



◀ TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY ROWENA HILL ▶

ADRIATIC

GINA SARACENI

FOREWORD BY RAFAEL CASTILLO ZAPATA

EPILOGUE BY BETINA BARRIOS AYALA


Alliteration

ADRIATIC | GINASARACENI
Translated from the Spanish by Rowena Hill
First edition in English in July 2022

© Gina Saraceni
© Foreword by Rafael Castillo Zapata
© Epilogue by Betina Barrios Ayala
© Alliteration Publishing, 2022

Editorial Direction by Betina Barrios Ayala
Design by Elisa Barrios
Cover by Andrea Martínez
Editorial Coordination by Amayra Velón

ISBN: 979-8-9852666-1-0

LITTLE BALLAD TO ACCOMPANY AN ADRIATIC

1

One of the first emotions that this eloquent *Adriatic* inspires is enjoyment of the jubilant unfolding of the toponymy, loaded with affective resonances, that pervades it. The names of places, from one side to the other of the seas, interlace to create luminous celebratory litanies: San Vito, Fossacesia, San Nicola, Vomero, Napoli, San Domino, Aleppo, Montegranaro, resonate melodiously with Carenero, Cayo Sardina, Cata, Carmen de Uria, Gran Roque:

*The dogs went with us
when we climbed
the low mountain
of Gran Roque Island.
On the way,
I expected to catch sight of
the goat of San Nicola
which was also this island
where a lighthouse was aging at the top.*

Poetry creates impossible archipelagoes.

Poetry joins the separate islands, produces new imaginary cartographies starting from the symbolic synthesis of different and

distant places which keep, of course, their lovely original names but to refer now to transposed territories and climates, which live and endure only in memory and in feeling. Each name named is a little altar for the worship of some lar connected with the ancestral land, the Adriatic land of father and mother, but also with the new gods, the found gods, found and at the same time constructed, like temples, in the land of grace bathed by a different sea, the land of the Caribbean and the Caribs, out of which song knits its harmonic strings, its distinct reverent melodies. And so the names of animals and plants, the magnificent flora of the tropics and its spectacular birds, with their raucous cries, always present in the scenes that the poem depicts, with its gaze fixed on the constant Adriatic distance.

*Entering the house
with eyes closed.
Keeping still
while insects
hum and the world
pauses*

before the breathing tropics.

Coming and going, flowing from one sea to another sea, in a continual crossing, geographical and verbal, with the memory of the initiatory journey of the father who embarks on an adventure beyond his home plot and plants his house and engenders and nourishes and fills the welcoming spaces of the land where he arrives, and adopts its customs and adapts to its rhythms and its idiosyncrasies. From this pioneer Ulysses, Saraceni gets her eagerness for the journey, her constant nostalgia for the return home, her persistent trust in the promise of the sea. The whole of Adriatic is an elegy for the father; a serene and precise elegy for the founder of the family, rolled out on a wavelength that relates it, unavoidably, with one of the tutelary books of our modern

poetry, *Mi padre el inmigrante* [My Father the Immigrant] (1945) by Vicente Gerbasi, an obligatory reference point when we are moved to sing the paternal sagas, the legendary fables of the migratory journey and the encounter with the amazement and wonder of our vast equinoctial regions. Thus, *Adriatic* is firmly rooted in very fertile poetic soil and lives in it with the poets focused on place that our tradition has accumulated: Ramón Palomares, José Barroeta, Luis Alberto Crespo, Yolanda Pantin, Igor Barreto, among others. A book, then, that converses with a substantial vein in Venezuelan poetry. And not only with that vein: it also resounds with voices that are, let's say, less provincial, less rural, more urban, like the magnificent voice that inhabits the poetry of Mária Russotto, another daughter of immigrants who has succeeded in taking on in her work the challenge of integrating two cultures by means of a new language, who inaugurates a new expressivity imbued with irony and elegance of exposition. Roots that mingle in the nutritious soil where Saraceni's poetry sinks its firm ankles, beside an Antonia Pozzi or a Luz Machado, for example. Beside poets from both sides of the two seas with their lares and their vicissitudes, such as Antonio Gamoneda, Umberto Saba, Eugenio Montale and Eugenio Montejó. From this rich and powerful family comes *Adriatic*; it joins that web of relations, embraces those presences, shelters in their shade, and stretches out toward an open space where it grows at its ease, in full daylight, buffeted by the most emotive sea gales.

2

This is why the landscape is so important in this deeply visual poetry: all the poems in *Adriatic* allude to a carefully calculated geographical setting. Reading José Watanabe, another of her tutelary poets, Saraceni has learned to focus her gaze on nature in order to capture what is essential in it. What her most perfect

poems depict, it seems to me, has a family resemblance to the seasonal poems of the great Japanese masters: Basho, Kobayashi.

*Mangroves live
flush with the water,
they embrace the sea inside.*

In these landscapes in *Adriatic* animals always appear. Saraceni is emotionally predisposed to take the side of the animal; her predisposition is at the same time admiration and compassion, surprise and intimacy, deep closeness, empathy. Sometimes this closeness is manifested in the lightning flash of a striking epiphany:

*The grasshopper
vanishes
with a hop.*

*Its existence is measured
in the gust of a jump,
in its elastic presence
in the world.*

At other times the extreme closeness to the animal is ordered as a shared commotion, as when she looks at a painting by the Colombian artist Ricardo Gómez Campuzano and writes:

*A cow weeps in the landscape.
No one listens to her bellowing
that overflows the abyss
where the calf fell.*

*Her desolation
is white as milk,
hard as the peak.*

*It's too late
for anything
to appear.*

*She looks into the distance,
the cow of suffering.*

3

But the poet has not only fulfilled the mandate of her maternal grandmother who, in one of the book's clearly remembered poems, tells her 'guarda la natura', as a law to live by; and, obeying it, the successor has contemplated nature deeply and has identified with it, wild and salty, merciful and sensual, raising free-hand her light, brief Japanese landscapes. It is also possible to find in some of her poems subtle interiors, like delicate Dutch paintings, where a slanted gaze captures a domestic moment full of dramatic clarity:

My mother's silence

is a landscape

white

lonely

irreparable.

No one hears

old age.

In such a plastic poetry, so visual and sensual, the gaze of Eros could not, of course, be lacking: in this *Adriatic*, with its multiple gradients and tidal currents that converse from one end to the other of two continents, two climates, two languages, human love is not separate from the exuberance of that nature crammed with meanings on which Saraceni's voice hangs and depends:

*The mangoes grow yellow
in the heart that you leave
every night in my hands.*

*You keep your promise in my blood
like matter that falls
and strikes life
on the end of its tongue.*

*When a mango
touches the earth
the yellow goes mad
and the juice of its flesh screams
for you to come back.*

This is a book of love in many senses: of the loving memory of the ancestral roots of the family house, of loving exaltation before the existential plenitude of animals, of loving veneration and celebration of the body in the fever of its delights, and *Adriatic* closes with a surprising poem, ordered like a myth. Love sometimes has the strength to create a myth, to produce a story that cannot be other than legendary, fabulous, earthly as well as extraterrestrial, fantastic, mysterious. Saraceni is not afraid to play along with the mythical impulse of love arising, reckless and ready for anything, and thus makes of the *Adriatic* a character, a code for the beloved and the lover, with

whom she celebrates a happy wedding. A fine culmination for a book like this, sensual and joyful, which does no more than court plenitude.

Rafael Castillo Zapata

ADRIATIC



to Pedro Varguillas
to Rosa Maria Carlini
in memory of Alessandro Carlini
in memory of Lidia Carchini

Un paese ci vuole, non fosse che per il gusto di andarsene via.

*Un paese vuol dire non essere soli,
sapere che nella gente,
nelle piante, nella terra c'è qualcosa di tuo che,
anche quando non ci sei, resta ad aspettarti.*

CESARE PAVESE

Settembre, andiamo. È tempo di migrare.

*Ora in terra d'Abruzzi i miei pastori
lascian gli stazzi e vanno verso il mare:
scendono all'Adriatico selvaggio
che verde è come i pascoli dei monti.*

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

Perto de muita agua, tudo è feliz.

JOAO GUIMARAES ROSA

*... in their rapture
at being together, I find my own joy.*

CHARLES SIMIC

*La luz de nuestro litoral está hecha de una intensa blancura calina
que nos contrae las pupilas como en pocas latitudes de la tierra.*

*Los viajeros venidos de países lejanos,
sobre todo los que provienen de regiones septentrionales,
pronto advierten que aquí el hombre está obligado
a mirar de manera distinta, y acaso no poco del atractivo
que el trópico les proporciona arraiga en esa nueva sensación
de la mirada a que naturalmente han de someterse.*

*Las cosas no se perciben tanto por la precisión de sus contornos
o por las aristas de sus volúmenes; se nos vienen encima,
querámoslo o no, casi disueltas en bultos de flotantes esfuminos.*

*En los ardientes mediodías, aun bajo el ala del sombrero,
los párpados se pliegan hasta casi cerrarse,
defendiéndose de la abrasiva claridad.*

*Muchos hombres de nuestras costas guardan el hábito de verlo todo,
aunque haya caído la noche, por una breve hendija
que no deja adivinarles el color de los ojos.*

Ven como si durmieran.

EUGENIO MONTEJO

*The light of our shores is made of an intensely white haze
that contracts the pupils as in few regions of the earth.
Travelers from distant countries,
especially those from northern parts,
soon realize that people here are obliged
to look in a different way, and it could be that a good part
of the attraction of the tropics for them stems from that new sensation
of the gaze to which of course they have to submit.
Things are not perceived so much for the precision
of their outlines or the angles of their volumes; they come at us,
like it or not, almost dissolved in bundles of shaded floaters.
At burning noons, even under the brim of a hat,
eyelids fold until they almost shut,
defending themselves from the abrasive brightness.
Many men of our coasts retain the habit of looking at everything,
even after nightfall, through a narrow crack
that does not allow the color of their eyes to be discerned.
They see as if they were asleep.*

EUGENIO MONTEJO

Radici

*Como planta
que busca la luz
y se tuerce hacia ella,
la casa huye hacia el mar,
atraviesa mesetas
sabanas, montes,
llega a la playa,
a las olas que retumban
con las aves del verano,
a la vida de un pez
que ensancha el mundo,
a la raíz del padre
que se llama Adriático:
así el mar,
así la casa.*

Radici

Like a plant
that seeks the light
and twists toward it,
the house flees toward the sea,
crosses plateaux
savannas, hills,
reaches the beach,
the waves echoing
with the birds of summer,
a fish's life
that broadens the world,
the root of the father
whose name is Adriatic:
so the sea,
so the house.

Trabocco

*En el litoral abruzzese
hay un animal prehistórico
que sobrevivió a la extinción.
Entre el mar y las rocas
su cuerpo de madera
resiste el golpe de las olas.
Parece un insecto gigante
con patas desiguales
y una larga cola que
llega hasta la orilla.*

*Esta antigua estructura,
—similar a un palafito—
sirvió durante siglos
para la pesca con redes.*

*El poeta Gabriele D'Annunzio
—nativo de esta costa—
dijo de él que parecía
el colosal esqueleto
de un anfibio antediluviano.*

*No hay Adriático
sin este insecto de madera
que pide que lo salvemos
de la destrucción.*

Trabocco

On the Abruzzi coast
there's a prehistoric animal
that survived extinction.
Between the sea and the rocks
its wooden body
resists the beating of the waves.
It looks like a giant insect
with uneven legs
and a long tail that
reaches the shore.

This ancient structure
—similar to a palafitte—
was used for centuries
for fishing with nets.

The poet Gabriele D'Annunzio
—born on this coast—
said of it that it looked like
the colossal skeleton
of an antediluvian amphibian.

There's no Adriatic
without this wooden insect
which is asking us to save it
from destruction.

Geografía

*Las clases de geografía
me enseñaron
a imaginar el mundo.
En un atlas
buscaba los países,
los mares, los desiertos,
y me preguntaba
cómo podía haber
tanta inmensidad
en una página.*

*Una vez,
para un examen,
tuve que elegir
un continente
y escogí Oceanía
por los canguros
que cargan
a sus pequeños
y saltan como grillos
en la sabana.*

*Mi abuela me decía
guarda la natura
entonces empecé
a buscar el mundo
entre la hierba,
cerca de las piedras,
en medio de las hojas.*

*La geografía se
volvió la espera
de lo que tarda
en revelarse.*

Geography

Geography classes
taught me
to imagine the world.
In an atlas
I looked for the countries,
the seas, the deserts,
and I wondered
how such immensity
could fit
on a page.

Once,
for an exam,
I had to choose
a continent
and I chose Oceania
because of the kangaroos
that carry
their babies
and jump like crickets
on the savanna.

My grandmother told me
guarda la natura
so I began
to look for the world
in the grass
beside the stones
among the leaves.

Geography
became the wait
for what takes time
to be revealed.

Infancia

a Alejandro

*Los niños que juegan en la orilla
serán peces en la corriente.*

Childhood

to Alejandro

The children playing on the shore
will be fishes in the current.