

A Poet's Struggle for a New Adriaticism in the Nineteenth Century

DOMINIQUE KIRCHNER REILL

*Rest, sister, and let
Them go without you to the sea
United to confront the arms of the Germans and the Veneti.
And from our coast they will disperse the traitors!*

And the sister responded:

*For many moons I have been waiting for my nine brothers,
They went to fight on the Adriatic Sea.
They went to fight on the Adriatic Sea for our fatherland.
And from me they commissioned a song of war.¹*

THESE STANZAS ARE FROM AN 1842 POEM TITLED “Origin of the Bora,” which recounted the mythical genesis of the strong northeasterly winds that since time immemorial have plagued Adriatic sailors. In the poem, the Bora was no mere weather pattern, but instead the reincarnation of the Slavic nation searching for its slain heroes, the Uskoci pirates made famous in the writings of the seventeenth-century Venetian philosopher Paolo Sarpi and twenty-first-century historian Wendy Bracewell.² In typical nineteenth-century Romantic style, the “Origin of the Bora” revealed how the winds (the soul of the sisters of the Uskoci, the Dalmatian womenfolk) blew upon the waters frantically searching for the corpses of their menfolk whom the Venetians and Germans had slain. These winds were relentless—they would never stop their frenzied quest—until the Uskoci heroes were returned home and their spirits were once again able to wield their swords along the “*Illyrian contradas*.”³ In the meantime, the poem warned, “Woe to any German or Venetian

¹“Resta, sorella, e lasciane/ Ir senza te sul mare/ L’armi tedesche e venete/ Uniti ad affrontare.” “Nove fratelli aspetto, e da più lune/ Vanno pugnando sull’adriatico mar. / Vanno pugnando per la patria terra, / E m’han commesso una canzon di Guerra.” Francesco Dall’Ongaro, *Fantasie drammatiche e liriche* (Florence, 1866), 89–99.

²Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca, 1992); Paolo Sarpi et al., *La Repubblica de Venezia, la Casa d’Austria e gli Usocchi* (Bari, 1965).

³“Tempo verrà che l’anime/ Dei nove estinti prodi/ Saran beate, e libera/ Dagli imprecati nodi/ Ripiglierà la spada/ L’illirica contrada. / Allora la Vila il cantico/ Di gloria, un di concetto, / Intonerà alla patria:/ Nè più sarà rejetto/ Dalla terribil Bora/ Chi volge a noi la prora.” Dall’Ongaro, *Fantasie drammatiche e liriche*, 89–99. “Illyria” and “Illyrian” is usually associated with the mid-nineteenth-century Slavic revival movement led by the Croatian, Ljudevit Gaj. Before Gaj’s movement, it referred to the northwestern part of the Balkan Peninsula. Illyricum was the name of the Roman province that stretched south to the Drina River in modern Albania, north to Istria, and east to the Sava River. Though

boat that advances . . . Their sails will fall in a heartbeat,/ And with the opposition of the wind they will be done for.”⁴

At first glance, the provenance of this Italian-language poem would most likely be attributed to the quill of an Illyrian nationalist, probably living in one of the coastal towns of Istria or Dalmatia. One could imagine that the pages of this poem probably sat alongside the proofs for a new South Slavic dictionary or a pamphlet calling for orthographic reforms to mirror those recently introduced in Croatia-Slavonia and Serbia. Or drafts of these pages could be imagined sitting in a university student’s cramped quarters in Vienna, piled alongside the newest issue of the Czech nationalist *Journal of the Bohemian Museum* and a copy of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*. For, in the 1840s, accounts of doomed Slavic warriors fighting selflessly to protect home and hearth against foreign invaders were often authored in these sorts of settings.

Instead, this poem was written alongside copies of Dante, Silvio Pellico’s *My Prisons*, Alessandro Manzoni’s *The Betrothed*, and some smuggled copies of Giuseppe Mazzini’s newspaper *Young Italy*. Only Italian, German, and French letters rested on the writing table where a messy hand scribbled the pirate-loving stanzas. And the only South Slavic words that came into contact with the writing of the poem were the echoes heard of jesting dockhands and a Dalmatian landlady chastising her son for skipping school.⁵ From such a provenance, the poem’s message becomes perplexing. Why did a participant in the burgeoning Italian national movement write a poem that dramatizes the plight of mythic Slavic heroes? Why would someone inspired by Manzoni, Mazzini, Pellico, and a host of other Risorgimento authors characterize Italians as “traitors” and make threats against “Venetian sails” if the sword of Slavic nationalism did not rule the eastern shores of the Adriatic?

Seen within the framework of the Risorgimento, the question is indeed a puzzling one. However, through an examination of the “Bora” poem’s author and his activities, this article will show that what appears perplexing on the surface actually reveals the new national and regional ideologies post-Napoleonic actors wrestled to conjoin into a stable whole. Alongside a new prioritization and extension of love of *patria* came a redefinition of *mare nostrum*. The “Bora” poem made clear how *patria* and *mare* should coalign: Italians, Germans, and Illyrians should all wield their respective swords over their respective shores while coexisting on the waters of their *collective* sea. The “nostrum” of *mare nostrum*, hence, was not national, but multinational. As such, nationalism and maritime regionalism were intertwined by the sea in such a way that a multinational regionalism could be the only natural order. An

originally used to characterize a non-Slavic tribe, by the eighteenth century “Illyrians” were commonly regarded as the Slavic-speaking peoples of the western Balkans. Napoleon also used the term in naming his Kingdom of Illyria in 1809, composed of Trieste, modern-day Slovenia, and most of Croatia (Dalmatia, Istria, much of the Military Zone, and the Kingdom of Croatia). Also, as a sidenote, in this article I consistently refer to the (South) Slavic national movement and (South) Slavic language practices. I use the term “Slavic” instead of Croatian, Yugoslav, South Slav, Serb, or Illyrian because this was the national identification that contemporaries, especially along the shores of the Adriatic, used most often to identify their nationhood and language. Using any other term for the first half of the nineteenth century would be ahistorical and offer more confusion than clarification, as the words “Croatian,” “Yugoslav,” and “Serb” denoted particularly different qualities in the early nineteenth century than they do today.

⁴“Guai se tedesco o veneto/ Legno s’avanza intanto,/ E degli eroi contamina/ Il funeral compianto!/ Cadon le vele a un tratto,/ E avverso il vento è fatto.”

⁵Francesco Dall’Ongaro, “Letter by Francesco Dall’Ongaro to Niccolò Tommaseo, Trieste: 12 December 1840,” (Florence National Library: Tommaseo Carteggi 73.30.10, 1840); idem, “Letter by Francesco Dall’Ongaro to Niccolò Tommaseo, Trieste: 24 July 1840,” (Florence National Library: Tommaseo Carteggi 73.29.12, 1840); idem, “Una madre dalmata,” *La Favilla* VI, no. 17 (1841).

analysis of this poet's life and work illustrates the radical departure multinational regionalism represented and points to its broader significance.

But before we can understand the departure and importance of this new multinational Adriaticism, it is necessary to get a clearer understanding of the "Bora" poem's author and the framework within which he was working. The poet who listened to Slavic-speaking sailors as he composed his Italian-language salute to Illyrianism was a Veneto priest turned writer, who answered to the name "Francesco Dall'Ongaro" when a policeman stopped him. The poet stopped much more willingly when a pretty girl called out "Cecco," his nickname. Dall'Ongaro was born in 1808 and raised in a small Veneto town that sat on one of the many rivers that flowed into the Adriatic. His family was a modest one: His father was a baker, his mother's family ran an inn, and his paternal uncles were boatbuilders. In reminiscing on his childhood, Dall'Ongaro remarked that "the frequent bangs of hammers, scraping of saws" were the initial cause "of the constant sympathy that binds me to seafarers."⁶ When the Venetian Republic dissolved after Napoleon's arrival, boat-building and baking for an increasingly impoverished seafarer community proved ever less lucrative. Hence, Dall'Ongaro's parents decided their precocious first-born's best chance in life was to enter the priesthood. Father, mother, young Cecco, and his four siblings packed their bags and moved to Venice, where the best seminaries were located and where it was assumed little Cecco would have a chance at a decent calling. Bread and boats were left behind to make way for Jesus, the influential Catholic Church, and the island-city of San Marco.

Once enrolled in Venice's Santa Maria della Salute seminary, Francesco Dall'Ongaro embraced his early lessons in catechism. From the sources that remain, it appears he always retained a true faith in Christianity, though his relationship with the rules and expectations of the Catholic Church was a much less happy one. Even before completing his education, Dall'Ongaro ran into trouble for challenging his teachers and roaming the *calle* of Venice after curfew. To escape a suspension of his studies, Dall'Ongaro went to Padua where his parents sent him. There he eventually took his orders; but because the Venetian church authorities had not forgotten his unruly nature, Dall'Ongaro was given a post at the small votive church, Santa Maria dei Miracoli in Venice. To a modern-day tourist's eyes, permission to give sermons at the gorgeous Renaissance-era church seems a great honor. But hidden behind the magnificent marble facades, the assignment indicated the distrust the Venetian clergy displayed toward Dall'Ongaro: The church's flock was small and supervision was constant, being but a ten-minute walk from the center of Venetian affairs, Piazza San Marco.

Dall'Ongaro lived up to everyone's distrust; he gave a sermon challenging directives from Rome by arguing that Catholics should reexamine their faith. In Dall'Ongaro's eyes, Catholics needed to push to reform socially their religious practice, rather than follow socially conservative norms. His sermon led to his dismissal, and Dall'Ongaro was offered a new post in a village church far from Venice. The reassignment was a punishment to which Dall'Ongaro refused to submit. Without a post but with a collar still around his neck, he left Venice and his Veneto upbringing behind to strike out on other, hopefully more fruitful, paths.

Before leaving Venice, Dall'Ongaro's mindscape was worldly in a decidedly Venetian fashion. It is clear from his friendship circles in Padua and Venice, as well as from his early publications in the 1830s, that Dall'Ongaro followed the literary trends of Western Europe's *beau monde*. He devoured Ugo Foscolo, Rousseau, and Lord Byron. The young Cecco

⁶Francesco Dall'Ongaro, "Lettera da Tremeacque," *La Favilla* VI (1841).

employed the term “cosmopolitan” to describe the literary circles of Venice led by Luigi Carrer and the well-known writers of Paris and London.⁷ But, despite his pretensions, Dall’Ongaro was decidedly provincial in as much as he had little knowledge of or interest in the broader Habsburg world to which his homeland had been incorporated at the Congress of Vienna. Dall’Ongaro did not interact with a greater Habsburg imperial world; he functioned within the province of Lombardy-Veneto. And if the young priest ever contemplated the waters of the Adriatic that lapped along Venice’s Lido, he would have probably coined the sea the “Gulf of Venice,” as early-modern mapmakers had done, disinterested in the other communities that claimed the Adriatic as *their* extended gulf.

The dynamics of how Dall’Ongaro turned from regarding the Adriatic as a naturally Venetian domain to a multinational one were rooted in his rebellion against church authority and in the opportunities the new Habsburg-control of the sea promised. Like so many black-sheep priests chased from the pulpit, the twenty-year-old Dall’Ongaro earned his keep by educating the wealthy. He used his friendship network in Venice to secure posts tutoring heirs to the city’s dethroned oligarchy, following families to the Veneto countryside and to the coastal towns of Istria. He was the kind of tutor hired to give promising sons the wrappings of intellectual polish, not to prepare future secretaries. He was also the kind of tutor no jealous husband would hire, as he spent much less time schooling pupils and much more time composing verses about his pupils’ beautiful mothers.

In fact, Dall’Ongaro’s versification soon began to occupy most of his hours bundled away in the remote villas of Venice’s former empire. He made his aesthetic inclinations public in 1837, publishing his first two books, one dedicated to his idol, Lord Byron, and another to one of his pupils’ mothers.⁸ These two publications sounded the final death knell for any future in the church. They also barred employment within most noble households. Eager to find new sources of income, Dall’Ongaro decided to move to Trieste, where he had managed to gain employment as a tutor for one of the city’s wealthier Jewish families. Unsurprisingly, the heads of the prosperous Levi clan opted for Dall’Ongaro not to live under the family roof while he tutored their son, Angelo. As such, Dall’Ongaro sought accommodations in the bustling port town for himself and his sister, who came to set up house for him. Free for the first time from the strictures of the church and from other people’s household rules, Dall’Ongaro explored the Habsburg’s famous new urban space.⁹

What Dall’Ongaro found in Trieste exceeded his expectations. Almost immediately he was accepted into the literary salon, the *Gabinetto di Minerva*, where he befriended some of the city’s most powerful men, most importantly Karl von Bruck—one of the founders of the Austrian Lloyd and later Habsburg minister of commerce and then of finance.¹⁰ Nothing

⁷Luigi Carrer (1801–1850) was considered the great literary hope of early-nineteenth-century Venice. He is most famous today for founding and editing the influential literary journal *Il Gondoliere*.

⁸Francesco Dall’Ongaro, *Odi quattro alla amica ideale* (Venice: Tipografia di G. Antonelli, 1837); idem, *Il Venerdì Santo: Scena della vita di L. Byron* (Padova, 1837).

⁹Alison Frank is currently preparing a volume studying the rise of Trieste in the nineteenth century. Until the publication of her book, for more information on the city’s nineteenth-century “boom,” see: Giulio Cervani, *La borghesia triestina nell’età del Risorgimento. Figure e problemi*, vol. 4, *Civiltà del Risorgimento* (Udine, 1969), 45–46; Ronald E. Coons, *Steamships, Statesmen, and Bureaucrats: Austrian Policy Towards the Steam Navigation Company of the Austrian Lloyd 1836–1848* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 3–4; and Giulio Cervani, *Stato e società a Trieste nel secolo XIX-Problemi e documenti* (Udine, 1983). Although it deals with the eighteenth century, Dubin’s book is very useful in seeing the role the Habsburgs played in Trieste’s rise: Lois C. Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford, California, 1999).

¹⁰Karl von Bruck (1798–1860) was a Prussian-born businessman and one of the most important financial leaders in the Habsburg Empire. Originally from a lower-middle-class family, Bruck served as a soldier in the Prussian army

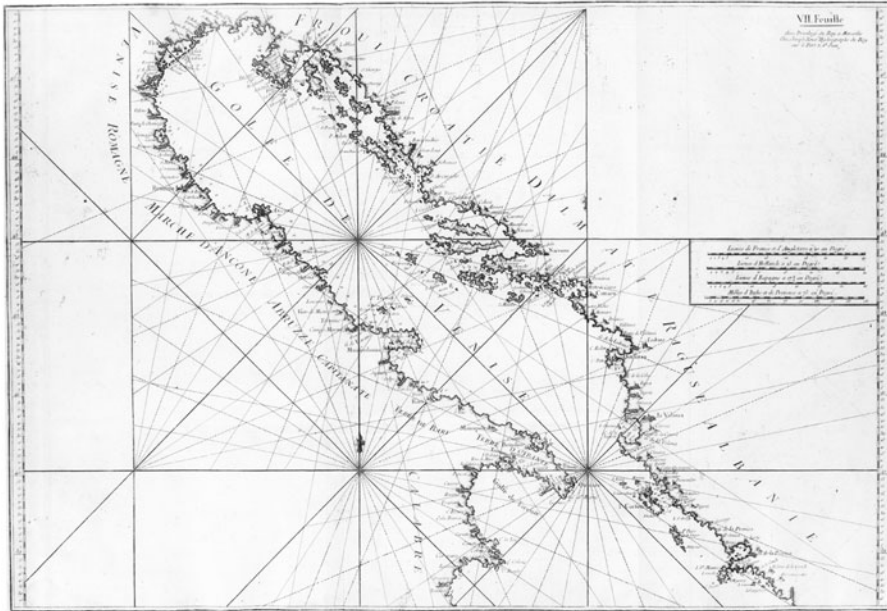


FIGURE 1: Alongside more famous examples, such as Vincenzo Coronelli's 1688 map *Golfo di Venezia*, which explicitly declared the sea to be "The Gulf of Venice, formerly known as the Adriatic Sea," scores of other such maps existed associating the Adriatic with the Venetian metropole. This 1764 French nautical map shows that even when Venice's influence was in decline, much of Europe regarded the Adriatic through a Venetian-centric lens. Source: *Image courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.*

could have been better for Dall'Ongaro's professional ambitions. Less than a year after his arrival, he was asked to replace the editor of the city's first literary journal, *La Favilla* (*The Spark*); and from there he gained ever more commissions to submit writings and teachings to Trieste's growing, culturally ambitious bourgeoisie.¹¹

Dall'Ongaro was offered the editorship of *La Favilla* not just because he made an amusing drinking companion (though it goes without saying that this is one of the reasons he was chosen). He was also considered the ideal candidate because of his wide friendship network with writers and artists outside Trieste and because of his enthusiasm for the Habsburg *porto-franco* town itself. When Dall'Ongaro took over *La Favilla*, he extended the scope of its contributions. Before Dall'Ongaro's editorship, *La Favilla* was a local journal to which, on the whole, only Triestines sent in their stabs at poetry, literary criticism, essays, and short fiction. With Dall'Ongaro as editor, the literary journal's authorship and content of

against Napoleon and then made his fortune and name in Trieste, where he traveled in 1821 on his way to Greece to help in the Greek independence movement. Recognized immediately by Trieste's commercial circles as a man with great abilities, Bruck was made secretary of Trieste's largest insurance firm, the *Azienda Assicuratrice*. In 1828, he married the daughter of the *Azienda's* co-director and was quickly propelled to take a leadership role in the insurance community. He helped found the Austrian Lloyd and used his position in Trieste to put into action Friedrich List's ideas that tariff barriers impeded trade. Francis Joseph appointed him commerce minister from 1848–1851 and then finance minister from 1855–1860. After the Habsburg's disastrous and highly costly losses in the Crimean War, Bruck committed suicide in reaction to accusations of financial mishandling.

¹¹For more about the growing bourgeoisie in Trieste, see: Marina Cattaruzza, *Trieste nell'Ottocento- Le trasformazioni di una società civile*, vol. 38, *Civiltà del Risorgimento* (Udine, 1995); Cervani, *La borghesia triestina*.

contributions noticeably shifted, supplementing the Triestine voices with arguments and ideas drawn from Venice, Friuli, Dalmatia, Florence, Milan, and beyond. Dall'Ongaro even convinced ambitious friends from afar to move to Trieste to help him run the journal.

His success at luring aspiring writers and artists to Trieste stemmed from the second reason Dall'Ongaro was chosen to take the helm of *La Favilla*: His conviction that Trieste was the city of the future. In part, this enthusiasm was a personal reaction to the new sense of freedom he felt upon living on his own. Dall'Ongaro wrote a friend a few months after his arrival, that “[i]t would be a bitter and terrible thing if I were forced to leave Trieste, where I see all the promises of such a successful future. Already I have begun to study, to write, to be a man! Returning to Venice would be like returning to oblivion (*ripassare il Lete*).”¹² Similar to how other Romantic authors at the time viewed the city, Venice became a symbol of all that was corrupt and decadent. In contrast, Dall'Ongaro presented Trieste as all that was young and busy, a new frontier where ambitious people from all over converged to make a new life for themselves.

The transitory quality of Trieste particularly captivated Dall'Ongaro's imagination, as can be seen in an article he wrote describing the chaos experienced yearly on 24 August, the day rental contracts for apartments were renewed. The sight of hundreds of Triestines packing up their belongings and moving them onto the street fascinated Dall'Ongaro. He believed it marked the breakdown of households' isolation, a phenomenon he thought promised to weaken class and community divides. From his perspective, on Trieste's moving day:

People, who had never seen each other before, make contact, get to know each other, and measure themselves against each other; every house simultaneously has two masters and none; thousands of favors, thousands of indulgences (*condiscendenze*) are exchanged, and often a great deal of tolerance is felt in making allowances for reciprocal indiscretions . . .

Now, going to live in a new house is like finding yourself in a new world. . . . Bit by bit new acquaintances are made, new social relationships, new bonds: all of the city slowly but surely begins to touch, to fuse, to remix and from this a commonality of interests and of moods is born, one which renders life pleasant and refreshing for the city-dwellers.¹³

Trieste, for Dall'Ongaro, was a revelation—a revelation as much of the city's possibilities as of what he felt his former home, Venice, lacked. Trieste was a city with “two masters and none” because of its transitory nature. Venice, instead, was “oblivion” where centuries-old oligarchies administered a world paralyzed and in decline. The opportunity for professional advancement and the constant mixing of peoples were the two stable images of Trieste that Dall'Ongaro put forward. This was just the kind of urban anthem that the financial backers of *La Favilla* wanted, most of whom were involved in orchestrating the city's booming insurance and shipping trades.¹⁴ Within a few years, the Austrian Lloyd company even began printing *La Favilla* in-house, rendering concrete the intertwined ambitions Dall'Ongaro and Trieste's business elites shared for the city. In image and in influence, together they worked to supplant Venice and enthrone Trieste as the new “Queen” of a new Adriatic.

¹²Francesco Dall'Ongaro, “Dall'Ongaro to Giambattista Bassi: 23 December 1837,” in *F. Dall'Ongaro e il suo epistolario scelto*, ed. Angelo de Gubernatis (Florence, 1897).

¹³Francesco Dall'Ongaro, “Varietà. Il ventiquattro d'Agosto a Trieste,” *La Favilla* III, no. 4 (1838).

¹⁴Giorgio Negrelli, “Introduzione- Una rivista borghese nell'austria metternichiana,” in *La Favilla (1836-1846)- Pagine scelte della rivista a cura di Giorgio Negrelli* (Udine, 1985).

Multinationalism was one of the primary means Dall'Ongaro used to reconceptualize the sea as a dominion whose center needed to be Trieste rather than Venice. This strategy is perhaps best understood when reading an 1843 *La Favilla* editorial that Dall'Ongaro and his friend, Pacifico Valussi, published to explain why so many of the journal's contributions focused on Slavic national themes:

Some have asked us why *La Favilla*, an Italian journal, so frequently focuses on Illyrian people and concerns. This question presupposes a reproach, to which we would not like to be subject without offering a reason. We were sorry to see that amidst the vast movement, the great passion, that all of the nations of Europe are displaying for all that involves Slavic history and literature, no Italian newspaper had yet begun to participate. If this oversight can be more or less excused for other periodicals of the [Italian] Peninsula, we believe that for us the fault would be much greater. For though it is true that we publish an Italian newspaper, we do so in a land (*contrada*) so close to Illyria that we felt we had to take it up . . . As nowadays it is easier and less expensive to travel, it should be hoped that the various peoples will get to know each other better. But to entice these useful and pleasing wanderings, every province, every region, should come forward with its own special prerogatives. Newspapers in my eyes have amongst their best goals just this, to spread abroad some knowledge of places and people that touch them the most. *La Favilla*, published in a mixed city, surrounded by people of Slavic origin, placed on the borders between Italy and Germany, needed to show where the physiognomy of the three nations differ to some degree.¹⁵

In Dall'Ongaro and Valussi's eyes, Trieste was special, had a special "prerogative," because of that "mixing" of people that Dall'Ongaro had so admired his first years in the city. Trieste was part of a "region" where the German, Italian, and Slavic "nations" met. As such, it was Triestines' obligation to broadcast information about lands and communities associated with their city, taking an active role in binding Europe's different nations together. The existence of cultural "nations" was a given in the minds of Dall'Ongaro and his *Favilla* set, regardless of the fact that in the 1840s no political states such as "Italy," "Germany," "Illyria," or "Yugoslavia" existed. Not only did they believe "nations" to be real, but they also felt that nations needed to be bolstered. Both in writing and in deeds, Dall'Ongaro promoted nationhood as the most likely means to resolve the social fragmentation caused by class divides and municipal jealousies.¹⁶ And it was Trieste's special "prerogative"—thanks to its "regional" status—to promote different nationalisms simultaneously and thereby harmonize them. Nations should be harmonized not because they were fundamentally the same. Instead, harmonization was necessary because nations (and especially the nations that "met" in Trieste) were inherently different yet potentially complementary. In essence, a project of multinationalism was what made Trieste special and central.

Dall'Ongaro did not content himself with promoting Trieste as a multinational center, however. Instead, he thought beyond the city and focused his own work on the "region" he believed supported Trieste's special situation. To this new Trieste-oriented Dall'Ongaro, the Adriatic no longer appeared the natural "Gulf of Venice." Instead, now he viewed the sea as the tie that bound the different peoples of Trieste together. And to uncover the true nature of the sea, Dall'Ongaro believed he had to reform the Venetian traditions that had blinded him to these interconnections. As such, Dall'Ongaro set out to merge the arts, history, and

¹⁵Pacifico Valussi and Francesco Dall'Ongaro, "Saggio d'una nuova versione dei canti popolari illirici," *La Favilla* VIII, no. 22 (1843).

¹⁶For an example of how Dall'Ongaro believed nationalism would cure municipal hatreds, see: Francesco Dall'Ongaro, "Notizie. Sulla prima riunione scientifica italiana in Pisa," *La Favilla* IV, no. 11 (1839).

aspirations of the Slavic-speaking world that sailed the Adriatic's waters and manned its shores to the existent Venetian maritime lore. This seemed the most effective means to create a "regional," instead of a "municipal," multinationalism. And so Dall'Ongaro began an eight-year-long campaign to create an Italo-Slavic Adriaticism.

Dall'Ongaro's main challenge, hence, was to discover the strengths of Slavic nationalism and incorporate it within his new Adriaticism. However, seeing as he did not speak any Slavic dialect, this was a task burdened with obvious limitations—limitations Dall'Ongaro tried to overcome through extensive reading and increased contact with Trieste's Dalmatian and Istrian inhabitants. Perhaps it is because of these limitations that Dall'Ongaro characterized "Slavs" with many of the same tropes that Johann Gottfried von Herder had employed decades earlier. In his writings, Dall'Ongaro presented the Slavic "nation" as "young," "uncivilized," "underdeveloped," and "simple" compared to its western, "more civilized" equivalents.¹⁷ But in typical Romantic style and following Herder's example, he argued that these seemingly negative attributes should be seen as positive, contending that Italian-speakers would only shed their artistic and spiritual dissipation by looking to Slavdom, where more vibrant "traditions have been conserved."¹⁸ Studying Slavic poetry, as such, presented a promising "bond" (*vincolo*) between Europe's modern, jaded world and the "young," undeveloped society of rural Slavdom. Trieste's vibrancy was just one example of how the combination of Slavic and Italian inspirations could expand and enhance both cultures, perhaps leading to a newer, more cosmopolitan one. Dall'Ongaro believed that by incorporating "mature" Italian art with its "innocent" Slavic equivalent, it would be possible to "reinvigorate the flaccid images of our own society" and that of the Adriatic more generally.¹⁹

It was in this context that Dall'Ongaro composed the "Origin of the Bora" poem with which this article began. At the poem's outset, Dall'Ongaro announced his intention of using poetic skills to meld Venetian and Slavic heritages to found his new vision of the Adriatic, writing in the poem's introduction that "[t]he argument of this ballad is based on Sarpi's *Storia degli Uscocchi* (History of the Uskoci), popular traditions, and fantasy."²⁰ Anyone familiar with Sarpi's *Uscocchi* would recognize instantly that Dall'Ongaro's "Origin of the Bora" was not only based on Sarpi's work but also served as its refutation.

To the eyes of Paolo Sarpi, the Uskoci had been unruly, bloodthirsty, malicious barbarians who deserved to be crushed by Venice. Dall'Ongaro instead produced a gendered passion play, where the Uskoci represented brave brothers fighting defensively and futilely to protect their womenfolk, to save their land, and to promote their greater "family" that was the Illyrian nation. The hegemonic Venetians and Germans were the villains, not the noble Uskoci. Dall'Ongaro introduced his poem citing only "*canti slavi*" (Slavic ballads) as the source base for the metaphors and symbols incorporated, foregoing any of the Venetian popular lore with which he was so familiar.²¹ And, finally, Dall'Ongaro's insistence on

¹⁷Francesco Dall'Ongaro, "Sulla poesia popolare dei popoli slavi," *La Favilla* V, no. 15 (1840).

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid. Dall'Ongaro concluded his over-the-top celebration of everything Slavic by exclaiming: "I would like writers, poets, and artists to dedicate themselves to study these [Slavic] populations still so poetic: perhaps thereby leading to new aspirations for their ballads, new subjects for their work, without remaining eternally confined to the by-now-sickly-sweet (*stucchevole*) Middle Ages." For a fascinating discussion of the *La Favilla*'s relationship with the Slavic national movement in Dalmatia, see: Bernard Stulli, "Tršćanska Favilla' i Južni Slaveni," (Trieste's Favilla and the South Slavs) *Anali Jadranskog Instituta* I (1956).

²⁰Dall'Ongaro, *Fantasie drammatiche e liriche*, 89–99.

²¹To assure that his own upbringing did not pose an obstacle in attaining his goal, Dall'Ongaro consulted the Miovich-Cunich family of sailors, "Dalmatian by stock (*stria*) and birth, but living in Trieste for over thirty

terming the enemies of the Uskoci as the “Germans and the Veneti” illuminates his attempt to displace Venetian history in a manner similar to how the Uskoci had tried to wipe away “Venetian sails.” For, though it was true that the Uskoci did battle the Venetians four centuries ago, their other nemesis was the Habsburg Empire, not “the Germans.” It was Venetianism that was portrayed as the enemy of Illyrianism in Dall’Ongaro’s work and mind. With his poetry he hoped to ensure that Italianism would not develop into the same oppressive force along Adriatic waters as its Venetian equivalent had been.

Dall’Ongaro’s care to downplay the role of the Habsburgs in the Uskoci tragic sea battle functioned as more than just a means to emphasize the role Venetian dominance had played in upsetting a “natural” multinational Adriatic order. For it must be remembered that Dall’Ongaro was writing within the Habsburg Empire’s *Urbs Fidelissima* (Most Faithful City), where censorship was the norm and poems would remain unpublished if influential officials disapproved. Not only was Dall’Ongaro writing within the context of Habsburg rule, he was also trying to publish within state-financed venues. In fact, after completing “Origin of the Bora,” Dall’Ongaro decided he wanted to publish an entire collection of sea-poems geared to the greater Adriatic’s maritime community. He even convinced his new friend Count Franz von Stadion—the governor of the Habsburg Littoral and later the Habsburg Minister of the Interior—to publish his volume of short poems as an addendum to Habsburg maritime law manuals.²²

Dall’Ongaro’s success at having both the “Origin of the Bora” and the rest of his sea-collection published—with the cost of printing sponsored by the Austrian Lloyd no less—cannot be explained simply by his care at characterizing his poem’s villains as “German,” rather than Habsburg. Instead, his achievement can best be explained by how the project must have sounded to the ears of such cosmopolitan and reform-oriented figures as Counts von Stadion and von Bruck. To these Habsburg actors, the poem would undoubtedly have seemed like an attack on the traditional *Venetian* hegemony over the sea. And perhaps the poem also would have been thought to echo some of the same multinational rhetoric that proclaimed the head of the Habsburg royal house as the “Father” of its many distinct and diverse peoples.²³ Just as Nature, according to Dall’Ongaro, required a multinational Adriatic for peace and prosperity, the Habsburgs seemed to be increasingly of the opinion that they, too, needed to forgo the Germanization and centralization initiatives promoted under Joseph II. Just as Dall’Ongaro argued that the Adriatic needed to be ordered around the intertwined interests of many nations, so Habsburg policymakers, too, seemed to be promoting a multinational empire to reap the same benefits. On an Adriatic scale, by the late 1830s, Habsburg officials of the eastern Adriatic demonstrated this sort of commitment by beginning to require Slavic language usage in schools, in newspapers, in churches, and among their administrative staff.²⁴ Not enough to satisfy disgruntled Illyrianists, to be sure.

years.” This family was a source of inspiration to Dall’Ongaro because he saw them as quintessentially Dalmatian in their relationship to the sea and the commercial capital of Trieste. He described them as “unaltered in accent, habits, heart, and Dalmatian virtue, though living in this city, of many languages and various imitative customs.” Dall’Ongaro, “Una madre dalmata,” *La Favilla* VI, no. 17 (1841).

²²Francesco Dall’Ongaro, “Letter by Francesco Dall’Ongaro to Niccolò Tommaseo, Trieste: no date, but probably early 1841,” (Florence National Library: Tommaseo Carteggi 73.30.4).

²³Robert A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918* (New York, 1950). Though Kann sees the multinational project as a priority only after 1848, well before the revolutions, state pomp presented the Habsburg emperor as the “Father” of his many different peoples.

²⁴For a fascinating discussion on Habsburg policies of introducing official multilingualism to Dalmatia, see: Konrad Clewing, *Staatlichkeit und nationale Identitätsbildung: Dalmatien in Vormärz und Revolution*, *Sudosteuropäische Arbeiten* 109 (Munich, 2001).

Too much for Italian Risorgimento fiends. But just enough to make it hard for a historian not to see that a multinational Adriatic was part of a multinational Habsburg program.

The success of Dall'Ongaro's first Adriatic initiatives encouraged him enormously.²⁵ However, his next large endeavor demonstrated the potential pitfalls of his multinational project. The work in question was a play titled *The Dalmatians*.²⁶ A melodrama first performed in Trieste in 1845, the play was a fictional account of the 1812 explosion of a French warship outside the Trieste harbor. As Dall'Ongaro admitted, his tale was a work of imagination, born "out of gossip" that claimed the boat had been intentionally destroyed as an act "of national more than personal vendetta."²⁷ As in his "Bora" poem, the violence of the story was represented as an act of revenge on the part of a Slavic-speaking Dalmatian, this time by a loyal former member of the Venetian Republic's navy.

According to Dall'Ongaro, the play was supposed to portray Dalmatians as the exemplary defenders of national, family, and gendered honor. In Dall'Ongaro's theatrical piece, only the Slavic-speaking Dalmatian was brave and determined enough to free the Adriatic's Italian and Slavic communities from the French intruder. Dalmatians, too, were the only Trieste residents shown as committed to protecting the fragile bonds of family and feminine virtue when the amoral lusts of French officers threatened. Though Dall'Ongaro believed these qualities would clearly cast the Slavic-speaking eastern Adriatic as the heroic savior of the theatrical piece, in reality the play communicated a completely different message, one of Slavs as bloodthirsty, irrational, and inherently "different."²⁸

Even in the play's introduction, Dall'Ongaro's reversion to centuries of Venetian disparagement of Slavic-speaking Dalmatians seemed evident, especially when he described the tragic deaths of hundreds of the ship's passengers as resulting from the wrath of "a peculiar mind, a proud, vindictive, true Schiavone."²⁹ As Larry Wolff and others have shown, *Schiavone*—which meant simultaneously Dalmatian and "Big Slave"—was *not* the politically correct nineteenth-century word to describe the Slavic-speaking populations of the eastern Adriatic.³⁰ Even a few years before the production of his play, Dall'Ongaro's *La Favilla* had published an article that lamented Italian-speakers' continued usage of a word imbued with so much historical baggage, implying that there might be deeper reasons that certain "Italians" continually preferred to use "*Schiavone*" and avoided denominating Slavic-speakers as "Slavs" as was current practice throughout the rest of Europe.³¹ To the surprise of many, Dall'Ongaro himself appeared to be the *Schiavone*-calling type.

When Dall'Ongaro sent his script around to friends to get their advice, he was bombarded with criticism. As one of Dall'Ongaro's most respected colleagues, Niccolò Tommaseo, put it: The play was just another example of how "Italians disparage the Dalmatian as savage, and savage in a particular sense, a mixture of the horrible and ridiculous, something never witnessed except in the imagination of these same Italians."³² Accusing Dall'Ongaro of doing

²⁵Dall'Ongaro, "Dall'Ongaro to Tommaseo: circa 1841."

²⁶Francesco Dall'Ongaro, *I Dalmati* (Turin, 1847), 10.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2001).

³¹P. C., "Rimembranze di Viaggi. Il Montenegro," *La Favilla* I, no. 32 (1837). The angry Dalmatian author of said article insisted that now was the time for Italian-speakers in Trieste to correct this long history of "slander" and start using the word "*Slavi*" (Slavs) like the rest of Europe.

³²Niccolò Tommaseo, "Letter from Niccolò Tommaseo to Francesco Dall'Ongaro, Venice: no date, but most likely mid 1845," (Firenze- Biblioteca Nazionale: Tommaseo Carteggi 73.33.22a).

to the Dalmatians what Edward Said would later say Westerners did to the Orient, Tommaseo pointed out the ways that Dall'Ongaro utilized and propagated a system of denigration.³³ The only solution Tommaseo could think of to avert something he knew was not Dall'Ongaro's purpose was to have the latter abandon his Adriatic project completely. Tommaseo wrote: "You who love and admire unhappy Dalmatia, why do you [disparage] it so as well? . . . I beg you in the name of a fairly unhappy people, give the heroes of your play another patria. The world is large."³⁴ Tommaseo, a Dalmatian and Slavic-speaker by birth, begged the Venetian Dall'Ongaro to restore peace by leaving the Adriatic behind and letting the figurative Uskoci fight their own battles.

Dall'Ongaro did not listen. He believed his friends were willfully misunderstanding him; his play was dedicated to Dalmatians and described Slavic-speakers as moral champions in the face of "French" infamy and "Italian" cowardice. As such, Dall'Ongaro ignored his friends' pleas and produced the play. *The Dalmatians'* Trieste audience proved as unappreciative as Tommaseo had been and faulted the play for its stilted histrionics and its description of Dalmatians as bloodthirsty, simpleton savages.³⁵ Dall'Ongaro's first reaction to his critics was to try to explain how they had misunderstood his intentions. When they remained unconvinced, he then took a defensive stance: He rededicated the play. No longer did Dall'Ongaro's *The Dalmatians* honor his contemporary Dalmatians. Instead, now his play was dedicated to the "dead, . . . those generous DALMATIANS who lost blood in order not to suffer the foreign yoke . . . worthy for having defended not only one city on the verge of death, but a nation, perhaps its own, or perhaps adopted, to which they were linked by many bonds."³⁶ In essence, Dall'Ongaro preferred the Dalmatians of the past, who (like the Uskoci) had either fought against Venice as pirates or (like his play's hero) had fought for Venice in her navy. The Dalmatians of his day, who balked at his old-fashioned Venetian prejudices, troubled him.

Dall'Ongaro's failure with *The Dalmatians* did not convince him to abandon his ambitions, however. After the dust had settled, he decided to change his tactics for promoting multinationalism. Apparently, the experience of being accused of what we today would call Orientalism shook Dall'Ongaro, and from 1845 until the outbreak of the Revolution of 1848, he decided to write on Slavic themes under the close supervision of his Slavic-speaking friends. Before 1845, Dall'Ongaro had ambitiously tried to meld Italian and Slavic national themes to create an all-encompassing Italo-Slavic Adriaticism. After 1845, unsure of what prejudice his own Veneto upbringing would create, he lost confidence in this method and became the obedient disciple of his Illyrianist friends, writing works that advanced the Adriatic's national movements equally but separately. He wrote Italian national poems and plays, and he wrote Illyrianist poems and plays. And though he wrote both genres with his own idiosyncratic style and his own Veneto-inflected Italian prose, Dall'Ongaro no longer melded the two. Interconnections between his two national genres were apparent only in the fact that he was the author of both. And the sea disappeared completely. Apparently, his *Schiavone* play persuaded him of the inherent danger contained in his attempt to meld two nationalisms into one Adriatic regionalism. With the onslaught of the Revolution of 1848 and the traumatic experience of the death of one of his brothers at the battle of Palmanova, Dall'Ongaro surrendered even that goal. He pushed multinationalism aside and dedicated himself fully to the land of *Italia*, ignoring the sea and the myriad of peoples who surrounded it.

³³Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York, 1979).

³⁴Tommaseo, "Tommaseo to Dall'Ongaro circa 1845."

³⁵Giuseppe Caprin, *Tempi andati* (Trieste, 1891).

³⁶Dall'Ongaro, *I Dalmati*, 15.

What, then, do the struggles of this poet for a new Adriaticism reveal? I believe four points emerge from Dall'Ongaro's life and writings. First, we are reminded that the history of nationalism, even at its outset in the nineteenth century, was not necessarily or primarily the product of national tunnel vision. Many activists (especially in the mid nineteenth century) understood the fight for the nation as being NOT part of a single trajectory of creating and reinforcing a defensive "us" against an oppressive "them." Dall'Ongaro's poetic struggles demonstrate how national activism was also part of a project to find a way to balance a world of many already existent us' and thems. As Dall'Ongaro wrote, without equally respected nations, the winds of the Adriatic would continue to wreak havoc. Blood would flow. And the sea would be torn up by a "natural" internecine battle with no end in sight.

Second, Dall'Ongaro's Adriaticism serves as a useful warning not to assume that "the region" or the politics of the region is somehow a necessarily more *longue durée* creature than the many other -isms that fascinated the nineteenth century. Dall'Ongaro's poem and his many other initiatives demonstrated a conscious effort to transform a Venetian-centered Adriatic regionalism into a more multilateral one. Regionalism for Dall'Ongaro (and his high-ranking Habsburg friends) was something that could be conducted, could be transformed. The ebbs and flows of a maritime environment, even the frenzied Bora winds of the sea, were not necessarily only timeless phenomena. Mortal time, too, could be inscribed in the regional story. To what degree the enterprise was successful is hard to say. But that the effort was undertaken reveals that just as there was a politics of the nation in the nineteenth century, so, too, was there an (intermingled) *courte durée* politics of the region.

Third, Dall'Ongaro's failure also raises some questions about the particular quality of maritime regionalism. As we saw, Dall'Ongaro was inspired by his experiences in Trieste. The sight of so many people cohabitating, collaborating, and productively intermingling while hailing from different linguistic, religious, and geographic traditions motivated him to imagine the waters of the Adriatic in similar terms. As the "Origin of the Bora" made clear, order would reign if the sea was manned by many. But perhaps Dall'Ongaro failed to bolster an Adriatic culture of variety precisely because no one lived *in* a sea the way they lived *in* a port-city. Instead, peoples lived *along* the waters. Dall'Ongaro believed that Trieste's collaborative diversity was stable and vibrant because day-to-day urban living created a situation where "thousands of favors, thousands of indulgences are exchanged, and often a great deal of tolerance is felt in making allowances for reciprocal indiscretions."³⁷ But perhaps maritime regionalism could not aspire to the same form of stabilized intermixing precisely because there was none of that day-to-day living that created the tolerance required. People *in* the sea sailed in contained vessels with flags a-waving. People *in* the sea swam as single agents. *In* the sea, how many favors and indulgences were exchanged among peoples of different linguistic, religious, and geographic traditions? How much "tolerance [was] felt in making allowances for reciprocal indiscretions" when riding the waves? Could nineteenth-century communities anchor their communion in such a watery conduit as the Adriatic in the same way as they could (and did) in urban, alpine, or desert landscapes?

One way or another, the fourth and most important thing that Dall'Ongaro's struggles illustrate is that before irredentism, before the world wars, before the violence that would tear apart the Adriatic in the twentieth century, Dall'Ongaro and a crew of like-minded activists believed in the possibility of creating a peaceful Adriatic regionalism that required

³⁷Dall'Ongaro, "Varietà, Il ventiquattro d'Agosto a Trieste." *La Favilla* III, no. 4 (1838).

lesser nationalisms.³⁸ And only awareness of greater regionalism would tame its component parts. Dall'Ongaro tried to tame his nationalisms into a greater regionalism and failed. But his failure, and the many failures that were to follow, makes plain just how important the attempt was.

DOMINIQUE KIRCHNER REILL is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL33124.

³⁸For more information about the extent and variety of this mid-nineteenth-century effort to stabilize a multinational Adriatic regionalism, see: Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Stanford, 2011).