbed by the use of the term "America" in the title of my essay. As I suggest elsewhere in this paper, I am aware that the use of the term "America" to refer to the United States is considered at the very least politically incorrect. Regrettably, given that there is no English-language equivalent of "statunitense," there are times when it is not really possible, or at the very least it is horrendously awkward, to use "United States." Equally regrettably, certain terms, "machiavellian," for example, will remain in common use, no matter how inaccurate or improper until a major paradigm shift has occurred.

Finally, "America" is in the title of Giacosa's book. In short, in this essay, in the spirit of Giacosa's book, "America" refers to the United States, unless otherwise specified.

8. Pasolini, Pier Paolo. "Il cinema impopolare," *Nuovi Argomenti* 20 (Oct/Dec 1970): 166-76. Reprinted in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo Eretico* (Milano: Garzanti, 1972): 273-80. Translated by Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1988): 267-75. See also, Jacobitti, Edmund E. "On the Wisdom of the Most Recent Italians: Or, How Italian is 'Weak Thought?'" Ben Lawton and Anthony Tamburri, eds., *Romance Languages Annual: 1989* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue Research Foundation, 1990): 141-49.

9. For a devastating collection of quotes by and about J. Danforth Quayle see, Slansky, Paul and Steve Radlauer, "Airhead Apparent," *Esquire* (August 1992): 117-24.

10. For an intelligent indictment of feminist extremism of both the right and the left see, Cathy Young, "Victimhood is Powerful," *Reason* (October 1992): 19-23.

11. D'Souza, Dinesh. *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

12. D'Souza 270-71.

13. D'Souza. "CUNY has added Italian Americans to its list of 'protected classes' for affirmative action." 271.

14. Bullock, Alan, and Stephen Trombley, eds. *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*. 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

15. Machiavelli, Niccolò. "Il Principe" e "Discorsi" (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1971): 65.

16. Marie Hall Ets. *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1970): 254, as quoted in Ernest S. Falbo, "Italian-Americans: Stocktaking," *Italian Quarterly* 17-68 (Spring 1974): 76.