

CĂLĂTORI ÎNTR-UN HOTEL UITAT

PAVANE FOR A DEFUNCT HOTEL

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Abstract

Hotelul Croix de Malte a fost numit după cavalerii de Malta care mai veghează încă asupra bisericii din apropiere, San Pancrazio (cu un binecunoscut triptic) și asupra celui mai vechi și umil spital. Și cu toate acestea vecinătatea cu noul Acvariu și portul de ambarcațiuni i-au adus mulțimi de vizitatori.

Cuvinte cheie: Hotel Croix de Malte, Marc Twain, calatori.

Abstract

The Hotel Croix de Malte was named after the Knights of Malta, who still preside over the nearby church of San Pancrazio (with a notable triptych) and run a day-hospital for the neighborhood, one of the city's oldest and poorest. However, proximity to the new Aquarium and marina has brought it crowds of visitors—at least in the daytime.

Key words: Hotel Croix de Malte, Marc Twain, travelers.

Pe data de 6 februarie 2002, Facultatea de Limbi Străine din cadrul Universității din Genova a găzduit o masă rotundă pe tema Hotelul Croce di Malta și oaspeții care i-au călcat pragul. Întâlnirea a fost ocazionată de inaugurarea unei plachete pe o clădire veche cu panoramă asupra golfului Genova, clădire care în secolele XVIII respectiv XIX reprezenta celebrul han al orașului. Hotelul Croix de Malte a fost numit după cavalerii de Malta care mai veghează încă asupra bisericii din apropiere, San Pancrazio (cu un binecunoscut triptic) și asupra celui mai vechi și umil spital. Și cu toate acestea vecinătatea cu noul Acvariu și portul de ambarcațiuni i-au adus mulțimi de vizitatori.

Când Tobias Smollett naviga de la Nice spre Genova în 1764, relatează:

We passed through a considerable number of ships and vessels lying at anchor, and landing at the water-gate, repaired to an inn called La Croix de Malte, in the neighbourhood of the harbour. Here we met with such good entertainment as

On February 6, 2002, the Faculty of Languages of the University of Genoa hosted a panel on 'The Hotel Croce di Malta and Its Guests'. The occasion was the inauguration of a plaque on an old building overlooking the Genoa harbour, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was the city's foremost inn. The Hotel Croix de Malte was named after the Knights of Malta, who still preside over the nearby church of San Pancrazio (with a notable triptych) and run a day-hospital for the neighborhood, one of the city's oldest and poorest. However, proximity to the new Aquarium and marina has brought it crowds of visitors—at least in the daytime.

When Tobias Smollett sailed from Nice into Genoa in 1764, he reported:

We passed through a considerable number of ships and vessels lying at anchor, and landing at the water-gate, repaired to an inn called La Croix de Malte, in the neighborhood of the harbour. Here we met with such good entertainment as prepossessed us in favour of the interior parts of Italy, and contributed with other

prepossessed us in favour of the interior parts of Italy, and contributed with other motives to detain us some days in this city (Travels, 205).

Un secol și ceva mai târziu, în 1877, Croce di Malta era încă la modă și i-a atras atenția lui Henry James 'I had found my hotel,' scria el în *Italian Hours*, deosebit de amuzat—the Croce di Malta, as it is called, established in a gigantic palace on the edge of the swarming and not over-clean harbour. It was the biggest house I had ever entered—the basement alone would have contained a dozen American caravanseries. I met an American gentleman in the vestibule who . . . was annoyed by its troublesome dimensions—one was a quarter of an hour ascending out of the basement—and desired to know if it were a 'fair sample' of the Genoese inns. It appeared an excellent specimen of Genoese architecture generally; so far as I had observed there were few houses perceptibly smaller than this Titanic tavern. I lunched in a dusky ballroom whose ceiling was vaulted, frescoed and gilded with the fatal facility of a couple of centuries ago . . . (114-115)

Curând după vizita lui James, hotelul Croce di Malta a fost închis, și orice urmă a lui a dispărut. Cercetând registre ale secolului XIX i-am găsit adresa, Vico dei Morci și am fost de-a dreptul fericit să constat că un Vico Morchi încă apare din labirintul întunecat al *topographical tangle* (James) – încălceală topografică – în lumina piațetei de pe faleză, Piazza Caricamento. S-a dovedit a fi aproape de un loc unde se mănâncă bine și unde adesea mă opresc între orele de curs (Friggitoria Carega, Via Sottoripa 113r) pentru că servesc cele mai bune *farinata* (mâncare pregătită din grâu/porumb/ năut, fiartă, prăjită în unt sau coaptă în cuptor), crevete prăjit sau caracatiță fiartă din câte cunosc – asta în cazul în care cineva dorește să stea pe o stinghie de metal în localul îngust, lângă cuptorul în care încă se

motives to detain us some days in this city (*Travels*, 205).

A little over a century later, in 1877, the Croce di Malta was still in business and attracted Henry James's considerable powers of attention. 'I had found my hotel,' he wrote in *Italian Hours*,

extremely entertaining—the Croce di Malta, as it is called, established in a gigantic palace on the edge of the swarming and not over-clean harbor. It was the biggest house I had ever entered—the basement alone would have contained a dozen American caravanseries. I met an American gentleman in the vestibule who . . . was annoyed by its troublesome dimensions—one was a quarter of an hour ascending out of the basement—and desired to know if it were a 'fair sample' of the Genoese inns. It appeared an excellent specimen of Genoese architecture generally; so far as I had observed there were few houses perceptibly smaller than this Titanic tavern. I lunched in a dusky ballroom whose ceiling was vaulted, frescoed and gilded with the fatal facility of a couple of centuries ago . . . (114-115)

Soon after James' visit, the Croce di Malta was shut down and all traces of it disappeared. By consulting directories from the nineteenth century I found its address to have been 'Vico dei Morci', and was happy to discover that a Vico Morchi still emerges from the dim labyrinth of Genoa's 'topographical tangle' (James) into the light of the seafront square, Piazza Caricamento. It turned out to be close to a little eatery where I often stop between classes (Friggitoria Carega, Via Sottoripa 113r), for it serves some of the best *farinata* (hot chickpea bake), fried shrimp and boiled octopus I know—if one is willing to stand or sit on a metal perch in the narrow shop, near the oven, still a wood-burning one. Winter and summer, there is no door to this venerable establishment, certain proof that

mai arde lemn. Iarnă sau vară, nu există ușa la acest venerabil stabiliment, dovadă sigură a climei temperate.

Vicho Morchi este mai degrabă o alee prăfuită din vecinătatea acestui fish&chips genevez. Tot aici am descoperit o frizerie care ar fi putut data foarte bine din timpul lui James, dacă nu ar fi fost imaginile lui Marx și Engels împodobind pereții precum și ciudatele creații din metal sau sculpturile modernist erotice ce zăceau în jur.

Bătrânul frizer politicos m-a informat asupra lui Castro care era un mare om de stat și că sculpturile fratelui său nu erau de vânzare. Locuia în casa de vizavi și auzise de la fata unei bătrâne care se stinsese la vârsta de 80 de ani cu mult înainte, că îi spusese bunicul său de hotelul care existase în acea casă.

Părea o dovadă sigură. În 1890 vechiul palat fusese renovat de noul proprietar și transformat în apartamente pentru familia sa numeroasă. Și a rămas așa. Frizerul prietenos urcă la etaj – nu exista lift. Și ca să pună capac era un turn roșu medieval, unde niște oaspeți mai romantici ar fi putut locui. Numai că eu nu găsesc nicio urmă a imensității care îl impresionase pe James. Probabil voi găsi dacă mă voi aventura înăuntru. Odată vizitasem studioul unui pictor genevez din apropiere și m-am gândit atunci că etajul era la fel de mare ca un teren de fotbal. Dar nu exista electricitate și poate nici măcar o sală de baie. Spunea că picta doar la lumina zilei.

James era ultimul dintre cei 3 americani, oaspeți de seamă ai hotelului Croce di Malta. În februarie 1829 James Fenimore Cooper îi scria soției sale în Florența:

'I am at the Croix de Malta, which looks directly upon the harbour. I can scarcely describe to you the pleasure I feel in seeing ships, hearing the cries of seamen, a race everywhere so much alike, and in smelling all the odours of the trade'. He even

this is a temperate climate.

Vico Morchi is a rather dingy alley on the next corner from this Genoese fish & chips. Here I discovered a barber-shop which could have gone back to the times of Henry James, were it not for the pictures of Marx and Engels adorning the walls and the strange metal constructs or erotic modernistic sculptures lying around the premises. The courteous and aged barber informed me that Castro was a great statesman and that his brother's sculptures were not for sale. He lives in the opposite building and he has heard from the daughter of an old lady who died long ago in her eighties that her grandfather said that the house was a hotel.

This seemed sufficient proof. In the 1890s the old palace was renovated by a new owner and turned into apartments for his extended family. And so it has remained. The friendly barber climbs up to the top floor—no elevator. And on top of that is a red medieval tower, where some of the more romantic guests may have stayed. Only, I can't see traces of the immensity that so impressed Henry James. Perhaps I will if I ever venture inside. I once visited a Genoese painter's studio nearby, and thought the floor was as big as a football field. But there was no electricity, and perhaps not even a bathroom. He said he only painted in the daytime anyhow.

James was the last of three notable American guests of the Croce di Malta. In February 1829 James Fenimore Cooper wrote his wife in Florence: 'I am at the Croix de Malta, which looks directly upon the harbor. I can scarcely describe to you the pleasure I feel in seeing ships, hearing the cries of seamen, a race everywhere so much alike, and in smelling all the odors of the trade'. He even considered bringing wife and child 'as high as this in June' (*Letters and Journals*, I, 361).

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain wrote enthusiastically:

considered bringing wife and child 'as high as this in June' (*Letters and Journals, I, 361*).

În *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain scria plin de entuziasm:

The hotel we live in belonged to one of those great orders of knights of the Cross in the times of the Crusades, and its mailed sentinels once kept watch and ward in its massive turrets and woke the echoes of these halls and corridors with their iron heels (122).

La timpul vizitei inocenților, Genova era un important punct turistic și chiar prietenul lui Twain William Dean Howells avea un capitol amețitor în *Italian Journeys* despre hoinărela prin labirinturile orașului. Nu spunea explicit unde a petrecut noaptea, dar surprinde scena foarte bine:

A very great number of the streets of Genoa are footways merely, and these are as narrow, as dark, as full of jutting chimney-places, balconies, and open window-shutters, and as picturesque as the little alleys in Venice. They wander at will around the bases of the gloomy old stony palaces, and seem to have a vagabond fondness for creeping down to the port, and losing themselves there in a certain cavernous arcade which curves round the water with the flections of the shore, and makes itself a twilight of noonday. Under it are clangorous shops of ironsmiths, and sizzling shops of marine cooks, and, looking down its dim perspective, one beholds chiefly sea-legs coming and going, more or less affected by strong waters . . . (34)

Din nefericire astăzi nu este posibil ca cineva să nu vadă persoane împleticindu-se sub influența unei doze de heroină, dar marinari, faruri și magazine de jefuit abundau încă.

Cât despre Mark Twain era impresionat de femeile din Genova:

The hotel we live in belonged to one of those great orders of knights of the Cross in the times of the Crusades, and its mailed sentinels once kept watch and ward in its massive turrets and woke the echoes of these halls and corridors with their iron heels (122).

At the time of the Innocents' visit, Genoa was still an important tourist stop, and even Twain's friend William Dean Howells has a bemused chapter in his *Italian Journeys* on wandering through the city's labyrinth. He doesn't say where he spent the night, but catches the scene very well:

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Unfortunatly today one is as likely as not to see somebody stagger under the influence of a shot of heroin, but sailors and ship chandlers and sizzling shops still abound.

Mark Twain, for his part, was impressed by the women of Genoa: 'I did not see how a man of only ordinary decision of character could marry here, because before he could get his mind made up he would fall in love with somebody else' (117). This is surely tongue-in-cheek, though Balzac claimed somewhere that Michelangelo had used Genoese models for his wide-breasted nudes

'I did not see how a man of only ordinary decision of character could marry here, because before he could get his mind made up he would fall in love with somebody else' (117). This is surely tongue-in-cheek, though Balzac claimed somewhere that Michelangelo had used Genoese models for his wide-breasted nudes in the Medici chapel. Genoa reminded Clemens 'of a cave I used to know at home . . . with its lofty passages, its silence and solitude, its shrouding gloom' (122).

Sunt sigur că vorbește despre peștera pe care o știm cu toții din *Tom Sawyer*.

Cu alte cuvinte era drept ca o placă de marmură în Vico Morchi să amintească tuturor plimbăreților care își vor întinde gâtul înspre colțul total neatrăgător despre trecutul ilustru al clădirii. AISNA sau Asociația de Studii Americane din Italia și AIWC sau Clubul Internațional al Femeilor de Origine Americană din Genova au împărțit costurile și toate aprobările fiind obținute, placheta a fost inaugurată pe 6 februarie 2002. Prietenii mei scoțieni vor fi dezamăgiți că numele lui Smollett a fost uitat (eu insumi am dat peste pasajul relevant mai târziu în *Travels*. Dar pe lângă americanii Cooper James și Mark Twain, trei figure europene sunt demne de amintit: Mary Shelly, Stendhal și Giuseppe Verdi. Se pare că Verdi a petrecut majoritatea iernilor la Genova, deoarece clima era mai blândă decât în Parma sa natală șă oamenii îl lasu în pace pe parcursul plimbărilor sale (genovezii au reputația de a fi oameni rezervați dar și zgârcoți.)

Desigur multe alți oaspeți de seamă ai hotelului Croce di Malta vor mai apărea în decursul timpului. Pentru fiecare dintre ei există o poveste, o scrisoare sau un capitol care ne poartă înapoi în timp și pare să necesite un tratament romanțat. Imaginați-vi-l pe Henry James întâlnindu-l pe Giuseppe Verdi într-o sală de bal plină de fresce și amândoi plănuiind o operă pe subiectul romanului Daisy (nu Luisa) Miller. Sau pe Mary Shelly, o văduvă de 25 de ani,

in the Medici chapel. Genoa reminded Clemens 'of a cave I used to know at home . . . with its lofty passages, its silence and solitude, its shrouding gloom' (122). I am sure this is the cave we all remember from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

So it was only right that there should be a marble plaque in Vico Morchi, informing all strollers who will crane their neck around the unpromising corner of the building's illustrious past.

AISNA, the American Studies Association of Italy, and AIWC, American International Women's Club Genoa, shared the expense and--all due permissions having been obtained--the tablet was inaugurated on February 6, 2002. My Scottish friends will be disappointed that Smollett's name was forgotten (I only came upon the relevant passage in the *Travels* later). But, besides the Americans Cooper James and Mark Twain, three European figures are listed: Mary Shelley, Stendhal, and Giuseppe Verdi. Verdi, it turns out, spent in Genoa most of his winters, because the climate there was milder than in his native Parma, and people would leave him alone in his strolls. (The Genoese have a reputation for reserve, as well as for stinginess.)

Certainly many other notable guests of the Croce di Malta will turn up. For every one of them there is a story, letter or chapter that takes us back into time, and seems to call for novelistic treatment. Imagine Henry James meeting Giuseppe Verdi in the frescoed ballroom, and the two planning together an opera on Daisy (not Luisa) Miller. Or Mary Shelley, a widow of 25, musing on her beloved Percy in September 1822, and worrying about her

-- and her child's -- future, 'in this busy hateful Genoa where nothing speaks to me of him, except the sea, which is his murderer' (*Letters*, I, 258). After she moved from the hotel to Casa Negrotto, Albaro, in the suburbs, Mary wrote Jane Williams about Edward Trelawny: 'He is at the Croce di Malta; Gabrielle [Wright] sees him every

meditând asupra preaiubitului ei Percy în septembrie 1822, și îngrijorându-se asupra viitorului ei însăși și a copilului său 'in this busy hateful Genoa where nothing speaks to me of him, except the sea, which is his murderer' (*Letters*, I, 258). După ce s-a mutat din hotel în casa Negrotto, Albaro de la periferie, Mary îi scria Janei Williams despre Edward Trelawny: 'He is at the Croce di Malta; Gabrielle [Wright] sees him every day—generally dines with him there, & what will become of him when W[right]. Comes home?—I have seen L.B[yron]. Only once & that by accident . . . I have copied for him the 10th Canto of Don Juan' (I, 281). Și acțiunea se complica.

Că aceste vieți s-au desfășurat sub arcadele întunecoase ale docurilor orașului Genova nu încetează să mă intrige. Poate placheta de pe fostul hotel Croce di Malta îi va ajuta pe studenții noștri de la Facultatea de Limbi Străine să-și însușească o perspectivă mai detaliată asupra acelor poezii și povestiri care sunt puși să le citească din antologii de la Londra și New York.

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day—generally dines with him there, & what will become of him when W[right]. comes home?—I have seen L.B[yron]. only once & that by accident . . . I have copied for him the 10th Canto of Don Juan' (I, 281). The plot thickens.

That these lives should have passed under the dim arcades of the Genoa waterfront does not cease to intrigue me. Perhaps the plaque on the former Hotel Croce di Malta will help our students at the Faculty of Languages get a closer perspective on those remote poems and stories they are assigned to read in their anthologies from London and New York.

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