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TOBINO'S INEFFABLE:
CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH URBAN LANDSCAPE

Essi [i Viareggini] non emigrano. Sì, possono stare fuori dei mesi, a bordo di una tartana o di un navicello, ma poi vogliono ritornare a casa loro, quali possano essere i disagi della derelitta casa, non molto dissimile dalla barca che hanno momentaneamente lasciato¹.

The dominant tone of Mario Tobino's writing is that of a lyric expression guided by instinct and memorial impulses. More precisely, he has the ability to portray the ineffable with simple, economical clarity. With a crisp style, Tobino renders the abstract concrete, offering to the reader the recondite inspirations and the idiosyncratic whims of a place. In this study, that place is Viareggio. Particularly idiosyncratic is the nautical ethos of Viareggio, seen in *Sulla spiaggia e di là dal molo* and *L'angelo del Liponard*. As Magrini observes, it figures among his most common themes: "Mario Tobino ha scelto come oggetto di rappresentazione letteraria, quindi della sua intera opera: la comunità di nave, la comunità di organizzazione militare, sia regolare sia clandestina, la comunità di ospedale psichiatrico" (Magrini, "Mario Tobino," 21). Tobino writes such works as *Sulla spiaggia e di là dal molo* and *L'angelo del Liponard* with sporadic reflections as he delineates his own historical perspectives, the pride for his city, and the legendary—though not necessarily verifiable—events of his city. The events reveal the unutterable *esprit* of the citizenry behind which Tobino outlines the architectural spaces as a physical extension of the former's transcendent quality. In this article, we will examine the ineffable inward quality of Viareggio. Through Tobino's metaphoric prose, this quintessence will culminate in the architectural experience of the city.

Tobino's connection to Viareggio and the metaphors that he employs to emblematised it and integrate it into a folkloric oral tradition are compelling. While *Sulla spiaggia* and *L'angelo del Liponard* appear disjointed and fragmentary, his overall ineffable sentiment-as-thesis offers his works coherence.² In these works, a series of nautical metaphors serve to express

¹Sbrana, *Viareggio*, p. 115, referring to the Viareggio of 1870.

an inner character of the city. Marabini is quite aware of this when he writes: "In *Sulla spiaggia e di là dal molo* il centro è Viareggio. E anche se il libro risulta composto di brani giustapposti e nati da occasioni diverse, ha pure una sua fisionomia. È l'unità che proviene, come sempre, da un sentimento" (Marabini, "Tobino," p. 323). Tobino tenders the reader a notional vision, of which one can see the whole only through its parts. Writing in anecdotal fragments, the author projects Viareggio as a synecdoche where each part stands for the whole and the whole is in each part. On more than one occasion he refers to his city by a nickname of his own invention: Medusa. On this Seroni remarks: "Qui, nei modi più propri al narratore, Medusa diventa il mondo, si fa lo specchio di un tempo difficile e colmo di complessità" (Seroni, "L'opera narrativa," 18). Despite its geographic connection with the rest of Italy, Medusa-Viareggio is a world that exists on the margin. The nautical theme in *Sulla spiaggia* and *L'angelo del Liponard* best expresses this isolation and pride, as well as the capricious temper of the Viareggians. As the boat and the sea represent the ideality of the author and solitude of Viareggio, the sailors and the boats that come in and out of the *darsena* "divengono le chiavi di volta per la conoscenza non

²Mario Tobino's work is interesting in the sense that it still fails to find a distinct place within literary criticism. Part of this problem results from the fact that he is so difficult to classify as a writer. Musumeci refers to this difficulty of classifying the works of Tobino. For instance, while comparing *Le libere donne di Magliano* and *Per le antiche scale*, he says: "First, it is not accurate to call them 'novels' (quite possibly none of Tobino's works is properly a novel), nor does Tobino in fact label them as such: the first carries no label, the second is called simply 'una storia.' Rather, they are portraits, fragments of experiences, rapid sketches that emerge from the repository of memories of the author, and ask to be recomposed in some artistic form" (Musumeci, "Tobino," pp. 80-81). Aside from his poetry, he has written a score of novels, but to call them novels is quite misleading and avoids the problem of classification. Among the critics of Tobino's works—from Del Beccaro to Luti; from Grillandi to Pullini—there are only two who actually discuss the issue of category at any depth: Magrini and Marabini. Many of Tobino's books could easily be qualified as diaristic works, anecdotal memoirs and local histories, novels, anti-novels, and chronicles. Tobino's main characteristic, in that respect, is that he exists rather independently from most literary movements. His cycle on the *manicomio* is full of books (for example, *Le libere donne di Magliano*, *Gli ultimi giorni di Magliano*), which are diaristic or fragmentary to the point that they defy categorization. In fact, perhaps because Tobino spent so much time as a psychiatric doctor working in mental institutions, many people did not regard him as a true writer, but merely as a doctor who, as a hobby, wrote.

occasionale del mondo esterno” (Grillandi, *Invito*, 87). Tobino’s ideality is a subjective rendition of an external reality formed through the abstraction of pride for Viareggio and a transcendent, ideal image that may only exist in immanence. With these elements, Tobino succeeds in offering his reader a host of metaphors and lyric prose that approximate the ineffable life force of Viareggio and the author’s connection to it.

Particularly in *Sulla spiaggia e di là dal molo*, and additionally in the short stories of *L’angelo del Liponard*, Tobino metaphorises Viareggio as a ship (architecturally) and as an island (socio-geographically). Furthermore, Viareggio assumes a metaphor which mirrors the process whereby older, traditional ways clash with the modernity imposed from the outside. In this regard, the city is a metaphor for the inevitable passing of time against which a culture must struggle or acquiesce. Through Tobino’s narration, one witnesses Viareggio’s changing architectural design. Initially, the design of the city comprises nautically-inspired wooden constructions built either by *calafati* themselves or inspired by the craftsmanship of the *calafati* and other shipbuilders. Then, chronologically prior to, and during, the composition of *Sulla spiaggia*, Viareggio evolved into a site of “cemento armato” (*Sulla spiaggia*, 122) inspired by non-local architects from Florence (and other places) with no vision of Viareggio’s poetic, nautical texture. In as much as Tobino speaks so little in general about architecture and city design within the book, it is particularly significant and revealing when he does, especially when he focuses on the changes wrought by outside influences.³ Tobino’s strongest application of metaphor is made when he casts Viareggio as a boat that is figuratively capsized by the architectural designs and ideologies of the outside world.

Fascism appears as one of these outside factors, though Tobino does not give it a larger historical context. He avoids a lengthy discussion of Fascism because he is more interested in elucidating the poetic individuality of Viareggio’s citizenry than exposing any overall denigratory effects from political movements or general tendencies that affected Italy as a whole. Tobino’s concern is the uniqueness of Viareggio.⁴ He does not give the Fascist move-

³This dichotomy of inside/outside is apparent not only throughout the works at hand but also in other works where Tobino imagines the alienated, idiosyncratic inmates of a mental hospital to be misunderstood by the seemingly ‘normal’ people on the outside who cannot see the poetic clarity of madness.

⁴Pullini comments thus: “Ma poi si risale indietro ancora nel tempo, alle origini del fascismo nel 1920, con l’uccisione di un carabiniere in borghese da parte di un appuntato, e un seguito di tumulti, un tentativo di rivoluzione popolare. Ma con la sezione “Al di qua del canale” [da *Sulla spiaggia*] si ritorna a Viareggio rie-

ment its own chapter, its own dissertation and explanation. Yet, for such a minor element in Tobino's writing, the subtext of the commentary is quite powerful as it actively focuses on Viareggio's spirit. With the discussion of the 1930s and the structural changes that accompanied them, the author emphasizes this anarchic fervour which he attributes to the sea more so than to a reaction to the strictures of the Fascist hierarchy.

For example, in the very brief chapter entitled "16 maggio 1921" Tobino presents a reflexion of a political struggle between the subversive Viareggian Communist *reds* and Fascist *blacks*. The former belong to the *darsena*, where they gathered at the club of the shipwrights; the latter are primarily outsiders, *terrazzani* of more upper-class lineage. When many were injured as a result of the clash between the reds and the blacks, Tobino observes that this "Era il primo delitto politico, fatto inusitatissimo in una città dove i lutti esistono solo per violenza del mare" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 108). Tobino's brief treatment speaks volumes on Fascism. He contrasts the nautical soul with the fascio-political world. The Viareggian way is not an ideology. It merely becomes one by default when forced into contrast with the order of Fascism—an order that is anomalous to the innate free spirit of the nautical soul. For Viareggio, the natural order is associated with the sea. From the sea they were born and to it they return in death. As Tobino notes in the first line of the novel, "Viareggio viene da lontanissimo" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 11). It seems to come from an open sea freed from ideology.

Tobino sketches Viareggio's ineffable identity, finding it impossible to avoid its obvious nautical motif, its traditional associations with the way-faring life, and the lore of the great captains. With a singular narrative voice that seems to speak for all Viareggians, from the beginning Tobino synthesizes lore, pride, and metaphor. Tobino first prepares his reader with the idea of Viareggio as a ship and then expresses this vision concretely in its very architecture. He refers to Viareggio's sail in a literal way (as seen through the exaggerated prism of its citizens), but also as a metonym (the sail for the vessel). Then, the part fuses with the whole to present a city as ship:

Quanto ti amo o mio paese, fosti ingenuamente generoso anche se tutti ti ignorano. Tenterò di narrarti con la più dolce modestia, aspiro a dire anche il tuo male, la corruzione, come succede che facilmente il vizio avanza. E se ho vissuto abbastanza per liberare tutto ciò che so, dirò anche la tua vela, quanto si distingueva in tutti i mari, la più forte d'Italia, la più numerosa. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 24)

vocata nei primi anni del Novecento rispetto a quella degli anni trenta: ed ogni tanto un giudizio sintetico sul fascismo" (Pullini, "Mario Tobino," p. 56).

In Tobino's denotative discourse, Viareggio's architecture emerges from the depiction of its innate quality. Over this, the author superimposes its figurative, connotative nature through his own expressionistic style. In its implicit comparison, a metaphor relies on the immediate distances and interactions between the metaphoric tenor and its vehicle. It is never perfectly clear in Tobino's narration, however, whether he expresses Viareggio's architectural configuration in its literal denotation or in his own associative connotations. Viareggio is a ready-made metaphor, a *metaphora in factis*, whereby the city is what it appears to be and something more. That is, Tobino could simply be embellishing a city which possesses an innate, lyric beauty, or he may be mythologising a less objectively obvious ethos that only he perceives. One could argue that Tobino's metaphors of Viareggian life (primarily the architecture-as-ship) reflect his own perceptions or that they reflect his expressionistic conceptualizations conditioned by memory and pride.

Within *Sulla spiaggia*, the chapter "Un modesto segreto" serves as a further example of this tendency. The author recounts being a member of the "teppa del Piazzone," yet another important cityscape in Tobino's lexicon. The *teppa* is a group of Viareggini that is reminiscent of the recurring characters in Fellini's *Vitelloni* and *Amarcord*. The *teppa* is an adolescent extension of the anarchic Viareggian affectivity. It is part of what Vanelli calls, "il desiderio di vita libera e spensierata, lo spirito anarchico" of Viareggio ("La poetica di Mario Tobino," 560). Furthermore, within this group Tobino's historical perception of Viareggio begins. Amongst this whimsy of playful pranksters he found his solidarity:

La mia storia di Viareggio parte dalla teppa del Piazzone [...] erano loro i miei grandi amici con i quali, se un altro destino non fosse intercorso, forse sarei stato felice tutta la vita, e forse non avrei neppure scritto, dato che vivere in quel modo era la completa poesia. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 59-60)

Furthermore, while Tobino elucidates what *would have been* different, he reveals the origins of his exaggerated, poetic view of Viareggio: the very nostalgia for his childhood and a sentimental envy for his mates who would later become *marinai*.⁵ His secret is this:

Perché ero, sono stato della teppa del Piazzone, e Ganzú, Adriatico, Truppino, Tanacca, Tono, Osvaldo, all'improvviso, uno dopo l'altro, non c'erano più, erano andati in mare, come mozzi, ragazzi di bordo. I loro padri erano marinai, qualcuno padrone di barca, e a loro insaputa li imbarcavano, li avviavano al loro cammino [...] Io avevo diverso desti-

⁵Ironically, his being distanced from his friends and the life of Viareggio greatly incited him not only to write this way, but to write at all.

no. Ero figlio di farmacista⁶, dovevo studiare, anche se male, a strappi. Qui capii la diversa condizione sociale e se anche, col muso rivolto a loro, presi la mia strada, il mio cuore rimase nel Piazzone ad attendere chi non sarebbe più tornato verso di me [...] I miei amici erano partiti; riapparivano per pochi giorni, dopo tanti mesi; erano diventati affettuose immagini fluttuanti tra lontane onde. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 60-61)

Tobino cannot recall another time in his life when he lived with such "assoluta partecipazione alle naturali leggi" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 60). His friends have become verses in a long poem that is the sea. Life in Viareggio is a poem that writes itself; Tobino records it as if he were merely its medium.

The *Piazzone* itself reverberates as a metaphor of urban space. It is a locus amoenus of a classless society. In the tradition of Viareggio's "dolce anarchia" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 12)—a term decidedly and poetically anti-Fascist—it is not an accident that Tobino's temperament was that of an "anarchico caratteriale, cresciuto in una Viareggio dove un costume di libertà paesana consentiva all'infanzia di non conoscere differenze di classe" (Del Beccaro, "Mario Tobino," 477). The locus of the *Piazzone* is a symbol of an egalitarian society that can be preserved only as an idea. It is doubly important for Tobino because the connection with his comrades was forged there and those very comrades have followed another course: the adventurous life of the sailor that is their natural birth right. This schism stands as our writer's incipient longing to reconnect as much with the times as with the natural poetry of a life he was not destined to live.

Tobino's yearning to turn back destiny is his expressionistic conception of Viareggio that manifests itself in his prose. Precisely because of this, one cannot easily discern what is truly metaphor from what is a real description of naturally metaphoric objects, for to relive the times means to recreate its urban landscape. As René Wellek and Austin Warren insightfully wrote, "We metaphorize [...] what we love, what we want to linger over and contemplate, to see from every angle and under every lighting, mirrored in specialized focus by all kinds of like things" (*Theory of Literature*, 197). Tobino himself is unsure of how much he has embellished through the prism of nostalgia and pride for his city, causing the reader to enquire how much legend is in his anecdotes and portrayals. To elucidate this point we refer to Tobino's own words:

Tante volte mi sono domandato se io deliro quando parlo del mio paese, e ogni volta mi rispondo che anzi, invece, tengo stretta la martinicca,

⁶For a more complete vision of Tobino's diverse destiny, see his *Il figlio del farmacista*.

stringo il freno come quando si parla di parenti. Sono soltanto un testimone, ho appena navigato qualche miglia; io sono un terrazzano che si aggira della darsena e affettuosamente ascolta chi ritorna dal difficile mare, riferisco ciò che ho udito, quel che mi ha nutrito. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 25)

With “riferisco ciò” Tobino lends an air of impersonal, possibly objective, testimony (the “*Sulla spiaggia*” part of the title, which represents a sense of reality). With “quel che mi ha nutrito” he represents a more personal, intuitive rapport with reality (the “di là dal molo” half of the title, which represents the notion of ideality and fable).⁷ The notion of sailors on the open sea instills in him a sense of mystique and adventure. Tobino offers one character, in particular, who exemplifies these qualities experienced through the imagination: Puccinelli, the professor of the Scuola Nautica—a man who had never even sailed, but who had extraordinary mathematical and astronomical knowledge. Despite Puccinelli’s lack of practical experience, to Tobino he embodied the ethos of the city and would make great sailors of his fellow citizens:

Ed era bravissimo in astronomia, quasi, per lui sordo, il linguaggio dei cieli fosse più agevole, perfetto in navigazione, lui che non aveva mai oltrepassato la punta del molo. Fu lui l’anima della Scuola nautica di Viareggio, dette lui la chiave, casalinga e sapiente; in quelle menti marinare disposte ma non usate alle sottigliezze dell’arte gettò consapevolezza, vestì di matematica il loro istinto, tradusse in pensiero quella navigazione alla quale fino allora essi erano arrivati col coraggio, con l’innata virtù. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 32)

Though limited to the land, his heart and his mind reside in an ideality metaphorised by the numinous sea. He is a Viareggian.⁸

Tobino discusses the marvel of the sea against the reality of the *entroterra* of Viareggio within the context of urban spaces. Further, he extends it into one of the most common architectural structures in Italy: the soccer stadium. The chapter entitled “Le tre giornate” recounts one of the few events in *Sulla spiaggia* not associated with the *darsena*, its boats,

⁷Pullini’s full citation reads as follows: “trasformando subito il sospetto di una letteratura di impersonale testimonianza (« riferisco ciò che ho udito ») in intuizione di un rapporto personale, lirico, con la realtà (« quel che mi ha nutrito »)” (Pullini, “Mario Tobino,” p. 52).

⁸It is in this liberating idea that the “alienati” of *Libere donne* live, as far as Tobino believes. Though they are limited to the walls and cells of the *manicomio*, they might be closer to a real truth.

or the captains and the sea. Early in this section, Tobino connects the sea itself with Viareggio's soccer team as if this ineffable is ineluctably joined to all aspects of Viareggian life: "Per la destrezza che impone il mare a chi fin da bambino lo frequenta, la squadra del Viareggio aveva una sua spavalderia" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 67). It is important that Tobino refers to the Viareggians as "loro che andavano in mare, poveri" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 73), and the side from Lucca as "terrazzani, che lasciavano il canale pieno di sabbia" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 73). One's glory is inextricably tied to the sea; the other's to the land that corrupts it. For *il Viareggio* to lose to a team of such *impure origins* would have meant shame for Viareggio. So when the *Lucchesi* tally the score in a game that Viareggio 'should have won', a riot ensues during which Viareggians attack the opposing squad screaming: "Vi si picchia tutti ... Basta! Vi si ammazza" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 73). This moment resulted in the three days of confusion, the culmination of which is Tobino's parodic reflection of a Soviet-inspired junta and an occupation of the municipal buildings and courts. Suddenly, the sweet anarchy of Viareggio turned into a bitter three-day revolution; a mutiny in this normally serene ship. In so doing, Tobino offers the reader a greater subtext still. So far, he narrates *Sulla spiaggia* with his gaze mostly on the *darsena*, the *molo*, the *piazzone* and the very people connected with the thalassic life. Yet, when he turns that gaze away from boundless fantasy of the seas to the inland area, his characters meet a harsh reality that does not offer them the same poetic solace that they experience with the sea. The implication is that the characters were destined to react negatively when their free spirits were confined to the limited spaces of the inland soccer stadium. Vanelli presents his own perspective of these characters who are accustomed to open spaces:

A questo [...] sono legate tante opere di Tobino, soprattutto i racconti marini e viareggini e quelli di avventura, da "La gelosia del marinaio" a *Sulla spiaggia e di là dal molo* dominati da una spazialità aperta, da ritmi distesi, da modulazioni liriche, che danno l'impressione della gioia contemplativa di chi è riuscito a sentire e a restituire nel particolare una traccia della bellezza e dell'armonia universale. (Vanelli, "La poetica di Mario Tobino," 557)

Not only were the Viareggians out of their 'element' in the stadium, but their inner harmony was disturbed by an external force: the Lucchesi.

Thus, it is curious to consider Tobino's motivation for including the *Three Days of May 1920*, as the tumult would later be called, within *Sulla spiaggia*, a novel that looks out to the sea for inspiration and equally envies the sea in its architecture. The Viareggians were not wholly in their milieu when confined to a landlocked structure whose focus is to draw the

spectators' gaze within it (the realm of reality), to the actual field on which soccer is played; into active life, away from the abstract 'contemplative joy' mentioned by Vanelli. Tobino suggests that, by definition, the tumult arose because the environment was adverse to the *estro* of the Viareggians. This passage disrupts the nautical theme and flow of the narration as much as the event itself was a disruption for the characters.

Therefore, as Tobino metaphorically identifies the inhabitants of his city as the crew of a boat, the junta that forms rather like a mutiny, temporarily cleaves the loyal harmony of the crew and its vessel. This mutiny simultaneously amounts to an objective correlative of the very anarchic sentiment residing in each and every one of the Viareggians. Ironically, this is the only time in *Sulla spiaggia* that one gets a candid sense of the demeanor of the city's inhabitants; one of the few moments during which the reader is privy to the dialogue and intimate encounters among individual characters.

On this point, we consider the riot that instigated the three-day revolutionary siege. In the *mêlée* after the game, a young *ex-militare* named Morganti is shot by a *carabiniere* after seemingly little provocation. In the moment before Morganti is shot, Tobino offers the reader an abrupt, elliptical character sketch, but one which also captures the free nature of Viareggians:

L'appuntato Berti ripeté con ira: "Ho detto: Via!" e mosse l'arma davanti ai loro visi. Fu il più giovane, il Morganti, che rispose. Era a Viareggio amato da tutti, allegro, confidenziale, suo spasso partecipare a ogni vicenda paesana, tanto è vero che pochi minuti prima lui stesso era sul campo di gioco, in mutandine come gli altri giocatori. Correva su e giù lungo il lato del campo sforbiciando la sua bandierina di guardialinee. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 74)

It is here that the reader also meets Tobino's representative of Viareggio's conceptual utopia: the character named "il Trecca." We meet him after many lines of anonymous dialogue spoken in reaction to Morganti's murder and the ensuing siege. Il Trecca had:

[Un']espressione marinaresca, che significava rispondere con immediatezza al pericolo, fu lui a prendere il bandolo, a essere il comandante. Il Trecca era un calafato, guizzante di muscoli, asciutto; gli occhi grigi infossati sotto la fronte. Essere deciso era l'unica Sua gioia, manifestare l'energia. Forse, se fosse stato istruito, se avesse potuto sciogliersi con le parole, sarebbe stato diverso. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 80)

This pronouncement contrasts Tobino's own statement about himself, when he had earlier imagined what his destiny would have been had he not

been the son of a pharmacist: he would have remained and become a shipwright, as well. The irony is that he becomes a polar opposite of il Trecca. Yet, in this distinction, Tobino's very ability to express himself with words ("sciogliersi con le parole") has allowed him to give il Trecca the literary voice which he would otherwise not have had. In fact, Tobino clarifies this by saying: "È il poeta che fa rimanere le storie; se no diventano polvere, lontane larve" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 54).

Following the appearance of il Trecca, the corpulent, limping lawyer, Bonturi, appears. He is the revered intellect of the town. As a putative historical figure, Bonturi conveniently allows Tobino to defend his own value as an intellectual within the very community he sketches.⁹ Tobino has already established the cityscape, but now he discusses his characters further so that he can re-insert them into the architecture that mirrors their ineffable texture.

Though very different from il Trecca, Bonturi's soul is Viareggian. Despite being well-off, Bonturi had already quietly fomented revolution for the lower classes in the past. The following passage, which serves as analepsis, exemplifies this: "Una volta mise fuori l'orologio come la lancetta fosse per scoccare: 'Presto — non so ancora dirvi l'ora precisa — quei palazzi, quelle ville che sono dietro le vostre spalle, lungo la Passeggiata, saranno vostre'" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 83).¹⁰ The portly lawyer wants to reason, but il Trecca and his fellow subversives would have none of this. Therefore, when Bonturi asks whether the revolutionaries have notified Rome of the political siege, an anonymous voice responds with the separatist hubris of those living on an island remote from the rest of Italy: "'Che c'entra Roma? Noi siamo di Viareggio. Ce l'hai sempre detto ...' e i sovversivi non sapevano spiegarsi. Ma non era tutto facile? Più facile di così era impossibile. Era venuto il momento e l'avevano afferrato. L'ora, quella dell'orologio, era scoccata" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 85). It is notable that one voice seems to respond as if it were a chorus of all the voices, but the voice interrupts itself ("Ce l'hai sempre detto ..."): because it lacked the proper verbal capacity to detail what Bonturi had told them, they remain within the destiny in which il Trecca finds himself; one not shared by Tobino except in the common history.

Bonturi is subsequently portrayed alone, contemplating the above-mentioned situation and how to resolve the tension. Tobino offers the

⁹Though, clearly, as we previously stated, without the intellectually inspired poet-ics, this story would not be told to outsiders within the literary community.

¹⁰Though this dialogue flashes back to an earlier speech by Bonturi, the mention of the Passeggiata is a telling flash-forward.

reader one of the lawyer's thoughts: "Non concepiscono che esista l'Italia, che ci sia una nazione, e che noi siamo costretti a farne parte. Mi accusano di averli aizzati ..." (*Sulla spiaggia*, 87). But he is a lawyer and perhaps lacks the true anarchic soul of the Viareggians. Perhaps it is he who is wrong; perhaps he fails to see that Viareggio does not fit in spiritually with Italy and needs to remain an island. Bonturi ponders whether his poorly interpreted words had been, in part, a cause of the junta: "Volevo dire di ogni paese, tutti insieme, ogni città, un movimento universale. Non così, da anarchici, dopo una partita di calcio" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 87). They did not misunderstand him; but neither do they believe they are anarchic. They are simply Viareggians; they become categorizable only by default when forced into a comparison with a particular politics governed by an ideology. After the Italian military invades Viareggio, order is restored and even those who had been reticent to involve themselves in the tumult are proud to participate again in the "orgoglio paesano. Era stato bello buttare in aria ogni legge, alzare le barricate, sparare su chi si presenta col berretto del comando. Bello essere stati ribelli, liberi" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 104). The army's suppression parallels the moment in which the Viareggians began to lose the soccer game: it left them with the delusion of a conquest of a liberty that was merely an object of their fantasy.

Tobino clearly recognizes Viareggio as an idyllic place that exists despite the outside realities of Italy. Thematically, Tobino reflects on the time when Queen Maria Luisa, Duchess of Lucca, visited his city—clearly a part of the oral tradition, for the visit occurred in 1820. He conflates his own conception of Viareggio with that of the queen's supposed experience: "La regina adesso dava le spalle alla terra; il mare immenso le faceva credere più vero ciò che immaginava" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 19). For Tobino, the sea has become part of what Pullini calls a "mito del mare come apertura di sogno" (Pullini, "Mario Tobino," 53).

This becomes the subconscious lens through which Tobino's narrative idiom is refracted. Moreover, this shows through in other works, beside *Sulla spiaggia* and *L'angelo del Liponard*, where island and boat metaphors unite quite incongruous places. For example, in *Gli ultimi giorni di Magliano*, our narrator—working as a psychiatrist—is clearly confined to the compound of the inland mental hospital, relatively distant from the locus of the *Passeggiata*. After a certain law (*legge 180*) was passed, the mental hospitals were forbidden to accept new patients. The current patients were to be released within two years. In the interim, no patients left Magliano, and none entered—the asylum languished. Yet, Tobino metaphorically sees this environment in nautical terms: "Ancora un bel bastimento, che per

ordine superiore non naviga più" (*Gli ultimi giorni di Magliano*, 113). Magrini refers to this correlation between hospital and ship: "l'equivalenza tra manicomio e nave è posta, invece, da Tobino in modo non casuale, bensì calcolato ed elaborato" (Magrini, "Mario Tobino," 22). The patients are relegated to the narrow confines of the asylum, unable to navigate in the outside world where so-called normal people sail. Tobino sees them as still navigating quite vigorously in their minds. This is a more poetic form of the 'ship of fools' found in Foucault's argument of the "Stultifera navis." In fact, Foucault would posit Tobino's static ship as the mediation between the old mythological 'ship of fools' and Foucault's own conception of mental hospital in his contemporary world:

Behold it moored now, made fast among things and men. Retained and maintained. No longer a ship but a hospital ... All this world of disorder, in perfect order, pronounces, each in his turn, the Praise of Reason. Already, in this "Hospital," confinement has succeeded embarkation. (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 35-36)

Furthermore, the cut-off, isolated life of the *manicomio* of Magliano¹¹ not only functions as a microcosm of the world for Tobino, but also as a reflection of how the inmates of the asylum were not unlike the Viareggians in their isolation—psychological or geographical.¹² In the first chapter of *Sulla spiaggia* ("I quattrocento"), Tobino speaks of Viareggio's early inhabitants and how they lived "come in un'isola," finishing his thought with the following line: "A Viareggio vissero puri per sei secoli" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 12). Viareggio's isolation was a potentially negative fact of life, but Tobino considers it metaphorically positive, connecting this with the adjective "puri" (pure), suggesting that living on such an island is living purely—a hyper- *campanilismo*.

The very glue of Viareggio's community is its ineffable sense of controlled anarchy. In that sense, the *manicomio* as a boat takes on a greater meaning, for, as Tobino remarks in *Le libere donne di Magliano*, "L'alienato nella cella è libero, sbandiera, non tralasciandone alcun grano, la sua pazzia, la cella suo regno dove dichiara se stesso, che è il compito della persona umana" (*Libere donne*, 36). Tobino's love and admiration for his people differ little from his admiration for the marginalised and their 'otherness' in the mental hospital: "Un medico di manicomio, se è vivo, sempre vor-

¹¹The real-life place was called Maggiano.

¹²In fact, Luti called Tobino "un autore isolato" (Luti, "Il labirinto della parola," p. 85) in the rhetorical sense.

tica tra il peso dei delirî e la speranza che qualsiasi uomo, anche se pazzo, sia libero" (*Libere donne*, 56) Tobino finds a poetic communion between the inhabitant of Viareggio and that of the *manicomio*. They both perceive their environment as an instant metaphor. In this sense, Tobino, like a poet/madman, communicates in his metaphors that which he perceives at a pre-lingual level. Musumeci refers to this communion of ideality as being in the margins of otherness: "Poet and madman are uniquely and inextricably creatures of otherness. They share a solitary space, inhabit a marginal landscape at the edge and they speak a different language, a language of resemblances not of signs" (Musumeci, "Tobino," 86). He sees himself as liminally connected in spirit to the sailors of Viareggio and to the inmates of the asylum. As he portrays Viareggio, Tobino poetically relates that for which the sailors would not have had words, going from the *res* to the *figura*, while narrating lives lived without the mediation of refined signs. Equally, the inmates experience conditions for which the language of even the most reasoned intellect has no capacity. The unmediated experience of the mad is perhaps a natural normalcy which only appears to be madness to outsiders, for it is forced to be expressed through common words wholly insufficient for a pure, organic vision. Direct perception without the impediments of philosophy imposed over the experience would appear abnormal to those governed by ideological laws. By default, the seemingly mad seers are marginalized and misunderstood. Their pure, ineffable experience is disfigured by men of intellect.

As we have already remarked, in a world of perception and resemblances, Tobino blurs cause and effect: it is not clear whether the boats influence the architecture or if he just sees a subliminal connection and fills in the rest. The asylum patients and the Viareggians are inseparable to Tobino, and both are connected to the boat. As Tobino lauds the crew of his *stultifera navis*, to be sure one of Tobino's most cherished features of Viareggio is its boats—*barcobestia*, *bastimenti*, *golette*, *paranze*, *cutter*, etc. This is why Tobino comfortably metaphorises the hospital at Magliano as a boat. In the design of the boat Tobino shares a communion with his fellow Viareggians. It is the material form of the abstract, inconcrete essence of Viareggio.

The city becomes the ideal, Platonic form of a boat for Tobino: a boat sailing alone on a vast sea of immanence where the poetry of Viareggian life exists undisturbed. For example, in "Zufolo per due darsene" (a chapter within the fourth section of *Sulla spiaggia*), despite the sombre recount of the funeral service for a young girl named Silvia, Tobino still manages to 'construct' his vessels in the last two lines: "Intorno c'erano le barche, nel

bellissimo inverno terso di luna, il lavoro degli uomini trasformati in poesia" (*Sulla spiaggia* 196).¹³ Since the majority of the pre-World War II structures was inspired by shipbuilding and built by *calafati*, even the *darsena* itself becomes a piazza (and the boats and sailors frequent it as Tobino frequented the *Piazzzone*).

Thus, Tobino redefines citizenship within *Sulla spiaggia*, speaking, with a passion for the legendary, of those who bore many generations of children aboard ships, as if their *patria* were not a land, but a boat. For example, in the chapter "Il capitano Angelo si diverte," the narrator makes a reference to the captain's wife: "C'era l'Adele Puccinelli, la moglie dell'Antonini, Sua compagna in tantissimi viaggi; il primo bambino era nato a bordo, i vagiti accompagnati dal gemere delle corde nei bozzelli" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 41). We discover that Captain Angelo himself was born aboard a boat when Tobino recalls how Angelo cared to wed a certain Emanuela, not of a "razza navigante" but of "nobile casato": "Emanuela non sapeva nulla del mare. La madre di Angelo, la Santina, che aveva partorito a bordo, navigato per anni e anni, era molto dubitosa di questo matrimonio" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 44). The notion of a navigating race forces the reader to see Viareggians as not simply different from other Italians. Tobino's narrative reflects an implication that the true *patria* of Viareggio resides not on the beach ("sulla spiaggia"), per se, but in abstraction ("di là dal molo").

The distinction that Tobino makes between *terrazzani* (landlubbers) and *viareggini* (sailors) implies that to be a true Viareggian one must be more than born in Viareggio, if not born at sea itself, but have the ethos of marineria in one's veins. A telling passage, which furthers this notion, is seen in the short story "Una festa a Telaro" from *L'angelo del Liponard*: "La chiesa, dentro, è la stanza di un vecchio capitano che fece il pirata [...] Potrebbe essere una chiesa che gli squali frequentano quando un loro congiunto muore" (177). The description here invites the reader to see not just a literal structure, but an intangible ethos that pervades Viareggian life. It appears as if the sharks and the sailors shared a greater connection—linked by the sea—than did the sailors and the *terrazzani*. In fact, as previously mentioned, the first line of *Sulla spiaggia* (in the chapter entitled "I quattrocento") mentions Viareggio's founding as if a boat of mysterious origins adrift on a sea had suddenly appeared in a port: "Viareggio viene da lontanissimo" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 11). For how long was it adrift? From where did it come? Was it born of the sea? In this regard, Tobino's reference (in the

¹³ Thus the boats are twice transformed into poetry: once in the seminal moment; the second time in Tobino's poetic account read on the pages of *Sulla spiaggia* ...

first person, no less) to his city as “Medusa” (*Sulla spiaggia*, 136), is revealing. The city is both a sea-creature and a mythic character.

Having defined the psyche of Viareggio’s citizens, we return full circle to the seminal thesis of this article: the cultural identity of a people as accounted through a lyric representation of its urban landscape. Within the pages of *L’angelo del Liponard* there are rhetorical comparisons which further develop the notion that to inhabit a structure in Viareggio is to inhabit a boat. The first instance is in the story “La gelosia del marinaio”: “Le case dei marinai odorano di bastimento, a viverci dentro è un po’ come vivere a bordo” (*L’angelo del Liponard*, 94). This implies that if one were to close one’s eyes, the difference would be negligible. In the chapter “I due marinai,” Tobino writes: “I due marinai parlano di viaggi, di porti stranieri, di bettole vicino al porto dove sembra di essere a bordo” (*L’angelo del Liponard*, 131). Familiar with the *darsena*, Tobino is sure to include these *bettole* (crude taverns) as a social extension of marineria. He does not clearly elucidate whether these constructions physically resembled the internal quarters of a ship, or whether it was merely the atmosphere and the idiosyncrasies within that lent an air of being aboard a ship. Yet, where these locations may or may not have been visually ship-like, within them the élan of *marineria* reigned:

Il caffè di Dario udì le più belle storie di mare, descrizioni di ardite manovre quando dal capitano dipende la salvezza di tutti. I giudizi che si davano sulle capacità di ogni marinaio erano definitivi e naturalmente al caffè Mazzini vigeva una severa gerarchia; quando entrava il capitano Antonio Antonini entrava un re, quando entrava suo figlio Angelo entrava il Delfino. Perché di lupi di mare, di nostromi carichi di esperienza, di marinai scoiattoli a chiudere e mollare i velacci, Viareggio ne aveva tanti, ma la risolutezza, l’illuminazione, la scienza marinara degli Antonini era unica. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 35)

The most significant chapter concerning boat metaphors in the architecture of Viareggio is “La passeggiata” in *Sulla spiaggia*. Sardi epitomizes the value of this architectural fixture as both a product of the Viareggian éspirt and a reflexion of it:

E con gli occhi del ricordo Tobino rivede la favolosa Passeggiata, le costruzioni in legno che erano, ciascuna, il ritratto di chi le aveva costruite: ognuno, infatti, faceva secondo l’estro, in assoluta libertà di fogge e di colori, per esprimere speranze, nostalgie, rimpianti, per ancorare sulla terra il ricordo di una barca che lo aveva portato, attraverso i mari di tutto il mondo, in terre lontanissime, in paesi di fiaba. (Sardi, “Tobino,” 566)

Furthermore, the metaphor of the previously mentioned structure, called

the *Passeggiata*, begets yet another, parallel metaphor: the state of Viareggio's architecture before and after the Fascist era also metaphorises the ineluctable passing of time as outside forces undo what Tobino can preserve in his fabulous recollection. The fact that Viareggio was characterized by the "dolce anarchia" of the first chapter, linguistically predisposed the city to be counterpointed by the anti-anarchic, highly hierarchic Fascist regime. In so doing, our narrator re-evokes the *Passeggiata*, which echoes the ineffable quality of the city:

Allora era tutta di legno [...] così in quella v'era l'ombra del cassero, in altre le sagome di grossi barconi, in alcune la sveltezza delle golette. E tra di loro e sopra i tetti si muovevano grandi bandiere, sculettavano le garrule multicolori bandierine dei pavesi. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 113-114)

Tobino further explains how the architecture should resemble a ship: "Le fogge erano le più diverse ma poiché i costruttori erano calafati, gli ideatori marinai rimasti a terra, quasi tutte ricordavano le faccende del mare" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 113-114). But inevitably the outside world changed everything. Referring particularly to Fascism in one instance, Tobino writes: "Viareggio fu sommersa dalla storia d'Italia non da un male proveniente dalle proprie viscere" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 114). The use of the adjective "sommersa" is interesting—boats are submerged and Tobino sees the downfall of his city in those terms. In his eyes, Fascism caused Viareggio to 'capsize'.

The nautical quality in the architecture of the *Passeggiata*, the focus of Tobino's metaphoric perceptions, was an affront to Fascism. The "dolce anarchia" will inevitably concede to the imposition of Fascist order. How could the Regime tolerate such expressions of separatist, local-colour identity? Tobino recalls that around 1930 the papers began to circulate articles referring to the colourful shacks (or *baracche*) and structures along the *Passeggiata*, saying that "quelle costruzioni che ricordano tolde, prue, relitti di bastimenti, carene abbandonate, erano un vecchiume, un segno di lazzaronismo italiano [...] un controsenso nella nuova Italia imperiale e fascista" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 120-121). The architecture nettled the design of Fascism's vision. This visual poetry, unimpeded by formal overarching ideology, offended the cold, pragmatic tastes of the Regime, which was governed by a strict philosophy:

Venne l'ordine che le baracche dovevano essere distrutte, tutti i colori trasformati in quello unico della calce, ogni bizzarria, spontaneità e fantasia doveva farsi disegno di geometri. Venne l'ordine che Viareggio fosse distrutta, quella che era stata dei calafati, dei pionieri, dei marinai, dei pescatori. L'autentico ritratto doveva essere cancellato, se ne sarebbe

costruita un'altra, decorosa, gerarchica, dove finalmente non ci sarebbe stato alcuno spontaneo respiro. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 121)¹⁴

With regard to the *Passeggiata*, the podestà—who, Tobino confesses, was not even a Viareggian—executed his duty expeditiously:

Le baracche crollarono [...] Furono distrutte le ingenue e felici geometrie, quelle sagome ispirate a casseri, poppe, pennoni [...] Fu ferito l'estro dei viareggini [...] era come spaccare il loro cuore ... la Passeggiata di Viareggio si trasformò in un lenzuolo intirizzito di freddo, una corona di fiori di smalto da appendere una volta per sempre. (*Sulla spiaggia* 122-123)

The image of artificial flowers hung indefinitely, rather than an image of fresh, sweet flowers, stifles the senses. When the heart and soul of *marineria* had been damaged, poetry was quashed. Aleatory, capricious architecture, based on expressing the ethos of the boat and the uniqueness of the city, had been replaced by a cold, impervious architecture, not constructed with the same wood of the sea vessels, but in a cement that reflected the antithesis of authenticity: “Al posto delle liete baracche sorsero delle costruzioni in cemento armato disegnate da architetti di Firenze, disegni fatti in ufficio, senza neppure l'ombra della disavvedutezza dei viareggini” (*Sulla spiaggia*, 122). Tobino uses “disavvedutezza” in an indirect free discourse: it is the voice of the non-Viareggians pronouncing their judgement. Consequentially, he employs it not as a term of opprobrium but of encomium by contrasting it with the ‘bureaucratic’ order of that which replaced the original structures:

¹⁴With the anaphora “venne l'ordine,” the reader of Tobino recognizes a connection to the metaphoric boats: the city itself and the *manicomio* -as-boat previously cited from *Gli ultimi giorni di Magliano*. In 1978 the same “ordine” destroyed another locus of Tobino's ideality. In his article on styles and communities in Tobino's work, Magrini refers to this outside force, or order, as being one of the main contributors to the destruction of any of the three types of communities: “Le comunità di Tobino cessano per morte naturale, quando i movimenti che le hanno costituite e tenute in vita vengono a mancare, o quando, per esempio, una legge esterna ed estranea le abolisce.” (Magrini, “Mario Tobino,” p. 23) *La legge 180* closed the mental hospitals and ended an era for the psychologist-writer and his eccentric patients. Tobino refers to this moment through his usual nautical metaphor: “arrivò l'ordine mentre ciurma e bastimento erano in bella navigazione, ogni vela aperta, capitano e marinai esperti dei venti, capaci a fronteggiare ogni situazione, dallo zefiro alla cupa tempesta” (*Gli ultimi giorni di Magliano*, 114) .

... nessun lontano barbaglio di quel concepire la vita come una festa. Della Passeggiata rimase soltanto il ricordo, ancora più vivo perché radicato nell'anima. Anche i nomi divennero falsi: il Nereo, l'Eolo, il Balena, il Felice, i fratelli Domenici, Poldo, il Cirillo, furono in gran parte ripetuti su quelle burocratiche murature, povere anche in cemento armato, ma non erano più gli stessi, sembravano etichette sopra i loculi dei cimiteri, sigle di pratiche evase. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 122)

With Viareggio's soul broken, other changes were facilitated that would affect the urban landscape even still. A new set of attitudes and fundamental values accompanied this process of replacement. Though reluctant, Tobino himself admits sarcastically that he began to accustom himself to the changes:

Infine la costruzione di cemento, squadrata, arida, burocratica, fu ultimata. Era proprio bella, il ritratto dell'impero, c'era anche lo sgabuzzino per i biglietti del cinematografo, ma quanto diverso da quello precedente che era tutto intimo, puzzolente di sigaro, con lo sportello che aveva per chiusura una persiana da bambola, nelle pareti infiorato di cartoline illustrate dai luoghi più lontani dagli artisti di varietà. Questo nuovo invece una ghigliottina, prossima a scendere. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 124)

These begot further irrevocable changes to Viareggio's identity so that even nature itself was damaged. The forest was razed to accommodate the next wave of cement structures so repellent to the Viareggian life force. The trees, which had produced wood for building boats and houses, were now gone. Unlike in English, in Italian, the mere mention of trees, "alberi," conjures images of the eponymously named masts of boats. For example, Tobino plays on the rooted plane trees and the 'tree' (as mast) in the moment during which order was restored after the famous "tre giornate": "I platani densi di foglie, l'immobilità del canale, il silenzio di attesa, davano un senso di memorabile. Si vedevano, subito al di là del canale, gli alberi dei bastimenti" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 101). Tobino fuses the sea and the land into one poetic moment whereby the discussion of real trees (platani) ineluctably streams the consciousness into the masts (alberi), which, in turn, are made from trees. So, in the tearing down of the "pineta" the last vestige of traditional Viareggian shipbuilding was metaphorically and literally erased. Tobino sardonically recounts this in his typically lyric-expressionistic style:

Poi si videro a Viareggio distruzioni di ogni genere, la gentilezza volata via, il genuino istinto lentamente strozzato come faceva Hitler con i suoi generali traditori; poi abbiamo persino visto sterminare la pineta più bella della nostra infanzia, più misteriosa di resine, quella che dal Marco

Polo andava alla Fossa. E oggi, là dove vivevano umidi sentieri, vergineo muschio, chiome di pini cullate dalla brezza, la musica dei loro aghi in accordo col tremolio della marina, affannano rachitici grattacieli con terrazzi uguali a deformati portasaponi, le pareti colorate di caramella. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 129)

The image of rachitic skyscrapers in the form of soap dishes could not be more of an antithesis to the serene, nautical image of the wooden boat. As Viareggio became less isolated, it lost its ship form. It became a *terra firma* looking out onto the sea, no longer a boat sailing on the sea's ideality or an island surrounded by its inspiration. After the Fascist era, Viareggio would never be what it once was, especially for our narrator. The shacks and the *bettole* would never reappear where the "casamenti" now stand: "Così in darsena, così in ogni strada, così sulla Passeggiata, la città si tramutava" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 210).

The architectural metaphor of the irrepressible passing of time is no more obvious than in this moment. Yet, as nostalgic as Tobino is for a magical time which may or may not have been as he described it, he is relatively optimistic and positive, even if somewhat reluctant to accept the times. Perhaps he is comforted by the knowledge that his poetic disposition will never be repressed, for it lies in his ideality. We recall Pullini's calling the sea a mythical aperture to dreams. A cynical Tobino mentions the destruction of the old that altered the rapport between the Viareggians and their sea. Referring to the architecture of the old Viareggio as compared to the *cemento armato* of the day, he relives, in a subtle metaphor, the passing of time and the perception of it:

Prima il mare si vedeva a sorpresa, di sglimbescio, per un pertugio. Dal molo si doveva arrivare a piazza Mazzini per trovare una vera apertura, un luogo dal quale mirare l'ampiezza dell'orizzonte, l'accavallarsi delle onde. Adesso, ogni quei tanti metri, le costruzioni si interrompono, c'è un vasto quadro di spiaggia, ai lati ci sono le quinte delle cabine e i loro terrazzini sono fasciati di tavole, diventano delle scatole chiuse, dai parallelapiedi poggiati sulla spiaggia che nelle notti buie e tempestose prendono l'aspetto di pesanti ordigni puntati verso il mare, di mostri accovacciati. Nelle notti di luna invece, quando il mare è placido, questi parallelapiedi si fanno sognanti e delicati, la spiaggia è d'avorio e mai toccata da piede umano, luccica per i raggi la trina delle onde. In queste notti di luna, il mare, la spiaggia, le cabine rinchiusi, diventano personaggi avvolti da una dorata nostalgia. (*Sulla spiaggia*, 126)

As long as the sea is there, there will always be a passage into dreams, for the sea is the medium on which the vessel travels. "La città si tramuta-

va," Tobino remarks, but quickly adds, "Il mare no, non era possibile" (*Sulla spiaggia*, 210). The constancy of the sea is the constancy of the poetic voice of Tobino. This voice, infused with the spirit of his dear city and its people offers coherence to the novel. An ineffable sentiment as identity, expressed through urban spaces, becomes the protagonist that the reader follows consistently through *Sulla spiaggia e di là dal molo* and *L'angelo del Liponard*.

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