

Origins of Fantasy

Peter Carravetta (October 18, 2008)



"....but he liked the part about the Modern World as well. He read that in New York there was a building that was 102 stories high! Per la miseria!"

When he was seven or eight, to amuse himself and kill the boredom and the fear of animals and adults, he would spend hours drawing people, houses and maps, crouched at his father's army surplus utility chest by u'focularu. He had learned to be thrifty with any available sheet of paper, plus he would pick up, even off the floor and by the piazza, any piece of blank or somehow usable paper. He did not dare ask his parents for an extra notebook. Spending for school supplies came at a designated moment, in September, when they'd buy him one pen, one pencil, three marbled notebooks, plus a reader and a general topics anthology - "u'sussidiariu." And he loved u'sussidiario especially. It had lots of maps, graphs, sketches, headings in bland magentas or dull blues, and some black and white photographs .



He was fascinated by the Ancient World, and he would strain to imagine what the Great Wall of China and the Coliseum looked like in reality. But he liked the part about the Modern World as well. He read that in New York there was a building that was 102 stories high! Per la miseria! The photograph was so small, he couldn't quite grasp the dimensions: he thought of 34 Municipios stacked atop one another! It was unbelievable. He queried the experts in construction in his family: his uncle Michele, a contractor who had actually built two-story houses, said with poured concrete you can do anything. His brother Franco just starting his own company had read they could make the floors lighter with a new honeycomb brick. His father, a foreman, just shook his head, wondering aloud: who knows what kind of steel they came up with. They agreed it was an engineering masterpiece, è un capolavoro edilizio.

He recalled that just outside of Lappano and perched on a hillcrest about 500 meters above Cosenza, there was a bluff with a majestic 270 degree view, where he could see the Crati River lazily vanishing in the north end of the valley, the Norman-Swabian castle down below atop a knoll in the city, then rising on the other, western, side the Appenine range, and pyramid-shaped Monte Cucuzza towering above it. The bulging hills that rose up gradually toward La Sila were to the southeast. Behind and further up the railway station and then the paternal house. It was a breathtaking location. It was one of his favorite spots to which he would steal away and daydream, undisturbed, and draw.

He would sit there for hours trying to calculate in meters how far down the slope the Empire State Building would have to be built in order for him to have a straight level view of the 102th floor. He had to ignore the height of the spire. But it looked like it would have had to be located just below Zumpano, yet slightly higher up than Cosenza. It would have been awesome. Just the cement needed! Imagine the motors to pull elevators four hundred meters up! And the thousands of people who could fit inside; why it'd hold Lappano and Zumpano and probably San Pietro too! He'd fantasize how this imaginary monolith would sit in that valley, out of place, true, but grandiose, imposing, beautiful, and imagine what you could see and do from up there. Fly away?

Did he know or even dream that someday — only eight years later! — he would be taking his father right up to that 102th observatory? Looking south toward the Statue of Liberty, his father had remarked: Do you recall that picture in your fourth grade sussidiario? Oh yes, oh yes...

Peter Carravetta is Alfonse M. D'Amato Professor of Italian and Italian American Studies, SUNY/Stony Brook

Source URL: <http://iitaly.org/magazine/focus/op-eds/article/origins-fantasy>

Links

[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/4876lfbocce011223920823jpg>