

"And if Fiume were to Call?" The Impossible Return of Gianni Angelo Grohovaz

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Abstract: While most Italian emigrants can return to their hometown whenever they wish, Italians from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia (areas that were ceded by Italy to Yugoslavia in the wake of World War Two) do not have that luxury. When they return home, they find that their hometown has changed dramatically and is no longer Italian. For them, a return "home" is, at best, a bitter return to a foreign reality and, at worst, an impossible return. By using the poetry of Gianni Angelo Grohovaz (Fiume, 1926–Little Township 1988) as a case study, this article examines Julian-Dalmatians expatriates as exiles for whom *nostos* is a dream and not a possibility.

Keywords: Gianni Angelo Grohovaz, Giuliano-Dalmati, Fiume, poetry, exodus. *nostos*

"I will impose on them a return that is no return."
(Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, v. 75)

Italians identify strongly with their place of birth as if it were an integral part of who they are. Their strong attachment to their *paese* is often tied to their family's roots in that town or area going back many generations, if not even centuries. For Italians who emigrated from their hometown in search of a better future, the desire to return home drives not only their feelings of nostalgia (from the Greek *nostos* 'return home' and *algos* 'pain'; OED online), but also their periodic physical return to the hometown to see family and friends or to look after property and assets left behind. Whether for personal or business reasons, their return is normally a pleasant and positive experience.

Not so for Italians who come from territories that are no longer part of Italy—places such as most of the peninsula of Istria, the city of Fiume, the islands in the Gulf of Kvarner (Cherso, Lussino, and Unie in particular), the city of Zara, and the Dalmatian islands of Pelagosa and Lagosta. We refer to these Italians as *Giuliano-Dalmati* because they come from the old Italian province of Venezia Giulia (fig. 1) and from the Dalmatian coast or archipelago. Their return home is a return very much like the one the goddess Athena imposes on the Greeks in Euripides' play *The Trojan Women*, "a bitter return [...] a return that is no return" (vv. 65, 75). When these Italians return to their *paese*, they find it so altered that it is no longer recognizable as theirs. Physically, cultural-

ly, linguistically, even politically their hometown has morphed into something that is, in many ways, alien to them. The reasons for this metamorphosis are to be found in events and political decisions taken at the end of World War Two and in its wake.



Fig. 1 Venezia Giulia and Zara, 1920-1943
(<http://www.corsadelricordo.it>)

As World War Two was coming to an end, Yugoslavian partisans and army units under the leadership of Marshall Josip Broz "Tito" captured the Dalmatian areas that had been part of Italy and the entire peninsula of Istria as far as Trieste. Claiming that these were Slavic territories rightfully belonging to Yugoslavia, Marshall Tito quickly annexed most of them to his newly created Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 confirmed and legitimized most of these annexations except for the northernmost slice of Istria that ran from Duino, just west of Trieste, south to Cittanova. In lieu of assigning this northernmost area to Italy or Yugoslavia, the Paris Peace Treaty plan-

ned instead to use it to create the "Free Territory of Trieste", an independent state that would serve as a buffer between Italy and Yugoslavia (fig. 2). It thought that the area's bilingual and multiethnic population might serve to defuse some of the tensions in the area. Though envisioned on paper, the Free State of Trieste never came into being. The area remained under Allied administration—the northern section that ran from Duino to Muggia (the so-called Zone A) was administered by British and American forces and the southern section from Capodistria to Cittanova (Zone B) by the Yugoslavian army. In 1954 the London Memorandum dissolved the arrangement and transferred Zone A to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia, a move that was later ratified by Italy and Yugoslavia with the Treaty of Osimo (1975). With the dismemberment and dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, the once-unified peninsula of Istria found itself partitioned among three different countries—Italy (who held the old Zone



Fig. 2 Free Territory of Trieste, 1947-1954 (Wikipedia Commons)

A), Slovenia (who now held the old Zone B), and Croatia (who got the rest of Istria).

No sooner did Yugoslavia occupy the Italian areas of Dalmatia, the city of Fiume, and the peninsula of Istria, than the local Italian population began to flee from their homes and seek refuge in peninsular Italy. Though at first a trickle, the *esodo* or "exodus" from Istria intensified once Tito's forces initiated a concerted campaign of intimidation against the local Italian population, complete with kangaroo courts and summary executions of individuals deemed to be "enemies of the people", for the most part leading figures in the local Italian community or employees of the Italian state. The 1947 Treaty of Paris sealed the fate of the area and its Italian population

tion—the massive departure of the population of Pola in February 1947 aboard the sailing ship *Toscana* has become emblematic of the *esodo* and



Fig. 3 The Exodus from Pola on the S.S. Toscana in February 1947 (Wikimedia Commons)

of the plight of the Italian population of Istria, Fiume, Dalmatia (fig. 3; see Petacco and Rocchi). Once in Italy, the majority of these refugees (*profughi*) were placed in camps scattered throughout the peninsula. Many waited for years for an opportunity to find work, accommodations, and a better future in Italy. Many, disillusioned with the situation in Italy, sought the help of the International Refugee Organization

(I.R.O.) and were able to emigrate to the U.S.A., Canada, or Australia.

Once they had left their towns to become refugees in Italy, the road back home for these Italians was blocked. In the years immediately following the war and the Treaty of Paris, a return to the hometown brought with it the risk of not being allowed back "out" into Italy by the Yugoslav government or of being arrested and tried as an "enemy of the people" by the Yugoslav justice system. Very few exiles dared to risk such a fate. With the passage of time and relative stability that followed the settlement of territorial questions in the 1950s, some exiles did begin to return to their hometown, but only as tourists in order to visit friends and relatives who had remained behind or to spend their holidays there.

Their return, however, was a bitter return. When they arrived in their hometown they found that everything had dramatically changed. First, the language spoken in the streets and stores was no longer the local Italian dialect or the Italian language they used to hear, but Slovenian or Croatian. Second, their hometown had changed name—Fiume had become Rijeka, Capodistria was now Koper, Lussinpiccolo was now Mali Lošinj. The streets and squares, once so familiar, had also changed name either to speak the language of the new lords or to honour a leading figure of the new regime—in Fiume, the Calle dei Pipistrelli was now called Šišmiša ulica (a direct translation of the original Italian name), but the Piazza delle Erbe now had a completely new name that honoured not the fresh produce that arrived from the hinterland, but a local historian Ivan Kobler (1811-1893). Even buildings had changed names—the city's major theatre was no longer named after Giuseppe Verdi but after Ivan Zajc (1832-1914). Ironically, both Ivan Kobler and Ivan Zajc, who were born and lived in Fiume when the city was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had been part of the local Italian community, as their baptismal names—Giovanni Kobler and Giovanni de Zaytz—clearly indicate; now, however, they had been rebaptized by the new Yugoslav state as Ivans and turned into *bona fide* Yugoslavs.¹ In short, the city to which Italian refugees from Istria or Dalmatian return is no longer the Italian city they once knew and loved, but a completely refashioned, revised, reformatted Yugoslav city, or, since 1991, a Slovenian or Croatian city. All the cities, towns, and villages in the area have had their Italian name replaced by a Slovenian or Croatian name, something that had not been done when Austria or France ruled these territories in the nineteenth century.²

So, what can Italian refugees from these cities and towns do? One solution is to accept the change and admit that Fiume no longer exists.

¹ The Slavicization of eminent local Italians has been undertaken even with historical figures such as Marco Polo, born in 1254 of Venetian parents on the Venetian island of Curzola, whom Croatia now calls Marko Polo and claims as her own; or the scholar Francesco Patrizi da Cherso (b. 1529 on the Venetian island of Cherso), who is celebrated and studied in Croatia as Frane Petrić.

² Austria ruled Istria from 1797 to 1805 and then again from 1814 to 1919; France ruled it in the interim, 1805-1814. Dalmatia followed a similar route.

Its people are gone and so is its Italian spirit. Only the geography remains, but even that has been rebaptized in honour of a different culture and a different set of eminent persons or places. Italian refugees from Istria, Fiume, and Dalmatia thus return not to their city, but to someone else's city. And this, for them, constitutes the bitter return vowed by the goddess Athena upon the returning Greeks.

Another solution is for refugees to return to the city of their youth through the power of their imagination, that is, with their memory. By searching in the back recesses of the mind for images and recollections of the city they once knew, refugees are able to return to the places of their youth. In the words of Giuliano Superina, an exile from Fiume who emigrated to Toronto,

Il fiumano rincorre con l'aiuto del ricordo gli angoli più remoti della sua città, ne ricerca le contrade meno note, la fruga in ogni angolo e ogni angolo gli risponde con un ricordo, la filtra tutta per ritrovarle l'anima.

Il fiumano ricorda, e cerca se stesso.

Cerca ancora nella sua città, nonostante l'annoso tempo trascorso, riparo e conforto dalle avversità che terre ignote gli hanno imposto.

Un mondo di fantasmi, di idee, di ricordi. Un mondo di speranze e forse di illusioni nel quale, però, il fiumano si lascia piacevolmente trasportare per ritrovare in esso conforto e pace. ("Prefazione", 7)

This is exactly what another Fiuman exile, Gianni Angelo Grohovaz, does when he thinks back to his hometown.

Born in Fiume in July 1926 when the city was part of the Kingdom of Italy, a refugee in Italy in June 1945 (a month after Fiume had been captured by Marshall Tito's partisans), and an immigrant to Canada in December 1950 after five years of living in refugee camps in Italy, Grohovaz is a major figure in Italian-Canadian history from the 1950s to the 1980s thanks to his long career as a journalist, writer, poet, and social activist. He died at only 62 years of age in May 1988 at his summer home in Tiny Township, next to Lake Huron, and is buried in nearby Allenwood Cemetery. Grohovaz is the author of many articles in the local Italian press as well as seven books published in Toronto: a collection of poetry in Fiuman dialect, *Per ricordar le cose che ricordo* (1st ed. 1974, 2nd ed. 1976); a history of the Famee Furlane Club of Toronto, *The First Half Century / Il primo mezzo secolo* (1982); a book-length commemoration of Canada's assistance to the Friuli earthquake victims, *To Friuli from Canada with Love* (1983); a collection of his radio editorials ... *e con rispetto parlando è al microfono gianni grohovaz* (1983); a history of Toronto's Santa Cecilia choir, *Coro Santa Cecilia, Toronto, Canada, 1961-1986* (1986); a history of a local Italian association, *Società Pescosolido di Toronto, 1962-1987* (1987); and a semi-autobiographical novel, *Strada bianca* (published posthumously in 1989). While this rich output points to his firm engagement with the Italian immigrant community in Canada and his profound sense of justice when fighting to overcome the prejudices and biases the community had to face, his first book, *Per ricordar le cose che ricordo* reveals his constant longing for the homeland

he was forced to abandon.

In the poem "5 de giugno 1945" that recalls the date of his departure from Fiume, Grohovaz notes the passage of time and his pain, both then and now, at having to abandon his hometown:

5 de giugno 1945

Nove e venti, de ani xe passadi
da quando Te go visto l'ultima volta:
no', non Ti eri come una muleta
el giorno de la Prima Comunione...
Gramaglie Te copriva el volto mesto,
mai più dimentigo quel giorno infame...
Quando Te salutavo, là in Stazion,
el bianco, rosso e blù da quel balcon
pareva enorme, roba da non creder:
cussi fora de posto el me pareva...
Quando a la curva non Te go vista più
do lagrime, pesanti come el piombo
me ga bagnado el viso, e pianzo ancora
per non poder morir ne la mia Tera.... (*Per ricordar*, 26)³

The poem presents Fiume as a woman in mourning and the narrator/poet as the man who leaves her at the station. The city is imagined feminine (as is normally the case in Italian), but with a significant twist—the pronouns referring to Fiume are capitalized (Te, Ti), as is also the word *Tera* (soil, earth, land), clearly a sign of respect, but perhaps also an indication that Fiume has acquired a quasi-divine status (in Italian, the "tu" form used to address the god-head is normally capitalized). Neither the station nor the city, but a Yugoslav flag (red, white, and blue) forms the background to this scene of farewell and separation. The flag seems both very large and out of place as it hangs from a near-by balcony and serves as the emblem of a new sovereignty that has imposed itself both on the city and the apartment. As the narrator/poet loses sight of the city at a bend on the road, he begins to weep and continues to do so to the present day, aware that he will not be able to return. His tears are as heavy as lead—an allusion not only to the weight of the pain that oppresses him, but also to the bullets that have torn his city and its population apart.⁴ The impossibility of a return is clearly evident in the despair of having to die abroad. The pain evident in the poem is in part muted by the humour and sarcasm we find in the prose note at the

³ 5 June 1945 // Nine and twenty years have passed / since I saw you the last time: / no, you were not a young girl / the day of her First Communion... / Mourning clothes covered your sad face, / I will never forget that infamous day... / When I said good-bye to you, there at the Station, / the white, red and blue on that balcony / seemed enormous, something unbelievable: / it seemed so out of place to me... / When, at the bend I no longer saw you / two tears, as heavy as led, / ran down my face, and I still weep / for not being able to die on my Soil....

⁴ In Italian, the term *piombo* (lead) is often used to refer to bullets and firearms;

foot of the page:

I fiumani scampava via da Fiume come che i poteva: qualchedun in divisa de garibaldin, qualche altro con el timbro de la tesera del pan [perché gaveva el timbro con la stela rossa], qualche altro con i documenti falsi. Me ricordo el Nereo Lenaz el gaveva una tesera che dixevo: "El Compagno Glauco pol viagar fino a Trieste". El più academico dei lasapasar dixevo testualmente: "Omo va e torna indrio", con tanto de firma de un comisario leterato. (*Per ricordar*, 26)⁵

Humour seems to lighten the mood of the narrative and make the mass exodus, by any means possible, from Fiume more bearable. At the same time, the sarcasm levelled at the new authorities, unable to form a correct sentence in Italian, betrays the author's contempt for the new regime and its officers. There is no possibility of cooperation, but only of derision. That lack of collaboration signs the exit visa that will prevent a return. Grohovaz never, in fact, returned to Fiume and died in exile in Canada, where he is buried.

The only possible return is thus with the imagination. The entire collection of poems is, in fact, a return on the wings of memory to Fiume, its places, people, and stories. Whether it be a poem about an obtuse schoolmate such as Vlacci (42-43), local personalities such as the shopkeeper Albina Pillepich (41), or local sites such as pier Scovazza (59), Grohovaz recreates the Fiume he left behind and gives it permanence, at least as a nostalgic fantasy. It is a city at peace with itself and its various component parts, especially the Italian, Slavic, and German populations, as best exemplified by the poem "Amor de bestie, odio de cristiani" that allegorizes the poet's three pets—a dog, a cat, and a bird—in order to point out the peaceful cohabitation and sharing of resources that characterized Fiume before the war:

"Amor de bestie, odio de cristiani"

Giulieto, el canarin de casa nostra,
col can e 'l gato andava assai d'acordo:
el Grom dormiva soto al fogoler
la gata ghe lavava anca le orece
mentre l'usel el se faceva el nido
tra le pieghe de la pele in testa al can...
Mia mama ghe butava le zerie:se
l'usel becava un poco, e poi el lassava

see, for example, the phrase *cadere sotto il piombo nemico* (to be killed by enemy fire) or *anni di piombo* (years of lead) to refer to the period of terrorist activity that gripped Italy from the late 1960s to the early 1980s.

⁵ The Fiumani fled from Fiume as they could: some in the uniform of a Garibaldino, another with the stamp on the bread card [because it bore a stamp with the red star], another with false documents. I remember Nereo Lenaz had a card that said "Comrade Glauco can travel as far as Trieste." The more scholarly pass said, verbatim: "Man go and come back", complete with the signature of a literate commissary.

che la gata ghe dassi una lecada.
 El can, ciapava la zeriesa,
 la mastigava un poco, e spudà l'osso
 tornava pacifico a dormir...
 E noi cristiani... non capimo un'acca:
 che le zeriese, spartirlele bisogna!
 Perché le flicche, i bori e le agiateze
 non poderemo portarse drio domani
 quando el becchin se spudarà le mani
 per meter soto tera i nostri ossi! (*Per ricordar*, 85)⁶

A similar peaceful co-existence is evoked in "L'orologio de la tore" (*Per ricordar*, 51-53). The light-hearted poem describes the mayor's early morning stroll along the city's main pedestrian route, the Corso, on his way to city hall, his concerns for the fact that the clock on the city hall tower is running three minutes late, and his thoughts on that afternoon's meeting with his counterpart from Sussak, the town on the other side of the Italian/Yugoslav border. The mayor stops at a bar for his usual shot of wine ("spriz de bianco") chased, this time, by a shot of pelin (Pelinkovac, a bitter herbs liqueur based on wormwood), that will serve as a tonic to fortify him for the afternoon meeting when the two dignitaries will discuss "the excessive contraband" between their two cities, all the while gifting each other with foodstuff and liquors from their respective warehouses and duty-free ports. The idyllic tone of the poem paints a nostalgic picture of a world-gone-by when, as Grohovaz indicates in his footnote, "border disputes were fought with *prosciutto* and domestic wine (or new wine)" ("le differenze de confin se combateva col persuto e vin domestigo [o matize che sia]." *Per ricordar*, 53). That idyllic moment is not only gone forever, but also in direct contrast to the present; the poet's comment underlines his attempt to "try to be good and remember the good times" ("Zercaremo di esser boni e ricordarse i bei tempi"; *Per ricordar*, 53). In a time of misery, one must ignore the pain and focus on the memories of pleasant earlier times. One way to do this is to idealize the past and to imagine what might be.

In fact, given the impossibility of an actual physical return, the exiled poet relies on his only resource, the power of his imagination, to help him undertake the journey home. Grohovaz does this throughout the entire collection as he recalls people, places, and events, but especial-

⁶ Animals' love, people's hate // Giulieto, the canary at our house / With the dog and cat got along well: / Grom would sleep under the fireplace / The cat would even wash his ears / While the bird made a nest for himself / Among the folds on the dog's head... / My mom would throw a few cherries at them: / The bird picked at them a bit, and then let / The cat give them a lick. / The dog would grab the cherry, / Chew it a bit and, having spat out the pit, / Would go back, peacefully, to sleep... / And we, human beings... we don't understand anything: / Cherries are meant to be shared! / Because the pennies, money, and easy living / We won't be able to take with us tomorrow / When the gravedigger will spit on his hands / Before putting our bones into the ground.

ly in the poem "Ritorno col pensiero" in which he imagines his return journey by boat from Venice, around Capo Promontore (today, Kap Kamenjak), along the southern coast of Istria, heading east past Mosciana (Mošćenice), Medea (Medveja), Ica (Ika), Laurana (Lovran), Abazia (Opatija), Volosca (Volosko), Preluca (Preluk), all of which he mentions with obvious fondness by their Italian names, till he arrives in Fiume where he gifts the city with "all the bitterness of my wicked / odious fate" ("tuto l'amaro del mio esilio infame"; *Per ricordare*, 30).

By referring to the "bitter bread" ("pane amaro") he is obliged to consume in his exile, Grohovaz alludes to Dante's famous verse "Tu proverai sì come sa di sale / lo pane altrui" ("You will taste how salty other people's bread is"; *Par.* 16: 58-59), a prophecy on Dante's fate as an exile wondering from place to place. The allusion to Dante is reinforced in Grohovaz's footnote to the poem where he says:

Chi non xe mai tornà, almeno con el pensiero a Fiume? Chi non ga spudà l'amaro pan, e non ga ripetù con Dante "quanto che duro xe el pan de i altri ..."? La nostra comedia xe molto meno divina ma assai più tragica de quela de Dante. (*Per ricordare*, 30)⁷

The comparison may be hyperbolic, but it does point to the anguish of the poet who, like Dante, will never be able to return home.

Grovovaz's allusions to Dante also connect him with Dante's well-known voyager, Ulysses (*Inf.* 26). However, although both Grohovaz and Ulysses undertake a sea voyage, the two mariners follow different paths and chase different goals: while Ulysses' journey is along uncharted waters and ends in catastrophe, Grohovaz's journey is along familiar shores and ends with a return home; while Ulysses, on reaching his destination, suffers destruction, Grohovaz instead is able to liberate himself of his bitter fate. In other words, Grohovaz is not Dante's Ulysses seeking new worlds and new knowledge beyond the Columns of Hercules, but Homer's Ulysses struggling to return to Ithaca and to familiar surroundings. His Penelope is Fiume, patiently waiting for his homecoming, not the unwelcoming uninhabited world ("mondo senza gente"; *Inf.* 26: 117).

Eventually, Grohovaz seems to come to terms with the impossibility of a return to Fiume and accepts Canada as his new home. In the poem "Chi mai gavessi deto? Fiume e Canadà ..." (*Per ricordare*, 31-33) he remembers how the page in his school atlas that showed Canada was like new because no-one ever went to look at it. When it came to Canada, Grohovaz and his schoolmates knew only that it was a very cold place and that, because it was a Dominion,⁸ it was probably enslaved ("Savevimo che el jera un posto fredo, / gnente de più però, / anzi, pen-

⁷ Who has not ever returned, at least with the imagination, to Fiume? Who has not spat out the bitter bread and has not repeated with Dante "how hard is other people's bread..."? Our comedy is a lot less divine, but a lot more tragic than Dante's.

⁸ Canada's formal name, as given in the Constitution Act of 1867 and reaffirmed

sando se trattasse de un Dominio / credevimo che el fossi in schiavitù!" *Per ricordar*, 31). The boys never thought that one day some of them might emigrate to Canada; they would, instead, play at being "Canadian," inspired to do so by stories in the Italian weekly comic magazine *L'Avventuroso* (1934-1943), quite popular with boys at the time, that featured a lead protagonist who always got his man.⁹ It is not clear who this comic book character might have been, but it seems that Grohovaz is referring to a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police because of the saying that "the Mounties always get their man."

In accepting Canada as his home Grohovaz becomes aware of a profound irony—Canada and Fiume are not that different after all. He is happy to be in Canada because in many ways it resembles Fiume; for example,

[...] anca quà xe zente de ogni sorte:
tute le raze, cento religion,
setantazinque lingue (e opinion).

[...]

Xe facile per noi, veci fiumani,
viver con gregghi, coi russi e coi zulù,
perché anca a Fiume jera i ungaresi,
i gnochi, ostrogoti e... perfin cinesi:

[...]

Andavimo d'acordo (come anca quà)
fin quando tuti i ospiti stranieri
no i ne tocava el cul o la bandiera...

Chi mai gavessi dito? Fiume e Canada
in fondo in fondo ga molte afinità. (*Per ricordar*, 31-33)¹⁰

In reaching this conclusion, Grohovaz is drawing upon his realization that Canada is a multicultural country, just like the Fiume he used to know that was home to Italian, Slavic, Austrian, Hungarian inhabitants (and even a Chinese storekeeper). It is this multiculturalism, in fact, that leads Grohovaz to become more fully engaged with Canada and to overcome the feeling of loss that overwhelmed him at his departure from Fiume and during his wanderings among various refugee camps in Italy.

But though he now accepts Canada as his new home, Grohovaz nonetheless does not forego his dream of a return home. In the footnote

in the Statute of Westminster (1931), is The Dominion of Canada. The term "dominion" was meant to allude to Psalm 72:8 "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

⁹ In Grohovaz's words, "*L'Avventuroso*, giornaleto molto diffuso tra la gioventù che dalle storie a puntate traeva personaggi da imitarsi nei loro giochi." *Per ricordar*, 109.

¹⁰ [...] here, too, there are people of all sorts: / all races, a hundred religions, / seventy-five languages (and opinions). / [...] / It's easy for us, old Fiumani, / to live with Greeks, with Russians, and with Zulus, / because in Fiume, too, there were Hungarians, / Krauts, Ostrogoths, and... even the Chinese: / [...] / We got along well (just like here) / as long as the foreign guests / did not touch our arse or our flag... / Who ever would have said it? Fiume and Canada / in the end, have a lot in common.

to this same poem in which he points out that Canada and Fiume are really not that different, Grohovaz leaves the door open for a return and concludes with the open-ended statement: "But if tomorrow Fiume were to call me..." ("Ma se domani Fiume me ciamassi..."; *Per ricordar*, 33). The ellipsis speaks volumes on Grohovaz's readiness to return, but also on the improbability of the event; as I pointed out elsewhere, Fiume will not call him because the Fiume he knew no longer exists (Eisenbichler, "Il ricordo," 109).

The inevitable realization that Fiume will not call does not, however, deter Grohovaz from hoping. In the final poem of the collection, "Ciudi la porta che xe giro d'aria" (*Per ricordar*, 97-98), he asks himself and his reader whether they will ever return to Fiume and then defends his hope as the central element in his life:

Ritornaremo ancora nel Quarnero?
Non xe soltanto una speranza magra
ma la certeza de chi crede sempre
che tuto quel che noi butemo in aria
deve tornar per forza su la tera.
Se qualchedun me dà del grande iluso
mi ghe rispondo grazie per l'elogio:
tireme via sti diexe schei de sogno
... cossa me resta ancora da la vita? (*Per ricordar*, 97)¹¹

This is a surprising statement, especially given Grohovaz's realization that the new home, Canada, is not unlike Fiume, that after twenty years in Canada there is something here that he likes and appreciates. He notes that those who come here end up staying: "Cussi come jera a Fiume, chi vien in Canada vien qua per restar" (*Per ricordar*, 33). And yet, the desire to go back home never wanes, so Grohovaz keeps himself ready for an eventual return:

Se pur tremila miglia ne separa
dal nostro Fogoler de Valscurigne
xe pronte le valige... caso mai
dovessimo tornar a casa nostra. (*Per ricordar*, 97)¹²

Impossible though it might be, and bitter as it surely will be, the return home is a dream the exile cannot forego. For Grohovaz, the overwhelming determination that compels the epic hero to return home, the *nostos*, is a fact of life that even a simple man like him cannot dismiss.

¹¹ Will we still return to the Kvarner? / It's not only a meagre hope / but the certainty of those who always believe / that all those things we throw up in the air / must, by force, return to earth. / If someone should peg me as a great deluded / I respond with "Thank you for the praise": / take these ten cents of a dream from me / ... what is there still left of my life?

¹² Even though three thousand miles separate us / from our Hearth in Valscurigne / the suitcases are ready... in case / we should return to our home.

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