

## Going ambiguously to the New World

Contextualizing Gianni Celati: “Como sono sbarcato in America”  
 (“How I landed in America”, 2001), and Jhumpa Lahiri:  
 “The Third and Final Continent”, “Mrs. Sen’s” (1999)

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### **The New World appears**

Gianni Celati’s (1937-) novel *Lunario del paradiso*<sup>1</sup>, from here on *Phases of the Moon in Paradise*<sup>2</sup>, is the story of a young man in his early twenties, who goes to Germany to see again a girl, Antje, whom he has seen one time on a beach in Italy, and whose love he searches, as one will see at the end, in vain. The action should happen in Hamburg at the beginning of the 1960ies because the presence of the famous four of Liverpool (who still did not use the name “The Beatles” and without Ringo Starr) in the same city where the narrator has arrived is mentioned. But the story is told, written on a typewriter in 1977 and 1978, in form of far away memories, and these are, as the narrator will have it, directed to his friends as to a general reader. In addition to the every day happenings of those days, the narrator adds also his reflections about the sense of his journey, and the meaning of making a journey at all. Seen that G. Celati was born in 1937 and seen the information about the narrator one may imagine that the novel incorporates autobiographical elements to what I would agree. When discussing the autobiographical background in Celati’s works Rebecca West sees in some of them

“... an openly autobiographical approach as seen (if more obliquely) in the early *Lunario del paradiso* and *La banda dei sospiri*, in which Celati’s family and friends, and his own youthful experiences, were at the basis of his fictional reelaboration.”<sup>3</sup>

The narrator arrives unexpectedly one evening at the house of Antje, and stays there willy-nilly for some weeks with her family. Her father, Mr. Schumacher, being a salesman of lamps, in the eyes of the narrator turns out to be still a Nazi sergeant, who likes to speak about his fine time during the Second World War as a soldier in the Netherlands (because of this he has given his children Dutch names: Antje and

to her brother Jan). Of course there is as well the mother, described as a beanpole (“spilungona”<sup>4</sup>); to her the narrator develops an ambiguous feeling with erotic, if only one-sided imagined, elements.

The sergeant Schumacher, who believes that paradise of heaven does not exist but is in his house, is convinced of the power of light which he met in the Dutch people’s thinking. He wants to make to flow this light as an “illumination” (inspiration) from his lamps into his mind and then as well into that of Giovanni, whom he calls Ciofanni, by the way of visions caused by his lamps his house and its surroundings are overcrowded with.

Giovanni meets with all kind of difficulties in Germany, his biggest problem is, where to live, because he is almost without money. Then, in the German policemen he still recognizes the Gestapo:

And then here I make another discovery. Here and there is the Gestapo; I know those of the Gestapo of the wartimes. Now they have put them onto the streets of that town to stop the traffic, to make cross the street the old women and the children.<sup>5</sup> (EJ)

And when speaking about the fiancé of his girlfriend Gisela he identifies the era in which he has arrived in Germany with the following words:

and as well her fiancé put himself into politics, in the same party as her father’s, **which then was the party of Christian criminal assassins of the criminal Adenauer.** Unleashed persecutors with the Gestapo of those who do not obey; gunrunner comrades of the Americans to dominate the world with their banks and their shit bombs.<sup>6</sup> (EJ)

And then there is the question of language, he does almost not speak German at his arrival, but begins to learn it:

I studied German from a grammar book of Italian for Germans; that means I studied it in reverse order. I learn to speak some words, but these were never fine words, really interesting words. The interesting words I asked from Antje, who knew the most interesting words of every language.<sup>7</sup> (EJ)

In the German translation is added that the narrator was looking for any interesting word in any language:

At that time I was looking for interesting words in all languages: for sentences of the poems, the words for making court to a woman, the words to laugh and to curse, quick-witted phrases, in which deep things are expressed. In the Italian textbook for Germans, as you can imagine easily, the sentences were so stupid that you would not think of them at the moment of the most stupid yawn.<sup>8</sup> (EJ)

And he still adds that he never had imagined that he had arrived abroad in order to learn to speak. While he is struggling on the one side with the German language Giovanni is on the other side fearing to become a German:

By now I almost spoke fluently German, but only when I was sloshed. I can not imagine what I had said, I was fearing, that I had become a little bit German.<sup>9</sup> (EJ)

By the way, the ‘confession’ to speak “fluently German, but only when I was sloshed” reminds me of a paragraph in Marc Twains “The awful German language”:

“*Also!*” If I have not shown that the German is a difficult language, I have at least intended to do it. I have heard of an American student who was asked how he was getting along with his German, and who answered promptly: “I am not getting along at all. I have worked at it hard for three level months, and all I have got to show for it is one solitary German phrase – ‘*Zwei glas,*’ ” (two glasses of beer.) He paused a moment, reflectively, then added with feeling, “But I’ve got that *solid!*”<sup>10</sup>

Connected to the motif of the narrator’s fear to be recognized as a foreigner by his speaking, in one of Celati’s narrations there is as well the motif of the narrator’s fear of “hearing [his] own voice” in his own country.

From Polesella, I took a coach to Guarda Veneta, and during the journey I was frightened of speaking and hearing my own voice, like when I was in another continent. I avoided looking at other passengers so that they wouldn’t turn and talk to me.<sup>11</sup> (RL)

But to these problems of language and identity and of that of making a journey as of many other problems in the novel I shall come back in another study of this novel. Here the novel serves only as the starting point for presenting some texts, by the Italian writer Gianni Celati and one by the Indian American woman writer Jhumpa Lahiri (1967-), born in London by Bengali parents and growing up in America<sup>12</sup>, in which America appears as the New World.

Of importance becomes here chapter XXII of *Lunario del paradiso* (in the German translation chapter 30), in which Giovanni is finally initiated to the great “illumination” through lamps by Nazi sergeant Schumacher. After Schumacher has had his visions it comes to Giovanni’s turn to see the visions and be “illuminated”, however he is not allowed to climb onto the rostrum on which Schumacher had climbed, but must remain on a dentist chair, because, according to Schumacher, he is too young, and has to be content “as a pilgrim who has reached the superior grades of the empyreum”<sup>13</sup> (EJ), and when Schumacher whispers into his ear he understands:

Giovanni listen the voice of the master! He would be the master, my guide, my Vergil, and as well omnipotent father of this paradise on earth, everything he. I am nothing, only a pilgrim”<sup>14</sup> (EJ)

Following the appearance of a kaleidoscope of psychedelic colours and forms Giovanni begins to enter his initiation and have his visions. At the end of which appears the American flag.

After the stripes of the American flag have vanished and there has remained “only a vast sky of stars”<sup>15</sup> (EJ) (the reader is free to imagine whether these are the stars of the American flag), Giovanni cannot keep quiet in his chair and wants to go to America at once, the narrator concludes:

The sergeant of the paradise wanted to reanimate me, and says, it has not ended. Alright, but of his lamps I had had my fill; what has remained impressed on me is the American flag. America, America, there is where I wanted to go, now, at once; to run off to”  
Captain , I said to him, it’s America the paradise”<sup>16</sup> (EJ)

### **Giovanni's stories of his landing in the New World – I: The story as it happened**

When compared with this praise of America the first story of Gianni Celati's *Cinema naturale* "How I landed in America"<sup>17</sup> has to be read very carefully. First it does not seem to contain at all the atmosphere of such an enthusiasm as in the novel. If there is any enthusiasm this is, for some time, systematically destroyed through the "disturbing adventures" with which the hero, Giovanni, of the story is confronted. The carefulness of the reader becomes as well necessary with the first sentence of the story where a narrator in the first person (the author?) tells us:

A person with the name Giovanni, whom I know very well, tells here how he landed in America for the first time, in the time of his youth.<sup>18</sup> (EJ)

However the story is then not, as in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise*, told in the first person but the story of this second narrator Giovanni is told in the third person, so that it should be that it is retold by the first narrator who has heard the story from his good acquaintance Giovanni. This gets more evident when one learns at the end of the story, that Giovanni in his youth has forgotten to tell his story in a letter home to a reader he even has not decided, because as one will see here below, he has found the chance to relate it orally to a compatriot he meets at the end of his adventures of his first days in America:

And then he had forgotten that he must write the letter, the idea did not even touch mind anymore. His head had emptied itself at all. All its remains and forwards he had spat out, all his uncertainties had vanished, not anything more to write to anybody.<sup>19</sup> (EJ)

The story which follows then has to be read as a story about Giovanni's plan to write about his adventures which are now told from the first narrator's perspective, who but cites Giovanni in the story for example as the "narrator", "our Giovanni", "the hero and narrator of the present story"<sup>20</sup> (EJ). It begins by the urgency felt by Giovanni, to write a letter, to be addressed to whom, as said, he does not even know at that moment, in which he wants "to narrate his experiences of the voyage to another continent"<sup>21</sup> (EJ), a letter which, as said will not be written at all for that time being. The urgency to write comes up on the airplane even before his arrival in America, because he traveled on an

old machine via England, and is warmed further up during a stay on Iceland's airport due to a damage on the old airplane on which he travels, because, as Giovanni thinks, this unforeseen event which forces him to sleep almost one day on a bench of the airport, could only enrich his 'travelogue' by giving it a start deviating from a normal beginning of a voyage.

However this letter-travelogue fails to be written at once, first because Giovanni does not have neither pen nor paper to write down his adventures which he experiences at the same time of interest to be written down even when felt as fastidious events. He rides on a bus from the airport to Port Authority where he has to wait for an overland bus to take him to his destination in the country. There is a bar full of black people where he enters only after some hesitation, but he must get a pen. After having paid for his coffee the barman asks him for a dime as a tip, but Giovanni does not have a ten cent coin. So he searches for all his cent pieces, which are more than ten, puts them on the counter and asks the barman if he would not have a pen. The barman asks him to repeat his request and, dissatisfied by the single cent pieces, "only the crumbs which the white man throws at the black man"<sup>22</sup> (EJ), smashes all the coins into Giovanni's face whereupon Giovanni flees from the bar and finds, as if he were a sleepwalker, to the bus station. Finally on the overland bus he tries to ask the conductor whether he has a pen but is rebuked that he must stay seated and that it is forbidden to speak to the conductor; so he composes his letter mentally.

At the bus station where he arrives in the earliest morning he is surprised by the dilapidated state of the place and by the kind of people staying there:

Giovanni had not seen a similar crowd of abandoned ones, bearded ones dressed in rags, dissolved women, bony old women, beer drinkers, people who spoke to themselves, soft obese ones, irritable thin ones, like at this country bus stop. Was that America? In the letter he must at once correct the image which one has about America through the films, given the fact that now he had seen how things really were.<sup>23</sup> (EJ)

By taxi Giovanni goes to the village he is destined for which is four kilometers away from the bus station, and he cannot stop to ask now this driver for a pen, this as well to exercise his language, but the driver does not understand the word. So he re-

mains without pen in front of an old house, a **“clapboard” house, belonging to the villa-**ge nearby where they made the first western films before Hollywood came up. Into that house he should move in, but he does not find a door bell, from where he concludes that the fact that American houses in the country do not have a bell and nobody opens has to enter as well into the letter. In addition he now comes to the idea to learn this letter by heart as a remedy for the missing pen. But after some time Giovanni is tired of waiting and moves to the village where all shops are closed, because it is the period of Thanksgiving day, but of a barber shop. Because he has not shaved his beard for three days he enters the shop, as well because he sees a chance to ask here, where he could buy paper and pen. However the barber gets infuriated by Giovanni’s wish to be shaved, because, as the barber argues, American barbers would not lower themselves to shear the beards of the clients, and Giovanni is thrown out of the shop, but at least has learnt from the barber that because of the feast of Thanksgiving Day he would not be able to buy a pen up to the next week.

Returned to the house he finds that one can enter there as one wishes and he finds a piece of paper with instructions for him with the location of his room and for food in the refrigerator. He finds the house with its great kitchen in the basement very American, but nobody is there, again because of the feast of Thanksgiving, and searching for a pen in the rooms of the absent ones he does not find any pencil. The attempt to write the letter on a typewriter he gives up after having composed in one hour only two incomprehensible sentences because the American typewriter’s alphabetic keyboard is different from that in Europe, and he cannot manage to use it. He falls to sleep and has dreams he wants to put in the letter, but even while he is dreaming to write them he becomes aware of not having a pen.

He awakes on the evening of Thanksgiving and goes out for a stroll through the empty streets when he hears twice a cockcrow which seems, strange as this may be, to lead him to the house of a woman, who turns out to be the woman with whom he had been in correspondence from Italy and who had found the place for him in the students’ wood house. This is a middle aged Italian woman married to an American who has left her for a twenty year old girl, as she laments to Giovanni. He feels at once very uneasy to stay with the woman who on top of talking to him, a stranger, about her intimate matters is drunk and leaves the room repeatedly to get a nip in the next room to return every time even more drunk. In this state of hers she tries to convince Giovanni to let go the

room in the wood house and move into her house. She forces him to look at the room he should move in upstairs, a narrow room under the roof with only a narrow transom, and is cramped untidily with children's toys and photos which shows her in her youth. Giovanni should see how nice she was in that time but to Giovanni she seems in those photos as tipsy and as with grimaces as now. Giovanni gets more and more embarrassed because of being so near to the woman in the narrowness of the room and the vicinity of the bed. And while she is insisting upon her beauty in her youth and at the same time upon how fitting the room is to Giovanni he only answers, yes, yes, so finally he seems to have agreed to moving into the room. Being even kissed by her now he finally manages to get out of the house with the argument that he has to take his trunk and the promise to return the next day. Out on the street he at once feels the "disaster of his expectations of life and the end of a career as a writer of interesting American things"<sup>24</sup> (EJ). While brooding about what has happened he again hears the cockcrow, however now from a totally different direction, but anyway he seems to follow that voice of the cock:

through the empty streets, already tired of being in America, exposed to so many inconveniences. He is already asking himself why he has come here, who has made him to do so. If he might have come here only to tell his experiences to the others and show off a little bit?<sup>25</sup> (EJ)

The cockcrow seems to lead him now to a restaurant, called diner in America, he enters: "Perhaps he had on his mind to ask for a pen, to write on the napkin."<sup>26</sup> (EJ). Inside, while he continues to hear the cockcrow, he begins to feel strange and as being in an unreal place where some voice began to speak to him:

But all this is thought from a distance, asking oneself after years if that diner has ever existed and if one has ever heard a voice of that kind. To keep it short, only after much time Giovanni has understood that the voice which spoke to him on that evening was the voice of the empty moments, when everything makes little sense, eternity fluctuates momentarily idly over your head. That is, I put it better, eternity flies over your head, bringing a breeze like the wings of an angel, exactly because in this moment you do not have anything to do, you do not have any experience to tell to your compatriots.<sup>27</sup> (EJ)



In the story this voice is given to a certain Jack, a person who speaks to Giovanni about his life, a life of conformism which he did not like at all as he does not like his wife who forced him to live such a life, and at home he often looks at his wife with the wish to strangle her. But then he finds a solution from this situation, that means to think:

It was enough that everything in their life was like a long empty moment ...  
“You put it into the sack of the empty moments which nobody will remember, because they are things of little interest, always the same about which nothing is to say, and this is the eternity”.<sup>28</sup> (EJ)

Thinking about the world in this way, according to Jack one can endure what is happening around oneself, and one will see how Giovanni is able to adapt himself to this theory.

Finally on Monday morning he can go to the department of “Arts and Letters” on the famous campus and there, in the department of Romance languages, he meets with an unexpected linguistic circumstance what makes him feel for a moment that he has arrived on the wrong continent. As it seems to Giovanni everybody in the department speaks French, but not contemporary French, but that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “the best one, the language of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau”<sup>29</sup> (EJ), this is following a rule established by the director of the department with the name Grossvogel [literally to be translated as big bird], of German origin. After a short welcome by the busy director, Giovanni, trembling to write the letter, asks the secretary for paper and pen. She corrects some too modern expressions in his request but gives him finally the instruments he has waited for so long, upon what he hurries to a small room to begin writing. But when considering how to begin the letter he enters into a state of getting asleep with his dreams to write the letter, and finally he does not remember if he ever has started to write it.

He is called out of his letter-dreams by a young Italian professor, speaking to him in modern Italian, and declares that he has come to welcome him to the university where Giovanni is going to work with him “by teaching the so called Italian language”<sup>30</sup> (EJ).

(By the way, here one must think of the description of the visit of the Giovanni in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* to Hamburg university, where he tells the students that the Italian language does not exist as even Italy is only an invention. There he

has followed two woman students to the department where one studies Italian and the professor to the class of whom they bring him, invites him to speak in Italian, and he insists it should be in modern Italian. Giovanni introduces himself and then invents a bogus (hi)story of Italy. He begins: “I have come here from very far, to make you know how and in which way the Italian language does not exist. You students of nothing; can you imagine, everyone, the nothing?”<sup>31</sup> (EJ). When a student asks him how he could utter the audacious thesis that Italian does not exist he answers: “Because Italy does not exist, that is why”<sup>32</sup> (EJ), and before he is drawn from the teacher’s desk he adds to his nonsense (hi)story: “And in this way they have invented Italy, a land which exists only in the poems, language of nothing, understood?”<sup>33</sup> (EJ). Here it may be said only that this episode fits into Celati’s making fun of university professors and students as well in other stories. In addition this episode may be seen as well as a punch to the handling of language in his stories.)

When asked by the Italian professor in America about his voyage Giovanni is not to be stopped telling him in about one hour everything which should enter the letter. Invited to lunch he repeats his narration for an elderly and deaf professor, and again he repeats it after arriving at the professor’s house for his wife at dinner. Having, by now, spoken about twelve hours without interruption and is heard in a friendly way by his auditors he returns to the wood house drunk with words, but forgetting to write the letter. On the following day he sends a telegram to his parents: “I have arrived”<sup>34</sup> (EJ).

### **Giovanni’s stories of his landing in the New World – II: Giovanni’s ideas to put the story in his letter into its right form**

When reading about Giovanni’s forced stay in Iceland at the beginning of “How I Landed in America” one must think of Giovanni’s getting lent a pullover and his stay in Iceland in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise*. In that novel summer has come to its end and it is becoming colder. Gisela, the girl he is going along with at that time, has lent him a wonderful Icelandic pullover, which has remained impressed on the narrator’s mind, who confesses that at that time he did not even know that there exist Icelandic pullovers. He continues:

Reality is that years later, when I went to Iceland by accident while I was going to America, I bought a same one for me; and Gisela I remember always

because of that pullover.<sup>35</sup> (EJ)

As one sees the narration in “How I landed in America” remains close to the novel in Italian by the fact that in both cases the stay in Iceland is due to “accident”. In the German translation the episode is told in a slightly other way but with an important added comment. Here one is told that Gisela had lent to Giovanni a pullover which she had bought in Iceland. Giovanni is overproud due to the wonderful pullover and due to Gisela being beside him, because she has a face like a movie star, and here the narrator continues:

In any case because of that I wanted many years later one day to go to Iceland to buy the same pullover. Here we have deception of the touristical longings, but as well the remembrance which fulfills its play with memory. Because we have to be astonished about some things which have happened, as soon as we tell about them, as if they, since they have happened, only would wait to be told.<sup>36</sup> (EJ)

In “**How I Landed in America**” **there is no word about buying a pullover in Iceland**, and following the version in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* the reader remains uncertain whether Giovanni really did buy one, which, however, belongs anyway to the touristic deceptions. If going, by now, back to the story “How I Landed in America” the end of this story shows that what I have called above “disturbing adventures” which take away Giovanni’s enthusiasm for America for a time may be seen as well as “touristic deceptions”, because they do, even if he has gone through them, make him feel, as we have seen, that he has “lived in a real novel”<sup>37</sup> (EJ).

As for the remembrance and memory which make us astonished about things happened when told, it is not so important that Giovanni first, and that is when he is young, forgets to write the letter because, as said above, “his head has emptied itself at all” and “all his uncertainties have vanished” (see here p.71). More important is that one recalls that the author/narrator at the beginning of the story informs the reader that in this story “A person with the name Giovanni, whom I know very well, tells here how he landed in America for the first time, in the time of his youth” (see here p.71). **Of additional importance** is that this person relating his adventures/touristical longings of his youth is said many times to reflect about how to write about these, in order to make the letter more

impressing and interesting. After he has fled from the bar with the frightening black at the counter and has got onto an overland bus which should take him to his destination in the country he repeatedly feels the urgency to write home because:

This was an experience to tell as soon as possible, so that his compatriots would know to what dangers he exposed himself, going to another continent.<sup>38</sup>  
(EJ)

The reader is told, however, that, while still on the bus, the dangerous event he had run into in the bar did not displease him “**because thus his letter would be more interesting**” (EJ) and it is added:

more interesting by charging a little bit the situation and even by telling that all the blacks in the bar wanted to give him a thrashing.<sup>39</sup> (EJ)

Then he arrives at the boarding house where he is destined to stay, which ‘perhaps’ has been built when the village had been “the capital of cinema before Hollywood would appear”<sup>40</sup> (EJ) what only few people know. He again considers this an interesting information to write about but as well that:

it would be impressing even to add that a famous cinema diva had lived in his house at the beginning of the century.<sup>41</sup> (EJ)

And again while he is waiting in front of the door because nobody does open it, he reflects in addition:

If they would have come to open him it would be better, and in the letter he could have invented something more exciting to tell to his compatriots.<sup>42</sup> (EJ)

When it is described how he is running away from the frightening barbershop, as always thinking upon his letter, it is said:

Here as well he had already added some more exciting touch, for example the fact that the barber would have been an herculean type, while, perhaps, he was only a medium type. But the expulsion from the shop he had to **exaggerate** a little bit, thinking of eventual readers.<sup>43</sup> (EJ)

But when it comes to the ‘adventure’ with the drunk woman, on the other hand it is

described as well Giovanni's strategy to exclude facts from his letter. After the woman, getting drunk more and more, has told him and continues to tell him about her infidel husband and proposed that he should move in to her house, this means for Giovanni:

According to her Giovanni must have left his room in the woodhouse, where a most famous cinema diva had lived at the beginning of the century, to move to that neglected place which he felt as well closed, and more, depressing.<sup>44</sup>  
(EJ)

And this means for him: "For sure, this was not an experience to put into the letter, OK, they were in America, and by speaking of things American one always impresses".<sup>45</sup> (EJ). After even what he feels as embarrassing sexual attacks Giovanni senses to lose the chance of becoming a writer this is:

"the end of a career of a writer of interesting American things, the irreparable loss of the glory to live in the house of a cinema diva of old times, what was a notable invention to write in the letter."<sup>46</sup> (EJ)

By letting the drunk Mrs. Jones out of the letter he follows exactly the theory of Jack, to put unpleasant things "into the sack of the empty moments which nobody will remember because they are things of little interest" (see here p.75), and as one learns later on, the figure of that very Jack will end as well into that sack, because "being a type a little bit to strange"<sup>47</sup> (EJ).

All these comments show his being "astonished" about the things happened "as soon as [he] tell[s] about them" and his/ "the remembrance which fulfills its play with memory" (see here p.77) **by changing the real events when told. A reason for this changing**, which is as well a kind of inventing, and/ or leaving out of events, becomes explained, too, after Giovanni has left the house of the obtrusive woman

Besides as well the mess of the copulation, this was not an experience in the sense which intended the hero and narrator of this story here. It is true that everyone invents the experiences of his life as he likes, and that does everybody, as soon as he opens his mouth, nobody excluded; but there is always need of something which inspires your invention. And the house of that poor left woman, without doubt in search of love, but too sad and too compelling for

our Giovanni, could not inspire to him anything adventurous to write.<sup>48</sup> (EJ)

(By the way one has not to oversee here that it is said “for our Giovanni” which recalls attention to the mode of narrating.)

Read in this way “**How I Landed in America**” becomes a kind of verification/interpretation of the passage about going to Iceland in the German translation of *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* (*Lunario del paradiso*) and as well to the end of the novel (Italian text), where the narrator gives an answer to anybody who would claim that his whole story is a lie:

I am almost going to vituperate him; it is time to give up these philosophers who forever do not let you make a story without going on your nerves. But I am sleepy, I go to bed; I let it written for him as it is, so that he reads and gets convinced:

Dear philosopher, give it up to be a fool, you try as well to make some stories and you will see that this is the blasted truth.<sup>49</sup> (EJ)

The end of *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* (German text) repeats these thoughts more or less in the same way but the last conclusion differs from this a little bit in being even more consequent and to the criticism is an opinion added:

Give it up your endless old, arrogant song! Everything happens, as it happens, and everything else is a fart; life is something, what happens, what it should be, you do not know, it is only a state of mind.<sup>50</sup> (EJ)

### **Remaining in the New World and adapting to it or not – Jhumpa Lahiris narrations**

Remembering one time more the ‘apparition’ or better ‘vision’ of the American flag in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* (the reason for this will be said soon) the story of Giovanni in “How I landed in America” reminds me first of the last story “The Third and Final Continent” in Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of stories in *Interpreter of Maladies*<sup>51</sup>.

As in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* the main part of the events in Lahiri’s story

is told explicitly some decades later after they have happened, and this seems to be the case as well in “How I landed in America”. In *Phases of the Moon in Paradise* it is mentioned for example, as said above, that at the time the narrator stays in the Northern city of Germany and hears music in the style of Elvis Presley in one part of city, the Beatles, and “they did not even call themselves Beatles”<sup>52</sup> (EJ), played at the same time in another part of it, so things in the novel must have happened, as was already said too, at the beginning of the 1960ies; and in the novel the narrator says, that he is writing “in summer, August 1977”<sup>53</sup> (EJ), or mentions “we are on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1978”<sup>54</sup> (EJ). As was already said, at the beginning of “How I Landed in America”, the reader is told that some Giovanni “tells here how he landed in America for the first time, in the time of his youth” (cf. p.71, note18), even if there are not given exact hints for the time one can imagine that there must have passed more than only a few years until the story is told. In “The Third and Final Continent” the narrator begins his story by telling how he “left India in 1964” and at the end of the story he mentions his “son who attends Harvard University”<sup>55</sup>. The narrator in the latter story goes first to London, not on an old plane which has a damage during its flight as does Giovanni’s in “How I Landed in America”, but is as well forced to cheap conditions that is to travel on “an Italian cargo vessel, in a third-class cabin next to the ship’s engine”<sup>56</sup>. To Giovanni’s bad adventures one may compare the poor and then moderate conditions under which the narrator lives first in London and then in Boston. He as Giovanni works at a University. About his life in London he writes:

I attended lectures at LSE [London School of Economics] and worked at the university library to get by. We lived three or four to a room, shared a single, icy toilet, and took turns cooking pots of egg curry, which we ate with our hands on a table covered with newspapers.”<sup>57</sup>

Five years later in 1969 the narrator’s life changes, his marriage is arranged in Calcutta to which he can agree because he has got a full time job in America at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. By now he can afford to go by plane first to Calcutta and a week later back to Boston. On the flight to Boston he learns from *The Student Guide to North America*, which he had bought in London for a cheapest price, because “although [he] was no longer a student [he] was on a budget all the same”<sup>58</sup>, that and how things in America are different, that is here from those in Britain. This one

may compare to how Giovanni has to experience the difference of life in America from that in Italy. Lahiri's narrator reports:

I learned that Americans drove on the right side of the road, not the left, and that they called a lift an elevator and an engaged phone busy. "The pace of life in North America is different from Britain as you will soon discover," the guidebook informed me. "Everybody feels he must get to the top. Don't expect an English cup of tea."<sup>59</sup>

At the landing he is informed together about the weather and time, and that two Americans had landed on the moon. In Boston, as recommended by the guide book he stays the first night and then for six weeks and the YMCA, even if his room is only very poorly furnished and filled with a terrible noise from Massachusetts Avenue. But for the time his wife is coming to arrive he has to find and "rent a proper apartment", what he thinks to have done when he discovers in the newspaper a room "for eight dollars per week" in the house of a lady who "only rent[s] rooms to boys from Harvard or Tech"<sup>60</sup>, as he is informed when phoning for an interview.

The meeting at the same evening with the owner "a tiny, extremely old woman"<sup>61</sup> runs well and the narrator is handed the key to the house, but before he can have look at the room, the old woman invites him to sit beside her on the bench she is using, which seems to be the one missing in front of the great piano in the corner of the parlor. After a moment of silence:

she intoned, as if she alone possessed this knowledge:  
"There is an American flag on the moon!"<sup>62</sup>

The narrator, who has **not given much thought about the moon shot up to that moment**, just answers "Yes, madame." But the old lady, Mrs. Croft, does not seem to be content with this answer, and the meeting continues with the following scene:

The woman bellowed, "A flag on the moon, boy! I heard it on the radio! Isn't that splendid?"

"Yes, madame." **But she was not satisfied with my reply. Instead she commanded, "Say 'splendid!'"**

I was both baffled and somewhat insulted by the request. It reminded me of the way I was taught multiplication tables as a child, repeating after the ma-



ster ...It also reminded me of my wedding, when I had repeated endless Sanskrit verses after the priest, verses I barely understood ... I said nothing.

“Say ‘splendid’ !” the woman bellowed once again.

“Splendid,” I murmured. I had to repeat the word a second time at the top of my lungs, so she could hear.

Satisfied with this answer the woman commands him next:

“Go see room!”<sup>63</sup>

This scene repeats itself similarly every evening for the next week. Having come home and after confirming that he has locked the door he has to answer at the declaration of the woman that it was splendid to have an American flag on the moon even if feeling like an idiot, with a yelling voice that this was splendid, and so he does even after he has learnt from the newspaper, that the astronauts had taken the flag back on their flight back to Earth. This stops when he has paid his rent of eight dollars on Friday of the next week.

The effect of the description of the “appearance” of the American flag in the two narrations could not be more different from one another. In the one text the enthusiasm and the wish to go at once to America, which is recognized as “the paradise” (see here p.70). In the other text a certain indifference, and the narrator feeling “baffled” when he waits for being demanded to repeat that it is “splendid”, for the fact that the American flag is on the moon.

However, in Celati’s novel America vanishes almost totally immediately from that moment on; after the narrator has told to sergeant Schumacher about his vision of the American flag, he is reprimanded by him, that he has had hallucinations and that it was not possible to have visions by the trick of the lanterns, there was no opium. Schumacher says that he calls them visions by joke and adds that Giovanni did not have understood anything. Against this Giovanni argues by himself, how could the sergeant have had visions, and he himself should not have seen the American flag, and that it must have been the very appearance of it which made him sing the American anthem, and he concludes:

Enough, if he does not believe me I break that friendship with the Nazi. He had put into my head this concoction of the visions in such a way that in the

end I had believed in them more than he; this talk about I get illuminated and all.

But how that one had been illuminated? He had not been illuminated by nothing at all. It was I who had been genuinely illuminated, as well without farts.<sup>64</sup> (EJ)

Before his vision of the American flag Giovanni had already arrived at the idea to go further North, first to Norway and then still further to Finland and even to the North Pole thinking that:

Then I would have been able to tell about real adventures, when coming home.<sup>65</sup> (EJ)

Shortly afterwards, when speaking to a conational he even remarks:

... that I wanted to go to Norway, and then to Finland; even to settle in Finland and becoming Finnish.<sup>66</sup> (EJ)

After his visions Giovanni meets a young man from Denmark with whom he has political discussions mainly about peace movement and communism. This Dane should take him in his sidecar to Denmark, where Giovanni wants to take part in the peace marches, the Dane has told him about. Beside that he imagines about his life in Denmark, that he had to learn still another language, that he would, perhaps, find his big love, and that he may read Anderson's stories in the original: "and I become Scandinavian, quiet, dignified, without too much tempers on my mind."<sup>67</sup> (EJ).

But on the day they should depart the Dane, who seems to be somewhat suspicious about the sincerity of Giovanni's political ideas, does not appear at the fixed place that is at the main station. After some waiting and thinking about, Giovanni buys a ticket back to Italy.

Instead of this the narrator in Jh. Lahiri's story gets more and more accommodated to the life in America. It may be added that it is during a visit at Mrs. Croft with his wife that he really begins to understand and love his wife, with whom he begins to live a regular life. He is shocked when he reads about the death in the paper of the hundred and three year old woman, in whose life the six weeks spent at her house were only such

a short time, but as he says “hers was the first life I had admired”<sup>68</sup>. The story finishes with his reporting about his normal life near Boston, he and his wife have become American citizens, visiting Calcutta “every few years”<sup>69</sup>, but concludes that he is still bewildered by every step which had led him to live in America, after India, Europe (England) the third continent for him. As for Giovanni in “How I Landed in America”, he, at least for the moment, seems to settle there as a teacher of Italian.

These three narrations may be seen as well in a context with the story “How a photographer landed in the New World” in Gianni Celati’s short story collection *Voices from the plain*, (Narratori delle pianure)<sup>70</sup> The narrator of the book has collected his stories starting his journey from Gallarate, Southeast of Milano and then by traveling along and down the river Po from the region of Piacenza to its mouth, from what the title of the collection derives. The story mentioned here is the twenty eights one of thirty. By now the narrator has come to the region where the “main part of the river, the Po di Venezia, [...] divides into its two main branches – the Po di Pila and the Po di Gnocca – on its journey towards the inlets of the lagoon and then on to the sea”<sup>71</sup> (RL), that is at Ca’ Venier, a place which cannot even be said to be a proper village. He describes the monotony of the landscape and the offshore, and this should be cited here in detail because of the outcome of the story:

Nothing could be less promising from a photographic point of view than this landscape, whose flatness and uniformity extend as far as the fringes of land that jut out into the sea. And out to sea little islands pop up here and there, like so many tongues of sand. Some emerge only at low tide, while others, fringed by grasses that hold back the mud carried seaward by the big river, are home to clumps of reeds visible from far off and other plants suited to the salty environment – this is called the foreshore.<sup>72</sup> (RL)

A photographer is sent to this area by a weekly magazine: “His photos had to illustrate a text that a famous writer was to write on ‘the humble folk of the mouth of the Po’”<sup>73</sup> (RL). Having taken, what one would call typical but not extraordinary photos of the region he already wants to return, when he hears about the women of that region speaking to the dead on the cemetery of Ca’ Venier. He goes to that cemetery and takes some snapshots by telephoto lens which he sends with the other material to the magazine, whereupon this asks him to go back to the region, explore more about the women

speaking with the dead and take some more exciting photos. The photographer does so, however his attempt to speak to a woman kneeling in front of a gravestone ends in a failure. Then he meets the caretaker of the graveyard, who teaches him, that the dead speak only to women.

Contrarily to the women on the cemetery, who left it without speaking to the photographer, the caretaker is very talkative, tells him “his whole life story and invite[s] him to his house”<sup>74</sup>. (RL). There the “extremely thin man”<sup>75</sup> (RL), who “[o]n his head... wore a kind of fur hat and under his jacket a cowboy-style checked shirt”<sup>76</sup> (RL) tells the photographer that his job is taking care for a boat “with all the fishing equipment”<sup>77</sup> (RL) of people who never come to this place, so that he has time to “go fishing in his own boat and mind the cemetery”<sup>78</sup>. (RL). And he explains him how he has lost three fingers on his right hand when, after the war, he helped a child to “put a hand-grenade back together to preserve a bit of powder”<sup>79</sup> (RL) – at that time he explains the children played with the cartridges and hand-grenades, which could be found near the many left German bunkers, lightening the gunpowder for fun. He explains further that where there had been the index finger he sometimes feels a sort of pain but that the same missing index finger often worked as a compass for him and helped him to find things he was looking for at the wrong place. But he adds that this index finger had as well once played a trick on him (RL, p.144: G.C., p.134 when it let him find a football lottery coupon a week too late, a coupon which he had filled in correctly and which would have made him a millionaire if he would not have lost it before delivering it.)

When the photographer wants to know more about the dead who speak only to the women, he says that perhaps the missing index finger could be of help to indicate the place where one could hear what the dead were saying, that is “on one or two islands, or on the sandbanks of the foreshore out to sea”<sup>80</sup>. (RL). He himself had found some of these places by fortune when hunting or fishing, but he had never been able to come upon them again. But it could be that “[by slapping] his missing index finger”<sup>81</sup> (RL) he might awake it, and it might indicate a direction.

The thin man awakes the photographer early in the morning and tells him that the missing finger “was ‘pointing’”<sup>82</sup> and that they should be in a hurry. With the car of the photographer they rush to the village of Pila from where a channel leads to the open sea. And from there they start out with a boat the thin man had hold there in the marsh grasses.

From there on the journey becomes more and more strange; they pass little islands and sandbanks, some of which full of unseen birds, while the thin man tells the fantastic names of the islands: “Barea, Zoaglia, Ca’Morta, Morosina, Pegaso, Bacucca”<sup>83</sup>. (RL). Finally the thin man points to a little dune, full of birds which flee when they arrive, which the man calls “Nuovo Mondo, the New World”<sup>84</sup> (RL), and the photographer understands that they have arrived.

Now the thin man makes the photographer hurry to get off the boat to hear the dead speak. When the photographer does as said the man turns the boat and leaves the photographer on that tiny place of mud and rushes away alone from that place:

yet not without explaining – though already with his back to him and rowing further and further away – that the missing finger had taken him to Nuovo Mondo and the very same finger had ordered that he stay there.<sup>85</sup> (RL)

**The name of the place as Nuovo Mondo and this put together with the above mentioned “kind of fur hat” and his “cowboy-style checked shirt”** (see here p.86) the very thin man wears makes one think of course of America. But how can the adventure of the photographer who wanted to make shots of photos to accompany a text about “the humble folk of the mouth of the Po” (see here p.85) and then in addition about the dead speaking to the women in that region and lands on a most little uninhabited ‘continent’, for how long the reader can only guess, be brought into a context with the three texts mentioned before this last story, or how can these three texts be brought together with this last story mentioned?!

As contrastively comparable one may consider what Giovanni calls the “concoction of the visions” (see here p.83) by the sergeant which had made him see the American flag and awakened in him the wish to go to America at once, with the missing index finger of the very thin man. Giovanni of the novel who does not longer believe in this concoction does not go at once to America as paradise, or what he might think of as a New World to him, but turns his imagination to the North of Europe. Meanwhile the photographer is forced to stay on a tiny bit of land in the sea by the missing index finger, the talking about which by the thin man may be seen as well as a concoction.

Near to the idea of such concoctions may then appear the somewhat mysterious crying of the cock in “**How I landed in America**”. **It leads Giovanni there to two decisive meetings** in what must be seen a New World to Giovanni there and then back to the

wood house he has to stay in. And from there he finds his way to the University where he is supposed to begin to teach and that means stay, at least for some time, in the New World.

Opposed to this the “inton[ing]” of Mrs. Croft that “There is an American flag on the moon”, and her “bellow[ing]” that this is “splendid” are no concoctions in that way to the narrator. As said above he is “both baffled and somewhat insulted” to be asked to repeat the “splendid[ness]” (see here p.82) of the event, but nevertheless this extravagance of Mrs. Croft’s behaviour together with the fact that she was one hundred three years old behaving so, may have contributed to the fact that, how the narrator - who “was stricken” as to become “unable to speak” when he reads her obituary in the paper - puts it:

Mrs. Croft’s was the first death I mourned in America, for hers was the first life I had admired ...<sup>86</sup>

And this again may have contributed to the fact that he has remained steadily in America, while he continues to speak of his staying “in this new world for nearly thirty years”<sup>87</sup>, decided to live as well in his old age there with his wife. This last decision is confirmed by his regular visits to the street where he has lived in Mrs. Croft’s house despite of the traffic every time he visits with his wife his son in Cambridge or takes him home for a weekend. Then he tells his son: “here was my first home in America, where I lived with a woman who was 103”<sup>88</sup>.

Finally it should be added that it is of course of importance that Jhumpa Lahiri puts this story at the end of her collection, however in this collection there is e.g. as well the story of “Mrs. Sen’s”<sup>89</sup>. Mrs. Sen has come to America with her husband who teaches mathematics at a university. In her apartment one has to take his shoes off, and Mrs. Sen wears at home as outside always saris. In the afternoon she chops vegetables with a blade brought from India, which suggests for preparing Indian meals. She is looking at the same time as a babysitter of an eleven years old boy, Eliot, to whose mother she offers Indian snacks when she comes to fetch her son in the evening. And to Eliot she tells about her life at home in India, for example that at times she could not sleep there because of the assembling of women on the roof of the house chopping tens of kilos of vegetables through the night. Then she adds:

“Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep

in so much silence.”<sup>90</sup>

And she is asking him timidly if someone would come to her place “if [she] began to scream right now at the top of [her] lungs, would someone come?”<sup>91</sup> And she explains to him, that in India, if you “just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements.”<sup>92</sup>

By then Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables.<sup>93</sup>

It should be mentioned here that Eliot is an important person for the narration of the story, because, as in the just above citation, many things are seen and transmitted to the reader through his eyes. There are for example the two things which, as Eliot sees this, make Mrs. Sen happy: “One was the arrival of a letter from her family”<sup>94</sup>, which becomes a little feast to her. “The other thing that made Mrs. Sen happy was fish from the seaside”.<sup>95</sup>

But there is the crucial thing of Mrs. Sen’s attempt to learn to drive and get a “her driver’s license”<sup>96</sup>. As for the outcome of this attempt one should not overlook a short section during the first meeting between Mrs. Sen and Eliot’s mother who: “Most of all [ ] was concerned that Mrs. Sen did not know how to drive.”<sup>97</sup> In this part of the conversation, which one might oversee in its importance at a first reading, appears something central of Mrs. Sen’s attitude and feeling of America. She adds **to her husband’s informing** that she “should have her driver’s license by December”<sup>98</sup>:

“Yes, I am learning,” Mrs. Sen said. “But I am a slow student. At home, you know, we have a driver.”

“You mean a chauffeur?”

**Mrs. Sen glanced at Mr. Sen**, who nodded.

Eliot’s mother nodded, too, looking around the room. “**And that’s all ... in India?**”

“Yes,” Mrs. Sen replied. ...“Everything is there.”<sup>99</sup> (emphasizes by EJ)

This scene shows the total dependency of Mrs. Sen in America on her husband, and this is not limited to things driving and the un/important?! linguistic deviation, and her

pride of having “everything” in India, where, when saying so, she must still think upon the “driver”.

When Eliot arrives at Mrs. Sen’s house from school, “for twenty minutes Mrs. Sen practiced driving”<sup>100</sup>, and Eliot understands that she did so in the company of his, not because, as she tells him “she didn’t feel right leaving him alone in the apartment, but ... she wanted him sitting beside her because she was afraid.”<sup>101</sup> At one of these driving trainings Mrs. Sen tells to Eliot:

“**Mr. Sen says** that once I receive my license, everything will improve. What do you think Eliot? Will things improve?

“You could go places,” Eliot suggested. “You could go anywhere.”

“Could I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot? Ten thousand miles, at fifty miles per hour?”<sup>102</sup> (emphasis EJ)

While thinking still and ever of Calcutta, her home, here is shown, too, Mrs. Sen’s hope, suggested by her husband, to being able to adapt herself to America, when being able to drive, but the condition for this is getting her “license”. Should one not already here see a deeper meaning in the non/ability to drive and get the license, a meaning that reaches over the pure act of car driving?!

‘Practicing driving’ means for Mrs. Sen to “circle[ ] the apartment complex once, then once again”<sup>103</sup> and this in a very distracted manner, stopping the car suddenly to hear something on the radio, seeing a bird beeping the horn and waiting to fly it away, and to Eliot she explains: “In India ... the driver sat on the right side, not the left”<sup>104</sup>. This again shows how she remains locked in her Indian world which she tries to keep up in her apartment, and this restrictedness is expressed much more explicitly by the fact that she cannot imagine to manage to enter the main road: “Impossible, Eliot. How can I go there?”, **she remarks to the boy, wondering why nobody is slowing down, despite the fact that there is not approaching a car at all, but at a great distance.** Excusing herself she brings in again her husband: “Anyway, I am not allowed on the main road **without Mr. Sen.**”<sup>105</sup> (emphasis EJ).

While to Eliot the road remains only an ordinary road, when he thinks of his mother’s driving, he observes that this ordinary road with its cars is effecting a change in Mrs. Sen: “he saw how that same stream of cars made her knuckles pale, her wrists tremble, and her English falter”<sup>106</sup>. However Mrs. Sen observes: “Everyone, this people,



too much in their world.”<sup>107</sup>, and this again reflects only her own state of mind

For getting her fish, and she insists on getting a whole fish and fresh one, Mrs. Sen calls regularly to the fish market, and if there is one available she calls to her husband at the university, who upon this interrupts his work and goes to fetch the fish. He does so until one day he tells her to stop cooking fish but prepare chicken, which is in the freezer, because he is busy in his office. But then there is a phone call from the fish market to Mrs. Sen’s house offering to hold a fish for her if she would come to fetch it until the evening. Her husband does not come at once because he has a meeting. This makes Mrs. Sen cry almost desperately, she then turns with Eliot to her bedroom and shows him all her richness of saris in her closet on hangers and in drawers. And asking when she did ever wear these saris she begins to throw many of them on her bed filling the room “with an intense smell of mothballs”<sup>108</sup>. While doing so she explains to Eliot about the imaginations of her relatives in India about her ‘queen-like’ life in America, and complains that she can not send any adequate picture to India. By now her husband arrives, despite his meeting, to accompany her to the fish market, but he waits in the car during the time she is shopping, worrying about the freshness of the fish. When he tells her to drive the car home this time, she refuses using, absurdly, Eliot’s presence as an excuse. Because of his meeting Mr. Sen returns to university at once after shopping. Mrs. Sen prepares the fish this time, but then stops driving and cooking for a while, neither fish nor chicken. During this time Eliot sees her strolling absentmindedly through her apartment, at one time she hears a tape with raga after what she says to Eliot: ““It is more sad even than your Beethoven, isn’t it?””<sup>109</sup>. At another time she hears a tape sent by her family on which the voices of its members are heard in Bengali, among them the voice of her grandfather, who, as she has learnt by a letter has died, as she explains to Eliot. Then she starts cooking again and it happens at that time that Mr. Sen calls “to take Eliot and Mrs Sen to the seaside”<sup>110</sup>. This time Mr. Sen enters the fish shop too, and it is he who takes care about the fishes’ freshness and how they should be cut. They buy a lot of fish but because Mr. Sen is hungry they stop at a take-out window and eat in front of it clam cakes which Mrs. Sen seasons very hot with Tabasco sauce and black pepper and likens them now happily with Indian pakoras. After they have even turned taking photos on the beach, Mr. Sen starts to drive, but after some time he stops and makes Mrs. Sen against her will go on driving home. Entering the city she gets more and more nervous

and stops suddenly at the roadside:

“No more,” she said, her forehead resting against the top of the steering wheel. “I hate it. I hate driving. I won’t go on.”<sup>11</sup>

This outcome of the afternoon stands in contrast to her being happy on the beach, to what she feels like eating pakora. And might one not feel under her words “I won’t go on” not only ‘driving’ but as well the American life?

The next time when the fish monger calls, she has stopped driving again, but she does not phone her husband but decides to go with Eliot by bus. The bus passes a nursing home and then a shopping center where they see some old women doing nothing but eating lozenges; self-pitying Mrs. Eliot asks Eliot whether he would “put [his] mother in a nursing home when she is old?”<sup>12</sup>, and imagines how old mothers (she herself?!) will end up in a nursing home buying themselves lozenges after their children have grown up. These dark thinkings of her fit to the atmosphere this episode is concluding with. Mrs. Sen gets her fish at the desolated fish shop, after that they buy clam cakes at the shop where they had been before, but there is no possibility to sit – Mrs. Sen has forgotten to bring napkins and on the bus appear “traces of fried batter [which] dotted the corners of her mouth”<sup>13</sup>. There is an old woman, obviously from the nursery home, who looks suspiciously at Mrs. Sen’s bag which is stained with blood of the fish, and when she gets off the bus she makes a remark to the driver, who upon this remarks to Mrs. Sen and Eliot that the smell/ stench of the fish is bothering other passengers, and that they should open a window. This whole scene has to be read as an underlining of Mrs. Sen’s situation in America, which she must feel isolating her and depressing, and it has to be read as an introduction to the final events of the story.

This is, that one afternoon the phone from the fish market rings again. Mrs. Sen calls three times in vain to the office of her husband. Then she begins, as if to prepare herself mentally meticulously for something, to slice an eggplant into very small pieces. These as she says to Eliot will be cooked “in a very tasty stew with fish and green bananas”<sup>14</sup>, knowing very well that she has to renounce the green bananas, but this underlines again her homesickness and desire for Indian food. She assures Eliot that they will go to take the fish, and they leave the apartment and enter the car. But because she is turning around the apartment complex several times Eliot thinks she is only practicing.

However, Mrs. Sen at a certain moment turns on to the main road and very soon she makes a little mistake by going on the left side, gets upset by the horn of an oncoming car and “hit[s] a telephone pole on the opposite corner”<sup>115</sup>. The outcome of the accident is very slight as for the passengers as for the car. Mr. Sen arrives with a colleague, speaks with the policeman who had arrived before, fills in some forms and without words drives both home. There Mrs. Sen throws the so meticulously cut eggplant pieces into the garbage pail and after preparing a snack for Eliot disappears into her room, from where Eliot hears her crying when going to the toilet. When Eliot’s mother arrives later Mr. Sen offers her to retribute the payment for the month. She agrees and the babysitting contract is finished by that. As Eliot’s mother confesses to her son she is satisfied and relieved by this solution.

To Eliot not going anymore to Mrs. Sen, one learns, does not matter much, and here one has to think again of Mrs. Sen’s explaining, how the whole neighborhood and more assemble, when something happens to somebody in India (see here p.89). And to Mrs. Sen has happened something serious, she has not been able to drive correctly the first time she did act on her own will without her husband’s presence. Not being able to get the license for driving could mean as well that she could not get the ‘license’ to stay in America, because she was unable to adapt herself to its way of life, always remaining in her mind in India. By throwing the small cut pieces of eggplant into the garbage pail she seems to throw away as well her broken up thinking upon the possibility that “once [she] receive[s her] driving licence, everything will improve” (see here p.90), as Mr. Sen used to say, as she told to Eliot.

## Conclusion

As already seen, at the end of *Phases of the Moon in Paradise, Lunario del paradiso* the narrator tries to give some meaning to his way of retelling what he has experienced during his journey. Before that he interprets, more explicitly in the german translation, especially the events not foreseen staying abroad. He speaks about the head of a person which as a strange animal picks up everything what it finds and swallowing that down it swells up, and one loses his head following it blindly:

If it has scooped something indigestible, it starts independently for horrible journeys, you may run after it as fast as you like.<sup>116</sup> (EJ)

A little bit after that he explains as well the reason for starting the narrator's journey as well the conditions of other people of his time, and here one should, perhaps, think again of an autobiographical background of the novel, as mentioned here at the beginning (see here p.67):

Because there were not few who, like this Giovanni, at that time ran off in their youthful restlessness for abroad to escape the local traps. But folk like him, without the indispensable pieces of equipment, afterwards it happened to them in the same way: Their head began to rush off like an express train, they had to run after it how long one does not know, and some of them still run today.<sup>117</sup> (EJ)

The autobiographical aspect may be seen, perhaps, in the last words: "and some of them still run today", which makes one think of Gianni Celati's continuing traveling and searching for the sense of it, as well after the years of his youth. This one may take from his travelogue novel *Adventures in Africa, Avventure in Africa*<sup>118</sup>. There he writes in a foreword like "Note", "Notizia" at the beginning of the text: "In January 1997 I have accompanied Jean Talon on a journey to West Africa, that took us from Mali us to Senegal and Mauritania. ..."<sup>119</sup>. (AB)

This text of his journey to Africa seems very near to reality, but Celati's mixed interest in Africa on a real and interpretative level, that is a level of literature, becomes obvious in his *Fata Morgana*<sup>120</sup>, which describes a stay of several persons in Africa on an imaginary level put as reality. This text was written, as the author writes as well in a "Note", "Notizia" in 1986-87<sup>121</sup>.

The mixture of reality and literature may be seen in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise, Lunario del paradiso* e.g. in the narrator's referring himself so many times to William Shakespeare and to Dante's *Vita Nova*<sup>122</sup> when speaking about his love to Antje. There may be as well be tracked down in/direct citations e.g. from Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi (The Betrothed)* and from Carlo Collodi's *Le Avventure di Pinocchio (The Adventures of Pinocchio)*. Even before he has been shown the visions by sergeant Schumacher, Giovanni in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise, Lunario del paradiso* had been thinking, fed up by his staying in an unknown town, of returning home:

End of the journey, one returns home; good by Nordic loves, good by enchanted little fairies, good by children with the mickey mouse, good by to that arm

of the lake I do not know anything about, because I was annoyed with it.<sup>123</sup> (EJ)

Here and elsewhere in the novel Giovanni seems to mistake the river Elbe in its broadness with which it flows from Hamburg into the North Sea with a lake, and his expression “good by to that arm of the lake” reminds one of Lucia’s farewell (“Addio”) to her village when fleeing from her prosecution in Alessandro Manzoni’s *The Betrothed, promessi sposi*. I think here of the beginning of the description of that farewell which initiates with the words: “Good by, mountains ascending from the waters, and elevated to the sky ...”<sup>124</sup> (EJ) adding this to the beginning of the novel: “This arm of the lake of Como ...”<sup>125</sup> (EJ), and it reminds me of this scene because as Giovanni repeats his “good by ...” so is repeated Lucia’s “Addio ...”.

Before that there is a scene in which Giovanni flees by night from his hosts after having gone to a party. When he is running headless and deadly tired through the streets there appears the sentence:

“And walk and walk through this street, now I was sure that it was wrong; I shall have walked for two hours. ... **My head was crashing from sleep and fatigue and disperation ...**”<sup>126</sup> (EJ)

This, now, reminds me of the beginning of Chapter XIII in Carlo Collodi’s *The Adventures of Pinocchio, Le avventure di pinocchio* which is: “And walk and walk and walk, until toward evening they finally arrived dead tired at the Red Crawfish Inn.”<sup>127</sup>

Bringing these reflections about describing reality mixing it with fantasy and literature in *Phases of the Moon in Paradise, Lunario del paradiso* together with G. Celati’s *How I Landed in America*, “Come sono sbarcato in America” and Jh. Lahiri’s *The Third and Final Continent*, one may say that Giovanni in Celati’s story is near to the narrator at the end of Celati’s novel, when described as he wants to alter his real adventures in America for his planned letter to a piece of lived and at the same time imagined adventures, as for example feeling himself put back in the time when movies were produced in the very village where he arrives at and thinking of the movie star (diva) who lived in the same house where he stays. Contrary to that the narrator in Lahiri’s story is adapting himself to the America as it is, but still, at the end, he wonders how he really has arrived to a New World. The story concludes:

I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am

not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.<sup>128</sup>

Again contrary to this Mrs. Sen in the second story by Jh. Lahiri here presented, fails to adapt herself to America. Even if Giovanni is narrating about his stay in Germany, he brings in the idea to go to a New World, that is America, as the result of a vision. And, thinking of the story “How a photographer landed in the New World”, “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, one might even ask the question: Does America really exist? – that is beyond the imagination of the narrators?!

- 1 Gianni Celati, *Lunario del paradiso*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi editore, 1978; of this text I have used as well the German translation which deviates from the Italian 1978 edition: Gianni Celati, *Mondphasen im Paradies*, Aus dem Italienischen von Marianne Schneider, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1999. In the German edition is explained: “Titel der ursprünglich 1978 in veränderter Form 1996 erschienenen Originalausgabe: *Lunario del paradiso*” ©Giangiaco Feltrinelli Editore Milano, that means: “Title from the original version from 1978 which appeared in changed form in 1996”, (without paging, cf. p.4 of the German translation). According to Rebecca West “*Lunario del paradiso* (Paradise Almanac)” was published with G. Celati’s novels “*Le avventure di Guizzardi* (The Adventures of Guizzardi, 1973)” and “*La banda dei sospiri* (The Gang of Sighs)”, 1976 “in a single volume in 1989, with an entirely rewritten version of *Lunario del paradiso*, under the title *Parlamenti buffi* (Funny Chatter)”, see Rebecca West’s article, “Gianni Celati (1937-)“, in: *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies* (vols.1-2), vol.1 A-J. Index, General Editor Gaetana Marrone, Editors Paolo Puppa, Luca Somigli, New York, London, Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group, 2007, pp.434-437, here p.435. Having at hand only the original text of *Lunario del paradiso* from 1978 I could not check whether the changed Italian edition from 1996, on which the German translation is based, is identical with the Italian version from 1989.
- 2 One word to the English citations and translations. In my running text I give first the English translation of Gianni Celati’s texts for rendering reading more consistent.

Instead of Rebecca West's translation of *Lunario del Paradiso* as *Paradise Almanac* I translated and cite the title here more literally as *Phases of the Moon in Paradise*, putting it into italics even if there does not exist such an English edition. From existing translations into English of text of G.Celati is used further here: Gianni Celati's *Narratori delle pianure*, ©Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore Milano, Prima edizione ne "I Narratori" giugno 1985, Prima edizione nell "Universale Economica" maggio 1988, I used here the Ottava edizione settembre 2008, translated as *Voices from the Plains*, Translated by Robert Lumley (in the text after the cited translation: RL), First published 1989 by Serpent's Tail, London. And I have cited from: Gianni Celati, *Avventure in Africa*, ©Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore Milano, Prima edizione ne "I Narratori" gennaio 1998, Prima edizione nell "Universale Economia" gennaio 2000, I used here: Quarta edizione settembre 2008; translated as *Adventures in Africa*, translated by Adria Bernardi (in the text after the cited translation AB), Foreword by Rebecca West, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2000. All other translations into the English are by the author of this essay (in the text after the cited translation: EJ).

- 3 Rebecca J. West, *Gianni Celati. The Craft of Everyday Storytelling*, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Toronto Buffalo London, Printed in Canada, 2000, p.249.
- 4 "madre spilungona", see e.g. G. C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.12.
- 5 "E poi qua faccio un'altra scoperta. Qua c'è la Gestapo; io li conosco quelli della Gestapo dal tempo di guerra. Adesso li hanno messi per le strade di questa città a fermare il traffico per far passare le vecchiette e i bambini.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.36.
- 6 "e anche il fidanzato si metteva in politica, nello stesso partito di suo padre, che era poi quel partito di assassini criminali cristiani del criminale Adenauer. Persecutori scatenati con la Gestapo di quelli che non rigano dritto; trafficanti soci degli americani per dominare il mondo con le loro banche e le loro bombe di merda.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.75.
- 7 "Studiavo tedesco su una grammatica d'italiano per tedeschi; la studiavo cioè all'incontrario. Imparo a parlare qualche parola, ma non erano mai belle parole, veramente interessanti. Le parole interessanti gliele chiedevo ad Antje, che sapeva le parole più interessanti d'ogni lingua", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.20.
- 8 "Damals war ich hinter den interessanten Wörtern in allen Sprachen her: hinter den Sätzen der Gedichte, den Worten, um einer Frau den Hof zu machen, den Wörtern zum

Lachen und zum Fluchen, gescheiterten Reden, in denen tiefe Dinge zur Sprache kommen. In dem Italienischlehrbuch für Deutsche, das kann man sich ja vorstellen, waren die Sätze so blöd, daß sie einem nicht einmal beim blödesten Gähnen einfallen würden.”, G.C., *Mondphasen im Paradies*, op.cit., p.38.

- 9 Here translated from G.C., *Phases of the Moon in Paradise, Mondphasen im Paradies*, p.115; in the Italian text one reads: “Parlavo spedito adesso quando ubriaco; non so di preciso cosa dicevo; avevo paura di essere diventato un po’ tedesco.”, G. C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.72.
- 10 Mark Twain, “The awful German Language”, in: M.T., *A Tramp Abroad*, Foreword Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Introduction Russel Banks, Afterword James S. Leonard, The Oxford Mark Twain (29-volume set), Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, (hardback 1996) here I used the paperback edition 2010, Appendix D, pp.601-619, here: p.614.
- 11 “The traveller’s return”, in: *Voices from the Plains*, op.cit., pp.113-119, here: p.114. “Da Polesella ho preso una corriera, e andando verso Guarda Veneta avevo paura di parlare e sentire al mia voce, come quando ero in un altro continente; evitavo di guardare gli altri passeggeri perché non mi rivolgessero la parola.” Gianni Celati, *Narratori delle pianure*, op.cit., p.106
- 12 For this information cf. Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, First Published in the USA in 1999 by Houghton Mifflin Company, here is used the first edition by Flamingo. An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 1999, text after the front cover, without paging.
- 13 “come un pellegrino giunto ai gradini superiori dell’ empireo”, G.C., *Lunario del Paradiso*, op.cit., p.108.
- 14 “Ciofanni ascolta la voce del maestro! Il maestro sarebbe lui, la mia guida, il mio Vergilio, e anche padre onnipotente di questo paradiso in terra; tutto lui. Io niente, solo un pellegrino.”, *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.108. Added to these allusions to Dante’s *Divina commedia*, in the German translation there is added directly after “Vergil”: “and I as Dante always amazed about everything.”; “und ich wie Dante immer über alles verwundert”, *Mondphasen im Paradies*, op.cit., p.175.
- 15 “... solo un grande cielo di stelle”, G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.110.
- 16 “Il sergente del paradiso voleva rianimarmi, dice che non è finita. Va be’, ma delle sue lampadine ne avevo I coglioni pieni; è la bandiera Americana che me è rimasta impres-



- sa. L'America, l'America, è lì che volevo andare, ora, subito; scappare! Capitano, gli ho detto, è l'America il paradiso.”, G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.111.
- 17 Gianni Celati, “Come sono sbarcato in America”, in: G.C., *Cinema naturale*, Milano, ©Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, Prima edizione ne “I Narratori” gennaio 2001, here cited after “Prima edizione nell “Universale Economia”, febbraio 2003, p.7.
- 18 “Un personaggio di nome Giovanni, che conosco benissimo, gui racconta come è sbarcato in America perla prima volta, ai tempi della sua giovinezza”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.7.
- 19 “E dopo si era dimenticato che doveva scrivere la lettera, l’idea non gli sfiorava più neanche il cervello. La sua testa si era svuotata di tutto. Tutti i suoi resti e avanzi li aveva sputati fuori, tutte le incertezze erano sparite, più niente da scrivere a nessuno”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.23.
- 20 “narratore”, “il nostro Giovanni”, “l’eroe e narratore della presente storia”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., pp.16, 17, 18.
- 21 “le sue esperienze di andata in un altro continente”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.7.
- 22 “solo le briciole che il bianco getta al nero”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.9.
- 23 “Giovanni non aveva mai visto una simile congrega di derelitti, barbuti straccioni, donne disfatte, vecchie ossute, bevitori di birra, gente che parla da sola, obesi mansueti, magri stizzosi, come in quella fermata di campagna. Era quella America? Nella lettera doveva rettificare subito l’idea che si ha dell’America attraverso i film, dato che adesso aveva visto come stavano veramente le cose.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.10.
- 24 “il disastro delle sue aspettative di vita, la fine d’una carriera di scrittore di interessanti cose americane”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.16.
- 25 “per le strade vuote, già stanco di essere in America, esposto a tanti inconvenienti. Già si sta chiedendo perché è venuto lì, chi glielo ha fatto fare. Che ci sia venuto soltanto per raccontare agli altri le sue esperienze, e darsi un po’ di arie?” G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.17.
- 26 “Forse aveva in mente di chiedere una penna, scrivere sul tovagliolo.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.18.
- 27 “Ma tutto ciò va pensato a distanza, dopo anni a chiedersi se quel diner sia mai esistito,

- e se si è mai ascoltata una voce del genere. In breve, solo dopo molto tempo Giovanni ha capito che la voce che gli parlava quella sera era la voce dei momenti vuoti, quando tutto ha poco senso, l'eternità ondeggia in apnea sopra la tua testa. Cioè, mi spiego meglio, l'eternità ti sorvola la testa, portando una brezzolina come le ali d'un angelo, proprio perché in quel momento non hai niente da fare, non hai nessuna esperienza da raccontare ai tuoi connazionali.", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., p.18.
- 28 "Bastava che tutto nella loro vita fosse come un lungo momento vuoto ... "Lo ficchi nel sacco dei momenti vuoti che nessuno si ricorda, perchè sono cose poco interessanti, sempre uguali, su cui non c'è niente da dire, ed è questa l'eternità.", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., pp.19-20.
- 29 "il migliore, la lingua di Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., p.21.
- 30 "nell' insegnamento della cosiddetta lingua italiana", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., p.22.
- 31 "Sono qui venuto da terre lontane per farvi sapere come e qualmente l'italiano non esiste. Voi studenti del nulla; hanno presente l'orsignori il nulla?", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.128.
- 32 "Perché non esiste Italia, ecco perché.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.129.
- 33 "Ed è così che sono inventati l'Italia, terra che esiste solo nelle poesie, lingua del nulla, comprendido?", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.130.
- 34 " "Sono arrivato""", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., p.23.
- 35 "Tant'è che dopo, anni dopo, quando sono andato in Islanda per sbaglio intanto che andavo in America, me ne sono comprato uno uguale, e Gisela me la ricordo sempre per quel maglio lí.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit.p.64.
- 36 "Auf jeden Fall wollte ich deswegen viele Jahre später eines Tages nach Island, mir den gleichen Pullover kaufen. Hier haben wir die Täuschung der touristischen Sehnsüchte, aber auch die Erinnerung, die ihr Spiel mit dem Gedächtnis treibt; denn über manche Dinge, die geschehen sind, müssen wir staunen, sobald wir sie erzählen, wie wenn sie, seit sie geschehen sind, nur darauf warten würden, erzählt zu werden.", G.C., *Mondphasen im Paradies*, op.cit., p.101.
- 37 "vissuto in un vero romanzo", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., p.23.
- 38 "Quella era un'esperienza da raccontare al più presto, affinché i suoi connazionali sapessero a quali pericoli si esponeva andando in un altro continente", G.C., "Come sono

- sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.9.
- 39 “la sua lettera sarebbe stata più interessante, caricando un po’ la situazione e magari raccontando che tutti quei neri nel bar volevano picchiarlo.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.10.
- 40 “la capitale del cinema, prima che sorgesse Hollywood”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.11.
- 41 “avrebbe fatto colpo, magari aggiungendo che una famosa diva del cinema aveva abitato nella sua casa, agli albori del secolo”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.11.
- 42 “Se però gli fossero venuti ad aprire sarebbe stato meglio, e nella lettera avrebbe potuto inventar qualcosa di più eccitante da raccontare ai propri connazionali.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.11.
- 43 “Anche qui ci aveva già aggiunto qualche tocco più eccitante, ad esempio il fatto che il barbiere fosse un tipo erculeo, mentre forse era solo un tipo medio. Ma la cacciata dal negozio doveva gonfiarla un po’, pensando a eventuali lettori.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.12.
- 44 “Secondo lei Giovanni avrebbe dovuto abbandonare la sua stanza nella casa di legno, dove aveva abitato una famosissima diva del cinema, agli albori del secolo, per trasferirsi in quella trasandata dimora che sapeva anche di chiuso, piuttosto deprimente.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.15.
- 45 “Di sicuro no era un’ esperienza da mettere nella lettera. Va bene che erano in America, e a parlare di cose americane si fa sempre colpo.”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.15
- 46 “la fine d’una carriera di scrittore interessanti cose americane, la perdita irreparabile della gloria di abitare nella casa di una antica diva del cinema, che era un’invenzione notevole, da scrivere nella lettera.” G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.16-17.
- 47 “essendo un tipo un po’ troppo strano”, G.C., “Come sono sbarcato in America”, op.cit., p.20.
- 48 “A parte anche i pasticci della copula, non era un’esperienza nel senso che intendeva l’eroe e narratore della presente storia. È vero che ognuno si inventa le sue esperienze di vita come gli pare, e lo fanno tutti appena aprono la bocca, nessuno escluso; ma c’è sempre bisogno di qualcosa che ispiri l’inventiva. E la casa di quella povera donna ab-

- bandonata, indubbiamente in cerca d'amore, ma troppo triste e troppo pressante per il nostro Giovanni, non poteva ispirargli niente di avventuroso da scrivere.", G.C., "Come sono sbarcato in America", op.cit., p.17.
- 49 "Quasi quasi vado a dirgliene quattro; è ora di piantarla con questi pensatori che non ti lasciano mai farti una storia senza rompere le balle. Ma ho sonno, vado a letto; gli lascio scritto qua in fondo, perché legga e si convinca: Caro pensatore, dacci un taglio di fare il cretino, prova anche tu a farti delle storie e vedrai che questa è la spattanata verità.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.185.
- 50 "Hört endlich auf mit dem alten blasierten Lied! Alles geschieht, wie es geschieht, und sonst zählt kein Furz; das Leben ist etwas, das geschieht, was es sein soll, weiß man nicht, es ist nur ein Geisteszustand", G.C., *Mondphasen im Paradies*, op.cit., p.263.
- 51 Jhumpa Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent", in: J.L., *Interpreter of Maladies*, op.cit., pp.173-198.
- 52 "non si chiamavano neanche Beatles", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.82.
- 53 "in estate, agosto 1977", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.95.
- 54 "siamo al io marzo 1978", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.78.
- 55 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.173, p.197.
- 56 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.173.
- 57 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.173.
- 58 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.174.
- 59 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.174.
- 60 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., pp.176, 176, 177.
- 61 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.177.
- 62 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.179.
- 63 J.L., "The Third and Final Continent", op.cit., p.179, pp.179-180.
- 64 "Basta, se non mi crede rompiano questa amicizia col nazista. Lui me l'aveva montata tanto questa balla delle visioni che alla fine ci avevo creduto più di lui; la storia del m'illuminò e tutto.
- Ma cosa si era illuminato quello lì? Non si era illuminato un'ostia di niente. Ero io che mi ero illuminato sul serio, anche senza le scoregge.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.116.
- 65 "Allora sí avrei potuto raccontare delle vere avventure, al rientro.", G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.81.

- 66 “... che volevo andare in Norvegia e poi in Finlandia; magari stabilirmi in Finlandia e farmi finlandese.”, G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.82.
- 67 “e divento scandinavo, calmo, posato, senza troppo grilli nel cervello”, G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.183.
- 68 Jh.L., “The Third and Final Continent”, op.cit., p.196.
- 69 Jh.L., “The Third and Final Continent”, op.cit., p.197.
- 70 Gianni Celati, “How a photographer landed in the New World”, in: G.C., *Voices from the plain*, op.cit., pp.141-145, in the Italian original: G.C. “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, in: G.C., *Narratori delle pianure*, op.cit., pp.131-135.
- 71 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.141; “[una zona di case sparse lungo] il Po di Venezia, prima che il fiume si dirami nei due grandi bracci del Po di Pila e del Po di Gnocca, verso le sacche lagunari e poi il mare.”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.131.
- 72 G.C. “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.141; “Niente di meno fotografabile di questo paesaggio, per la sua platezza e uniformità fino alle frange di terra che si spingono nel mare. E in mezzo al mare spuntano qua e là isolotti che spesso hanno la forma di lingue di sabbia; alcuni di questi emergono solo con la bassa marea, mentre altri, divenuti insediamenti d'erbe che trattengono il fango portato a mare dal grande fiume, mostrano in distanza ciuffi di giunchi e altre piante adatte all'ambiente salmastro, e vengono chiamati “barene”.G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.131.
- 73 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.141; “Le sue foto dovevano apparire a commento d'un testo che un celebre scrittore avrebbe scritto, a proposito della “umile gente alle foci del Po”.”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., pp.131-132.
- 74 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.142; “[gli] contava tutta la sua vita e lo invitava a casa sua”; G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.133.
- 75 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.142; “un uomo magrissimo”, G.C., “Come un fotografo e sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., pp.132-133.
- 76 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.143; “In testa portava una specie di colbacco di peluche, e sotto la giacca una camicia a quadri da cowboy”, G.C., “Come un fotografo e sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.133.

- 77 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.143; “assieme a tutta l’attrezzatura da pesca”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.133.
- 78 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.143; “andare a pescare sulla propria barca e sorvegliare il cimitero”; G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit. p.133.
- 79 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.143; “richiudere una bomba a mano per conservare un po’ di polvere”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.134.
- 80 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.144; “in qualche isolotto di sabbia o barena in mezzo al mare”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.134.
- 81 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.144; “dando [ ] [l’indice mancante] degli schiaffi”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.135.
- 82 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.145; “puntava”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.135.
- 83 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.145; “Barea, Zoaglia, Ca’ Morta, Morosina, Pegaso, Bacucca”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.135.
- 84 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.145; “Nuovo Mondo”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.135.
- 85 G.C., “How a photographer landed in the New World”, op.cit., p.145; “non senza avergli spiegato – ma già con le spalle voltate, remando e allontanandosi – il dito mancante l’aveva portato al Nuovo Mondo e lo stesso dito aveva ordinato che ci restasse.”, G.C., “Come un fotografo è sbarcato nel Nuovo Mondo”, op.cit., p.135.
- 86 J.L., “The Third and Final Continent”, op.cit., p.196.
- 87 J.L., “The Third and Final Continent”, op.cit., p.198.
- 88 J.L., “The Third and Final Continent”, op.cit., p.197.
- 89 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s, in: J.L., *The Interpreter of Maladies*, op.cit., pp.111-135.
- 90 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.115.
- 91 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.116.
- 92 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.116.

- 93 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.116.
- 94 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.121.
- 95 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.123.
- 96 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.113.
- 97 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.113.
- 98 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.113.
- 99 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.113.
- 100 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.119.
- 101 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.119.
- 102 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.119.
- 103 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.120.
- 104 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.120.
- 105 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.120.
- 106 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.121.
- 107 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., e.g.p.121.
- 108 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.125.
- 109 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.128.
- 110 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.129.
- 111 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.131.
- 112 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.131.
- 113 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.132.
- 114 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.133.
- 115 J.L., “Mrs. Sen’s”, op.cit., p.134.
- 116 “Wenn er etwas Unverdauliches gefressen hat, geht er selbständig auf grauenvolle Reisen, da kannst du ihm noch so schnell nachrennen.”, G.C., *Mondphasen im Paradies*, op.cit., p.241.
- 117 “Denn es waren nicht wenige, die damals wie dieser Giovanni in ihrer jugendlichen Unruhe ins Ausland abhauten, um den heimatlichen Fallen zu entgehen. Aber solche wie er, ohne die nötigen Requisiten, nachher ging es ihnen genauso: Ihr Kopf fing an davonzurasen wie ein Schnellzug, sie mußten wer weiß wie lange hinterherlaufen, und manch einer läuft heute noch.”, G.C., *Mondphasen im Paradies*, op.cit., p.243.
- 118 Gianni Celati, *Adventures in Africa*, op.cit., G.C., *Avventure in Africa*, op.cit.
- 119 *Adventures in Africa*, op.cit., p.XIII, G. C., *Avventure in Africa*, op.cit., p.5.

- 120 Gianni Celati, *Fata Morgana*, ©Giangiaco Feltrinelli Editore Milano, Prima edizione ne “I Narratori” febbraio 2005, here used: Terza edizione giugno 2005,
- 121 “Scritto nel 1986-87”, G.C., *Fata Morgana*, op.cit., p.7.
- 122 Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, (ca.294) Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., Milano 1999, I edizione Oscar classici 1999, here used: Ristampa, Anno 2011.
- 123 “Finito il viaggio si torna a casa; addio amori nordici, addio fatine incantate, addio bambini col topolino, addio a quel ramo del lago di non so cosa che ne avevo i coglionni pieni.”, G.C., *Lunario del Paradiso*, op.cit., p.97.
- 124 “Addio, monti sorgenti dall’acque, ed elevati al cielo...”, Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (1827), Introduzione, note, postille e antologia della critica a cura di Lanfranco Caretti, Roma - Bari, gius. Editori Laterza & Figli Spa, Prima edizione 1970, here used: Terza edizione 1974, p.141.
- 125 “Quel ramo del lago di Como ...”, A. Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, op.cit., p.11.
- 126 “Cammina cammina per quella strada, adesso ero sicuro che era sbagliata; avrò camminato per due ore. ...  
Mi crollava la testa dal sonno e stanchezza e disperazione”, G.C., *Lunario del paradiso*, op.cit., p.55.
- 127 “Cammina, cammina, cammina, alla fine sul far della sera arrivarono stanchi morti all’osteria del Gambero Rosso”, Carlo Collodi (Carlo Lorenzini), *The Adventures of Pinocchio. Story of a Puppet. Le Avventure di Pinocchio*:Storie di un larattino (1883), The Complete Text in a Bilingual Edition with the Original Illustrations, translated with introduction and notes by Nicolas J. Perella, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, University of California Press, Ltd. London, England, 1986, First Paperback Printing 1991, here used: Second Paperback Printing 2005, pp.166-167, the English citation (by Nicolas J. Perella) in the text above was taken from this translation, p.167.
- 128 J.L., “The Third and Final Continent”, op.cit., p.198.