

**“Italian journalists travelling to the USSR”.**

The Italian cultural context of the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by the close union between literature and journalism, with the all Italian phenomenon of the “Terza pagina”. This issue contributed also to determine a significant turning point in the consideration of the travel reportage, with an increase of frequency of articles in the Italian newspapers of the foreign correspondent from the 1930s onwards. In most cases, writers were chosen to be sent on site, adding this way to the opportunity of investigation, that motivated the journalistic service itself, the literary depth and peculiar interpretation of a different reality full of original narrative-reflexive trends (Zava 2019: 47-49). Cases such as those of Guido Piovene, Giorgio Bocca, Arrigo Levi and Tiziano Terzani, are representative of this tendency of blending in the reportages from USSR different components, in order to introduce the Italian reader both the political, economic and social analyses of the Soviet reality through the observation and comments on places, situations and people (very often supported by data and information gathered on site) and to present the writer’s overall and personal experience of the travel, consisting of perceptive landscape, environmental and cultural stimuli.

**GUIDO PIOVENE**

In the broad panorama of 20th century journalism, Guido Piovene turns out to be one of the most brilliant examples of a writer who wrote for newspapers and magazines, in the name of a journalism that, while aiming to portray current affairs and major national and international historical events, in search of the real intrinsic implications concerning the real human and social relationships, did not lose that stylistic quality and that refinement of structure and fluency that are characteristic of his narrative and non-fiction production. The case of Piovene is particularly exemplary, by virtue of his multifaceted experience as a journalist, but also as a art and film critic, a writer, and a regular contributor to the Terza pagina of the major national/Italian and European newspapers.

When he left for his journey to the Soviet Union in 1960, Guido Piovene was already a well known journalist and writer, best known to the general public for the radio and then TV success of his « Viaggio in Italia » and the publication of a literary guide in 1956. On his return from France, the journalist was commissioned by the newspaper « La Stampa » to send a series of articles from the USSR over the course of a long journey, articulated in an elaborate itinerary. This itinerary,

proposed to him by the Turin newspaper, fuelled even more the author's analytical spirit and amplified that natural drive towards geographical, social and cultural enquiry.

The uncertain climate of thaw inaugurated by Khrushchev provided the backdrop to the journey of the journalist, who was accompanied by his ever-present wife Mimy, whose testimony was useful in adding a few more details to the writer's story. Perhaps only the experience of the travel reports of the journalist Piovene can justify the writer's long and so carefully planned journey. Piovene understands and makes clear to the readers the *sui generis* experience represented by the journey to the Soviet Russia from the very first lines of the opening article of his reportage, «The novelty of the trip should be in the periphery, but the means to examine my observations can only be gathered in the capital».

Piovene's journey in the Soviet Union, and consequently the perspective from which the local reality is observed, arise from certain guiding lines, resulting from the direction of the gaze clearly stated by the author. The investigation criterion that emerges in clear-cut is the essential parameter against which the observation of the Soviet reality is determined by the detection of the advancement of the new and the persistence of the old, the consideration of how the spread of Soviet ideology mixes and comes into contact with a tradition that in many cases survives and coexists with the new, giving rise to inevitable contradictions.

Piovene Soviet journey confirms the extraordinary blend of limpid, narrative and descriptive style, with which he tackles the contradictory and multiple landscapes of Eastern Europe and Asian territories, and of profound attention and journalistic analysis with which he approaches the local culture and people.

## **GIORGIO BOCCA**

Journalist and essayist, Giorgio Bocca trained during the Resistance time, in which he participated as a partisan. His activity as an essayist continued in the following years with investigative works on Italian history and political and social reality. He travelled the USSR during Breznev time, in 1973 and wrote articles that arouse controversies in the Soviet newspaper "Pravda". From his report, in 1974 he published his book "La Russia di Breznev". In the introduction of this book he immediately stated that, «To know and understand 1973 Russia is a difficult task, not only and not so much because of the obstacles it places in the way of knowledge, the denied statistics, the closed zones, the evaded discourses, but because misunderstandings weigh on it for which we are partly responsible» (1974 : 3).

Bocca referred these misunderstandings referring to the role played by USSR in WWII and its final outcome as one of the winner countries. He starts a strict analysis of Soviet history of 20th century

giving different interpretations of facts, weighing up political, economical and social events that make Soviet Union a reality difficult to know, due to the lack of its interpretive keys. Russian interpretation of time, traditions, the national philosophy are different from the Western ones. The propaganda has an important role in the country<sup>1</sup>; everything has to be observed using a different eye. Bocca still referred to USSR as «the other planet », as Emanuelli did in the 30s (cfr. the title of his book «Planet Russia »). However, Bocca lists also some reasons because in 1973 it is easier to know Russia for Italians: the first one depends on the fact that Italian Communist party started writing down its own history that, according to Bocca, coincides with the Soviet one. For Bocca USSR is better known in 1973 because of the stable and widespread presence of European workers and technicians in Soviet companies, who can observe the Soviet world from the inside, who has confidential relations with the inhabitants and who knows how to give the right indications and suggest appropriate verifications to the reporter. The main topics he deals with in his articles and reportage concern the new Stalinism, the conditions of Soviet life, the productive systems of factories and in the countryside, the different realities of some Soviet countries like Georgia, the phenomena of propaganda and the cultural life in cities like Moscow and Leningrad.

As every traveller, also Bocca tries to give the Italian a 360-degree look at the Soviet reality commenting on data and the latest events in the country. At the end of his reportage he made a number of assumptions on the future of USSR (to become a consumerist country like other western countries, hypothesis of a liberal-bourgeois revolution or reform, that of the resumption of the march of socialism, or still the possibility of becoming a world hegemony. From these pages it comes out Bocca's sharp writing more inclined to moralistic outrage than to calm or ironic exposition.

## ARRIGO LEVI

He was a correspondent from London for the "La Gazzetta del Popolo" and "Il Corriere di Informazione" and from Moscow for "Il Corriere della sera", a special correspondent for "Il Giorno" and later an editor of the RAI Telegiornale and from 1973 to 1978 editor of the newspaper "La Stampa", he collaborated as a journalist also with "The Times" and the American weekly "Newsweek".

He wrote "Tra Est e Ovest. Cronache di un trentennio 1960-1989", a long collection of articles from USSR that covers the years 1960 to 1989. The period witnesses the long experience A. Levi had in USSR history, politics, economics. The first title of his collection of articles had to be «The world tour in 40 years». He spent during the 60s several years in Moscow and from there he had a

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<sup>1</sup> He refers to the falsification of propaganda during the Stalin era.

privileged position of observation on what was happening in Khrushchiov's age. Some of the most interesting articles concern the life of Western people in USSR and the relationship between Khrushchev and Russian people, the poets of the 60s and the facts of Babij Jar, the rivalry with America for the conquest of space, the facts of Prague in 1968 and «the Ostpolitik», the point of view of Moscow on the birth of a united Europe, the first and second détetes and the rise of Gorbachev and the new politics of *perestrojka*. The book maintains the journalist spirit, but the informative tone is very often mingled with personal and reflexive impressions of the writer, which allows the reader to participate first-hand in the narrated events and tracing this way the development of the Soviet society during the long period of thirty years.

## TIZIANO TERZANI

In the 70s he was a correspondent from Singapore for «Der Spiegel», then he collaborated with several newspapers and reviews, including «Il Giorno», «l'Espresso», «La Repubblica», «Il Messaggero» and «Il Corriere della Sera», witnessing the crucial stages of the war in Vietnam and the seizure of power by the Communists.

He demonstrated an aptitude for geographical and cultural investigation, rendered with a lively way of writing and aimed not so much at purely information, but rather to a mapping of the complex dynamics that intimately link the environment, the tradition and the human reality. The 1992 reportage, «Goodnight, Mr Lenin», was the result of Terzani's journey in the Soviet Union between August and September 1991, precisely at the historical stage when the Soviet Union was in disintegration until its official dissolution on 26th December.

«Goodnight, Mr Lenin» follows the development of a narration where, on the one hand, it reveals the author bent on the search for the 'true' and is animated by a feverish curiosity and a devouring interest in 'man', and on the other hand the book reveals the fascination exerted on Terzani by those almost mythical places where one comes across real characters, living or passed away but still floating, with their ideas (Politi 2023: 2). The exploratory context is in line with the consideration of how important the constant and dynamic intertwining of the geographical element and the events of human history and how much this can constitute a parameter of investigation and evaluation for Terzani: it is an expedition along the Siberian river Amur, the border line between the Soviet Union and China, with all the relevance that in such a case a precise territorial component entails in the management of political events. The news of the putsch that tried to remove Gorbachev from power caught Terzani right on the Amur, arousing in him the need to completely change his itinerary to see how, in the Soviet cities and regions the changes that history was dictating were taking place, applying from the very first reflections that parameter of historical investigation that cannot detach

itself from the environmental context. Terzani's text is therefore the expression of a contamination of genres; the narrative typology, specifically characterised by the constant oscillation between reportage, travelogue, memoir, odeporic writing, reporting of facts, personalised discourse and documented enquiry. The ability to make through conceptual and visual descriptions the events before the reader's eyes does not follow the paths of classical perspective, which essentially aims to provide the illusion of as faithful a representation of space as possible. Thus the journey, which was supposed to last only two weeks, expands into a time of two months, placing itself in a geographic space that, sliding down the Amur along the border with China, 'towards the geographical end of the Soviet empire' (Terzani 2005: 10), leads the narrator into 'the historical end of that empire. [...] in a country where the party no longer existed anymore, in a system that, having lost its glue, was falling apart' (Terzani 2005: 10-13).