

Gianmaria Testa

"20 Mila Leghe"

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The first was the Cape of Good Hope
closed by law and special decree
so that the Pacific waves would quit
bastardizing that other sea.

Next it was the turn of Panama and Suez,
and then of the Bosphorus and Gibraltar:
every last wave demanded
respect for its sovereign independence.

No more exchanges of water and fish,
no more round-the-world trips in sailing ships
all canals were closed
to the passage of foreign waves.

Thus for a time the waters of all
the planet's seas became calm again,
but before long it began again: a wave said
that it was time to end it all.

And so it happened that one day in our local sea
the Ionian demanded to be alone,
and so did the Tyrrhenian and the Sicilian Strait
and the Adriatic forthwith.

In short, 'let no one mix with anyone else'
thundered the waters of the shallows;
'let each remain anchored in place
and bathe only the sands of her birth.'

It seemed to be over but it was only the beginning,
and it was truly ugly to see
in what once was a vast expanse
the gashes of trenches rending the sea.

It was only the beginning, as we said,
because now the secessionist fever
was sickening every single shore,
and nothing and no one managed to say 'enough'.

And thus from Trieste to the tip of Apulia

from Sicily to the Italian Riviera
every last tiny creek demanded
independence and not in name only.

But the matter went shabby
when they seized each other drop by drop
and, each eyeing her neighbor, said
'go away or I'll break your face'.
The sea was soon an assemblage of dewdrops
of no use to fish or any creature.
tuna, anchovies, and swordfish died,
deep-sea vessels stayed on dry land.

And then one day or (I'm not sure) one night
something even stranger happened
do you know the formula H₂O?
Yes, the one for water that we all know.

Well, hydrogen took exception
and claimed to have a majority
and thus the sovereign right
to pursue now-hallowed independence.

A kind of wind blew, an infinite gust,
and the water of the seas vaporized into the sky.
there remained a desert of salt and granite,
but dark and deep, blacker than black.

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