UTOPIAN DREAMS AND THE NOSTALGIC IMPULSE: FULVIO TOMIZZA'S *MATERADA* AND THE CONTINUING ISTRIAN DIASPORIC DISCOURSE

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"...the literary utopian idea that Istria...is a distinct geo-ethnic and historical whole and that the inhabitant of Istria ... is of mixed nationality, a bastard!"

Nedjeljko Fabrio,
President, Croatian Writers Union, 1991

Summary

The author argues that Fulvio Tomizza's first protagonist, Francesco Koslović, of the 1960 novel Materada, represents an interiorization of Istria's political and ethnic tensions within a single family and a single "transcultured" individual. The author links, moreover, the pervasive sense of nostalgia in the work to the broader cultural context of Triestine modernism, suggesting that the philosophical absence characteristic of such thought is fundamental to the diasporic inspiration of much of what Tomizza wrote. But such inspiration also springs from real events with real emotional content, and moments of the post-war exodus continue to pose difficulties for discussion and understanding. The specific case of Anna Maria Mori's and Nelida Milani's collaborative memoir Bora is discussed from the standpoint of the power disparity evident in the presentation of the two women's discourses, a disparity that draws into serious question the very possibility of a dialogue of equals concerning memories of a place called Istria. In two final subsections, the author suggests that the conceptualization of Istrian culture through various metaphors of mixture (metissage, hybrid, etc.) are equally valid in various contexts and admits to a personal stake in the revalorization of mixture per se, both in and out of Istria.

A Place of Borders

The population of the Istrian peninsula has long included a rich ethnic mixture. This trait has combined with the region's relative isolation to make it a kind

of central-European microcosm,[1] characterized by a multifarious ethnic base that has changed political affiliations countless times. The region's most recent history tends to continue such a tradition, if it can be called that, as it passed through the hands of Austria-Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, and into those of Croatia and Slovenia in less than a hundred years. A more diffuse, though administratively onerous ruler in the guise of "Europe", may also not be far in the offing.[2] Moreover, while previous waves of immigrants moved or were transported here by various regimes in response to the region's depopulation following epidemics or wars, refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo have provided the latest wave of "*došljaci*", legal and otherwise. In time, they too will undoubtedly form part of the region's rich heritage.

Valuable perspective on contemporary events can be gained by exploring the vast "literature of exodus" that Istrian writers, poets, historians, and memoirists have generated since the 1940s, especially following World War II. The complex political situation after the war heightened ethnic tensions, growing since the end of the nineteenth-century, when in May of 1945 Yugoslav Partisan forces occupied Trieste and most of Istria. In the ensuing months of indecision, the United Nations established the Free Territory of Trieste, dividing it for administrative purposes into Zone A (the city itself and its immediate hinterland) under the British and Americans and Zone B (an area of two hundred square miles south of the city) under the Yugoslavs; finally, in 1954 Zone A was incorporated into Italy, Zone B into Yugoslavia. In the meantime, Yugoslavia had become a socialist republic. Unlike the contemporaneous division of Berlin, however, Trieste and its environs were not seen primarily as an ideological battleground pitting communist and capitalist forces against one another. Instead, in what has come to seem traditional Balkan fashion, international diplomacy considered ethnicity as the key to normalizing relations between the two countries, envisioning the establishment of "ethnic equilibrium" in border regions.

[1] As one contemporary journalist puts it, "Nobody passes through Istra; one goes *into* it, as into Calabria or the Mull of Kintyre. It has always been a region in the fullest sense, with its own history, dialects and folklore. Like nowhere else in the federation except Vojvodina, it generated an identity beyond ethnic and national difference" (Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The Ending of Yugoslavia*. New York, 1992. pp. 61-2).

[2] One might also count the Allied military administration in the years immediately following WWII as a form of "rule". Slovenian Istria is, of course, better poised to join the European Union before its Croatian counterpart. Integration, whenever it occurs, will mean additional freedom of movement into and out of the region, and greater challenges for "*istriani*".

Istrians faced with the choice of a future were not wealthy people. Most were peasant farmers, fisherman, teachers, shopkeepers. They had lived in the same houses for generations, often working generations to obtain them. Leaving, for those who chose it, meant giving up what they had and their parents or grandparents or great-grandparents had always wanted, taking a suitcase, some boxes, maybe a truckload of objects with them in an impossible semblance of transferring what was their life to another place far away. Their plight and, ultimately, their decisions, made some fifty years ago now, shaped the lives of their descendants in fundamental ways. Those decisions have also, inevitably, provided rich literary inspiration.

Where to Return?

"The Istrian is someone a little backward in his sentiments, somewhere on the border between the Slavic and Latin worlds, between the Balkans and the Appenines".

Tone Peruško, 1964.

The best known, most prolific, and likely most profound writer to emerge from the Istrian crucible was Fulvio Tomizza (1935-1999). His first novel in particular, the 1960 work *Materada*, was groundbreaking. The first mainstream Italian-language novel to include slavicisms, *Materada* introduced the theme of the *exodus*—the Italo-Istrian equivalent of the mainstream Croat and Serb usage of "diaspora" to refer to emigrés from the Yugoslav regime—not as a feature of ethnicity primarily but as an issue of regional identity.[3] It marked Tomizza, moreover, as a writer of the diasporic experience, a mark he would carry for the rest of his career.[4]

For Francesco Koslović, the hero and narrator of *Materada*, no clear and exclusive sense of national identity exists. He is a product of the inter-ethnic milieu in which he has lived his life, bi-lingual and bi-cultural, both Italian and Croatian, but neither one nor the other exclusively—a transcultured individual. His identity is intimately linked to his surroundings, and he is suggested as the most "natural" outcome of a marginal region which, while undergoing countless changes in regime and shifts in official border-lines, has historically retained its heterogeneous, multi-ethnic character. In Tomizza's portrayal Koslović's is a regional identity with no state representing it. To compound the political and

[3] *Materada*, Mondadori, 1960. English tr., Russell Valentino. Evanston: IL, 1999.

[4] For a systematic treatment of Tomizza's opus, see Nižić, Živko. *Kolizijske kulture u prozi Fulvija Tomizze*. Rijeka-Fiume: EDIT, 1996.

ethnic difficulties (or perhaps universalize them), the issue is given a personal turn because in Koslović's case a family feud is also involved. The latter development proved a masterful twist on the part of the young writer, for it toned down the still controversial configuration of his work, at least partially eliminating bipartisan political issues and interiorizing the conflict inside a family, inside a man.

Materada represented a clear departure from previous treatments of the exodus in that it portrayed a regional Istrian identity that, far from excluding the area's Slavic roots, showed its dependence on them and emphasized the two elements' coexistence and, indeed, symbiosis. "True *convivenza*", writes the Croatian historian, Miroslav Bertoša, "is possible in ethnically mixed regions only when there is no fear that one or another side will be assimilated".[5] By placing the region's most pressing ethnic distinctions within an individual, moreover, one who was tied to the land itself, Tomizza effectively eliminated the issue of fear of assimilation. Whether Tomizza's depiction is an accurate representation of Istrian reality is another issue.

Tomizza, who died in 1999, always maintainted his identity was itself regional, calling himself a "*scrittore di confine*", not Italian but Istrian. This self-definition grated on the nerves of some Italians in Istria proper because, despite the Istrian content of his books, Tomizza remained, after all, a permanent resident of Trieste, in a certain sense, "safe" across the border in Italy. On the other hand, the cultural tight rope walked by Tomizza's works is clear from the fact that numerous Yugoslav officials, and later those of independent Croatia, found his claims of a mixed Istrian identity spurious.[6] My impression is that the criticism of the former derived from an economic foundation, especially in later years, while that of the later was essentially political.

Even a cursory reading of Tomizza's works indicates his non-exploitative and anti-inflamatory approach. *Materada* in particular furnishes a portrayal devoid of ethnic hatred, even of ethnic bias. Evil resides in individuals and political institutions, but the notion of ethnicity-based or nationalistic self-definition is rendered impossible in practice by the main character's bi-cultural status. It is replaced by a love for the native region, the tastes, stories, songs, and practices that comprise it now and, most importantly, comprised it in the past.

It is not surprising, then, that the pervasive atmosphere of nostalgia one finds in the work, which is diffuse in much of what Tomizza wrote, is not directed at

[5] *Etos i etnos zavičaja* (Pula-Rijeka, 1985), p. 101.

[6] See for instance the entire text of Nedjeljko Fabrio's critique of Tomizza's *La Miglior Vita*, quoted in the epigraph to this article. *Sastavljenje štiva*, Zagreb, 1977, p. 194; and his open letter to Tomizza (in which he quotes his previous work) in *Vrijeme*, Feb. 10, 1991, p. 9.

any concrete object, certainly not toward physical return to the land of his birth. Instead, it is an abstracted sense of absence most closely associated with the philosophical absence one finds in certain modernist currents. Here Tomizza's depiction ties into the works of Triestine writers and philosophers of the early 20th century, most notably, Italo Svevo, Umberto Saba, and especially Carlo Michelstaedter. Michelstaedter's 1910 treatise, *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, amply demonstrates the principle of absence taken to its greatest lengths:

A weight hangs suspended from a hook; and being suspended it suffers because it cannot fall: it cannot get off the hook, for insofar as it is weight it is suspended, and as long as it is suspended it is dependent. We want to satisfy it: we free it from its dependence, letting it satisfy its hunger for what lies below, and it falls independently for as long as it is content to fall. However, at none of the points attained is it content to stop but still wants to fall [...]. Nor will any future point be such as to render it content, since [...] every point attained will be emptied of all attraction, no longer being below; thus, *it wants at every point the points below it*, and those attract it more and more: it is always drawn by an equal hunger for what is below, and the will to fall remains infinite with it always. If at some point the will were finished for it and it could *possess* in one point the infinite descent of the infinite future—at that point it would no longer be what it is: *a weight.*

The weight's identity, what makes it the same for itself at all times, is a lack, an absence. Here Michelstaedter cleverly combines the Augustinian notion of worldly desire—one is connected to the world through desire, longing for it, a kind of absence in oneself that wants the world—with the pre-Socratic, essentially Parmenidesic, "way of being", what "is, and cannot not-be", which is "the path of persuasion" (*πειθους*) (D 2). The result for Michelstaedter is a contradictory identity, an individual in conflict with himself, a mirror of contemporary society of sorts, a paradigm of late Hapsburg dissonance.

Michelstaedter's text is the tip of the existential iceburg of Triestine (and by extension, Central European) modernism. It is likewise the ultimate expression of what the twenty-year-old Tomizza encountered—part of the "myth" or "phantom" of Trieste— when he settled in the divided, post-Imperial, and at that time newly marginalized Italian city, in 1955.[7] The nostalgia that permeates *Materada*

[7] Still today Italians from the interior who visit Trieste routinely describe it as a "strange city" without, apparently, taking into account its long Austrian heritage, its absent "hinterland" or *retroterra* (the surrounding hills are predominantly Slovene), and its consequent strong ties to Central and Eastern Europe. Tomizza's self-description as a "*scrittore di frontiera*", or "*di confine*", therefore, reflects his *triestinità*, as much as his *instrianità.* On Trieste's multiculturalism see, for instance, Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste. Un identità di frontiera* (Torino, 1987).

has no concreteness, nor ultimately can it have. For it depends on the absence that lies at the heart of its creation. Like Michelstaedter's weight, which in ceasing to fall would lose its identity, an identity of absence lies at the heart of the diasporic experience Tomizza depicts. *Dove tornare?* asks one of Tomizza's later titles. Where indeed? The answer must always only be a longing reiteration of the very same.

To Stay or Not to Stay

"I felt I was leaving behind my youth, scattered a little here a little there, in a hedge, behind a pile of straw, in the air, at the foot of one of the countless little walls that divide our fields".

Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*

The importance of Tomizza's treatment of ethnic heterogeneity should be immediately obvious in the context of twentieth-century Balkan history. Claims of Bosnian, Macedonian, and most recently Kosovar cultural distinctiveness have long been at the heart of conflicts in the region, assuming particularly poignant forms in recent years. In this sense, Tomizza's Istria reflects the culture of Central Europe as a whole—represented in writers from Kafka to Ivo Andrić, Danilo Kiš, and Milan Kundera—which expresses numerous common themes through the filter of a joint historical experience, but in the midst of great ethnic and religious diversity, a combination that has resulted in a multitude of political and military conflicts, changes of regime, shifts in population. Tomizza's depiction draws its inspiration from a small part of this great diversity, serving to legitimize it against the ravages of nationalist and politically-motivated violence. It is an artistic treatment of the tragedy of emigration forced upon those who would have much rather stayed home.

Such emigration is the subject of a recent and exceptional work by Anna Moria Mori and Nelida Milani (Kruljac, her married name, is omitted in her Italian language publications)—Mori, a feminist author and journalist in Rome, Milani a retired professor of Italian in Pula, Croatia, and also author of several books, including the award winning *A Cardboard Suitcase* (*Una valigia di cartone*, 1991). Their collaborative *Bora* is a book of reminiscences encompassing historical and personal material from approximately 1930 to the present. The primary locale is Istria, Mori's family being among those who departed after the Yugoslav annexation, while Milani's remained. The reminiscences are

exchanged, therefore, from two vastly different standpoints, one Western, the other Yugoslav, "extracom-munitarian", as Milani puts it.

The questions the book attempts to answer, or at least provides more appropriate questions about, are profound. The answers to the parents' doubts about whether to stay or go are provided in the lives of their descendants, who reflect on the choices of their parents and grandparents without judging them. To stay with all the potential difficulties of the political situation but with what one knows and with the graves of one's ancestors and the songs and language and food and smells of the place one has known—or to go, usually though not always, with nothing, not even the freedom to choose, a luxury romanticized by North Americans and West Europeans, because that freedom costs money and you won't likely have that.

The memories are framed by Mori's opening ekphrasis of a little girl's photograph, herself in June of 1937: the date is given and the place "obvious, understood: Pola, Istria, Italy". But when she types the name into her computer it is automatically underlined in red as an error. When she tries the new name, the new identity, Pula, it is accepted without question. "For the computer, and the collective, Pola doesn't exist, it is no more, it never did exist: it is Pula, Histra, Croatia". The natural next question is, what about herself, someone from this nonexitent place? In part the book is Mori's exercise in recapturing herself and her generation through memory. Her account begins with a description of her meeting with Milani during the filming of a documentary about Istria and continues through the series of letters exchanged in their collaboration. But from this simple beginning, the interaction grows more complex.

Mori may be looking for herself in the past, but Milani's aims appear quite different. In her opening words, her first letter to Mori, she excuses herself for initially refusing (violently—she hung up on her) to collaborate. It was, she writes, partly out of the fear of not being able to explain things too complexly intertwined with her own mixed idiom of Croatian and Italian. She asks, "Are you familiar with the death of unique things? the advent of doubled things?" But her hesitation also comes out of a sense of estrangement from her "Italian brothers", not recognizing herself in any of them. "We who remained had to adapt psychologically to the situation here and traces of that adaptation can still be seen in each of us... Imagine the moment when none of them spoke our language unless to say, 'You—Italian; you—fascist'... What do [you] exiles know of our 'internal exile' [...], how much it cost, in bitterness, face saving, conflict, tension, contradictions, frustration, suffering?"

Each woman writes about adapting to and coping with the realities she has faced. Mori's experience of exile and new roots is remniscent of the stories of North American immigrants, especially political refugees, Cubans, Soviet Jews. Milani's—perhaps the more profound because of greater suffering—is filled with anger and bitterness, nostalgia and philosophy. Both women have been professionally successful. But while Mori could hide her refugee heritage so long as to find proclaiming it at the end of the book a liberation of sorts, Milani describes coming to terms with her place over the years as an Italian in a "Slav" state, someone left behind in a sense, abandoned and transformed like the name of the city Mori's computer refuses to accept. Milani's living multiculturalism is, in the end, rather un-Italian. On the contrary, hers is a quintessentially Central European attitude, just as her prose, with its fact-based pathos, is often reminiscent of a writer like Danilo Kiš.

Her identity of internal exile and central European cultural hybrid is palpable in every one of her passages—on the status of ethnic Italians then and now, she writes:

Under communism they said we represented a bridge between Yugoslavia and Italy. We were never that. We wanted to be a bridge between the Italians of yesterday's Istria and those of tomorrow's, that, yes, to give to our children and grandchildren the vanished whole, the finished portrait [...]. For all its varieties and forms of origin, the stump always holds a hope of completeness, strong and inalienable. Its margins are the shreds of a wound that would like to heal but can't;

on the exodus of ethnic Italians, she writes:

The exodus divided as many families as did the Berlin wall. But no one here wants to talk about it: an object without style, a tabu playing hide and seek with history, a metaphor that's not refined enough? [...] Exodus is the concentration camp of our people. Some boys put a graffito on the Marina cemetary wall: exodus is the real divorce;

on her own "mixed" identity, she writes:

Gray is made of white and black. It isn't understandable from inside a tradition but stays at the horizon, beyond the sea [...]. Gray is the mist of a non-place, a mysterious entity that produces, bewilderingly, surprise, fear, curiosity, an invitation to 'walk far in someone else's shoes,' cutting capers, a freedom deprived of any oppressive sense of belonging.

The gray of her own identity, then, is a freedom, an ability to shift from context to context, being at one time Italian, at another Croatian, at still another Istrian, at others European (even if extra-communitarian). One can imagine her self-charac-terization in this manner would appeal to any number of individuals concerned about maintaining, or more appropriately losing, their regional distinctiveness in an all-encompassing "Europe".

But forceful as such formulations may be, especially for the diversity-minded American intellectual, there are other, more basic problems the book highlights. First among them: the entire enterprise of a dialogue of equals regarding memories and affinities of the place called Istria is something the book itself draws into doubt.

Who's Story Now?

The book's basic organization presents its first interpretive problem, which is how the discourse is framed. Control, in this case, is left to Mori as the "Westerner"—she opens and closes the book, she's chosen the epigraphs, her name is first, Milani's text is italicized, presumably because it is "special". Certainly, any collaboration will have a first author, but to think of this collaboration in such a way is to overlook the clear power disparity between the two women, a disparity rooted in politics, economics, and history, all of which render the regional Istrian identity tangible as the poor cousin in this discourse. The contributors themselves appear to be aware of the disparity, certainly in their lives, but also in the role of their writing, and each provides her comments, albeit sometimes obliquely.

Milani cannot help but be honest and profound in declaring, in the end, she really doesn't care about reality:

In a common dialect and community, we realize concrete worlds that can't be shared, the reciprocal foreignness of two conceptual horizons without points of contact, because they are products of two very diverse contexts. Only the affective world can be shared, of our childhood and adolescence, of imaginary worlds. The Istrian world as you imagine it from far away, the Italian world as I imagine it. There are aspects of Italian reality that escape and don't interest me. But to me it's still the ideal land. Italy, the dreamed of Atlantis, a molecule of which I carry in my language! What interests me is conserving its poetic image. Discovering and accepting its true face is not important (224).

The poetic image is here part of the fragments of a memory that "doesn't have a precise sequence". It is filled in, created in part, like a silk worm gathering material to be spit out later. "What we forget we integrate with imagination, while sensations remain alive and often overpower recollections" (55).
On the other hand, despite the bravado of such a stand, one is left with the suspicion Milani only half believes her own words when she passes to another vein, affective as always, and, it seems to me, central to the women's entire exchange:

We look at their clothes, the clothes of the women, [...] their nylon stockings, the pearls around their necks, their bracelets and everything else. [...] Oh, their Italian clothes that travel through Pola beneath the eyes of us who remained as if they were works of art. Their Vespas, then their Lambrettes and their Fiats, they speak about a completely foreign civilzation, tell stories about that other world, about installment-plan purchases and exchanges for buying a house, Swedish furniture from Upim, about polished nails and orange-red lipstick, about foxfur shawls and camel hair coats with a low, martingale collar [...], about a certain well-being and elegance and a femininity that no longer exists here. We who remained are part of another geography, buried by an invisible demarcation of history (225).

The contextual disparity of the women's lives, which Milani suggested above might be overcome through affective sharing, is palpable in this contemporary "*Ubi sunt*" passage as a marked and quite concrete disparity of things. It is a description reminiscent of the mortified glance of a young Czech tourist in the midst of a group of Westerners taking out their cameras for a collective photo as she in turn pulls her clunky, gray mechanism from her bag.
Of this too Milani appears aware, and her response is typically bitter sweet:

Abject poverty has reduced us to feeling "natural". Polenta and sardine variety. No more. What do you mean virtual reality, global warming, the whole world like a huge metropolis, racking your brain in order not to be stuck by the sad compulsory travesties of modernity and trying to be yourself? We non European communitarians have something fine in having this link to feeling "natural", living "pour la nature", hugging trees, eating fish, watching the flight of seagulls. Being ourselves. We are ourselves...

As with so many ethnographic studies, the clear power differential between the two realms of writing can easily end by transforming Milani's prose, indeed, Milani's life experience, into the anthropological object of the other's explora-

tion, not to mention the Western reader's interest, for whom her descriptions assume a non-particular, representative, "exotic" value.

Luckily, the quality of Milani's writing prevents such an interpretive turn. She is a master of the telling detail, the "precious, true word" as she calls it, which can make everything clear. In this case, what it renders clearest is the profundity of a life experience at the "fragile extreme" of cultures on the border.

Conflicting Metaphors

If something called a regional Istrian identity does in fact exist, at what point in its history and under what specific conditions did it form? What factors demonstrate this essential hybridity? Language? Literature? Music and folklore? Popular culture? On the other hand, is Istria better characterized—as Fabrio (in my first epigraph) and others have claimed—as "a ground of autochthonous values: Croat, Slovene, and Italian"?[8] In the latter view, Istrian heterogeneity must be understood as a kaleidoscope of different groups, each of which, while coming into contact with the others, nevertheless maintains its distinctive national or ethnic character.

Such heterogeneity, of course, as the linguistic and cultural analyses of Nelida Milani Kruljac and others have shown, may be characterized by both metaphors simultaneously, and others as well. At times one or another way of conceptualizing Istrian culture becomes dominant, as hybrid, metissage, mosaic, even symbiosis. The manner of thinking about it depends on the activity one is discussing, the group one has in mind, the region in question, and the period. A bilingual classroom in 1992 Pula, the Buje wine fair, Tomizza's interiorized Francesco Koslović of *Materada*, Mate Balota's turn of the century Pazin—these are distinct and, at first glance, virtually ungeneralizable cultural unities, which might be called, respectively, metissage, carnivalesque, hybrid, and dialectal synthesis. But a characteristic Istrian reality continues to be discussed by writers and politicians alike, while such "objective" criteria as distinct Istrian voting patterns make its dismissal as an intellectual or utopian construct irresponsible, if not dishonest.

As a living, non-archival phenomenon that, like any natural category, changes gradually over time, contemporary Istrian culture can provide helpful insights into the effects of globalization and europeanization on a distinctively multi-eth-

[8] See previous note to Fabrio's statements.

nic region. Its particularity and relative isolation make it an especially attractive "laboratory" for studying the changes that European regions (*regia*) are likely to be faced with in the very near future.[9] What is certain is that the nationalist and nationalizing rhetoric of a Tudjman (or, to judge by his published statements, a Fabrio for that matter) in which, to borrow Berto£a's apt phraseology, history becomes the ancillary of politics, and in which the mixed cultural entity, in whatever combinatory phrase or metaphor one finds most appropriate, is likened to the bastard, can only render more painful the inevitable fertilizations of cross-border cultural life.

On the Importance of Being a Bastard

I must admit a certain personal stake in the "multicultural" conceptualization of Istrian identity discussed above. I do not think this stake has rendered my research invalid or overly biased. But in the interest of personal disclosure, a feature of contemporary cultural anthropology of the Ruth Behar variety,[10] the following comments may be of interest.

As a second-generation American of European heritage—my mother's parents came from the Azores Islands, Portugal, my father's from Puglia, Italy—I have sometimes been mistaken for a foreigner by other Americans, though neither I nor my parents speak our native English with an accent. European friends have often put me in a different conceptual category from other "WASP" Americans, somehow more like them and able to identify with their attitudes and evaluations of North American life, even though I often disagree with them—most likely because I'm a North American, after all. Add to this the fact that my wife is Japanese and that by training and profession I am a Slavist, and one may glimpse the contours of a life characterized by, if not devoted to, cultural and linguistic diversity. In practice, this makes for a rule of "bastardized" communication and cultural mixing on a daily basis.

[9] Of special interest in this connection are the following recent collections: Bergnach, Laura, ed. *L'Istria come risorsa per nuove convivenze*. Gorizia: Istituto di Sociologia Internazionale di Gorizia (I.S.I.G.), Gorizia, 1995; Milani-Kruljac, Nelida and Srđa Orbanić, eds. *Identità-Alterità*. Fiume-Rijeka: EDIT, 1995, a special Issue of *La Battana*. I am also indebted to Nicolò Sponza, of the Center for Historical Research, Rovinj, for his bibliographical references and several long conversations.

[10] Behar's most important studies to date are *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (New York, 1994), and *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (New York, 1997).

To say nothing of the "*culture de fond*" of the U.S. as a hodge-podge of influences, our homelife is characterized by conversations in an inter-language of English with Japanese and, occasionally, other "foreign" words and phrases tossed in, an *insalatiera* of foods in which parmesan cheese and olive oil find themselves in startling proximity to soy sauce and ginger, and a physical environment in which the futon and the *kotatsu* lie with hardwood floors and furnaces. At work, of course, there is more rigidity in the illusion of keeping linguistic cultures distinct, finishing a sentence in Russian if that was how it got started (unless one is speaking with certain emigres, who tend to shift over without noticing: they understand, I can't help thinking, the illusion as such). Such phenomena are well-known to Istrians, and their linguistic flexibility, especially between Croatian and Italian, often gives me a warm feeling inside.

To call the mixed individual a cultural bastard, then, is more than an insult to the *istriano*, it is an insult to me personally and to the life I have chosen to lead (as it most likely is to the majority of North and South Americans living today). In response, I could hang my bastard head, retreat to my bastard home, speak to my wife in our bastard language, and rear as best we can our bastard children in the hope that one day maybe, we too might be pure.... But that would not be very consistent, would it?