

A LITERARY ITINERARY FULVIO TOMIZZA



ITINERARY 1 Materada – Petrovija [7 km]



FORUM
TOMIZZA



GRADSKA KNJIŽNICA UMAG
BIBLIOTEKA CIVICA UMAGO

ITINERARY 1: Materada/Matterada – Petrovija/Petrovia [7 km]

1. MATERADA / MATTERADA

This literary itinerary starts in the little parish of Matterada where Fulvio Tomizza was born. It is also the place where he rests, next to his forefathers, in the silence of the small graveyard. Matterada is the title of his first of many novels, giving witness to his profound attachment to the parish founded by an ancestor, the steward Giorgio Tomice in 1668, as confirmed by the inscription on the architrave of the church in Matterada.

The house was built with six doors and eighteen windows on each side. The stables were opposite stretching the full length of the house. This became the embryo of Giurizzani and he became its master. Then the church in Materada was built and he put his name on the architrave of the main door, together with the date 1668 and his new title of steward to which he was unanimously elected.

(Il sogno dalmata, Milano, Mondadori 2001, p.22).

The village of Matterada consists of a cluster of houses assembled around the church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows. Giurizzani and Matterada are close together and, although the first is larger, the latter is better known because it has the parish church. In the church there are two stones inscribed in the glagolitic alphabet dating back respectively to 1531 and 1535. These stones were incorporated in the building from the very beginning, but their importance was discovered much later. Tomizza's character, Martin Crusich, recounts the amazing discovery in the novel *La miglior vita*:

I found him kneeling in the middle of the aisle intent on copying down, not the main inscription on the Radovan's tombstone, but the strange



half worn signs inside a circle on the next stone. The signs looked like a dense sequence of miniature rakes and pitchforks „This is big – was his greeting while getting up – a very interesting glagolitic inscription that will be useful for my dissertation“... So I learnt that under the Venetians, there was a small pre-existing community, probably wiped out by the plague in 1630, which had its own chapel run by an Illyric priest, who was using glagolitic, the first Slavonic alphabet.

(La miglior vita, Milano 1977, Rizzoli p.41)

MATERADA'S GRAVEYARD

We left the church for the cemetery a few steps away. It was noon and the bell started chiming again. We were singing the Credo, and now our song floated out over the low stone wall and down to the fields below. You could hear the bells of Buje, then those of Carsette, and Verteneglio, Petrovia, and San Lorenzo.

(...) The other bells fell silent; only our resisted. But it, too, seemed ready to stop and, after few loud chimes, died completely. The singing stopped as well.

(...) I looked at the tombs. What with all their weeds they looked like mounds of earth on the backs of enormous moles and I thought of our deceased.

(...) An acre of that rockless land had sufficed for them all; it could have sufficed for us and our children too. „Farewell to our dead“, said one woman aloud.

(Materada, Northwestern University Press, 1999 – translation by Russell Scott Valentino; p. 134)

In his novel *Materada* while describing the suffering of the Kozlović brothers and the plight of their land, Tomizza narrates the fate of the people polarised by hatred, resentment and revenge, but also seeking a new, definite sense of identity. Francesco Kozlović (Coslovich in Italian) and his brother Berto work on their uncle's land which is to be inherited by his son who lives in Trieste. On their uncle's advice, they buy the land from him, but the new regime nationalises it. They start a legal case to get back the land that has always belonged to their family but to no avail. In the end Francesco will take the agonising decision to leave his country and tear off the roots that link him to his homeland.

“Uncle Tio” I said, “don't you think it's about time we came to some agreement about the land?” (...) We have to know how things stand. What will be left to us in case of misfortune?”

(...) “Slow down now. Your land is at Kerso. It's more than enough. (...) I bought the land for you. It's not my fault if the communism came and took it. Go and yell at the communists. I've done my duty”.

(Materada, Northwestern University Press, 1999 – translation by Russell Scott Valentino; pp 12-13)

It was the day Berto and I were plowing the vines in Salia. (...) It had been a



fine year. The fields were beautiful. The potatoes had come up well, the hay pretty well, the wheat really well, we'd dodged the hail, and now all we needed was two little inches of rain to strengthen the corn: we'd have all we wanted. But our field was located on a hill, and the land underneath was still wet. The two steers pulled like we were plowing in sand.

(...) We finished an hour before sunset, and I'd taken the harness off the steers so they could graze where they liked along the paths. Berto was sitting under the pear tree. I went up to him and offered him a cigarette. We sat in silence, passing the flask with water and vinegar back and forth. Then we switched to the bottle of wine and started to talk. "Well Berto?"

"I don't know. You tell me, Franz."

"No. Now we're alone and we have to decide together. What do the women say?"

"You know them. They're like the others. They'd go at the drop of a hat, on foot even."

"And you?"

"I don't want to leave the land. We can't leave it, Francesco. It's ours and it's good land. None better anywhere."

"I agree. It's ours, but we can't have it. If we waited another ten years, things might sort themselves out. But what will be left of us and our kids in ten years? And what will be here in ten years?"

"So you're for going?"

"There's nothing else left. The way things are, we've no choice."

"Even if they gave you the land?"

"Even if they gave me the land." I answered calmly.

(...) "Old Man Nin was right: we are not made for this regime. Maybe it takes another kind of stomach. Or maybe you get used to it a little at a time, but I don't want that. I'm afraid of it."

(...) A gust of the north wind came up from the sea, carrying the fragrance of the freshly tilled soil, of red earth, the likes of which you can't find anywhere. My brother took a deep breath, then lowered his head and: "Let's go Franz. We'll always be damned like the others. Let's leave now when the country is getting prettier by the day. Do you remember a year like this?"

(Materada, Northwestern University Press, 1999 – translation by Russell Scott Valentino; pp 103-105)

The itinerary continues from Materada to Juricani (Giurizzani). Take the country path on the left of the car park, which leads to an olive grove. After the olive grove, turn slightly to the right and continue for 1 km on the trail until you meet the tarmac road Čepljani - Juricani (Cipiani - Giurizzani) and turn right to Juricani (Giurizzani).

2. JURICANI /GIURIZZANI

Giurizzani is exactly halfway between Buje and Umago, and all the houses have electric lights. As we came down from Băbizza, we could hear the commotion from the tavern as far back as the pond – bicycles ringing their bells, young people laughing, a few saxophone and trumpet notes.

(Materada, Northwestern University Press, 1999 – translation by Russell Scott Valentino; pp. 17-18)

Giurizzani, the largest village in this area, features greatly in most of the novels quoted in this guide. In the past it used to be the main economic centre of the district, as it had the local pub, the food store, run by Tomizza's mother, the post office and the school. Today, in the village there is only the primary Croatian school and the Dom – the Culture centre, built immediately after the war. The latter hosts the local Italian Community, founded in 2002

The central part of the village spread out. On the side of the Italian school, where now the teaching was only in Croatian, the foundation of the largest building constructed in the parish after Radovans' house was laid... The building overlooking the main road was hardly finished, when another was started right behind it, and in due time grew to the same size(...) Such an undertaking required working on Sundays as well as, by engaging brigades of students and workers drawn from Buje and Umago. Similar and even flashier buildings were sprouting up in other communities where there was a local committee headquarter.

On the ground floor of the first building there were a bar, a butcher's, and the food store with an annexed shed for hardware, pesticides and fertilizers (...) The one behind it consisted only of a large dance hall with a stage reserved for the brassband, speakers and itinerant artists."

(La miglior vita, Milano 1977, Rizzoli p.p. 202-203-204)

Grandma Cecilia was the only member of the two families of my youth who stayed in Istria. She kept living in her small house in Giurizzani, with the stable and the vegetable garden at the back, and the main road Buie-Umago to the front. Hers was the last house on the left of the village of my birth, while only twenty metres further on, towards the church of Materada, where the buses used to stop and there was a post office, hidden in a tangle of wild figs, stood the aqueduct fountain with the tubs for the laundry and the drinking trough for the cattle, which was built during Mussolini's Italy. At that point, the main road, which has since been tarmacked, meets an unpaved road which leads to the furthest village in the parish, Vardizza, located on a karsic plain; but after only about hundred metres, after the pond, another, even smaller, road leads to a hamlet of four houses, where I'm currently staying.

(*rapporti colpevoli*, Tascabili Bompiani, Milano 2009, p.121)

THE PUBLIC WATER FONT IN GIURIZZANI

For centuries the lack of water was the main reason for people's poor hygiene and ill health conditions. It was also the main hindrance for the development of agriculture. People would get the water from the Potocco, the only stream which still flows from the hills of Buie to Umago, and from the many ponds called *lachi*. There were several springs scattered along the coast, while the only public cistern, built in 1667, was located in the main square in Umago.

The water font in Giurizzani is one of the many built in Istria in the Thirties. At the time, the building of the Great Istrian Aqueduct was the greatest development to the infrastructure undertaken by the Italian State in the area. The original project proposed three distribution networks across the peninsula, each one fed by a separate water supply.

Towards the end of 1934 Umago was connected to the Quieto river water network. A series of 34 water fonts were erected between Umago and the surrounding villages. The fonts built in red brick or Istrian stone, satisfied all the needs of the villagers as they provided running water, and supplied the tubs for the laundry and the drinking trough for the cattle.

Continuing on, take the road located at the Istrian aqueduct fountain, which leads to the village of Babica (Babizza). At the next intersection, take the small road to the left and after nearly 1 km you will reach the village of Momikija (Momichia). At the far end of the village and on the left side, an untarmac lane will take you to the small house where Fulvio Tomizza lived.

3. MOMIKIJA / MOMICHIA

In the Seventies, Tomizza bought a little house in Momichia, a little secluded hamlet not far from Giurizzani. His intention was to revert to a simpler life style, more in tune with the rhythms of nature. In that quiet spot he would write his best pages.

The tension between the different areas had considerably subsided and, in the



wake of renewed mingling among the border populations, I also started to spend few days here and there. Days that would become months. They would become the full months of my peasant life, when my brain was overwhelmed with secret and bizarre moods. I found a wreck of a house enclosed by woods and olive trees, which did not preclude the view of the sea, in a secluded corner of the parish, and I re-built it as a small house for my modest needs as a repatriated person. Slowly I reconnected with the unparalleled landscape and with the few people who had stayed on. I learnt to grow the vegetable garden and to control the neglected, too exuberant vegetation. I converted the attic into a writing room with the table against the window and all the necessary paraphenalia. Here, since 1972, alternating between writing and farming, I have written the second half of my literary outpour.

(*Le mie estati letterarie*, Marsilio, Venezia 2009, p. 135).

4. TOWARDS PETROVIJA / PETROVIA

The itinerary continues along the boundary of Tomizza's olive grove, up to the hamlet of Picudo (Pizzudo). Cross the intersection with the tarmac road and continue through woodland and fields until you meet the Potok (Potocco) stream. You will see a bridge near the village of Petrovia. A left turn will take you into the village.

After a kilometre on the main road towards Umago, he turned onto the dusty dirt track which runs through the acacias towards the Potoc stream, dry often even in winter. The lane, shady with tall brambles, reminded him stories of when from Materada to the sea, it was all a huge oak forest and one could move from branch to branch without ever touching the ground.

(*La quinta stagione*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano 1987, p.100)