

Book review

Giani Stuparich, *One Year of School and The Island*, translated by Charles Klopp and Melinda Nelson, Agincourt Press: New York, 2021; 108 pp.: 978-1946328298, US\$15.99 (pbk)

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As evidenced by its title, *One Year of School and The Island* contains two stories, both by the Triestine author Giani Stuparich (1891–1961). “One Year of School” (1929) and “The Island” (1943) were written and published in fascist Italy and, although neither fascism nor war are directly mentioned in the stories, they reflect the trauma and disruption of the First World War and its aftermath. The stories offer important perspectives on the transnational literature of Trieste, but can also be considered in terms of European literary traditions more broadly. Readers of Anton Chekhov, Thomas Mann, and Katherine Mansfield will see shared thematic and stylistic preoccupations in Stuparich’s stories, which describe first love, school experiences, fraught father–son relationships, illness, and contemplations of death, especially in the latter of the two stories: “He wasn’t denying the inevitability of death, but he was rebelling at the tragic struggle between a sound and healthy organism and a cruel and insidious illness” (p. 89).

While Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba, authors in Stuparich’s social circle, are well known, Giani Stuparich is part of a group, along with his friend Scipio Slataper, student Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, and Roberto Bazlen, of important Triestine authors who tended to be ignored outside of academic circles and certainly in English-speaking ones. This translation joins other recent ones, such as Roberto Bazlen’s *Notes Without a Text*, translated by Alex Andriessse (Dalkey Archive Press, 2019), and Scipio Slataper’s *My Karst*, translated by Elena Coda and Nicholas Benson (University of Toronto, 2021), that reveal the variety of the literature of this fascinating city to English readers. While Stuparich’s stories are more traditional in form than these two works, they have also often been overlooked partly because they reflect the particularity of Trieste and its environs.

Stuparich plays an important role in Trieste studies, not only as a writer himself but also as a connecting figure. Unlike his brother Carlo (also a writer) and Scipio Slataper, Giani Stuparich survived fighting in the First World War and carried on these authors’ legacies by editing their works. Stuparich’s non-fiction publications such as *La nazione Ceca* and *Machiavelli in Germania* are testaments to how he brought Austro-Hungarian (German, Slavic, Nordic) cultures into Italian. His stories can also be read in the context of different national traditions, most obviously Italian, Austrian,

and German. In Italian, the works of Stuparich have been positively received by writers such as Eugenio Montale (who called him the “most discreet” of authors) and Claudio Magris.

Based on several real figures, “One Year of School” is significant to consider in terms of education, women, and masculine spaces. It describes a group around Edda Marty, “a very brave girl, the first to try for a place in that all-male school” (p. 21). Many of the boys view Edda’s joining their class as a sign that society is disintegrating. Edda, meanwhile, longs to be in a place with a more open culture: “Why didn’t she live in a real city like Vienna, where women could smoke, go to cafés, come home late at night, and be treated as equals by men—even get into arguments with them?” (p. 23). Edda’s struggles add to the picture of Triestine women intellectuals, like Alberta, sister of Ada and Augusta in *La coscienza di Zeno*, and those of real writers such as Willy Dias, Lina Galli, Haydée, and Elody Oblath (Stuparich’s wife). Trieste is frequently described, perhaps most famously by Saba, as being behind other European cities, but it also produced great works of modernism. These tensions are evident in Stuparich’s writing and the characters themselves, for instance Mitis who “had come to a decision: he was going to study and do things. Political activism was what he was born for; he’d provide Trieste with the bold vision and constructive energy that the city needed” (p. 45). The character then goes on to research, “Istria, Trieste, issues that had to do with the Adriatic region, irredentism; at home he boned up by reading Tacitus, Dante, Machiavelli” (p. 45).

The works of Stuparich are part of a rich tradition and conversations that used to be minimized. The writings of Emma Bond, Mimmo Cangiano, Elena Coda, Thomas Harrison, Charles Klopp (one of the translators), Salvatore Pappalardo, Sandra Parmegiani, Nicoletta Pireddu, Katia Pizzi, and Elizabeth Schächter show the significance of considering discourses about the Mediterranean, world literature, language philosophy, European identities, transnationalism, and globalism in examinations of Austro-Italian literature. As publications on the Italian-speaking authors from territories of the former Habsburg Empire have grown, new literary works that explore Austro-Italian connections, such as Andrea Molesini’s *Not All Bastards Are from Vienna*, Francesca Melandri’s *Eva Sleeps*, and Hans von Trotha’s *Pollak’s Arm*, have also appeared and been translated into English. The translation of Stuparich’s stories is part of an increased scholarly and popular interest in borders, particularly those between Italy and Austria, and their literatures.

The brief preface roots Charles Klopp and Melinda Nelson in a history of people from outside Italy or Austria who are fascinated by Trieste, a list that ranges from James Joyce to Jan Morris to Veit Heinichen. Klopp’s introduction provides clear and comprehensive context for understanding Stuparich’s engaging stories and ends by mentioning that “One Year of School” has already been translated into French, Croatian, German, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, and Dutch. Translations into English often lag behind others. With their careful and fluid prose, Klopp and Nelson bring Stuparich’s Triestine views of Europe and early 20th-century life to an anglophone audience. The work should interest both scholars of Trieste and broader readers of fiction, especially literature from borderlands.