

Sea of Literatures

Alpe Adria e dintorni, itinerari mediterranei

Letteratura e cinema di confine

Collana diretta da
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Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl and Steffen Schneider

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Cristina Benussi (University of Trieste)

Tales of the Adriatic

Abstract: The tales set in the Adriatic Sea show the different cultures that have crossed it and the different situations experienced by those people: pirates, trade, pilgrimages to the holy land, wars, relief, sporting events and more, in different historical periods have left significant traces along its coasts. They reflect the multiplicity of Mediterranean cultures.

1 Geography and History

The Adriatic is a stretch of the Mediterranean, a sea longer than it is wide, oblique, oriented as it is from north/west to south/east. Its low, sandy west coast has no ports, unlike its rocky, jagged west coast, which is rich in moorings. This particular configuration, in addition to the system of winds and currents, for many centuries has forced sailors to zigzag between the Italian and Illyrian coasts, at least until the advent of steam ships. The trade of typical products of the two coasts has been therefore intense, and the movements of entire family groups belonging to the ethnic groups located on the opposite shores were frequent: from the Balkan area workers of various kinds arrived in the west, while Italian entrepreneurs left from here towards the east.

Since the year 1000 the Adriatic waterways were controlled by the Republic of Venice, which aimed to expand to the east. The opportunity was offered by the victory of its fleet, led by Pietro II Orseolo / Peter II Orseolo, against the Nazarene pirates that infested the Mediterranean: the coastal towns of Istria and Dalmatia spontaneously submitted to the power of the Serenissima. Reported since pre-Roman times, the attacks of the pirates, especially Saracens and Turks from the Ottoman Empire, were confirmed in the late Middle Ages by merchants and pilgrims to the Holy Land: in those waters they risked, if not the loss of life, certainly that of their property. The various merchant fleets that sailed the Adriatic, as Fernand Braudel tells us (1987), were still governed by sailors from the North Sea, or from the Illyrian coast. Even the deep-sea fishermen found a valuable help in the most experienced colleagues from the north or from the east coast. The Adriatic was a sea where many people could meet, crossing on its different shores: Ashkenazi Jews arrived mainly in Trieste and Venice; Corfiots and Sephardites found a home along the Italian peninsula, where there were also many settlements of Slavic, Turkish, Armenian, Albanian, Montenegrin people, etc. The contamination of different religions and cultures made the Adriatic Sea the backdrop of tales that

very often began with the stories of the origins of different cities, especially coastal ones. From the very first centuries, in fact, narratives of Ragusa, Sibenik, Trogir, on the one hand, Venice, Ravenna, Rimini and Ancona on the other were elaborated. Pirate conflicts, wild clashes for survival, linguistic crossbreeds, intense trade and so on had given rise to a real Adriatic repertoire that recounted the birth and rise of its dominant cities.

2 Mythical Historiography: Humanism

An example of the mythical historiography of the humanistic age is the poem by Gian Mario Filelfo, born in Constantinople, who in the 1470s composed his *Chroniche de la città de Anchona* (1979). He told of the fortunate journey of Fidefora, a queen forced to flee from Schiavonia after the death of her husband. Like Dido, who had escaped from Tyre to Carthage where she founded a kingdom, Fidefora, too, stopped on that Adriatic promontory and gave rise to a city, Ancona. However, it is puzzling that in describing the conquest of power by Ancona's inhabitants, no explicit mention is made of their victory over the Turks. Obviously, the author had good relations with them, since he called them generically "*popoli d'oriente*" / "peoples from the East", arrived nearby to plunder the rich Ravenna. Their defeat was not attributed to their tactical inferiority, but to the perilousness of the navigation along the coast of the Adriatic's eastern shore, on whose rocks their ships would easily get stranded. In this blatant manipulation of historical data, Filelfo therefore appears much more diplomatic than Enea Silvio Piccolomini who, still shocked by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, when writing his *De Europa* five years later described the Turks as a "*truculento, svergognato, fornicatore*" / "truculent, shameful and fornicating" people. But he was to become Papa Pio II / Pope Pius II and precisely against them he wanted to organize a new crusade, which however he was unable to set up. Historiographically more correct, he sought to disprove fabulous allegations, starting with those about the Argonauts: according to him Jason and Medea did not sail from the Black Sea to Istria along the inland river system, nor did they follow the course of the Istro, before taking the Po. The documents he consulted, of course, did not mention such accounts.

3 Manuals, Diaries and Pilot Books of the Renaissance Bourgeoisie

It was the merchants who gave a new face to the Adriatic, such as Benedetto Cotrugli, a Dubrovnik citizen who lived between 1410 and 1469. Not only did he write the first *Libro de l'arte de la mercatura*,¹ but he also composed a *De navigazione* (1464/65), a description of life on board. With the pragmatic sense of those who look at the result rather than at theoretical hypotheses, Cotrugli taught the use of instruments useful for navigation and suggested ways to avoid possible dangers. He recommended sailors to maintain a friendly relationship with all those who practiced the trade, including Turks, beyond flags and religions. The two manuals have as corollary a firm principle of the early capitalistic economy, that is the need to profit from the enterprises but to limit it to a just profit, in order to distribute benefits also to the customers, who would be well disposed to buy other goods, if the merchant was honest.

A Venetian probably of Longobard origin, Marin Sanudo (1466–1536), called the Younger, was rather reluctant to take up positions in the maritime colonies of his Venice, which he loved deeply. In his *Diaries* (1879–1903) he has described in detail, in the form of a chronicle, the historical events that involved Venice from 1496 to 1533. The most interesting part of the story is the portrayal of the real strength of the Maritime Republic, that is to say its merchant fleet: Sanudo described the preparations for the departure, the assessment and planning of supplies, the forecast of risks such as pirate assaults and shipwrecks, basing his depiction on the reports provided by survivors. The powerful narration of the Arsenal, founded in 1104, is so famous that Dante took it as a benchmark for the Circle of Malebolge: in the XXI Canto of *Inferno / Hell*, the poet condemned those who used public office for personal benefit, to be immersed in boiling pitch like that of the Venetian shipyard. This place was actually a superb manufacturing site in which specialised workers carried out the individual operations of assembling standard components along an assembly line. It was one of the oldest examples of a pre-industrial economic-productive structure. Another subject of the Serenissima, originally from Rhodes, Gioseppe Rosaccio, in 1598 wrote a *Viaggio da Venetia a Costantinopoli. Per Mare, e per Terra, & insieme quello di terra Santa / Journey from Venice to Constantinople. By Sea, and by Land, & together that of the Holy Land* ([1598] 1992). The trauma of the collapse of the Eastern Empire had been overcome and this geogra-

1 *Il trattato De navigatione di Benedetto Cotrugli* (1464–1465). Commented edition of ms. Schoenberg 473 with the text of ms.557 di Yale. Ed. Piero Falchetta. *Studi veneziani* LVII (2009): 16–334.

pher celebrated Lepanto where the Holy League, of which Venice was a member, had beaten the Ottomans. He could not possibly know that, despite such victory, from that moment on the decline of the Serenissima would begin, and therefore he wrote with all the pride of the son of a powerful homeland to which he owed obedience and respect. The route, the ports, the winds, the morphology of the coastal and inland territories, the agricultural and manufacturing production of the individual localities, the trade rules, the rarest goods, the descriptions of the habits of the locals, but also the legends of the foundation of the main places and their subsequent history, are accurately reported because, as the subtitle states, his study is “*utile, a Mercanti Marinari, & à Studiosi di Geografia*” / “useful, to Sea Merchants, & to Scholars of Geography”. The pirates, especially the Turks, and the garrisons of the fortifications erected in defense, became characters of a passionate representation. Rosaccio, however, wanted to reassure travellers that the Venetian Republic was very careful to make the Adriatic and Middle Eastern traffic safe. The good merchant did not hesitate to underline that the two civilizations, Christian and Ottoman, had both left impressive signs and that they could coexist with fruitful mutual exchanges. And this was true also for another purely Italian matter: nothing to object that in 1525, in his *Prose della vulgar lingua / Prose of the vulgar language*, the Venetian Pietro Bembo had recognized the primacy of Tuscan as a literary language. The important thing was that the Mediterranean commercial language remained Venetian.

4 Dossiers, Autobiographies, Letters: Towards the Modernity of the Enlightenment

The Serenissima had to contend with other forces in the Italian peninsula and in the rest of Europe that were changing the political balance and control of trade with the Levant through the Adriatic Sea, otherwise known as the Gulf of Venice. After Lepanto (1571) and seventy years of peace with the Turks, the conflict resumed. With the peace of Passarowitz (1718), the trade flows were strongly threatened by the competition from France and England, while the Habsburgs stepped in and in 1719 founded the new free port of the Austro-Hungarian empire in Trieste, which was to compete strongly with the city of the Doges. In fact, in the second book of his *Mémoires*,² Giacomo Casanova recounted the delicate diplomatic task

² *Le Mémoires de J. Casanova de Seingalt, écrits par lui-même* is the title of the old edition of Giacomo Casanova's memoirs. Written in French between 1789 and 1798, they were published posthumously around 1825 in a censored version, and placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1834,

entrusted to him by Venice, in 1741/42, at the court of Constantinople, when he was just twenty years old. As an old man, he recalled his round trip from Venice to Constantinople and back again along the classical route, the Istrian Vrsar, the Dalmatian and Dubrovnik outposts, the commercial, military and cultural settlements located in Kotor, Corfu and Korcula. He described vividly his sea voyage, insisting, however, above all on his romantic vicissitudes, without forgetting to equate the art of sailing with the wisdom of governing oneself and the things of the world. When he then fled from the Piombi, to earn merits and be able to return to his motherland in 1772 he went to Trieste. Here he spied on land and sea traffic, sending precious Adriatic information to Venice: number and type of ships, imperial concessions, goods traffic of the Habsburg fleet, and other useful information for the competition.

The relevance of factual information, the abandonment of mythology, and the need to adhere to the historical truth are the basis of the eighteenth-century narrative, born from the need for rational clarity invoked by the Enlightenment. Travellers and historians presented essential and objective facts, possibly free from prejudice. The legendary and adventurous aura disappeared and the Adriatic turned into a sea described with historical and scientific interest, according to the new genre inaugurated by the reports of the *Grand Tour*. The odeporic perspective, which at the end of the eighteenth century was promoted by members of the bourgeoisie in search of success, underpins, for example, the short story by Antonio De Giuliani (1785)³ from Trieste, who used economic terms to describe the morphological, climatic and political characteristics of the free port of Trieste, which he believed to be underexploited. An example of an epistolary novel is the *Journey to Dalmatia / Viaggio in Dalmazia* (Fortis [1774] 1986) by Alberto Fortis, one of the precursors of the genre. The nine letters of the collection are grouped according to the topographical districts explored by the author considering three aspects: geology, ancient history and the retrieval of information economically useful to identify possible resources for the Serenissima. And so, we find detailed historical reconstructions, which come from the observation of the stratification of the different civilizations exposed by the force of bradyseisms and now visible under the water line. There are accurate descriptions of shells, marbles, phosphoric marine lights, stones useful to detect the fertility of the land. The intent is to push the motherland to refine agricultural and fishing techniques so as to draw

along with all the author's other works. A new edition, in line with the original manuscript, has replaced the old title with its original one by *Histoire de ma vie* (12 vols.), Wiesbaden-Paris, F. A. Brockhaus-Librairie Plon, 1960–1962.

³ Other eighteenth-century travellers on the Adriatic: Carlo Gozzi 1797; Ruggero Boscovich di Ragusa 1759–1760; Zaccaria Valaresso 1769/70; Francesco Grisellini 1780; Francesco Apostoli 1801.

more resources and thus reduce the import of goods. Often the author, distracted by the beauty of the places and the flavours of their cuisine, indulged in discussing navigation techniques. Another eighteenth-century traveller, Giambattista Casti, in a refined literary prose, suggested itineraries and seasonal times suitable for avoiding bad weather when undertaking a journey of extraordinary tourist interest: Venice, Corfu, Zakynthos, the Dardanelles, Constantinople, and then back via Athens. Also Casti did not fail to inform the reader about the military power, the state of finances, religion, customs, administrative, legal and school legislation, and the gastronomy of the areas he was passing through; he also gave precious information about Turkey, against which the Austro-Russian coalition had just been formed.⁴ The point of view was always that of a Venetian, who considered western civilization absolutely superior and who took care to confide it also to his female readers. In fact, a female public began to form, made wider by the incipient industrial revolution which favoured the inclusion of the bourgeois classes. Giacomo De Concina, with his *Journey to Coastal Dalmatia / Viaggio nella Dalmazia litorale* (De Concina 1809), twenty-three letters addressed to a friend, portray Fortis' itinerary, focusing on certain themes, such as topography, soil fertility, the river and road network, ports, cities, mines, natural resources and the products derived from them. The perspective of the government officer, of the scholar and of the scientist did not exclude that of the man of culture, who managed to grasp the link between the different civilizations and to appreciate artistic details that reminded him of the great Venetian school, from Titian to Tintoretto, from Palma il Vecchio to Veronese. While admiring the beauty of that steep coast, Casti also found time to make frequent observations on navigation techniques. But in the meantime something had changed: with the advent of Napoleon, that shore had ceased to be Venetian and was about to become Austrian. A fact well known to Ugo Foscolo, a native of Zakynthos, an island of the Serenissima, where his father, a ship's doctor, had chosen to live. Although immersed in the culture of classical Greece, Foscolo felt Venetian and therefore, as a betrayed patriot, reacted vigorously to the signing of the Treaty of Campoformido, with which in 1797 Napoleon handed over Venice, Istria and Dalmatia to the Habsburgs (Zakynthos remained French). The theme of exile was thus strongly raised in Foscolo's *A Zacinto* written between 1802 and 1803, one of the most famous poems in Italian literature. The writer, fleeing from the Austrian police, compared his wanderings to Ulysses' perilous *nostos*,

⁴ *Relazione di un mio viaggio fatto da Venezia a Costantinopoli l'anno 1788, con alcune osservazioni attinenti al medesimo, particolarmente sul Serraglio attuale del gran Signore. Operetta inedita piacevole ed istruttiva dell'abate Giambattista Casti*, 1802. It is an epistolary novel with a complex editorial story. To learn more about it please refer to Pavarini (2009).

but unlike Ulysses who managed to see his homeland, the “petrosa Itaca”, again, Foscolo sensed that he would never be back.

5 Poems, Opera Librettos, Novels: the Birth of Nations and Romanticism

After the Congress of Vienna, which restored the dynastic equilibrium of the past, the bourgeoisie of trade and industry began to regain power, encouraged by the results of the French Revolution and Napoleon’s achievements. Romanticism was the movement that accompanied the demand for autonomy, including national autonomy. The struggle against absolutism in the name of constitutional liberalism was in fact identified in many national communities with the struggle for unity and independence of the various peoples dismembered or enslaved by the policy of restoration. The Italian Risorgimento, one of the many movements that perturbed nineteenth-century Europe, experienced defeats and victories: the Adriatic began to tell other stories, which reversed the roles and made the sea a liquid plain that divided instead of united. In the romantic nineteenth century, Venice the conqueror, which had placed the “*schiavi*”, that is the Slavs, at its service, became the emblem of an oppressive system of power that provided content to the melodrama, a new popular narrative genre: powerful emotions, underlined by the power of musical romances in which good and bad guys, heroes and traitors, patriots and spies were clearly recognizable, made opera librettos vehicles of political propaganda too (Sorbi 2015). Venice became a negative example of an evil power. Melodramas such as Verdi’s *I due Foscari* (1844) with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, or Enrico Petrella’s *Morosina* (1859) with a text by Domenico Bolognese, or Alessandro Magotti’s *L’ultimo Faliero* (1877) with words by Luigi Scalchi, now put the figure of the pirate in a positive light, the Uskoks became the bearer of alternative values to those of the Serenissima. The archetype was Schiller with his *Die Räuber* (The Robbers) (1782) and, musically, *Il Pirata* (1827) by Vincenzo Bellini with lyrics by Felice Romani. Sailing by sea and attacking Venetian ships now meant opposing a civilization from which one would deliberately choose to walk away, because it was oppressive and unjust. That was the time when Niccolò Tommaseo gathered the *Tuscan, Corsican, Illyrian and Greek folk songs / Canti popolari toscani, corsi, illirici e greci* (1841/42) along the shores of the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic Sea, as a sign not only of respect for cultures neglected by the cultured class, but also of attention to the values and ethical principles of peoples until then subjugated. Tommaseo, who engaged in the Risorgimento struggle, would never forget his place of birth, Sibenik in Dalmatia, where a good part of the pop-

ulation in the hinterland was Slavic, like his mother. When he returned home, he felt the need to learn his mother tongue, especially after finding out that some Dalmatian folk songs had spread throughout Europe. From enemy to hero, the Uskok was the one who, in the name of freedom, had to become an outlaw to oppose unjust tyranny. Even the Trieste-born Leone Fortis, with the musical aid of Francesco Petroncini, arrived at La Scala in Milan with his *L'Uscocco* (1862). And in 1873 the *scapigliato* Antonio Ghislanzoni with *Fosca*, set to music by Antonio Carlos Gomes, sided with the enemies of Venice, in a story set in the first centuries of his fortune, in the year 900. Meanwhile, there had been Lissa, who for years remained a shame to be washed away for the Italian Navy. Another *scapigliato*, Arrigo Boito, in the verses of the *Mona Lisa / Gioconda* (1876) set to music by Amilcare Ponchielli, staged a Venice in ruins destined to drag any project of happiness into the mud. The Adriatic, like every sea, showed its funereal aspect more than ever.

6 The Epic of the Great War

D'Annunzio perceived this sense of gloominess following the red sails of *Canto novo* that left the coasts of Abruzzo heading to the shores of Dalmatia and Istria. The Adriatic was the place where the ships set sail from opposite ports and crossed their routes – as told in one of the *Novelle della Pescara*, *Il Cerusico di mare*, whose protagonist was a doctor who tried in vain to save a passenger. For this sea of death and glory, the poet wrote verses full of nationalistic ardour, starting with *March 12, 1882 / 12 marzo 1882*, a poem composed on the occasion of his nineteenth birthday. Towards the end of August 1887, together with Adolfo de Bosis, D'Annunzio decided to take a cruise on the small yacht “Lady Clara”: the travel plan was to sail up the coast to Venice, then on to Trieste and Zadar, to finally reach the Bay of Kotor moving from island to island. The journey stopped before reaching Venice, as the inexperienced sailors lost their way, taking some risks. The following year, in an article on the “Tribuna”, which later became the prologue to the book on *L'Armata d'Italia*, D'Annunzio recalled that episode; but the adventure was cloaked in a patriotic symbolism: the poet's experience was transfigured into the tragic destiny of Faà di Bruno, who was swallowed up by the sea in Lissa when the ship “King of Italy” / “Re d'Italia” sank with its four hundred sailors on board. Through a series of successive passages, the poet concludes with a complaint about the loss of Italian dominion over the eastern Adriatic coast, which he hoped would be regained. The season of irredentism began, a movement that claimed the need to conquer the lands where Italian was still spoken. Venice became a positive example again. Moved by some political intention, D'Annunzio spent some time composing *La nave*, in which the Venetians, confined in the lagoon, became the protagonists of

a struggle for the conquest of their Adriatic dominion. When the war broke out, D'Annunzio retired to Venice, from where in January 1916 he thought of making an inspection in Trieste, which he intended to fly over by airplane. But a defect in the carburetor forced him to make an emergency landing: it was on this occasion that the poet suffered the eye damage that forced him into darkness, and that led him to the extraordinary experience of the *Notturmo*. In October 1918 he organized the famous Bakar raid, an incursion against the Austrian navy that had a resounding echo.

During the First World War, the Adriatic Sea, on which trade routes had been suspended, became the scene of clandestine events: from its shores one sailed to escape conscription, and so, in Trieste, the Austrian Admiralty (Haydée 2015) illuminated the surface of the water with a spotlight placed on the heights of Opicina. Stuparich, too, in his novel *Ritorneranno / They will return* (1942), has his characters look at the horizon, waiting to see the Italian ships appear, a sign of victory. This victory finally arrived, but looked so “mutilated” that D'Annunzio decided to occupy Fiume with his troops of legionnaires.

7 A Mass Society: Reportages

Arturo Marpicati was among D'Annunzio's followers. Soon after the end of the “Impresa di Fiume” (the Italian Regency of Carnaro) he wrote about his experience in his *Piccolo romanzo di una vela* (1922). It was a travel diary, a competitive and relaxing journey at the same time, a bit of a regatta and a bit of a cruise, that the writer made aboard a cutter between Fiume, Venice and Zadar, in waters that were Italian at the time. The irredentist satisfaction is evident, while the tension of the sporting challenge made the novel a sort of symbolic initiation into life: youth became the season of transition from the firm security of the mainland to the fascinating liquidity of the sea, full of uncertainties. The desire for adventure made the daring protagonist similar to Homer's Ulysses, although more attentive to the charm of the changing shades of colour of the seascapes than to the search for existential and cognitive experiences. A narrative genre emerged that followed the *reportages* made popular by Paul Morand, Evelyn Waugh, Pierre Loti, Valéry Larbaud. This was also the genre used by another legionnaire, Giovanni Comisso, for his *Il porto dell'amore* (1924), an account of the “Impresa di Fiume” provided from a non-politically oriented point of view: war aggressiveness, patriotic ideals and sexual impulses were correlated in D'Annunzio-esque expressions, which had the blue sea of the Carnaro as their reference point. In some way this view anticipated the collection *Gente di mare* (1928): here the author described the joys of a small cabotage vessel that allowed him to come across fishing boats, colorful, dec-

orated and painted with sacred scenes able to protect them from the sea when it got rough. Comisso wrote of places between the lagoon coasts of the west and the rocky coasts of the east that had different characteristics but had all been forged by civilizations capable of dialoguing with each other. It was the wind, in all its directions and qualifications – sirocco, mistral, bora, libeccio – that unified the various stories: diaries, reportages, memories, chronicles, sketches or paper articles – the various pieces of the collection spoke of men and women of the sea able to measure themselves against the forces of nature. In the case of the futurist Vladimiro Miletti (Miletti 1937) waves and wind represented the challenge that has always attracted man. Indeed, the father of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, had emphasized the beginning of a new era by celebrating the strength of the primordial elements, which would sweep away the decaying archaic civilization: he did so in the novel *La Conquête des Étoiles*, written in French in 1902 and translated into Italian in 1920. Those were the years in which the exhibition of physical strength and overcoming challenges were the prerogatives of the new fascist man: Nico Ledvinca with *Remi sull'Adriatico* (1933) described the physical effort that rowers had to make on a *jole* (a type of boat) called “Vittoria” (Victory) to reach the finishing line. Ledvinca highlighted the competitive effort but also the enjoyment of the beauty of nature in moments of rest. The cruise became a sort of initiation journey for young people with a goliardic spirit, who, upon going ashore, would go wild engaging in dances, amorous adventures and imitations of pirates. Obviously, sailing on the sea of Buccari, their thoughts went to the intrepid D’Annunzio who had mocked the Austrian navy.

8 A Disturbing Symbolism and the Return to Myth

In the interval between the two world wars, the Adriatic Sea became a “training ground for life” but was threatened by a negative force. Another devastating war was on its way. One of Giani Stuparich’s most beautiful stories, *L’isola / The Island* (1942), has the sea as its narrative backdrop: the author is on a boat scheduled to bring his terminally ill father back to his native land, Lošinj, for the last time. Beyond the enchantment of the landscape, the emotion felt in seeing the father find the places of his childhood, the lasting impression is that of the protagonist staring at the horizon that finally swallows the profile of the Dalmatian town. On the return journey, from the deck of the boat, Stuparich looked at the Lošinj island disappearing in the distance and perceived it as an epitome of his own life, spent between a melancholic adolescence and a missed youth, waiting nostal-

gically for something that sometimes had been lost and sometimes had never happened and that was now progressing towards an inevitable death.

Between 1921 and 1943, the Adriatic Sea experienced a steady flow of Jews from Trieste to Palestine or the Americas. The city, in fact, was the only Italian port from which ships would sail to the East. Until the 1930s refugees from Eastern Europe fled from the Russian and Polish pogroms, but then, with the advent of Nazism in 1933, Jews arrived in Trieste from all the territories occupied by Hitler: the city thus became a full-fledged “Shaar Zion”, “Zion Gate” until 1943, when emigration ended with the Nazi occupation of the entire regional territory. More than 150,000 Jewish people fled, assisted by the Jewish Agency, which provided accommodations and material, economic and morale support.

Then, after the Nazi-Fascists lost the war, it was the turn of the exiles from Istria, Fiume/Rijeka and Dalmatia, who sometimes chose to flee by sea, in precarious clandestine boats or, from 1947 onwards, aboard the Toscana motor ship with regular service from Pula, a predominantly Italian city now under the dominion of communist Yugoslavia. In all cases, the pain for the loss of people and things, the nostalgia for what was being left behind, the anxiety for an uncertain future but also the hope of being able to start again elsewhere were feelings associated with the image of a sea that is one of the most tormented in history. In *Mai vele più / Never more sails*, Biagio Marin described his Grado through the chromatic language of the coloured sails, which resembled butterflies standing out against the blue sea; he wrote of the fishing boats with their polychrome decorations, of the stained *bragozzi*, and of the steamboats with their dark sides, which sailed towards the blue into a dreamlike and reassuring dimension. However, after the war the poet from Grado carried out an operation typical of those who had seen the lands of Istria and Dalmatia being annexed to Yugoslavia. Those lands entered into the realms of memory and were transformed into a fabulous entity, associated with the figure of the father, the helmsman of a lugger on which he would sometimes take his son: “*Ero tutt’occhi: E mio padre diceva il nome di ogni punta, di ogni secca, di ogni rada. E ogni nome suonava in me come una parola magica, che mi aprisse nuove prospettive*” / “I was all eyes: And my father said the name of every point, every shoal, every road. And each name sounded like a magic word in me, opening up new perspectives” (Marin 2007, 28–29). On that big yellow-sailed lugger, the father returning from his travels would bring nuts and sweet figs, raisins and wine, and stories of people known on the same paths travelled by Ulysses, so that the wood of the boat smelled of strange scents and retained the echoes of distant voices. Umberto Saba, instead, in his early poems, looked at sails and ships only from afar, firm on the shore, as if he were a Telemachus waiting for the return of Ulysses, the joyful and light-hearted father who had abandoned him before his birth. The sea was a symbol of adventure and openness towards a life still full

of dreams. In the poem *Ulisse* the roles are reversed. The poet, now an adult, embodies the Homeric hero, but in the version of the myth reworked by Dante: he doesn't return to his Penelope and does he renounce Ithaca as he is too strongly attracted by navigation, or by life, full of pitfalls yet fascinating, which is like the slippery rocks of Dalmatia, splendid like emeralds, but dangerous for sailors when they disappear under the surface of the water, made invisible by the tides.

Another death-related symbolism characterizes the sea portrayed by Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini. In one of his long stories, *L'onda dell'incrociatore / Cruiser wave* (1947), taking place during the fascist period, the writer staged the sordid relationships between his characters trapped in an unconscious and naive game bordering on sadism. The protagonists, perpetrators and, at the same time, victims of physical and moral violence, are fixed in the changing summery light of the sea. Devoid of any filial or fraternal loving piety, they were educated in a hedonistic and turbid sensuality that often led them to behave in an arrogantly, lively and ambiguously. Jealousy turned two boys into the involuntary killers of an Alpine soldier who was in Trieste to celebrate the victory in Africa and drowned in a *maona* (a type of boat) hit by the wave of a cruiser sailing offshore.

In addition to poems and tales that capture landscapes and soulscapes of the Adriatic, a number of works considered the human tragedies that occurred in this sea over the centuries and re-proposed one of its strongest myths. So, Claudio Magris, from *Assirtidi*, in *Microcosmi / Microcosms* until the more recent novel *Alla cieca / Blind* (2005), has taken up the story of the Alexandrian poet Apollonius Rhodius, who in the fourth book of his *Argonautics* (III a. C) told the story of Jason and Medea and their companions; after the conquest of the Golden Fleece they sailed up the river Istro until they reached the Adriatic Sea. According to Magris, that river was most likely the Danube, which through the Sava and its tributaries flowed into the Adriatic. In a place along the coast of this sea, where the group had stopped, Medea's father, wanting to convince his daughter to leave Jason, sent his son Absirto to talk to her. But Absirto was killed by his sister, torn to pieces and thrown into the Carnaro. From its boiling waters emerged the three islands of Cres, Lošinj and Krk, called, in honour of the young man, Assirtids (or Absirtids). «*Il mare è luogo d'agguato e di morte*» (Magris 1997, 166) / "The sea is a place of ambush and death," said the author.

That violence has become an emblem of a constant destiny of division and dismemberment, both in the mythical past and in the recent history of those lands. This is confirmed by various narratives: Nelida Milani and Anna Maria Mori in *Bora* (1999) made it almost a prologue to the terrible story of the deportees in nearby Golj Otok, who arrived by sea to the island which housed the concentration camp where Tito's opponents were jailed. Pietro Tarticchio with *Nascinguerra*

(2001) has taken up the myth again, with the description of some ancient graffiti common to the two shores of the Adriatic, a symbolism that recalls stories of fragmentation, loss and rupture of an order. Because sometimes, unfortunately, history can repeat itself.

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