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### **‘QUALE TRIESTINITA`?’: VOICES AND ECHOES FROM ITALIAN TRIESTE**

#### **Abstract:**

In focusing on Italian Trieste and, in particular, on as large as possible a corpus of Triestine poetry contemporary to S.Kosovel, my paper provides a perspective that is peripheral and ‘outside’. Special attention is paid to the Futurist avant-garde: the Futurist leader Marinetti considered Trieste as Futurist city *par excellence* and the first Futurist soirees took place at Teatro Rossetti between 1909 and 1910. Futurism attracted a large group of local artists, some of whom (e.g. Carmelich and Cernigoj) were personally known by and became close to Kosovel. The poets Sanzin and Miletto espoused enthusiastically the Futurist linguistic experimentalism, as well as the movement’s national/nationalist tendencies. Poetry of national and romantic inspiration is also of fundamental importance: Slataper’s vitalist approach to the rugged Karst region, though pre-Great War, provides scope for comparative approaches. Nationalist poetry, much of which officially compromised with the Fascist regime (Cambon, Corraj, Alma Sperante), is equally integral to the Triestine cultural landscape of the 1920s and ‘30s. By shedding light on a significant portion of poetry in Italian arising from the vibrant, if largely hostile, cultural environment of Trieste, my paper invites an implicit rather than explicit assessment of Kosovel’s role and contribution to the European avant-garde.

## **‘QUALE TRIESTINITA’?: VOICES AND ECHOES FROM ITALIAN TRIESTE**

In re-evaluating as large as possible a corpus of Triestine poetry in Italian, my article intends to court the poetics and production of Šrečko Kosovel. As a scholar of Triestine literary identities, it is a challenge for me to assess a ‘state of poetry’ at a specified time in Triestine history in terms of its marginality *vis-à-vis* a central ‘elsewhere’: the thought and work of the eminent Slovene poet Šrečko Kosovel. My argument starts with singling out a number of Italian poets who were, *grosso modo*, contemporary to Kosovel, some of whom may well have been familiar to him, such as Scipio Slataper (1888-1915), Giulio Camber Barni (1891-1941), and Umberto Saba (1883-1957). I will subsequently mention, if in passing, a cluster of hardly memorable poets who were associated with the climate of virulent *italianità* that helped give rise to and sustain the fascist phenomenon. Finally, I plan to devote special attention to the Futurist avant-garde, who, in its Constructivist inflection, is, of course, particularly relevant to Kosovel. Early on, the Futurists appropriated Trieste as a radically modern urban space and, as such, an ideal platform to voice their ideological and aesthetic credos. In the course of my exposition, mention will also be made to a small number of exquisitely local concerns, such as *irredentismo*, the grave heritage of the *Risorgimento*, and the unresolved, belated attachment to the Romantic tradition, a burden that weighed heavily on Triestine poetry up until relatively recently.

The generation of Triestine and Julian authors who sought both cultural escape and legitimisation in Florence in the early years of the XX century, and Scipio Slataper in particular, played an instrumental role in defining Italian Triestine literature as it is commonly understood. Since the late XIX century the prevailing cultural orientation combined conservative Romanticism and Positivism. Its Italian inspiration, ideologically and aesthetically influenced more specifically by the poet Giosuè Carducci, whose work was also familiar to Kosovel, allowed a backward-looking search for cultural legitimisation. Conversely, Trieste’s particular geo-political position allowed the freedom to experiment further and wider. The result was an unmediated combination of asynchronous cultural trends. A number of pre-war authors, to include Slataper and the brothers Carlo and Giani Stuparich, powerfully affected by a crisis of identity emerging during their Florentine exile, combined a self-centred autobiographical style with outmoded *repêchages* into the most hackneyed Italian literary tradition: a ‘spiritual encyclopedism’, as Ernestina Pellegrini puts it, combining a number of heterogeneous, at times even incompatible, cultural and historical elements.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. E.Pellegrini, ‘Aspetti della cultura triestina tra Otto e Novecento’, *Il Ponte*, 4(1980), pp.354-71.

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Is it true that Trieste had neither a cultural tradition nor a cultural scene at the beginning of the XX century, as Slataper provocatively declared in a frequently quoted ‘Lettera triestina’?<sup>2</sup> The answer must be in the negative, for the city at the time was by no means a cultural desert: Trieste boasted, among other events, the first Futurist soirées and the first Italian performance of Wagner’s *Tetralogy*. The cultural life of the Slovene community, though a ‘counter culture’ as Marina Cattaruzza puts it, was vibrant, as testified by the theatrical, musical and poetic activities promoted by the *Narodni dom*, the numerous periodical publications, from *Edinost* to *Novi rod* to *Ženski svet*, to quote only a few that are relevant to Kosovel.<sup>3</sup> Slataper’s statement is therefore entirely provocative, designed to shake up an environment at the cultural margins of Italy perceived as being too steeped in trade and eager to secure a place for itself in the national sphere. Slataper and his acolytes hoped to achieve this national integration by diving into the most canonical and idealised cultural tradition, that of Florence. Having ‘descended’ on Florence almost as a barbarian gasping for civilization, Slataper contributed to the influential periodical *La Voce* from 1909 and took over its editorship in 1910.<sup>4</sup> On Slataper’s example, a whole generation of young Triestine intellectuals (the already mentioned brothers Stuparich, Virgilio Giotti, Biagio Marin, Alberto Spaini, Gemma Harazim and others), persuaded in many cases by the impending contingency of being called up to arms, attended University courses in Florence and formed a close circle, contributing regularly to *La Voce* and disseminating the Modernist, pro-European agenda that was integral to the periodical.<sup>5</sup>

This generation ‘invented’, as if in a veritable ‘invention of tradition’, Triestine literature away from Trieste, while in Florence, a city they perceived as instrumental in bringing the Triestines back to their alleged all-Italian roots.<sup>6</sup> Their main aim was to act as catalysts, facilitating the discovery of an alleged ‘genuine Triestine soul’ in their fellow citizens. In reality, however, and quite apart from both *La Voce*’s calls for modernization and

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<sup>2</sup> S.Slataper, ‘Trieste non ha tradizioni di cultura’, first published in *La Voce*, 11 February 1909, now in *Scritti politici*, ed. By G.Stuparich (Rome: Stock, 1925), pp.3-7.

<sup>3</sup> M.Cattaruzza, ‘Slovenes and Italians in Trieste, 1850-1914’, in *Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe*, ed. by Max Engman (Strasbourg: European Science Foundation; New York: New York University Press; Aldershot: Dartmouth, c.1992) pp.182-219 (p.201). See also Boris Pahor, *Šrečko Kosovel* (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1993), esp. pp.34-39.

<sup>4</sup> Slataper’s ‘calata’ (=‘descent’) is a term widely used in his best known work *Il mio carso* (Florence: La Voce, 1912).

<sup>5</sup> G.Stuparich, for instance, started contributing to *La Voce* in 1913 with two articles dealing with federalism and the Czech and German nations. Stuparich’s first monograph, *La nazione czecca* (Catania: Battiato, 1915) was also published under the auspices of *La Voce* and dedicated to its influential mentor Giuseppe Prezzolini.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of an ‘invention of tradition’ is in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). A.Spaini declared in an interview with Giorgio Baroni: ‘*La Voce* servì come ponte tra Trieste e l’Italia’ –see G.Baroni, *Trieste e ‘La Voce’* (Milan: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1975), p.91.

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internationalisation of literary culture and the vibrant presence of non-Italian cultures in Trieste, the main force at play here remained the pre-eminent *toscanità* of the *vociani* that both legitimised and sustained an equally powerful idea of a local loyalty and singularity in the Triestines.<sup>7</sup> The mystical and revolutionary ‘discovery’ of one’s own regional soul seems to me, at closer scrutiny, as a poetic disguise whereby a constructed *toscanità* became the model of a largely ‘invented’ and contrived *triestinità*.<sup>8</sup> A confused city, in search of a literary identity it could call its own, was clearly vulnerable to discourses centred on the notion of an eminent, undisputed, and, above all, single national and cultural identity.

Statements advocating the crucial role of Trieste as ‘centro del mondo’, historical seat of a conflict between the spirit of an elusive culture and the matter of an all too tangible trade, recur in Slataper’s fiction.<sup>9</sup> In the lyrical prose *Il mio carso* (1912) ‘la storia è vissuta liricamente, perciò non compresa.’<sup>10</sup> Slataper produces here curious overlaps of belated *Sturm und Drang* Romanticism, a rhetorical *vitalismo* reeking of D’Annunzio, and mystical, generic statements on the urban modernity of ‘la città’ as opposed to the rural lack of self-awareness of the Karst, a mental landscape evoked with great affection but also as culture-less and backward-looking.<sup>11</sup> It is important to mention that Slataper’s *Mio carso* was eventually to become almost the prototype text of modern Triestine literature. Its publication created, almost *ex novo*, a literary province in Italy and paved the way for the success of other major local Italian authors, such as Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba.

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<sup>7</sup> In recalling Slataper’s late night Florentine readings of excerpts of *Il mio carso*, Stuparich comments: ‘era proprio la scoperta poetica della mia anima triestina. [...] Io sentii, per merito della sua [Slataper’s] creazione, nascere il Carso dalla Toscana.’ –G.Stuparich, ‘Romanticismo e “Il notiziario della III armata”, in *Trieste nei miei ricordi* (Milan: Garzanti, 1948), pp.29-39 (pp.30-32). For both Slataper and Stuparich even the Tuscan landscape bore empathic traits with the Julian one: local landscapes can of course also act as powerful markers of identity formation.

<sup>8</sup> For the *toscanità* of *La Voce*, see also Walter L.Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Giorgio Voghera who disputed the notion that *La Voce* and Triestine culture had anything in common in his volume *Anni di Trieste* (Gorizia: Goriziana, 1989), p.92: ‘Non so davvero come non si faccia a non accorgersi *prima facie* che la “civiltà” triestina [...] differisce dalla civiltà vociana forse altrettanto che da quella azteca. Di vero c’è soltanto che i vociani hanno aiutato molto i triestini.’

<sup>9</sup> See S.Slataper, ‘L’avvenire nazionale e politico di Trieste’, in *Scritti politici*, p.93: ‘Trieste è posto di transizione –geografica, storica, di cultura, di commercio –cioè di lotta. Ogni cosa è duplice o triplice a Trieste, cominciando dalla flora e finendo con l’etnicità. Finchè Trieste non ha coscienza di sé, finchè gli slavi parlano italiano e la cultura si compie e si soddisfa nel commercio, nell’interesse commerciale, la vita è discretamente pacifica. Appena nasce il bisogno di una cultura disinteressata, la crosta fredda è rotta e si discoprono i dibattiti ansiosi.’

<sup>10</sup> Anco Marzio Mutterle, *Scipio Slataper* (Milan: Mursia, 1965), p.77.

<sup>11</sup> See Alberto Abruzzese, *Svevo Slataper e Michelstaedter: Lo stile e il viaggio* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979), p.141: ‘Slataper [...] partecipa ideologicamente al mito di una società in ascesa. La macchina, il denaro, la merce, il commercio sono tutte cose fondamentalmente buone, per lo scrittore triestino: ma contemporaneamente sente il peso schiacciante di questa nuova dimensione umana che ha compreso e della quale è entrato a far parte.’

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Despite Slataper's 'ungenerous treatment' of the Triestine Slovenes, as argued persuasively by Boris Pahor, his figure remains relevant in terms of his awareness of the ethnic diversity and vitality of the Karst (it should be borne in mind that Slataper was possibly the first Italian Triestine author who granted attention –albeit partially –to the Slovenes of Trieste and the hinterland) and the ethical roots of his philo-Europeanism.<sup>12</sup> Both notions are of course applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to Kosovel himself and studies of the two authors in a comparative perspective are welcome, particularly if shedding light on the linguistic as well as widely cultural aspect: Kosovel had a conceivably good knowledge of Italian even though his awareness of Italian literature and thought appears mediated, rather than through Slataper and the 'vociani triestini', via the far more influential minister and scholar Ivan Trinko (1863-1954), an eminent translator and mediator between the two cultures, his close friend and fellow contributor of *Lepa Vida*, Mirijam (Fanica Obid), and his Neapolitan friend Carlo Curcio.<sup>13</sup>

The return to an idealised all-Italian past and the growing appeal of a local tradition were perceived even more intensely after the end of the Great War. Historical events severed Trieste from its Austro-Hungarian past, but the heritage of the Empire was also increasingly being cherished in an idealised form and handed down from one generation to the next.<sup>14</sup> After defecting from the Austrian army to join the Italian troops under false names, Slataper and many Triestine writers of his generation, such as Enrico Elia, Carlo Stuparich, Ruggero Timeus Fauro, died in battle, and the survivors took on their heritage almost intact, demonstrating an inability (perhaps an unwillingness?) to detach themselves from Florentine pre-war culture, and move forward. In particular Giani Stuparich's survival of a war catastrophe that had killed his brother Carlo and best friend Slataper was experienced with intense guilt and shame and subsequently bitterly atoned for through his diligent repetition of themes and styles belonging to a pre-war world. By doing this, Stuparich was not merely paying tribute to a generation of dead writers: he was also contributing to perpetuating a local literary repetition, unwittingly reinforcing *triestinità*.

We are all aware of the influence, indeed of the formative role, exercised by the Great War on Kosovel, a childhood experience that left indelible marks in his poetics. The collection of poems *La Buffa* by Giulio Camber Barni, written in the trenches and published only in 1950, demonstrates the extent to which the *Risorgimento* remained a powerful, if

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<sup>12</sup> B.Pahor, *Kosovel*, p.48: 'trattamento [...] tutt'altro che generoso.'

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Professor Claudio Magris for drawing my attention to a conference taking place in Trieste focusing on the Karst in Kosovel and Slataper in a comparative perspective, though I have not been able to track down any publication attached to the event.

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anachronistic, source of inspiration in Trieste. Barni's confessional poetry finds moral and aesthetic premises in the pre-war, in *irredentismo*, and the widespread notion of the war as a social and national equalizer. Alongside many war diaries of this type, however, *La Buffa* illustrates the progressive demise of Barni's idealised 'just war'. Visions of titanic struggle typically give way to increasing instances of human degradation, resentment, bitterness, and collapse of patriotic ideals. See, in particular, the poems 'Simone' and 'Il cappellano': 'Simone, amico caro,/ purtroppo la guerra è finita./ Che cosa ne faremo/ di questa nostra vita?' and 'Il cappellano militare/ disse che Gesù Cristo/ amava tanto la guerra./ Concluse:/ "Viva l'Italia!/ Evviva S.Antonio!"'<sup>15</sup> Resonant of several of Kosovel's own positions, Barni's poetry captures very effectively the sense of emptiness and futility, the powerlessness, the anti-clericalism which were all contributing factors to the rise of fascism. A classic war poet in terms of his linguistic and narrative realism, Barni bans any lyrical or rhetorical embellishment: the episodes he describes are invariably brief and stripped naked of detail, with direct speech inserted spontaneously, frequently in the dialect of the individual soldiers. The prevailing epic tone is also descending directly from the Italian unification: the Great War is typically celebrated as the last war of the *Risorgimento*.<sup>16</sup>

One of the greatest supporters of Barni in Trieste was the poet Umberto Saba, who wrote a frank and complimentary preface to *La Buffa* published in the first edition. My outline of a 'state of Italian poetry' in Trieste would be incomplete without devoting some attention to Saba and his early collections of poems. Saba portrays his native Trieste as a concrete urban space, invested with an ontological dimension of its own, densely populated with human collectivities who work, talk, eat, and walk: a city buzzing with people, animals, and objects.<sup>17</sup> Saba's habitual itineraries run along many of the old Triestine streets, thereby granting them literary dignity: Via del Lazzaretto Vecchio, Via della Pietà, Via del Monte,

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<sup>14</sup> After 1936, the Axis Berlin-Rome equalized Trieste's imperial past to Nazi Germany under a generic 'Germanic' umbrella. Trieste became then a veritable bulwark that, while defending its own past, at the same time upheld fascism's most fateful political and military alliance.

<sup>15</sup> G.Camber Barni, 'Simone' and 'Il cappellano', in *La Buffa* (Milan: Mondadori, 1950), pp.197 and 156.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. cf. G.Camber Barni, 'La canzone di Lavezzari', in *La Buffa*, p.170: 'Il 24 maggio, la notte della guerra, Giuseppe Garibaldi uscì di sotto terra. E andò da Lavezzari, che si beveva il vino; gli disse: "Lavezzari, vecchio garibaldino, Lavezzari, vecchio fante, è scoppiata un'altra guerra, ma io non posso andarci: perché sono sotto terra. Camerata di Bezzeca, mio vecchio portabandiera, v'è te sul Podigora, e porta la mia bandiera!' The down-to-earth prosiness reveals the extent to which Barni's interventionism was both genuine and irredentist, even though, as Saba pointed out, inevitably short-lived; see U.Saba, 'Di questo libro e di un altro mondo' (preface to *La Buffa*), in *Prose*, ed. by Linuccia Saba (Milan: Mondadori, 1964), p.690. See also the pacifist E.Elia (1891-1915), and particularly his war poetry, collected in *Schegge d'anima* (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. E.Pellegrini, *Le città interiori in scrittori triestini di ieri e di oggi* (Bergamo: Moretti & Vitali, 1995), p.57: 'Trieste è per Saba [...] una città concreta, particolare, piena di persone che lavorano, parlano, mangiano, e piena di animali e di oggetti particolari'.

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Via Domenico Rossetti. The poet found most of his inspiration in his home town and displayed an obsessive, if ambivalent, interest in it, referring frequently to Trieste in his letters, poems and prose works, loathing it while there and missing it terribly when staying elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> For Saba, however, Trieste is not the ‘ville tentaculaire’ of Modernism nor is it the dynamic metropolis of the Futurists, but, in the words of Russo, rather an ‘urban georgic’.<sup>19</sup> Its key features include its insularity, its domestic air of cosy backwardness allowing the poet a secluded existence, quite apart from contemporary movements and schools. Saba writes about a pre-war Trieste, prior to the destruction of Cittavecchia: a city, in short, which has not yet fallen prey to the devil of modernity –here Saba is antipodean to the contemporary Futurist avant-garde, who, as will be argued below, praised Trieste for opposite reasons. Most importantly, in this respect Saba appears to be also antipodean to Kosovel, whose Trieste is dominated by beauty and doom following the arson of *Edinost* (1925), a city emasculated by the large waves of emigrant Slovenes looking for a better future in the Americas, a Trieste who is a witness to the ‘sick heart’ of the poet (see, in particular, ‘Blizu polnoči’).<sup>20</sup>

In Saba’s collection ‘Trieste e una donna’ (1910-12), the city takes on the role of a character in its own right: the poet’s own antagonist.<sup>21</sup> His ambivalence towards the city results most frequently in contiguity of Trieste with female, specifically maternal, figures. The early, experimental poems to Bianca, later excluded from *Il Canzoniere*, testify to this. In Saba, the maternal complex is so overwhelming that poetry itself can be viewed as a second, *good* mother, able to fill in the emotional gaps left by the poet’s real life *bad* mother, Rachele Poli.<sup>22</sup> In Pellegrini’s words, ‘la poesia di Saba [...] narra la lotta del poeta contro il complesso materno’ -Trieste becomes a ‘uterine city’ constructed in the specular image of a city within a city: the legendary Jewish ghetto of Cittavecchia.<sup>23</sup> The celebrated ‘A mia

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<sup>18</sup> For a resumé of Saba’s multiple, even contradictory, attitudes towards Trieste, see K.Pizzi, *A City in Search of an Author: The Literary Identity of Trieste* (London-Sheffield-New York: Sheffield Academic Press-Continuum, 2001), p.67.

<sup>19</sup> Fabio Russo, ‘Saba, le cose, l’eco, l’ombra’, in Stelio Mattioni and others, *Il Punto su Saba: Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Trieste 25-27 marzo 1984)* (Trieste: Lint, 1985), pp.346-359 (p.347).

<sup>20</sup> Cit. in B.Pahor, *Kosovel*, pp.43-44. However, Saba and Kosovel appear to have traits in common as well, such as the use of the rhyme and metaphors, especially the ones featuring birds –for the latter, cf. the illuminating contribution of Darja Pavlic in this collection.

<sup>21</sup> See multiple poems collected in U.Saba, *Il Canzoniere* (Turin: Einaudi, 5th edn, 1978). In the poem entitled ‘Trieste’, the city is famously likened to a ‘ragazzaccio aspro e vorace’ (p.79); in ‘Città vecchia’ the poet is contemplating, while walking, various human types redolent of the old quarter: ‘prostituta’, ‘marinaio’, ‘il dragone’, ‘il friggitore’ (p.81): Saba’s attitude is contemplative to the extent that, as clarified by Pellegrini, ‘non si attua mai la fusione [...] di soggetto e oggetto’ –cf. E.Pellegrini, *Le città interiori*, p.55.

<sup>22</sup> For the role of Saba’s mother, cf. esp. Mario Lavagetto, *La gallina di Saba* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), pp.162-63 and Giacomo Debenedetti, ‘Saba e il grembo della poesia’, *Galleria* 1.2 (1960), pp.114-21.

<sup>23</sup> E.Pellegrini, *Le città interiori*, pp.55 and 67. In the poem ‘A mamma’, part of the collection *Poesie dell’adolescenza e giovanili* (1900-1907) Saba draws a reverent, if at times naïve, portrait of his mother

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moglie' is a hymn to Saba's wife Lina regarded as an archetype of all-encompassing maternity: on the poet's own admission the poem reads like one a child could have written for his own mother if he were allowed to marry her.<sup>24</sup> Similarly to Petrarch's Laura, Lina here is ultimately 'la madre', a disquieting figure who looms large as the city tends to disappear, as if Lina and Trieste were antithetical and one could only survive to the detriment of the other.<sup>25</sup> It is especially in collection *Trieste e una donna* that Saba explores various positions of the triad woman-mother-Trieste: the poems 'Trieste', 'Verso casa', 'Città vecchia', 'Dopo la tristezza', 'Tre vie', 'Via della pietà', 'Il fanciullo appassionato', 'Il molo', 'Più soli', all deal with a Trieste antagonised as a mother symbol. The pervasive dimension remains domesticity, and it is precisely under the guise of domesticity that Trieste comes to play a powerful role in Saba's poetry. In short, Saba's intimist, Oedipal, parochial approach to Trieste appears to be far removed from Kosovel's social and political engagement with the city.

Saba's emphasis on the comfortable provincialism of his home town are also alien from both the contemporary climate of virulent *italianità* and the nationalist/ internationalist attitude of the Futurist avant-garde. More vigorously than elsewhere, in Trieste a Fascist officialdom attempted to institutionalise a deeply seated emphasis on *italianità*.<sup>26</sup> Trieste's diverse and complex ethnic make-up was largely replaced with an 'invention of tradition' whereby, for instance, legendary Roman genealogies were assigned to various Italian political elites.<sup>27</sup> A straightjacket of Italian officialdom was imposed on the city's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identity, notably through acts of violence and persecution directed towards the Slovene community. *Italianità*, frequently proclaimed in dramatic, mystical terms as a *fatalità*, an ineluctable fate, and frequently conflated with the similarly ambiguous *triestinità*, equated the composite local identity with the cultural and literary traditions of Italy alone.<sup>28</sup>

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as dominating his wider psychological and poetic horizons (cf. M.Lavagetto, *La gallina*, p.137: 'la figura della madre si staglia [...] come un oroscopo che accompagna la vicenda del protagonista, come un idolo silenzioso ed enigmatico che si innalza sulla prima raccolta'). In the collection *Versi militari* (1908), the poem 'Il bersaglio' identifies a soldier's target with the poet's own mother: shooting the target equals getting rid of mother and any frightening shadow she may cast on her son's adult life (M.Lavagetto, *La gallina*, p.157).

<sup>24</sup> M.Lavagetto, *La gallina*, p.89. The poem 'A mia moglie' is in the collection *Casa e campagna* (1909-10).

<sup>25</sup> M.Lavagetto, *La gallina*, p.95.

<sup>26</sup> See Anna Millo, *L'élite del potere a Trieste: Una biografia collettiva 1891-1938* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), p.137. A local patriotic song comes to mind, 'El campanil de San Giusto', composed in 1904, the year of Kosovel's birth, like many others praising a dubious *italianità* - lyrics by Augusto Levi, cit. in Paolo Zoldan, *Poesie patriottiche dei tempi passati: 1891-1914* (Trieste: "Italo Svevo", 1968), p.55.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Podestà Valerio was alleged to have descended from the *Valeria Gens* -cf. A.Millo, *L'élite del potere*, p.137.

<sup>28</sup> See Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste: Un'identità di frontiera* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982, 1987), p.17.

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All of these factors contribute to what Ernesto Sestan defined as ‘ipertrofia del sentimento nazionale’, a powerful national feeling inflated by the *liberal-nazionali* and handed down to the fascist Establishment, who carried it forward.<sup>29</sup> The example set by the Fiume enterprise of 1919-20, and particularly by its charismatic leader Gabriele D’Annunzio, similarly contributed to identifying *italianità* with a rising fascist regime eager to establish itself in the area. A whole set of discourses which were deeply, ambiguously enmeshed with *italianità* (the pseudo-classical ritual, the staging of a Roman imperial past, the rhetoric of ‘discorsi dal balcone’) were experimented on the Triestine stage in the course of the 1910s and 1920s before being adopted in the rest of Italy. *Italianità* became even more firmly synonymous with *anti-slavismo*: to quote one example for all –the arson of the *Narodni dom*-Hotel Balkan on 13 July 1920. I will not dwell here on the copious, eminently forgettable poetry composed and published in Trieste in praise of the fascist regime and its leader Benito Mussolini –I will quote few names and dates, for the sake of contextualisation: Alma Sperante (pseudonym of Carlo Mioni; 1871-1946), Corraj (pseudonym of Raimondo Cornet; 1887-1945), Nella Doria Cambon (1872-1948). It is significant that both Corraj and Cambon portrayed Mussolini as a catalyst able to draw together tradition and modernity without contradiction: this is of course a paradox, but an important one, and one that fascism borrowed largely from Futurism. The triumph of mechanical aesthetics and proto-consumerism celebrated by the fascists are redolent of claims that were advocated in the first place by the Futurist avant-garde.<sup>30</sup>

Not only were the earliest ever Futurist performances staged in Trieste between 1908 and 1909, but also the first proper Futurist *soirée* took place at Trieste’s Politeama Rossetti on 12 January 1910. Kosovel, who later was to attend occasionally the Teatro Rossetti, was obviously still too young to have been in the audience. In 1908 Marinetti took an active part in demonstrations in Trieste advocating the city’s ‘restitution to Italy’. The soon-to-be leader of Futurism, ‘spoke at the Gymnastic Society, defending the Triestine students shot in Vienna and declaring that one day Trieste would have its own university [...]. The whole episode ended in tumultuous fights, and Marinetti was arrested.’<sup>31</sup> However, a Futurist group proper gathered together in Trieste in 1922 (1924 according to other sources) under the self-appointed leadership of Bruno Sanzin (b.1906). Sanzin collected and printed the pamphlet

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<sup>29</sup> E.Sestan, *Venezia Giulia: Lineamenti di una storia etnica e culturale* (Rome: Edizioni Italiane, 1947), pp.402ff. –cited in A.Millo, *L’élite del potere*, p.140.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Ugo Sartori, Paolo Veronese and Gino Villasanta, *Trieste 1934-XII: La storia, la vita, il domani* (Trieste: Comitato per il ‘Giugno Triestino’, 1934), p.64: ‘la vita economica di Trieste batte con la martellante cadenza d’un motore e somiglia al turbinoso giro di un’elica. Motori ed eliche: strumenti e simboli della sua potenza.’

<sup>31</sup> Günter Berghaus, *The Genesis of Futurism: Marinetti’s Early Career and Writings 1899-1909* (Leeds: Society for Italian Studies Occasional Papers, 1995), p.82.

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*Marinetti e il futurismo* (1924) and edited a Futurist column in the periodical *Italia Nova*, later to become a journal in its own right with the title *Energie futuriste*, edited by Kosovel's friend Giorgio Carmelich. In his poetry, Sanzin incorporated dynamism, speed, mechanicism, and patriotic heroism.<sup>32</sup> In the poem 'Pensieri in libertà', Sanzin visualised flags waving in the wind in Trieste: the nationalist thematic is here combined with dynamism of the struggle, 'la lotta', understood as the essence of life.<sup>33</sup> The graphic impressionism of the scene, windswept and punctuated with colours, together with the devices of onomatopoeia and repetition clustered around the iconic flags, are Sanzin's tribute to the ideological and aesthetic credo of Futurism. Sanzin emphasises both the patriotic and urban bias of Futurism, and combines them with other themes of avant-garde inspiration, from dynamism to energy, to 'trascendenza artistica', particularly in his 'aeropoems' *Fiori d'Italia* (1942).

Vladimiro Miletti (b.1913) also embraced unconditionally the avant-garde. Miletti was described as the archetypal elegant and aggressive Futurist, 'giovane poeta elegante, sportivo, aderente all'avanguardia più strepitosa'.<sup>34</sup> In poems such as 'Pioggia veloce' and 'Manicure', the emphasis on dynamism and speed acquires a surreal, ironic ring: Miletti obviously espoused the linguistic iconoclasm of Futurism with a lighter, airy element, reminiscent of the poetry of Aldo Palazzeschi: 'Mi sembra un tuffo/ scagliarmi in macchina/ nell'acquazzone,/ mentre scodinzola il tergicristallo,/ lieto che piova.' 'Le forbicine, beccuzzi ghiotti/ di passerotti,/ sulle ciliegie/ delle tue unghie.'<sup>35</sup> As typical of Triestine Futurism, Miletti is characterised by an irreverent, comic approach.<sup>36</sup> Patriotism becomes here a secondary preoccupation as the poetics of the inconsequential and the inconsistent prevail.

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<sup>32</sup> See Giorgio Baroni, 'Bruno G. Sanzin e il "suo" futurismo', in *Umberto Saba e dintorni: Appunti per una storia della letteratura giuliana* (Milan: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1984), pp.243-51 (p.244): 'Le opere del primo Sanzin ([...]) sono caratterizzate da tematiche ispirate ai miti futuristi: macchina, eroismo, patria, velocità, audacia; con una tinteggiatura di superomismo.'

<sup>33</sup> B.Sanzin, 'Pensieri in libertà', in *Il proprio mondo nei ricordi e nella fantasia* (Padua: Rebellato, 1979), pp.68-69: 'garrire di bandiere su gli spalti della storia. Con tanto vento che le anime di ondeggianti schiocchianti, perché senza vento le bandiere sembrerebbero mute. Con tanto sole che riverberi il tripudio dei colori, perché senza sole le bandiere sembrerebbero spente. Bandiere di gloria, bandiere di fede, bandiere di tutte le vittorie. Simboli di eterna sfida, poiché la lotta è l'unica costante della vita.'

<sup>34</sup> See Marcello Fraulini, 'Prefazione' in V.Miletti, *Orme d'impulsi* (Trieste: Società Artistico Letteraria, 1967), p.9.

<sup>35</sup> V.Miletti, 'Pioggia veloce' and 'Manicure', in *Orme di impulsi*, pp.68 and 72. See also the Triestine Futurist poet Mario Cavedali, mentioned by F.T.Marinetti in 'Battaglie di Trieste (aprile-giugno 1910)', in *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (1915), in *Teoria e invenzione futurista* (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), pp.245-53.

<sup>36</sup> Claudia Salaris records some irreverent nicknames chosen by Triestine Futurists, including Sempresù, Escodamè and Chissenè –C.Salaris, *Storia del futurismo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985), p.245.

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The Futurists elected Trieste, after Milan and Paris, as Futurist city *par excellence*.<sup>37</sup>

As a city 'without a past', Trieste was ideally projected towards a future of uncompromisingly urban and mechanical modernity. However, the city's embrace of all that was modern, together with the insecurities generated by its 'outsider complex', brought about further contradictions. Ultimately, they prompted Trieste to cling further to the most traditional literary expressions of Italy with indiscriminate enthusiasm. Fascist ideologies continued to espouse Trieste's *italianità* with modernity and their own promotion of industrial renovation, particularly renovation of the moribund Triestine port, a partnership celebrated symbolically in the city's granting of honorary citizenship to Mussolini on 20 May 1924.

Quite apart from the national ideology mentioned above, a more properly Modernist, more open to European influences, and therefore more noteworthy, experience, was attempted by Giorgio Carmelich, together with Emilio Mario Dolfi. In 1922-23, Carmelich put together the pamphlets *Epeo* and the Dadaist *Eet* (spelled with 18 'e's on the frontispiece), an experimental 'anti-book' ('anti-libro') composed of notes, drawings, words in freedom, and theatrical 'sintesi'. Carmelich pursued his experimental inclinations within a 'Bottega di Epeo' and in 1924 the Triestine periodical *Crepuscolo* included a 'Futurist page'.<sup>38</sup> In 1925, Carmelich edited the periodical *25*.

Even more worthy of note, and relatively under-researched as yet, is Trieste's own contribution to the Constructivist experience, which is arguably quite unique in Italy. Artists such as Milko Bambič and Venio Pilon, Ivan Čargo and Avgust Černigoj, all contributed to the periodical *Tank* and looked to Ljubljana as a powerful centre of attraction. Constructivism was of course likely to be particularly attractive to Kosovel via his early Nietzschean persuasion. Černigoj, in particular, was to exercise the deepest influence on Kosovel, who employed a Constructivist style, composed of words in freedom and typographic syntheses, to voice his concerns over his own national identity. Kosovel scoured the Slovene nation, spurring it into activity (see 'Jaz protestiram' and 'Rodovnik') and into looking ahead to a European future, which, of course, was to lead to the experience of the journal *Euroslave: Revue pour une vie neuve en Europe*.<sup>39</sup>

Alongside Boris Pahor, and to conclude briefly, I remain persuaded that the more profoundly Modernist and most valuable significance of Kosovel's Constructivism lies in his humanist, pacifist and ethically Socialist conviction: a social revolution must remain constructive rather than destructive. In 1927, Černigoj published a Manifesto of the 'Gruppo

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<sup>37</sup> See Roberto Curci and Gabriella Ziani, *Bianco rosa e verde: Scrittrici a Trieste fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Trieste: Lint, 1993), p.109; see also Joseph Cary, *A Ghost in Trieste* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.85-86.

<sup>38</sup> C.Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*, pp.173-176.

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costruttivista' in Trieste: tragically, and due to his premature disappearance a year earlier, Kosovel was unable to bring his contribution to this unrivalled experience.

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<sup>39</sup> See B.Pahor, *Kosovel*, pp.69-70.