

Milan

Celtic in origin, Milan was acquired by Rome in 197 B.C. An important center during the Roman era (*Mediolânnum* or *Mediolanium*), and after having declined as a medieval village, it began to prosper as an archiepiscopal and consular town between the tenth and eleventh centuries. It led the struggle of the Italian cities against the Emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa) at Legnano (1176), securing Italian independence in the Peace of Constance (1183), but the commune was undermined by social unrest. During the thirteenth century, the Visconti and Della Torre families fought to impose their lordship or *signoria*. The Viscontis prevailed, and under their dominion Milan then became the Renaissance ducal power that served as a concrete reference for the fairy-like atmosphere of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Meanwhile, Milan's archbishopric was influential, and Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584) became a leading figure during the counter-Reformation. Having passed through the rule of the Sforzas (Francesco Sforza ruled until the city was captured by Louis XII of France in 1498) and the domination of the Hapsburgs, which ended in 1713 with the war of the Spanish Succession, Milan saw the establishment of Austrian rule. The enlightened rule of both Hapsburg emperors (Maria Theresa and Joseph II) encouraged the flowering of enlightenment culture, which Lombard reformers such as the Verri brothers, Cesare Beccaria, and the entire group of intellectuals active around the journal *Il caffè* bequeathed to Milan during the Jacobin and romantic periods.

In fact, the city which fascinated Stendhal when he visited it in 1800 as a second lieutenant in the Napoleonic army became, between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, a reference point in the cultural and social field. As the capital of the Lombard-Venetian kingdom (1815), Milan rose to become its moral capital through the intellectual conquests, passion, and knowledge of a tradition which its artists give to all Italians. Giuseppe Parini's moral fervor, Ugo Foscolo's political and impassioned zeal, and the work of Alessandro Manzoni himself bequeathed the legacy of a staunch romantic creed tempered by a constant sense of classical trend. One thinks of the passion of a citizenry that spent lavishly, when the Teatro Ducale (inaugurated in 1717) was destroyed by a fire in 1776, to endow Milan with two beautiful theaters and thus to put it on par with European capitals like Vienna. These two theaters are the Regio Teatro at La Scala, inaugurated in 1776 with Antonio Salieri's *Europa riconosciuta* (*Europe Recognized*), and the Regio Teatro alla Canobbiana, whose first curtain rose only three years later. Their construction was entrusted to the Imperial architect Giuseppe Piermarini (1734-1808), the creator of a total renewal of the city's urban plan, along with architectural masterpieces such as Palazzo Belgioioso, Palazzo Casnedi, Palazzo Cusani, and Palazzo del Monte di Pietà.

The nineteenth century was also the golden age of the Milanese theater. The citizens who took part in the evenings of music at La Scala, inflamed by the power of the melodramas, especially those of Giuseppe Verdi, left the theater prepared to fight for their country's independence. The romantic impulse flourished on the stage of the Teatro Filodrammatici (previously called Teatro Patriottico). On 30 December 1800, in fact, the curtain rose for the first time on Vittorio Alfieri's tragedy *Filippo*. This is the theater where the wife of Vincenzo Monti, Teresa Pickler, performed, but also the stalls of the Teatro Carcano (1803) and the Teatro Re (1813) all encourage the desire for liberation that the entire citizenry possesses and that is manifested in the "Cinque Giornate" (Five Days): the intellectual class, eminent among whom is the philosopher and economist Carlo Cattaneo, offers itself to lead. Less fervor appeared in the

Milanese boxes when, in 1861, national unification was achieved. Indeed despite a renewed enthusiasm for the reconstruction and planning of public works, the atmosphere remained tense, often spilling out in disturbances and uprisings on the part of the common people, who were sliding into conditions of extreme poverty. The Lombard capital followed all of the vicissitudes of the new-born Italian state (from Aspromonte to the convention of September 1864), including the possibility of a national liberation from Austria, seen to be allied with Bismarck in the conflict for the duchies of Denmark. War, which was looked to as a solution to all troubles, saw Italy defeated and humiliated. The city aspired to become an example for all of Italy. Evidence of this aspiration may be found in the journal *Il conciliatore* (1818-19), which is linked to the newborn patriotic movement, and Cattaneo's *Il politecnico* (1839), perhaps the most relevant cultural review of the time, which gave prominence to science and technology, considered as bridges towards development and social renewal; as well as in *The Teatro Milanese* (1869) of Cletto Arrighi (alias Carlo Righetti, 1830-1906) which tried to impose a new vision of the world of representational art, beyond the egotism of the *grande attore* (star actor) and the control of the theater manager; and the foundation, in 1882, of the S.I.A. (Società Italiana Autori), the first organization formed for the protection of artistic talent. At the end of the century, the enthusiasm that welcomed the annexation of Rome in 1870 was accompanied by the sad episode of the disturbances of 1898, when the general Bava Beccaris did not hesitate to fire against the striking workers of the Pirelli factory. The repressive intervention that followed was extremely harsh.

The beginning of the twentieth century took shape partly tied to the political ferments of the end of the nineteenth century, and partly rocked by new cultural ideas. The Scapigliatura movement's legacy soon gave way to the subversive wave of Futurism. One voice of the *scapigliato* fervor was the magazine *La folla* (1901), founded by Paolo Valera (1850-1926), a writer and novelist born in Como whose adopted city was Milan. His novel, *La folla* (1901; *The Crowd*), describes a post-industrial Milan that is estranged and decayed. Valera was part of the democratic *scapigliati*, to whom the successful dramatic author Carlo Bertolazzi (1870-1916), with his theater divided between popular atmospheres and bourgeois interiors, was also close. The poetry of Gian Pietro Lucini (1867-1914), his works teeming with symbolism and liberty, formed a bridge between Scapigliatura and Futurism. The golden age of the futurist avant-garde occurred, nevertheless, in what might be defined as the Milanese moment of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who founded the magazine *Poesia* (1905) in the Lombard capital. In this period he attracted the most livid minds in Italy: Ardengo Soffici and Aldo Palazzeschi for literature, Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla and Carlo Carrà for painting, who signed the *Manifesto dei pittori futuristi* (*Manifesto of the Futurist Painters*) in Milan in 1910. Although it was a radically anti-bourgeois movement, Marinetti's futurism seemed to find an ideal cradle in industrial Milan, which he saw as a new Paris and which the painters tied to him, like Boccioni; it also represented in the crudest and most violent aspects the chaos of its piazzas—*Rissa in Galleria* (1910) and *Baruffa* (1911), for instance.

In 1915 the winds of war began to blow fiercely. Nevertheless, in the city inflamed by Gabriele D'Annunzio, a delicate voice, that of the poet and novelist Ada Negri (1870-1945), made itself heard. In her lyricism, both meditative and intimate, there is a delicate socialist and feminist vein expressing a humble, Christian conception of existence, as in *Vespertina* (1930; *Vespertina*) and *Il dono* (1936; *The Gift*). But the greatest poetic voice of Milan *entre-deux-guerres* is that of Clemente Rebora (1885-1957). The war marked the young poet, who from his

very first writings revealed a distrust of progress and grasped the disturbing side of the industrialized city, to which he juxtaposed an ideal of social health that bore the stamp of Giuseppe Parini. At the same time, however, one senses in him the loss of the enlightenment faith in History, whose meaning he was scarcely able to understand. Poetry in dialect also re-acquired a leading role during the inter-war years. Long informed by the model of Carlo Porta, who was at once exemplary and stifling, dialectal poetry found new originality in the work of Delio Tessa (1886-1939). His collection *L'è el dì di mort, alegher!* (1932; *It's the Day of the Dead, Cheer Up!*) remains unknown because Tessa's cold sensibility is not understood, a sensibility which makes him depict a colorless and icy Milan. The innovative portion of Tessa's work resides in his unusual treatment of the themes already touched upon by the previous generation of dialectal lyric poets. The form, intended more for the ear than for the eye, tends towards a syntactic and rhythmic fragmentation, which reflects the traumatic nature of what is represented. The Milanese dialect is for the poet a living language which captures Milan's unharmonious chorus of bourgeoisie, lower classes, natives, and immigrants.

Between 1920 and 1940, the fascist regime did not seem to put a stop to its citizens' cultural projects. Milan acquired, in fact, an undisputed primacy in publishing with the rise of Mondadori and Rizzoli. *Il corriere della sera* (established in 1876) grew into the most important national daily, becoming an example for its publication of *elzeviri*, third-page articles which printed the thoughts of the literati on questions of culture, politics, and contemporary life. Periodicals of undisputed prestige were published, first among which is *Il convegno* founded by Enzo Ferrieri (1890-1969). Ferrieri was an acute intellectual, editor, director, and cultural promoter who established the Circolo del Convegno, a place for cultural debate in which the great names of literature participate and where Italo Svevo held two important conferences on James Joyce between 1920 and 1930. Ferrieri published hitherto unpublished works of Wedekind, Mann, Joyce, although not neglecting the Italian and specifically the Milanese *côté*. *Il convegno*, along with *L'esame* (1922) and *La fiera letteraria* (1925) and *900* (1926), helped to make the city's cultural scene less provincial, opening it up to the most innovative European currents. Ferrieri is also interested in the possible renewal of the national theater, not only devoting himself to the publication of new authors, but also paying attention to innovative trends in European productions. As a stage director he put his innovative intentions into practice by founding a small space, the Teatro del Convegno, which was unfortunately marked by fitful activity: the small theater was inaugurated in 1924 at Palazzo Litta and, only a year later, moved to the salons of via Borgospesso, the seat of the circle, where it remained until 1930. It re-opened subsequently in via Belgioioso, in Palazzo Besana, from 1956 to 1960.

Between the two world wars, the works and experiences of three prose-writers became prominent: Carlo Linati (1878-1949), Giovan Battista Angioletti (1896-1961), and Cesare Angelini (1887-1976). Their works fully manifest the Janus-face of Milanese culture, which was at once tied to its roots and attentive to the evolution of culture in Europe. But one of the greatest geniuses of Milan's twentieth-century literature remained Carlo Emilio Gadda (1896-1973), who was inclined to construct a system that would encompass History, in order to try to give it a meaning amidst the isolated fragments of an *opus unicum* that is sought for but never achieved. In his mature style, different languages and registers followed one another—including the technical, which derives from his studies of engineering—and form a complex, often dissonant polyphony. In *L'Adalgisa* (1944; *Adalgisa*), this *pastiche* is contaminated by the Milanese

dialect, which depicts the local bourgeoisie at the beginning of the century. The pastiche of existence is revealed in an omnivorous writing that devours everything, waging an endless struggle even as it harkens back to doubts that it will ever be resolved. With Gadda we begin to move in a Milan wounded by World War II, a Milan that slowly, after the liberation, resumed its cultural path firmly and decisively. One example is the administration's and populace's support at the birth in 1947 of the Piccolo Teatro, the first stable public Italian theater. Paolo Grassi and Giorgio Strehler's project signaled Milan's desire to make itself into an active national cultural center. Inaugurated the evening of May 14, the Piccolo became one of the poles around which post-war Milanese intellectual life gravitated; it also gathered at La Scala, which was reconstructed after the bombardments, and rediscovered itself in the pages of Elio Vittorini's *Il politecnico*. It is not by chance that the programmatic manifesto of the Piccolo Teatro appeared in the journal of this adopted Milanese (Vittorini was Sicilian). Vittorini reclaimed the name of Cattaneo's journal, making it into the voice of the new cultural ferment, and reflecting an intellectual gesture that is difficult to imagine in another city. Vittorini the novelist is also profoundly associated with Milan, with *Il garofano rosso* (1933; *The Pink Carnation*) and *Uomini e no* (1945; *Men and Not Men*), in which individual experience is made to bear universal values.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Milan encountered the poetry of Vittorio Sereni (1913-1983), the poetics of the object, colloquial language, and the meaning of landscape, both real and symbolic, which gives the artistic coordinates of the "Linea Lombarda". This distinguishes the works of artists (Milanese by birth or adoption) such as Giorgio Orelli, Nelo Risi, Luciano Erba, and Giovanni Raboni. The latter's work is distinguished by a poetic tending towards a high formal perfection, as in *Ogni terzo pensiero* (1993; *Every Third Thought*). Raboni, a poet, essayist and critic, not to mention organizer of various cultural enterprises involving the city, took the work of Rebora as his guide and considered poetry an indefeasible patrimony. The "Linea Lombarda", in its different generational waves, remained trapped between hermeticism and the neo-avant-garde. Represented by Gruppo 63, the latter rejected traditional lyricism. Although Gruppo 63 was born in Palermo, its Milanese spirit acquired central importance with Nanni Balestrini and Antonio Porta.

A further current, a descendant of Lombardian expressionism, is that of the dialectal lyrics of Franco Loi (1930-) and the experimentation of Giovanni Testori (1923-1993). Originally from Genova, Loi adopted the Milanese dialect and returned it to the artistic levels reached by Tessa. The expressionism of his predecessor is reversed in works in which there shines through a violent love for life, in a balance between prayer and blasphemy, which reflects an entirely human and subjective religiosity loaded with Biblical and Dantean echoes. Giovanni Testori was more inclined to follow the open path of Gadda's experimentations. His lyricism renders a dramatic vision of human destinies, described with a jumbled language crammed with oxymorons in a predominantly dialectal color, as in *I trionfi* (1965; *Victories*). Testori's Milan is that of the industrial outskirts, which he expressed in a convulsed and screaming voice. A neo-realist, Pasolinian dimension was already present in his debut short story "Il dio di Roserio" (1954; "Roserio's god") and was developed alongside a poetics of Manzonian references: reconstructing History with unknown cases of destitute people and a humiliated, wounded humanity. Such a poetic acquires great depth when we consider that, in 1958, the tale was included in the volume *Il ponte della Ghisolfa* (*The Ghisolfa Bridge*), the first book of the cycle *I*

segreti di Milano (The Secrets of Milan), to which the tales of *La Gilda del Mac Mahon* (1959; *Mac Mahon's Gilda*), the comedies *La Maria Brasca* (1960; *Maria Brasca*) and *L'Arialdia* (1961; *Arialdia*), and the novel *Il fabbricone* (1961; *The Factory*) also belong. The Testorian neo-realism of his themes is contaminated by the baroque expressionism of the style, which is meant to represent the tragic tensions of a world divided between predators and victims. Testori's city hides the inferno amidst the industrial outskirts and suburbs. Among the ranks of the Lombard avant-garde are also Alberto Arbasino and Pier Giorgio Manganelli, who, far from seeking a definitive form, make themselves the bearers of writing that is open to many possibilities.

The contemporary plots of literature and poetry also inevitably pass through the Milan that serves as the backdrop to the novels of Dino Buzzati (1906-1972), such as *Paura alla Scala* (1949; *Fear at La Scala*) and *Un amore* (1963; *A Love Affair*); through the dark, somber city of the detective stories of Giorgio Scerbanenco (1911-1969) and the acrid Milan of the debut novel of Aldo Busi (1948-), *Seminario sulla gioventú (Seminar on Youth; 1984)*; and through the city as filtered through the memory of Alberto Vigevani (1919-1999). There also emerged the delicate voice of the poetry of Alda Merini (1931-), who through psychic and spiritual upheaval constructed a terse lyricism devoid of intellectual experimentation. We should mention the rupture marked by the movement of the avant-garde and the impact of recent critical methodologies, havens for the new stylistic and narratological strategies. Using the tools of semiotics, Maria Corti (1915-2002) rediscovered the distance between the old novel and the contemporary novel. And new narrative implications may be found in the work of Giuseppe Pontiggia (1934-), in which the quest for one's own destiny and for truth is set within a vain and hypocritical Milan, as in *L'arte della fuga* (1968; *The Art of the Escape*), *Il giocatore invisibile* (1978; *The Invisible Player*), and *Il raggio d'ombra* (1988; *The Ray of Shadow*).

In closing, the 1980s saw the emergence of a new phenomenon, films mainly produced on the margins of the industry: Milan became one of the centers for alternative production companies committed to an innovative idea of filmmaking. They include Maurizio Nichetti's *Bambú Cinema & TV* (1987) and Silvio Soldini's *Monogatari* (1988). From his first feature film, *L'aria serena dell'ovest* (1990), to *L'anima divisa in due* (1992) and *Le acrobate* (1997), Soldini portrays his own city as a cold, claustrophobic metropolis, an incubator for political turmoil and corruption. Gabriele Salvatores, a Neapolitan director working in Milan, has also had a great influence, due to his success in capturing a new section of Italian society on film. His debut with *Kamikazen, ultima notte a Milano* (1987), a film on cabaret performers, proved to be successful with a new generation of actor-directors. Salvatores attended the Accademia d'Arte Drammatica at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan and founded the experimental Teatro dell'Elfo in 1972. The general idea was to take up a different cultural and economic space from commercial productions. During this time, in fact, certain corporate giants emerged to fill the gap created by deregulation, among them Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest (today's Mediaset), which owned the three major private networks (Canale 5, Telequattro, Italia 1). Berlusconi built his reputation out of popular TV programming (films, soap operas, cartoons) and advertising sales, thus attracting a massive viewership and providing a range of entertainment never experienced before on the RAI's national channels.

Further Reading

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