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In Val Bregaglia, in the mountains, and far away

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On the road to Smolensk - woods, woods, woods.

On the road to Smolensk - posts, posts, posts.

On the road to Smolensk, like your eyes, -

Two icy stars - my blue destinies.

On the road to Smolensk, a song by Bulat OkudZava

The streams descending from the watershed of the Lunghin pass (2645 m) near the Maloja carry their waters to three distant seas, spaced far apart: the En - which gives its name to Engadine - , runs eastwards to the Danube, which then flows into the Black Sea. The Julia and other torrents head north, towards the Rhine and the North Sea. Southward bound is the Mera which crosses Val Bregaglia to reach Lake Como and the Adda, the river of Valtellina and a tributary of the Po River: the Po flows into the Adriatic Sea. In the central part of Val Bregaglia, a path originating in the valley floor, amid meadows and forests, in Stampa, leads to the sun-lit terrace of Soglio, which dominates the valley, especially its outlet, its shiny south-west opening towards Valchiavenna and Italy. In Stampa the path begins with a stone bridge poised over the pale and stony bed of the Mera, close to Alberto Giacometti's paternal house: a pink house on the roadside right across from the stop of the mail-coach which links Sankt Moritz (High Engadine) to Castasegna (Italian-Swiss border). The caravans of the ancient Romans on their way to and from the Settimo pass, or to and from the Maloja and the Julier used to go through Stampa, and in the 19th century the silk merchants would stop by on their way through Val Bregaglia. The village of Stampa was the first stage along the mountain route: visitors stopped at the Ciasa Granda, the only noble mansion in the area, built in the 16th century not without a certain essential splendour.

Moving on up, after Stampa, past Vicosoprano, the high valley gradually becomes darker and wilder, narrower and taller; finally it is hemmed in by the steep, forest-covered slopes of the Maloja pass. And those who get to the top of the Maloja (1815 m) are offered an unencumbered view of the crystalline, vast Engadine plateau, of the dark sheets of water of its lakes, of the majestic amphitheatre formed by the bare mountains, which rise solemn above the prairie where the short grass blades are hardened by the rough climate and the wind. Between Stampa and the village called Maloja there is an eight-hundred meter difference in level: up there the light is so pure, the air so light and clear, the mountain tops and the sky so close that one feels one has reached the summit of the world and is seized by an exhilarating mystical sensation. The High Engadine was to Nietzsche and to Segantini their chosen homeland, the ideal place, a symbol of their destinies. Down in Val Bregaglia it is different: sheltered by the mountains, the narrow valley is filled with shadow far hours, days on end, or invaded by the sparkling heat mist that conceals the landscape on the warm afternoons of the summer season. Only in winter would Segantini come down to Soglio

and stay at the Salis Palace hotel to find a milder climate. At Maloja, Alberto's father, the painter Giovanni Giacometti (1868-1933), had introduced himself one day to Segantini, whom he admired and regarded as his master: they had become friends; up there he also had a house and a studio. During the last years of his life Giovanni Giacometti mostly portrayed the landscape, the localities and the people of the High Engadine. Another painter, Augusto Giacometti (1877-1947), a distant relative of Giovanni and Alberto, also from Stampa, had won - and still maintains - some recognition, at least in Switzerland. Augusto Giacometti had moved to Zurich early, to Zurich and to Florence, from the time of his school years, but he used to come home every now and then («I remember that one summer afternoon, while I was going to Plaun da Lej by boat with my uncle, my aunt and my cousin Diego [...], we saw, in the mail-coach, Augusto Giacometti on his way to Stampa where he was going spend a few weeks' vacation. My uncle said: "Augusto is on the coach" or, as we say in our dialect "Agusto". No further words were added [...]»¹).

Near Stampa, beyond the small settlement of Coltura, a 18th century church, San Pietro, rises from the top of a wooded hill in a glade; it is an Evangelical reformed church (as is natural here), with its little churchyard. Inside, the walls are white washed, bare, but on the further wall, beneath the corbel arch, there is a fresco by Augusto Giacometti, dated 1915, with luminous springtime colours: *The morning of the Resurrection*. An angel sits at the centre, with a serious look on his young, squarish face, with a yellow-orange garment and wings, on the purple floor flowers are scattered, forming red patches; the angel sitting with his wings unfurled against a turquoise background; to the left, a small gate lost in the green (turquoise) wood, the clothes of the two pious women blending in with the hues of that fresh, celestial morning vegetation, (And outside, in the sun, on this cool early morning in September: red dahlias and purple asters in the vegetable gardens, brick walls lining the paths, dark, scintillating rocks in the meadows, elders; above, the mountain summits, and the glaciers flooded with warm light, a woman hanging out sheets in her backyard, lightly murmuring fountains, doors opened onto stables and barns, the odour of cows and hay, hardly any noise). And so Augusto Giacometti would return to his native valley every now and then.

Alberto Giacometti also used to come home, at regular intervals, feeling tied to these places. And in this canton he also came to die and now he lies buried in the cemetery of Borgonovo - where he was born - which is also that of Stampa. He would return to Stampa, to the Maloja, to his paternal house. To his mother. Those who grow up in the mountains, in the Alpine valleys, always feel they belong to them, can never forget them. Like so many others, Alberto Giacometti left the valley to go far away, like so many others he often returned and remained what he was, a native of that valley. Perhaps no other departure, no other break, and hence no other ties, were as absolute, and as deep as his. Because the distance between Paris and Stampa is nothing compared to the unbridgeable gap that his artistic research, day after day, forced upon him.

« ...

Germania

Da l'emigraziun in Germania ais da dir in generel il seguaint: la Surselva, la Val da Mesoc ed il Grischun centrel as concentreschan pü al süd e vest, occasiuno tres lur confessiun. L'Engiadina e la Bergiaglia tschernivan spieclmaing la Prussia, Saxonia e Schlesia u alura il nord. Da granda importanزا ais l'emigraziun d'interas dinastias d'architets e stuccatuors dal Mesoc in Baviera e cuntredgias cunfinantas.

...

Iglesias / Sardegna (I)

Andrea Lanicca e Rudolf Robbi da S-chanf eiran in possess d'üna pastizaria intuorn il 1911 fin zieva la prüma guerra mundiela.

...

Königsberg hoz Kaliningrad (SU)

Al cumanzamaint dal 19avel tschientiner vivaiva ün ram da la famiglia Jenatsch da Puntraschigna a Königsberg. [...]. Ils Champells restettan a Königsberg fin zieva la prüma guerra (avrigl 1919). In ün'exposiziun da campions avaiava la ditta exposit duos ouvras in marzipaun: üna rappreschantaiva ün dals chastels da l'imperatur Wilhelm II e l'otra la vappa Campell. Las ouvras gnittan premiedas.

...

Lemberg (SU)

Ambrosius figl da Schimun Nuotcla da Ftan doc. dal 1616 scu impressari da fabrica (28). Padruot J. Savet da Silvaplauna † 18-3-1831 - Johann J. Savet † 30-12-1839. A. Sparpagnani da Castasegna doc. dal 1837. Sebastian Pool eir da Castasegna doc. 1839. [...]. Il "*Café di Milano*" eira dal 1803 in possess da la famiglia Maurizio da Visavraun. Giovanni G. Scartazzini da Promontogno ais documento dal 1821/28 a Lemberg. [...].

...

Londra (GB)

[...]. Il pü renumno e prominent Engiadinais a Londra eira sainza dubi Gisep de Pianta da Susch. El naschit dal 1744 a Castasegna scu figl dal ravarenda Andrea e dvantet dal 1773 bibliotecari al "British Museum". El scrivet üna dissertaziun davart l'istorgia da la lingua rumauntscha. Pü tard dvantet el directur dal museum. [...].

...

Napoléon-Vendée / Poitou (F)

Ils seguaints Bergiagliots Antonio Snidro, Andrea Baltresca, Antonio Baltresca, Agostino Scartazzini e Tommaso Scartazzini sun documentos dal 1816 scu sozis in üna butia da pastizaria. Lucien L'Orsa da Silvaplauna ais documento allò dal 1862/63.

...

Oviedo (E)

Il "*Café Suizo*" eira in possess da Juan Stampa. (ca. 1910).

...

Paris (F)

[...]. Il grand artist Alberto Giacometti, chi murit d'incuort a Cuoira, ho vivieu a Paris dal 1922 fin l'utuon 1965. El vain quinto tiers il pü grands sculptuors contemporauns dal muond. Dal 1964 survgnit el il premi "Guggenheim" e dal 1965 il "Grand Prix National des Arts". In utuon 1965 gnit el eir onuro da l'universited da Berna. [...].

...

Szegedin (H)

Rudolf Stampa da Stampa ais doc. intuorn il 1830.

...

Tunis (TN)

Florin Tuor da Mustèr, directur a L'Hotel "Tunisie Palace", † allò als 19-1-1934 in eted da 55 ans. Dr. Walter Bossi dad Alvaschagn, ambaschadur svizzer, doc. 1962.

...»²

But does the artist truly belong to his people?

What are his affection for his native village - and his family ties, his friends, and the recurrent return to the beloved places of bis childhood, and the mountains, the meadows, the valleys, the emotions that swell each time he sees them again - really mean to him other than the few severe relief lines marking out the infinite boundless realm of his fatal solitude? A solitude filled with ferment, with life and strength, but to which a grave is the final mark.

Thus the sculptor, the painter Alberto Giacometti rests in his valley. With his father and mother,

with his brother Diego and his distant relative Augusto Giacometti, with all the other Giacomettis buried near the church of San Giorgio, amid the meadows, the mountains, in the heart of Val Bregaglia - their scattered tombs, gathered in the churchyard of Borgonovo and Stampa. In that peace.

*Youth, youth, like a night in May
you no longer resound,
like the wild cherry free in the provincial steppe!*

Sergej Esenin, *Pugačëv*

¹ Renato Stampa, *Per il centenario della nascita di Giovanni Giacometti*, in «Quaderni Grigionitaliani», XXXVII, Aprii 1968.

² Dolf Kaiser, *Cumpatriots in terras estras. Prouva d'üna documentaziun davart l'emigraziun grischuna, considerand in speciel l'Engiadina e contuorns*, Stampa separada dal Fögl Ladin 1965-67, Samedan 1968.