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Loneliness, sorrow, old age, sickness, death travel through the imperceptible existences of the city and its characters. But there is no delight, no morbid contemplation of these creatures of decadence – like we find in Villiers de L'Isle Adam, Huysmans or D'Annunzio – since the analysis searching for the origins of such prostration keeps away all decadent aestheticism. These states are considered to be accidents, ridiculous accidents within the *great accident* of existence itself. Life is an accident, a *sickness of matter*, an inflammatory process that will once more be extinguished in the purity of the inorganic and the inanimate.

Svevo lived Trieste like the obscure province of mediocrity and smallness and, incapable of escaping bourgeois vulgarity, he turned to literature, to reading and to the art of playing the violin for his exile. And if Joyce found in Trieste the place where he could rid himself of his obsessive identity, Trieste provoked in Svevo a need to grasp his own until he found the innocuous grounds for human existence.

The anxiety provoked in Svevo by his native city and its "damned dialect", its ignorant bourgeoisie, its winds and humid saltpetre, turns into "la calda vita" for Umberto Saba who feels how its winds rejuvenate Trieste that opens itself out to the sun and the blue like a white "vaporetto" making its way in the waters. Saba loves Trieste like he loves his wife, *Trieste è la città, la donna è Lina*; in the same way that he loves all those small, insignificant things that can return the feeling that both, Lina and the city, reveal to him. Trieste is, with its "scontrosa grazia", the recurring theme in his poetry. Trieste – *aspra e maliciosa, la più strana città* – fulfills not only the function of objective correlate (the object of reality that unleashes poetic experience and which is the origins of the poem), but it is also in itself, and through itself, the object of his poetry and his reflections; it is part of his biography, and holds in its streets, in its squares, in the harbour and in many of its walls, slices of his childhood, of his adolescence, of his sorrow and of his dreams.

Trieste's name appears in the title of two of his works *Trieste e una donna* (poetry) and *Interno e paradiso di Trieste* (prose). In the latter book he says: "Trieste has always been a cross of races. The city was populated by different peoples: Italians born in the city, Slavs born in the territory, Germans, Jews, Greeks, Orientals, Turks wearing red caps on their heads, and I don't know how many others. It is born, as a modern city, from the institution of the free port toward the end of the 18th century. Favoured by this and other contingencies, its development was, at the beginning, so quick that it can be compared to that undergone around the same period by New York. Later, not having enormous America to back it up, it slackened its pace and halted... On this trading amalgam of such ethnically diverse persons (some of us Triestines have, even today, up to ten or twelve different bloods; and this is one of the reasons for the particular "nevrosi" of its inhabitants) the Italian tongue and culture played the role of cement, imposing themselves through an entirely spontaneous process. Nobody could, or can today, live and trade in Trieste without knowing Italian. But leaving language and culture aside, Trieste always was, for reasons of "natural history" which neither the city nor its dwellers can avoid, a cosmopolitan city. Herein lay its dangers, but also its fascination."

Umberto Saba is, together with Eugenio Montale, one of the great 20th century Italian lyrical poets. His cosmopolitanism, like Svevo's, carried Italian poetry to unexpected parameters considering the poetic perspectives at the end of the century, more specifically, D'Annunzio and Carducci. Saba's poetry is transparent, intentionally simple, avoiding all literary aestheticism, unnecessary adjectivisation and a formalism that could veil the immediate meaning of a poetic experience: "Sono uno dei poeti italiani il cui discorso regge sul verbo e non sull'aggettivo". In Saba's opinion, the poet's function is exempt from any transcendental finality (even if it is transcendental); the poet is he who "ascoltando e guardando" interprets the common law of human condition: "Through the splendour of form, the poet comforts men, all men who are sensitive to poetry (of whom there are few), from all which they have had to renounce in order to become civilised men, to walk on two legs instead of four, etc. etc."

Saba's is a poetry of experience. But not of the moral experience provided by years and life, not the experience which shapes the adult and confers him a moral authority. Saba's is a poetry of the first original experience, that which makes us feel human and whose presence allows us to contemplate the world and ourselves with the surprise and amazement of a first time. Poetry brings that first experience back to us, gives birth once again to the child time and experience have spoilt:

"To create and to understand art, one thing is, above all else, necessary: to have preserved within us our childhood which all process of life tends, on the other hand, to destroy. The poet is a child who is marvelled by the things that have happened to him, having become an adult. *But adult up to what point?*

Trieste is, therefore, contemplated with amazement, as if the sirocco and the "bora" were constantly rejuvenating it, offering itself to the eyes of the poet, in all its splendorous beauty. Trieste generates in Saba an aesthetic experience awakening feelings and thoughts that flow from him in the form of poems. The poet recognises himself in his city. In it he recognises whom he was and continues to be thanks to the city. He finds comfort in it, and it is through the city that he continues to be a poet: the child amazed by the ideas, feelings, memories, dreams revealed to him by the city:

In fondo all'Adriatico selvaggio
si apriva un porto alla tua infanzia. Navi
verso lontano partivano. Bianco,
in cima al verder sovrastante colle,
dagli spalti d'antico forte, un fumo
usciva dove un lampo e un rombo. Immenso
l'accoglieva l'azzurro, lo sperdeva
nella volta celeste. Rispondeva
guerriera nave al saluto, ancorata
al largo della tua casa che aveva
in capo al molo una rosa, la rosa
dei venti.
Era un piccolo porto, era una porta
aperta ai sogni.

From *Mediterranee*, 2.

In *Trieste e una Donna* Saba identifies the city with

his wife: they both emerge under their unmistakable appearances: those awakening his genuine innocence: "Trieste", "Città Vecchia", "Tre Vie", "Via della Pietà", "Il Molo" are poems that embrace characteristic landscapes of the city; no impressionistic descriptions are to be found in them, only a moral reflection on what happens to the poet bound to the city; a joyful exultation of the urban aspect where the poet found, and still finds, thanks to the poem, presences of happiness or of the quietening of his soul:

Per me al mondo no v'ha un più caro e fido
luogo di questo. Dove mai più solo
mi sento e in una buona compagnia che al molo
San Carlo, e più mi piace l'onda e il lido?
Vedo navi cui nome è già un ricordo
d'infanzia.

"Il Molo" from *Trieste e una Donna*

Umberto Saba's innocence knows bitterness, disappointments, goodness and generosity which are different aspects of the same chaotic contents of life; and the light clarity of his poetry is the result of a deep feeling which is aware of all forms of desire and of the difficulty entailed in making them come true.

Like Svevo, Saba shared literature with business. He owned the *Libreria Anticuarria* in Via San Nicolò, 30, in Trieste. The bookshop was a cenacle of men of letters, a meeting place for poets, and put within the Triestines' reach all literature that had a, special, appeal for the poet, and which the poet himself recalls in *Autobiografia*:

Una strana bottega d'antiquario
s'apre, a Trieste, in una via secreta.
D'antiche legature un oro vario
l'occhio per gli scaffali errante allietta.
Vive in quell'aria tranquillo un poeta.
Dei morti in quel vivente lapidario
la sua opera compie, onesta e lieta,
d'Amor pensoso, ignoto e solitario.

The *Canzoniere*, a title under which is compiled all his poetry, does not owe its name to Petrarco, but to Heinrich Heine and his books *Buch der Lieder* (Book of songs) and *Romanzerorä* and, like Heine, Saba decided against including in his *Canzoniere* any poem that could break up the "psychic unity" of the whole. Once again, the cosmopolitan constant of Trieste is strengthened in the poet who, faithful to Italian lyrical tradition, does not scorn the teachings of Germanic lyrical poetry.

It is in that provincial Trieste, forgotten and left aside by the administration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; in that place lacking tradition and identity, or with the identity resulting from not having one; with frontiers coinciding with the city borders; open, nonetheless, by the languages cohabiting in the same territory; in that closed and self-satisfied city; cosmopolitan, too, as are all metropolises; it is in that bourgeois and decadent Trieste that the transit of our contemporary world takes place; in that city of small dimensions we can contemplate the crystallisation of our modernity and the definite fall of the last presences belonging to an order of old; both sharing the same place and the same time, without feeling alien from one other, even if diverse in their opinions and aims.

Trieste is the stage for the fall of an Empire; the only empire surviving, badly, in Old Europe since Queen Victoria's death. A survival that manifested its decrepitude and unhappiness by absorbing itself in what it once was; and incapable of getting along and tuning in with the new rhythm of the new times. The last of the Habsburgs remind me of the last members of the family of Usher and the downfall of their mansion, all of them ruined by the cracks inflicted by time; Franz Joseph, Elizabeth, Rudolph, Maximilian, Louis, Ferdinand are as Saturnian and irascible as Roderick Usher, as fragile as crystal, and sick from so much beauty.

Trieste is also the stage for the collapse of the values maintaining the old bourgeoisie: fatherland, work and family, in whose names the most abject of crimes were committed against human freedom and honesty. And the foundation for this bourgeois society – the individual and the making-up of his identity – will be judged. In Trieste (Joyce and Svevo), and in Venice (Wittgenstein and Hofmannsthal), it is confirmed that the individual is a product of language and that identity is construed through language; that the world is a fabrication of the mind in the possession of language and that, once the logical order of language has been broken, the unity of consciousness is also broken; only the possession of language will allow the assumption of identity. All transcendence is doubted, and metaphysics will take a different route, having both been reduced to the infinite and immanent extension of language. Like this TRIESTE built out of language, extensive and infinite, and removed from history by the sole grace of the highest of literatures.

GENERAL CITY SHAPE CONFIGURATION (pág 8)

I shall try to describe the urban development of the city of Trieste by reading and interpreting the episodes which, in my view, crystallize a general specific configuration of the city. I hope also to be able to illustrate issues of a somewhat more general order.

I wish to point out, in the first place, that it is neither immediately evident nor obvious that cities can be understood or represented as a whole. In the second place, and even if we accept it, it is debatable whether this general image is instrumental, i. e., whether it serves the purpose of an operative disciplinary discussion about the city. This "fear" is perhaps due to the scepticism or uncertainty with which one contemplates the development of city-plans. We can at

