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A Round-Trip Journey to America: Giose Rimanelli's "Biglietto di terza"

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ABSTRACT

Giose Rimanelli's book, Biglietto di terza, is one of his least studied texts and, at the same time, one that has bewildered the critics and its readers for many years. Some believe that the narrative is the author's autobiography detailing a trip to Canada to visit his family; others assume that he is in search of his American roots; and still others think that it is a travelogue of an Italian in Canada. A more penetrating study will allow the reader to delve into the intrinsic essence of the work and to explore, in collaboration with the protagonist, a physical, emotional, and metaphysical itinerary that takes the narrator from his native Italy to the coast of Canada, to finally return to where he started: Italy, effecting a complete circle from the

Old World to the New, concluding, as he started, in the Old. To have a broad vision of the migrant reality, Rimanelli chooses to make the journey to Canada as an immigrant even though he is not. He uses his family's migrant reality as a model for the immigrant experience. In this way, he becomes a living witness to a particular society: the destitute refugee in search of a better life in America than the one he left behind.

KEYWORDS: *Immigration and the Myth of America; Autobiographical elements; Literature as a Diver-sivo; Brutality of Italy's Civil War.*

AUTRICE

Sheryl Lynn Postman received her Ph.D. in XX Century Spanish literature, with a secondary field in Italian Studies, at the State University of New York at Albany. Her research has been, primarily, on XX century Spanish Literature and 20th century Italian literature and the impact each discipline has had on the other. She utilizes an interdisciplinary approach in her readings and research of the contemporary texts. She has published two books on the works of Giose Rimanelli; one on Miguel Delibes, and several edited books on Italian literature, Italian American studies, and the 1891 lynching of Italians in New Orleans. She has written more than forty articles on the works of Rimanelli, Delibes, Italo Calvino, Ferdinando Camon, Molisan Folktales and in Italian American Studies. She just retired from the University of Massachusetts Lowell where she was granted the title of Professor Emerita of Spanish and Italian Studies.

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Sixty-five years ago, Giose Rimanelli's narrative *Biglietto di terza*¹ came out in Italy. Forty years after that initial publication, it is reprinted and released in Canada (1998). *Biglietto di terza* is a collection of thirty-seven objective and introspective episodes of the author's inaugural journey to Canada to visit his then recently immigrated family to his mother's homeland to spend the 1953 Christmas holidays with them. Through episodic literary pieces, beginning with the mother's unending and relentless pleas to visit, and concluding with his return to his native Italy, all experiences within the text are linked by the presence of the unnamed narrator.

Biglietto di terza is a narrative that may confuse the reader. The literary critics of the book, erroneously have stated that the text represents numerous artistic positions: Valerio Volpini believed it was an autobiography;² Guido Somnavilla calls it a reportage of American life;³ Primo Ruffo indicates that it is a series of journalistic articles;⁴ and Giuseppe Prezzolini states that the book is "un libro di vita, dove la fantasia e il sentimento hanno parte quanto gli occhi".⁵ All of the commentators, moreover, put forth, and appear to agree, that the author, a product of a tri-cultural familial background, is in search of his American roots, pointing out the Canadian origin of his mother and the American of his maternal grandfather.

A more penetrating study will allow the reader to delve into the intrinsic essence of the work and to explore, in collaboration with the protagonist, a physical, emotional, and metaphysical itinerary that takes the narrator from his native Italy to the coast of Canada, to finally return to where he started: Italy, effecting a complete circle from the Old World to the New, concluding, as he started, in the Old. To have a broad vision of the migrant reality, Rimanelli chooses to make the journey to Canada as an immigrant even though he is not. He uses his family's migrant reality as a model for the immigrant experience.⁶ In this way, he becomes a living witness

¹ G. RIMANELLI, *Biglietto di terza*, Arnoldo Modadori Editore, Milano 1958. A new edition of the book came out in Canada in 1998 (Soleil, Welland, Ontario 1998).

² V. VOLPINI, *Scrittori che viaggiano*, in «Il popolo», Roma, 10 Marzo, 1959. Volpini notes that the author is: «Alla ricerca delle radici della sua stessa natura di uomo, lo scrittore è mosso continuamente da una mescolanza oscura ma attiva di tenerezza e rancore; si direbbe che in lui rivivano continuamente gli stati d'animo di generazioni di emigranti che non accettano la civiltà e la società nella quale vivono pur sentendosene parte».

³ G. SOMNAVILLA, in «Lettture» (Milano), maggio 1959.

⁴ P. RUFFO, in «Libri del Meridiano d'Italia» (Milano), 29 novembre 1959.

⁵ G. PREZZOLINI, *Il migliore e più profondo Rimanelli*, in «Misure Critiche», XVII-XVIII, 1988, 65-67, p. 146.

⁶ «...volli rendermi conto di qual era, realmente, la situazione della mia famiglia, che potrebbe esser presa a modello e simbolo della maggior parte delle famiglie dei nuovi immigrati», G. RIMANELLI, *Biglietto di terza* cit., p. 49. All specific references that come directly from this edition of the book will be placed with the page number in parentheses within the body of the text.

to a particular society: the destitute refugee in search of a better life in America than the one he left behind.

The basic story line of *Biglietto di terza* is simple and shines through the multiple episodes of the narrative that obscure it from the inexperienced reader. The book's protagonist, whose name never appears, receives a series of letters from his mother asking him to take a trip to Montreal, reminding him that the family has not spent the Christmas holidays together in over ten years. He decides to visit his family. He arrives in Montreal where he gets to know the maternal side of the family. After a few days, he opts to stay a while longer to understand his family's situation and, because of his prolonged visit, that of the immigrants. Unlike the typical emigrant, he immediately finds work. He loses his first position because he is accused of being a communist;⁷ he loses the second due to a building fire. He decides to travel through Ontario for a broader perspective of life in Canada. A female passenger he helps, steals his wallet and his car. Without a vehicle and without currency, he finds work on a tobacco farm to earn enough money to return to Italy. He goes back to Montreal and then, to his mother's displeasure, refuses to remain in Canada.

The huge and multifaceted world he has found is one he describes as geographically American, politically British, and organically French,⁸ yet it is a universe in which the fiscal situation, the dollar, is of great significance. Money becomes the symbol of their future because it is the key that opens the doorway to a new life, one without socio-economic restrictions or barriers that hindered their progress in the Old World. Immigrants of all nations, those who have suffered socially and were poor due to their lack of wealth in their countries of origin, spend their time in Canada searching for fiscal prosperity. Monetary assets, from the immigrant's perspective, illustrate the personal and cultural success of an individual, offering them something denied in the Old World: a step up the socio-economic ladder to a better life. In this way, financial capital helps them establish a new human experience and culture in their new environment: the Italian Canadian.

⁷ When Rimanelli arrived in America during this trip, he had a verbal contract from «Milano-Sera», directed by Davide Lajola, a friend of Pavese's and of Rimanelli's. The journal ceased to exist during Rimanelli's transatlantic voyage and without notifying Rimanelli, Lajola became the editor of «L'Unità», a communist newspaper that had published some of Rimanelli's articles without his knowledge. Historically this period in America is the "Red Scare" and all could be lost because of an ultra-conservative and aggressive politics against a person. Rimanelli was not a member of any political party, but the Italian General Council suggested that he leave if he did not want to enter prison for espionage (Letter from Giose Rimanelli to Pierluigi Giorgio, il 6 settembre 1998).

⁸ «Ho vissuto in Canada dieci mesi: pochi, veramente pochi per poter capire a fondo la singolare complessità di un paese geograficamente americano, politicamente britannico e largamente francese per la sua origine, internazionale, d'altra parte, per le sue preoccupazioni economiche», *Nota...* p. 231.

The economic situation of the protagonist's family, and consequently also for all emigrants, emerges from the beginning of the text with the mother's correspondence that provokes the narrator's visit. She complains, first of her need to work for the family to have a sufficient income, and then that money plays too significant a role in America. According to her, it was of no importance in Italy:

Sono andata a lavorare ieri, e sono già vecchia per saper lavorare. Hai il *foreman* dietro le spalle che viene pagato per fare la spia. E poi ho sempre la testa che mi duole perché questi palazzi non c'erano quando ero io, e perché un soldo è un soldo, e non potrò mai dimenticare che in Italia non ho mai avuto premura per un soldo. Un soldo, in Italia, c'era e non c'era: tuo padre è andato alla guerra dell'Africa per guadagnare un soldo, e per guadagnare un soldo tuo padre ha lasciato una gamba sotto una cava di rena. Pur un soldo non era importantissimo quando c'era né quando non c'era, perché prima del soldo avevamo la lattuga nell'orto e un po' di grano nel cassone, e avevamo tante altre cose che non costavano niente. (p. 8)

Ironically, when the protagonist arrives, before the family celebration, the mother, who accused Americans of being too concerned with wealth, explains in detail the entire maternal family's financial standing. She is the only one within the narrative who constantly mentions the wealth of a person. Obviously, the affluence that the mother claimed not being important in Italy has become for her a significant reality in America.

The theme of immigration and the reasons for which the southern Italian emigrates, and leaves Italy are present in various of Rimanelli's novels. The "Southern problem" (*il problema del sud*), the extreme poverty that enveloped the Mezzogiorno area of the peninsula comes into view, briefly, in *Tiro al piccione*, but will resonate clearly in many of the author's subsequent writings such as the unpublished novel, *La terra dei padre*, an early draft of *Peccato originale*, and *Familia*. Furthermore, the theme of immigration, the result of the aforementioned "southern problem," will become dominant in many of the author's future novels such as this narrative, *Una posizione sociale* (although the migration is reversed: America to Italy) *Tragica America*,⁹ *Detroit Blues*¹⁰ and many more.

To present a more open and vast vision of America, Rimanelli initiates his saga with a geographical description of the country that parallels a huge blank painter's canvas. The author, unlike the writers of the Fascist era, does not want to destroy the American myth but to demonstrate that the American dream is still alive within a world without limitations. The final result of *Biglietto di terza*, as noted on the book jacket, marks a "reading" of an intellectually and physically experienced North

⁹ G. RIMANELLI, *Tragica America*, Immordino editore, Genova 1968.

¹⁰ ID., *Detroit Blues*, Editions Soleil, Welland, Ontario 1997.

America that begins with Mario Soldati's *America primo amore* (1935), and then continued with *America amara* (1940) by Emilio Cecchi: three books that still constitute an essential trilogy "d'un'America segreta, dolorosa e amorosa, vissuta e goduta e respinta quel tanto da indurre forme nuove di nostalgia."¹¹

Soldati and Cecchi attempted to promote a negative image of the country during the years of fascism to coincide and agree with the political philosophy of Mussolini and his extremist politics. Soldati characterized America as a country of gangsters and delinquents, while Cecchi claimed it as a nation without culture. These two writers tried to destroy the American myth, a *promised land* for Italy's poor and oppressed. The Fascist government supported this tactic. The image of America under Fascism is demythified. The new paradigm highlights the worst aspects of American life: a cold, alienating, money-grabbing nation whose portrayal coincided with Mussolini's hostile regard for the America.¹² Sergio Pautasso points out that Rimanelli's description of America is diametrically opposed to that of Emilio Cecchi. He specifies that Rimanelli has no moralistic or political concerns, preferring to discover the Canadian reality where emigrants live and suffer. Rimanelli's America is, therefore, Canada.¹³

Beginning with his arrival in Canada, the writer describes a white landscape covered with never-ending snow. There is so much snow that it takes two days to travel from Halifax to Montreal, five hundred miles, a journey that usually takes twenty-two hours to cover by train. During the train ride there is one constant question: When do we get there? No one gives a precise answer because it all depends on the possibility of inclement weather. There is also another question that repeats continuously: how large is the country? The answer comes in various stages: from here to Montreal; or from Montreal to Toronto; from Toronto to Calgary, and always coincides with the gesture of the arms held wide open. This physical image of the train crossing through freshly fallen snow suggests the hugeness of the country. The geophysical representation of this new land allows the reader to envision a blank canvas yet to be painted; actual life experience form the brush strokes used to exhibit the new existence of the immigrant.

The author describes, yet another representation to indicate how large and without borders Canada is in an episode entitled *The Glass House*. Within this segment, there is a crystal residence where a young Canadian couple resides. There are

¹¹ *Biglietto di terza*, notes from the book jacket.

¹² S. PACIFICI, *The Modern Italian Novel*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1979, p. 14.

¹³ In «Libreria», a cura di Sergio Pautasso, 1959.

no curtains that cover the windows. Everyone can see them, and the couple that reside in this house can see out. Nothing blocks the view; there are no obstructions. The only complaint comes from a British cleric who has resided in Canada for several years. The clergyman, according to the owner of the house, believes that Canadians are a primitive people and that it is his duty to harness their savageness and control them. Rimanelli, with this episode, suggests two perspectives of history: the European and the American: the British cleric and the Canadian couple. Europe's history is so long that it stifles and impedes a person's socio-economic growth; and America's, without an extensive, repressive society, does not control the future of anyone; ancient history does not play a role in the present that will decide the future. The people of the glass house have no restrictions because of yesteryear (like the Europeans), they create their own destiny. The future for them, like the glass in the house, is clean, unobstructed, and spacious.

The Fifties were very productive years for Rimanelli. It is, according to the writer, his decade. Five books were published in a period of seven years: *Tiro al Piccione*,¹⁴ *Peccato originale*,¹⁵ *Biglietto di terza*, *Una posizione sociale*,¹⁶ and *Il mestiere del furbo*.¹⁷ In the introduction to the new edition of *Biglietto di terza* that came out forty years after the original, Rimanelli states, and as he always maintained in conversations, that the reason for which he made the trip to Canada was to find out what had become of certain characters, the Vietri women, from his novel *Peccato originale*, which was, at that time, about to go on the market in Italy. Moreover, in that same introduction he adds that he also planned to visit the city of New Orleans, the hometown of his maternal grandfather, to do research on the lynching of Italian immigrants in that city at the end of the 19th century for his yet (at that time) unwritten novel *Una posizione sociale*.

Notwithstanding that the structure of the *Biglietto di terza* is traditional, stylistically it is not as it weaves between various literary genres. There are elements that are autobiographical. There are also Indian myths, journalistic pieces, songs, poetry, and short stories. The use of interpersonal dialogues penetrates the whole book, giving a livelier impression of everyday life. Structurally, there are thirty-seven chapters that engage the reader in a transatlantic and transcultural journey that the protagonist experiences over a period of ten months, all in a chronological time.

¹⁴ G. RIMANELLI, *Tiro al piccione*, Mondadori, Milano 1953; Einaudi, Torino 1991 and Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2022.

¹⁵ ID., *Peccato originale*, Mondadori, Milano 1954.

¹⁶ ID., *Una posizione sociale*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1959. The novel comes out, again, with a new title: *La stanza grande*, Avagliano, Cava dei Tirreni 1996 and with the original title with Rubbettino, 2023.

¹⁷ A.G. SOLARI, *Il mestiere del furbo*, Sugar Editore, Milano 1959. The book is reprinted in New York with Bordighera Press, NY in 2016.

Rimanelli presents these thirty-seven episodes and makes his way through the energetic and spirited lifestyle of the immigrant in a cosmos they have all accepted and embraced, thus demonstrating a new existence, a new vital experience in a different universe creating a history that the author defines as a *diversivo*.¹⁸ Fabio Mazziotti noted that although the author says *Biglietto di terza* is a diversion, the book is quite serious and thoughtful.¹⁹ Additionally he states that the structure of this book is *quasi* a novel, thereby counterbalancing the earlier statements by Volpini, Somma-villa, Ruffo and Prezzolini.

In a curious mathematical *diversivo* that pertains to the narrative, Rimanelli's trip occurred in 1953. The author at that time was twenty-six years old. In each of the thirty-seven episodes the narrator of the segments is the same and ever present. Now, thirty-seven, the number of episodes within the text, from fifty-three (1953) is twenty-six, corresponding to the age of the writer at the time of his American odyssey. Additionally, the thirty-seven chapters less the somewhat more than ten months of the narrator's stay in Canada also corresponds, roughly, to the age of the author: twenty-six. Although not a mathematician, Rimanelli creates a numerical game play pattern within this text that the reader will perceive within all his work.

Irony permeates the text initiating from the book's title, *Biglietto di terza*. Instead of making the journey to Canada in elegance, a feat that Rimanelli could have easily done at the time, the author makes it with a third-class ticket, steerage, re-enacting the voyage of the destitute immigrant searching for a better life than the one he left behind. Rimanelli does not come to Canada seeking something better, as the migrants did, but on vacation to spend some time with his family. This satiric wit illustrated from the start of the narrative will set a humorous tone that will weave itself throughout the work. It will initiate in this early period with the protagonist's choice of luggage for his passage to America: all are new, spotless, and in excellent condition whereas those of the non-native settlers are worn-out, heavily stained, and held together with rope. The narrator's suitcase is extremely heavy with the books he brought with him for study, unlike the immigrant who carries only the necessary items for a new life and the scattered personal objects of their prior existence in Italy.

Artistically, *Biglietto di terza* is not an autobiography even though the book is written in the first-person singular. This is a stylistic method that Rimanelli used in his first novel, *Tiro al piccione*. In that narrative, also written in the first-person

¹⁸ Conversation with the author, Giose Rimanelli, March 1994; and, also, in the book's jacket: «Con questo libro, che l'Autore definisce un suo `diversivo', egli si rivela anche viaggiatore, osservatore di caratteri e ambienti, acuto analista delle cose degli uomini e, soprattutto, del sentimento degli uomini».

¹⁹ F. MAZZIOTTI, *Biglietto di terza*, in «Il cittadino» (Napoli), 27 settembre 1959, p. 3.

singular, the protagonist is Marco Laudato and not the author. There are, however, as in earlier works, various autobiographical anecdotes and details in *Biglietto di terza* that parallel the author's life. Giovanni Cecchetti points out that Rimanelli's autobiographical roots are so strong that they become general information of the author. There is, Cecchetti points out, an ongoing autobiographical urgency in Rimanelli's work that when he does not recognize facts as his own, he transforms them so that they appear to be. The use of these autobiographical components, according to Cecchetti, is more a way of "rediscovering", of redefining oneself, which is also the basis of his continuous experimentalism [...].²⁰ He adds that even if Rimanelli writes about himself, it is only for a similarity, "[..]. "è un sé stesso mitizzato, quindi anche gli altri sono mitizzati, e diventano lui stesso".²¹

Michael Sprinkler indicates that an autobiography is the reproduction of facts which constitutes a unique and individual articulation of a model. The reiteration of texts, according to Sprinkler, produces differences, and memory and repetition become categories of fundamental consideration for any autobiography.²² At the same time, in his essay, *Memoria d'un romanzo*, Rimanelli notes that *Biglietto di terza* is, in part, an autobiography.²³ He does not explain which elements are real to his life and which are not, but it is, according to his own words, not totally an autobiography. There is, as a result, no autobiographical pact as the text is not entirely the life of the author.²⁴ The voices of the narrator, the writer and the protagonist are not completely the same. Rimanelli, with this publication, is not the historian of his own life.²⁵ Additionally, Georges Gusdorf explains that all literature is autobiographical, and this concept corresponds to Rimanelli who affirms that all his work is autobiographical in nature.²⁶

Although there are apparent personal elements of Rimanelli's life within this text, there is no specificity that totally corresponds to Rimanelli's life. There is data

²⁰ G. CECCHETTI, *Autobiografia mitografica in Giose Rimanelli*, in *Rimanelliana: Studi su Giose Rimanelli*, edited by Sebastiano Martelli («Forum Italicum», 2000), p. 121.

²¹ Ivi, p. 123.

²² M. SPRINKLER, *The End of Autobiography*, in *Autobiography*, edited by James Olney, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1980, p. 329.

²³ G. RIMANELLI, *Memoria di un romanzo*, in «Rivista di Studi Italiani», 1999, XVII, n° 1, p. 389.

²⁴ P. LEJEUNE, *On Autobiography*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1989, p. 5.

²⁵ G. GUSDORF, *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography*, in *Autobiography*, edited by James Olney, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1980, p. 31.

²⁶ «My literature is almost all autobiographical in nature: novels, poetry, literary criticism. I date everything I write; on each completed work I mark down the hour, the day, the month and the year. And this is because I feel I am alone in the world. My writing, in fact, has never been directed at the world, rather, it reflects the reality of my own existence in direct contact with practical facts or ideals offered by my world's historical contingencies. My discourse, therefore, is more narrative than critical, more personal than objective. I learn by writing», G. RIMANELLI, *Notes on Fascist/Antifascist Politics and Cultures from the Point of View of a Misfit*, in «Rivista di Studi Italiani», II, Dec. 1984, p. 73.

which coincides with his life but there is other information that does not. No one ever mentions or uses the protagonist's name. He talks about his family, but the father's name is, like that of the son, a mystery. This narrator indicates that everyone called his mother by the nickname of Suzy whereas Rimanelli's mother's nickname was another: Tina. At the beginning of the text, the protagonist makes a trip to his hometown in Italy, but that name also does not appear. Upon entering the ancestral home, he recalls the names of two people: Giulia and Leonardo. There was no Leonardo in Rimanelli's life nor in any of his narratives and there was not even a "true" Giulia, as presented in *Tiro al piccione*. She was, as Rimanelli has often pointed out, a literary means, a fiction to push Marco Laudato's plot forward.²⁷

Upon arrival in Canada, the family has a welcome dinner for the long, lost sheep of the family which may remind the reader of the celebration that took place on Marco Laudato's return to Casacalenda after the war. There is a reference to the war but not to the side for which the protagonist fought. Rimanelli did have Canadian uncles, but there was no Uncle Pat, and none had the surname of Dominick. The writer, in his 1999 essay, clarified that the Uncle Pat episodes were a source of comic relief, although there was some truth to them. Also, his brother Gino got divorced, but not from a Canadian, but from an Italian. The ex-wife was from their hometown and, as in the book, he converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism, to marry again in a church. Ironically, Rimanelli did not know about his brother's conversion until the 1990s, forty years after *Biglietto di terza* came out. Rimanelli's perspective was that the spiritual conversion of his brother was yet another literary means to advance the plot and, at the same time, to explain a cultural change taking place in the immigrant world.

There are three constant elements in Rimanelli's work: Molise; America; and the brutality and horrors of the Civil War. In *Biglietto di terza*, these items do not play a very visible role, but the astute reader of the author's opus perceives them. Molise, although it is not specifically mentioned, becomes known during a small visit that the narrator makes to a church in Montreal, *La Madonna della Difesa*, a religious sanctuary also found in Casacalenda (Molise), the author's hometown. The emigrants recreated the shrine in Montreal with an extraordinary variation: the image of Mussolini.²⁸

²⁷ According to Rimanelli, there was a Giulia in Casacalenda, but he never had any type of relationship with her. When the two met again in the United States, over fifty years later, she had no idea who he was and spoke to him always using the formal style of speech. Additionally, her husband was not a teacher. (Conversations with the author).

²⁸ There is a remarkable difference between the two places of worship: in Montreal there is a dome fresco illustrating the figure of Mussolini (with his horse) commemorating the Lateran Pacts of 1929 and this image is not present in the original sanctuary in Casacalenda.

America obviously stands out throughout the text with the presence of the whole family and their involved history of immigration. The ferocity and horrors that swept across the Italian peninsula during the civil war appears here, not with a story of the narrator, but with another: a Piedmontese partisan who lost his wife and son due to the brutality of a Nazi. Now, years after the war, this Piedmontese believes he saw that same German assassin in a bar in Montreal and tries to kill him. Unfortunately, he made a huge mistake: it was the wrong person. Years after the war and in another country, an innocent person becomes yet one more victim of the Nazis, another casualty of an inhumane past.

The short story in *Biglietto di terza*, *La macchia di sangue*, recalls the extreme poverty depicted in the author's novel *Peccato originale*. That novel deals with the socio-economic reasons for which many Italians immigrated to America in the post-war period. Arriving in his hometown for family business, the protagonist of *Biglietto di terza* witnesses in shock the destitution and the starvation of the townspeople. In this story a horse dies, and everyone crowds around to get pieces of the dead animal to have meat in the house. The severe hunger suffered in the post-war period is evident. Penury dominates all aspects of life for the southern Italian and the people are desperate to emigrate to America in search of a better life.

At the end of *Tiro al piccione*, Marco learns that Giulia has married the village teacher and had a child. Here too, there is an emotional bond with Rimanelli's first novel. The lady in *Biglietto di terza* who is renting the family house to which the protagonist comes evokes the image of Giulia who, also, married a teacher of the village. This lady has three children. The eldest of the three is ten years old, the same age that Giulia's son would be at that moment of this character's visit. Just as Giulia was a literary means to push Marco's story forward in *Tiro al piccione*, similarly, the unnamed lady of this tale is a method to advance the protagonist's tale in *Biglietto di terza*.

Even the narrator's entry into the bus *Nowhere* in *Biglietto di terza* reminds the careful reader of Marco Laudato's entry into military service. Marco, alone in Venice, hungry, and wet from the rain, followed a group of people who were walking in pairs while he was trying to escape the bad weather. As the seminarian he once was, he followed behind them and entered a building without knowing that it was a recruitment office. In this text, the protagonist, going to an appointment for an interview for a position in Montreal, tries to shelter himself from the cold and never-ending snow of the day, and he too follows a group of people who were moving in pairs, and

again, like a seminarian, enters the infernal bus without knowing its route or destination.²⁹ He was, just as he did in *Tiro al piccione*, trying to flee the inclement climate conditions.

The only correspondence this narrator receives from his father in *Biglietto di terza* is one that reminds the reader once more of *Peccato originale*. In that narrative Vincenzo Rimanelli, the father of the writer, appears, and the elder Rimanelli mentions by name, his son, Giose. In *Biglietto di terza*, there is a variation of that epistle: neither the father nor the author's name appears. The missive in both books is directed to a friend, Scoccherà, a name that appears in both narratives.³⁰ This recycling of already written matter is, as Capek Habekovic explains, a basic element of Rimanelli. The author does this not to be repetitive or for selfish reasons, but as a process of ongoing revisions to produce a richer effect that has a deeper dimension.³¹

Uncle Pat emerges nowhere else in this book, but his surname, Dominick, might be a wink at the future novel *Una posizione sociale* in which the writer depicts his maternal grandfather Dominick, Antonio Minicucci, who was known as Tony "Slim" Dominick. Uncle Pat mentions his father's passion for the trumpet, a musical instrument that plays a considerable role in the forthcoming *Una posizione sociale* and discusses their coming to Canada from New Orleans. Grandfather Dominick in the novel plays the trumpet at night while talking about the horrific history of the lynching in New Orleans. The personal story of both the literary grandfather and the actual one, looked at immigration in reverse: the American who emigrates to Italy. Additionally, the names of the brothers within *Biglietto di terza*, Gino and Antonio, are still a link

²⁹ «Seguii dapprima un gruppo di persone, le persi poi, e come perso anch'io tenni dietro a un giovane, che la neve mi nascondeva e ripresentava», pp. 71-72.

³⁰ «... cara Italia come sei più cara adesso, ma io ci ho una gamba rotta e tu lo sai, Scoccherà, ma il boss viene e mi fa: su con quella gamba, ed io non posso dirgli che ho una gamba rotta al femore se no mi caccia e addio, e poi questa settimana ci ho da spendere 15 dollari per comprare gli occhiali a mia moglie che pure lavora ma non ci vede bene, e dice che sarà contenta quando anche mio figlio Giose verrà da noi, ma se si decide a buttare i libri perché non servono e qui non legge nessuno e pensano solo a fare buisnisse. E poi degli italo-americani non ti voglio parlare, sono tutti pazzi sfuriati, e se la cosa continua diventeremo anche noi nevrastenici, e a pensarci bene l'America è un bluff tondo così, e noi ci trattano da somari...» (*Peccato originale*, p. 107) The letter in *Biglietto di terza*: «...cara Italia come sei più cara adesso ma io ho una gamba rotta e tu lo sai, Scoccherà, ma il boss viene e mi fa: su con quella gamba, e io non posso dirgli che ho una gamba rotta al femore se no mi slacca e addio, e poi questa settimana ho da spendere 15 dollari per comprare gli occhiali a mia moglie che pure lei lavora e non ci vede bene. E poi degli italo-ameircani non ti voglio parlare, sono tutti pazzi sfuriati e pensano solo a fare bisinisse, s se la cosa continua diventeremo anche noi nevrastenici, e a pensarci bene l'America è un bluff tondo così, e noi ci trattano da somari», *Biglietto di terza*, p. 9.

³¹ R. CAPEK-HABEKOVIC, *Listening to the Beet of Different Drums: Giose Rimaneli's Latest Poetry*, in «Rivista di Studi Italiani», anno XIX, giugno 2001, p. 109.

to the novel. In *Una posizione sociale*, the protagonist, Massimo Niro, has two brothers: Antonio and Gino, the name of the author's siblings.

Biglietto di terza is a narrated text with real and imaginary characters. It is, as the author notes, a book made up of sketches of Canadian life.³² There is no concrete information at all about the protagonist. The only possibly particular item that could define this character are the names of the brothers: Gino and Antonio, and these are typical appellations of anyone in Italy. The protagonist's name does not appear; nor does that of the father. Those of the other family members are fabrications of the writer. There is no reference to his hometown in Italy although in the second chapter, he goes there on family business. The town is never named.

The play with language, the experimentalism of the structure, the use of multiple dialogues, all created within *Biglietto di terza*, the sensation of a subtle and emotional movement which permits the reader to travel alongside the protagonist, through time and space, whether in this book or others by Rimanelli. The writer presents the reality of the Italian Canadian immigrant in the chapter *La parlata Italo-Americana*. He explains:

Ogni dialetto nostro, dopo un lungo soggiorno fuori dalla matrice originaria, sembra si rivesta di nuove tonalità, si irrobustisca con altri significati: si trasforma tanto rapidamente in questo periodo di assestamento che ci sembra un cammino pigro il suo formarsi iniziale durante i venti secoli passati, dai giorni in cui Orazio cantava la fonte di Bandusia. (p. 132)

This episode, apart from being extremely amusing, shows the use of code switching which, according to Anna Maria Milone, leaves the reader with the perception of belonging and witnessing firsthand the writer's universe.³³ Furthermore, it reveals to the reader the sociolinguistic transition of the newcomer: the immigrant adapts to the new environment without forgetting his heritage but incorporates the new one to create a fresh and innovative dialect that is not restricted to the regional limits of the peninsula.

In this publication, the first hint of a transcultural odyssey is the transatlantic journey that the protagonist makes with all the immigrants who are looking for a new life. Upon arrival in Halifax, the ship's destination, to begin yet another inter-continental journey to arrive at the travelers' ending point, the migrating passengers offer a small prayer:

³² *Memoria di un romanzo*, p. 389.

³³ A.M. MILONE, *Giose Rimanelli: Lo scrittore itinerante. Uno studio dei romanzi dei temi e dei personaggi* in «Agon», n. 3, ottobre-dicembre 2014, p. 66.

Siate felici, stranieri. Siamo in terra canadese. Sì signora. Siamo nella terra promessa. Abbiamo attraversato il Mar Rosso e ci aspettano, ora, grappoli d'uva dolce grandi come grattacieli. (p. 28)

The crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews, although freed from slavery in Egypt and promised the land of the Canaanites, proved difficult and arduous: they were not blessed to enter the *Promised Land* immediately or easily. G-d forbade their entry for having sinned against Him. The pilgrims, during their journey, lost their faith, so G-d punished them and only allowed their descendants, those without memory of their ancestors' sin, to enter Paradise.

If the transatlantic journey for immigrants is like that of the Jews escaping Egypt and passing through the Red Sea, it suggests that entry into the *Promised Land* of America will be delayed for the expatriate due to the difficulties they encounter upon arrival. Nonetheless, it hints that the doorway may be open to future generations who will have leveled the playing field having been born here.

To underline the precarious nature of the work situation and, consequently, the financial one for the recently arrived immigrant, there is the chapter, *Il ragazzo del W.C.* This segment illustrates the difficulty of finding a job for the new migrant. According to that episode, the employment contract, a document that all immigrants must have to prove their work status, does not guarantee anything. A young man who came to Canada with a signed contract is denied employment and is unable to find anything in Montreal. He locks himself in the public facilities, crying, and the Police are summoned to remove him. They find out, like the others present, that he has no funds. He has been without his family for over two months and is at his wits end. Present among the spectators is an Italian Canadian who offers him employment in another town, over two hours away, at a reduced salary from the one originally promised. The signed contract, so necessary for admittance into America, is just a piece of paper and does not guarantee anything to the hopeful immigrant. In this manner, the American dream can turn into a nightmare without the firm commitment of employment and the money that comes with it. To survive in this new universe, the emigrant must have a job, any job, as long as he makes a living.

The protagonist of the story decides to stay in Canada for a while and immediately finds a good paying position. Uncle Pat refused to believe it was possible. The nephew was able to find employment without the assistance of his relative, a feat that the uncle could not process. The uncle explains that finding a job in a brief time in Canada is impossible failing to recognize that his nephew is a noted person in Italian letters. He refused to believe that anyone would pay his nephew money just to write. According to the uncle, writing is not serious work, "Scrittore, già. Uno che

s'inventa delle storie." (p. 144) As far as the uncle is concerned, physical work is the only classification that exists.³⁴

This uncle is the wealthiest of the entire family. He had, according to gossip, a connection to the notorious Frank Costello. He never denied it, but he obviously took advantage of it. There is a small song about the uncle that the people of the neighborhood sing.³⁵ The lyrics depict a dishonest person and strongly suggests a connection with the underworld. When the protagonist mentions it, the uncle, angrily, states that these are the words of his enemies. He adds:

Anche tu sei *smart*, se sei riuscito a trovarti un buon posto. Ma parleranno male anche di te, prima o poi. (p. 77)

In a curious twist of fate, the uncle's statement is a type of portent for the negativity to befall the writer a year later with the release of his literary criticism book *Il mestiere del furbo*, a text that caused his exclusion and alienation from the Italian world of letters.

Travel is a ubiquitous element in Rimanelli's writings, and it penetrates his entire work. The transcendental journey is not new to Italian literature and Dante's *La divina commedia* and his traveler *par excellence* resonates in all of Rimanelli's work.³⁶ The transition between the two universes permits the reader to explore and delve into the same world as the protagonist. He is a Ulysses type character. Sante Matteo points out that Rimanelli's travels are not like those made by Homer's Ulysses but are more related to Dante's.³⁷ In this way, the author functions as a guide, a Virgil for the reader.

The first hint of the presence of the great poet is more an imperceptible sensation than a tangible sign: the navigation across the ocean for the immigrants. The author compares this voyage with that trek of the ancient Jews escaping slavery and their crossing the Red Sea to escape their inferno in Egypt. The immigrants in Rimanelli's saga are traveling the ocean to escape their infernal existence they endured in southern Italy, a place that offered them no respite from the centuries of poverty and social degradation to a foreign world that offered them the hope of a better tomorrow.

³⁴ «No, figlio, è tempo perso questo poeticare, lo zio Pat veniva a dirmi con aria di commiserazione. No, figlio, non così si fanno i quattrini. No, figlio, no figlio, no figlio, e guarda me piuttosto cosa ti faccio, con un niente ti trovo *dolori*, perché tutto ciò che tocco si muta in *dolori*, e perciò ora ti organizzo una campagna di beneficenza...», p. 135.

³⁵ «Era smarto il dabben uomo, / Conosceva il business, / Era amico del polisse / E in collegio non andò», p. 77.

³⁶ S.L. POSTMAN, *Crossing the Acheron: A Study of Nine Novels by Giose Rimanelli*, Legas, New York 2000.

³⁷ S. MATTEO, *Molise Lost and Regained in Rimanelli's American Odyssey*, in «Rivista di Studi Italiani», 2001, Anno XIX, n. 1, p. 237.

Dante's presence in Rimanelli's book eventually appears within the specificity of the text. One day, the protagonist took a bus to go for an interview. Mistakenly, he entered one, whose name was *Nowhere*. It was a city bus that circulated, without stopping, throughout the city. During this ride, he met a young thief, Rick, who some-time later offered to kill a person for the protagonist for a low fee. During this ride he felt, as he explained, as if he were with all "le anime condannate che Caronte ha portato a Dite."³⁸

The name of this bus repeats in the penultimate chapter of the book, *Viaggio senza ritorno*. It displays a hell-like world from which only honest and diligent people can escape. After a girl steals the hero's car, he meets Bill Foster. Foster comes to Canada to earn money and return to Pennsylvania for his wedding. He is a teacher engaged to a pharmacist, the daughter of the city manager. A bus offers the two young men a ride to the nearest village. The name of the bus was, as in Montreal, *Nowhere*, a name that made both travelers remember and cite verses from *La divina commedia*.³⁹

The work the two travel companions find, like so many other emigrants, is on a tobacco farm. It is dangerous, backbreaking, and pays poorly. The owner, Lucia Mes-sala, was a Canadian of Italian origin. She did not compensate her workers as much as the other landlords in the area. From her perspective, the emigrants are not worth much and they have no choice but to accept her low offer if they want to work. She blatantly took advantage of their necessity for work and a salary. Additionally, this episode appears to be a continuation, albeit with different characters, of the story told in the earlier episode, *il ragazzo del W.C.* in which a young immigrant must take a job two hours away from Montreal at a lower salary than originally promised.

This section shows the extremes the emigrants endure in search of a better life. They take an exceedingly difficult and dangerous job to get some money. One day, a farm worker was seriously injured. Everyone, except Foster, protested the working conditions by going on strike. Instead of objecting to the problematic work environment, at that moment, Foster started a relationship with the owner. Foster abused his temporary situation: he did not work as much as the others, he refused to do what was asked of him, and yet he expected the same salary as everyone else. The lady landowner believed the personal relationship was more serious than Foster. Foster's punishment for taking advantage of his circumstances would be that he would not leave the inferno in which they were all working: the owner killed him.

³⁸ «Era il primo pomeriggio e la città, sotto i fiocchi bianchi, pareva addormentata. Gardai uno per uno i miei compagni di viaggio, e anch'essi parevano addormentati, figure di sasso antico, anime di condannati che il Caronte sordo portava a Dite», p. 74.

³⁹ D. ALIGHIERI, *Inferno*, Canto III, vv. 100-105.

He would never enter the *Promised Land* that awaited him upon his return to Pennsylvania.

In sardonic form, Foster, who came to that territory on the *Nowhere* bus, dies from a gunshot wound, exactly the way Rick, from Montreal's *Nowhere* bus promised to kill a person for the narrator. Foster remains inside the waters of the Acheron. Dante proclaims that the river is for those people who neither satisfied G-d nor Satan, but for those destined to remain in continual torment.⁴⁰ They are the people who refused to take a stand against an unpleasant reality. Foster did not protest the hardships of the job like his companions or protest when a fellow worker is seriously injured due to substandard working conditions; he thought only of himself. His voice remained silent in life and in death.

Unlike the Italian emigrants of *Biglietto di terza*, the American (Foster) is of unknown ancestry. He did not make the sea voyage to escape the hell-like existence in southern Italy but crossed the American continent with the intention of earning money to advance himself economically. Additionally, unlike many of the Italian immigrants, Forster had an education. He comes to Canada for personal financial gain; the Italian immigrant came for a better life for the entire family now and in the future. They wanted an existence that offered more than the life they had in the Old World. Foster's is a journey of greed, not of hope.

Contrary to the story of Bill Foster, there are the two brothers of the protagonist: Antonio and Gino. These two portray the diligent, hard-working immigrant. The brothers have been in Canada for five years. Neither of them speaks Italian in public for fear of open prejudice against them and they do not even speak it between themselves. Gino pretends to be an Englishman and Antonio a Frenchman, each speaking the language of their new *persona*. Their aim is to advance their lives socially and economically. There is, however, continuous controversy between them with respect to money. Antonio keeps everything; Gino spends it, saving some and contributing, unlike Antonio, to the household. They worked and saved money to achieve the American dream. The two brothers, models for the emigrant experience, were able to open their own shops and thus obtain the desired objective. For them, inferno was left behind in the Old World and heaven is the *Promised Land* they found in the New.

The text, in addition, analyzes the different types of immigrants who come to America: the hardworking ones, like the two brothers, who work all the time and put aside money to create their American dream; those who must learn that a job, any job, is needed to survive; others who seek leverage through a personal relationship; and those, like Uncle Pat, who have nefarious connections.

⁴⁰ Ivi, Canto III: 34-36.

Unlike the guides that Rimanelli's protagonists in his early narratives had, in *Biglietto di terza* the guide is not a specific person, but the whole immigrant community. The Italian Canadian does not prevent the journey towards a better life for the newcomers, rather they leave the doors wide open for a brighter future for them. They try to help the new arrivals, establishing a new culture, a combination of two worlds: the Italian Canadian, an American culture in which people can get ahead, socially, and economically, while retaining the Italian customs.

There is not sufficient reason for the protagonist of *Biglietto di terza* to have a specific guide in this new land because his voyage is not an escape from the bowels of hell but a journey of exploration. He is experimenting, albeit in a varied and protected form, the new reality of the immigrant experience. His existence in Italy was not infernal. The torment in Italy for the immigrant now in America was a country that did not allow the people of the South to ameliorate socially, politically, or economically. Italy did nothing to solve their incessant problems. The emigrant, according to the writer, is someone who wants to break the locked chains of the past and move forward towards a boundless future of unending opportunities. The author was only in Canada for ten- and one-half months and did not choose to remain, preferring to return to Italy. He had a choice.

Giose Rimanelli's narrative *Biglietto di terza* explores the Italian immigrant experience from within the culture during the post-war years in Europe. In the 1950s, the author who is still a citizen of Italy and not of the United States, voyages to Canada to visit his family. The post-war years in America saw more employment, a baby boom, and economic prosperity for almost everyone. This is a Golden Age for all Americans. In Italy, although there was similar prosperity, these changes had no effect on the South, thereby necessitating the immigration of many. Using his own relatives as a paradigm, Rimanelli presents a wide panorama of images that create a series of sketches of the alien adventure and their lifestyle in the New World. He converts the myth of America into its reality: a world of hard work and dedication. There are no *streets paved with gold* nor is it *a land of milk and honey*. Success is the result of hard work and dedication. The immigrants, although facing a great deal of harshness in these new, adopted lands, were able to prosper as well. They were not hindered by an ancient caste-like system that did not allow them to progress and move up the social ladder. In America the new arrivals were able to flourish and thrive, and thrive, they did. By the third generation, the descendants of the original immigrants became business entrepreneurs, artists, musicians, educators, and politicians. They became the fabric of the American life.