MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

I. S. MED.

Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean

01/2023

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

Giovanna Summerfield, Auburn University (USA)
Rosario Pollicino, University of South Carolina (USA) (editors)

Mehraneh Ebrahimi, York University (CAN) (book/media review editor)

Francesca Bregoli, Queens College, New York (USA)
Baris Cayli Messina, University of Lincoln (UK)
Megan Carney, The University of Arizona (USA)
Antonio Cecere, Università di Roma, "Tor Vergata" (Italia)
Amanda Dalola, University of Minnesota (USA)
Dionysis Drosos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Grecia)
Sherine Hafez, University of California, Riverside (USA)
Claudia Karagoz, Saint Louis University (USA)
Amara Lhakous, writer
Paolo Militello, Università di Catania (Italia)
Halima Ouanada, University of Tunis El Manar (Tunisia)
Benita Sampedro, Hofstra University (USA)
Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, Tulane University (USA)
Roberta Torre, filmmaker
Nadia Zeldes, Ben Gurion University of the Negev (Israele)

© 2023—Mimesis International
www.mimesisinternational.com
e-mail: info@mimesisinternational.com

Isbn: 9788869774423

© MIM Edizioni Srl
P.I. C.F. 02419370305

INDICE

From the Editors 7

Interview with Leila Simona Talani 9

ARTICLES

Mariana Starke and the Grand Tour in Europe, Italy, and Sicily between the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth Century 13
Paolo Militello

Lebanon and Egypt: The Construction of a Vital Space in Women's Writing 33
Laura Restuccia

Religious Ripples on the Bosporus. Mediterranean History as an Analogy for the nineteenth-century *Kulturkampf* in Ida Hahn-Hahn's *Eudoxia* 49
Paul Csillag

«To Do Good and Love One's Country». Three Italian Poetesses during the Risorgimento 71
Elena Frasca

A Postmodern 'New' Wave? Women and the Gendering of Seascape in Contemporary Italian Cinema 87
Antonio D'Amico

(Re)Collections of a "Piccola Streghina" from the Heart of the Mediterranean: Gender and Class Consciousness in Grazia Deledda's Folkloric Writings 109
Elena Emma Sottilotta

Motherhood and the 'Ndrangheta in *La terra dei santi* 131
Veronica Vegna

Interview with Sarah Abrevaya Stein 151

Book Reviews 157

Contributors 165

FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the first issue of *I.S. Med. Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean*, a new journal that aims to fill the gaps of Mediterranean scholarship and to produce an interdisciplinary and multicultural dialogue regarding this exciting field of study about a Mediterranean, for our purposes and interests, particularly situated in modern and contemporary contexts. The Mediterranean is here intended as a geo-cultural space that goes beyond political borders and that includes, besides the humanities and the social sciences, inquiries about matters within media and pop culture, sociolinguistics and creative writing, as identity and community expressions.

We should like to recognize the authors, the anonymous peer reviewers, our editorial team, the members of the editorial board (Francesca Bregoli, Queens College, New York; Baris Cayli, University of Lincoln, UK; Megan Carney, The University of Arizona, USA; Antonio Cecere, Università di Roma “Tor Vergata”, Italy; Amanda Dalola, University of Minnesota, USA; Dionysis Drosos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; Sherine Hafez, University of California, Riverside, USA; Claudia Karagoz, Saint Louis University, USA; Amara Lakhous, writer; Paolo Militello, Università di Catania, Italy; Halima Ouanada, University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia; Benita Sampedro, Hofstra University, N.Y., USA; Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, Tulane University, USA; Roberta Torre, Filmmaker; Nadia Zeldes, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel) and the staff of Mimesis International for their valuable help in bringing out our first high quality issue during our current challenging times.

After meeting and presenting at several professional conferences, we felt inspired to create our own space where to gather and incentivize new perspectives on the Mediterranean. In July 2021 we were able to organize and to lead our first Mediterranean Studies Symposium held in Ortigia, Italy at the Exedra Mediterranean Center. Despite the looming pandemic, the success of this first initiative spurred us to continue the discussion through two other events, one virtual in June 2022 and the other face-to-face which will be hosted by the Centre of Mediterranean Studies, in Dubrovnik, Croatia in June 29-July 1, 2023.

Although the symposium provides a great exchange venue for scholars all around the world, the participants' number is always limited, by choice, in order to engage in meaningful discussions during and after presentations. The journal will feed our minds and souls during the time in between symposia. This scholarly journal, which follows a strict double-blind peer-review policy, will be published twice per year, one in early summer and the other in early winter.

This first issue, which focuses on women of and in the Mediterranean, contains essays that span from Mariana Starke and her Grand Tour, as analysed by Paolo Militello, women's writing in Lebanon and Egypt, in southern Italy, and in nineteenth-century *Kulturkampf*, as reported by Laura Restuccia, Elena Sottilotta, Elena Frasca, and Paul Csillag, to cinematic women representations in films like *L'Attesa* and *La terra dei santi* detailed by Antonio D'Amico and Veronica Vegna. Readers will be happy to see also two interviews, one with Leila Simona Talani, co-author of *Women in the Mediterranean*, and the other with Sarah Stein, author of the article "Queen of Herbs: A Plant's Eye View of the Sephardic Diaspora." The issue closes with two book reviews.

We are beginning this venture with a lot of enthusiasm and passion. We hope our work inspires many readers to engage with this and the following issues. We welcome any submission on topics related to Mediterranean Studies and recommend paying particular attention to the submission requirements posted on the journal's website. Moreover, as we continue to organize annual Mediterranean Studies symposia, we encourage our readers to follow news about these events and to possibly join us to begin or continue a crucial dialogue with those involved and invested in the Mediterranean. In the meantime, feel free to contact the authors directly; their emails are provided in the contributors' section of each issue.

Enjoy the reading!

INTERVIEW WITH LEILA SIMONA TALANI

Leila Simona Talani is the editor of the volume *Women in the Mediterranean* (Routledge 2018), together with Serena Giusti, which served as point of departure and inspiration to the second Mediterranean Studies Symposium held virtually in June 2022. Talani is professor of International Political Economy and director of the Centre for Italian Politics @ European and International Studies at King's College, London, editor of the Palgrave series on the Politics of Migration and Citizenship as well as author of many scholarly publications, such as *The IPE of migration in The globalization era* (Palgrave 2022); *The Political Economy of Italy in the Euro* (Palgrave 2017), *The Handbook of the International Political Economy of Migration* (Edward Elgar, 2014-2017); *The Arab Spring in the Global Political Economy*(Palgrave, 2014),

Q. What is your definition of Mediterranean?
A. The Mediterranean is the mother of civilization.

Q. And how is the definition of "Mediterranean woman" linked or not to your definition of the term "Mediterranean"?
A. If the Mediterranean is a mother is a woman by definition

Q. What did prompt you to work on the theme of Mediterranean women?
A. The existence of inequalities and discriminations against women in the Mediterranean area.

Q. Your recent collective volume *Women in the Mediterranean* covers gender discriminations and inequalities, the equally serious but different challenges women have on the two shores of the Mediterranean as well as of the activism and feminism proved by the women in these areas. Could you summarize these challenges and activities and possibly update us on the status of these women's rights and obstacles?

A. Women face discriminations in the family, in society and in the economy on the two shores of the Mediterranean. Obviously different countries face different challenges and it is not here the place to review them all. But the common element is the persistence of gender inequalities and discrimination which do not seem to be easy to overcome. Female literacy rate in Egypt is 66% in 2017 the world average is 77%. Female employment rate in Italy is 40% in 2021 the world average is 46%, in the UK is 58% (World Bank data).

Q. Do you believe that these challenges and approaches to face them are different for women of/in other parts of the world and why?

A. Yes, they are. For cultural and historical reasons, but they exist all over the globe. I don't think there is a single element that explain all differences in the Mediterranean area.

Q. Do you believe that great publications on the topic like yours and attempts like ours to continue to discuss these issues can bring forth some change?

A. Yes, at least in terms of knowledge and awareness.

Q. Considering the long-standing challenges of women and the current situation, as you mentioned even in your introduction, how do you envision the role and position of women could change?

A. Women empowerment would start from giving them more opportunities to study and join the labour markets. Economic independence and knowledge are at the basis of their emancipation.

ARTICLES

MARIANA STARKE AND THE GRAND TOUR IN EUROPE, ITALY, AND SICILY BETWEEN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY

Paolo Militello*

Abstract

This article examines the British writer and traveller Mariana Starke (1762-1838), with emphasis on her accounts of her journey to Italy and her first guide-book on Sicily: *Travels in Europe between the years 1824 and 1828 [...] comprising an historical account of Sicily with particular information for strangers in that Island* (London: John Murray, 1828). The analysis aims to consider Starke's work within the typical and "European" contexts of representation of the *Grand Tour* while, at the same time, highlighting some of the peculiarities related to said author: not only because the traveller is a woman (relatively unusual in Sicily for that time), but also because, with the practical information she imparted (food prices, transportation costs, etc.), Mariana Starke made a significant contribution to the development of modern travel guides.

Keywords: History, Grand Tour, Europe, Italy, Sicily

Letters from Italy (1800 and 1815) and Travels in Italy (1802)

The writer and traveller Mariana Starke (1762-1838) was born in southeast England (in Epsom, County Surrey) to Mary Hughes and Richard Starke (former deputy governor of Fort St. David, Madras, on the southeast coast of India from 1752 to 1756).[1] Mariana spent her first thirty years in her father's English estate, Hyland House, writing plays (*The Sword of Peace*, 1788*; The British Orphan*, 1790), a long poem (*The Poor Sol-*

* Università di Catania

1 For an essential bibliography, see Benjamin Colbert, "Starke Mariana, 1762-1838", in "Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database", British Travel Writing, University of Wolverhampton, accessed October 20, 2022, https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/authors/1135.

dier. An American Tale, 1789) and some tragedies (*The Widow of Malabar*, 1791*; The Tournament*, 1800).

In 1792, thirty-year-old Mariana, together with her parents and her sister, Louisa, moved to the south of France and Italy for treatment of tuberculosis, which had afflicted her and all her family at various stages. For the seven years following her return to health, Starke witnessed the death of her sister (in Nice, 1792), her father (in Pisa, 1794), and her mother on her return to England in 1798. Having overcome these vicissitudes, Mariana decided to write about her travelling and living experiences in Italy, and in 1800 completed her two volumes of travel notes, under the imprint of Sir Richard Phillips in London, with the long title: *Letters from Italy, between the years 1792 and 1798 containing a view of the revolutions in that country […] likewise pointing out The matchless Works of Art which still embellish Pisa, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Venice, &c. With instructions for the Use of Invalids and Families who may not choose to incur the Expence attendant upon travelling with a Courier.*[2] On the title page, Starke also introduces her aforementioned tragedies *Widow of Malabar* and *The Tournament*, while the also volume includes a rare map of the theatre of war in Italy in 1799.

The title – *Letters from Italy* – evidenced the epistolary style of the piece, a narrative form that had already been in vogue even within travel literature since the end of the 18th century[3] (consider, for example, Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, the account of his journey to Italy between 1786 and 1788, only published after, in 1816 and 1817).[4] The subtitle, on the other hand, states the objectives clearly: to bestow a direct testimony of the events of

---

2 For the full titles of Starke's guides, see the bibliography at the end of this article.

3 For the *Grand Tour* in Italy see, Cesare De Seta, *L'Italia nello specchio del Grand Tour* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2014) and Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour. The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2015) and Arturo Tosi, *Language and the Grand Tour. Linguistic Experiences of Travelling in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For the *Grand Tour* in Sicily, as well as the classic text by Hélène Tuzet, *La Sicile au XVIIIe siècle vue par les voyageurs étrangers* (Strasbourg: P. H. Heitz, 1955), see Enrico Iachello, *The territory of Sicily and its representations (16th-19th centuries)* (Palermo: New Digital Frontiers, 2018). A list of the voyagers in Sicily in Salvo Di Matteo, *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia dagli Arabi alla seconda metà del XX secolo. Repertorio, analisi, bibliografia* (Palermo: Ispe, 2000).

4 See Karin Baumgartner, "Travel, Tourism, and Cultural Identity in Mariana Starke's *Letters from Italy* (1800) and Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (1816-1817)", *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, Vol. 83 (3), 10/2014: 177-195.

the revolution (which were listed),[5] but also to provide a practical guide for those having to travel to Italy and the south of France, especially for health reasons. In fact, the introduction in the first edition reads:

> I am likewise encouraged by a hope of being serviceable to those of my Countrymen, who, in consequence of pulmonary complaints, are compelled to exchange their native soil for the renovating sun of Italy, to insert a few observations (relative to health), the result of seven year experience, during which period my time and thoughts were chiefly occupied by endeavours to mitigate the sufferings of those most dear to me. I presume not to imagine myself correct in every thing which I have advanced. The occupation of a Nurse has often prevented me from obtaining accurate knowledge on points worthy of minute investigation. Nevertheless, general outlines will sometimes convey tolerably just ideas of a country, even though the picture be not shaded by a Master's hand; hence, I trust, that the little knowledge I have been able to collect may so far inform Travellers [sic], as to guard them against those serious inconveniences which too generally retard, and not unfrequently prevent, the recovery of consumptive Persons.[6]

In 1802, the book was reprinted by Phillips in London, with a new title, *Travels in Italy,* and with an additional subtitle (*also a Supplement comprising Instructions for Travelling in France*), with only mentions of the revolutionary events.[7] Both the *Letters* and the *Travels*, in 8" format (approximately 20 centimetres), were divided into 25 chapters (or "letters")[8] in which the account of events in revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe was interwoven with historical and artistic information and details of Starke's travels from Nice to Italy (down to Naples, and then on to Florence), and then from Vienna to Prague, Dresden, and Hamburg, before finally returning to England. Moreover, to her texts, the author adds an appendix with the expenses incurred and the costs that families could expect. Here we see one of the main characteristics of Mariana Starke's successive works: she did not limit herself to *récit de voyage*, but also gave practical advices. The result thus seemed to mix the two main trends of the period: "the first-person travel essay or travel memoir, and the travel guide-book."[9]

---

5 *Containing a view of the revolutions in that country. From the capture of Nice by the French Republic to the expulsion of Pius VI from the Ecclesiastical State*.

6 Starke, *Letters from Italy*, v-vi.

7 *Containing a view of the late revolutions in that country*.

8 From letter I to XVI in the first 383-page volume; from XVII to XXV in the second 409-page volume.

9 Baumgartner, "Travel", 178.

After the publication of *Letters from Italy* and *Travels in Italy*, more than ten years would pass before our writer, who had in the meantime devoted herself to poetry, finally decided to publish an updated and heavily expanded edition of her guidebooks. In 1814, she had, in fact, contacted the well-known London publisher, John Murray III (who, since the 1930s, started the famous Murray's *Handbooks for Travellers*), and "with a keen business eye" wrote to scholar Benjamin Colbert, "Starke predicted that a work that 'comprehends every kind of information most needful to continental travellers' would, in the event of a peace between England and France, support the 'immediate & immense' emigration likely to ensue." "Allow me to enquire" she wrote to Murray "whether, if that event occurs, you would like to purchase the above-named work."[10]

In 1815, however, a new edition of *Letters from Italy (the Second Edition)* was published in London (Printed for G. and S. Robinson, 25, Paternoster-Row). While similar to *Letters*, it contained some additional content and updates to the title. The new edition, for example, therefore listed *The expense incurred by residing in various Parts of Italy, France &c. so that persons who visit the Continent from economical motives may select the most eligible Places for permanent Residence*, and included *instructions for Invalids, relative to the Island of Madeira; and for the use of Invalids and Families who may not wish to avoid the Expense attendant upon travelling with a Courier*, and finally presented as a *Revised, corrected, and considerably enlarged, by an Itinerary of Chamouni, and all the most frequented Passes of the Alps, Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Poland*.

Travels on the Continent (1820)

The collaboration with the publisher Murray began a few years later in 1820, with *Travels on the Continent written for the use and special information of Travellers*. The three hundred pages of this new publication were collected still in 8" but in a slightly smaller format: 19 centimetres. The book was preceded by an *Advertisement* that reassured readers of the safety of their travels in Europe, particularly regarding the "disbanded soldiers, converted into *banditti* [sic]" who after 1814 infested "the post-roads of southern France, the Alps, the Apennines, and the countries bordering those mountains; especially the borders of the Roman and Neapolitan territories." By

10 Colbert, "Starke Mariana".

1820, "that all the above-named countries, except the tract between Terracina and Mola, are now, and have long been, exempt from so serious an evil."[11]

This was followed by the *Introduction* written in London in October 1819, in which the author, aware of "how impossible it is to give an accurate and circumstantial account of any country, without residing in it," declared that she had decided to revisit the continent: "and become an Eye Witness of the alterations made there, by the events of the last twenty years: events which have so completely changed the order of things, with respect to roads, accommodations, and works of art, that new Guides for Travellers are extremely wanted in almost every large city of southern Europe."[12] Rather than simply republishing her previous books, she therefore wrote a new one, "and being ambitious to prove myself a faithful historian, I spent two years, namely, from May, 1817, to June, 1819, in the countries it has been my endeavour to describe; that I might write from the spot, and trust nothing to memory."[13] This was the typical "je l'ai vu" rhetoric of the *Grand Tour* used to lend credibility to the travel narrative.

Eight years later, in 1828, after an interlude of several "new" editions titled *Information and directions for travellers on the Continent*,[14] a new and rejuvenated copy of what had by then become one of the most famous guidebooks for English travellers made its first appearance.

Travels in Europe [...] comprising an historical account of Sicily (1828)

In London in 1828, Murray published *Travels in Europe between the years 1824 and 1828 adapted to the use of travellers comprising an historical account of Sicily with particular information for strangers in that Island*. As Colbert noted, by this time Starke's works "emphasise their 'usefulness' and became the prototypes for Murray's own handbooks for travellers, not to mention other guidebook series."[15]

This new edition of *Travels*, with more than 600 pages collected "within the compass of One Portable Volume", had as its "chief object" to "comprise all the information necessary for Travellers on the Continent

11 Starke, *Travels on the Continent*, iii-iv.
12 Ibid. v.
13 Ibid.
14 *Fifth edition*, in 1824 and in 1826, with editor Murray; *Sixth edition, thoroughly revised, and with considerable additions adorned with plates*, in 1825, for Glaucus Masi, an Italian editor that frequently reprinted English works.
15 Colbert, "Starke Mariana".

of Europe, and the Island of Sicily."[16] But why was Sicily added? The reason is clearly in the *Advertisement* written in Exmouth, in September 1827, explained in: "and a Guide for Sicily being much wanted, she has given a concise historical account of that Island, and its antiquities, added to Information and Directions for Travellers who may intend going thither."[17] However, things were not exactly so. There was no shortage of guidebooks on Sicily. From the first half of the 18th century, Magna Graecia and Sicily had been included in the *Grand Tour* itinerary (particularly after the archaeological excavations in Herculaneum and Pompeii, promoted in the late 1730s by the new Bourbon dynasty of Naples) and new travel accounts of Sicily and Malta had been published as well. In the 1770s, the Scotsman, Patrick Brydone, wrote an important guidebook in English, titled *A tour through Sicily and Malta. In a series of Letters* […][18] From then, numerous other English-speaking travellers had visited the island, often publishing an account of their journey, not to mention *récits de voyage* written in other languages (French, German, Italian etc.) and subsequently translated into English.

It is true, however, that reports by female travellers were not yet very widespread at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and there was above all a lack of guidebooks with practical information. From this point of view, Starke's was perhaps the first example of such a guidebook for Sicily. We shall therefore briefly analyse her pages dedicated to Sicily (Chapter XI). We will thereby try to identify which elements in *Travels* were traditional and which were new.

Starke's Tour of Sicily

Starke begins the chapter on Sicily with a *Concise History of the Island* based mainly on the information provided by classical authors, from Homer to Diodorus Siculus to Herodotus (following the customary obligation to consult and quote classical texts). This "classical" introduction is followed by the first practical information on the island, in particular the *Most eligible months for visiting it* from March to June, when "the sun is not sufficiently fervent to be dangerous (if Travellers guard their heads properly against it), neither is there, at this seasons, much *Mal'aria.*"[19] The main ports (Messi-

16 Starke, *Travels in Europe, Advertisement*

17 Ibid.

18 Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell: London 1773.

19 Starke, *Travels in Europe*, 366.

na, Syracuse and Trapani, Catania, and Palermo) and small landing-places are then listed and, to draw the traveller into an air of adventure, it is noted that “to avoid being surprised by Corsairs, the Sicilians have encircled themselves with Martello Towers”[20] (in reality, these fortifications had been built between the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Iberian monarchy had to defend itself against Ottoman attacks, in a completely different historical context to that of the first half of the 19th century).

Having completed her overview of the island, the guide proceeds with the recommended travel itinerary. The first city to be described is Palermo, which is reached by sea from Naples. The approach to the city is described as “fine scenery: the Æolides [Aeolian Islands] forms a beautiful group on the left, near Sicily, […] and Ætna is likewise seen at a distance.”[21] The exotic aspect of Palermo is emphasised: “the gaiety and Asiatic appearance of Palermo are peculiarly striking; an effect produced, in part, by numerous palm-trees, and a species of weeping cedar, which flourishes here. Palermo, however, displays other features of an Asiatic Town; some of its buildings are Saracenic”. It also mentions the best hotel, *The Prince of Wales*, “kept by Mr. and Mrs. Page: the latter is an English woman.”[22] Even in the first pages dedicated to Palermo, we already find all the characteristics of a *Grand Tour* narrative with the addition of the usual practical information and historical and artistic indications, and with new focus, typical of the period, not only on Greek-Roman monuments, but also on medieval examples, especially Sicilian-Norman ones. Customs and traditions, always points of interest on the *Grand Tour*, are also taken into account. For example, when the guide describes the “splendid Quay, called the Marina, and furnished with Marble Seats and a Small Theatre”: “during summer, a select Band of Musicians execute music, generally of their own composing, to amuse the Palermitan Nobility, who drive daily, and even twice a day, to the Marina, for the benefit of sea-breezes.” Starke adds: “Foreigners, on arriving in the Harbour of Palermo, are welcomed by a Boat filled with a Band of Music”; and at the same Marina “may usually be seen idle Palermitans, of the lower rank, assembled round a Storyteller, whose histories, though not equal, perhaps, in merit, to ‘The Arabian Tales’, excite the interest of his auditors. This exhibition seems to be derived from the Asiatics” and, in a footnote: “These Story-tellers [itinerant *cantastorie*, ndr] exhibit all the year round, at a given hour, in Palermo, delivering expositions of Ariosto, Tasso, &c., al-

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid. 367.

ternately exciting the laughter and the tears of their hearers; and receiving, as a recompense from each of them, a grain or two."[23]

After visiting Palermo and nearby sites (Monreale, the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino, the Capuchin Catacombs with the mummies, the Prince of Palagonia's "villa of the monsters" in Bagheria, etc.), the tour of Sicily begins, not without first explaining the way people travelled at that time: "Travellers who wish to make the Tour of the Island, usually set out on the Carriage-road, which extends some way; ordering their Mules, or Lettigo (a litter) to be in waiting at its termination."[24]

After following a route through a country described as "beautiful" (with "butterflies superb") the travellers arrive in the town of Alcamo, which "abounds with Churches and Religious Establishments."[25] This was a common observation of Sicilian cities made by travellers, not only English-speaking ones, who noticed an excessive and oppressive presence of the Catholic Church in Sicilian society. In Alcamo, one could stay overnight in a hotel "kept by an Abate", where there is a gentleman whom several travellers (we do not know if Starke does as well) "have taken as their Guide to the Sulphureous Hot Springs, and Ruins of Segesta."[26] This introduces the local element with an insider perspective, the Sicilian guide that in some way influences the traveller's perception of Sicily.

The next stop of the tour is Trapani, where the Carriage-road ends. The city, with its "safe Harbour" (mentioned by Virgil in the Aeneid) is also "famed for having been the place where Anchises died, and where Æneas celebrated funeral games in his father's honour."[27] It appears "strongly fortified, and enriched by Coral and Thunny Fisheries. Ivory, Coral, Conchs and Alabaster, are manufactured in the town."[28] Unfortunately, however, the hotel in Trapani is not a good one. From Trapani, travellers usually

23 Ibid. footnotes *g* and *h*.

24 "A Lettiga, the national carriage, holds two persons; and is, in shape, something like the body of a Vis-à-vis. This Vehicle, provided with strong poles, resembling those of a Sedan-chair, is carried by very powerful porter-mules […] Two mules go before, and one behind, accompanied by a muleteer on foot, armed with a stick, ten or twelve feet long, to guide the mules; and another muleteer mounted, and riding at the head of the Cavalcade. A Lettiga is not usually furnished with cushions to sit upon; but has a dirty lining, and a gaudy outside: it goes up and down every hill, however steep […] The motion of Lettiga is fatiguing, and apt to produce drowsiness […]" (Ivi, 405).

25 Ibid. 372.

26 Ibid. footnote *z*.

27 Ibid. 373.

28 Ibid.

"make an excursion to the summit of Eryx, the highest Mountain of Sicily, Ætna excepted."[29] Or they go to Castel Vetrano, through Marsala and Mazzara. Starke visits Erice and its antiquities, and afterwards heads to Marsala, a city remembered because it was "erected by the Saracens on the Promontory of Lilybæum"; that is, on one of the three points of the island, at a famous site of ancient history, especially for the battle that ended the first Punic war.[30]

After sleeping in Marsala, travellers usually proceed through Mazzara to the *Stone Quarry* south of Campobello (today known as "Cave di Cusa"): "the Quarry excites a peculiar interest; because the stone of which it is composed, whether destined for shaft of pillars, was hewn out of this Quarry in shape and size precisely such as the builder required; instead of being cut into large shapeless blocks, and fashioned afterwards."[31] As we know today, the columns of the quarry were intended for the construction of the Greek temples of Selinunte.

In Selinunte, travellers arrive "through lanes bordered with white roses, and a path shaded with ilexes, as it approaches the sea, is lovely. And the first view of the three largest Temples is most striking, in consequence of the colossal mass of ruins they exhibit."[32] After admiring the temples, one then moves on to Sciacca "called Termæ Salinuntiæ from its Baths, said to have been constructed by Dædalus."[33] Here, the only hotel one can find is intolerable, and "travellers, if compelled to sleep in Sciacca, usually endeavour to obtain a private Lodging."[34]

From Sciacca, through immense rice fields ("and the air in this neighbourhood must, consequently, be unwholesome during warm weather") one arrives at the "the solitary House of San Patro" (current Casale San Pietro) and then to the town of Siculiana: "the country is dreary, and Siculiana is a wretched town with a bad Inn."[35]

Another important stop is Girgenti (Agrigento). The New Port, or Wharf, of Girgenti "presents a busy scene: here are immense quantities of sulphur cake, with other articles for exportation, lining the shore; ships taking in their respective cargoes; and boats loading with corn […] The mod-

---

29 Ibid. p. 373 and footnote *c*.
30 Ibid. 374.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid. 374-375.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid. 376.
35 Ibid.

ern Mole of Girgenti may indeed be called an Emporium for corn."[36] In the Girgenti Hotel (served by the Bishop's Cook), one can meet Mr. Politi, "an Artist who keeps for sale a collection of Greek-Sicilian Vases, found in the Tombs of Agrigentum" and who "has fitted up Apartments for the accommodation of Travellers" (Raffaello Politi was also actually a scholar who had collaborated with the most important archaeologists of the time). But also a "banker, named Granet, who resides at Girgenti, and speaks English, and that is very kind and useful to Travellers."[37] The verdict on the ancient city of Girgenti is clearly positive. Less so for the modern one. "Modern Girgenti stands near the Site of the Citadel of the ancient Agrigentum; and though apparently magnificent, when seen from a distance, is found, on closer examination, to consist of small houses, and narrow streets." The hill crowned by the modern town, however, is the site of ancient Agrigentum, where travellers can admire "the stupendous Temples, worth seeing than any other antiquities Sicily contains."[38]

After visiting Agrigento, one continues to Palma, which is pleasantly situated in a lush valley, and then, across a bleak plain, to Licata, the ancient Phintia with wider roads than those we usually find in Sicily. Regarding the stay in Licata, the guide is very clear: "Persons fortunate enough to procure a letter of recommendation to Sig. Giuseppe Paraninfo, are most hospitably received, and comfortably lodged, by that Gentleman, who resides at Licata: but those who are under the necessity of going to Hotel, are wretchedly accommodate."[39] One finds the same situation in the town of Terranova whose description follows (a town built by Emperor Frederick II, that stands near the site of ancient Gela): "the Hotel at Terranova is tolerably good; but persons acquainted with Mr Wilding, Prince Butera's brother, and a Resident here, are entertained at his house most sumptuously."[40]

At this point, almost all travellers on the *Grand Tour* cut towards the centre of the island, skipping south-eastern Sicily. Starke's guide also observed this trend. Thus, after sleeping in Terranova, travellers usually proceed to Caltagirone, "famous for a Manufactory of small Figures of Terracotta, beautifully executed, and representing the lower class of people in coloured costumes."[41] From there it was on to Mineo and Palagonia, with a distant view of Ætna, and a pass through which a torrent

36 Ibid. 377.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid. 381.
40 Ibid. 381-382.
41 Ibid. 382.

of lava seems to have passed, and then on to Lentini, the ancient Leontium, and Carlentini, built and fortified by Charles V. Here there was the Biviere of Lentini, a lake that "contains myriads of Leeches, which might endanger the life of any person tempted to bathe in its pestiferous water," and that "causes exhalations so peculiarly noxious, that they poison the surrounding country with *Mal'aria*."[42] Passing through Augusta, one finally arrived at ancient Syracuse.

Those who, in any case, did not want to follow the usual route and preferred to venture into the south-eastern part of the island, especially to visit Baron Gabriele Judica's Museum and Excavations in Palazzola (the Baron's town of residence, today Palazzolo Acreide), "usually went from Terranova to Syracuse either by Biscari, or Chiaramonte: but this road is extremely bad, and may, indeed, be called dangerous": the result, however, was worth the effort, in fact "Baron Judica receives Travellers with great kindness and hospitality" and "wish to sell all of his Antiquities."[43] Returning to Syracuse, the first part of the road to this city reveals Ætna towering majestically above all else. Of this city most famous for Greek and Roman antiquities, Starke describes all the monuments already known to travellers on the *Grand Tour*, and summarising her indications are therefore not of great interest for the purposes of our analysis. She does, however, make interesting references to hotels (*The Albergo del Sole* [Hotel of the Sun] near the Duomo, and "another, but a very inferior Inn, *The Leone d'oro* [Golden Lion]") and two towns that Starke does not visit: Noto, "a beautiful little Town, containing a collection of Medals & co. on sale" and Avola, where "small Sugar Plantations may still be seen" with "the cultivation of the Sugar Cane."[44]

The next stop after Syracuse is Catania, with its good hotels: "*The Elephant Inn* [the elephant is the city's symbol] in Piazza del Duomo, which is very comfortable; and the *Corona d'oro* [Golden Crown], the master of which Hotel, Sig. Abbate, is an excellent Guide to the summit of Ætna."[45] The tour of Catania is the usual one which naturally includes the city's two most important museums: that of the Benedictine monastery, which, however, "is shewn to Travellers of the male sex" (this is one of the few mentions of the difficulties and impediments female travellers encountered in Sicily), and that of the Prince of Biscari, one of the points of reference for all *Grand Tour* travellers in Catania during the second half of the 18th cen-

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid. 382, footnote *k*.
44 Ibid. 388.
45 Ibid. 389.

tury: "and Travellers, anxious to see it to advantage, should signify their wish, over night, to the principal Custode [Keeper], a gentlemanly, well informed person, who, thus called upon, shews the Museum himself."[46]

From Catania, then begins one of the most fascinating experiences for travellers: the ascent to Mount Etna. In this regard, Starke cites a report made by "an English Gentleman and his Wife, who ascended to the Crater of Ætna at Midsummer, 1826, under the direction of Vincenzo Carbonaro, a judicious guide from Nicolosi" [the little town called "la porta dell'Etna", the gateway to Etna], and an account of the journey of another English Gentlemen who ascended to the crater at the end of November, 1824."[47]

The next stop after visiting Mount Etna is Taormina, reached via the road to Acireale, Giarre, Francavilla, and Giardini, not without first visiting some of the province's principal attractions: the Port of Ulysses at Ognina; the Castle of Aci, "a strongly situated Fortress built on ancient Lava which run into the sea"; the Scopuli Cyclopum at Trizza, that "some writers conjecture that are the Rocks described by Homer, as being near the Cave of the Cannibal, Polyphemus, who feasted on the ill-fated followers of Ulysses"; and the Castagno dei cento Cavalli [the Hundred Horse Chestnut], "that looks like six trees close together."[48] Travellers mainly visited the Roman Theatre in Taormina, located in a "lovely situation, commanding a view of the Streights of Messina, Giarra, Aci, Ætna, and the whole country near Taormina, which is highly cultivated, and richly clothed with olive and mulberry-trees."[49] The last important stop is Messina, a city rebuilt after the earthquake of 1783. From here it was also possible to make an excursion by water to visit Scylla (opposite her counterpart Charybdis) and land at Reggio.

At the end of the journey, "[t]ravellers, in order to complete their Tour round the sea coast of Sicily, usually prefer embarking in a *Speronaro* (a very safe kind of boat) at Messina, visiting the Lipari Islands, and going thence to Cefalù; instead of going by land to the latter Place"; for this last route, "good as far as Melazzo, bad and mountainous thence to Cefalù", Starke quotes an extract from the journal of an English Gentleman and his Wife.[50] Finally, Starke's guidebook, like many other travel accounts, contains a section on the character of the Sicilians, the climate, and the roads.

46 Ibid. 390.
47 Ibid. 394-397.
48 Ibid. 397-398.
49 Ibid. 399.
50 Ibid. 401-402.

Practical suggestions

The part devoted to practical information is very interesting, with prices given in “tarì” (a coin equal to 10 grana), in “carlini” (3 tarì, thus 30 grana) and in “piastre” (12 tarì, thus 120 grana). To give an idea, the storytellers in the Palermo Marina were rewarded with one or two “grana.”

The hotels prices are the following items to be discussed: in the big cities “beds are six tari each person; and dinners eight […] In smaller towns beds for masters are four tari each, beds for servants two tari each; and the Guide, belonging to the Travellers, provides the table. This Guide who acts as Cook, and Purveyor, and who is indispensable appendage to every party of Travellers in Sicily, expects, for wages, one piastre a day.”[51]

The price of a “Lettiga carried by three mules is about thirty carlini (900 grana) per day, while travelling; and about fifteen carlini for every day of the rest. Mules for persons who ride may be engaged at Palermo, and throughout the Island, for ten tari each mule, on travelling days, and five on resting days. At Catania the hire of mules is somewhat cheaper than at Palermo” and “for every Guide from Nicolosi to the summit of Ætna, including his mule, and charcoal for the Casa degli Inglesi, the price is two piastres and half.”[52]

The list with the days, hours, and miles required to reach each stage is very useful. In addition to these, and much other practical information, the names of the guides are to be noted (in addition to those already mentioned, in Palermo the best guides for travellers intending to make the Tour of the Island were Camello [Carmelo, ndr] Catalani and Francesco Mursalona), as well as the reference to the “Letters of Recommendation”, namely “lettere commendatizie” that, especially in the 18th century, allowed the traveler to rely on the private hospitality of some important person in the city visited (using all possible networks: diplomatic, cultural, freemasonic etc.). When Starke writes, things had changed a bit:

> Letters of recommendation to all the Civil Authorities, from the Luogotenente at Palermo, are desirable; and letters of recommendation, from the British Consul General to all the Vice-Consuls, are, for British Travellers in Sicily, most useful. Passports, on leaving Naples to visit this Island, on leaving Palermo to make a tour round the sea coast to Catania and Messina, and on leaving Messina to visit Rheggio, or the Lipari Isles, are, at present, indispensable.[53]

51 Ibid. 406.
52 Ibid. 405-406.
53 Ibid. 406.

The chapter ends with the final acknowledgements by the author:

> The Author feels that it would be assuming a merit to which she has little claim, did she not most thankfully acknowledge how much the foregoing account of Sicily has been improved by the minute, accurate, and valuable Observations, in manuscript, of E.I. Rudge, Esq; and the Notes of other intelligent British Travellers, who have recently visited the Island.[54]

Thus ends the chapter on Sicily. From then on, the island has been duly included in the numerous editions of Travels published even after the author's death.

Conclusion

The pages written by Mariana Starke, and in particular those dedicated to Sicily, seem to therefore largely reflect the earlier *Grand Tour* travel narratives. They always (or almost always) had the same characteristics and were written according to a common model that could be defined as "European" (as Enrico Iachello demonstrated): a "je l'ai vu" rhetoric (I saw it with my own eyes) to confirm the reliability and truth of one's own account (and to sometimes contradict that of a predecessor); an adventurous pattern that sometimes leads to an amplification of the difficulties encountered (dirty hotels, uncomfortable roads, brigands, etc.) to ensure the reader remains captivated; an interest in ancient monuments, in Nature (volcanoes, Etna, vegetation), in local customs and habits; and, finally, a reference to classical Greco-Roman texts and contemporary Sicilian guidebooks that influenced, with their local vision, the travellers' "foreign" perspective. This demonstrates the openness of the Sicilian élite and people, who welcome foreign travelers and establish with them a network that is not only economic but also socio-cultural.

But there is something comparatively new in Mariana Starke. As we have stated, one of the main characteristics of her works was that they did not limit themselves to travel narratives, but also provided practical information, intended not only for male or female tourists (Starke does not consider the difficulties faced by women travelling alone), but also addressed to people forced to travel due to health problems. This level of practicality is hardly present (if at all) in previous guidebooks.

These features are, above all, the important novelties: not only because the protagonist of the trip is a woman (quite an unusual fact in Sicily for

54 Ibid. 409.

that time), but also because, with her practical information (food prices, transportation costs, etc.), Mariana Starke made a significant contribution to the development of modern travel guides.

Bibliography

Baumgartner, Karin, “Travel, Tourism, and Cultural Identity in Mariana Starke’s Letters from Italy (1800) and Goethe’s Italienische Reise (1816-1817)” in *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, Vol. 83 (3), 10/2014: 177-195.

Brydone, Patrick, *A tour through Sicily and Malta. In a series of Letters*. London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1773.

Colbert, Benjamin. “Starke Mariana, 1762-1838” in “Women’s Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database”, British Travel Writing, University of Wolverhampton, accessed October 20, 2022, https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/authors/1135.

De Seta, Cesare, *L’Italia nello specchio del Grand Tour*. Milano: Rizzoli, 2014.

Di Matteo, Salvo. *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia dagli Arabi alla seconda metà del XX secolo. Repertorio, analisi, bibliografia*. Palermo: Ispe, 2000.

Iachello, Enrico. *The territory of Sicily and its representations (16th-19th centuries)*. Palermo: New digital frontiers, 2018.

Starke, Mariana. *Information and Directions for Travellers on the Continent by Mariana Starke, Fifth Edition, thoroughly revised, and with considerable additions.* London: John Murray, Albemarle-Street, 1824 and 1826.

Starke, Mariana. *Information and Directions for Travellers on the Continent by Mariana Starke. Sixth Edition, thoroughly revised, and with considerable additions adorned with plates in two Volumes.* Leghorn: Printed and sold by Glaucus Masi, Verrazzana street, opposite the Post-Office, 1825.

Starke, Mariana. *Letters from Italy, between the years 1792 and 1798, containing a view of the revolutions in that country, from the capture of Nice by the French Republic to the expulsion of Pius VI from the Ecclesiastical State: Likewise pointing out The matchless Works of Art which still embellish Pisa, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Venice, &c. With instructions for the Use of Invalids and Families who may not choose to incur the Expence attendant upon travelling with a Courier. By Mariana Starke, Author of the Widow of Malabar, the Tournament, &c. In Two Volumes*. London: Printed by T. Gillet, Salisbury-Square, fleet-street, For R. Phillips, no. 71, St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1800.

Starke, Mariana. *Letters from Italy; containing a view of the revolutions in that country, from the capture of Nice, by the French Republic, to the expulsion of Pius VI from the Ecclesiastical State: Likewise pointing out The matchless Works of Art which still embellish Pisa, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Venice, &c. Also specifying The expense incurred by residing in various Parts of Italy, France &c. so that persons who visit the Continent from economical*

motives may select the most eligible Places for permanent Residence. With instructions for Invalids, relative to the Island of Madeira; and for the use of Invalids and Families who may not wish to avoid the Expense attendant upon travelling with a Courier. By Mariana Starke, Author of the "Widow of Malabar", "The Tournament", "The Beauties of Carlo-Maria Maggi paraphrased" &c. &c. The second edition, Revised, corrected, and considerably enlarged, by an Itinerary of Chamouni, and all the most frequented Passes of the Alps, Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Poland. In Two Volumes. London: Printed for G. and S. Robinson, 25, Paternoster-Row, 1815.

Starke, Mariana. *Travels in Italy, between the years 1792 and 1798; containing a view of the late revolutions in that country. Likewise pointing out The matchless Works of Art which still embellish Pisa, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Venice, &c. With instructions for the Use of Invalids and Families who may not choose to incur the Expence attendant upon travelling with a Courier. Also A Supplement, comprising Instructions for travelling in France, With Descriptions of all the principal Roads and Cities in that Republic. By Mariana Starke, Author of the Widow of Malabar, the Tournament, &c. In Two Volumes.* London: Printed for R. Phillips, St. Paul's Church Yard. By T. Gillet, Salisbury-Square, 1802.

Starke, Mariana. *Travels on the Continent: written for the use and particular information of Travellers by Mariana Starke*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1820.

Starke, Mariana. *Travels in Europe between the years 1824 and 1828 adapted to the use of Travellers comprising an historical Account of Sicily with particular information for strangers in that Island by Mariana Starke*. London: John Murray, Albemarle-Street, 1828.

Sweet, Rosemary. *Cities and the Grand Tour. The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Tosi, Arturo. *Language and the Grand Tour. Linguistic Experiences of Travelling in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Tuzet, Hélène. *La Sicile au XVIIIe siècle vue par les voyageurs étrangers*. Strasbourg: P. H. Heitz, 1955.

Route round the Sea Coast of Sicily, on mules; between the latter part of May and the Early part of July, 1826 (Starke, *Travels in Europe*, 406-408) Cartographic reconstruction.

1st day. From Palermo to Sala di Partinico+ miles 19. Hours employed in riding, 5 ¼. From Partinico to Alcamo*, miles 12. Hours employed in riding, 3 ½. Objects best worth notice: Morreale – its Cathedral – Picture, by Morrealese, in the Benedictine Convent – View of the Valley.

2d day. Temple of Segesta+ miles 9. Hours employed in riding, 3. – Trepani* [sic] miles 21. Hours employed in riding, 6 ¾. Objects best worth notice: Temple of Segesta – Theatre.

3d day. A Vineyard +. Hours employed in riding, 4. – Marsala*, miles 18, from Trepani. Hours employed in riding, 2 ½. Objects best worth notice: Monte S. Giuliano, the ancient Eryx.

4th day. Mazzara, miles 12 – Hours employed in riding, 2 ¾. Stone Quarry + [Cave di Cusa] near Campobello [di Mazara], miles 8. – Hours employed in riding, 2 – Castel-Vetrano*, miles 8 – Hours employed in riding, 2. Objects best worth notice: the Stone Quarry.

5th day. Selinuntium +, miles 9. Hours employed in riding, 2 ½. Sciacca*, miles 21. Hours employed in riding, 4 ¾. Objects best worth notice: two Sets of Temples; three in each, at Selinuntium. Hot Springs, at Sciacca.

6th day. San Patro, on the banks of the Platanus+, miles 19 – Hours employed in riding, about 4 ¾. – Siculiana*, miles 11. Hours employed in riding, about 2 ¾.

7th day. Girgenti+, miles 12 – Hours employed in riding, 3 ½. Objects best worth notice: the Mole – the Temples, and other Antiquities – the Cathedral, its Baptismal Font, and Echo.

8th day. Occupied in seeing the remains of Agrigentum.

9th day. Palma+, miles 16. Hours employed in riding, 5 ¼. – Licata*, (commonly called Alicata) miles 12. Hours employed in riding, 3 ½.

10th day. Half a day of rest, Terranova* [today Gela], miles 18. Hours employed in riding, 5.

11th day. A Barn+, miles 17 – Hours employed in riding, 4 ¼. Caltagirone*, miles 7. Hours employed in riding, 2 ¾. Objects best worth notice: a celebrated Manufacture of small Clay Figures, at Caltagirone.

12th day. A Brook+, beyond Palagonia, miles 17 – Hours employed in riding, rather more than 5 ½. Lentini*, miles 13. Hours employed in riding, 3 ¾. Objects best worth notice: the Biviere di Lentini: an extensive, but very unwholesome Lake, well stored with fish.

13th day, Walnut-trees+, miles 17. Hours employed in riding, 5 ¼ – Siragusa, miles 13 – Hours employed in riding, 3 ¾. Objects best worth notice at Syracuse: Amphitheatre – Theatre – Ear of Dionysius – Tomb called that of Archimedes – Strada Sepulcrale – Catacombs – Remains of Fort Labdalus – Subterranean Passage for Cavalry, &c. – Garden of the P.P. Cappuccini – River Anapus – Temple of Jupiter Olympicus – Papyri – Fonte Ciane – Duomo – Statue of Venus, in the Museum.

14th, 15th and 16th day, at Syracuse.

17th day. Scaro d'Agnuni*, miles 24 – Hours employed in riding, 6 1/2. Catania*, miles 18 – Hours employed in riding, 4 1/4. Objects best worth notice: on leaving Syracuse, Scala Græca – Trophy erected in honour [sic] of Marcellus. At Catania: Theatre – Amphitheatre – Baths – and other Subterranean Antiquities – Duomo – Church of the Benedictines, their Garden and Museum – Prince Biscari's Museum.

18th, 19th, and 20th day, at Catania.

21st and 22d day. Expedition to Ætna, now called Mongibello.

23d day. At Catania.

24th day. Trizza*, miles 7. Hours employed in riding, about 2. Giarra*, miles 17 – Hours employed in riding, 3 ½. Objects best worth notice: Scopuli Cyclopum at Trizza. As the ride from Catania to Giarra occupies only half a day, Travellers frequently employ the other half in visiting the Castagno di Cento Cavalli, situated about six miles from Giarra.

25th day. Francavilla+, miles 18. Hours employed in riding, about 5. Giardini*, miles 10. Hours employed in riding, about 3.

26th day. Dining Place, miles 14. Hours employed in riding, and visiting the Ruins of Taurominium, 2 miles beyond Giardini, 5 ¼. Messina*, miles 20. Hours employed in riding, about 5. Objects best worth notice: Church of S. Pancrazio – ancient Piscinæ – Naumachia – Theatre, and view from it, at Taormina. At Catania [sic. mistake: it's Messina]: convent of S. Gregorio – Cathedral – Citadel – Faro – Surrounding Country.
27th, and three following days, Messina.
28th day, by sea – From Messina to Acqua Nero, hours 6.
29th day, at nine in the morning Stromboli. To examine the Crater here occupies the better part of a day.
30th day, at ten in the Morning, Lipari. To examine this Island occupies the better part of a day; and Travellers usually sleep here.
31th day, at five in the morning, Vulcano. The walk to and from the Crater here, occupies hours 2 ½. And if the wind be tolerably fair, Cefalù is reached before midnight.
32th day, on mules, from Cefalù to Termini+, miles 24. Hours employed in riding, 5 ¼. Palermo, miles 24 – in a four-wheel carriage, hours 3 ¾.

LEBANON AND EGYPT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A VITAL SPACE IN WOMEN'S FRANCOPHONE WRITING[1]

Laura Restuccia[*]

Abstract

This contribution outlines the developments of the French-speaking literary production of the Mashriq, from its debut in the last decades of the nineteenth century up to the 1980s, from a gender perspective. Specifically, approaching the female literary universe of Lebanon and Egypt entails referring to cultural contexts in which women have historically suffered forms of exclusion and marginalisation, if not outright oppression, and in which solidly patriarchal and hierarchical family structures have often found in the religious faith a justification facilitating the perpetration and diffusion of such discrimination. In this context, literary writing has played a fundamental role as women are able to express their own points of view. Exploring a variety of narrative genres, they present, at the level of content, the multifaceted nature of their ordeals: war, destruction, social conflicts, the horror of violence, the loss of freedom. The outcome is a female writing characterised by a strong social commitment, one which promotes intellectual survival, serving as a complaint, a protest, a tool for awakening the conscience of their fellow countrymen about their own destinies and for making their voices heard by those outside their countries, regions and cultures as well.

Keywords: Mashriq, Lebanon, Egypt, gender literature, French-speaking literature.

The Mashriq designates the Arab East however its geographical limits vary considerably depending on the sources or theories. In its most widely accepted geographical sense, the Mashriq includes Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Kuwait although, for the cultural aspect, Israel would remain excluded. For obvious reasons of space, I am going to present in this article only a selection from the women's Francophone writing of Lebanon and Egypt which are, without a doubt, the countries in which the Francophone literary heritage is richer and more varied.

* Università di Palermo

1 This article was translated by Richard E. Burcket.

I will specifically include Andrée Chedid, Amy Kher, Jeanne Arcache and Yasmine Khlat, among others. I am going to argue how the simple nationality has not a specific meaning to the literary production of these writers, indeed some of them can be seen as belonging to both Lebanese and Egyptian literature according to the perspective of the topic analysed.

Trying to outline the developments of the literary production of the Mashriq, departing from a gender perspective, inevitably involves a double risk: on the one hand, as it happens when approaching any other literary universe, there is the risk of 'ghettoising' women's writing within a category of its own by assuming a separation from its male counterpart; on the other, moving within a universe crossed by profound linguistic, historical, political, cultural and religious differences whose boundaries we do not deeply understand, there is the risk that we may formulate simplistic and reductive approaches. Indeed, approaching the female literary universe of Lebanon and Egypt certainly entails referring to cultural contexts in which women have historically suffered forms of exclusion and marginalisation, if not outright oppression, and in which solid patriarchal and hierarchical family structures have often found in religious faith an alibi which, while not deriving directly from it, justifies and facilitates the perpetration and diffusion of certain sexist behaviours. In this context, as in other similar ones, literary writing, which has been long described and interpreted by the male literary world, serves as a crucial form of expression for women's points of view.[2] Since the appearance of women writing, between the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, women in this region have used literature as a tool for defining their role in society and within the family, undermining from within, with different levels of supremacy and political activism, the deeply rooted patriarchal system. In short, writing has emerged as a strategic practice for overcoming the strict role assigned to them by the society determined by gender belonging and, at the same time, for redefining the women as active part of the same society which marginalised them.[3]

2 For an overview of this topic, see: M. Bradan, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995; M. Takieddine Amyuni «A Panorama of Lebanese Women Writers, 1975-1995», in L. Rustum Shehadeh *Women and War in Lebanon*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1999, pp. 89-111; C. Boustani, *Effects du féminin: variations narrratives francophones*, Paris, Khartala, 2003.

3 See: M. Cooke «Arab Women Writers», in M. M. Badawi, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 443-462.

Before going into the specific cross-section of women's French-speaking literary production in Lebanon and Egypt, it is useful to note that this literature is, in general, little known to Western readers, for two principal reasons: first, because these authors write in a second language, albeit not a foreign one,[4] in a mostly Arabic-speaking region of the world, they remain, especially in Egypt, mostly marginalised within their own country; second, because even outside this region, they are victims of widespread ignorance about the historical reasons for the presence of the French language in these countries.[5] Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that, although Lebanese and Egyptian Francophone literatures continue to proliferate today, their authors, who now live in French-speaking countries, direct their works to an audience of French-speaking readers and publish them in their adopted countries. This is why I have chosen to limit my examples only to the period up to the 1980s.

The historical events that have occurred in the Middle East have resulted in the mixing of populations from places outside the region as well as an ineluctable migration, both between countries of the region and beyond the region's borders, by many people forced to flee in search of safety. The pursuit of economic power for the assertion of hegemony over the region – first by the Ottoman Empire, then France and Great Britain – also led, at least until the early decades of the twentieth century, to a continuous movement of people among nations.[6] Today, to attribute many writers and their works to one specific country or another becomes particularly problematic and it is precisely for this reason that certain authors are cited as belonging to the literary heritage of more than one country, while others, though officially citizens of one nation, have ended up rooting their literary and intellectual activity in an adopted state. The first of the problems that we have to face while navigating within the literary panorama of this region is, in fact, the very definition of *belonging* to a geographical area.[7] Although the

4 See C. Majdalani *Petit traité des mélanges*, Beirut, Layali, 2002, p. 29.

5 See: J. Ascar-Nahas *Les amis de la culture française en Egypte (1925-1945)*, Le Caire, Éditions Horus, 1945; J. Ascar-Nahas, Égypte et culture française, Le Caire, Éd. de la Société Orientale de Publicité, 1953; S. Abou *Le bilinguisme arabe-français au Liban*, Paris, PUF, 1962; N. Gueunier *Le français du Liban: cent portraits linguistiques*, Paris, Didier Érudition, 1993.

6 See: S. S. Friedman, *A History of the Middle East*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 2006.

7 For a more complete overview of this literature, see: Z. Ramy *Dictionnaire de la littérature libanaise de langue française*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998; M. Kober, I. Fenoglio & D. Lancon (eds.), *Entre Nil et Sable, écrivains d'Egypte d'expression française*, preface by R. Sole, Paris, Publication du Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique, 1999.

problem of belonging to a religion or cultural community still seems very important today, nationality is increasingly becoming an essential point of reference for the affirmation of identity.[8]

Lebanon, an unavoidable crossing point between the West and the Arab world, is also a point of intersection among three cultures due to its geo-political position. France's presence in the area began with the Crusades, but the use of the French language became important only from the sixteenth century when Francis I signed an agreement (1535) with Suleiman the Magnificent granting missionaries and merchants entry to the territory. In 1860, after the conflicts in Damascus and Mount Lebanon, France sent an expedition with the excuse of protecting Christian minorities from the Ottoman Empire. This circumstance accelerated the progressive and increasingly widespread use of the French language, which was finally affirmed after 1920 with the establishment of the League of Nations mandate which would last until 1943, when Lebanon obtained its independence. The use of the French language started in Egypt with Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition (1798-1801) and spread thanks to the admiration that the aristocracy and bourgeois families had, right from the start, for the culture of *l'Hexagone*, so much so that they entrusted their children's education to French missionaries who introduced their language in schools. It soon became a language of political and commercial mediation thanks also to the birth of numerous "*Sociétés savants*" [learned societies] and "*Cercles littéraires et Artistiques*" [literary and artistic circles].[9]

Moreover Egypt received a strong French influence and even if after 1802, it was no longer officially under French military occupation but the two countries maintained cultural relations – even though not always peaceful – until the 1970s. Starting from the 1860s, the use of French in Egypt had grown stronger with successive waves of Lebanese and Syrian Christian immigration as they tried to escape the repeated religious massacres that were occurring in their homelands. During this period, in

8 See: Z. Darwiche Jabbour, *Littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient: Egypte, Liban, Syrie*, Aix-en-Provence, Édisud, 2007; J.-Fr. Durand & M. Del Fiol (eds.), «Regards sur les littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient. Egypte, Liban», *Interculturel-Francophonies*, n. 14, November 2008.

9 See: D. Gérard, «Le choix de la langue en Égypte. La langue française en Égypte dans l'entre-deux-guerres», *Les Langues en* Egypte, series I, n. 27-28, 1996, pp. 253-284; J.-J. Luthi, *La littérature d'expression française en Egypte: 1798-1998*, foreword by B. Boutros-Ghali, introduction by M. Genevoix, Paris-Montréal, L'Harmattan, 2000, especially pp. 25-30 [the first edition appeared as J.-J. Luthiı, *Introduction à la littérature d'expression française en Egypte (1798-1945)*, Paris, Éditions de l'École, 1974].

fact, Egypt guaranteed a certain level of freedom to those dwelling on its soil, this same freedom would not be guaranteed in the future countries of Lebanon and Syria.These are the historical reasons that make it difficult to attribute a nationality to some Middle Eastern writers. In many cases, they were French people temporarily or permanently settled in Egypt; in other cases, they were individuals who began their literary careers on the banks of the Nile and were then forced to live abroad. Still others, born in Lebanon, ended up residing in Egypt.

Many of the authors that will be discussed here, in fact, claim a sense of belonging to both of these two countries. Andrée Chedid herself and, to limit ourselves to just a few other examples, Amy Kher – who held a literary salon in Alexandria called "*Le petit Rambouillet*" – Jeanne Arcache and Yasmine Khlat, can be seen as belonging to both Lebanese and Egyptian literature, depending on the topic addressed in their works. Despite the circularity of national belonging and the fact that there are common traits and ideas in the women's writing of these countries, the diversity of historical and political events behind the spread of the French language does not allow us, indeed, to talk about women's literary production as a single entity since the texts of the writers considered are profoundly marked by the cultural domination of Western powers which have contributed to different layers of the struggle against the political and cultural penetration and to the hegemony exercised by the colonising countries.[10] There is no doubt, that, Lebanese and Egyptian literatures, although addressing different issues are closely intertwined by certain common historical traits that these countries faced (and still do) such as exile and emigration.[11]

Since the first decade of the twentieth century in Lebanon and Egypt, women have felt the need to speak up in order to free themselves from the role attributed to them due to their gender while, at the same time, claiming precisely a specificity based on their gender.[12] Among the pi-

10 See: «Introduction», in L. Suhair Majaj, P.W. Sunderman, & T. Saliba (eds.), *Intersections, Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2002, pp. XX-XXI.

11 See: J.-J. Luthi, *La littérature d'expression française en Egypte: 1798-1998*, *op. cit.*; S. Khalaf (ed.), *Littérature libanaise de langue français*, Ottawa, Naaman, 1981; M. Kober, I. Fenoglio & D. Lançon (eds.), *Entre Nil et sable: Écrivains d'Egypte d'expression française (1920-1960)*, *op. cit.*; N. Mansour Zakka *Littérature libanaise contemporaine: aspects thématiques*, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, 2000.

12 See: M. Cooke, «Arab Women Writers», in M. M. Badawi, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 443-462.

oneers, I should certainly mention May Ziyadah: a lively scholar who attended the religious school of Antoma. She stood out, above all, for her ability to learn languages. With a perfect knowledge of Arabic and French, along with fluency in German, English, Italian, Greek and Latin, she was able to read works by different authors and from different eras directly in their original language. In 1908, she moved to Cairo where her father directed the magazine *Al-Mahroussa* and where she began her university career in literature. A courageous and strong-willed woman, she is still remembered today for her feverish activity in favour of female emancipation from ignorance and the yoke of outdated traditions. In 1911, under the pseudonym Isis Copia, she self-published the poetry collection *Fleurs de rêves* in which her verses speak of an ephemeral happiness capable of transporting her, in the magic of a dream, beyond the limits of a monotonous existence. Her militancy in support of women's causes blossomed at a time when the feminist movement was still taking its first timid steps, but her message already anticipated demands that are perhaps still far from being realised and shared today. Her idea of female emancipation, in fact, was that of a woman who manages to be free from male control without sacrificing her femininity. Just as a man tries to claim and affirm his virility, a woman must exalt her nature, contrasting the male's virile strength and arrogance with the female's tenderness, grace and feeling.[13]

In the years of the French Mandate (formally in force between 1923 and 1943, though the presence of French troops until 1946), the political climate changed and intellectuals were divided between the defenders and opponents of "Greater Syria." In this phase, a large group of young intellectuals gave life to the "Libanisme phénicien" movement. These young people, of a Francophile nature and with an ideology contrary to the nascent Arab nationalism, saw in the jurisdiction of France on Lebanese territory a possible way out. The members of the movement gathered around *La Revue Phénicienne* (the Phoenicians review) with the aim of bringing out French-speaking literature. Poems or short texts were published in the magazine that traced the poetic works of Symbolism and Parnassianism. Parallel to this civil commitment, feminist movements were also developing. In 1942, Victoria Khozami created the foundations of a women's social organisation that would be established in 1943 with the name "Social

13 See: M. Booth, «Biography and Feminist Rhetoric in Early Twentieth Century Egypt: Mayy Zyada's Studies of Three Women's Lives», *Journal of Women's History*, 3, n. 1, 1991, pp. 38-64; A. Ziegler, «'Al-Haraka Baraka! The Late Rediscovery of Mayy Zyada's Works», *Die Welt des Islams*, 39, n. 1, 1999, pp. 103-115.

Democratic Women's League," open to all women without religious distinction. Among the main objectives of the League were the fight against poverty and inequality.

A flourishing literary production, primarily by female authors, emerged to enrich the Francophone literary panorama in the decade from 1960-1970. These writers present a new figure of a woman who approaches creative writing not as a form of compensation for the frustrations she has suffered, but as an instrument for overcoming them. These are women who, freed from any feelings of narcissism, question the world that opens up to their gaze as a place to explore and discover. Among them, Nadia Tuéni was perhaps one of the most interesting poets of this period. Daughter of a Lebanese father and a Franco-Algerian mother, she always felt her dual cultural belonging was a precious heritage to be defended. She published her first collection of poetry, *Les textes blonds*,[14] at the age of twenty-eight, but the history of her people comes out with particular force in *Poèmes pour une histoire*,[15] which combines the themes of exile and the search for roots. But we must also mention Nohad Salameh who, though the daughter of a poet who wrote in Arabic, was secure in her double identity and chose French as the language of creation and expression. Since her first collection, *Les enfants d'avril*,[16] the themes that would populate her subsequent poetry were immediately evident: exile, love, double identity and belonging. Particularly interesting within the substantial fictional production by women in this period are also the works of Éveline Bustros who, in *Sous la baguette du coudrier*,[17] in telling a story of adultery and a consequent "honour killing," denounces archaic customs of the mountains, and those of Andrée Chedid, of Lebanese origin but born in Cairo and naturalised French, who was also the author of numerous poetry collections.

In Chedid's narrative works,[18] the idea of a journey, be it dreamlike, poetic, interior or of initiation, is constantly present, expressing the reality of a people made nomadic by necessity. Simply put, it was precisely in the 1960s that women imposed a new face on literature. It was a nationalist literature, no longer limited to the simple imitation of European models but

14 Beirut, Dar an-nahar, 1963.

15 Paris, Seghers, 1973.

16 Paris, Les Temps Parallèles, 1980.

17 Beirut, self-published collection, later in *Romans et écrits divers*, Beirut, Éditions Dar An-Nahar, 1988.

18 Her notable early novels include *Le sommeil délivré* (Paris, Stock, 1952), *Jonathan* (Paris, Seuil, 1955), *Le sixième jour* (Paris, Julliard, 1960), and *La maison sans racines* (Paris, Flammarion, 1985) stands out among her more recent works.

expressing an authentic literary inventiveness by adopting new genres to that field, such as drama or the non-fiction essay. Towards 1960, in fact, the theatrical genre developed thanks to the creation of a university centre for drama studies in Beirut and the foundation of a theatre by the young author, Gabriel Boustany, who would inaugurate the new institution by putting on stage a play he had composed himself.[19] Women made their presence felt in this field as well: just think of the dramaturgical activity of Andrée Chedid, whose success in this area was based primarily on three plays: *Les nombres*,[20] *Bérénice d'Egypte*[21] and *Le montreur*.[22] The first, written immediately after the Israeli-Palestinian war, was inspired by the Bible; the second, also rooted in antiquity, addresses the problem of power by setting the story in the age of the Pharoahs – a subject that would also be taken up in her next novel, *Néfertiti et le rêve d'Akhnaton*[23] – while the third stands out for its originality and the lyricism that creeps into the action, giving a particular charm to it.

In Lebanon, starting from the civil war that broke out on April 13, 1975 and which lasted for fifteen years, literature was oriented towards existential questions. One of the central themes of that period was, of course, war. Indeed, the civil war was followed, first in 1978 and then in 1882, by the invasion of the southern part of the country by Israeli troops, resulting in numerous casualties and deaths and the destruction of entire villages. Although the West tends to forget the war in Lebanon, and the postwar governments have tried to erase its memory, such oblivion was impossible for the Lebanese, and their literature, in its various genres, certainly represents it. In terms of poetic production, collections of poems increased exponentially, and, once again, the most sensitive writers paying attention to events were women.[24] Among others, it is worth mentioning Vénus Khoury-Ghata, who expresses the anguish of death which people suffering a war must confront. The collections *Au sud du silence*[25] and *Les ombres et leurs cris*[26] are closely tied to the Lebanese tragedy, which memory continued to linger, like an indelible nightmare, in the subsequent collections *Fables pour*

19 *Le retour d'Adonis*, 1963.
20 Paris, Seuil, 1968.
21 Paris, Seuil, 1968.
22 Paris, Seuil, 1969.
23 Paris, Flammarion, 1974.
24 See: M. Takieddine Amyuni, «A Panorama of Lebanese Women Writers, 1975-1995», *op. cit.*, pp. 89-111.
25 Paris, Librairie Saint-Germain-des-Près, 1975.
26 Paris, Belfond, 1979.

un peuple d'argile[27] and *Quelle est la nuit parmi les nuits*.[28] The poet rebels against the absurdity of war and considers it unthinkable that fighters, from whatever side they are on, would establish relationships of complicity with foreign powers against their own fellow citizens. Therefore, in her view, it is not a real civil war but rather a war of "others" fought on Lebanese soil and with the blood of its own children. In this context, another name to remember is undoubtedly that of Claire Gebeyli, whose poetic collections, such as *Mémorial d'exil*[29] et *Mise à jour*,[30] insist on the theme of war. In her verses, with a Baudelairian flavour, the battered and wounded city of Beirut emerges in all its dramatic physicality.

During the 1980s, writers – once again, predominantly spearheaded by women – continued to interrogate the subject of war, with some seeking answers to the causes of the tragedy in the past. It was as if the passive victimhood which had been forced upon them elicited their screams as they tried to process their deep wounds, and in the face of a spectacle of violence perpetrated by men, women reacted by using writing not only to express their dissent towards an absurd war but to challenge the values of the patriarchal society that wanted them to be subjected to men. The first voice of this large group was that of Etel Adnan who, in 1977 and still during the war, published her *Sitt Marie-Rose*,[31] a novel inspired by a true story of a woman involved in the Palestinian resistance who, during the civil war, was tortured and subsequently murdered by a childhood friend. But it is also the case of Évelyne Accad who, with *L'Excisée*,[32] reacted vehemently against the brutality of the war in Lebanon, with the same force with which the Surrealists reacted in the face of the inhumanity of the First World War. Her *Coquelicot du massacre*[33] is also a denunciation of the violence of war and the power imbalance between the sexes imposed by the extremist traditions of the Maronites whose separatist ideas, in Accad's view, had contributed to the explosion of the conflict. Andrée Chedid, in *La maison sans racine* from 1985, describes how, in 1975, Lebanon suddenly found itself plunged into despair,[34] while in the subsequent *L'Enfant multiple*, a

27 Paris, Belfond, 1992.
28 Paris, Mercure de France, 2004.
29 Paris, Librairie Saint-Germain-des-Prés, 1975.
30 Paris, Agence de cooperation Culturelle et technique, 1982.
31 Paris, Éditions des Femmes, 1977.
32 Paris, L'Harmattan,1982.
33 Paris, L'Harmattan, 1988.
34 34. See A. M. Miraglia, « Le temps et ses reflets dans *La maison sans racine* d'Andrée Chedid », *Francofonia*, XVIII, n. 35, Autumn 1998, pp. 17-33.

feeling of faith in a better future seems to mark a victory over war. Even Dominique Eddé, despite having left the country, felt the need to recount those atrocious moments. In her epistolary novel *Lettre posthume*[35] from 1989, she describes the nostalgic thoughts of an old man forced to witness the destruction of his own country; His memories alternate, turbulent images with peaceful ones of the Lebanon of another time.

If Chedid and Eddé evoke Lebanon with nostalgic tones, Vénus Khoury-Ghata chooses cynicism to describe the horrors in her country. In *Vacarme pour une lune morte*,[36] the writer, exiled to Paris, describes the war in tones of biting irony: Lebanon is represented under the allegorical guise of Nabilia, which suffers cruel violence that leads to collective suicide. In *Une maison au bord des larmes*[37] and *La Maîtresse du notable*,[38] the war is background canvas upon which two family tragedies play out, and continues to be represented as a grotesque scenario in which the only feelings that seem to emerge are bitterness and hatred. As we can see, through their works, these authors stand as promoters and protagonists of a political, social and intellectual movement.

If, over the course of the nineteenth century, French-language literary expression flourished in Egypt, it was due, above all, to the work of French authors transplanted to the banks of the Nile. Notable among the female writers of this group is Niya Salîma (pseudonym of Eugénie Brun), French by birth but relocated to Cairo following her Egyptian husband. But the first real shift towards a more genuinely Middle Eastern literature was marked by the writer Jeanne Arcache who was born in Alexandria to a Lebanese father and a French mother, wrote two collections of poetry and a romantically toned novel. In the poetic genre, the works published between 1928 and 1938 were clearly affected by the French poets of Parnassianism, Symbolism and, above all, Surrealism.[39] One of the first representatives of Symbolist poetry in Egypt was Valentine de Saint-Point, great-grandniece of Alphonse de Lamartine. After having disturbed the souls of many Parisian intellectuals fascinated by her dazzling beauty, she decided to move

35 Both books were published by Gallimard, 1989.
36 Paris, Flammarion, 1983.
37 Paris, Balland, 1988.
38 Paris, Seghers, 1992.
39 See: M. A. Caws, R. Kuezli, G. Raaberg (eds.), *Surrealism and Women*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996; K. Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996; W. Chadwick (ed.), *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998.

to Egypt where she converted to Islam and dedicated herself to writing mystical-religious verses. Joyce Mansour, for her part, began her poetic journey by flirting with the Surrealist movement[40] with her first collection of poetry called *Cris*.[41] From her verses – up to her last collection *Trous noir*[42] – emerge a personal, as well as collective, pain from the wound inflicted on a people by Nazism. However, although her work seemed to be destined to remain in the shadows when not outright misunderstood, has been re-evaluated by contemporary critics.

The narrative production of the novel is quite varied and can be divided into four major trends, the first of which is constituted by the pioneers of the genre who conceived the novel as a sociological document on Egyptian customs. This phase spanned two decades, from approximately 1930 to 1950. Among the writers of this generation, Out-El-Kouloub (pseudonym of Madame Demerdarch) stands out, a brave woman who made her debut on the literary scene in 1934. She was a Muslim who wore the veil, yet she was also divorced and the daughter of an aristocratic family; she led a very active intellectual life that included hosting a literary salon in her home, frequented by personalities of the calibre of Jules Romains and Georges Duhamel.

The characters described in her works – along with strongly autobiographical notes – present the mosaic of her society, from the conformist bourgeoisie to the world of artists. Her work remains of particular importance for the commitment shown by the writer towards the female cause. Following the thread that unites her novels *Le coffret hindou*[43] and *Ramza*[44] one participates in the achievements of Egyptian women in defending their dignity, and in *La nuit de la destinée*[45] the tendency of women who live in modern cities to turn their eyes to the West is condemned.[46] For

40 In this regard, see: G. Colville, *Scandaleusement d'elles. Trente-quatre femmes surréalistes*, Paris, Jean-Michel Place, 1999, pp. 186-195; M.-L. Missir,*Joyce Mansour, une étrange demoiselle*, Paris, Jean-Michel Place, 2005; S. Caron, *Réinventer le lyrisme. Le surréalisme de Joyce Mansour*, Geneva, Droz, 2007.

41 Paris, Seghers, 1954.

42 Brussels, La Pierre d'Alun, 1986.

43 Paris, Gallimard, 1951.

44 Paris, Gallimard, 1958; regarding this text and the author's poetics, see also: J.-G. Lapacherie, «Le féminisme dans la littérature égyptienne de langue française», *Francofonia*, n. 23, 1992, pp. 21-32; J. Madoeuf, «Féminisme et orientalisme au miroir francophone d'Out-El-Kouloub (1892-1968)», *Egypte/Monde arabe*, series I, n. 29, 1997, pp. 101-114.

45 Preface to É. Domenghem, Paris, Gallimard, 1954.

46 See: J. Madœf, «Féminisme et orientalisme au miroir francophone d'Out-El-Kouloub (1892-1968)», *op. cit.*

her part, Amy Kher adds her voice to the female cause with *Mes sœurs*[47] in which she decries the effects of the breakdown of marriage bonds on a middle-class woman.[48]

Four of Andrée Chedid's novels are entirely set in Egypt, and two of them are rooted in antiquity: *Néfertiti et le rêve d'Akhnaton* and *Les Marches de sable*.[49] In the former, history is just a background on which reinvented famous personalities come to life and become individuals who resemble us with their strengths and weaknesses. The character of Queen Nefertiti, for example, is not only a sovereign but also a woman in love and a devoted bride. *Les Marches de sable* is set, in turn, in the fourth century, a period in which the city of Alexandria was the scene of bloody struggles between pagans and Christians; but here, too, the reading of a historical period becomes a pretext for a lucid critique of the present. Two other novels, *Sommeil délivré* and *Le sixième jour*, are instead set in the contemporary world. The writer describes the problems of a whole society through individual dramas, although the underlying message remains profoundly optimistic.[50]

Still in Egypt, following the new political trauma constituted by the Gulf War that broke out in 1991, there was the birth of a new literary avant-garde, *gil at-tis'inat*, the nineties generation. Breaking with the ideal of merging aesthetic innovation and political commitment, this generation of writers claimed the right to withdraw from addressing the great social issues to return to writing about the self. The commitment of women writers continues to this day, bringing the raw facts of their daily lives to the attention of readers. So, once again we have Dominique Eddé taking the field with *Kamal Jann*[51] to explain the reasons behind the events of the "Arab Spring." The writer invites readers to immerse themselves in a world dominated by violence in which the physical and mental torture perpetrated on individuals by the merciless regimes of the Middle East are exposed, unveiled.

As can be seen from the few examples cited, in these two Middle Eastern countries overlooking the shores of the Mediterranean, the contemporary cultural horizon is characterised by a strong presence of female authors.

47 Le Caire, R. Schindler, 1942.

48 See: E. Accad, *Sexuality, War and Literature in the Middle East*, New York, New York University Press, 1989.

49 Paris, Flammarion, 1981.

50 See: Chapter II: «Andrée Chedid», in M. M. Magill & K. S. Stephenson (eds.), *Dit de femmes. Entretiens d'écrivaines françaises*, Birmingham, Summa Publications, 2003, pp. 27-38.

51 Paris, Albin Michel, 2012.

It is a women's literature which, challenging French-speaking male literature in quality and quantity, established itself on the literary scene, overcoming the weight of political and cultural conflicts to initiate intercultural dialogue, like the Phoenicians, beyond the shores of *Mare nostrum*. These women's writing is an instrument of awareness and a weapon against all forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Contributing to the renewal of the socially engaged novel, they condemn all forms of violence, with particular regard to political and sectarian conflicts. The choice to write in French in countries where this language has always had, even more now, a marginal use, serves as a refuge and a screen against the persecutions suffered, as evidenced by the testimony of many Arabic-speaking writers, including Mona Jabbour, Sahar Khalifé, Layla Baalbaki and Nawal el Saadaou. The French language thus provides refuge and protection, but it also becomes the language for the freedom of expression. An example can be found in two novels that tell of the same family drama written by two sisters: *Une maison au bord des larmes*, published in France by the French-speaking Vénus Khoury-Ghata, and *Awraq min dafater chajarat roummane*,[52] published in Lebanon and written in Arabic by May Ménassa. While the novel written in French presents a raw realism, the story told in Arabic is affected by a socio-cultural conditioning that induces the writer to present, in a more prudent way, a masked reality. Writing in French these women denounce ailments and sufferings and proclaim the will to live, placing emphasis, in particular, on the clash/comparison relationship with what is perceived as a dichotomous *mal/mâle* [evil/male] pair, homophonic in French and perceived here as synonymous.

By declaring a revelatory power, female literary expression does not simply aim to "express their place" but rather insists on constructing it by progressively representing much more than a literary echo of gender issues. Many authors, especially those belonging to the more recent generation, firmly refuse to be relegated to a female or feminist context, claiming rather a gender perspective. Their writings, while returning, as a starting point, to the contours of local and individual specificities inextricably linked to different socio-political and cultural contexts, betray the urgency to overcome narrow geographical and cultural boundaries and transmit more universal messages.

Thus, exploring a variety of narrative genres, we find that these authors recount the multifaceted nature of their ordeals: war, destruction, social conflicts, the horror of violence, the loss of freedom in some cases, to fulfil

52 Beirut, Dar-an-Nahar, 1999.

the need to affirm and defend their people. The result is a writing characterised by a strong social commitment, a writing which, in most cases, provides intellectual survival, becoming a complaint, a protest, a tool for awakening the conscience of their fellow countrymen about their own destinies, and for making their voices heard by those outside their countries, regions and cultures.

Bibliography

Abou, Sélim. *Le bilinguisme arabe-français au Liban*. Paris: PUF, 1962.

Accad, Evelyne. *L'Excisée*. Paris: L'Harmattan,1982.

Accad, Evelyne. *Coquelicot du massacre*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988.

Accad, Evelyne. *Sexuality, War and Literature in the Middle East*. New York: New York University Press, 1989.

Adnan, Etel. *Sitt Marie-Rose*. Paris: Éditions des Femmes, 1977.

Ascar-Nahas, Joseph. *Les amis de la culture française en Egypte (1925-1945)*, documents présentés par M. Brin et précédés d'une conférence sur les conférences par A.-Nahas J. Le Caire: Éditions Horus, 1945.

Ascar-Nahas, Joseph. Égypte et culture française. Le Caire: Éd. de la Société Orientale de Publicité, 1953.

Booth, Marilyn. «Biography and Feminist Rhetoric in Early Twentieth Century Egypt: Mayy Zyada's Studies of Three Women's Lives» in *Journal of Women's History*, 3, n. 1, 1991. 38-64.

Bradan, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Boustani,Carmen. *Effects du féminin: variations narrratives francophones*. Paris: Khartala, 2003.

Boustany, Gabriel. *Le Retour d'Adonis*. Beyrouth, 1963.

Bustros, Eveline. *Sous la baguette du coudrier*, Beirut, self-published collection; later in *Romans et écrits divers*. Beirut: Éditions Dar An-Nahar, 1988.

Caron, Stéphanie. *Réinventer le lyrisme. Le surréalisme de Joyce Mansour*. Geneva: Droz, 2007.

Caws, Mary Ann, Rudolf Kuezli, Gwen Raaberg. (eds.). *Surrealism and Women*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Chadwick, Whitney. (ed.). *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998.

Chedid, Andrée. *Sommeil délivré*. Paris: Stock-Delamain et Boutelleau, 1952.

Chedid, Andrée. *Jonathan*. Paris: Seuil, 1955.

Chedid, Andrée. *Le sixième jour.* Paris: Julliard, 1960.

Chedid, Andrée. *Les Nombres*. Paris: Seuil, 1968.

Chedid, Andrée. *Bérénice d'Egypte*. Paris: Seuil, 1968.

Chedid, Andrée. *Le Montreur*. Paris: Seuil, 1969.

Chedid, Andrée. *Néfertiti et le rêve d'Akhnaton*. Paris: Flammarion, 1974.
Chedid, Andrée. *Les Marches de sable*. Paris: Flammarion, 1981.
Chedid, Andrée. *La maison sans racines*. Paris: Flammarion, 1985.
Chedid, Andrée. *L'Enfant multiple*. Paris: Flammarion, 1989.
Colville, Georgiana. *Scandaleusement d'elles. Trente-quatre femmes surréalistes*. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1999.
Conley, Katharine. *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.
Cooke, Miriam. "Arab Women Writers." Badawi M. M., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 443-462.
Darwiche, Jabbour Z. *Littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient: Egypte, Liban, Syrie*. Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 2007.
Durand, Jean.-François and Maxime Del Fiol. (eds.). "Regards sur les littératures francophones du Moyen-Orient. Egypte, Liban." *Interculturel-Francophonies*, n. 14, novembre 2008.
Edde, Dominique. *Lettre Posthume*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.
Edde, Dominique. *Kamal Jann*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2012.
Friedman, Saul S. *A History of the Middle East*. Jefferson (NC): McFarland, 2006.
Gebeyli, Claire. *Mémorial d'exil*. Paris: Librairie Saint-Germain-des-Prés, 1975.
Gebeyli, Claire. *La mise à jour*. Paris: Agence de cooperation Culturelle et technique, 1982.
Gerard, Delphine. "Le choix de la langue en Égypte. La langue française en Égypte dans l'entre-deux-guerres" in *Les Langues en Égypte*, I série, nn. 27-28, 1996. 253-284.
Guernier, Nicole. *Le français du Liban: cent portraits linguistiques*. Paris: Didier Érudition, 1993.
Khalaf, Saher. (ed.). *Littérature libanaise de langue français*. Ottawa: Naaman, 1981.
Kher, Amy. *Mes sœurs*. Le Caire: R. Schindler, 1942.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *Au sud du silence*. Paris: Librairie Saint-Germain-des-Près, 1975.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *Les Ombres et leurs cris*. Paris: Belfond, 1979.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *Vacarme pour une lune morte*. Paris: Flammarion, 1983.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *Une maison au bord des larmes.* Paris: Balland, 1988.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *La Maîtresse du Notable*. Paris: Seghers, 1992.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *Fables pour un peuple d'argile*. Paris: Belfond, 1992.
Khoury-Ghata, Vénus. *Quelle est la nuit parmi les nuits*. Paris: Mercure de France, 2004.
Kober, Marc, Irene Fenoglio, Daniel Lançon (eds.). *Entre Nil et Sable, écrivains d'Egypte d'expression française*. Paris: Publication du Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique, 1999.
Lapacherie, Jean-Gérard. "Le féminisme dans la littérature égyptienne de langue française" in *Francofonia*, n. 23, 1992, pp. 21-32.

Luthi, Jean-Jacques. *La littérature d'expression française en Egypte: 1798-1998*. Paris- Montréal: L'Harmattan, 2000.

Madœuf, Julia. "Féminisme et orientalisme au miroir francophone d'Out-El-Kouloub (1892- 1968)" in *Egypte/Monde arabe*, series I, n. 29, 1997. 101-114.

Magill, Michèle M. & Katherine S. Stephensn(eds.). Chapter II: "Andrée Chedid" in *Dit de femmes. Entretiens d'écrivaines françaises*. Birmingham: Summa Publications, 2003. 27-38.

Majdalani, Charif. *Petit traité des mélanges*. Beyrouth: éditions Layali, 2002.

Mansour, Joyce. *Cris,* Paris: Seghers, 1954.

Mansour, Joyce. *Trous noir*. Brussels: La Pierre d'Alun, 1986.

Mansour, Zakka N. *Littérature libanaise contemporaine: aspects thématiques*. Holy Spirit: University of Kaslik, 2000.

Méssana, May. *Awraq min dafater chajarat roummane*. Beirut: Dar-an-Nahar, 1999.

Miraglia, Anne-Marie. "Le temps et ses reflets dans "La maison sans racines" d'Andrée Chedid" in *Francofonia*, XVIII, n. 35, Autumn 1998. 17-33.

Missir, Marie-Laure. *Joyce Mansour, une étrange demoiselle*. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2005.

Out-El-Kouloub. *Le coffret hindou*. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.

Out-El-Kouloub. *La nuit de la destinée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.

Out-El-Kouloub. *Ramza*. Paris: Gallimard, 1958.

Ramy, Zein. *Dictionnaire de la littérature libanaise de langue française*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998.

Salameh, Nohad. *Les Enfants d 'Avril*. Paris: Les temps Parallèles, 1980.

Suhair Majaj, Lisa, Paula W. Sunderman & Therese Saliba (eds.). *Intersections, Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

Takieddine Amyuni, Mona. "A Panorama of Lebanese Women Writers, 1975-1995" in Rustum Shehadeh, Lamia, *Women and War in Lebanon*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999. 89-111.

Tueni, Nadia. *Les Textes blonds*. Beyrouth: Dar an-nahar, 1963.

Tueni, Nadia. *Poèmes pour une histoire*. Paris: Seghers, 1973.

Ziegler, Antje. "'Al-Haraka Baraka! The Late Rediscovery of Mayy Zyada's Works" in *Die Welt des Islams*, 39, n. 1, 1999. 103-115.

RELIGIOUS RIPPLES ON THE BOSPORUS
Mediterranean History used as an Analogy for the Nineteenth-Century *Kulturkampf* in Ida Hahn-Hahn's *Eudoxia*

Paul Csillag*

Abstract

In 1866, the German Countess Ida von Hahn-Hahn published a historical novel titled *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin*. Its protagonists are the fifth-century Byzantine Empress Eudoxia and a Gothic Arian princess named Gunild. Gunild was Hahn's literary alter ego, representing the connection between Gothic and German ethnicities. In the story, the Gothic princess converts from Arianism to Catholicism, symbolizing Hahn's own conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism. Hahn wrote a story based on historical figures of the early Mediterranean Middle Ages to express her nineteenth-century religious ideas. As a Catholic convert and writer, one of her major incentives was to convince her readers of the superiority of the Roman Church. At the time she wrote *Eudoxia*, conflict between Protestants and Catholics was dividing German society, leading to the so-called *Kulturkampf* which would fully escalate later in the 1870s. With her novel, Hahn advocated for the Catholic Church, and argued in favor of the territorial independence of the Papal States. By doing so, she was implicitly criticizing liberal, secular, and Protestant authors who favored an expropriation of the church's earthly possessions. For the author, the *Kulturkampf* represented a confrontation between a controlling, conquering state and the rightful church. To explain her interpretation of current political events, Hahn used semifictional characters like Eudoxia and John Chrysostom to symbolize secular power and Catholicism respectively against a backdrop of Mediterranean history. Her historical novel is, moreover, an example of how female Mediterranean history could be used to create political narratives and how female writers of nineteenth-century Europe interacted with the southern sea's past.

Keywords: Ida Hahn-Hahn, Historical Fiction, Eudoxia, Mediterranean History, *Kulturkampf*

The Byzantine Empire appeared enormous to the writers and readers of the nineteenth century. Controlling most of the eastern Mediterranean,

* European University Institute. Postgraduate-Stipendien des OeAD, finanziert aus Mitteln des österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF). Special thanks go to Nicola Hargreaves from the EUI for helping with the manuscript.

the empire of the early Middle Ages had evolved into a symbol of power and wealth in modern historical thinking. Yet, it was also believed to be decadent and overly focused on luxury. As the political center of this supposedly immoral empire, the Byzantine emperors attracted the interest of a nineteenth-century readership. Sometimes, their spouses too became fruitful material for historical fiction. One of these was Eudoxia. At the beginning of the fifth century, Emperor Arcadius (377–408) occupied the Byzantine throne. Seen as having been weak in nature, the young emperor appeared less interesting to a nineteenth-century audience than his wife, Empress Eudoxia (who died in 404).[1]

The empress's story fascinated not only historians but also novelists. In the city of Mainz during the 1860s, a German Catholic author worked feverishly on a manuscript for a novel with the Byzantine female ruler at its center. Ida von Hahn-Hahn (1805–1880) published her novel *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin. Ein Zeitgemälde aus dem fünften Jahrhundert* (Eudoxia, the Empress. A painting of the fifth century) in 1866.[2] Hahn's fascination with the reign of Eudoxia stemmed partly from her predilection for stories of strong historical women, and partly from her affinity for religious material. Because of the author's simultaneous interest for female and religious history, Hahn invented the fictional figure of Gunild, a Gothic warrior's daughter in service to the empress, to insert her own religious identity into the story. As an Arian Goth, Gunild is initially an outsider at Eudoxia's court. Soon, however, she converts to Catholicism and experiences true piety. For Hahn, this narrative reflected her own conversion from German Protestantism to Catholicism. Caught between denominations and living in an age of increasing religious strife, the author felt that she could use the story of Byzantine religious quarrels to explain her personal position in nineteenth-century Europe. In fact, Eudoxia's reign had been marked by religious unrest, and against this background, a power struggle between her and the Constantinopolitan patriarch John Chrysostom (347–407). As an exotic tale, the sectarian tensions of medieval Byzantium offered writers

1 J. B. Burry, *A History of the Later Roman Empire. From Arcadius to Irene* (London, New York: Macmillan and Co, 1889), 98–100.

2 Ida Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin. Ein Zeitgemälde aus dem fünften Jahrhundert*, vol. 1 (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchelm, 1866). The novel was published in two volumes with each containing around two hundred pages. As was typical for the time, the books were published at the same moment and were meant to be purchased together. Because the use of two volumes instead of one had rather to do with the material format than with differences in style, story, or publication date, I will refer to the novel in its singular form instead of using the plural.

like Hahn the opportunity to indirectly describe the religious politics of their own day, the nineteenth century.[3] Ever since the publication of her *Oriental Letters* (1844), reporting from her travels through the Ottoman Empire including nineteenth-century Constantinople, her role as a connoisseur of Oriental matters was widely accepted. The fifth-century Byzantine Empire provided excellent historical material for an author fond of Oriental stereotypes and Constantinopolitan customs.[4]

Hahn was not the only nineteenth-century female writer who had a fondness for medieval Mediterranean history. British authors, such as Sister Francis Raphael (1823–1894), and Italian novelists like Antonietta Klitsche de la Grange (1832–1912) used Roman, Greek, and Byzantine material for their books. This trend became increasingly widespread after the middle of the century.[5] Female authors around the globe started writing more and more historical fiction and simultaneously highlighting female participation in human history. Interestingly, historical novels became popular enough to undermine official narratives of scholastic historiography, which portrayed the past as a predominantly male sphere. Books like *Eudoxia* were less scrutinized than academic essays since they were considered as a merely entertaining pastime more than as a legitimate representation of the past. The genre, thus, could be used to include the stories of women in an otherwise mostly male historiography.[6]

Against the initial expectations of a twenty-first-century reader, this struggle for more female agency was not always opposed to ecclesiastical institutions. All three of the above-mentioned writers, Hahn, Francis Raphael, and Klitsche, were zealous Catholics and consequently wrote in a pious style. As devout believers, they defended the cause of the church in their books. Historical novels became a tool to propagate a Catholic worldview, to convert non-believers, and to exonerate the church from historical crimes. The novelists' stories were often filled with strong female

---

3 Andriani Georgiou, "Empresses in Byzantine Society: Justifiably Angry or Simply Angry?," in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 111–40, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96038-8_5.

4 Ulrike Brisson, "Discovering Scheherazade: Representations of Oriental Women in the Travel Writing of Nineteenth-Century German Women," *Women in German Yearbook*, no. 29 (2013): 97.

5 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, Paperback ed (London: Verso, 2007), 27.

6 Hamish Dalley, "Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel: Epistemologies of Contemporary Realism," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (March 2014): 57, https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2013.3.

characters who professed an unshakeable faith in God. In the novels, these protagonists represented devout women, standing their ground in opposition to their earthly and sinful compatriots. Repeatedly, defending their religion against hostile social surroundings mutated into a fight for female independence. In other words, in the novels, a Catholic apologetic intention overlapped with feminist sentiment.[7]

Hahn's Catholic-feminist novel *Eudoxia* is a perfect example of this, inasmuch as it was a response to a fierce anti-Catholic discourse that had taken hold in the German public sphere. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the so-called *Kulturkampf* ravaged Europe. The Catholic and Protestant churches argued over preeminence on the continent (and the globe), while strengthened liberal secularism rose to become what came to be seen as a third denomination. Religious leaders and state rulers did not so much fight with the sword as they did with the pen. Instead of taking the quarrel over denominational supremacy to the battlefield, they preferred to dabble in editorial warfare. The church, for example, established a central newspaper for its propagandistic program, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and Protestant and liberal publishing houses had their own outlets, like *Die Gartenlaube*. While journals and newspapers gained cultural salience, literature had an equally pertinent role in the propagandist apparatus of both sides. Authors often instrumentalized their stories to speak out for Catholicism, Protestantism, or secularism. For religious writers, historical fiction evolved into a favorite tool to defend their position in a nineteenth-century discourse. Historical tales could be used to defame the enemy, laud one's own religion, or create an analogy to explain the author's thoughts on the current political situation.[8]

Hahn's historical novel *Eudoxia* must also be seen as a part of the emerging nineteenth-century literary *Kulturkampf*. In her foreword, the author pointed out that she was writing in support of the Roman Church. Her short sermon-like preface considered not only the position of Catholics in Germany but also their increasingly precarious situation in Italy.

7 For example: Augusta Theodosia Drane, *Uriel; or, The Chapel of the Angels* (London: Burns and Oates, 1884); Antonietta Klitsche de la Grange, *Il Navicellaio del Tevere* (Torino, Roma: Pietro di G. Marietti. Tipografico Pontificio-Tip. E Lib. Poliglotta de Propaganda Fide, 1866); Ida Hahn-Hahn, *Maria Regina* (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchelm, 1860).

8 Yvonne Maria Werner and Jonas Harvard, *European Anti-Catholicism in a Comparative and Transnational Perspective*, European Studies 31 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 14; Amerigo Caruso, "Antifemminismo femminile? Luise Hensel, Ida Hahn e Marie Nathusius nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento," *Contemporanea*, no. 4 (2019): 521–22, https://doi.org/10.1409/95109.

The Italian unification process was threatening the Papal States, one of the last remnants of the peninsula's old political system. Spurred on by recent success, Italian liberals and nationalists were calling for an annexation of the Holy See's territorial possessions. From Hahn's conservative Catholic perspective, this policy of annexing church property would only lead to moral degeneration.[9]

With her tale, the author tried to counter an anti-Catholic, anti-feminist narrative. Michael B. Gross has observed how these two forms of Othering were particularly intertwined since Protestant writers often described Catholicism as an effeminate religion. In opposition to the womanish, overly emotional Catholic, the Protestant portrayed himself as a rationally focused individualist. While the papist believer was duped by sweet-talking priests, the Protestant maintained his independent mind. Inevitably, this rhetorical opposition brings to mind a simultaneously developing Orientalism, as described by Edward Said in his famous monograph.[10] In fact, the Catholic and the Oriental were similarly connotated with traits inherently ascribed to the female gender such as effeminacy or high emotionalism. In contrast, the northern Protestant writer depicted himself as a male rationalist. As Michael B. Gross has noted, anti-Catholicism, Orientalist tendencies, and anti-feminism were, thus, deeply interlaced.[11]

Hahn used her novel to argue concurrently against anti-Catholic and misogynist claims. However, she also endeavored to overcome another cultural trend in European literature: a negative Mediterranism. Because of geographical and religious congruities, contemporary authors understood the *Kulturkampf* not only as a fight between Catholicism and Protestantism but also as a confrontation between North and South. *Kulturkampf* did not merely represent a conflict between the German government under Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) and Pope Pius IX (1792–1878). On the contrary, it constituted a struggle that encompassed the whole of Europe, if not the globe.[12] In this context, stereotypical depictions of Catholicism repeatedly connected the religion to the continent's

9 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin*, III–VI.

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

11 Michael B. Gross, *The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, 2. paperback ed, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor, Mich: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2008), 11.

12 Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, "Introduction: The European Culture Wars," in *Culture Wars*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511496714.001;

Mediterranean south. Both the region as well as the denomination were ascribed qualities such as superstition, backwardness, and intolerance. The German *Los-von-Rom* movement, for example, argued that Protestant Germany needed to rid itself of the Catholic, Mediterranean millstone because of the latter's economic underperformance. In this context, Manuel Borutta observed how anti-Catholicism did not just overlap with anti-feminism, and Orientalism, but also with hostilities towards the European South as a whole.[13]

To better comprehend in what manner Hahn used Mediterranean history, I analyze here the narrative of her book *Eudoxia*. After giving a short biography of the author, I examine the various characters of the novel and their cultural connotations. The reader will observe how Byzantine history became a parable for the *Kulturkampf*, how Hahn played with German and Catholic identities, and how she described female agency. I believe this is a worthwhile contribution to Mediterranean and Gender Studies since it uncovers the power of a female Catholic author countering a Protestant male narrative. The latter has to date enjoyed far more attention from academics, who have often overlooked the female Catholic response. Instead of depicting anti-Catholic, anti-Mediterranean, and anti-womanhood as a one-directional action, I attempt to pinpoint the equal and opposite reactions to their Protestant adversaries of writers like Hahn.

Ida von Hahn-Hahn – A Catholic Feminist?

Ida von Hahn-Hahn is something of an enigma to literary academics of the twenty-first century. Gerd Oberembt, who has written an extensive and detailed biography, locates the author between melancholy Romanticism and conservative Catholicism.[14] Her role in early feminism, however, poses an additional conundrum. According to Gisela Argyle, Hahn was a rebel who used the novel as a medium to speak out, because

Timothy Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2010), 5–7, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230109124.

13 Manuel Borutta, *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe*, Bürgertum, n. F., Bd. 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 49.

14 Gerd Oberembt, *Ida Gräfin Hahn-Hahn. Weltschmerz und Ultramontanismus. Studien zum Unterhaltungsroman im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980).

as a woman she had no other access to historical discourse.[15] Traci S. O'Brien, on the other hand, sees her feminism as troublesome, considering that Hahn had, at least by today's standards, a problematic view of "Oriental races".[16] Finally, Amerigo Caruso paints Hahn as thoroughly anti-feminist and rather reactionary. He believes that Hahn preferred a conservative model for the role of women in society instead of following radical feminism.[17] Academia's diverging perceptions of the writer of *Eudoxia* stem from the fact that Hahn's understanding of race and gender was specific and individual. As such, she resists being categorized and seldom fits the current political compartmentalization. Todd Kontje points out that modern scholars try to fit Hahn into their own narratives rather than understand her original incentives.[18]

The drastic changes in her eventful life are another reason for the ambivalence surrounding Hahn in current academic research. Born into northern German aristocracy, she grew up as a well-educated, Protestant woman. Her father spent most of the family's fortune on extravagant theater plays, which forced her to marry her wealthy cousin, in 1826. Motivated by financial reasons rather than love, the marriage did not last long. After her divorce in 1829, Hahn traveled through Germany and other countries, like Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire. During her time as a voluntary nomad, she partly toured alone, partly with her lover Adolf von Bystram. After Adolf's death in 1849, Hahn decided to make some radical changes in her life. She converted to Catholicism and after a short sojourn at a French monastery, she moved to Mainz where she founded a similar institution for women. There, Hahn remained until the end of her life.[19]

Before her conversion, the cosmopolitan, constantly-traveling Hahn was considered a rebel. Her books were filled with sarcastic remarks against the patriarchal world order, while still adhering to a somewhat conservative

---

15 Gisela Argyle, "The Horror and the Pleasure of Un-English Fiction: Ida von Hahn-Hahn and Fanny Lewald in England," *Comparative Literature Studies* 44, no. 1 (2007): 161, https://doi.org/10.1353/cls.2007.0026.

16 Traci S. O'Brian, "A 'Daughter of the Occident' Travels to the 'Orient': Ida von Hahn-Hahn's The Countess Faustina and Letters From the Orient," *Women in German Yearbook*, no. 24 (2008): 42.

17 Amerigo Caruso, "Antifemminismo femminile?," 517.

18 Todd Curtis Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation 1771-1871: Domestic Fiction in the Fatherland*, Cambridge Studies in German (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140.

19 Helen Chambers, *Humor and Irony in Nineteenth-Century German Women's Writing: Studies in Prose Fiction, 1840-1900*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2007), 32.

image of marriage. She herself, divorced and in an open sexual liaison, appeared radically feminist to her contemporaries during the first half of the century. Her desire for independence also tinged her female protagonists in the novels. This underpinning of female agency did not cease with her 1849 conversion. However, her writing became saturated with Catholic undertones and values. Hahn also supported a thoroughly religious understanding of womanhood, underlining the importance of women showing virtue and being sexually reticent.[20] Because of these rather conservative nuances, recent critics, such as Amerigo Caruso, have suggested that Hahn could even be described as anti-feminist.[21] However, the female characters of her novels kept their independent thinking and the capability to overcome male dominance. In *Eudoxia*, this independence is not marked by sexual liberty but rather by women defending their faith, deciding autonomously over their adherence to one denomination or the other. In Hahn's biography, the year 1849 can, thus, be identified as a religious watershed moment on the one hand, and a feminist continuity on the other.[22]

Eudoxia's Caesaropapism – The Master Thesis

Seventeen years after her conversion, the novelist became fascinated by Byzantine history, a fascination which culminated in her book *Eudoxia*. The novel, set at the beginning of the fifth century, tells the story of Empress Eudoxia, wife to Emperor Arcadius. In the first volume, the reader witnesses her ascension to the throne by overcoming other politicians at the Byzantine court such as the treacherous minister Eutrop. In the second volume, the narrative focuses on the quarrels between the Byzantine state under Eudoxia and the Constantinopolitan Church under Patriarch John Chrysostom. The ambitious empress tries to control both state and church, but Hahn disapproved of her protagonist's policy. As a Catholic author, Hahn scolded her heroine Eudoxia for interfering with ecclesiastical matters. The author took the side of the Patriarch, arguing in favor of the Constantinopolitan Church and its independence.

The author felt especially connected to the preacher Chrysostom, a historical figure, who had acquired legendary fame thanks to his eloquence – because of ostensible parallels between his past and her present Chris-

20 Chambers, *Humor and Irony in Nineteenth-Century German Women's Writing,* 41.
21 Amerigo Caruso, "Antifemminismo femminile?," 517.
22 Chambers, *Humor and Irony in Nineteenth-Century German Women's Writing*, 44–46.

tendom. For Hahn, nineteenth-century Catholicism and the fifth-century Constantinopolitan Church were the same religious institution. Although this presentation might appear bewildering to some, the author repeatedly called the Christian denomination of the fifth century "*katholisch*".[23] Early Christians used this term also during antiquity to designate the main church and separate it from minor denominations. In Hahn's nineteenth-century usage, however, the word developed a new meaning in connection to the Roman Church. By repeatedly calling the Constantinopolitan congregation Catholic, the author established a direct link between the main church of the fifth century and the Roman belief in the present. Hahn equated her own denomination with that of the fifth-century Byzantines. According to her depiction, the Constantinopolitan congregation represented the "true" church in opposition to other early forms of Christianity like Arianism.[24] Fifth-century Arianism was a religious movement that differed from the official religion laid down by the Nicaean Council. This alternative form of Christianity, which questioned the divinity of Christ, found many adherents among the Goths, a people that at the time partly served the Byzantine emperor. In Hahn's view, the Arian denomination was a heretic belief, like other misguided Christian creeds throughout history. It becomes clear that Hahn instrumentalized the medieval Constantinopolitan Church as an analogy for nineteenth-century Catholicism while Arianism was equated to nineteenth-century Protestantism. In other words, to explain the conflict between righteous Catholicism and false Protestantism, the author used an example from Byzantine and Mediterranean history.[25]

Protestant Arianism and Catholic Christianity, however, did not represent the sole dichotomy of the book. An opposition between the holy church and the earthly, impure Byzantine society likewise causes a conflict that pushes the story of the book forward. In Hahn's narrative, the Mediterranean empire appears as a licentious state, in which an avaricious upper class governs the equally sinful lower classes. Her fictional Byzantine noblewomen of fifth-century Constantinople "competed in luxury, splendor, and wastefulness, and caused infinite damage."[26] "Greed for money, luxury, and hedonism were idols that received rich offerings, as if the old idolatrous temples had not been closed."[27] For Hahn, luxury ostentatiously functioned as the main culprit for Byzantium's recession. In her view, it

23 For example: Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, Die Kaiserin*, 1:9, 176, 206, 209, 216.
24 For example: Hahn-Hahn, 1:208, 209, 240.
25 For example: Hahn-Hahn, 1:173, 250.
26 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, Die Kaiserin,* 1:43. My translation.
27 Hahn-Hahn, 1:16. My translation.

had been luxury out of all sins that led to the Empire's eventual downfall in 1453.[28] Despite the book's plot unfolding in medieval Byzantium, Hahn's religiously motivated criticism of materialism was targeted at her contemporaries. As a Christian novel, *Eudoxia* served to recall nineteenth-century readers traditionally Catholic values such as piety, poverty, and humbleness. Instead of pursuing their obsession with material objects, Hahn's audience ought to refocus on a moral and spiritual way of life. The author asserted that one should renounce worldly luxury to help the poor and sick and one would be rewarded in the afterlife.

In her attack on materialism, Hahn availed herself of multiple topoi which were an essential part of what has been called 'Byzantinism'. A word with many meanings, Byzantinism can, according to Helen Bodin, signify a form of Othering.[29] Like Edward Said's Orientalism or Maria Todorova's Balkanism, the term circumscribes a nineteenth-century literary (and academic) tendency that exoticized a certain geographical area with its respective culture. In each case, authors (mostly European) described a place and society supposedly foreign to them. This illocutionary act served to assert one's own (Western) identity by degrading the encountered Other.[30] Instead of targeting the Orient or the Balkans, Byzantinism focused on the namesake empire. Nevertheless, all three entities were ascribed similar pejorative adjectives, like effeminacy, luxury, or superstition. Historical novelists used narrations of the Byzantine Empire – or the Orient or the Balkans – to conjure the image of an Eastern and uncivilized realm. Decadent emperors and licentious noblewomen, corrupt priests, and treacherous merchants began to populate the pages of historical fiction. Stories of the Byzantine Empire could be instrumentalized to criticize societies of the present by analogy. By doing so, the historical novelists could feign that they were writing about a long-gone empire, where in reality, they were denouncing a present political entity.

---

28 Hahn-Hahn, 1:21.

29 Helen Bodin, "Whose Byzantinism – Ours or theirs? On the Issue of Byzantinism from a Cultural Semiotic Perspective," in *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500,* ed. Przemysław Marciniak and Dion Smyth (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 11–42, here 40–42.

30 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Maria Nikolaeva Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Continually, historical novelists referred to the Byzantine Empire to demean societies or cultures of their own day.[31]

Hahn, true to her time, reified traditional negative descriptions of the Byzantine Empire to admonish her readership. Lust for luxury, the main sin under her scrutiny, appeared in the novel as the cause of further cultural sins like nepotism. At the beginning of Hahn's book, one of the more honorable protagonists, Amantius, complains about the wrongs committed by Eutrop, the emperor's favorite. Eutrop had accepted bribes in exchange for placing his friends in the most profitable positions at court. Amantius laments that "Leo the wool merchant and Alexander the butcher" were promoted to "captain of the cavalry and [the] accountant of the treasury."[32] This tale was meant to indicate the dilapidated state of the Byzantine bureaucracy and state apparatus; neither merchants nor butchers were supposed to occupy official political positions, traditionally reserved for the aristocratic elite. Eutrop's venality demonstrated the corrupt and hence weak Constantinopolitan government.

In Hahn's opinion, nepotism was even worse when it involved the church. In another chapter of *Eudoxia*, Eugraphia, an ambitious noblewoman, tries to help her son into a wealthy position by making use of her contacts in the clergy and at the court. With the support of the book's arch-villain Eutrop, she is able to make her son, Eugenios, a priest. He, however, does not fit the role, having been educated in too liberal a way, and left to his vices. Instead of working as a man of God, he preys on women and spends his time in the streets. Eutrop's influence on the church, inducing weak and depraved men into its service, symbolized the harmful effects of Byzantine society on the Christian religion. In other words, it was not the ecclesiastical institution in itself that was in error, but impious men.[33]

Eventually, multiple noble men and women, among whom Eudoxia plays a major role, manage to convince Emperor Arcadius of Eutrop's wrongdoings. Promptly, the emperor evicts his former favorite from Constantinople. With Eutrop out of the picture, Eudoxia takes a position of superiority in Byzantine politics. Like her predecessor, she attempts to include the Constantinopolitan Church in her sphere of influence but clashes with the patriarch. Chrysostom is unwilling to obey and fully submit the

---

31 Przemysław Marciniak and Dion Smythe, "Introduction," in *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500* (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 1–8, here 2.

32 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin*, 1:6. My translation.

33 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin*, 1:15.

church to imperial rule. Even worse, he criticizes the empress for her temperament, her lust for luxury, and her self-idolization.

By shaping her novel's narrative accordingly, Hahn sided with the Constantinopolitan Church against the pretentions of the Byzantine empress. Against her declared protagonist, Eudoxia, the author supported the position of Chrysostom who represented the Catholic Church and its ideals. Known for his golden tongue, Chrysostom became a symbol of eloquence while still alive. His capacity to influence the masses (for better or worse) remained a popular story right up to the nineteenth century.[34] Because of his talent to convince his listeners of the teachings of Christ, Hahn venerated him, to a certain extent even identifying with the patriarch. Given her proximity to the Christian religion, it is not surprising that the Catholic author agreed with Chrysostom on political matters, especially with his defense of the independence of the church.[35]

Empress Eudoxia, on the other hand, appears to be more ambivalent. For Hahn, the empress has justifiably conquered her position at court. As a female ruler, Eudoxia mostly acts in an honorable manner with good intentions, lending a hand to most of the book's good characters. Her sole mistake lies in her ambition, trying to overcome the independence of the church. Hahn called this policy of the state attempting to administer ecclesiastical institutions "*Cäsaropapismus*" or Caesaropapism.[36] Nowadays, the term is probably familiar because of its use by Max Weber, who saw Ottoman Islam as a Caesaropapist system. His definition circumscribed a political system in which a secular power, for example an emperor, oversaw the ecclesiastical branch of the same society.[37] Ever since, historians have defined the most diverging political societies as "Caesaropapist", including Anglican England or Orthodox Russia. However, academics mostly utilized the term to describe Byzantine religious policies, ascribing the Byzantine Emperor a prominent role in the Constantinopolitan Church. Historians assumed that a Basileus like Arcadius would have controlled not only the Byzantine earthly empire but also its ecclesiastical sector. Although Caesaropapism as an analytical tool was popular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, recent academic articles evince a more critical take on the concept. An essential part of current mistrust towards

34 James Daniel Cook, *Preaching and Popular Christianity: Reading the Sermons of John Chrysostom*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

35 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin,* 1:190, 220, 231–32.

36 Hahn-Hahn, 1: IV.

37 Y. Djedi, "Max Weber, Islam and Modernity," *Max Weber Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 35, https://doi.org/10.15543/MWS/2011/1/4.

Caesaropapism lies in its negative connotations. As in Hahn's novel, certain scholars criticized a unification of state and church under one crown. Many historians thought the system to be unmodern and hence, inferior to other concepts of state-religion relationships. Often Caesaropapism was held accountable for the supposed backwardness of certain societies, such as, for example, the Ottoman or Russian Empire, both states with a claim to a Byzantine heritage.[38]

In Hahn's narrative, Caesaropapism also has a negative meaning. According to the author, Caesaropapism even became the main evil in Byzantine society. Other sins, such as luxury, ambition, or nepotism, could be linked to the church being controlled by the empress. While Chrysostom, the representative of an independent clergy, incarnated pure Christianity, the influence of Empress Eudoxia signified an earthly encroachment into spiritual matters. Moral institutions were, consequently, poisoned by egocentrism and trivial interests. Although Hahn depicted Eudoxia as a strong and benevolent female ruler, she also criticized her for trying to control the church.

Hahn reappropriated nineteenth-century literary topoi that originally targeted the Mediterranean or Catholicism and instead ascribed them to Caesaropapism. In her foreword, she argued: "Rome, the center of the spiritual world, should remain untouched by the influence of a vain throne […] And because the church has a human element […] it needs to live in a free state, which is not under the control of emperors and kings."[39] According to Hahn, it had been those emperors and kings who caused the decay of the Eastern church. Decadence, corruption, and immorality were not caused by the Catholic Church but by the Byzantine rulers who wanted to control it. It was not an overly fanatic piety that had caused the downfall of Constantinople but a mingling of the state in ecclesiastical affairs. "Constantinople has fallen to it [the human element] from the beginning. […] From this came heresy and schism, the separation of the Greek church from Rome, the deadliest of all spiritual and moral weaknesses, and finally, the downfall of a Christian Empire – before the Turkish crescent."[40] Ingeniously, Hahn performed a narrational sleight of hand. Previously, many historical novelists had used Byzantinism to attack nineteenth-century Catholicism, fearing its leverage in state politics and hence, proposing an increased

38 Deno J. Geanakoplos, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of The Problem of Caesaropapism," *Church History* 34, no. 4 (December 1965): 381, 399, https://doi.org/10.2307/3163118.

39 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin,* 1: V. My translation.

40 Hahn-Hahn*, Eudoxia, die Kaiserin,* 1: V. My translation.

secularization. In *Eudoxia*, however, neither Catholicism, femininity, nor Mediterranean culture were to blame, but Caesaropapist politics.

In Hahn's novel, it was the state that tried to merge the two spheres. The fault did not lie with the clergy but with the secular rulers. Implicitly, this reverse criticism aimed at the Protestant and secular states. Here, religion was often subordinate to civic power. Hahn argued that the Christian religion ought to be independent and able to blossom freely. The place for such independence was in neither Germany nor Constantinople but in Rome: "Since the Christian church had existed, Rome was its free state. Those who tried to steal its scepter have fallen one after the other, and Rome has risen again and again, like the sun."[41] Considering that the novelist was writing in 1866, she was not merely defending Catholic rights around Europe but its territorial existence. At this time, the territorial Papal State feared for its life and power because of an advancing national-liberal Italian unification movement. The same year, Italy's ally, Protestant Prussia had decisively defeated the Austrian (Catholic) army at Sadowa/Königgrätz. The fate of the Catholic faith was insecure. Hahn used the story of Eudoxia and Chrysostom to give her version of the conflict. In her eyes, both in nineteenth-century Europe and medieval Byzantium, the cause of society's problems lay in the state taking control of the church. The novel *Eudoxia* ought to show the problems that would arise if liberal, nationalist movements in Italy and Germany took territorial control over formerly ecclesiastic domains.

Gunild's Gothic Arianism – A Slave Antithesis

Although the title of Hahn's novel alludes to the pivotal role of Empress Eudoxia, another character shares the prominent position. Gunild, the daughter of the leader of the Germanic Goths, arrives at the Byzantine court after the first introductory chapters. During the transition from the fourth to the fifth century, a part of the Goths had joined the empire and now fought against their compatriots in the name of the emperor. Hahn used this historical disposition to insert some Germanic elements into her story of the Mediterranean.

In the book, Gunild is described as a "young, beautiful girl with a proud posture" who spoke Greek with "a foreign accent."[42] Hahn thus indicated

41 Hahn-Hahn, 1: VI. My translation.

42 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin,* 1:96. My translation.

the superior character, the freedom-loving spirit, and the foreignness to anything Mediterranean personified by the Gothic woman. Welcomed by Eudoxia, Gunild is accepted at the Byzantine court although she does not feel at home in the southern, decadent halls. When the empress asks what Gunild desires, "she exclaims: 'My people and my freedom!' 'Little barbarian!' smiled Eudoxia. 'O let me go!' begged Gunild; […] let me go to my home to see the woody shores of the Danube!"[43] Hahn's Gothic princess acts as a foreign element at the Byzantine court. She neither dabbles in aristocratic intrigues nor does she enjoy the luxurious comfort of the Constantinopolitan metropole. Rather, she prefers the nature of her home country and the company of straightforward Goths. For readers familiar with the myth of the freedom-loving, honest German, Hahn's deployment of this nineteenth-century stereotype becomes immediately apparent.[44] The author availed herself of the history of the Goths to insert a figure into a Mediterranean scenario with whom a German readership ought to identify. By doing so, she sought to render Byzantine lore more relatable to her mainly German audience.

In the novel, court culture and decadence are not the only estrangements Gunild encounters. She is also of a different creed. When the Gothic princess explores the Byzantine capital, she meets Olympia. Olympia is a noblewoman who had left aristocratic circles to open a hospital where she works piously to help the sick and wounded. The two virtuous women understand each other from the start but suddenly Olympia is stunned. She says: "You are a Goth….hence an Arian?' Gunild answers proudly: 'Goth and Arian."[45] At the beginning of the fifth century, the Goths indeed followed a denomination different from the Constantinopolitan Church.[46] In the case of Hahn's novel, Arianism becomes an analogy for Protestantism, while a Gothic ethnicity is used as a symbol of German nationality. The dogma of the Constantinopolitan Church, instead, is repeatedly described as "Catholic". Hence, Hahn played with religious-geographical images familiar to the reader. An Arian Goth from the north could be compared to the Protestant north, whereas Mediterranean Byzantium equaled nineteenth-century southern Catholicism with its center in Rome. As such,

43 Hahn-Hahn, 1:96. My translation.

44 Rainer Kipper, *Der Germanenmythos im deutschen Kaiserreich: Formen und Funktionen historischer Selbstthematisierung*, Formen der Erinnerung, Bd. 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 50.

45 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin*, 1:106. My translation.

46 Mirón Jurík, "Gothic Christians in Constantinople: The Arians," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 26, no. 1 (2021): 81–93.

Hahn appropriated Mediterranean history for her audience, writing German participation into a southern past.

In the book, the two ethnoreligious identities, Ariano-Gothic and Constantinopolitan-Byzantine are shown as stark contrasts. Gothic Arianism is supposedly freedom-loving and barbarian, while the Catholic Mediterranean society functions in a more ordered and civilized way. For the book's second protagonist, Gunild, this opposition entails multiple disadvantages. Already Olympia, the laudable noblewoman who serves the poor, recoils because of Gunild's different religious believes. Again and again, the Gothic princess faces animosity because of her foreign beliefs. Finally, Empress Eudoxia decides to convert the Arian girl. Gunild, however, is initially hostile towards these attempts, being a proud and resolute Arian Goth. Gunild's Arianism and Eudoxia's Catholicism appear as opposites. While the Constantinopolitan Church adopts the position of the dominant, centrist, and true religion, Germanic Arianism performs as its renegade opposition. The ensuing conflict proposes, next to the rift between Caesaropapist empress and patriarch, a second narrative arc. Not only does there exist a problematic contrast between a controlling empire and a freedom-seeking religion but also between a Constantinopolitan Church and Arianism, hence Catholicism and Protestantism.

Hahn aimed to overcome these oppositions by ending her novel with a fitting synthesis. In her conclusion, in fact, the writer dissolved both the tension between the Catholic thesis and the Arian antithesis and the antagonism between Caesaropapist state and the independent church in two different ways. This rhetorical act mattered to the author since it was also a message for her nineteenth-century audience.

Conversion and an Independent Church – A pro-Catholic Synthesis

Close to the end of the first volume of *Eudoxia*, Gunild is in despair. Her father, the Gothic leader Gainas, has rebelled against the emperor, paying with his head. Not only has Gunild lost her father, but she has also realized that what he told her might not be true, "that the Goth had succumbed to the same sins and taken the same fall as the Greek [Eutrop], that neither his Arianism nor his Gothic blood asserted perfection – and with quiet despair, she asked: What can I love? – what should I honor?"[47] Because her father, her moral guide, has given into ambition and treachery himself, Gunild

47 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin,* 1:208–9. My translation.

starts to question her former religious compass and ethnic identity. Gainas' death disproves the superiority of Gothic ethnicity and Arianism (or German race and Protestantism), in which Gunild has believed.

Implicitly, Hahn demanded of her readers that they question their religious identity as Gunild had done. Her readers should, she believed, reflect on their denominational and racial self-understanding. Needless to say, Hahn directed this message mainly toward German Protestants. Defending the Catholic Church, Hahn eschewed any worldview in which the latter was subordinate to the former. Not only did she criticize the idea of northern Protestantism being superior, but she also attacked the concept of ethnoreligions as mixed forms of identity as a whole. Gainas, the novel's main propagator of such a bifurcated identity, dies because of his mistakes, delegitimizing his worldview. By describing Gunild's ensuing thoughts, Hahn countered nineteenth-century Protestant polemics which claimed a supposed intricate connection between Lutheran values and German ethnicity. In her view, being of Gothic or German blood had nothing to do with being of Arian or Protestant faith. A separation of denomination and ethnic thinking allowed for an identity that was simultaneously German and Catholic, hence Hahn's own self-understanding.

After a prolonged period of thinking, Gunild finally gives in and converts to Catholicism. She is filled with happiness because she has found "true" religion. Even the somewhat immoral agents and bureaucrats at the Byzantine court congratulate her on her conversion. All antagonisms of the book stop briefly and Gunild's conversion catalyzes a general synthesis, a premature happy ending. The reader ought to comprehend the ontological, ubiquitous bliss that stems from the general reconciliation between a Christian and the Catholic Church. Hahn proposed, thus, conversion to Catholicism as the ultimate bridge between former opposites. Her solution to the quarrels of the *Kulturkampf* rested in accepting the Roman Church as the right shepherd. Easy to discern, this chapter of *Eudoxia* functioned as an appeal to her compatriots to quit Protestantism for its Catholic Other. In this way, according to the author, both the shortcomings of Gothic Arianism and Constantinopolitan Byzantine society are resolved in the figure of Gunild. As the main character and Hahn's alter ego, she is forgiven by converting to Catholicism and vanquishes Byzantine effeminacy through her Gothic character. The author claimed a similar identity for herself, converting as a German to Catholicism. Logically, her conclusion insinuated that nineteenth-century Germans converting to the Roman belief would remedy both the former's as well as the latter's mistakes and concomitantly resolve the *Kulturkampf*.

However, the narrative of the book does not end on this joyful note. On the contrary, the plot evolves into a tragedy. Gunild has not converted to Catholicism because of the promises of Eudoxia, trying to lure her with luxury and civilization. Instead, she adheres to the teachings of Chrysostom who prefers reticence and poverty. This development, among many others, enrages the empress, who sees her favorite slip through her fingers, changing side in the struggle between church and state. The fact that Gunild starts to criticize the empress's own piety incenses Eudoxia even further. For example, the Gothic princess questions her benefactor's obsession with relics. Previously, to bolster her popularity among the people, Eudoxia has built new sanctuaries where she exhibits the bones of famous saints. For Gunild, this action is nothing but a farce to trick the gullible people. When she reproaches Eudoxia, the latter argues that an empress and a girl have very different needs in religion. The empress maintains that although relics might not be the purest form of honoring God, they are essential to appease the population.[48]

Disenchanted by Eudoxia's power-orientated, feigned piety, Gunild leaves the empress's court for good. The final chapters of the novel describe the escalation between state and church, ruler and patriarch. At the end of the book, the empress's troops storm the Hagia Sophia to imprison the patriarch and his followers for high treason. In the novel, it is clear that Chrysostom did not commit such a crime. Nevertheless, his adherents and disciples, including Gunild, are tortured to force them to defame their teacher. Gunild must endure immense pain but does not give in. Finally, she dies. When Eudoxia hears what has happened, she cries out, recognizing her mistake.[49]

According to Hahn, the real reason behind the so-called *Kulturkampf* did not stem from an opposition between Catholicism and Protestantism but Caesaropapism and the free church. Gunild's conversion had overcome the rift between Arianism/Protestantism and the Constantinopolitan/Catholic Church and brought about a utilitarian harmony. However, because of the empress's – hence the state's – insistence on controlling the church by getting rid of its rebellious patriarch, Eudoxia causes the death of the Gothic princess. As a message to her audience, Hahn showed how an aggressive secular state trying to control the church caused more damage than a conflict between Germanic Protestantism and Mediterranean Catholicism

48 Ida Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin. Ein Zeitgemälde aus dem fünften Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchelm, 1866), 135.

49 Hahn-Hahn, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin,* 2:262.

ever could. Implicitly, the author accused the German state agents of not acting because of true adherence to Protestant ideals but rather because of a Caesaropapist will to impure power.

Conclusion

With her novel, Ida Hahn-Hahn told two stories. The first is a story with a happy ending. Arian Goths, represented by Gunild, and Byzantine Catholicism laid their differences aside after the former had realized its errors. Mediterranean civilization and northern freedom could enter a fecund unity and achieve a happy ending. The second story, however, is a tragedy. Gunild became the victim of a struggle between state and church. Because of her desire to rule the church as well as her empire, the ambitious Eudoxia, the incarnation of Caesaropapism, appeared as the clear aggressor. In Hahn's perspective, the Byzantine church under Chrysostom was right to defend itself against the encroaching secular power of the empress. Finally, Eudoxia, who had been misled by her egocentric, greedy Byzantine courtiers, understands her errors. Hahn's Byzantine *Kulturkampf* is thus the consequence of human sin and a misunderstanding between church and state.

Through a narrational trick, the writer transmitted her version of nineteenth-century religious strife between Christian denominations. Hahn did not just publish a novel on Byzantine history, merely meant to entertain her readership, but rather gave a polemical as well as sophisticated opinion on current religious and political issues. With an evident proselytizing intention, the author underlined the importance of conversion to Catholicism. By narrating Gunild's story, she endeavored to prove that Germanic ethnicity and Mediterranean Christianity were indeed compatible. Allegedly, the true origin of religious conflict and social problems lay not in the foundations of Christianity but in the machinations of Caesaropapism. All the shortcomings of the church, according to the narrative, stem from this earthly, civic invasion into ecclesiastical matters. According to Hahn, it was not the Catholic Church infiltrating the nation-state but the state controlling the church which caused problems in both spheres. A liberal narrative of secularization against religion was refuted and reversed, with Hahn pleading for separation of state and church in the name of the latter. It was not the demand for secularization that had changed, only the perpetrator.

In the end, *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin* had an autobiographical undertone. Gunild's development in the book stemmed partly from Hahn's own expe-

riences in real life. She herself had converted to Catholicism after the death of an important male figure in her life. Just as Hahn had changed denomination after the death of her partner Bystram, so did Gunild after the death of her father. It seems plausible that many thoughts and words ascribed to Gunild were, in fact, Hahn's personal feelings and ideas. By availing herself of Byzantine lore, the German novelist attempted to express the feeling of a personality caught between Protestantism and Catholicism, state and church, and various concepts of femininity. She drew the picture of two historical women who possessed the power to choose between religions, and between state and church. Hahn instrumentalized Mediterranean historical fiction to depict her own time, her political opinions, her emotions, her religious worldview, and her ideal of womanhood. By drawing on an example of Byzantine and Gothic princesses of the fifth century, she described her political opinions as well as personal social position in the nineteenth century. Through the voices of Eudoxia and Gunild, Hahn was able to provide an idea of what it meant to live as a female Catholic convert in the prelude to the menacingly looming *Kulturkampf.*

Bibliography

Amerigo Caruso. "Antifemminismo femminile? Luise Hensel, Ida Hahn e Marie Nathusius nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento." *Contemporanea*, no. 4 (2019): 503–30. https://doi.org/10.1409/95109.

Argyle, Gisela. "The Horror and the Pleasure of Un-English Fiction: Ida von Hahn-Hahn and Fanny Lewald in England." *Comparative Literature Studies* 44, no. 1 (2007): 144–65. https://doi.org/10.1353/cls.2007.0026.

Borutta, Manuel. *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter Der europäischen Kulturkämpfe*. Bürgertum, n. F., Bd. 7. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010.

Brisson, Ulrike. "Discovering Scheherazade: Representations of Oriental Women in the Travel Writing of Nineteenth-Century German Women." *Women in German Yearbook*, no. 29 (2013): 97–117.

Burry, J. B. *A History of the Later Roman Empire. From Arcadius to Irene*. London, New York: Macmillan and Co, 1889.

Chambers, Helen. *Humor and Irony in Nineteenth-Century German Women's Writing: Studies in Prose Fiction, 1840-1900*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture. Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2007.

Clark, Christopher, and Wolfram Kaiser. "Introduction: The European Culture Wars." In *Culture Wars*, edited by Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, 1st ed., 1–10. Cambridge University Press, 2003. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511496714.001.

Cook, James Daniel. *Preaching and Popular Christianity: Reading the Sermons of John Chrysostom*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Dalley, Hamish. "Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel: Epistemologies of Contemporary Realism." *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (March 2014): 51–67. https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2013.3.

Djedi, Y. "Max Weber, Islam and Modernity." *Max Weber Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 35. https://doi.org/10.15543/MWS/2011/1/4.

Drane, Augusta Theodosia. *Uriel; or, The Chapel of the Angels*. London: Burns and Oates, 1884.

Geanakoplos, Deno J. "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of The Problem of Caesaropapism." *Church History* 34, no. 4 (December 1965): 381–403. https://doi.org/10.2307/3163118.

Georgiou, Andriani. "Empresses in Byzantine Society: Justifiably Angry or Simply Angry?" In *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, edited by Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer, 111–40. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96038-8_5.

Gross, Michael B. *The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. 2. paperback ed. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany. Ann Arbor, Mich: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2008.

Hahn-Hahn, Ida. *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin. Ein Zeitgemälde aus dem fünften Jahrhundert*. Vol. 1. Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchelm, 1866.

– *Eudoxia, die Kaiserin. Ein Zeitgemälde aus dem fünften Jahrhundert*. Vol. 2. Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchelm, 1866.

– *Maria Regina*. Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchelm, 1860.

Jurík, Mirón. "Gothic Christians in Constantinople: The Arians," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 26, no. 1 (2021): 81–93.

Kipper, Rainer. *Der Germanenmythos im deutschen Kaiserreich: Formen und Funktionen historischer Selbstthematisierung*. Formen Der Erinnerung, Bd. 11. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002.

Klitsche de la Grange, Antonietta. *Il Navicellaio del Tevere*. Torino-Roma: Pietro di G. Marietti. Tipografico Pontificio-Tip. E Lib. Poliglotta de Propaganda Fide, 1866.

Kontje, Todd Curtis. *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation 1771-1871: Domestic Fiction in the Fatherland*. Cambridge Studies in German. Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Marciniak, Przemysław, and Dion Smythe. "Introduction." In *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500*. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015.

– eds. *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500*. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015.

Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. Paperback ed. London: Verso, 2007.

Oberembt, Gerd. *Ida Gräfin Hahn-Hahn. Weltschmerz und Ultramontanismus. Studien zum Unterhaltungsroman im 19. Jahrhundert.* Bonn: Bouvier, 1980.

O'Brien, Traci S. "A 'Daughter of the Occident' Travels to the 'Orient': Ida von Hahn-Hahn's The Countess Faustina and Letters From the Orient." *Women in German Yearbook*, no. 24 (2008): 26–48.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Todorova, Maria Nikolaeva. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Verhoeven, Timothy. *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230109124.

Werner, Yvonne Maria, and Jonas Harvard. *European Anti-Catholicism in a Comparative and Transnational Perspective*. European Studies 31. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013.

«TO DO GOOD AND LOVE ONE'S COUNTRY» Three Italian poetesses during the Risorgimento

Elena Frasca*

Abstract

It is well known that the Risorgimento provides a vast reservoir from which to draw insights into a social, territorial and political fabric that was undergoing an era-defining transformation. Research into the substantial and significant metamorphosis underway during the period can be approached from various angles, allowing wider conclusions to be drawn. This article will consider an interesting source that had an essential role in the inexorable process of sweeping change that characterised the 1800s: the periodical press. In particular, it focuses on the analysis of a periodical which was founded during a particularly meaningful time period. *L'Alba* was published in Catania in 1845 as a "strenna", a gift given to Baron Antonino Ursino Recupero on New Year's Day of that year. Among the eighty-nine compositions contained in the periodical, the contributions written by three Neapolitan female poets stand out: Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Maria Giuseppa Guacci. The historical developments around the fate of periodicals, particularly those with political aims, during that part of the nineteenth century are intertwined with the public and personal lives of three women who played a significant role in the evolution of a society undergoing transformation, dedicating themselves to public work related to culture, literature and poetry, without forgetting the attention they gave more to innovative forms of education, moulded by their perspective as women.

Keywords: Risorgimento, Italian poetry, periodicals, Mancini, Capecelatro, Guacci

It is well known that the Risorgimento provides a vast reservoir from which to draw insights into a social, territorial and political fabric that was undergoing an era-defining transformation. Research into the substantial and significant metamorphosis underway during the period can be approached from various angles, allowing wider conclusions to be drawn. This article will consider an interesting source that had an essential role in

* Università di Catania

the inexorable process of sweeping change that characterised the 1800s: the periodical press. In particular, it will focus on three women, educated Neapolitan patriots who would go on to play an active role in the events of the Risorgimento, each one with her own contribution, especially with regard to education from a female perspective. Brought together by their plans and intentions, these three poetesses – Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Giuseppina Guacci Nobile – were also united in publishing some of their works in a periodical issued in Catania in the mid-1800s, a crucial period due to the important events that characterised it and which, in fact, were discussed in a particularly lively periodical press. The momentous events connected with the Risorgimento, which were soon to culminate in the unification of the peninsula, came to a head during those very years that saw revolts, even in Sicily, against the Bourbon rulers.

It was the natural and inevitable result of an ever clearer public opinion which proliferated and gained momentum in the traditional meeting places used by political and cultural groups: literary and scientific academies, reading rooms, salons, cafés, but also clubs with somewhat hidden agendas, which were often subjected to inspection by censors.[1]Thus, the periodical press became the indispensable corollary to a whirlwind of opinions and lines of thinking.[2]

After the uprisings of the 1820s, there was a veritable boom in periodical publications that were not limited to literary or scientific topics, but instead were more open to profound political reflections. The editors and founders of these publications were fully aware of the incredible tool they held in their hands, a powerful instrument able to reach a vast public and convey thoughts and ideologies.[3] As expected, the governments cast a censorious eye over these elements, with their potential to disturb the status quo, implementing targeted restrictive press legislation, taxing where pos-

1 On this topic, see: Elena Frasca, "A "New mania". The Carboneria: conflicts and ambivalences (Sicily, 1820-1830)," in *Proceedings of the International Conference "Understanding Social Conflict. The Relationship between Sociology and History"*, ed. Liana Daher, Catania, 14-15 December 2016 (Milan: Mimesis, 2020), 141-153; Id., "La "nuova mania". Carboneria, università e moti del 1820-21 nel Mezzogiorno," in *Una rivoluzione "globale". Mobilitazione politica, conflitti civili e bande armate nel Mezzogiorno del 1820*, ed. Sebastiano Angelo Granata (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2021), 72-87.

2 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *La rivoluzione inavvertita. La stampa come fattore di mutamento* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1986).

3 Paolo Viola, *Storia moderna e contemporanea. L'Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 17-18.

sible and censoring in cases that were considered "dangerous". Despite this, the phenomenon displayed every sign of being irreversible and unstoppable. During these difficult years, the role of the all-seeing Bourbon police came to the fore, with particular attention given to censorship.[4] This struggle between police inspections and the printing presses thus showed no signs of easing, but this did not in any way discourage those who believed in the free circulation of news and ideas by means of the printed word.[5] Hence, the periodicals that sprang up, especially during this particularly meaningful period, represent a precious source that allows one to delve deep into a very specific territorial situation and take an intimate look at aspects and depictions of society, getting closer to the customs and political thinking of the time.[6] In that tumultuous century, characterised by the upheaval that accompanied the Italian unification,[7] above all in Sicily itself, the attempts made to modernise the system or to resist such change found an ideal channel to do so in the periodic press[8] which, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s, proliferated and flourished.[9]

Many were the periodicals that emerged during those months. In this political and cultural climate, women also played a decisive role.

---

4 For a wider overview, cfr. Silvana Raffaele, *La bottega dei saperi. Politica scolastica, percorsi formativi dinamiche sociali nel Meridione borbonico* (Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2005), in particular, 353-357.

5 Cfr. Elena Frasca, "Misfatti e malfattori. Il sistema penale nel Meridione borbonico", in *Pensiero politico e istituzioni nella transizione dal Regno borbonico all'Unità d'Italia*, ed. Franca Biondi (Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2011), 245-265.

6 Guido Dall'Olio, *Storia moderna: i temi e le fonti* (Rome: Carocci, 2004).

7 On this topic, cfr.: Rosario Romeo, *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Bari: Laterza, 1950); Francesco Saverio Romano, *Momenti del Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Messina-Florence: D'Anna, 1952); Francesco Renda, *Risorgimento e classi popolari in Sicilia (1820-1821)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968); Massimo Ganci, *La nazione siciliana* (Siracusa: Ediprint, 1986); Vincenzo D'Alessandro and Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'Unità d'Italia* (Turin: Utet, 1989), in particular, 667-783.

8 Cfr. Guido Libertini, "Aspetti della cultura catanese nell'Ottocento," *Rivista del Comune* 1 (1934): 14-27; Alfio Carrà, *La stampa periodica catanese nel Risorgimento italiano (1818-1870). Rassegna critica del giornalismo in Catania dal 1818 al 1870* (Catania: Etna, 1962); Santi Correnti, "Per la storia della stampa periodica in Sicilia," *Rivista Storica Siciliana* I, 1 (1973): 3-28. See also Dina Bertoni Jovine, *I periodici popolari del Risorgimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965).

9 On this topic, see Elena Frasca, "«Per smascherare l'ascoso veleno». Religione, eresia e censura in una rivista catanese dell'Ottocento," in *"Non conformismo religioso" nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, Atti del 4° Incontro di studi sul Valdismo Mediterraneo – Monteleone di Puglia, 9-10th June 2017, eds. Alfonso Tortora and Claudio Azzara (Avellino: Terebinto, 2018), 99-111.

The public and private lives of these three Neapolitan poetesses, Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Giuseppina Guacci Nobile, which were often intertwined, reveal a great deal of the social, political and cultural climate that characterised the age in which they lived. Women tried to make progress, through the power of the written word, in a social and mental labyrinth, which seemed to only recognise male achievements, relegating the other half of the population to second class citizenship. Yet, concrete changes began to take place, above all towards a slow, but steady unpicking of ancient webs of prejudice and censorship towards the female world, which hitherto had been confined to comfortable domesticity in the reassuring roles of daughter, wife and mother.

It was in the nineteenth century that women began to make a name for themselves as authors, including in periodicals, drawing attention to what Cesare Beccaria[10] had observed in 1865 about female "giornaliste", "willing to benefit from periodicals", presented as more interesting and lighter than a book.[11]

To this, we must add the increasingly common bonds that would form between women, and even men, in the cultural and political salons[12] in vogue in Italy and beyond. These venues provided a home for practical activism, the circulation of ideas, intellectual debates and exchanges as well as playing a decisive role in the fitful process of creating an identity. In these environs, women also had an active role, not only on a political[13] and cultural level, but also in decisively asserting the urgent need to give women an innovative and complete intellectual education, while not neglecting the essential role of the wife, and above all, the mother, her children's first teacher.[14] In addition, women were finally given the opportunity to publish their compositions in newspapers, magazines and newsletters, showcasing their work to a broad and varied audience.

10 (1738-1794). Milanese jurist, famous for his well-known work opera *De' delitti e delle pene*, on which modern penal law is based.

11 Francesca Serra, "Lumi di giornalismo galante a Firenze: il Giornale delle Dame," *Studi italiani*, no. 1-2 (2002): 304.

12 On this topic, cfr. Elena Brambilla, *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004).

13 Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia, Poetesse patriote nel Risorgimento (1821-1826)* (Rome: Carocci, 2011).

14 See Elena Frasca, "Donna per ingegno e virtù rara in ogni tempo. Quasi unica nel nostro». Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci (1803-1887)," *Annali della Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione*, vol. 15 (2016): 101-122.

This article provides the analysis of a periodical founded during a particularly meaningful time period. *L'Alba*, which was published in Catania in 1845 as a "strenna", was a gift given to Baron Antonino Ursino Recupero[15] on New Year's Day of that year and bore the following dedication:[16] "To the illustrious Antonio Ursino Ursino, lover of literature and science, jurist and notable orator on his beloved land, we dedicate this literary Alba as a token of our admiration."[17] Percolla himself, in the introduction, explains the importance of "strenne" in general:

> Italy, that famous land, was the first to employ "strenne" as New Year's gifts – these pleasant, delightful and instructive books: from there they made their way to France and England – and grew so much, in literary terms, quality of print and artistically, that on returning to our shores so beautiful and praiseworthy, many believed (as they still do) that these were an entirely French and English discovery.[18]

although he does promptly specify that "it is only in Sicily that "Strenne" are not particularly successful, in fact one could say that they never have been so."[19]

The 235 pages which make up *L'Alba*, or *Strenna Catanese*, include 98 compositions, which can be grouped into 61 poems and 37 stories in prose. Leafing through the periodical, works by important authors such as Nicolò

15 "Al chiaro nome di Antonio Ursino Ursino, vago di lettere e di scienze, giurisperito ed oratore cospicuo delle patrie cose amantissimo, quest'Alba letteraria in segno di ammirazione." Antonio Ursino Recupero had an impressive book collection which, according to a specific provision made in his will, was bequeathed on his death to Catania's municipal Library; collections were then combined to form, on 11th May 1931, "l'Ente Morale Biblioteche Riunite "Civica e A. Ursino Recupero", which was recognised as part of a World Heritage Site in 2002 by Unesco. Rita Angela Carbonaro, "Un patrimonio da salvaguardare: Le Biblioteche Riunite Civica e A. Ursino Recupero di Catania," *Kalòs-Luoghi di Sicilia. Catania. Le istituzioni municipali*" (Catania: Palermo Kalos, 2001), 16-25. Orazio Viola, *Le Biblioteche riunite "Civica e Ursino Recupero"* (Catania: Zuccarello e Izzi, 1934), 7-9.

16 All translations from Italian into English are mine.

17 Vincenzo Percolla, *L'Alba ovvero Strenna Catanese, pel Capo d'Anno 1845* (Catania: Tipografia del Reale Ospizio, 1845), 4.

18 Percolla, *L'Alba*, 6.

19 Percolla, *L'Alba*, 7. See Giuseppe Baretta and Grazia Maria Griffini, *Strenne dell'Ottocento a Milano* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1986); Marino Berengo, *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980); Carlo Tenca, "Le strenne", *Rivista Europea*, no. 1 (January 1845): in Id., *Delle Strenne e degli almanacchi*, ed. Alfredo Cottignoli (Naples: Liguori, 1995).

Tommaseo, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Thomas Moore, George Gordon Byron, Alphonse de Lamartine stand out, as do writers from Catania. Recurring themes in the published contributions include child rearing, patriotism, marriage, art, poverty, the family, religion and the rules of Italian. However, many other topics can be found in its pages, showing the editor's openness to a variety of themes and lines of thought, as befitted a good "strenna". Some readers turned their noses up at the results of this choice, including Abbot Antonio Racioppi:

> I would not give too much blame to Percolla for having included in his "Strenna" puerile works, full of solecisms that perhaps he did not have the courage to reject; rather, I find deplorable his indolence in leaving uncorrected certain unforgivable and grave errors. While I urge him as much as I do and might not to be dismayed by the errors that his concern for the dignity of others might have allowed to slip through unseen, I am sure that on his second attempt he will be capable of opening his eyes when choosing authors, and will not allow himself to be beguiled by their fleeting renown; thus most praiseworthy success will crown his work.[20]

Among the eighty-nine compositions contained in the periodical, the contributions written by three Neapolitan female poets are to be noted: Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini, Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and Maria Giuseppa (Giuseppina) Guacci Nobile. The historical developments around the fate of periodicals, particularly those with political aims, during that part of the 19th century are intertwined with the public and personal lives of these three women who played a significant role in the evolution of a society undergoing transformation, dedicating themselves to public work related to culture, literature and poetry, without forgetting the attention they gave more to innovative forms of education, moulded by their perspective as women.

Our three Neapolitan poetesses' contributions to the "strenna" were primarily sonnets on various subjects, sharing a melancholy air characterised, inevitably, by the influence of Romanticism. Reading between the lines of their works, we will see how these women's clear and incisive patriotic spirit, which shaped their lives, also shines through. The "torment"[21] that Mancini Oliva refers to the "italiche genti"[22] evoked by Ric-

---

20 Antonio Racioppi, "Esame di opere," *Il Lucifero, giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico, industriale*, a. VIII, dal 5 febbraio 1845 all'8 gennaio 1846 (Naples: 1845-1846), 50.

21 Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini, "Sonetto," *L'Alba*, 17.

22 Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro, "A Vincenzo Bellini," *L'Alba*, 30.

ciardi Capecelatro in her apology to Vincenzo Bellini,[23] and the "hope" spoken of by Guacci Nobile are perfectly in tune with the atmosphere of the time, both in Naples and beyond.

Laura Beatrice Fortunata Oliva Mancini was born in Naples, on 17th January 1821, to Domenico Simeone Oliva, a literature and philosophy teacher, and Rosa Giuliani, both of whom were from "old, upstanding families."[24] The father was a respected poet, earnestly combating "Gallicisms, banalities and Arcadian pseudo-pastoral writing,"[25] and defending Italian's peculiarities. Hence, Laura was soon educated in literature and the Classics. The first years of her life were spent in France, where the family had taken refuge due to her father's political activities during the 1820-21 uprisings.[26] The biographer Savini writes that

> Laura Beatrice was born for art and literature and these she adored as deities […]. The poetic creations that her young girl's mind unveils allow a glimpse of what she will become as a woman: just as from the delicacy of her heart one can easily understand her inspirations and the themes to which she will consequently wish to dedicate it.[27]

Deeply affected by religion, young Laura particularly appreciated music, which was a veritable "revelation of her soul"[28] and she found great inspiration in reading Dante, Petrarch and Alfieri. Her patriotism greatly influenced her production, especially during those years that were so meaningful for Italy's destiny. She soon dedicated herself to composing numerous patriotic songs, which drew the attention of the day's literary critics and allowed her to meet Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, founder, in Naples, of the periodical entitled *Ore solitarie* and who became her husband. Towards the end of 1846, the couple began a tour of the principal Italian cities, meeting important authors of literature and poetry and hosted cultural salons particularly in Florence but also in Naples and Turin, frequented by important personali-

23 (1801-1835). Renowned composer from Catania, author of well-known operas including *Norma*, *I sonnambuli* e *I puritani*.

24 Medoro Savini, *Laura Beatrice Oliva-Mancini* (Florence: Tipografia e libreria Galletti Romei e C., 1869), 11.

25 Savini, *Laura*, 12.

26 Valeria Guarna, *Oliva Laura Beatrice Fortunata*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2013), vol. 79.

27 Savini, *Laura*, 16-17.

28 Savini, *Laura*, 19.

ties including Carlo Poerio,[29] Guglielmo Pepe,[30] Giuseppe Garibaldi[31] and Terenzio Mamiani.[32]

It was almost 1848 and, inevitably, the uprisings had a profound effect on Laura and her production, which now took a decisive turn towards heartfelt patriotism, earning her the nickname "muse of the Unification of Italy."[33] Once the uprisings had been quelled, Mancini Oliva, along with her husband who had been involved in the anti-Bourbon movement, moved to Piedmont, where she was able to play an active role in founding a school that would train future female teachers, working towards fulfilling her desire to improve public education. Her clear attachment to those revolutionary experiences, which extended beyond Italy and characterised the Risorgimento, led her to encourage her two sons to enlist, inspired by patriotic ideals. She died, prematurely, in 1865. On the house where she was born, a plaque reads: *"poetess of the misadventures and liberty of Italy.*" Her biographer recorded that her mottos were: "Do good and love one's country."[34] "For Laura Beatrice Mancini, the highest ideal was to be found in passion for great things and great ideas and the union of the disparate concepts of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, which is why she was happy in fulfilling her duty."[35] Mancini Oliva published a sonnet in *L'Alba* in which she sings of the beauty of heaven and earth, recounting how poetry, for her, is the ideal means through which to express her soul's emotions and sentiments: "I will always entrust to you alone, my rhyme, the agony of my heart, and my torment."[36]

Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro was born in Naples on 14th November 1802, to Francesco Ricciardi and Luisa Granito. Detailed particulars of her family[37] can be found by consulting her brother Giuseppe Ricciardi's extensive archive, held at Naples' Biblioteca Nazionale, and which contains a diverse collection of documentation, from private correspondence

29 (1803-1867). Italian lawyer, patriot and politician.

30 (1783-1855). Italian General and patriot.

31 (1807-1882). Italian General and patriot, played a decisive role in unifying the peninsula.

32 (1799-1885). Italian writer, politician and patriot.

33 Ivi, p. 24.

34 Ivi, p. 52.

35 Ivi, p. 54.

36 Oliva Mancini, "Sonetto," 17.

37 On the Ricciardi family, cfr. Angela Russo, *«Nel desiderio delle tue care nuove». Scritture private e relazioni di genere nell'Ottocento risorgimentale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006).

to official letters, from unpublished writings to manuscripts, and so much more, produced between the 1830s and 1880s, when the political spirit of those times was at its peak. Much of the information we have about Irene comes to us through her brother, to whom she was especially close, and with whom she shared the same political ideals,[38] which were developed after hearing their mother's first-hand account of the emergence and collapse of the Parthenopean Republic.[39] Giuseppe Ricciardi describes his sister as having: "a candid disposition, noble intelligence and singular virtue."[40] A lover of painting, music and poetry from a young age, he describes her talent:

> she debuted on the poetic stage together with another poetess, Giuseppina Guacci, who, from that time onwards, shone like a brighter star and who was bound to my good sister, to whom she wrote the most beautiful letters, a collection of which would make one of the most noble letter collections that Italy has ever seen.[41]

This friendship between Ricciardi and Guacci was deep and long-lasting, as shown by the prolific correspondence they exchanged, which can be consulted at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence. They were bound by the idea of "avoiding banal subjects and always singing of Italian themes."[42]

Irene's first tutor was her mother Luisa, a woman with a sharp intellect. She was a determined supporter of girls' education, and for her daughter selected excellent teachers that educated her in various subjects: Mathematics, Chemistry, Botany, French, Music, Drawing, as well as Poetry and Dance.[43] Thus educated, it was not long before Irene began publishing her work in the well-known Neapolitan periodical *Il Lucifero*, contributing substantially to promoting her (anti-Bourbon, Mazzini-sympathising and republican from the outset[44]) brother

38 Russo, *Nel desiderio*, 16.

39 Irene Flavia Caporuscio, *Ricciardi, Irene*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2016), vol. 87.

40 Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro, *Poesie Scelte*, *Introduzione* by Giuseppe Ricciardi (Naples: Stamperia del Vaglio, 1876), XXIV.

41 Ricciardi Capecelatro, *Poesie*, XVIII.

42 Russo, *«Nel desiderio*, 101.

43 Russo, *«Nel desiderio*, 15-17.

44 Russo, *«Nel desiderio*, 15. On Giuseppe Ricciardi, see Marta Petrusewicz, "Giuseppe Ricciardi, ribelle romantico europeo," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* (1999), 235-261.

Giuseppe's work, supporting his ideas in the various intellectual circles of the time. Irene did not hide her own fervent patriotic spirit, as also shown in many of her verses, delivered in public at the "poetesse sebezie" cultural circle, which included Giuseppina Guacci and Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva as members. Her ideals were surely further strengthened by the numerous trips she made around Italy, providing essential opportunities to enter the important intellectual circles of the time and meet people of the calibre of Alessandro Manzoni,[45] Vincenzo Monti[46] and Giacomo Leopardi[47] but also Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi.[48] Her marriage, in 1837, to the composer Vincenzo Capecelatro steered her cultural interest towards the theatre, for which she soon began to write various operas.

Together with her husband, she lived in Paris from 1838 to 1842, coming into contact with Italian exiles, including her brother Giuseppe, who had recently joined "Giovine Italia". In the French capital, she met important intellectuals, such as Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo. After having spent many more years travelling around Europe, so much so that her nephews and nieces gave her the nickname "Travelling Aunt", she died in her beloved Naples the 30th September 1870 The periodical *L'Alba* preserves one of Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro's songs, dedicated to an eruption of Vesuvius, and two sonnets – one dedicated to a mother's grief over the death of her son ("True, you saw bloodless your only son, but why did he ever suffer torments and death and ascend triumphant to the divine throne?")[49] and another in honour of Vincenzo Bellini. The latter, in particular, praises the Sicilian composer, who, she writes, delighted the "italiche genti"[50] with his operas and whose musical heritage continues, despite his premature death, to stir the hearts of his listeners.

Maria Giuseppa Guacci Nobile was born in Naples on 20th June 1807 to Giovanni Guacci, printer, and Saveria Tagliaferri. She was educated according to strictly liberal and patriotic precepts, rounding out her education at Basilio Puoti's purist school, which inevitably shaped her thinking and knowledge, allowing her to form friendships with Luigi Settembrini,[51]

45 (1785-1873). Italian writer.
46 (1754-1828). Italian poet.
47 (1798-1837). Italian poet.
48 (1763-1836). Italian writer, hostess to a celebrated literary salon.
49 Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro, "Alla Santissima addolorata," *L'Alba*, 65.
50 Ricciardi Capecelatro, "A Vincenzo Bellini," 30.
51 (1813-1876). Italian writer and patriot.

Francesco de Sanctis[52] and the Imbriani brothers,[53] with whom she shared literary interests and similarly liberal political views.[54]

Her political activism led to her hosting political salons of a certain importance,[55] which were also attended by Giacomo Leopardi, with whom she shared a pessimistic view of life, even though that sentiment never reached the extremes that it did in his case. In 1833 Guacci received the honour of being the first woman to be admitted to the Accademia Pontaniana in Naples. In 1835, she married Antonio Nobile, deputy director of the Astronomical Observatory of Capodimonte and professor of Mathematics and Geometry. She published a number of texts related to various aspects of decorum. In addition to poetry collections[56] and strongly political and patriotic works, she also focused on writing for children: in 1841, she wrote *Alfabeto*, a guide to educating children, and in 1842 the *Prime Letture* (First Readings) and *Seconde Letture per fanciulli da' 9 a 12 anni* (Second Readings for children from 9 to 12 years of age). Her interest in children's education and training was also manifested in the important role she played, in the 1840s, in supporting the promotion of the "Società per gli Asili Infantili" (Society for Infant Schools), which was focused on the creation of public establishments for the children of the lower classes.

As previously mentioned, Guacci formed a deep friendship with Irene Ricciardi Capecelatro and their prolific correspondence gives evidence of the many interests they had in common and a convergence of their viewpoints, whether political, related to women's issues or to more personal accounts of private matters.[57] As Graziella Pagliano writes, the theme of friendship between women – "more intimate and substantial, compared to that between men"[58] – finds a certain "literary" dignity in the modern era, and above all, from the mid-1700s onwards.[59] A detailed picture of what

52 (1817-1883). Italian writer and patriot, Minister for Education in unified Italy.

53 Matteo Renato (1843-1901), Italian politician; Vittorio (1840-1886), writer.

54 Silvana Musella and Francesco Augurio, *Guacci, Maria Giuseppa*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2003), vol. 60.

55 Anna Balzerano, *Giuseppina Guacci Nobile nella vita, nell'arte, nella storia del Risorgimento* (Cava dei Tirreni: Di Mauro, 1975).

56 Pietro Ardito, *Le Rime della Guacci* (Naples: Morano, 1882).

57 Angela Russo, "Alla nobile donzella Irene Ricciardi". Lettere di Giuseppina Guacci Nobile," in Laura Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia* (Naples: ClioPress, 2004), 272-293.

58 Graziella Pagliano, "L'amicizia taciuta. I testi letterari," *Memorie*, n. 32 (1991): 19.

59 On the value of epistolary relationships, not limited to women, see: Maria Luisa Betri and Daniela Maldini Chiarito (eds.), *Scritture di desiderio e di ricordo. Autobiografie, diari, memorie tra Settecento e Novecento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli,

was happening in Italy at the time emerges from reading the two Neapolitan poetesses' correspondence. For example, Giuseppina writes to her friend in consternation when referring to women's status in Italy, a country that "withholds the noblest offices, the most righteous pleasures, the most ardent desires and is a grave for women, a veritable moral plague."[60]

Guacci died young on 25th November 1848, a year full of social and political upheaval, in which she had been at the forefront of organising committees and fundraisers for exiles and political prisoners. The poet dedicated a sonnet to *L'Alba*, meaningfully entitled "*La Speranza*": "Hail my dear hope, hail my serene one! Spread over the earth a clear glow, rise up from the lively Tyrrhenian wave."[61]

These three "Italian Risorgimento poetesses" are perfectly in line with the cultural and political climate that pervaded Italy, but also much of Europe,[62] in those very significant years.

As Guidi wrote, by means of their writing, many women tried "to go beyond the boundaries of their prescribed identity, to express and draw out gifts, abilities and potential that otherwise would be condemned to the invisibility of cultural and legal norms."[63] This was a tradition that was deeply rooted in those times.[64]

Writing from a female perspective took various forms, not least letter-writing, which, as we have seen in Ricciardi and Guacci's case, was an 'acceptable' form of writing, that could be used to convey thoughts and opinions.[65] This need to express ideas and sentiments that historically had been "masculine" impelled many of these women to meet in literary circles and academies, similar to those hosted by men, that would allow for an

---

2002); Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia*; Maria Luisa Betri and Daniela Maldini Chiarito (eds.),*"Dolce dono graditissimo": la lettera privata dal Settecento al Novecento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000); Russo, *«Nel desiderio*; Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia (secoli XV-XVII)* (Rome: Viella, 1999).

60 Lucia Valenzi, "Maria Giuseppina Guacci Nobile tra letteratura e politica," *Archivio storico per le Province Napoletane*, CXVII (Napoli: Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, 1999): 537-548.

61 Maria Giuseppa Guacci Nobile, "La speranza," *L'Alba*, 51.

62 See Karen Offen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

63 L. Guidi, "Patriottismo femminile e travestimenti sulla scena risorgimentale", in L. Guidi, A. Lamarra (eds.), *Travestimenti e metamorfosi. Percorsi dell'identità di genere tra epoche e culture* (Naples: Filema, 2003), p. 59.

64 Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

65 See Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia*.

exchange of views. The three Neapolitan poetesses, as previously stated, played an active role in the "poetesse sebezie" group, where they recited verses that often touched on deeply patriotic topics. Naturally, prejudice towards women that expressed their ideas would continue to be so for a long time. Many of them offered their literary or educational contributions while masking them behind the reassuring figures of wives or loving mothers, their children's first teachers, eager to support the cause without overstepping the boundaries imposed by society. It is this method, or perhaps disguise, that allowed these women to make their voices heard without scandalising or destabilising the rigid social hierarchy of the time.

Bibliography

Archivio di Stato di Catania, fondo *Miscellanea Risorgimentale*, b. 27, fasc. II, cc. 194-197. Collezione delle leggi e de' decreti del Regno delle Due Sicilie.

Ardito, Pietro. *Le Rime della Guacci*. Naples: Morano, 1882.

Balzerano, Anna. *Giuseppina Guacci Nobile nella vita, nell'arte, nella storia del Risorgimento*. Cava dei Tirreni: Di Mauro, 1975.

Baretta, Giuseppe, and Grazia Maria Griffini. *Strenne dell'Ottocento a Milano*. Milan: Scheiwiller, 1986.

Berengo, Marino. *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione*. Turin: Einaudi, 1980.

Bertoni Jovine, Dina. *I periodici popolari del Risorgimento*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965.

Betri, Maria Luisa, and Daniela Maldini Chiarito. *Scritture di desiderio e di ricordo. Autobiografie, diari, memorie tra Settecento e Novecento*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002.

Betri, Maria Luisa, and Daniela Maldini Chiarito. *"Dolce dono graditissimo": la lettera privata dal Settecento al Novecento*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000.

Brambilla, Elena. *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento*. Venice: Marsilio, 2004.

Caporuscio, Irene Flavia. *Ricciardi, Irene*. In *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*. Rome: Treccani, 2016, vol. 87.

Carbonaro, Rita Angela. "Un patrimonio da salvaguardare: le Biblioteche Riunite Civica e A. Ursino Recupero di Catania." In *Kalòs-Luoghi di Sicilia. Catania. Le istituzioni municipali*, 16-25. Catania: Palermo Kalos, 2001.

Carrà, Alfio. *La stampa periodica catanese nel Risorgimento italiano (1818-1870). Rassegna critica del giornalismo in Catania dal 1818 al 1870*. Catania: Etna, 1962.

Correnti, Santi. "Per la storia della stampa periodica in Sicilia." *Rivista Storica Siciliana* I, 1 (1973): 3-28.

D'Alessandro, Vincenzo, and Giuseppe Giarrizzo. *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'Unità d'Italia*. Turin: Utet, 1989.

Dall'Olio, Guido. *Storia moderna: i temi e le fonti*. Rome: Carocci, 2004.

Eisenstein L., Elizabeth. *La rivoluzione inavvertita. La stampa come fattore di mutamento*. Bologna: il Mulino, 1986.

Frasca, Elena. "*«Donna per ingegno e virtù rara in ogni tempo. Quasi unica nel nostro». Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci (1803-1887)*." *Annali della Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione*, vol. 15 (2016): 101-122.

Frasca, Elena. "«Per smascherare l'ascoso veleno». Religione, eresia e censura in una rivista catanese dell'Ottocento." In *"Non conformismo religioso" nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, Atti del 4° Incontro di studi sul Valdismo Mediterraneo – Monteleone di Puglia, 9-10th June 2017, edited by Alfonso Tortora and Claudio Azzara, 99-111. Avellino: Terebinto, 2018.

Frasca, Elena. "A "New mania". The Carboneria: conflicts and ambivalences (Sicily, 1820-1830)". In *Proceedings of the International Conference "Understanding Social Conflict. The Relationship between Sociology and History"*, edited by Liana Daher, Catania, 14-15th December 2016, 141-53. Milan: Mimesis, 2020.

Frasca, Elena. "La "nuova mania". Carboneria, università e moti del 1820-21 nel Mezzogiorno". In *Una rivoluzione "globale". Mobilitazione politica, conflitti civili e bande armate nel Mezzogiorno del 1820*, edited by Sebastiano Angelo Granata, 72-87. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2021.

Frasca, Elena. "Misfatti e malfattori. Il sistema penale nel Meridione borbonico,". In *Pensiero politico e istituzioni nella transizione dal Regno borbonico all'Unità d'Italia*, edited by Franca Biondi, 245-65. Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2011.

Ganci, Massimo. *La nazione siciliana*. Siracusa: Ediprint, 1986.

Guacci Nobile, Maria Giuseppa. "La speranza." *L'Alba*: 51.

Guarna, Valeria. *Oliva Laura Beatrice Fortunata*. In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Rome: Treccani, 2013, vol. 79.

Guidi, Laura. "Patriottismo femminile e travestimenti sulla scena risorgimentale", in L. Guidi, A. Lamarra (eds.), *Travestimenti e metamorfosi. Percorsi dell'identità di genere tra epoche e culture*. Napoli: Filema, 2003)

Guidi, Laura. *Scritture femminili e Storia*. Napoli: ClioPress, 2004.

Libertini, Guido. "Aspetti della cultura catanese nell'Ottocento." *Rivista del Comune* 1 (1934): 14-27.

Mori, Maria Teresa. *Figlie d'Italia, Poetesse patriote nel Risorgimento (1821-1826)*. Rome: Carocci, 2011.

Musella, Silvana, and Francesco Augurio. *Guacci, Maria Giuseppa*. In *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*. Rome: Treccani, 2003, vol. 60.

Offen, Karen. *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Oliva Mancini, Laura Beatrice. "Sonetto." *L'Alba*: 17.

Pagliano, Graziella. "L'amicizia taciuta. I testi letterari." *Memorie*, no. 32 (1991): 19.

Panizza Letizia, and Sharon Wood. *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Percolla, Vincenzo. *L'Alba ovvero Strenna Catanese, pel Capo d'Anno 1845*. Catania: Tipografia del Reale Ospizio, 1845.

Petrusewicz, Marta. "Giuseppe Ricciardi, ribelle romantico europeo." *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* (1999): 235-261.

Racioppi, Antonio. "Esame di opere". *Il Lucifero, giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico, industriale*, a. VIII (1845-1846): 50.

Raffaele, Silvana. *La bottega dei saperi. Politica scolastica, percorsi formativi dinamiche sociali nel Meridione borbonico*. Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2005.

Renda, Francesco. *Risorgimento e classi popolari in Sicilia (1820-1821)*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968.

Ricciardi Capecelatro, Irene. "A Vincenzo Bellini." *L'Alba*: 30.

Ricciardi Capecelatro, Irene. "Alla Santissima addolorata." *L'Alba*: 65.

Ricciardi Capecelatro, Irene. *Poesie Scelte*, *Introduzione* by Giuseppe Ricciardi. Naples: Stamperia del Vaglio, 1876.

Romano, Francesco Saverio. *Momenti del Risorgimento in Sicilia*. Messina-Florence: D'Anna, 1952.

Romeo, Rosario. *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia*. Bari: Laterza, 1950.

Russo, Angela. "Alla nobile donzella Irene Ricciardi". Lettere di Giuseppina Guacci Nobile." In Laura Guidi, *Scritture femminili e Storia*, 272-93. Naples: ClioPress, 2004.

Russo, Angela. *«Nel desiderio delle tue care nuove». Scritture private e relazioni di genere nell'Ottocento risorgimentale*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006.

Savini, Medoro. *Laura Beatrice Oliva-Mancini*. Florence: Tipografia e libreria Galletti Romei e C., 1869.

Serra, Francesco. "Lumi di giornalismo galante a Firenze: il Giornale delle Dame." *Studi italiani*, no. 1-2 (2002): 304.

Tenca, Carlo. "Le strenne", *Rivista Europea*, no. 1 (January 1845). In Id., *Delle Strenne e degli almanacchi*, edited by Alfredo Cottignoli. Naples: Liguori, 1995.

Valenzi, Lucia. "Maria Giuseppina Guacci Nobile tra letteratura e politica." *Archivio storico per le Province Napoletane*, CXVII (1999): 537-548.

Viola, Orazio. *Le Biblioteche riunite "Civica e Ursino Recupero"*. Catania: Zuccarello e Izzi, 1934.

Viola, Paolo. *Storia moderna e contemporanea. L'Ottocento*. Turin: Einaudi, 2000, 17-18.

Zarri, Gabriella. *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia (secoli XV-XVII)*. Rome: Viella, 1999.

A POSTMODERN ‘NEW’ WAVE?
Sicily, Women, and the Gendering of Seascape in Contemporary Italian Cinema

Antonio D’Amico*

Abstract

Recent scholarship on the marginalization of women across the Mediterranean has reframed the issue of gender inequality on labour, culture, and religion. This paper examines how recent cinematic representations of women across Italian films set in Sicily reproduce regressive gender politics on a symbolic level. To this end, my discussion focuses on two contemporary texts: *È stata la mano di Dio / The Hand of God* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2021) and *L’attesa / The Wait* (Piero Messina, 2015). My comparison highlights how both films rearticulate a set of aesthetic strategies previously adopted by Modernist Italian directors to frame the island’s female inhabitants through the prism of religious iconography. Hence, I interrogate the meaning of mobilizing these formal operations in a postmodern register to argue that *È stata la mano di Dio* and *L’attesa*’s aestheticizing framing of womanhood in a Mediterranean space is emblematic of a broader tendency in contemporary Italian cinema. This trend manifests itself in the two films’ construction of gender through the conversion of mythical archetypes and Catholic iconography into a series of floating signifiers. Accordingly, my analysis probes the inherent limitations of the postmodern attempt to portray the experience of women through a Christian and Classical male-oriented iconographic tradition *vis-à-vis* the work of contemporary women filmmakers offering alternative representations of their own experience on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Keywords: Contemporary Italian Cinema, Mediterranean Studies, Piero Messina, Paolo Sorrentino, Sicily

In a 2016 article titled *Una certa tendenza del cinema italiano*, Vito Zagarrio invokes François Truffaut’s renowned 1954 piece to celebrate

---

* Yale University
I wish to thank Prof. Millicent Marcus for her feedback on the first draft of this article as well as this journal editors’ Prof. Giovanna Summerfield and Prof. Rosario Pollicino for their subsequent corrections.

the changing fortunes of contemporary Italian cinema: "While Italian cinema has not been *propheta in patria* for more than two decades, Italian films are now viewed with respect even by their own audiences."[1] Unlike Truffaut's inflammatory article, Zagarrio is mainly concerned with championing the work of a new generation of young directors. Chief among these is Piero Messina's debut feature *L'attesa / The Wait* (2015). Zagarrio upholds the film as the most emblematic sign of this rebirth.[2] His enthusiasm appears out of tune *vis-à-vis* the deep pessimism surrounding the decline and crisis of Italian cinema.[3] This attitude has been denounced by Pierpaolo Antonello as a "misuse of the concept of 'crisis' in Italian critical discourse" which has "neglected crucial aspects pertaining to film production and has proposed fairly simplistic, often highly ideological analyses on the relation between aesthetics and politics."[4] Similarly, Millicent Marcus challenges "the expectation that a cinematic revival must always follow the paradigms of earlier avant-gardes" as she claims that "it fails to take into account

---

1 Original Italian: "Mentre per più di due decenni il cinema italiano non è stato propheta in patria, ora i film italiani sono guardati con rispetto anche dal proprio pubblico." Vito Zagarrio. "Una certa tendenza del cinema italiano." *Flinders University Languages Group Online Review* 5.1 (2016): 8. Zagarrio develops this thesis in *Nouvelle vague italiana: Il cinema del nuovo millennio*. Marsilio Editori spa, 2022; François Truffaut, "A certain tendency of the French Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, translated by Bill Nichols (University of California Press Berkely, Los Angeles, London: 1976): 221 – 237. All translations from Italian to English are mine.

2 Born in Caltagirone in 1981, Messina began his filmmaking career while attending the DAMS of Roma Tre with *Stidda ca curri* (2004). The short won the first prize at the 50th Taormina Film Festival (2004), where the young Sicilian filmmaker met the festival's main juror and his future collaborator, Paolo Sorrentino. Before the two began working together, Messina studied at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* graduating in 2012. In the meantime, he shot the historical documentary *Pirrera* (2006), which chronicles the decline of inland Sicily's sulphur mining industry. Messina began working as the assistant director for Sorrentino's English language film *This must be the place* (2011) and the Oscar winning *La grande bellezza / The Great Beauty* (2013). Following *L'attesa*, Messina returned to making smaller projects.

3 See for instance Luca Barattoni, *Italian post-neorealist cinema*. Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

4 Original Italian: "abuso della nozione di 'crisi' nel contesto critico italiano (…) trascurato aspetti cruciali inerenti la produzione cinematografica e proponendo analisi alquanto schematiche, spesso fortemente ideologizzate, rispetto al rapporto tra estetica e politica." Pierpaolo Antonello. "Di crisi in meglio. Realismo, impegno postmoderno e cinema politico nell'Italia degli anni zero: da Nanni Moretti a Paolo Sorrentino." *Italian studies* 67.2 (2012): 169.

the vastly altered cultural context within which the current cinema must operate (…) in this age of postmodern simulation, the cinema’s vocation for reference (…) requires deliberate strategies of resistance and reinvention.”[5] But to what extent does *L’attesa* represent, if not the herald of what Zagarrio admits is an impossibility (i.e., a new New Wave), at least a sign of renewal?

This article challenges this idea and suggests that, on the contrary, the film merely reproduces old *Nouvelle Vague* clichés about feminine imperviousness while having little if anything that is substantially new to communicate to its audience. At the same time, my discussion suggests that *L’attesa*’s lack of depth is indicative of a certain tendency in contemporary Italian cinema. This inclination manifests itself most explicitly in the articulation of some of the aesthetic strategies employed by 20th-century Italian directors to frame womanhood through the lens of religious iconography. To illustrate that *L’attesa* is not an isolated instance, the following paragraphs will briefly consider the latest film of Messina’s former collaborator as well as the most renowned contemporary Italian director, Paolo Sorrentino.

In a particularly significant moment taking place towards the end of Sorrentino’s *È stata la mano di Dio / The Hand of God* (2021), the orphaned Fabio momentarily leaves Naples to spend time in Stromboli, 243 kilometers away from his native city.[6] Upon disembarking on Stromboli’s black ashen shores, Sorrentino’s camera captures the sight of a naked woman.[7] The woman stands in shallow water and is recorded by a high-angle bird’s-eye-view framing her body on screen right as she walks toward the shoreline (screen left). Before long, however, the sea ‘nymph’ plunges into the water and vanishes from our sight. Without lingering any further, a cut fishes her washed ashore sunbathing on the beach. Her body is now on full display for the camera. Much like Haydée’s beach stroll in

5 Millicent Marcus, *After Fellini: National cinema in the postmodern age* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2002), 8.

6 In a film that is otherwise almost entirely set in Naples and its immediate surroundings – except for Maria and Saverio’s tragic death in Roccaraso – the significance of this brief excursion is immediately apparent.

7 This image is preceded by two shots depicting Fabio’s arrival on the island aboard a ferry, a set-up that is highly reminiscent of Nanni Moretti’s odyssey across the Aeolians in the second episode (i.e., *Isole*) of *Caro diario* (1993). Yet, Sorrentino’s use of formal devices foregrounding his authorial presence in the text / behind the camera marks a significant departure from Moretti’s minimalist style. The former’s adoption of oblique camera angles and of shallow focus (just as Stromboli erupts!) offer a much more overt display of directorial bravado.

the opening moments of Éric Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* (1967), the woman's emergence reenacts the – post-Renaissance iconography of the – birth of Venus from sea foam.[8] This is further underlined by the contrast between her pale complexion and the black sand. Moreover, her appearance establishes a direct link between the small Mediterranean island and the female body, a gendering of seascape which gains in narrative significance in relation to the dramatic function Stromboli performs in Fabio's journey as a negative image of urban Naples – despite both spaces being similarly plunged in a cobalt blue Mediterranean.

The following shots anchor what the camera has hitherto displayed to Fabio's voyeuristic position. A 'reverse' shot frames the adolescent before he too appears naked before the camera, covering his genitals with a bush. This is, in turn, revealed as the perspective of his older brother Marco.[9] This recursive play of gazes is interrupted by five shots framing a grieving Fabio against the slopes of the island's volcanic cone, momentarily turning the young man into a solitary 'Romantic' figure contemplating nature much as he contemplated the naked woman earlier. However, not before long, the landscape is overhauled by a flashback bringing us back to Na-

8 *The Collector* explores balneal heterosexual relationships by deconstructing the Medusean male point of view. This is most explicit in the film's opening moments. Following a brief credit sequence accompanied by a drumming soundtrack playing against a blue backdrop gesturing towards the film's Mediterranean setting, a title card which reads "Haydée" introduces the film's first prologue. The sequence is 1:03-minute and is comprised of seven shots (ASL = 9 seconds) of decreasing length. In the opening 23-second shot, the camera follows the short-haired blonde walking on the shoreline wearing a two-piece swimsuit in a panning high-angle long shot. A cut-in shows her tanned feet splashing in the water and plunging in the sand, an image which gestures towards the Venus archetype of a woman arising from sea foam. Haydée turns around and moves in the opposite direction before stopping and turning her feet towards the camera. The male gaze turns her into a static, lifeless object. A medium close-up showing her frozen statuesque pose is followed by a series of shots encapsulating cinematographer Néstor Almendros's minimalist compositions which fragment her body into static close-ups of her shoulder blades, the back of her knees and her collarbones converging in her jugular notch. In the sequence's final shot, the camera travels across her body from feet to head by tilting upwards before lingering on a shallow focus close-up framing Haydée's profile against the sea's blue backdrop.

9 Fabietto stands up (match-cut) and the film cuts to a long-shot showing him walking away from the camera towards the sea before a high-angle shot of Marco gazing towards screen right while sunbathing next to a friend – a backgammon board lying between them – situates this as his perspective.

ples.[10] The film then returns to sea level, setting a dialogue between Fabio and Marco lasting twelve shots (organized according to a shot/reverse shot logic) on a pier. As Fabio puts it: "we are not rich… we have to understand what we want to do when we grow up."[11] Unlike the previous shots, the final six shots are set at night and are also conspicuously devoid of Fabio's presence. The camera abandons the protagonist to show the ferry's night-time departure from the island. His absence provides this moment with its oneiric quality, allowing the anonymous collectivity to emerge from the background. In fact, the sequence ends by showing a significant number of people jumping in the sea in a fable-like moment.

The sequence is devoid of non-diegetic music. In its place, the score accompanying Fabio's journey to Stromboli interweaves the sound of the ferry's engines with an earthly symphony of waves and volcanic explosions. Similarly, the film itself ends with another departure, only this time not *to* but *from* his native city, the train carrying a matured Fabio to Rome to jumpstart his career in cinema self-reflexively gesturing towards the medium itself (or the film strip's rotation).[12] At the same time, the *monacello* who waves good-bye to him represents Naples and its rich folkloristic traditions which Fabio leaves behind to the tune of Pino Daniele's *Napule è* (1977). The film's final moments encapsulate the nostalgic pastiche of 1980s Italian popular culture (Maradona, television, Oriana Fallaci's books), filmic references to Sorrentino's adoptive masters (Federico Fellini and Antonio Capuano) and quasi-Oedipal adolescent sexual desire (directed at Fabio's voluptuous and neurotic aunt representing his muse and, to a certain extent, his elderly neighbor) dominating the film's auto-biographical *Bildungsroman*. Whereas the opening shots of traffic appear to go beyond citation and verge (much as *La grande bellezza* (2013)) on plagiarism of *8 ½* (Federico Fellini, 1963), the off-screen inclusion of a perverted Fellini foregrounds Sorrentino's conscious attempt to distance himself from Fellini's legacy and step outside his shadow (even while making his own *Armacord*!), a position in which *La grande bellezza* put the Neapolitan

---

10 Fabio puts on his earphones but instead of prompting diegetic music, this gesture is followed by a cut to the earlier shot depicting Fabio and his parents on a scooter which introduced the characters to the audience, thus returning us to the film's opening moments, a small subversion of expectations placing us directly inside the character's mind.

11 Original Italian: "non siamo ricchi… dobbiamo capire cosa vogliamo fare da grandi."

12 Much as the repeated appearance of a VHS tape of *C'era una volta in America* / *Once Upon a Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984) in Fabio's house.

director in and which is one of, if not the reason of his staggering domestic and international success.

On the one hand, Fabio's destination at the end of the film represents the center of gravity of Italian cinema. On the other hand, the protagonist's brief albeit significant trip to the Eolian islands situates him in a space defined by a palimpsestic layering of film history – as Giovanna Taviani's *Fughe e approdi* (2010) highlights. Notwithstanding its link to classical iconography, the film's landing on the island exemplifies the extent to which Sorrentino's representation of gender is coterminous with that of his adolescent protagonist. The naked woman is likely a tourist and hence the film has little to say about native islanders. Their absence identifies the island as a holiday destination for young people. At the same time, the image of womanhood that the film stages for the camera (motivated diegetically by Fabietto's position as the narrative's focalizer) is quite eloquent about the broader issue of the cinematic representation of the place of women on the shores of the Mediterranean in the age of mass tourism.

Within the textual economy of the film, Stromboli sets the stage for the urban tourist's primitivist return to nature (performed through nudism) to find himself in a time of crisis.[13] Accordingly, the sublime seascape shots of the island could be read in opposition to the film's urban setting, but this becomes increasingly difficult when considering the amount of screen time Sorrentino devotes to the Gulf of Naples. In fact, it is no coincidence that the film opens with a long and uninterrupted bird's-eye-view of the bay. In addition, the film's climactic sequence silhouettes Fabietto's dialogue with Antonio Capuano against the gulf in a highly evocative and quasi-surrealist moment marking the protagonist's maturation into manhood – Capuano 'rebaptizes' him as Fabio before he dives into the sea and disappears from the film. In this context, one could easily draw a connection between Sorrentino's filmic representations of Naples and Stromboli and the many parallelisms between Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli – terra di Dio* (1950) and his framing of Capri in *Viaggio in Italia* (1953), starting from their Northern European female protagonists played by Ingrid Bergman. At the same time, it would be more productive to turn in the opposite direction, sixty kilometers south of Stromboli, and situate Sorrentino's brief engagement with the *isole* '*circumsiciliane*' in relation to the screening of Sicily in the debut feature of his former assistant Messina.

13 It is quite interesting that the sequence is preceded by an extremely high angle shot of the house framing a bored Fabietto staring at the television before he turns off the television with his father's stick, disconnecting himself from the imagined community created by low-brow mass entertainment.

Early on in *L'attesa*, Messina offers a set-up echoing the apparition of a sea nymph in *È stata la mano di Dio* quite closely. Following an elaborate transition which sees a shot of the sky dissolve into an underwater shot, a woman in a bikini appears before the camera as she swims to the surface. However, unlike in Sorrentino's film, she does not emerge on the seashore, but rather in the middle of the lake of Santa Rosalia, a small artificial lake situated in inland Sicily and a womb-like space staging a symbolic link between water and procreation. Although seemingly unimportant, this moment is quite revealing. First, the lake functions as a simulacrum of the Mediterranean, thematizing the displacement of characters and events across more inessential effigies. Indeed, it is no coincidence that this moment is repeated later in the film. On this other occasion, however, the woman appears to a small audience, emerging beside a small boat to the sight of two male spectators. If the siren in Lampedusa'a *La Sirena* is an allegory of classical literature, the two swimmers in *L'attesa* and *È stata la mano di Dio* can be read as allegories of cinema as a medium devoted to the display of erotic spectacles. Yet, unlike the woman who disappears before Fabietto, the 'siren' in Messina's film is not merely an unnamed apparition. She is the deuteragonist, and as such, she performs various other functions within the film's narrative.

Screened at the 72nd Venice film festival, Messina's film was met by seven minutes of clapping.[14] However, upon its domestic release on September 17, the film received a mixed critical reception. A transnational co-production, the film was produced by the Italian *Indigo Film* – the production company behind Sorrentino's earlier 2010s works. And much like *La grande bellezza* and *Youth* (2015), the film was distributed by *Mediaset* and French production companies *Barbary films* and *Pathé*. Its plot is overtly allegorical and Pirandellian. Set during Easter, *L'attesa* follows Anna, a divorced French woman (played by Juliette Binoche) transplanted in Sicily. After attending the funeral of her son Giuseppe, Anna returns to her empty mansion and shuts herself off from the world, inside a cavernous domestic space. Mirrors are covered with black cloths, windows are barred closed, and the screen falls into darkness, as a motionless Anna is pushed to the edge of the frame in highly unbalanced shots reflecting her inner state. The film seems to come to a halt, returning to the primordial state of undifferentiated darkness of its opening moments. This trend is suddenly reversed by a phone ringing. Technology rekindles Anna's link to the world.

14 The film was screened alongside another Sicilian island film set in Pantelleria: Luca Guadagnino's remake of Jacques Deray's 1969 *La Piscine*, *A Bigger Splash* (2015).

A swift fade overturns the gradual dimming of the image to white. The call announces an unexpected visitor: her son's French girlfriend Jeanne and the abovementioned siren figure. Jeanne is unaware that Giuseppe is dead, and upon her arrival, Anna avoids informing her about it to pretend that her son is still alive. Indeed, she tells Jeanne that Giuseppe will return for Easter. Hence, the two women begin waiting in the mansion and its rural surrounding, allowing the film to linger on the island's landscape throughout its 100-minute running time.

Interviewed by Mariella Caruso, Messina describes Sicily as ubiquitous in his work. As he puts it, "Even if I did a science fiction series, there would be Sicily in its fabric."[15] This is not the case with *L'attesa*, as the film is set entirely on the island. Conversely, Fabio's sojourn in Stromboli only lasts 4:37 minutes, i.e., 3,69% of *È stata la mano di Dio*'s 125-minute running time. In a similar fashion, Messina purports a strong attraction to the world of women. As he puts it, "I inhabit the female world, it intrigues me, and I fall in love with it. I have a very strong relationship with my mother on whom I modelled the protagonist of The Wait played by Juliette Binoche."[16] Accordingly, the film revolves around these two thematic coordinates: Sicily and women. Yet, it is interesting to note that the character Binoche portrays bears striking affinities to the ageing actress she plays in the French-Swiss-German co-production *Clouds of Sils Maria* (Olivier Assayas, 2014).[17]

---

15 Original Italian: "Anche se facessi una serie di fantascienza nel suo tessuto ci sarebbe la Sicilia."
Piero Messina quoted by Mariella Caruso, "Il regista Piero Messina tra Artemisia e Mika," in *Volevo fare il Giornalista*, November 1, 2022. https://www.volevofareilgiornalista.it/il-regista-piero-messina-tra-il-doc-artemisia-e-stasera-casamika/. Accessed on October 22, 2022.

16 Original Italian: "quello femminile è un mondo che abito, m'incuriosisce e di cui m'innamoro. Ho un rapporto molto forte con mia madre sulla quale ho modellato la protagonista de *L'attesa* interpretata da Juliette Binoche." Ibid.

17 Assayas's film offers an interesting point of comparison. Its narrative follows Maria's (Binoche) preparation for a role in a play aided by her younger assistant Valentine (Kristen Stewart) and explores themes of generational replacement, the loss of youth and art criticism. She is set to star alongside the young and up and coming actress Jo-Ann (Chloë Grace Moretz) in a play about the entanglement between an older woman and her younger assistant self-reflexively mirroring the relationship between the film's protagonists. In a moment recalling Anna's disappearance (through a dissolve) on the rocky shores of Lisca bianca in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960), Valentine disappears (from the film) in the grassy plateaus near the Maloja Pass, the site of a unique meteorological phenomenon documented by Arnold Frank's 1924 short *Cloud Phenomena of*

But Messina's representation of place and gender does not merely reflect the experience of womanhood in Sicily. Instead, it actively participates in the production of the meaning of both 'woman' and 'Sicily' through a set of binary oppositions.[18] In her analysis of the representation of gender in Italian cinema between the 40s and the 60s, Maggie Günsberg builds on the theoretical paradigms of classical 1970s feminist film criticism through the work of Judith Butler and identifies a tension between a dynamic and a static construction of gender (i.e., gender as either process or fixity). The latter, she argues, is most apparent in genres pivoting around body-spectacle and the visual pleasure of dissolving boundaries (i.e., peplum, horror, and spaghetti western).[19] Conversely, notwithstanding the consonance of their names, Jeanne and Anna embody two distinct but similarly static modes of womanhood. While the younger woman is both an object to-be-looked-at (according to Mulvey's classical 1970s formulation) and an active desiring subject, the older woman's divorced status allows her to embody her role as a mother. In fact, Anna prides herself on being the first woman to have divorced in the *ragusano* (i.e., the area where the film takes place).

In recent years, scholarship in the field of Italian film studies has shifted its focus to more contemporary texts raising contemporary issues such as the representation of queer identities, gender mobility, and migration. For instance, Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo describe contemporary Italian migrant films as inviting the audience to sympathize with "migrant and female characters" in "a nation of transformed landscapes which is still desperately holding on to traditional cultural and gender myths."[20] Conversely, Messina's film appears to continue to

Maloja. Assayas's meta-cinematic inclusion of Frank's mountain film (within the film) evokes a key cinematic genre in the ideology of Nazism (Leni Riefenstahl is the star of many of his films) with direct links to German Romanticism. While it could be argued that *L'attesa* too shares some Romantic affinities (given the place Sicily holds in Goethe's writing), it is more interesting to note that both films are about the relationship between two women haunted by the absence of a dead man (in the case of *Clouds of Sils Maria,* the author of the play).

18 For instance, Friedrich Kittler argues that Victorian-inflected early cinema is directly producing (rather than reproducing) female hysteria. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, film, typewriter* (Stanford University Press, 1999): 124.

19 Maggie Günsberg, *Italian cinema: gender and genre* (New York: Springer, 2005)

20 Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo, "Gendering mobility and migration in contemporary Italian cinema", *The Italianist* 30.2 (2010): 178. See also Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo, *Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking*, Vol. 59 (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2013).

hold onto these traditional myths. Chief among them is the connection between Anna (and thus womanhood) and domesticity, which Giuliana Bruno frames as supporting the gender binary opposition underpinning a static view of identity in which "domus, domesticity, and domestication continue to be confused and gendered feminine" and the gendered domus or home as female, understood as antithetical to voyage, becomes the "very site of the production of sexual difference."[21]

Although Jeanne and Anna are defined by their shared ethnic and national affiliations (i.e., white metropolitan French), they are subjected to vastly different degrees of objectification – which are inversely proportional to both their age and their rootedness in the film's setting. The younger Jeanne is both exoticized and conscripted to exoticize Sicily through her tourist gaze. While also an outsider, the older Anna appears to have assimilated the local customs and is quite at ease in her role as a wealthy upper-class woman who does not have to work. Indeed, much of the film's generic pleasure lies in the camera's display of her landed property. Her mansion offers the (*gattopardo*-esque) spectacle of an aristocratic dwelling. In addition, we are constantly reminded of her social status by her delegation of domestic labor to her housekeeper. Hence, the specific type of womanhood she embodies cannot be divorced from either her race (lest one falls into white solipsism) or her social class. In fact, she appears quite distinct from another Pirandellian mother roaming the Sicilian countryside on the screen: the destitute and illiterate Mariagrazia who is split across two timelines intersecting the macro-historical events of the Risorgimento in the first episode (i.e., "L'altro figlio") of *Kaos* (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 1984).

On a formal level, the film is punctuated by a series of self-reflexive, meta-cinematic moments offering a way into its construction. In the opening credits sequence, for instance, a static interior shot silhouettes various static figures against Mount Etna in a Surrealist image recalling the view of the mountain from Taormina in the closing shot of *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960).[22] The mountain is framed by a large window

---

21 Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, (New York: Verso, 2007), 85.

22 The citation is overt, but the tone is quite different. Whereas in *L'attesa* Etna dominates the screen, in Antonioni's modernist film the mountain is pushed to the bottom left corner of the frame. Indeed, it is dwarfed by the wall which splits the screen in half and symbolizes the existential barrier between the two protagonists: Claudia and Sandro. Alternatively, the wall could be read as a warning against heavy-handed symbolic readings, a blank slate defying signification that

fragmenting its conic shape into various rectangular panels. The frame-within-a-frame composition explicitly recalls the film strip, thus thematizing the status of the cinematic image (of Sicily) as an image both textually and intertextually.

The constructedness of Etna's postcard-like image is foreshadowed by the earlier top-down X-Ray shot scanning the objects inside various bags, scrolling screen left as they pass through controls. Coincidentally, one of these objects is a pair of women's heels. Their skeletal contours explicitly recall both Anna's footwear in the film's opening sequence and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980). By extension, this parallelism evokes the opposition that Fredric Jameson draws between Warhol's negative image and Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* in his analysis of Postmodernism.[23] In this context, the lived-in heels Anna wears at Giuseppe's funeral gravitate towards the paradigm exemplified by the latter. Their appearance signposts the scene's circular closure, and thus they emerge as particularly significant. The camera's descending movement follows Anna's tears as they soak her feet before dropping to the floor, a composition paralleling the camera's elaborate rotation around a statue of a crucified Christ (representing Giuseppe) in the film's opening shot.

This overabundance of visual and symbolical allusions carries over to the sequence depicting Jeanne's journey through Sicily. The film eschews plausibility and has her take a detour through the barren slopes of Etna. Its infernal landscape stages her encounter with a mourning statue of the Virgin Mary wrapped in black plastic. The statue will only be unveiled in the film's final moments when in the streets of Caltagirone, where Anna finds herself on the eve of Easter Sunday. While the statue's initial apparition foreshadows Jeanne's encounter with Anna, this later moment marks a pivotal moment of mirror stage identification – as a point of view shot makes explicit. Yet, Jeanne's journey through Hell carries both Scriptural and pagan echoes, the transformation of the island into a barren landscape

---

inhibits the reification of nature under a picturesque register. See Rosalind Galt, "On *L'Avventura* and the picturesque," *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (London: BFI Publishing, 2011). Nonetheless,the hand of the modernist artist behind this cold and calculated formalist framing conveying existential dread makes itself felt. While the man caught in a fedifragous act looks down in shame, Claudia rises 'above' the mountain. She mediates our view of the landscape, operating as a diegetic observer refracting our gaze. Conversely, Messina's highly impactful image is devoid of narrative weight and operates merely on a self-referential and touristic level.

23 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism* (Durham: Duke university press, 1991), 58.

closer to the underworld evoking both Good Friday and the Harrowing of Hell, as well as the myths of Orpheus and Ceres.

Upon Jeanne's arrival at the mansion, Anna spies on the young woman's naked body through the crack of a door – a voyeuristic position echoing that of Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Following a brief misunderstanding that once again thematizes the idea of copies and simulacra (Jeanne mistakes Anna's sister-in-law for Anna), the two women start to bond over the memory of the deceased Giuseppe. Anna takes Jeanne to the artificial lake and once again stares at Jeanne as she undresses before diving into the water. Yet, in both instances her presence carries little narrative weight and appears as more of an excuse to display Jeanne's body to the camera's male gaze.

But *L'attesa* thematizes film spectatorship even more explicitly in a later sequence by showing Pietro, Anna's house steward, watching Mauro Bolognini's 1959 black and white comedy *Arrangiatevi* on a small television. The film-within-the-film shows Totò playing tug-of-war with an old man in Rome's urban periphery. The two are cheered by a small proletarian crowd – an audience reflecting Pietro/the spectator's position. After a quick panning shot framing the rope from one end to the other, the film cuts between the two men showing Totò's slapstick physical performance. Messina's choice to show this moment is not casual. Indeed, on a thematic level, the scene echoes the generational themes that Messina's film explores through homosocial relationships, albeit through the opposite gender. Nothing could be further away from *L'attesa*'s meditative exploration of female bonds than a comedic fight between two old patriarchs. Yet, this juxtaposition allows Messina's representation of womanhood to emerge even more forcefully.[24] Moreover, on a formal level, the film-within-a-film foregrounds the same visual doubling technique that Messina adopts to link his characters into mirroring couples. In addition, the opposition between Anna and Jeanne does not lead to a physical scuffle but develops dialectically through a series of dialogues culminating in Jeanne's infidelity.

This trajectory becomes most explicit in the scene depicting Jeanne and Anna's visit to the *Villa Romana del Casale* in Piazza Armerina. The 1:15-minute sequence set in the ruins of another aristocratic mansion comprises eight shots, resulting in a contemplative 9.38-second ASL. This is roughly equivalent to the 9.23-second ASL emerging in the

24 Much like the representation of women in Sorrentino's film is in the service of and brings to the fore his representation of boyhood and brotherhood.

4:37-minute sequence showing Fabio's journey to the Aeolians in thirty shots. This formal affinity reflects the two films' ideological proximity. An establishing long shot shows the two women arriving at the archaeological site at night. An iron structure divides the screen into a series of rectangular frames(within-a-frame), evoking the opening shot fragmenting Mount Etna. As a result, the image possesses a strong symmetrical (hence static) composition. Shot in low-key lighting, Anna and Jeanne are silhouetted against the pavilion surrounding the ruins. As they move screen left, their shadows appear in the lower half of the frame moving in their opposite direction. This proto-cinematic phantasmagoria recalls both Plato's cave and Jean-Louis Baudry's Platonic description of the cinematic apparatus.[25] Moreover, they foreshadow the ground-level shots displaying the villa's mosaic floors. These culminate in a high angle-shot of the 'bikini girls' mosaic in the *Sala delle Dieci Ragazze*. A voice-off accompanies their appearance providing a sociological explanation to their representation: "The mosaic depicts ten women in bikinis putting on a show in honor of the goddess Tethys. Judging from their bodies, we can deduce that beauty standards were different from those today. In the first centuries, three out of ten women died in childbirth. Wide hips, hence, the chance of surviving childbirth, were greatly valued by men back then." The *subligacula* (loincloth) and *strophia* (breastband) worn by these figures – Roman women were allowed to compete amongst themselves but not naked – inevitably recalls the swimwear Jeanne wears in the earlier scene, prompting Anna to underly the generational gap separating them:

> "You thought Louis Réard invented it?"
> "Huh?"
> "The bikini. That's before your time."[26]

---

25 Jean-Louis Baudry and Alan Williams, "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974): 39-47.

26 Drawing on Patrik Alac's 2002 *The Bikini: A Cultural History*, David Abdulafia suggests that in the postwar period the display of the body became increasingly common. As he notes, while the bikini was first exhibited "at a fashion show in Paris in 1946," it only started to be widely adopted in the following decades, as people began exposing increasing amounts of skin. In 1948 it was banned in both Italy and Spain, but the influx of foreign tourists reversed the tide. David Abdulafia, *The great sea: a human history of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

A long shot situates the previous framing of the mosaic as a POV by showing Jeanne and Anna standing on a raised platform above it. The two are positioned in a perfectly symmetrical shot separating them into distinct frames (much like the shot of Totò and his Istrian neighbour in *Arrangiatevi*). While Jeanne looks down at the mosaic, Anna glances at the couple beside her and awkwardly stares at them as they listen to an audio recording revealing the source of the voice-off. Shortly thereafter, the two women are silhouetted against the mosaic in an extremely high-angle over the shoulder view, breaking once again the 180-degree rule while maintaining some degree of spatial coherence. This mirroring juxtaposition invites two possible interpretative strategies: are Jeanne and Anna active spectators looking at a pre-modern screen, or is the film projecting them on the mosaic, collapsing them on the same level as the flat figures dancing below them? As Messina's framing of the two across the scenes that I have considered above suggests, the latter seems to be the case. When Anna leaves the frame on screen right, the film (match)cuts back to this camera set-up. But when Jeanne follows her off-screen the shot remains momentarily 'empty', lingering on the mosaic (partially covered by the balustrade) for four seconds as we hear the steps of the two women walking off-screen. This post-neorealist detaching of the camera from the narrative subjects displays Giuseppe's ghostly perspective much as Antonioni's camera reflects Anna's perspective when following Sandro and Claudia throughout their journey across Sicily in *L'Avventura*.

The film is punctuated by a series of similarly 'lyrical' or 'poetic' (or at least attempting to be so) instances. For instance, the same formal operation is performed to show the close-up of a thread blowing in the wind, a plastic cup rolling on a table, and an exterior long-shot of an inflated sunbed flying in a courtyard. The conspicuous lack of human presence coupled with the animation of an inanimate object inevitably recalls the Zen-inspired metaphysical pulsion of Yasujirō Ozu's cinema (e.g., *Banshun / Late Spring* (1949)) and what Noel Burch refers to as "pillow shots."[27] Their insertion introduces an element of discontinuity

27 Burch defines pillow shots as shots which "never contribute to the progress of the narrative proper" while "often refer(ing) to a character or a set, presenting or re-presenting it out of narrative context. The space from which these references are made is invariably presented as outside the diegesis, as a pictorial space on another plane of 'reality' as it were, even when the artefacts are, as is often the case, seen previously or subsequently in shots that belong wholly to the diegesis." Noël Burch, *To the distant observer: Form and meaning in the Japanese cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 161-2.

in the construction of diegetic space. This aesthetic device is already present in Messina's earlier work. An analogous moment appears in the short film *Terra* (2012), for instance, when the camera shows a cutaway of the wind pushing a plastic chair on a ferry's deck.[28] However, the significance of these moments lies not in their aesthetic value, but in their inherent ephemerality exacerbated by their derivative nature.

In this context, Messina's four-minute short advertisement commissioned by Armani *Films of City Frames* (2014) emerges as particularly significant *vis-à-vis* the aesthetic trajectories of his work and that of Sorrentino, as well as, more broadly, of Italian cinema. The film opens with a collection of picturesque views of Rome that is immediately reminiscent of Sorrentino's *La grande bellezza*. Its grandiose framing of the Tiber at golden hour encapsulates Italian cinema's gravitational pull towards the Eternal city. Rome's urban landscape is accompanied by a voice-over reciting Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1932 *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. Before long, the city's skyline is revealed as a mere reflection appearing inside the lens of a pair of Armani sunglasses resting on a table where a man (i.e., 'Sorrentino') is writing the screenplay of *La grande bellezza*. Hence, it displays its status as a companion piece to a text that is already parasitical, notwithstanding the degree of self-awareness that *La grande bellezza* demonstrates about its indebtedness to Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960). Yet, the high-art pretensions that *Films of City Frames* displays unveils the shallowness of both works. The corporate advertisement unmasks the highbrow text. Both are similarly rooted in the Neoliberal commodification of the city's architectural beauty. Messina's competently made short about an artist's Romantic engagement (filtered through sunglasses) with Rome's cityscape has very little substance of its own. This is exemplified by the Surrealist interaction between a catatonic friar and a woman seducing him. The decadent subversion of Catholic iconography evokes Fellini's desecrating masquerades Christian ritual.

However, both Sorrentino and Messina operate in a context in which the Catholic signifiers overturned by Fellini's parodic representations have been thoroughly emptied of their meaning. And whereas the characters of *La grande bellezza* search for meaning in a world of anomie where grace

28 Set entirely on a ferry crossing the strait of Sicily, the 23-minute *Terra* was screened at the 65th Cannes Film Festival. The short follows a mysterious man who returns to Italy after many years. He wanders across the vessel's confined "heterotopic" space interacting with his fellow passengers in a series of brief conversations punctuating the film's episodic progression – thus further underlying its indebtedness to Elio Vittorini's work.

offers a tenuous line of flight, Messina's brief vignette is no deeper than the sun lenses it advertises. This postmodern lack of depth manifests itself most conspicuously in the way the religious allegory which the film is built around seems to go nowhere. Messina's attempt to craft a more personal (and hence more authentic) film by turning his camera to his native island – much as Sorrentino does by turning *É stata la mano di Dio* into a love letter to Naples – is ultimately devoid of substance. As a result, much like the characters in *L'attesa*, we find ourselves waiting for a miracle that will never happen.

My analysis, however, does not seek to offer a critical assessment of the film. Rather, it aims to probe the deeper implications of the aesthetic failures lying beneath the film's opulent surface. Overall, *L'attesa* is far from the resounding aesthetic success that Zagarrio celebrates. But while the film fails to be the herald of a 'new' Italian New Wave, it reveals quite a lot about the status of contemporary Italian cinema. Much as *É stata la mano di Dio*, it is steeped in a masculinist heritage that the original French *Nouvelle Vague* (1959-62) inherited but eventually overcame as *La Collectioneuse*'s self-awareness about its representation of gender demonstrates.[29] Conversely, Messina and Sorrentino appear too invested in their own prophetic vision to go beyond it. Thus, they are perhaps best understood in relation to Emanuele Crialese's 2002 *Respiro*, a film which Giuliana Muscio upholds as "belonging to the tradition of quality European cinema" antithetical to "dominant commercial cinema" (i.e., Hollywood) and whose "peculiar expressive strength (…) depends on its 'Sicilianity', on its representation of the Sicilian landscape, its social conventions and culture."[30] Unlike *Respiro*, *L'attesa* deals only tangentially with the experience of native Sicilian women and focuses instead on the island's adoptive daughters, plunging them in a milieu oversaturated with Catholic symbolism. However, its 'Sicilianity' should not be understood in essentialist terms. Sicily is not inherently unique as Don Fabrizio argues in *Il gattopardo* (Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, 1958), but rather, as Costanza Quatriglio (2020) suggests, it "is more correctly narrated as a meeting point between geographies, histories, and cultures rather than removed or extraneous to these,"

29 See Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, trans. Kristin Ross (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

30 Giuliana Muscio, "Sicilian Film Productions: Between Europe and the Mediterranean Islands," in *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identities*, ed. William Uricchio (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 178.

a conceptual shift, she argues, that should also be applied to both Italy and the European continent.[31]

Both Jeanne and Fabio's short but pivotal journeys to Sicily bear witness to the extent to which the island (and its surrounding archipelagos) occupies a privileged place in the history of Italian cinema.[32] The island's

---

31 Costanza Quatriglio, "Afterword," in *Sicily on Screen: Essays on the Representation of the Island and its Culture*, ed. Giovanna Summerfield (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), 273-4. Indeed, as Quatriglio argues in an earlier interview: "I aspire to make international films, to narrate stories that will exit the belly button of my country. I do not want to be labeled as a Sicilian filmmaker; I do not like that because I feel I belong to the world. This is something I have always felt. I make my films in Sicily also because our cinema is conservative. One is Sicilian and makes films in Sicily because these are financed earlier and easier than other stories." Costanza Quatriglio quoted in Giovanna Summerfield, "Interview with Costanza Quatriglio (July 2012)," *Italian Women Filmmakers and the Gendered Screen*, ed. Maristella Cantini (New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2013), 268.

32 The imagined Sicily emerging in these works of fiction can be better understood as reproducing mythical archetypes about motherhood and fertility reinforcing traditional gender roles. Implications of female promiscuity (or Queerness) threatening entrenched social hierarchies are conjured on the screen only to be ultimately exorcised through laughter or tragedy. The latter is exemplified by the death of a young Sicilian woman who metonymically stands for the entire nation in the first episode of Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946). The high angle shot of her lifeless body lying on the island's rocky shores portrays Italy as the victim of the German occupier punishing her/the nation for welcoming American G.Is. The opposite strategy emerges in Ettore Scola's debut feature *Se permettete parliamo di donne* (1964), a low-brow comedy comprising nine lascivious vignettes set across the peninsula and starring Vittorio Gassman. Much like *Paisà*, the film's opening episode is set in rural Sicily. However, its tone is comedic rather than tragic, and its simple narrative about marital infidelity and brigands reproduces stereotypes about superstitious backwardness set against the increasingly secularized post-economic boom Italy.
The 9:14-minute episode opens with a horseman riding through a desertic landscape. The camera follows the man's journey to an isolated farmhouse exhibiting his thick eyebrows, his moustache, his flat cap (or *coppola*), and his shotgun. The film then cuts to an interior shot of a woman cooking dinner in her modest black attire. After she notices the mysterious stranger, a mobile high angle shot shows her looking at the horseman through the frames of two windows, a frame-within-a-frame composition recalling the episode's opening 'panel' and positioning her as a spectator. Once the frightened woman informs the man that her husband is not home, he trespasses into the domestic space, walking into the house in one continuous shot bridging interior and exterior space. She offers him a drink and begins to undress, offering herself to the stranger believing him to be a brigand who has come to kill her husband, Gaspare, only for the man to reveal himself as a friend of Gaspare who only wanted to return him the shotgun (carrying overt phallic symbolism) that he had borrowed from him – a Plautine misunderstanding

heterotopic shores offer both Sorrentino and Messina a distinctive backdrop, situating their films in relation to a constellation of canonical works signposting key aesthetic developments of the postwar period. At the same time, *L'attesa*'s and *É stata la mano di Dio*'s aestheticizing framing of womanhood in a Mediterranean space is emblematic of a broader tendency in contemporary Italian cinema. This trend manifests itself most explicitly in *L'attesa*'s construction of gender through the conversion of Christian and pagan iconography into a series of floating signifiers. Yet, this operation displays the inherent limitations of the director's attempt to portray the experience of Mediterranean women *vis-à-vis* the work of contemporary women filmmakers (Donatella Maiorca, Emma Dante, Costanza Quatriglio) offering alternative representations of their own experience on the shores of the Mediterranean through stories about nonnormative relationships.

These authors have been the subject of the edited volume *Sicily on Screen: Essays on the Representation of the Island and its Culture* (Giovanna Summerfield, 2020). The book offers a series of studies on

---

caused by excessive hospitality that leads to marital infidelity, parodying early cinema anxieties about the disruption of the bourgeois family displayed in home invasion films, a key narrative trope in the development of parallel editing. The woman bears many striking affinities with Binoche's Anna, both on a chromatic and narrative level. On the one hand, their wait for their respective kinsmen is interrupted by a violation of the domestic space. On the other, both are linked to the Virgin Mary, as testified by the woman entrusting herself to a small altar of the Virgin Mary upon the stranger's arrival. Indeed, much as in Dino Risi's *Il Sorpasso* (1962), in which Bruno (Gassman) derides two nuns from Santa Rosalia of Partinico, Sicilian women are connoted, first and foremost, by their Catholic religiosity.

More recently, this long cinematic tradition inspired the region to promote a project titled *Sicily, women and cinema* at the 2021 Cannes film festival. The project sets out to draw productions and (cine)tourism by renewing the image of Sicilian women spread by Visconti, Antonioni, Tornatore, and Rossellini. At the same time, the region's endorsement appears motivated by strictly economic ends, commodifying a repertoire of (already commodified) images of women. The project bears many similarities to an earlier project subsidized by the *Sicilia film commission*. Released in the same year as *L'attesa*, *Τά Ύυναικεία – Cose di donne* (Lorenzo Daniele, 2014) features various talking heads recounting their experience as Sicilian women to frame the island as a female land. Once again, the metaphorical gendering of place is as interesting as it is problematic, and it would be more accurate to suggest that Sicily has been constructed as a gendered space. Accordingly, my analysis attempted to engage critically with this characterization rather than reading utopian traces of an egalitarian society into cultural objects produced by a patriarchal social order.

topics ranging from peripherality, racial Othering, Lesbianism, and more broadly, the notion of Sicilianness. Emerging in the wake of Sebastiano Gesù’s seminal 1993 work on Sicily and cinema, the volume’s contributions share a sense of Sicily as a space of deep contradictions, an island whose long history elevates it as a particularly fruitful object for scholarly engagement. Its overarching argument echoes that of an earlier essay by Gaetana Marrone which frames Sicily as “an island that resists control and constantly reinvents itself on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea” is particularly emblematic.[33] Accordingly, Marrone champions the filmic articulation of new metaphors expanding our understanding of what it means to be Sicilian through the crossing of borders and the re-negotiation of the binary oppositions which have hitherto defined the meaning of the island. At the same time, this argument is perhaps too teleological and one sided. The Mediterranean is indeed a bridge promoting cultural exchange across its shores, but it is also a barrier. Therefore, it would be reductive to only focus on the utopian promise underpinning the qualitative change brought about by cultural hybridization and changing demographics. Hence, the celebration of the entropic effects brought about by the waning of old binary oppositions should go beyond an appraisal of novelty as an end in itself.

To argue that women have been at the center of the process through which the meaning of Sicily has been coded would be to state the obvious. Rather than merely interrogate the specific formal operations through which the image of the island has been constructed (and deconstructed) through the image of its female inhabitants, it would be perhaps more productive to ground future enquiries about the gendering of Sicily’s topography across Italian cinema in a deeper understanding of the material circumstances in which this image is produced.[34] One should neither reduce these represen-

33 Gaetana Marrone, “A cinematic grand tour of Sicily: irony, memory and metamorphic desire from Goethe to Tornatore.” *California Italian Studies* 1.1 (2010): 11.

34 For instance, an interesting starting point against which the gendering of the island’s archaic landscape can be better understood would the unique position in which Sicily’s labor market found itself in the second half of the nineteenth century. While salaries in Northern Italy were relatively higher than in the peninsula’s poorer southern regions, the island stood as the exception, as its salaries were also higher than those of the rest of the South. This was due to demand of skilled workers that the construction of the island’s railways required (*vis à vis* a relatively low availability), but also to the fact that, unlike in the rest of the peninsula, women represented a smaller percentage of the workforce, hence the higher salaries for unskilled male labourers, testifying the extent to which the island’s inhabitants clung to their traditional patriarchal roots. As Giovanni

tations to the status of mere superstructural reflections of the existent nor divorce them entirely from their roots in a reality outside of the screen. The meanings of woman and Sicily, woman in Sicily, Sicily as woman, and all other possible permutations of these two terms do not reproduce a static reality but contribute to produce an ever-evolving one subject to alteration – within certain parameters. It develops through a process of poetic or metaphoric augmentation: the semantic field of 'Sicily-woman' embraces new polysemic relations and severs old ones, expanding the horizon of meaning which extends beyond material reality. Accordingly, films like *L'attesa* and *È stata la mano di Dio* can either reinforce or disrupt the understanding of 'Sicily as 'woman' and 'woman' as 'wife', 'object', or 'mother', bringing imagined – but nonetheless impactful – worlds into being. Messina and Sorrentino's failed attempt to conjure novel worlds instead of a pastiche of worlds imagined by others is symptomatic of a deeper impasse: perhaps the *a priori* impossibility for artists in their position to express something new under the current circumstances?

Bibliography

Abdulafia, David. *The great sea: a human history of the Mediterranean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Antonello, Pierpaolo. "Di crisi in meglio. Realismo, impegno postmoderno e cinema politico nell'Italia degli anni zero: da Nanni Moretti a Paolo Sorrentino." *Italian studies,* 67.2 (2012).

Baudry, Jean-Louis and Alan Williams. "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus." *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974).

Bruno, Giuliana. *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*. New York: Verso, 2007 Burch, Noël. *To the distant observer: Form and meaning in the Japanese cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

Caruso, Mariella. "Il regista Piero Messina tra Artemisia e Mika." In *Volevo fare il Giornalista*. November 1, 2022. https://www.volevofareilgiornalista.it/il-

Federico (2007: 322) notes: "in almost all regions the number of" female laborers was "40%, while in some southern regions (…) it was much lower. In fact, women accounted for only 25% of the agricultural labor force in Apulia, 11% in Sicily and 4% in Sardinia" – "in quasi tutte le regioni il numero di" manodopera femminile era "40%, mentre in alcune regioni meridionali (…) è molto minore. Infatti le donne rappresentavano solo il 25% della manodopera agricola in Puglia, l'11% in Sicilia ed il 4% in Sardegna." Giovanni Federico, "Ma l'agricoltura meridionale era davvero arretrata?" *Rivista di politica economica* 97.3/4 (2007): 322.

regista-piero-messina-tra-il-doc-artemisia-e-stasera-casamika/. Accessed on October 22, 2022.

De Bonis, Maurizio G. "L'attesa. Un film di Piero Messina." In *CultFrame Arti Visive*. 18 September 2015. https://www.cultframe.com/2015/09/l-attesa-film-piero-messina/ Accessed on October 22, 2022.

Federico, Giovanni. "Ma l'agricoltura meridionale era davvero arretrata?" *Rivista di politica economica*, 97.3/4 (2007).

Galt, Rosalind. "On L'Avventura and the picturesque." *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*. London: BFI Publishing, 2011.

Gesù, Sebastiano, ed. *La Sicilia e il cinema*. Catania: Maimone, 1993.

Günsberg, Maggie. *Italian cinema: gender and genre*. Springer, 2005.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1984)." *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke UP* (1991).

Karagoz, Claudia. "Of Miracles and Madonnas: Roberta Torre's women on the Verge in *I baci mai dati*. In *Sicily on Screen: Essays on the Representation of the Island and its Culture*. Edited by Giovanna Summerfield. Jefferson: North Carolina, 2020.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, film, typewriter*. Stanford University Press, 1999.

Luciano, Bernadette and Susanna Scarparo, "Gendering mobility and migration in contemporary Italian cinema." *The Italianist*, 30.2 (2010).

Luciano, Bernadette and Susanna Scarparo, *Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking*. Vol. 59. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2013.

Marcus, Millicent. *After Fellini: National cinema in the postmodern age*. Baltimore: JHU Press, 2002.

Marrone, Gaetana. "A cinematic grand tour of Sicily: irony, memory and metamorphic desire from Goethe to Tornatore." *California Italian Studies*, 1.1 (2010).

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." *Visual and other pleasures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989.

Muscio, Giuliana. "Sicilian Film Productions: Between Europe and the Mediterranean Islands." In *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identities*. Edited by William Uricchio. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Quatriglio, Costanza. "Afterword." In *Sicily on Screen: Essays on the Representation of the Island and its Culture*. Edited by Giovanna Summerfield. Jefferson: McFarland, 2020.

Sellier, Geneviève. *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*. Translated by Kristin Ross. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Summerfield, Giovanna. "Interview with Costanza Quatriglio (July 2012)." *Italian Women Filmmakers and the Gendered Screen*. Edited by Maristella Cantini. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Summerfield, Giovanna. "Sicily, the Key to Everything: Seeking and Finding in *L'Avventura* and *Il bell'Antonio*." In *Sicily on Screen: Essays on the Represen-*

tation of the Island and its Culture. Edited by Giovanna Summerfield. Jefferson: North Carolina, 2020.

Talani, Leila Simona, and Serena Giusti. "Women in the Mediterranean: Still discriminated against?" *Journal of Balkan and near eastern studies* 19, no. 5 (2017).

Truffaut, François. "A certain tendency of the French Cinema." In *Movies and Methods*, translated by Bill Nichols. Los Angeles, London: University of California Press Berkely, 1976.

Zagarrio, Vito. "Una certa tendenza del cinema italiano." *Flinders University Languages Group Online Review*, 5.1 (2016).

Zagarrio, Vito. *Nouvelle vague italiana: Il cinema del nuovo millennio*. Venezia: Marsilio Editori spa, 2022.

Filmography

8 ½ (Federico Fellini, 1963)
A Bigger Splash (Luca Guadagnino, 2015)
Arrangiatevi (Mauro Bolognini, 1959)
Banshun / Late Spring (Yasujirō Ozu, 1949)
C'era una volta in America / Once Upon a Time in America (Sergio Leone, 1984)
Cloud Phenomena of Maloja (Arnold Frank, 1924)
Clouds of Sils Maria (Olivier Assayas, 2014)
È stata la mano di Dio / The Hand of God (Paolo Sorrentino, 2021)
Fughe e approdi (Giovanna Taviani, 2010)
Il bell'Antonio (Mauro Bolognini, 1960)
Kaos (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 1984)
L'attesa / The Wait (Piero Messina, 2015)
La Collectionneuse / The Collector (Éric Rohmer, 1967)
La grande bellezza (Paolo Sorrentino, 2013)
La Piscine (Jacques Deray, 1969)
La terra trema – episodio del mare (Luchino Visconti, 1948)
Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
Respiro (Emanuele Crialese, 2002)
Roma (Federico Fellini, 1972)
Se permettete parliamo di donne (Ettore Scola, 1964)
Stromboli – terra di Dio (Roberto Rossellini, 1950)
Terra (Piero Messina, 2012,)
This Must Be the Place (Paolo Sorrentino, 2011)
Τά Υυναικεία – Cose di donne (Lorenzo Daniele, 2014)
Viaggio in Italia (Roberto Rossellini, 1953)
Viola di mare (Donatella Maiorca, 2009)
Youth (Paolo Sorrentino, 2015)

(RE)COLLECTIONS OF A "PICCOLA STREGHINA" FROM THE HEART OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: Gender and Class Consciousness in Grazia Deledda's Folkloric Writings

Elena Emma Sottilotta*

Abstract

Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1926, at the dawn of her literary career, Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) published several folkloric writings and ethnographic sketches based on tales and popular traditions that she personally collected among the members of the lower classes in Sardinia, an aspect of her production which has received considerably less critical attention in comparison with the scholarly scrutiny that has been devoted to her work as a novelist. Similar to other nineteenth-century female folklorists, Deledda promoted herself as a Sardinian collector in a complex social context and at a historical juncture when coming out in the public sphere was still unconventional for a woman. Nearly a century after her recognition as a Nobel Prize winner, it is important to acknowledge that she was not only a talented novelist but also a scrupulous divulgator of insular traditions. Hence, this article explores her positionality as a folklorist in her youth and some of the challenges she faced in gathering and publishing popular traditions in late nineteenth-century journals such as *Natura ed Arte* and *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane*, under the mentorship of Angelo De Gubernatis. This article places emphasis on Deledda's gender and class consciousness at this early stage of her life through an examination of her private correspondence with De Gubernatis and through a critical analysis of the first sketch that she published in *Natura ed Arte*, titled "La donna in Sardegna". Although this piece is often listed amid her folkloric writings without much relevance attached to it, it shows an awareness of multiple social perspectives and touches upon several issues that characterised Deledda's subsequent literary production, namely her ideological relationship with lower-class women, her self-identification as a middle-class woman, and the increasing consciousness of her mediating role between the prejudiced image of Sardinia in the Italian mainland and the more accurate picture that she wished to convey to the continental readership.

* University of Cambridge

Keywords: Grazia Deledda; Folklore Collection; Sardinian Popular Traditions; Gender and Class Consciousness; Post-unification Italy

Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) can rightly be regarded as the first woman to perform the role of "storyteller of the unknown and oral popular epic that was flourishing in her island."[1] Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1926, at the dawn of her literary career, between 1892 and 1901, Deledda published several folkloric writings, including ethnographic sketches, articles on popular traditions, local legends and fairy tales. However, this aspect of her production has been largely neglected. Attention to this early stage of Deledda's development as a writer leads to a deeper understanding of her visceral attachment to her native island, her ambitious endeavour to make herself known on the Italian literary scene and her emerging gender and class consciousness. Hence, this article explores her positionality as a folklorist and some of the challenges she faced in gathering and publishing popular traditions in late-nineteenth-century Sardinia.

As Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) notably remarked, in this historical period folklore was studied chiefly as a "'picturesque' element" whereas it "ought to be studied as a 'conception of the world' of particular social strata which are untouched by modern currents of thought."[2] Insular folklore, in particular, is marked by a fluctuating sense of openness and closure, of conservation and exposure. In his seminal treatise *Breviario mediterraneo*, Predrag Matvejević (1932-2017) underscored the peculiarities of insular contexts.[3] Yet not all islands are identical: in this regard, Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) observed that, if Sicily tends to be historically and culturally framed as an "island at the cross-roads," Sardinia leans towards the classification of "prison-island," albeit paradoxically retaining features of both

1 Benedetto Croce, "Grazia Deledda," in *La letteratura della nuova Italia. Saggi critici*, 6 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1940, vol. 6), 317–326 (318). "Raccontatrice dell'epopea popolare, inedita ed orale, che fioriva nella sua isola." Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are mine.

2 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, vol. 1), 186. "Elemento 'pittoresco'"; "Occorrerebbe studiarlo invece come 'concezione del mondo e della vita', implicita in grande misura, di determinati strati […] della società." See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 4 vols, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975, vol. 3), 2311.

3 Predrag Matvejević, *Breviario Mediterraneo* (Milan: Garzanti, 2004 [1987]), 30–34.

categories.[4] This image of Sardinia conjures the clichéd perception of the island as "resistant and refractory to what comes from the sea," as Martin Butler and Gigliola Sulis commented.[5] This marginalised representation of Sardinia, in spite of its central position at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, places the island and its culture within a postcolonial critical framework, in line with the idea of the Mediterranean as "a space of resistance to Western modernity from within."[6]

In her youth, Grazia Deledda found a way to break free from the geographical and cultural isolation of her island by participating in the nationalistic project of collecting popular traditions in post-Unification Italy. In her study on Deledda's stylistic markers of orality, Cristina Lavinio observed that Deledda's involvement in this folkloric enterprise begs in-depth study.[7] Her liminality as a collector, suspended between her Sardinian peripheral position and her national and international aspirations, can be reappraised through an examination of her private correspondence with Angelo De Gubernatis (1840-1913), orientalist, folklorist, mythologist and founder of several journals, including *Natura ed Arte* and *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane*.[8] Particularly crucial for the establishment of folkloric research in Italy was the foundation of the *Società nazionale per le tradizioni popolari italiane* by De Gubernatis in Rome in 1893. The main objective of this association, which was supported by Margherita of Savoy (1851-

4 Lucien Febvre, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, trans. E. G. Mountford and J. H. Paxton (London and New York: Routledge, 1996 [1922]), 219–221.

5 Martin Butler and Gigliola Sulis, "A Tempest between Naples and Sardinia: Gianfranco Cabiddu's *La stoffa dei sogni*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (2019): 309–340 (327).

6 Butler and Sulis, "A Tempest between Naples and Sardinia," 328.

7 Cristina Lavinio, "«Era un silenzio che ascoltava». Grazia Deledda tra leggende e fiabe," in *Oralità narrativa, cultura popolare e arte. Grazia Deledda e Dario Fo. Atti del convegno, Nuoro, 10-11 dicembre 2018*, ed. Cristina Lavinio (Nuoro: ISRE Edizioni, 2019), 73–93 (77). The present article provides an overview of this long-overdue investigation into Deledda's role as a folklorist on a regional, national and transnational level, which I carried out as part of my PhD project at the University of Cambridge. I am grateful for the award of a scholarship by the London-based Italian cultural association *Il Circolo*, which allowed me to carry out first-hand research in Sardinian libraries and archives. I would like to thank the director of the Coro "Grazia Deledda" Franco Mottoi and the staff of the Biblioteca "Sebastiano Satta" for their kind support during my research visit in Nuoro.

8 On De Gubernatis as a scholar of comparative mythology in Italy, see Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Storia del folklore in Europa* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2016 [1952]), 284–286, and Lorenzo Fabbri, "Angelo De Gubernatis e la mitologia comparata," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 83, no. 1 (2017): 143–169.

1926) and inspired by the British *Folklore Society* inaugurated in London in 1878, was to generate a new impetus for the field of popular traditions in Italy, expanding the path traced by Giuseppe Pitrè (1841-1916) in Sicily.[9] During her personal quest for local tales and customs in the second largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, Deledda approached Sardinian traditions as fragments of a microcosm that was radically distinct from other Italian regional cultures. Alongside the folkloric contributions made by scholars such as Francesco Mango (1856-1900), Egidio Bellorini (1865-1946), Andrea Pirodda (1868-1926) and Luigi Falchi (1873-1940),[10] Deledda, being the first woman in Sardinia to undertake such a task, was a true pioneer.

The Challenges of a "Novello Folk-lorista"

Born after the Italian Unification to a relatively well-off middle-class family in 1871, Deledda lived in Nuoro until 1900. A turning point in her life was the departure from Sardinia after marrying Palmiro Madesani, for what she frequently referred to as "the continent," that is, the Italian mainland. She started pursuing her ambition to become a writer from an early

---

9 On Giuseppe Pitrè's life, oeuvre and seminal impulse for the foundation of folklore studies in Italy, see Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Pitrè, la Sicilia e il folklore* (Messina: D'Alma, 1951); Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 109–134; Loredana Bellantonio, "Riflessioni sull'opera di Giuseppe Pitrè nel primo centenario della scomparsa. Gli scritti inediti," *Palaver* 6, no. 1 (2017): 136–146; Rosario Perricone (ed.), *Pitrè e Salomone Marino. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi a 100 anni dalla morte* (Palermo: Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2017).

10 Deledda mentioned explicitly Mango, Bellorini, Pirodda and Falchi in her correspondence with De Gubernatis in a letter dated 8 May 1893, when she was striving to gain the support of other folklorists in Sardinia. See *Grazia Deledda. Lettere ad Angelo De Gubernatis (1892-1909),* ed. Roberta Masini (Cagliari: CUEC, 2007), 22–24. Mango was the author of *Novelline popolari sarde* (1890). Bellorini wrote *Saggio di canti popolari nuoresi* (1892), *Canti popolari amorosi raccolti a Nuoro* (1893) and *Ninne nanne e cantilene infantili raccolte a Nuoro* (1894). Pirodda focused on traditions from Aggius in Gallura, which he published in *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* and *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* in 1894 and 1895. Falchi, director of the journals *Terra dei nuraghes* and *La Sardegna artistica*, collaborated with De Gubernatis and wrote *Storia critica della letteratura e dei costumi sardi dal secolo XVI ad oggi* (1898). For a more detailed overview of these and other scholars involved in the collection of Sardinian folklore, see Mario Atzori and Maria Margherita Satta, "Antologia delle tradizioni popolari in Sardegna," in *Prima etnografia d'Italia: gli studi di folklore tra '800 e '900 nel quadro europeo*, ed. Gian Luigi Bravo (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2013), 79–107.

age. However, the path to achieve this dream was riddled with obstacles. It is important to bear in mind that Deledda learnt Italian at school and therefore wrote in a language that was different from her mother tongue, the Logudorese variety of Sardinian language from Nuoro. If this condition of plurilingualism was true for all post-unification writers, it was particularly challenging for women given their restricted access to educational prospects, which often led them to succumb to the prevailing illiteracy. Despite her linguistic and literary self-learning process and admirably strong ambition as a writer, Deledda was initially dismissed as a regional author and frequently discriminated against her language and literary style.[11]

Her involvement in ethnographic research preceded the publication of her most renowned novels, such as *Elias Portolu* (1900), *Cenere* (1904) and *Canne al vento* (1913). Her work as a folklorist reached its peak with *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro*, defined as "the most scientific and ethnographic of her writings,"[12] which was initially published in ten monthly instalments from August 1894 to May 1895 under De Gubernatis's editorship in *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane*[13] and as a volume by the Roman publishing house Forzani.[14] This series of articles on oral traditions, which Deledda

11 These persistently dismissive attitudes and the fluctuating scholarly interest towards Deledda in twentieth-century literary criticism are emphasised in a volume aimed at reassessing her literary production, fittingly entitled *Chi ha paura di Grazia Deledda? Traduzione, ricezione, comparazione*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Pavona: Iacobelli, 2010). On Deledda's language, see Cristina Lavinio, "Primi appunti per una revisione critica dei giudizi sulla lingua di Grazia Deledda," in *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea. Atti del seminario di studi 'Grazia Deledda e la cultura sarda fra '800 e '900'*, 2 vols, ed. Ugo Collu (Nuoro: Consorzio per la Pubblica Lettura "Sebastiano Satta", 1992, vol. 1), 69–82.

12 Lynn M. Gunzberg, "Ruralism, Folklore, and Grazia Deledda's Novels," *Modern Language Studies* 13, no. 3 (1983): 112–122 (117).

13 The first instalment of *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro* was preceded by an article in which Deledda reported the parody of a *gosos*, a popular genre of Sardinian religious songs. See Grazia Deledda, "Preghiere: lauda di Sant'Antonio," *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* 1, no. 1 (1893): 62–68.

14 The date 1894 is reported in the frontispiece of the volume. However, as remarked by Benvenuta Piredda in her analysis of the influence of Deledda's folkloric research on her literary production, this date "is to be considered incorrect because in that year the first chapters had just been published in *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane*" ["è da considerarsi errata perché in quell'anno erano usciti appena i primi capitoli in *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane*"]. See Benvenuta Piredda, *Le tradizioni popolari sarde in Grazia Deledda* (Sassari: Edes, 2010), 22. On the genesis of *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro*, see Atzori and Satta, 84–88. Deledda's folkloric writings have been republished in *Tradizioni popolari di Sardegna: credenze magiche, antiche feste, superstizioni e riti di una volta nei*

reported in the original dialect of Nuoro with parallel translations in Italian, contains references to proverbs, curses, poems, riddles, children's games, prayers and rituals, superstitions and beliefs related to the natural and supernatural worlds, popular remedies, spells and religious hymns. She also detailed nuptial and funeral customs, traditional dresses, greetings and festivities. Her approach was clearly influenced by the positivist prejudices that prevailed overseas. Not coincidentally, while she was collecting folklore, she published her novel *La via del male* (1896) and dedicated it to Paolo Orano (1875-1945), author of the essay "Psicologia della Sardegna" (1896), and Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960), author of *La delinquenza in Sardegna* (1897), both inspired by the criminological theories of Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). Niceforo referred explicitly to Deledda in *La delinquenza in Sardegna* (1897), quoting excerpts from *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro* and defining her as a "brilliant Sardinian writer."[15] However, in the second edition of *La via del male*, the dedication to Niceforo and Orano would disappear, suggesting Deledda's intention to distance herself from their positivist positions.[16]

What is striking about Deledda's folklore collection is her attempt to record and portray the popular traditions she observed in an apparently detached manner. To do this, she mastered a different mode of narration from the one she usually adopted as a novelist, a scientific perspective that has subtle implications in terms of gender, class and identity issues.[17] Nonetheless, her own "self" as a female collector is prevalent throughout her folkloric writings, and her voice intentionally, and indeed frequently, emerges in between these descriptive passages. This "centrality of self-representation" is common among Sardinian writers, who tend to document insular life as the main focus of their texts, showcasing a fixation, if not ob-

più significativi scritti etnografici dell'autrice sarda, ed. Dolores Turchi (Rome: Newton Compton, 1995).

15 "Geniale scrittrice sarda." See Alfredo Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna* (Palermo: Remo Sandron, 1897), 100.

16 Margherita Heyer-Caput interpreted this removal as a "sign of the intellectual independence that defines the revision of *La via del male* in its entirety." See Margherita Heyer-Caput, *Grazia Deledda's Dance of Modernity* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), 35. On the influence of criminal anthropology in Deledda's works, see Jonathan R. Hiller, "The Enduring Vision of Biodeterministic Sardinian Inferiority in the Works of Grazia Deledda," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012): 271–287.

17 In this regard, Enrica Delitala observed how Deledda approached local customs with "an idealised and detached attitude" ["un atteggiamento di idealizzazione e distacco"]. See Enrica Delitala, "Grazia Deledda e la 'Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane'", in Collu (1992, vol. 1), 307–312 (308).

session, with the island.[18] In the final paragraph of the preface to *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro*, Deledda wrote:

> The collection that we are presenting today is certainly incomplete. First of all, it is the first work of a novice folklorist, who lacks the culture and erudition necessary to render this kind of work more interesting. It is a volume arranged without pretentions, […] with the sole intent of encouraging others to follow this work and to complete with scholarly endeavours what this young and inexperienced pen cannot do in the present moment.[19]

Her label as a "novice folklorist" declared that she was simply an amateur scholar while simultaneously creating a space for herself within this new field of enquiry; this approach characterised her public presence and autobiographical writings, which were suspended between an overt modesty and an inner consciousness of her own talent. Although this attitude aligns with her self-effacing yet resolute personality, this humble definition does not give justice to her work as a folklorist. The downplaying of her own work can be interpreted through the lens of Joan Radner and Susan Lanser's strategies of coding, more specifically as a way to "claim incompetence."[20] Such claims represent both "a conventional strategy by which the woman writer says on her own behalf what she knows her audience thinks: that she has little right to be writing, and that her work is bound to be inferior"[21] and a subtle "appropriation of male forms,"[22] such as the male-dominated discipline of folklore studies in the late nineteenth century.

---

18 On the "attachment" of Sardinian writers to their island, see Nereide Rudas, *L'isola dei coralli. Itinerari dell'identità* (Rome: Carocci, 2004 [1997]), 158–164, and Gigliola Sulis, "Sardinian Fiction at End of the Twentieth and Beginning of the Twenty-first Century: An Overview and First Assessment," *Incontri: Rivista europea di studi italiani* 32, no. 2 (2017): 69–79.

19 "La raccolta che oggi presentiamo è certamente incompleta. Anzitutto, è il primo lavoro di un novello folk-lorista, a cui manca la coltura e l'erudizione necessaria per rendere più interessante questa specie di lavori. È un volume fatto senza pretese, […] col solo intento d'invogliare altri a seguirlo ed a completare con lavori e ricerche dotte ciò che ora la sua penna giovane e inesperta non può fare." See Grazia Deledda, "Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna: Nuoro," *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* 1, no. 9 (1894): 651–662 (653).

20 Joan Radner and Susan Lanser, "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Special Issue: *Folklore and Feminism*, ed. Bruce Jackson, 100, no. 398 (1987): 412–425 (421).

21 Radner and Lanser, "The Feminist Voice," 422.

22 Radner and Lanser, "The Feminist Voice," 423.

The frequent disregard for Deledda's contributions as a folklorist may have several motivations: certainly, her work as a novelist received more attention partially because it rendered her famous on an international level, but also because, in terms of the hierarchy of cultural productions, writing novels and short stories was conceived as a higher form of creative engagement with the raw material that she collected when she was a younger and less-experienced writer; secondly, this neglect can be linked to the generally dismissive attitude towards women who participated in the collection of regional folklore in post-unification Italy, whose efforts have traditionally been disregarded. Almost a century after her Nobel Prize, it is important to acknowledge that Deledda was not only a talented novelist but also a scrupulous divulgator of Sardinian popular life and traditions, in particular from her hometown Nuoro.

Nuoro is part of the Barbagia region, which literally means the "land of barbarians." The villages in this area, and Nuoro in particular, used to be represented as "depositaries of traditional Sardinian culture and language," an "identity paradigm" that became popular also thanks to Deledda's literary model.[23] The town was described by Deledda in *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro* as "the heart of Sardinia, it is Sardinia itself in all its manifestations. It is the open field where the incipient civilization fights a silent struggle with the strange Sardinian barbarism, so exaggerated beyond the sea."[24] Deledda set Nuoro aside not only from the Italian peninsula but also from Sardinia itself, in a manner similar to other foreign explorers who ventured into this area such as D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and Max Leopold Wagner (1880-1962), who portrayed it as "the innermost regions of the island, less 'contaminated' by foreign cultures, an island within the island."[25]

In her ethnographic sketches, Deledda – rather than denying a view of Barbagia as a locus of exoticism and otherness – builds on the picture of the town that prevailed "beyond the sea." Her ethnographic writings became a means for her to become a "spokesperson or standard-bearer of the insular world."[26] Although her representation of Sardinia tends to eternalise its status

23 Sulis, "Sardinian Fiction," 72.

24 "Il cuore della Sardegna, è la Sardegna stessa con tutte le sue manifestazioni. È il campo aperto dove la civiltà incipiente combatte una lotta silenziosa con la strana barbarie sarda, così esagerata oltre mare." Grazia Deledda, "Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro," 651.

25 Valentina Serra, "Island Geopoetics and the Postcolonial Discourse of Sardinia in German-Language Literature," *Island Studies Journal* 12, no. 2 (2017): 281–290 (284).

26 "Portavoce o alfiere del mondo isolano." Alberto Mario Cirese, *Intellettuali, folklore e istinto di classe. Note su Verga, Deledda, Scotellaro, Gramsci* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 39.

of subalternity, it is also true that Deledda embarked on this project with great determination and contributed through her writing to offer a more multifaceted portrayal of the island. Furthermore, her irony and bitterness towards the state of neglect of her region often seep through her anthropological gaze. In this respect, the rich correspondence between Deledda and De Gubernatis is central to understanding her sense of commitment and her desire to emerge on the national stage as a representative of Sardinian traditions.

Conscious of her own skills and talent but also of the difficulties of her task, in this epistolary exchange Deledda defined herself as "a little witch who inadvertently bewitches everyone but, similarly to witches, never has peace or comfort."[27] De Gubernatis turned into a positive figure for the emerging Sardinian writer. He became not only Deledda's point of reference in Italy but also her friend and mentor. In particular, he was a crucial guide in her autonomous training as a novice folklorist. For instance, in a letter dated 13 July 1893, Deledda explicitly asked him if fairy tales could also be considered as folklore: "Tell me: do fairy tales also play a part in folk-lore? There are some very beautiful ones."[28] In these letters, it is possible to discern her growing familiarity with the different genres of oral traditions and the progress she made thanks to her self-learning process.

Her activity as a folklorist led her to actions that went against the rigid social rules to which women had to comply at the time. Deledda constantly fluctuated between acceptance of these norms and their transgression. For example, when she documented a dense list of Nuorese proverbs, she wrote in a footnote: "Let's leave aside some proverbs that are too dirty to be collected by a young lady."[29] This ironic comment acknowledged her

---

27 "Piccola streghina che strega tutti senza volerlo, ma che, come le streghe, non ha mai pace né conforto." Grazia Deledda in Masini (2007), 96.

28 "Mi dica: c'entrano anche le fiabe nel folk-lore? Ce ne sono di bellissime." Deledda in Masini (2007), 45. For a translation into English of two fairy tales written by Grazia Deledda, "Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio" and "I tre talismani", see Cristina Mazzoni, *The Pomegranates and Other Modern Italian Fairy Tales* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2021), 112–122. For an analysis of "Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio," see Cristina Mazzoni, "'The Loving Re-Education of a Soul': Learning from Fairy Tales through Grazia Deledda and Cristina Campo", *Quaderni d'italianistica* 24, no. 2 (2008): 93–110, and "A Fairy Tale Madonna: Grazia Deledda's 'Our Lady of Good Counsel'", *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 19, no. 1 (2019): 131–145. "I tre talismani" was originally collected by Deledda's friend Maria Manca, founder of the first female periodical in Sardinia, *La donna sarda*.

29 "Lasciamo da parte alcuni proverbi troppo sudici per essere raccolti da una signorina." Grazia Deledda, "Proverbi e detti popolari nuoresi (Proverbios e testos nugoresos)," *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* 1, no. 11 (1894): 821–830 (828).

awareness that including these scandalous proverbs would reflect poorly on her as a young woman. In another letter, she mentioned how her folkloric research led her "in the sheepfolds, in the poorest and darkest houses, between smoke and misery."[30] She also emphasised how she adopted stratagems such as telling lies and pretending to be sick to gather popular remedies, which were an integral part of the folk wisdom that she eagerly wanted to preserve. Her zeal for this search of oral fragments is evident from the very beginning of her correspondence with De Gubernatis.

The Cinderella of Italy

Enthused by De Gubernatis's project to collect popular traditions, on 2 May 1893 Deledda sent a letter to Antonio Scano and Antonio Giuseppe Satta, editors of the journal *Vita Sarda*, which was published *in toto* first on 14 May 1893 in *Vita Sarda* under the title "Per il folk-lore sardo"[31] and then in *Versi e prose giovanili*.[32] Deledda's letter to Scano and Satta, to which she attached the programme of the *Società delle tradizioni popolari italiane*, reveals the importance she placed on this folkloric endeavour. She defined her collection as a "patriotic work" and an "intellectual crusade,"[33] strong terms that convey the seriousness and rigour with which she embarked on this task. She entrusted the editors of *Vita Nuova* to encourage other Sardinians to take part in the project, since "in each village there is at least one student who can succinctly collect the beliefs, the small ancient poems, the domestic customs, the superstitions, the popular festivities."[34] They needed only to gather notes and send them to Deledda, who offered to compile them, order them and cite their sources.

The publication of this appeal would give rise to a misunderstanding with De Gubernatis: it can be deduced from Deledda's reply that the task that De Gubernatis had entrusted to her consisted only in securing new members for the society rather than taking such an official position. De-

30 "Negli ovili, nelle case più povere e più oscure, tra il fumo e la miseria". Deledda in Masini (2007), 101.
31 Grazia Deledda, "Per il folk-lore sardo," *Vita Sarda* 3, no. 8 (1893): 3.
32 Grazia Deledda, *Versi e prose giovanili*, ed. Antonio Scano (Milan: Treves, 1938), 241–242.
33 "Opera patriottica" and '"crociata intellettuale." Deledda, *Versi*, 241.
34 "In ciascun villaggio c'è almeno uno studente che può raccogliere succintamente le credenze, le piccole poesie antiche, gli usi domestici, le superstizioni, le feste popolari." Deledda, *Versi*, 241.

ledda was therefore forced to apologise to him for publishing her unsolicited invitation to Sardinian scholars in *Vita Sarda*. In other words, she was perhaps too hasty and too zealous in her response to De Gubernatis's initiative. After sending her letter to Scano and Satta, Deledda suggestively commented in a letter to De Gubernatis dated 8 May 1893 that

> If I manage to stir my friends, to ignite in them the enthusiasm that I already feel for this work, it is certain that Sardinia will offer an interesting contingent to the study of folk-lore. I promise you that I will do everything possible, everything that is in me. Unfortunately, a strange and painful phenomenon occurs in Sardinia. Sardinians continuously lament that their island is the Italian Cinderella, still waiting for a good fairy or perhaps a Christopher Columbus who may take her from the darkness and from the corner in which she subsists, – they all shout, but when it is necessary to do something, when an intellectual movement is required of them, a little practice for their theories, then no one moves, no one is moved![35]

Deledda's analogy of Sardinia as the Cinderella of Italy, the quintessential fairy-tale heroine in distress, was in line with the tendency among local intellectuals to victimise Sardinia, presenting it as a land in dire need of a saviour. In this respect, the wish for a Christopher Columbus to intervene and save the island from its obscurity situates Sardinia in a colonialist paradigm, resonating with contemporary reassessments of the island's historical past as "semi-colonial."[36]

It is worth noting that Deledda identified with great clarity the age-old ills that afflicted Sardinia. On the one hand, by presenting it as a forgotten,

35 "Se riesco a scuotere i miei amici, a spandere in loro l'entusiasmo che io sento già per questa opera, è certo che la Sardegna porgerà un interessante contingente allo studio del folk-lore. Io le prometto di fare tutto il possibile, tutto quello che sta in me. Pur troppo in Sardegna si verifica uno strano e doloroso fenomeno. I sardi gridano ad ogni istante che l'isola loro è la cenerentola italiana, che aspetta tutt'ora una fata benefica, o magari un Cristoforo Colombo che la tragga dall'oscurità e dall'angolo in cui sussiste, – gridano tutti, ma quando si tratta di fare qualcosa, quando si esige da loro un movimento intellettuale, un po' di pratica per le loro teorie, allora nessuno si muove, nessuno si commuove!". Deledda in Masini (2007), 19. Deledda reported the same metaphor in her letter to Scano and Satta: "Everyone cries out that Sardinia is the Cinderella of Italy, still waiting for her fairy godmother to discover her and take her out of the obscurity in which she lives" ["Tutti gridano che la Sardegna è la Cenerentola d'Italia, che aspetta tutt'ora la fata benefica che la scopra e la tragga dall'oscurità in cui vive"]. Deledda, *Versi*, 241.

36 Birgit Wagner, "La questione sarda. La sfida dell'alterità," in *Aut aut: il postcoloniale in Italia, 349*, ed. Giovanni Leghissa (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2011), 10–29.

exploited and mistreated region, completely detached from the continent and abandoned to its fate, she described it as if it were a land of colonial conquest, linking its decline and its possible salvation to external political and historical causes. On the other hand, she did not ignore the endogenous roots of this decadence. Aware of the importance of gathering popular traditions, Deledda saw in De Gubernatis's folkloric initiative an opportunity for her island, and herself, to fit into a continental and international context. She lucidly interpreted this enterprise as a unique chance to enhance not only the Sardinian territory but also its people, connecting them to an extensive and ever-expanding cultural network. A few weeks later, she wrote to De Gubernatis:

> Therefore, since the great Sardinians are disheartened and none of them want to take charge of this enterprise, I place myself at the head of this army that is beginning to move. And I hope. I am very tiny, you know, I am tiny even in comparison with Sardinian women who are very small, but I am bold and courageous like a giant and I am not afraid of intellectual battles. Now I have put myself in this one and I hope to win it. In Sardinia I am well known and loved, especially by young people. Now I have appealed to them and I am sure that everyone will answer me, not so much for the love of country as for love of me.[37]

Deledda was ready to assume this cultural and political mission personally, becoming its chief interpreter. She concluded her ardent letter to Scano and Satta with a tinge of humility, a recurrent *topos* for women writers which implicitly reflected the clash between her apparent unpretentiousness and the importance of the task she had taken in. She asked once more to help "this little worker who has dedicated her life and thoughts to Sardinia, and who constantly dreams to see her region, if not better known, freed at least from the slander coming from overseas"[38] – a dream that emerges preponderantly in her ethnographic sketch "La donna in Sardegna".

---

37 "Dunque, giacché i grandi sardi sono sconfortati e nessuno di essi vuol mettersi a capo di questa impresa, io stessa mi pongo in testa a questo esercito che comincia a muoversi. E spero. Sono piccina piccina, sa, sono piccola anche in confronto delle donne sarde che sono piccolissime, ma sono ardita e coraggiosa come un gigante e non temo le battaglie intellettuali. Ora mi son messa in questa e spero di vincerla. In Sardegna sono molto conosciuta ed amata, specialmente dai giovani. Ora io ho fatto l'appello ad essi e son sicura che tutti mi risponderanno, non tanto per amor di patria quanto per amor mio." Deledda in Masini (2007), 25.

38 "Questa piccola lavoratrice che ha consacrato la sua vita e i suoi pensieri alla Sardegna, e che sogna ad ogni istante di vederla, se non più conosciuta, liberata almeno dalle calunnie d'oltre mare". Deledda, *Versi*, 242.

The Woman in Late-Nineteenth-Century Sardinia

In a letter dated 8 November 1892, Deledda informed De Gubernatis that she would immediately start to "write the article about Sardinian women, putting in it, as you are pleased to write to me, all my knowledge and all the immense love I feel for my picturesque and unfortunate country."[39] "La donna in Sardegna," the first article to mark her collaboration with De Gubernatis and therefore her venture into the field of folklore studies, was published on 15 March 1893 in *Natura ed Arte*, accompanied by six illustration of Sardinian female peasants dressed in traditional fashion.[40] Deledda's spirit of observation and awareness of societal changes emerges in these lines, as well as her acute prescience of the gradual enculturing process that was going to radically alter the Sardinian *fin-de-siècle* landscape.

Although she never proclaimed to be a feminist, her sensitivity towards the condition of women is evident not only in her writings but also in her participation in the "Primo Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane" in 1908.[41] Not coincidentally, Deledda dedicated the incipit of the article to Eleonora d'Arborea, Sardinian medieval heroine and promulgator of the *Carta de logu* in 1392, a legislative code of great historical value. By placing her at the beginning of her discussion around women in Sardinia, Deledda recognised her importance as an extraordinary historical female figure in the island. The excursus continued with a wide-ranging investigation of Sardinian lower-class women, whose various typologies are skilfully portrayed by connecting their characterisation to the towns and villages to which they belong.

Deledda aroused the readers' curiosity by portraying typical Sardinian women through vivid images that nearly transform these descriptions into *tableaux vivant*. She explicitly focused on lower-class women rather than the aristocratic "gentlewomen" because the former were the ones she had studied in depth, while she knew the latter only "from afar or for reputation."[42] The first portrait she delineated is that of a Sardinian woman strongly linked to tradition, without ambitions: "firmly

39 "Scrivere l'articolo sulle donne sarde, mettendoci, come lei si compiace scrivermi, tutto il mio sapere e tutto l'immenso amore che nutro per il mio paese tanto pittoresco quanto disgraziato." Deledda in Masini (2007), 13.

40 Grazia Deledda, "La donna in Sardegna," *Natura ed Arte* 1, no. 8 (1893): 750–762.

41 On Deledda and the feminist discourse, see Susan Briziarelli, "Woman as Outlaw: Grazia Deledda and the Politics of Gender," *Modern Language Notes* 110, no. 1 (1995): 20–31.

42 "Da lontano o per fama." Deledda, "La donna in Sardegna," 762.

attached to tradition, she follows her mother's habits, customs, ideas, in the same way as her mother had preserved those of her mother, and in her maternal education she will pass them on to her children and her grandchildren."[43] Despite describing lower-class women as uneducated, Deledda showed respect for their beliefs and admiration for their diligence. Though it is possible to discern her self-distancing from them, it can also be assumed that she was attempting to build on the previous knowledge and prejudices of her target continental readers in order to offer a more nuanced depiction of Sardinian womanhood.

In conjunction with an overview of local female costumes, the geography of the Sardinian territory, with its mountains, vegetation, colours and flavours, is outlined. Deledda would return to these ethnographic descriptions in a subsequent article on "Tipi e paesaggi sardi," published in 1901 in *Nuova Antologia*. In a positivist fashion, she seemed to acknowledge an intimate connection between geography and social conditions, which in turn influenced women's characterisation. She observed: "each [woman] reflects the environment in which she lives, the costume she wears, the landscape that surrounds her;"[44] "it is always the environment, always the new external manifestation of existence, which exerts influence."[45] It is tempting to interpret statements such as "each region has a specialty, a reflection of nature in the face and spirit of the woman"[46] as a feminisation of the geography of the Sardinian landscape. However, in Deledda's view, as elucidated in the subsequent passages of the article, women were far from being a mere background or reflection of Sardinian nature. Their essential function on a societal level is underlined: "everywhere the Sardinian woman works."[47] Women were the pillars of the familial and social structure: "And they work and work, poor women, exposed to the bad weather, reaping under the sun, harvesting grapes, gathering olives in winter, – in mines, in the

43 "Attaccata saldamente alla tradizione segue gli usi, i costumi, le idee di sua madre, come questa aveva conservato quelle della madre sua, e nell'educazione materna le trasmetterà ai suoi figli ed ai suoi nipoti." Ivi, 751.

44 "Ciascuna [donna] riflette l'ambiente in cui vive, il costume che indossa, il paesaggio che la circonda." Ivi, 752.

45 "È sempre l'ambiente, sempre la nuova esterna manifestazione della esistenza, che influisce." Ivi, 754.

46 "Ogni regione ha una specialità, un riflesso della natura nel volto e nello spirito della donna". Ivi, 755.

47 "Dappertutto la donna sarda lavora." Ivi, 757.

manufacturing field, in the vegetable gardens and at home."[48] Her discussion on local women is interspersed with verses of typical female songs in Sardinian, followed by translations in Italian in the footnotes. These *muttos*, improvised love rhymes, reflect Deledda's conception of poetry as "the history of the people."[49]

In her first sketch, Deledda also showcased a knowledge of the economic and social relations existing between city and countryside, namely between the progressive cities of Cagliari and Sassari and the inland with its wild mountains and remote villages, where development and progress were more difficult to attain. The villages were "not yet crossed by the microscopic railways that the government has granted us,"[50] a significant aside in which Deledda's resentment towards the unjust post-unification government comes to the surface. Through this sarcastic remark the writer alluded to the historical issues related to the debated *Questione sarda* (Sardinian Question), which locates itself within the broader *Questione meridionale* (Southern Question) in Italy, a phenomenon that generated a collective intellectual effort to understand the socio-cultural causes of the perceived backwardness of the *Mezzogiorno*.[51]

The Barbagia region is described as the most picturesque of Sardinia: the costumes are generally described as "barbaric" but for the most important occasions "there are clothes of a supreme delicacy, which recall the sweetness of chestnut leaves."[52] Nuoro, located in the heart of Barbagia, was called the "Athens of Sardinia"[53] for its cultural liveliness and for being the place of birth of several intellectuals such as Sebastiano Satta (1867-1914), Antonio Ballero (1864-1932) and Francesco Ciusa (1883-1949). Deledda underlined the idea that Nuoro was

---

48 "E lavorano, lavorano, povere donne, esposte a tutte le intemperie, mietendo sotto il sol-leone, vendemmiando, raccogliendo ulive in inverno, – nelle miniere, nelle lavorazioni, negli orti e in casa." Ivi, 756.

49 "La storia dei popoli". Ivi, 759.

50 "Non ancora solcati dalle microscopiche ferrovie che il governo ci ha regalato." Ivi, 751.

51 Deledda did not shy away from expressing her criticism towards the governmental economic policies implemented in the island. For instance, in the short story "Colpi di Scure" (1905), she sharply criticised the exploitation and deforestation provoked by the introduction of the railway system in Sardinia. In this respect, see Fiorenzo Caterini, *Colpi di scure e sensi di colpa. Storia del disboscamento della Sardegna dalle origini a oggi* (Sassari: Carlo Delfino Editore, 2013).

52 "Barbari", "ci sono vestiti di una delicatezza suprema, che richiamano al pensiero la dolcezza delle foglie dei castagni." Deledda, "La donna in Sardegna," 754.

53 "Atene della Sardegna." Deledda, "Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna: Nuoro," 651.

one of the few Sardinian towns touched by modernity. Consequently, female attitudes were more civilised there: it was therefore not unusual to find "a woman of the folk with a newspaper or a novel lost in her basket of sewing or even to hear her absorbed in comments on political and administrative elections."[54] Deledda's irony or perhaps her self-complacency in being a native woman of Nuoro emerges between the lines.

In "La donna in Sardegna", the young Deledda gave further confirmation of her ability as a versatile writer and acute observer of insular folklore. She ended this ethnographic sketch by claiming that her studies aimed exclusively at giving a picture of the women of the people and not of the women of the bourgeoisie, among whom there were women who were becoming progressively more accustomed to modernity:

> We also have women who attend high school and prepare themselves for the struggles of science and art, women who paint, sing, play, study, think, write. They are in small number if compared to the immense space of the island, – but they are enough if compared to the percentage of the population; – and they represent the vague gleam of a new era, the dreamed Sardinian Risorgimento, destined to be mothers, teachers, guides to a new, healthy, strong and intelligent generation that will raise Sardinia from the literary, artistic, political, economic and social darkness in which the island lies.[55]

It is a conclusive message of hope mixed with bitterness, a hope placed in the women of the Sardinian bourgeoisie that, by cultivating arts, letters and politics, could transfer to the children of the twentieth century "a healthy and strong culture."[56] These final references to middle-class women are particularly significant: it is not far-fetched to imagine that in this passage Deledda was thinking about herself and her own positioning within Sardinian society as a woman destined to become the chief listener,

54 "Qualche popolana col giornale o il romanzo smarrito nel panierino del suo cucito o, addirittura, nel sentirla occupata di elezioni politiche e amministrative." Deledda, "La donna in Sardegna," 754.

55 "Per ciò abbiamo anche noi donne che frequentano il liceo e si preparano alle lotte della scienza e dell'arte, abbiamo donne che dipingono, che cantano, che suonano, che studiano, che pensano, che scrivono. Sono in numero ristretto per l'immenso spazio dell'isola, – ma sono abbastanza in confronto al numero della popolazione; – e sono il vago barlume precursore di un'êra novella, del sognato Risorgimento sardo, destinate qual sono ad essere madri, maestre, guide ad una nuova, sana, forte e intelligente generazione che solleverà la Sardegna dal tenebrore letterario, artistico, politico, economico e sociale in cui giace." Ivi, 762.

56 "Una sana e forte cultura." Ivi, 762.

observer and teller of its popular life. Through these optimistic words, she voiced her dream of helping her native island to resurge from the decadence which it had been fatally confined to up to that point.

Deledda's cultural formation was nourished by the folkloric substratum that connected her to Sardinia. In her novels, she would reinterpret and re-propose the corpus of traditions and legends that she collected in her youth beyond the borders of her island, as a vital lymph for her creative imagination and for the readership of the new Italian nation. Her contribution as a collector is inserted in the transnational quest for popular traditions that was gaining a foothold in the late nineteenth century across Europe. In Italy, the fragmented nature of the new-born Italian state engendered a multiplicity of centripetal contributions to folklore studies which were fuelled by a complex mosaic of deeply regional perspectives. In this regard, it is significant that the first collection of Italian folktales would be published only in the mid-twentieth century by Italo Calvino. Prior to Calvino's *Fiabe italiane* (1956), the publication of folklore collections in Italy, despite being a prolific phenomenon, was largely distinguished by a regional denominator.

Such drives, though present throughout the Italian peninsula, were particularly prolific in the South and in the islands. Deledda's role as a folklorist was grounded in these polycentric endeavours to gather the multifaceted Italian regional traditions. In his collection of Sicilian fairy tales, Giuseppe Pitrè conjured an evocative parallel between tradition and the sea, which has been thoroughly interpreted by Eveljn Ferraro: "Tradition is unique but varied, mobile, multiform like the sea."[57] Decades later, Calvino himself would resort to a "sea metaphor" to describe his leap into the abyss of nineteenth-century folklore.[58] For Deledda, Pitrè, De Gubernatis and all the nineteenth-century men and women of letters who participated in this

57 "La tradizione è unica ma varia, mobile, multiforme come il mare." Giuseppe Pitrè, *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*, 4 vols, trans. Bianca Lazzaro, introduced by Jack Zipes, preface by Giovanni Puglisi (Rome: Donzelli, 2013 [1875], vol. 1), 52. As Ferraro observed, tales and traditions "emerge from the same ancient sea, in disparate shapes and names, and across borders." See Eveljn Ferraro, "'La tradizione è come il mare': Giuseppe Pitrè's Transnational Approach to Folk and Fairy Tales in the New Italy," *Italian Studies* (2022): 1–13 (10).

58 Italo Calvino, Introduction to *Fiabe italiane, raccolte dalla tradizione popolare durante gli ultimi cento anni e trascritte in lingua dai vari dialetti*, 3 vols (Milan, Oscar Mondadori, 2015 [1956], vol. 1), X. On Calvino's sea metaphor, see Elena Emma Sottilotta, "From Avalon to Southern Italy: The Afterlife of Fata Morgana in Laura Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen* (1870)," *Women Language Literature in Italy / Donne Lingua Letteratura in Italia*, no. 3 (2021): 103–121 (112).

search for oral traditions, the act of collecting folklore was a means to participate in the cultural life of the time on a local, regional and (trans)national level. These efforts can be reassessed as an expression of the "mutable and diversifying locality" that distinguishes the Mediterranean basin and that makes it "simultaneously suspended, stretched, and stratified within a heterogeneous modernity."[59]

As a whole, Deledda's folkloric quest was not only an important apprenticeship but also a performative means to make herself and *her* Sardinia known in the Italian peninsula and beyond, from the heart of the Mediterranean Sea to the world. Her venture into folklore studies gave her the opportunity to place herself at the centre of the investigation into the habits and customs of her people by successfully setting the stage for her ethnographic performance and by poetically reinforcing her own bond with Sardinia, while collecting in person a folkloric repertoire that will eventually permeate the narrative fabric of her novels and short stories. Her contribution to late nineteenth-century folklore studies ultimately constituted a fertile ground on which she drew heavily for her subsequent production, transfiguring and transfusing for literary ends the rich material drawn directly from the voice of her own people.

Bibliography

Atzori, Mario and Maria Margherita Satta. "Antologia delle tradizioni popolari in Sardegna." In *Prima etnografia d'Italia: gli studi di folklore tra '800 e '900 nel quadro europeo*, edited by Gian Luigi Bravo, 79-107. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2013.

Bellantonio, Loredana. "Riflessioni sull'opera di Giuseppe Pitrè nel primo centenario della scomparsa. Gli scritti inediti." *Palaver* 6, no. 1 (2017): 136–146.

Briziarelli, Susan. "Woman as Outlaw: Grazia Deledda and the Politics of Gender." *Modern Language Notes* 110, no 1 (1995): 20–31.

Butler, Martin and Gigliola Sulis. "A Tempest between Naples and Sardinia: Gianfranco Cabiddu's *La stoffa dei sogni*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (2019): 309–340.

Calvino, Italo. *Fiabe italiane, raccolte dalla tradizione popolare durante gli ultimi cento anni e trascritte in lingua dai vari dialetti*, 3 vols. Milan, Oscar Mondadori, 2015 [1956].

Caterini, Fiorenzo. *Colpi di scure e sensi di colpa. Storia del disboscamento della Sardegna dalle origini a oggi.* Sassari: Carlo Delfino Editore, 2013.

---

59 Ian Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

Chambers, Ian. *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008.
Cirese, Alberto Mario. *Intellettuali, folklore e istinto di classe. Note su Verga, Deledda, Scotellaro, Gramsci*. Turin: Einaudi, 1976.
Cocchiara, Giuseppe. *Pitrè, la Sicilia e il folklore*. Messina: D'Alma, 1951.
Cocchiara, Giuseppe. *Storia del folklore in Europa*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2016 [1952].
Croce, Benedetto. "Grazia Deledda." In *La letteratura della nuova Italia. Saggi critici*, 6 vols, vol. 6, 317–326. Bari: Laterza, 1940.
Deledda, Grazia. "Per il folk-lore sardo." *Vita Sarda* 3, no. 8 (1893): 3.
Deledda, Grazia. "La donna in Sardegna." *Natura ed Arte* 1, no. 8 (1893): 750–762.
Deledda, Grazia. "Preghiere: lauda di Sant'Antonio." *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* 1, no. 1 (1893): 62–68.
Deledda, Grazia. "Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro in Sardegna: Nuoro." *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* 1, no. 9 (1894): 651–662.
Deledda, Grazia. "Proverbi e detti popolari nuoresi (Proverbios e testos nugoresos)." *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane* 1, no. 11 (1894): 821–830.
Deledda, Grazia. *Versi e prose giovanili*, edited by Antonio Scano. Milan: Treves, 1938.
Deledda, Grazia. *Tradizioni popolari di Sardegna: credenze magiche, antiche feste, superstizioni e riti di una volta nei più significativi scritti etnografici dell'autrice sarda*, edited by Dolores Turchi. Rome: Newton Compton, 1995.
Delitala, Enrica. "Grazia Deledda e la 'Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane'", in *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea. Atti del seminario di studi 'Grazia Deledda e la cultura sarda fra '800 e '900'*, edited by Ugo Collu, 2 vols, vol. 1, 307–312. Nuoro: Consorzio per la Pubblica Lettura "Sebastiano Satta", 1992.
Fabbri, Lorenzo. "Angelo De Gubernatis e la mitologia comparata." *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 83, no. 1 (2017): 143–169.
Farnetti, Monica, ed. *Chi ha paura di Grazia Deledda? Traduzione, ricezione, comparazione*. Pavona: Iacobelli, 2010.
Febvre, Lucien. *A Geographical Introduction to History*. Translated by E. G. Mountford and J. H. Paxton. London and New York: Routledge, 1996 [1922].
Ferraro, Eveljn. "'La tradizione è come il mare': Giuseppe Pitrè's Transnational Approach to Folk and Fairy Tales in the New Italy." *Italian Studies* (2022): 1–13 (10).
Gramsci, Antonio. *Quaderni del Carcere*, 4 vols, edited by Valentino Gerratana. Turin: Einaudi, 1975.
Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols, edited by Joseph A. Buttigieg. Translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
Gunzberg, Lynn M. "Ruralism, Folklore, and Grazia Deledda's Novels." *Modern Language Studies* 13, no. 3 (1983): 112–122.
Heyer-Caput, Margherita. *Grazia Deledda's Dance of Modernity*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008.

Hiller, Jonathan R. “The Enduring Vision of Biodeterministic Sardinian Inferiority in the Works of Grazia Deledda.” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012): 271–287.

Lavinio, Cristina. “Primi appunti per una revisione critica dei giudizi sulla lingua di Grazia Deledda.” In *Grazia Deledda nella cultura contemporanea. Atti del seminario di studi ‘Grazia Deledda e la cultura sarda fra ’800 e ’900’*, edited by Ugo Collu, 2 vols, vol. 1, 69–82. Nuoro: Consorzio per la Pubblica Lettura “Sebastiano Satta”, 1992.

Lavinio, Cristina. “«Era un silenzio che ascoltava». Grazia Deledda tra leggende e fiabe.” In *Oralità narrativa, cultura popolare e arte. Grazia Deledda e Dario Fo. Atti del convegno, Nuoro, 10-11 dicembre 2018*, edited by Cristina Lavinio, 73–93. Nuoro: ISRE Edizioni, 2019.

Masini, Roberta, ed. *Grazia Deledda. Lettere ad Angelo De Gubernatis (1892-1909).* Cagliari: CUEC, 2007.

Matvejević, Predrag. *Breviario mediterraneo.* Milan: Garzanti, 2004 [1987].

Mazzoni, Cristina. “‘The Loving Re-Education of a Soul’: Learning from Fairy Tales through Grazia Deledda and Cristina Campo.” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 24, no. 2 (2008): 93–110.

Mazzoni, Cristina. “A Fairy Tale Madonna: Grazia Deledda’s ‘Our Lady of Good Counsel’.” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 19, no. 1 (2019): 131–145.

Mazzoni, Cristina. *The Pomegranates and Other Italian Fairy Tales*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021.

Niceforo, Alfredo. *La delinquenza in Sardegna*. Palermo: Remo Sandron, 1897.

Perricone, Rosario, ed. *Pitrè e Salomone Marino. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi a 100 anni dalla morte*. Palermo: Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2017.

Piredda, Benvenuta. *Le tradizioni popolari sarde in Grazia Deledda*. Sassari: Edes, 2010.

Pitrè, Giuseppe. *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*, 4 vols, introduced by Jack Zipes, preface by Giovanni Puglisi. Translated by Bianca Lazzaro. Rome: Donzelli, 2013 [1875].

Radner, Joan N., and Susan S. Lanser. “The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, Special Issue: *Folklore and Feminism*, edited by Bruce Jackson, 100, no. 398 (1987): 412–425.

Rudas, Nereide. *L’isola dei coralli. Itinerari dell’identità.* Rome: Carocci, 2004 [1997].

Serra, Valentina. “Island Geopoetics and the Postcolonial Discourse of Sardinia in German-Language Literature.” *Island Studies Journal* 12, no. 2 (2017): 281–290.

Sottilotta, Elena Emma. “From Avalon to Southern Italy: The Afterlife of Fata Morgana in Laura Gonzenbach’s *Sicilianische Märchen* (1870).” *Women Language Literature in Italy / Donne Lingua Letteratura in Italia*, no. 3 (2021): 103–121.

Sulis, Gigliola. “Sardinian Fiction at End of the Twentieth and Beginning of the Twenty-first Century: An Overview and First Assessment.” *Incontri: Rivista europea di studi italiani* 32, no. 2 (2017): 69–79.

Wagner, Birgit. "La questione sarda. La sfida dell'alterità." In *Aut aut: il postcoloniale in Italia, 349*, edited Giovanni Leghissa, 10–29. Milan: il Saggiatore, 2011.

Zipes, Jack. *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

MOTHERHOOD AND THE ’NDRANGHETA IN *LA TERRA DEI SANTI*

Veronica Vegna*

Abstract

Motherhood is central to the existence and continuity of the mafia due to a woman’s ability to procreate and raise her offspring according to the organization’s code of conduct. In the case of the ’ndrangheta, a type of Italian mafia whose structure is based on familial ties, motherhood contributes to its particular cohesive and resilient configuration. In cinematic portrayals of the mafias, scenes of mothers crying over the bodies of their dead sons are common. In Fernando Muraca’s *La terra dei santi* (2015), such a scene acts as a potent reminder of the coexistence of love and death in the day-to-day life of a “mafia woman,” and more so if she is a mother. This film centers on the theme of motherhood and departs from the ancillary narrative functions female characters traditionally play in movies set in mafia contexts. *La terra dei santi* joins other films in their increasing attention to women with regard to Italian organized crime. Among recent movies about the ’ndrangheta with female protagonists are *Lea* (2015) by Marco Tullio Giordana, *A Chiara* (2021) by Jonas Carpignano, and *Una femmina* (2022) by Francesco Costabile. Other films, such as Francesco Munzi’s *Anime nere* (2014), Giacomo Campiotti’s *Liberi di scegliere* (2019), and Enzo Monteleone’s *Duisburg – linea di sangue* (2019) draw attention to family ties and women’s key roles in the criminal organization. The TV series *Bang Bang Baby* (2022), directed by Michele Alhaique, Giuseppe Bonito, and Margherita Ferri, also features women as central figures in the ’ndrangheta underworld. The growing number of these female portrayals suggests an expanding interest in women and organized crime. News headlines and books on women involved in mafia activities or turning into State’s witnesses are becoming increasingly common. The media’s attention on this topic also seems to coincide with a greater consideration gender has received in mafia studies. Focusing on narrative strategies, aesthetic choices and the construction of characters in *La terra dei santi*, this article analyzes the theme of motherhood – seen as an institution engulfing female subjectivity in the context of the mafia – and its conflicting interaction, central to Muraca’s film, with mothering – the process of caring for and protecting children like a mother.

Keywords: ’ndrangheta, women, motherhood, cinema, mafia

* University of Chicago

Motherhood is central to the existence and continuity of the mafia due to a woman's ability to procreate and raise her offspring according to the organization's code of conduct. In the case of the 'ndrangheta, a type of Italian mafia whose structure is based on blood ties, motherhood contributes to its particularly cohesive and resilient configuration.[1] Familial ties consolidate power – for instance, through arranged marriages – and convey stability to the 'ndrangheta. In cinematic portrayals of the mafias, scenes of mothers crying over the bodies of their dead sons are common. In Fernando Muraca's *La terra dei santi* (2015), such a scene acts as a potent reminder of the coexistence of love and death in the day-to-day life of a "mafia woman," and more so if she is a mother. This film centers on women and the theme of motherhood, and thus departs from the ancillary narrative functions female characters traditionally play in movies set in mafia contexts (in line with the men-only mafia affiliation in real life and, more generally, with the patriarchal society we live in). *La terra dei santi* joins other films of the past two decades in their increasing attention to women with regard to Italian organized crime.[2] This article analyzes how, in Muraca's film, motherhood – seen as an institution engulfing female subjectivity in the context of the mafia – is presented in conflicting interaction with mothering – the process of caring for and protecting children like a mother. In particular, it focuses on the narrative and aesthetic choices that underscore the construction of the main female characters in relation to that conflict.

Mafia and the Female Subject

The growing number of female portrayals (sometimes entirely fictional, other times based on true stories) with regard to Italian organized crime is

---

1 In this article, in addition to the generic term "mafia," I am also using the plural "mafias" to highlight the existence of a variety of Italian mafia-type organizations, with the 'ndrangheta, the Camorra, and the Sicilian mafia or Cosa Nostra being the most prominent.

2 Muraca's 2008 film, *È tempo di cambiare*, also explores the theme of women and the 'ndrangheta. Among recent movies about the 'ndrangheta with female protagonists are *Lea* (2015) by Marco Tullio Giordana, *A Chiara* (2021) by Jonas Carpignano, and *Una femmina* (2022) by Francesco Costabile. Other films, such as Francesco Munzi's *Anime nere* (2014), Giacomo Campiotti's *Liberi di scegliere* (2019), and Enzo Monteleone's *Duisburg – linea di sangue* (2019) draw attention to family ties and women's key roles in the criminal organization. The TV series *Bang Bang Baby* (2022), directed by Michele Alhaique, Giuseppe Bonito, and Margherita Ferri, also features women as central figures in the 'ndrangheta underworld.

not confined to cinema and television. News headlines on women and the Italian mafias have become more common, and the media’s increasing attention on this topic seems to coincide with a greater consideration gender has received in mafia studies. Starting in the 1990s, a number of authors (Renate Siebert, Anna Puglisi, Alessandra Dino, Teresa Principato, Clare Longrigg, Girolamo Lo Verso, and Innocenzo Fiore, to name some)[3] have investigated the complex female role with regard to organized crime, often centering on mothers and their multifaceted function, from indoctrinators of their children to Erinyes inciting revenge in mafia feuds. Some of this research has also pointed to instances of women playing active roles in mafia business – for example, within drug trafficking or as messengers – and occupying positions of borrowed power in conjunction with the phenomenon of *pentitismo*[4] and its destabilizing effect on the organization.

When discussing male domination over women, Deborah Cameron argues that “virtually all accounts of the origins of patriarchy suggest that a significant factor in its emergence was the desire of men to exploit and control women’s reproductive capacities.”[5] Such instrumental use and abuse of maternity is of paramount importance for the totalitarian male-dominated mafias, where women are often treated like property and, as mothers, are in charge of the primary socialization of their children according to the organization’s rules. But it is also a double-edged sword for the organization itself, in the case of mothers who decide to flee from the day-to-day violence and death to rescue themselves and their offspring. However, in certain cases this decision leads to a separation from their children, who are sometimes used by their relatives to convince them to recant their statement. In the words of journalist Lirio Abbate, “This is the most painful wound for those women of the ’ndrangheta who decide to give evidence to the State authorities; what makes them most vulnerable is their maternal love.”[6]

3 Among the many scholars who have contributed to shed light on the role of “mafia women” are also Ombretta Ingrascì, Felia Allum, and Liliana Madeo. Several essays on this and related topics can be found in “Donne di mafia” (2011), Serenata (2014), and Fiandaca (2007).

4 The so-called “pentiti” (literally “those who repented”) are mafia members who decide to collaborate with the Italian State and thus betray the criminal organization.

5 Cameron, p. 33.

6 Abbate, p. 202. “È questa la ferita più dolorosa per le donne di ’ndrangheta che scelgono di collaborare con la giustizia, è l’amore materno che più le rende vulnerabili.” All translations from Italian into English are mine.

That same love can also be a driving force to embrace legality. Maternity is, indeed, an important element in the fight against organized crime, as the increasing number of female witnesses from mafia families, who are oftentimes mothers, shows. The list of mothers who have rejected the 'ndrangheta and, in some cases, paid with their lives includes Giuseppina Pesce, Lea Garofalo, Maria Concetta Cacciola, Annina Lo Bianco, and many others (see Iantosca 2013, Abbate 2014, Ursetta 2016, Kahn and Véron 2017, Perry 2018, Lauricella 2019, Pickering-Iazzi 2019, Cozzi 2019, and Gigliotti 2022). These are stories of women used as bargaining chips in arranged marriages to create alliances between families and consolidate power; of domestic violence and rape; of murders (in some cases possibly disguised as suicides) in the name of family honor; of vengeance and "omertà" (the code of silence); of women who rebel and others who are complicit and loyal to the mafia/family; of parents sentencing their daughters to death and brothers killing their own sisters.[7] As Dina Lauricella puts it, "If you are a woman of a family of the 'ndrangheta you are not allowed to make mistakes, any behavior opposed to the self-imposed parastatal rules has direct consequences on your last name. Therefore, to preserve the honor of the 'ndrina or the family (which are the same thing), they do not think twice about killing you and make your dead body disappear."[8]

Women and Mothers in La terra dei santi

La terra dei santi is not based specifically on any of these stories, but evokes some of them by centering on the complex condition of being a mother in the 'ndrangheta. Set around 2012-2013 in Calabria, but shot in Manfredonia, Puglia, *La terra dei santi* revolves, in part, around the

---

7 Some women, however, actively contribute to the mafia business. In the 'ndrangheta, a woman who "distinguishes" herself in the organization's criminal activities can receive the title of "sorella d'omertà" (sister of omertà). There are also examples of female leadership, such as that of Maria Serraino, who ran her family/clan in Milan and was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1997, or Aurora Spanò, who played a central role in the clan's business and was sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2015 (a harsher sentence than that of her husband).

8 Lauricella, p. viii. "Se sei una donna di una famiglia di 'Ndrangheta non puoi sbagliare, ogni atteggiamento contrario alle regole parastatali autoimposte ha conseguenze dirette sul cognome che porti e pertanto, al fine di salvaguardare l'onore della 'ndrina, o della famiglia, che sono la stessa cosa, non ci si pensa due volte a farti fuori e a far sparire il tuo cadavere."

predicament of Assunta (interpreted by Daniela Marra), the 35-year-old widow of a member of the ’ndrangheta and mother of two sons. At the beginning of the film, she is forced by local boss Alfredo to marry her brother-in-law, Nando. In addition to her children – Giuseppe, 17 (who ends up joining the ’ndrangheta and getting killed in a mafia feud) and Franceschino, 5 – she gets pregnant as a result of an unwanted and violent sexual encounter with her newlywed husband. Assunta is also the younger sister of Caterina (Lorenza Indovina), the wife of Alfredo. Contrary to a common perception of wives of mafiosi as unaware of their husbands’ criminal activities, Caterina actively participates in the organization’s drug trafficking while her husband hides from justice in a country house and in a concealed room of the family-owned supermarket, a front for their illegal business. Both sisters contribute to the criminal enterprise, with Caterina benefitting from money, power, and respect deriving from her status of wife of a mafia boss: in one scene, Caterina gives mafia-related orders to some members of the organization and checks large quantities of drug hidden under bags of pasta; in the same scene, Assunta counts money presumably coming from drug trafficking, while indoctrinating her youngest son with her anti-law views.

Assunta and Caterina are not the only central characters of *La terra dei santi*. In what might seem a dialectic opposition, they face a female judge (interpreted by Valeria Solarino) from the north of Italy who has come to Calabria to fight the ’ndrangheta. Evoking Captain Bellodi in Leonardo Sciascia’s *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) for her origins and role, determination and integrity, she resorts to the extreme measure of taking the children of the ’ndrangheta away from their families to give them a better future.[9] This character representing legality does not have a name in the movie and gets addressed as “giudice” (judge) or “dottoressa” (meaning someone holding a university degree). However, in the film’s screenplay her name is Vittoria, and in *Il cielo a metà* (2014), a novel where Monica Zapelli – screenwriter of *La terra dei santi* together with Muraca – presents a similar story, her full name is Vittoria Bollani. In this article, I will either use her first name from the screenplay or her profession.

Oppositions are not limited to the film’s central characters. They can be found also in some of the film’s aesthetic and narrative choices, where contrasts and, in some cases, dualism play a role at various levels: from

9 Starting in 2012, the Court of Reggio Calabria has adopted this measure in certain cases in order to distance minors from their mafia families and expose them to a culture of legality in environments outside the region of Calabria. In Carpignano’s film *A Chiara*, this measure is applied to the film’s protagonist.

the frequent crosscuts creating parallels between characters to the chiaroscuro of the desaturated photography underscoring the dichotomy and conflicts of the storyline, and to the succession of narrative moments with a similar mise-en-scène or action but opposite protagonists which establish analogies while encouraging comparisons. The concurrent use of some of these elements in *La terra dei santi* is apparent from the start and contributes to position the three central female characters in relation to each other through their differences and similarities.

The film begins with a woman jogging by the beach. The camera provides a fragmented view of her body with subsequent close-ups of her feet, legs, chest, back, and profile in motion. No frontal shot is included and the character's identity (Vittoria) is not revealed at this point. A crosscut introduces the viewer to an indoor setting where two sisters (Assunta and Caterina) discuss the imposed marriage that the younger of the two begrudgingly accepts later that day by tying the knot with the brother of her dead husband.[10] Assunta only wears some lingerie in this scene while her wedding dress is displayed on a coat hanger. Her undergarments contrast with Caterina being fully dressed, visually highlighting the two sisters' conflicting position with regard to the arranged marriage: Assunta's rejection, on the one hand, and Caterina's approval, on the other.

The abrupt transition between these two initial moments – the jogging scene and the conversation between the two sisters – clearly marks a change in circumstances and contexts. However, Assunta's swift entrance into the scene from right to left creates some continuity with the previous scene where Vittoria runs in the same direction. Additionally, her dark hair similar to Vittoria's suggests a visual analogy between these two characters. Both scenes share a similar gray/bluish chromatic range in the background which aesthetically contributes to establish a parallel between them. Moreover, Assunta's partially exposed body conjures up the camera's insistence on Vittoria's body parts in the previous shots.

The beginning of the film is just one of a number of instances in which parallel editing, analogies between actions, and in some cases the whole mise-en-scène[11] encourage an initial association between characters which, however, results in highlighting their differences by inviting the spectator

10 Within the 'ndrangheta, endogamy is indeed a common practice aiming at strengthening the criminal organization (Gratteri and Nicaso p. 66).

11 E.g., a shot of Assunta in a car at the end of a scene is similar to a shot of a car with Vittoria in it at the beginning of a subsequent scene; Assunta seating at a table at the end of another scene is followed by a shot of Vittoria also seating at a table; a scene of Vittoria running on the beach suddenly cuts to Caterina working out on a treadmill.

to draw comparisons between them. In the initial sequence, for example, once the viewer realizes that the running woman is a judge and Assunta is the sister-in-law of a mafia boss, their differences – marked by their positions with regard to the law and their views on motherhood – become more apparent.

Motherhood and Mothering in Conflict

The film conveys the conflict between its central characters in a variety of ways. The recurring contrast between indoor and outdoor settings, for instance, in some of the scenes acquires significance through the opposition between the judge’s free will and mobility – her running routine being an expression of the latter – and Assunta’s more limited agency and domestic confinement (incidentally, the only time we see this character happy is with her two children on the same beach where Vittoria goes running). Likewise, on other occasions, crosscuts from Vittoria running on the beach to Caterina working out on a treadmill suggest the opposition between freedom and reclusion. These moments also highlight some central traits of the two characters: on the one hand, Vittoria’s determination to fight the mafia is conjured by her frequent jogs on a beach that is both full of trash and along a beautiful seaside (with pollution symbolizing organized crime’s devastating effects on society); on the other, Caterina’s use of the treadmill can be attributed to the attention she places on her looks to please her husband.

The relationship between the central female characters encourages a comparison of their points of view on maternity in a number of scenes that are set in the judge’s office and in an interrogation room. The fact that these spaces are not usually associated with such a topic serves to highlight its connection to criminality in Muraca’s film. With one exception, these scenes feature judicial interventions initiated by Vittoria: in two of them, the judge summons Assunta to her office, and, on another occasion, she questions Caterina. In the very last scene of the film, which is not an interrogation but takes place once again in the judge’s office, Assunta goes to Vittoria presumably to become a State witness in order to escape from her mafia family and reunite with her youngest son (who in the meantime has been taken away from her by social workers). Rather than advancing the storyline, these are moments of reflection for the viewer on the role of women as mothers and wives in the ’ndrangheta. Differently from an interrogation searching for clues related to a case, in some of these scenes,

queries and remarks move from the specific (Assunta and Caterina's circumstances) to the general (the role of mothers and wives in the mafia underworld), while also including observations about the nature of power and the meaning of love. Judicial and anthropological gazes interweave in the effort to understand womanhood within the 'ndrangheta – an organization where past and present coexist, and old practices, such as that of protecting the family honor at all costs, are found side-by-side with modernity and great adaptability when it comes to business.[12]

In these scenes, antithetical views clash and irreconcilable disagreements are foregrounded through the central characters' exchanges.[13] A sequence of shots/reverse shots with the strong chiaroscuro characterizing the entire film photography underscores these duel-like encounters, which feature a number of medium shots, close-ups, and some extreme close-ups to convey the palpable tension. However, these scenes – and the whole film for that matter – also draw attention to something Vittoria, Assunta, and Caterina share: their being women in patriarchal systems (that of the 'ndrangheta being a more extreme expression of patriarchy than the judiciary one).

When discussing why the active role of women in the 'ndrangheta has not received attention at least up until the 1980s, Angela Iantosca draws a comparison between the mafia on the one hand and the police forces and the judicial system on the other: "the mafia is an organization of men of honor; law enforcement agencies and the judiciary are primarily composed of men. Therefore, it has been a battle among men. A war among knights who, from opposite positions, have tried to impose their own virile superiority."[14] Iantosca's analogy between "men of honor" and men of law fits *La terra dei santi,* whose audience is often reminded of gender inequality within patriarchy, from the already mentioned arranged marriages to attempted rapes – the latter a common element of the mafia movie[15] – but

12 Notably, the 'ndrangheta is very active in the richest and most developed areas of the north of Italy and other parts of the world. This characteristic of the organization is not included in *La terra dei santi*, but it is present in other films, such as Renato De Maria's *Lo spietato* (2019) and the previously mentioned *Anime nere*, and *Duisburg – linea di sangue*.

13 Incidentally, on two of these occasions, both Caterina and Assunta make a remark about Vittoria, a judge from the north of Italy, not having understood anything about Calabria and the world they live in.

14 Iantosca, p. 14. "La mafia è un'organizzazione di uomini d'onore, le Forze dell'Ordine, la Magistratura sono composte per lo più da uomini. Quindi si è trattato di una battaglia tra uomini. Una guerra tra cavalieri che, da posizioni opposte, hanno tentato di affermare la propria virile superiorità."

15 Morreale, pp. 51-52.

also through more subtle references, some of which have to do with Vittoria being a female magistrate. It is worth noticing here that the delayed attention given to the Calabrian mafia is not confined to the role of women within it. The whole organization and its expanding power were underestimated for a long time.[16]

The very first time Assunta and Vittoria meet in the film,[17] their exchange centers on the expectations of Assunta's role as mother and her responsibility to supervise her children. Her remark in this scene, "per stare bene ci basta stare lontani degli sbirri" (to feel good we just need to stay away from the police),[18] asserts her world view – antithetical to Vittoria's – where State authorities are perceived as enemies in a war-like context. Here, Assunta does not engage in the conversation around mothering and motherhood, but instead relies on an anti-State discourse often used by the mafia to legitimize itself *vis-à-vis* law-enforcing authorities which are seen as the "bad guys." It is police marshal Domenico who, soon after this encounter, brings back the topic of motherhood by warning the judge not to mess with the children of the mothers of the 'ndrangheta. What follows is a moment of reflection on why these women send their sons to die. Vittoria argues it is not just about the money, but she does not know exactly why they do so. Mothers in mafia families experience the co-existence of love and death in their daily life – "Eros against Thanatos" as Siebert puts it[19] – through the feelings for their sons, on the one hand, and the constant and concurrent awareness that they will be killed sooner or later, on the other. This circumstance, however, is not a deterrent in many cases, as women typically indoctrinate their sons, educate them to worship their father as a behavioral model, and incite them to avenge close relatives when they get killed. Some mothers would rather have their sons sentenced to jail than turned into "infami" (traitors, lacking honor). In the case of women married to prominent mafiosi, their status of mother and wife often comes with privileges and wealth. This and the fear of retaliation are reasons for some women to stay loyal to the mafia. Additionally, as Siebert observes, "the birth of the male allows the woman, if only at second hand, to partic-

16 Gratteri and Nicaso observe that after the 2007 massacre of Duisburg, Germany (where six members of the 'ndrangheta were murdered in a mafia feud), international attention was given to what is now "the scariest, most powerful" of the mafias (2020, 3).

17 This occurs when Assunta goes to see her husband, Nando, who is in jail for vandalizing Vittoria's car as an act of intimidation ordered by the mafia boss.

18 "Sbirri" is a derogatory term for police officers.

19 Siebert, pp. 79-103.

ipate in the splendour of the male principle – the dominant principle of the public sphere – and, simultaneously, it gives her the opportunity to form it and bind it, to make it dependent and make it hers by proxy – in private."[20]

When addressing motherhood as experience and as a social institution in *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich points out to patriarchy with its exploitation of women and convenient idealization of mothers that has been internalized by women themselves: "As mothers, women have been idealized and also exploited. To affirm women's intrinsic human value in the face of its continuing flagrant and insidious denial is no easy thing to do in steady, clear, unsentimental terms."[21] Rich also reflects on "the central ambiguity at the heart of patriarchy: the ideas of the sacredness of motherhood and the redemptive power of woman as means, contrasted with the degradation of women in the order created by men."[22] This is readily apparent in mafia-type organizations, where being a mother generally defines the identity of a woman and determines her subjectivity. To this point, sociologist Ombretta Ingrascì argues that, in line with the mafia's traditional gendered model, "women are granted some importance almost exclusively for their reproductive function" and they themselves emphasize their role as mothers as they are "aware that, if separated from maternity, femininity is for the most part despised."[23] Sexual violence and forced marriages are examples of female degradation in *La terra dei santi*, while the idealized identification of women with mothers is evident in Assunta and Caterina's disdain toward Vittoria's childless status.

As mothers and wives of mafia bosses, women are typically granted respect and some authority from their community, while still being subjected to a dictatorial, misogynist, and male-dominated environment. In *La terra dei santi*, Caterina is an example of this dual condition: she enjoys the power borrowed from her husband, and the privileges and wealth that come with her status as wife of a mafia boss; at the same time, and just like her younger sister, she had to endure an arranged marriage (with Alfredo) forced on her by her father with the complicity of her mother, as she reveals at the beginning of the film.[24] A "donna di potere" (a woman of power), she

20 Siebert, pp. 58-59; see also Lo Verso, 2006.
21 Rich, p. xliv.
22 Rich, p. 72.
23 Ingrascì, *Donne d'onore*, p. 13: "alle donne è attribuita una certa importanza quasi esclusivamente nella loro funzione riproduttiva"; "consapevoli che alla femminilità separata dalla maternità è riservato più che altro disprezzo."
24 One of the shots in the scene where Caterina reveals her common fate to Assunta aesthetically creates a parallel between the two sisters by dividing the frame in

will proudly define herself later in the film, but also a victim of that same power. Differently from Caterina, Assunta might appear to be a victim *tout court*: a widow of a mafioso, she must marry against her own will her brother-in-law who is also a member of the 'ndrangheta; her oldest son is murdered and her youngest is taken by the social workers. However, the film also points out to her connivance and fair amount of responsibility as a mother: she is loyal to the family/organization, shares the same anti-State view and despises legality like her relatives, and does not object to the involvement of her older son in criminal activities.

About a third of the way into the film, Vittoria summons Assunta to her office – a scene that immediately follows Giuseppe's ritual of affiliation to the 'ndrangheta. Unlike the scenes where Vittoria's culture of legality and sense of justice produce a compelling effect against anti-State/pro-mafia positions, this encounter has an ironic outcome: Assunta mocks the judicial system for not having ink in their pens, when Vittoria unsuccessfully tries to sign the police report at the end of the scene. The conversation revolves around Assunta's position as a mother and wife in a family of the 'ndrangheta rather than on her knowledge of the criminal organization, for which she has been summoned. Like in other scenes, these two instrumental roles are central to the interaction, with that of wife generating Assunta's disdain because of her recent arranged marriage, as she reluctantly admits to be "coniugata" (formal for married) when asked to provide her marital status. Throughout the encounter, Vittoria's remarks trigger her rival's defensive reaction to what she regards as an invasion of privacy. The two women face each other at the opposite sides of a desk and similar point-of-view shots highlight their reciprocal aggressiveness and symmetrical distribution of power. Mutual dominance and centrality are even more apparent when comparing these two characters with the male figures also present in this scene – Domenico and the police officer typing the report – who, by contrast, are relegated to a secondary position.

Assunta displays the same arrogant attitude when summoned for the second time by the judge, who informs her of Nando's decision to turn

---

roughly two halves with the use of a mirror: a medium shot of Caterina's reflected image on the right is paired with a close-up of Assunta on the left side. While the camera focuses on Caterina, Assunta is out of focus. The shot suggests that one sister is the "mirrored" image of the other, since they both have been forced to marry men against their will, as Caterina tells Assunta at this point of the scene. However, Assunta's blurred image in contrast with Caterina's clear mirror reflection conveys also their differences and highlights the younger sister's emotional state. This is just one instance were mirrors play a part in the aesthetic choices of this film.

State's evidence and become a *pentito*. Set again in the judge's office, the mise-en-scène here is similar to that of her first interrogation. This aesthetic choice foregrounds the animosity between the two women throughout their conversation that centers once again on Assunta's responsibility as a mother to keep her children safe. The tension escalates even faster than in the first interrogation, as Vittoria openly criticizes Assunta's mothering ability and threatens to terminate her parental rights. As a reaction, Assunta asserts herself as a mother and questions Vittoria's womanhood: "Ma che femmina sei che porti via i figli alle mamme?" (What type of woman are you, taking children away from their mothers?). In response, the judge appeals again to the meaning of mothering: "E tu che madre sei che li mandi a morire ammazzati?" (And what type of mother are you who sends her own children to get killed?). While Vittoria views the conflict between mothering and motherhood in the mafia as irreconcilable, Assunta experiences the contradictions inherent in her role of a mother of *'ndranghetista*, but shows loyalty to the organization/family. Shot from the point of view of the two women and central to *La terra dei santi*'s main theme of maternity in the 'ndrangheta, this scene's relevance is also marked by its position in the middle of the film. Just like in the first interrogation scene previously analyzed, female authority and aggressiveness are additionally underscored by the marginal position of the male characters in the scene: Domenico, Nando, and a police officer typing the report are ancillary figures, as the camera focuses primarily on the two women, casting these men as observers for most of the exchange. Although the main reason for this encounter is Nando's decision to give evidence to the authorities, the animated meeting centers, as said, on mothering and the certain death that expects Assunta's sons if left in their 'ndrangheta family. A number of images of men, however, are visible throughout the scene, from the photographs of young *'ndranghetisti* murdered or disappeared, which Vittoria relentlessly shows Assunta, to the blurred mug shots of mafiosi hanging on a board, to the crucifix and a picture of then-president of Italy Giorgio Napolitano hanging on the wall. These subtle references to male figures draw further attention to gender. The unexpected asymmetrical power distribution favoring female characters over less prominent male figures (Assunta even accuses Nando of being a "pupazzo della dottoressa" – the judge's puppet) highlights the film's dominant female gaze on a topic, motherhood, in which women occupy centrality, but over which men have historically exerted control. Additionally, Vittoria's insistence on expected mothering behaviors could be seen as a reminder of the functionality our patriarchal society, rather than just the mafia, attributes to maternity.

Although featured mostly as rivals, it is perhaps their common womanhood that leads to an emotional Vittoria hugging Assunta toward the end of the film. This binding moment follows the murder of Assunta's older son and the removal of her parental rights. Vittoria's hug is an unexpected reaction that the screenplay of *La terra dei santi* describes as "impacciata" (clumsy, awkward). This is a rare moment of "syn-pathos" between these two characters and its emotional charge evokes a previous scene where Assunta cries desperately over her dead son and hugs his body. Arguably the most moving and dramatic moment in *La terra dei santi*, the image of Assunta embracing Giuseppe provides an iconographic representation of mothering love evoking the Pietà through its mise-en-scène and context in conjunction with the idea of martyrdom suggested by the position of Giuseppe's lifeless body.[25] Additionally, Giuseppe gets killed in a square shaped like an amphitheater, and the passersby – among them several women – and police officers evoke the chorus of a Greek tragedy. Their astonished expressions and the nondiegetic melancholic soundtrack amplify this emotional moment.

Female Power: Authority and Vulnerability

Being the wife of a mafia boss is the central topic of an exchange between Vittoria and Caterina taking place in an interrogation room later in the film. The only scene when these two characters meet, this is also a climactic moment, in which Caterina rather than Assunta appears to be Vittoria's true antagonist. This encounter fulfils a didactic function, as Caterina summarizes what the wife of a boss is expected to do. She professes the importance of her role of wife with a mixture of pride and arrogance.

25 Religious references are common in this film. Some of them point to the Catholic and masonic elements imbuing 'ndrangheta rituals, while others have to do with the strong influence of religion in Calabria. The film's title (in English, *Land of Saints*) is a reference to the Greek Orthodox Christianity, as well as a reminder of the presence of the mafia in the region through the similarity between the terms "santi" and "santisti" (the latter a recognition given to some members of the 'ndrangheta), as pointed out in the film itself. The affiliation scene includes an image of the Archangel Michael – which is used in real life as part of the initiation ritual of new mafia members – and a statue of the archangel is also shown later in the film suggesting antithetically the triumph of good over evil. In two other scenes, the image of Saint Anthony framed by thirteen lights is a reminder of "la Tredicina", a tradition devoted to the saint protector of children. A picture of Padre Pio, a popular saint in the South of Italy, is also visible on other occasions.

Conveniently, she leaves out information about her active involvement in the organization, just like some *pentiti* have done when questioned about women's roles *vis-à-vis* the mafia. Similar to Assunta's reaction in a previous scene when she realizes Vittoria does not have children, Caterina's insolent tone while summing up her duties as a wife ("lasagne, parlare senza metter in imbarazzo il marito, crescere i figli" – lasagna, do not embarrass your husband when talking, raise your children) carries a sense of superiority *vis-à-vis* the judge's single status, which she sees as a deficiency. Being a wife and having children (first and foremost sons) confer women a place in the world of the mafia.[26] Caterina's married status is her source of power, and more so if her son will at some point take over as the head of the 'ndrina (the family as well as the 'ndrangheta clan). She wishes to give her son "un posto d'onore" (a place of honor) in the world of the 'ndrangheta. As mentioned, women in mafia contexts often identify with their role of "mother-institution," which includes the pedagogical part they play when raising they children according to the organization's diktats. When discussing mafia family dynamics, psychologist Innocenzo Fiore points out to "la configurazione del potere istituzionale materno" (the configuration of the maternal institutional power) which perpetuates situations where daughters in mafia families acquire the institutionalized role of mother at the expense of their subjectivity, while sons reject anything that is feminine and worship masculinity in order to secure their power as mafiosi.[27]

Unlike the previous exchange with Assunta, here the conversation between the two rivals (the judge being a woman of power like herself, in the words of Caterina) conveys an unequal level of authority through the mise-en-scène: while Caterina is seated on one side of the desk, Vittoria is standing up on the opposite side. The camera angle in the shot/reverse shot alternation thus confers superiority to the judge, in line with the moral significance of the scene. However, Caterina's arrogance and confidence exuding from Lorenza Indovina's convincing acting counterbalance this effect. Like in the other interrogation scenes, the change in power distribu-

26 According to Ingrascì, "As women are appreciated by men when they give birth to boys, the latter are the reason why a woman/mother feels proud within her community" (Ingrascì, *Donne d'onore,* p. 13). ("Proprio perché la donna è apprezzata dall'uomo come generatrice di figli maschi, questi rappresentano per la donna-madre motivo d'orgoglio agli occhi della comunità.")

27 Fiore, p. 215. When discussing the hypertrophic masculinity of mafiosi, Siebert talks about "the particular staging of mafioso identity," which entails the suppression of female aspects (Siebert, pp. 22-23), while Baris Cayli looks at mafia women's performance under the influence of masculinity within Italian organized crime.

tion surfacing in moments of conflict between the female characters invites the spectator to reflect on their opposing views, rather than just embracing a priori “good” (the law) versus “evil” (crime).

Caterina’s judgmental attitude toward the unmarried status of the judge is not suggested only by her remarks. When inferring her opponent is single, she glances at her outfit and appearance. The scene here hints at the importance Caterina places on female attractiveness in a male-dominated context – a leitmotif when it comes to this character, whose vanity, jealousy for her sister’s youth, and desire to please Alfredo with her looks and sensuality are often highlighted in the film. Clothes play a significant role in underscoring differences between the female characters in this film. For instance, Caterina’s low cut and form fitting clothes and ostentatious jewelry often contrast with Vittoria’s more somber and less stereotypically feminine style.

To this point, a nude scene of Vittoria might come as a surprise in a film where her character departs from a conventional representation of femininity to embrace a role, that of a judge, traditionally played by men both in films and real life. Yet, she is the only character in *La terra dei santi* whose body is shown naked, even if just for a couple of seconds. The scene follows the last part of the conversation on Assunta’s imposed marriage which features Caterina’s closet in the background, whose mechanical curtains operated by a remote control bring to mind a stage. The nude scene starts with a medium shot of Vittoria’s naked back, while she is facing a small wardrobe to decide what to wear after a shower. Her exposed body and the narrow selection of clothes in her wardrobe are in stark contrast with Caterina’s elegantly dressed appearance and her large closet full of flashy items from the previous scene. And so is a glimpse of the judge’s naked breasts reflected in a mirror later in this scene, followed by Vittoria covering up to answer the door, only to find a mafia death threat waiting for her: a pig’s head coupled with a picture of herself running.

This voyeuristic scene might bring to mind the objectification of the female body as discussed by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*, and the scopophilic instinct and male gaze central to Laura Mulvey’s article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” It also aligns with the camera’s attention to Vittoria’s fragmented body in the opening running scene and other recurrent similar moments. Given that the film suggests a tension between the non-traditional role that Vittoria plays as a magistrate (her gender is pointed out on more than one occasion by other characters in the film) and a conventional androcentric idea of female attractiveness, this scene seems to fall into the latter perhaps to engage the spectator gaze. Vittoria’s

naked body in this scene also seems to act as a reminder of her womanhood, as well as her fragility which is also underscored by the mafia threat that closes the scene. The combination of the pig's head and her picture (suggesting the 'ndrangheta knows her habits and can strike at any time) with the brief nude moment conveys a sense of intrusion and violation of Vittoria's intimacy. On the other hand, her status as a single and childless woman as well as her profession suggest the patriarchal obstacles she has to face. Interestingly enough, the other scenes of *La terra dei santi* that hint at nudity are those featuring Assunta's unwanted sexual intercourse with Nando and the sexual assault carried out by Alfredo. Both these moments allude to female vulnerability in relation to male dominance, as it is often the case with rape scenes.

The very last scene of the film references gender disparity through an additional dialogue between the two protagonists that closes the film abruptly. Assunta tries to negotiate her cooperation with Vittoria in the hope of getting back her youngest son and perhaps also as an act of revenge toward her sister and Alfredo.[28] Once again, tension in the meeting between these two very different women – both for background and beliefs – escalates, and conveys Assunta's resentment and mistrust about the judge's ability to understand her world. At the end of this interaction, the judge's scolding comment on Assunta's pregnancy – "un altro soldato per il loro esercito" (another soldier for their army) – serves as a reminder of the military configuration of the organization, the fatal destiny of mafia members, and the organization's gender exclusivity. Assunta's response and final line of the film – "se è fortunato. Altrimenti una donna" (if lucky. Otherwise a woman) – is a switch of perspective which encourages the audience to reflect once again on gender and the mafia's patriarchal system.[29] The director's choice to opt for an abrupt but thematically assertive ending brings to the fore one more time the film's main topic, motherhood. As Fernando Muraca explains in an interview with the author of this article, he wanted

---

28 In addition to the conflicts between Assunta and Vittoria, and the latter and Caterina, the storyline revolves around the antagonism between the two sisters, which becomes more apparent with Giuseppe's murder and the sexual assault by Alfredo. Caterina's selfishness, lack of empathy, and yearning for money and power (typical attributes of mafia members) mark her differences with her sister.

29 Incidentally, the screenplay of *La terra dei santi* does not finish abruptly, but instead has some sort of circular ending: Vittoria runs on the beach like in the opening scene and then takes a swim; after entering polluted waters she reaches out the clean part of the sea. Also missing in the film is the part of the story line where Assunta decides to collaborate with Vittoria, Alfredo is arrested, and Caterina deals with some mafia business and later works out on a treadmill.

to make "a film with female protagonists, not a story of transmission of power between men. A film that would go into the inner folds of these families, narrating tragically the fate of children and women. […] *La terra dei santi* does not show the way the 'ndrangheta operates, but instead, with an anthropological approach, it asks itself what the 'ndrangheta is, what it is built on" and it finds the answer at the source, inside the family, within motherhood.[30] And this is precisely what *La terra dei santi* does all along: it shifts the focus from a traditional male perspective conveyed by many filmic portrayals of the mafia to a female gaze within the film itself through the interaction of its characters. Mothering and motherhood, two concepts that intuitively are perceived as complementary, are here seen in opposition within the mafia context. Muraca's film foregrounds women and their instrumental role as mothers within the organization. This complex role – where power and submission, perpetration and victimization coexist – is marked by conflicts which *La terra dei santi* addresses at multiple levels: from its narrative strategies to its aesthetic choices and to the construction of its characters.

Bibliography

Abbate, Lirio. *Fimmine ribelli*. Milan: Rizzoli, 2013.

Allum, Fellia, and Irene Marchi. "Analyzing the Role of Women in Italian Mafias: The Case of the Neapolitan Camorra." *Qualitative Sociology* 41, no. 3 (August 2018): 361-80.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.

Cameron, Deborah. *Feminism: A Brief Introduction to the Ideas, Debates & Politics of the Movement.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Cayli, Baris. "Performance Matters More than Masculinity: Violence, Gender Dynamics and Mafia Women." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 29 (2016): 36-47.

Cozzi, Marcello. *Lupare rosa: Storie di amore, sangue e onore.* Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2019.

"Donne di Mafia." *Meridiana: Rivista di Storia e Scienze Sociali* 67 (2011).

Fiandaca, Giovanni, ed. *Women and the Mafia: Female Roles in Organized Crime Structures*. Translated by Stephen Jackson. Amsterdam: Springer, 2007.

30 "un film con protagoniste donne, non una storia di trasmissione di potere fra uomini. Un film che entra nelle pieghe di queste famiglie, raccontando tragicamente la sorte dei figli e delle donne. […] *La terra dei santi* non mostra la maniera in cui opera la 'ndrangheta, ma invece, con un approccio antropologico, si domanda che cos'è la 'ndrangheta, su cosa si fonda." Interview by author, February 8th, 2022.

Fiore, Innocenzo. *Le radici inconsce dello psichismo mafioso*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 1997.

Gigliotti, Saveria Maria. *'Ndrangheta tra politica, fede e ruolo delle donne*. Lamezia Terme: Grafichéditore, 2022.

Gratteri, Nicola, and Antonio Nicaso. *Fratelli di sangue: Storie, boss e affari della 'ndrangheta, la mafia più potente del mondo*. Milan: Mondadori, 2020.

Iantosca, Angela. *Onora la madre: storie di 'ndrangheta al femminile*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013.

Ingrascì, Ombretta. *Donne d'onore: storie di mafia al femminile*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007.

–. *Gender and Organized Crime in Italy: Women's Agency in Italian Mafias.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2021.

Kahn, Milka, and Anne Véron. *Women of Honor*. Translated by James Ferguson. London: Hurst & Company, 2017.

Lauricella, Dina. *Il codice del disonore: Donne che fanno tremare la 'Ndrangheta*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2019.

Longrigg, Claire. *Mafia Women.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1997.

Lo Verso, Girolamo. "Per uno studio dello psichismo mafioso." In *La mafia dentro: psicologia e psicopatologia di un fondamentalismo*, edited by Girolamo Lo Verso, 23-35. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002.

Madeo, Liliana. *Donne di mafia: Vittime. Complici. Protagoniste.* Turin: Miraggi edizioni, 2020.

Morreale, Emiliano. *La mafia immaginaria: settant'anni di Cosa nostra al cinema (1949-2019)*. Roma: Donzelli, 2020.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 833-44. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Muraca, Fernando, director. *La terra dei santi*. ASAP Cinema, 2015. 89 min.

Perry, Alex. *The Good Mothers: The True Story of the Women Who Took on the World's Most Powerful Mafia*. New York: William Morrow, 2018.

Pickering-Iazzi, Robin, "Dead Silent: Life Stories of Girls and Women Killed by the Italian Mafias, 1878-2018" (2019). *French, Italian and Comparative Literature Faculty Books*. 2. https://dc.uwm.edu/freita_facbooks/2

Principato, Teresa, and Alessandra Dino. *Mafia donna. Le vestali del sacro e dell'onore.* Palermo: Flaccovio, 1997.

Puglisi, Anna. *Sole contro la mafia.* Palermo: La luna, 1990.

–. *Donne, Mafia e Antimafia.* Trapani: DG Editore, 2005.

–. *Storie di donne.* Trapani: DG Editore, 2007.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience & Institution*. London: W.W. Norton, 2021.

Sciascia, Leonardo. *Il giorno della civetta*. Turin: Einaudi, 1972.

Serenata, Nicoletta, ed. *The 'Ndrangheta and Sacra Corona Unita. The History, Organization and Operations of Two Unknown Mafia Groups.* New York: Springer, 2014.

Siebert, Renate. *Secrets of Life and Death: Women and the Mafia*. Translated by Liz Heron. London: Verso, 1996.
Ursetta, Umberto. *Vittime e ribelli: donne di ’ndrangheta. Da Lea Garofalo a Giuseppina Pesce*. Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2016.

INTERVIEW WITH SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN

Sarah Abrevaya Stein, Professor, Viterbi Family Endowed Chair in Mediterranean Jewish Studies, & Sady and Ludwig Kahn Director, Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies at UCLA, was the keynote speaker for the first Mediterranean Studies Symposium held in Ortigia, Italy, July 1-4, 2021. An adaptation of her presentation was published in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 112/1, Winter 2022, under the title "The Queen of Herbs: A Plant's Eye View of the Sephardic Diaspora." Stein has published extensively. Her latest book, *Wartime North Africa, A Documentary History 1934-1950* (Stanford UP, 2022) is the first-ever collection of primary documents on North African history and the Holocaust.

Q. What is your definition of Mediterranean? And your definition of Mediterranean diaspora?

A. For generations, scholars have energetically debated the definition and limits of the Mediterranean, its peoples and geography. As a scholar of Mediterranean Jewry, I am inspired by Matthias Lehmann's and Jessica Marglin's grappling (in their co-edited The Mediterranean and the Jews, 2020) with what the Mediterranean has meant (and has not meant, and should mean) to scholars of Jews, and Jews to scholars of the Mediterranean.

My current work engages a set of questions that are less definitional. What I am curious about is how Jews experienced the landscape and botany of the Mediterranean while they lived in the region and once they left it behind. Rather than searching for a theoretical, geographical, or cultural answer to the question of what the Mediterranean (or the Mediterranean diaspora) is or was, then, I find myself thinking about how the elements, flora, and landscape of the Mediterranean were experienced by Jews, and perhaps came to define their very Mediterraneanness.

I have published one article related to this topic, "The Queen of Herbs: A Plant's Eye View of the Sephardic Diaspora" (*Jewish Quarterly Review* 112/1, Winter 2022), which explores Sephardic Jews' abiding affection for

a single plant, ruda (ruta graveolens, or rue). Folkloric writing on ruda has emphasized the immutability of Mediterranean Jewish folkways; but ruda has a history, which reveals how a plant can further a particular diaspora--not the Jewish diaspora from biblical Israel, nor the Sephardic diaspora from medieval Iberia, but Jewish life in and diaspora from the modern Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia.

A conceptually intertwined article, "Sephardic Botánica" (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 64/3, May 2022), explores the Sephardic embrace of herbalist practices ubiquitous to the Mediterranean – and follows the extraordinary evolution of this tradition in Sephardic owned botánicas across the United States. Botánicas tend to be understood as local manifestations of an intricate, trans-Atlantic Black, Caribbean, and Latinx religious, spiritual, and healing world. Their shelves hold the herbal products, sacramental goods, ritual implements, and counseling that allow patrons of Italian, African and Latin American Indigenous ancestries to practice folk Catholicism, herbalism, Hoodoo (also called "conjure"), Vodou, Santería, Espiritismo, Curanderismo, Òrìṣà worship and other ethnomedical and spiritual systems. But the particular botánica my article explores, Caribbean Botanical Garden, was opened in East Harlem in the 1930s by a Sephardic Jewish man from the Italian – and, in his lifetime, Ottoman – island of Rhodes. This (and other Sephardic-owned botánicas in Baltimore, Atlanta, Memphis, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles) integrated Sephardic and Eastern Mediterranean sources of inspiration as well as trans-Atlantic Black, Caribbean, and Latinx ones.

A third, narratively experimental article, as "Eating on the Ground" examines the Mediterranean Jewish embrace of picnics. The picnic and the portable camera came of age together in late and post Ottoman society, and "vernacular" picnic photographs are a ubiquitous feature of the Sephardic photo album. "Eating on the Ground" converses with the children, women, men, and objects that appear in these images, considering how Sephardic Jews relaxed and ate in nature at a time when so much was shifting around them. It also asks whether the scattered, globally diasporic, families-owned archive of the Sephardic photo album can be united to restore a lived, dusty, lusty image of late and post-Ottoman Jewish life.

All told, this work seeks to highlight how Jews expressed themselves spiritually and healed themselves medicinally, how they relaxed and socialized, tended to their babies, moved their bodies, experienced girlhood and boyhood, built homes and businesses, lived and died in the landscape of the Mediterranean. It seeks to speak to the sense of belonging Jews had in the modern Mediterranean, and the ways Sephardim continued to

nurture that affinity in adopted cities across the globe. Looking away from strict definitions of region or diaspora, it thinks about the indelible imprint of land, landscape, and botany on lived experience.

Q. Your article, "The Queen of Herbs: A Plant's Eye View of the Sephardic Diaspora", is not only thought-provoking about diaspora but also about women. Can you give us a brief summary and scope of the article?

A. Mediterranean Jews put ruda to many uses – medicinal, magical, ceremonial. Ruda was midwife and protector, the safest company to usher in the next generation and protect the *parida* [new mother] and newborn. In Ottoman times, Jewish women would give it in small doses to a woman in labor; rest it, protectively, on the bed of the new mother or crib of a newborn; pin it to the pillow of an infant boy undergoing *brit milah* [ritual circumcision]; or use it to bless the head of a mother or child. So the plant was evoked, in Ladino, as "*ruda menuda, guarda de las criaturas*" [minced rue, protector of children].

Ruda grew in Jewish gardens and in pots in Jewish courtyards in Rhodes, Salonica, Constantinople, Izmir, and beyond. Muslim merchants sold sprigs to Jewish women outside the mikvah [ritual bath] on Friday afternoon, allowing them to walk home clutching a nosegay of ruda over their heart.

In "Queen of Herbs," I argue that if we invite ruda to center stage, we are poised to learn a new kind of Sephardic history, as well as a new story of migration, material history, and the human-plant relationship. Ruda lets us reconsider the history of an Ottoman diaspora from the earth up: complimenting existing histories of Sephardic Jewry with an approach that is tactile, ethnobotanical and intimate – one might even say, close to the heart.

Q. Your statement about the ruda "easy to regenerate from a cutting" (p. 128) is clearly a comparison of a Mediterranean legacy. Can you elaborate?

A. Basil, garlic, marjoram, mint mallow, chamomile, fennel, anise, parsley, cinnamon, and cloves were all embraced by Sephardic Jews for their curative and magical powers. But ruda was considered "*la reina de las yervas*" [Ladino: the queen of herbs] because of its potency and versatility.

Crucially, ruda was sturdy and easy to replant from a cutting. This made the plant well equipped for migration, which it did along with Sephardic Jews in the early twentieth century. Sephardic Jews planted ruda in new homes in émigré centers like New York, Seattle, and Los Angeles. To speak only of Los Angeles, for our purposes; the first Sephardic Jews to move to Los Angeles planted it downtown where, in the 1920s and 1930s, poor, im-

migrant Ottoman Jews lived, worked, and built institutions in the vicinity of 44th and Hoover. These Jews and their children replanted clippings of the same plants when they moved in the 1950s and 1960s to the tonier, whiter, more securely middle-class West Side. And a third generation of ruda clippings found a home in the San Fernando Valley, where Sephardic Jews settled in the 1980s and 1990s. So ruda migrated with Sephardic families across oceans, between urban neighborhoods, and through the generations. In this case, as in many others, we can see how plants and immigrants have symbiotically transformed the landscape, intertwining worlds old and new.

Q. We also loved the idea of the public garden as a space of peace and freedom for the Sephardic Jewish women, queens of the gardens amidst the "queen of the herbs" and how the ruda is associated closely to women for they are not only the gardeners but the healers of their communities. Is it still the case nowadays? What are some other places and ways in which Jewish and Mediterranean women can affirm themselves?

A. Traditional Mediterranean Jewish herbalism has faded to the point of near extinction – but its residue does remain. As I write in "Queen of Herbs": "Third-and fourth-generation Sephardic Angelenos no longer buy sprigs of ruda on their way home from the communal bath, to be sure, but some do still tuck a sprig inside their bra – a permutation of the Izmirli tradition of carrying a sprig on one's breast. Others keep a cutting of the plant in their car as a protective mechanism. For Sephardim, as for other residents of Los Angeles, the highways that carry us to and from the Valley have become crucial vectors of Jewish life (and folklore) in southern California. It seems that today, as ever, one can't take good fortune for granted."

Q. Do you feel that women are the major key players of dissemination of cultural traditions and customs?

A. I would say that the role of women as shapers of cultural, linguistic, culinary, sartorial, economic, legal, material (and just about all forms of daily) practice in the modern Mediterranean has been grossly underappreciated, for Jews as well as non-Jews. Scholars will need to think inventively about what culture is/does, and about where to look for its traces, in order to reverse this trend.

Q. All your mentions about plants, jasmine, mint, basil, garlic, chamomile, fennel, anise, parsley, marjoram brought us back to our native Sicily (that had one of the largest Jewish communities up until the 1400s) but it

was also the marzipan and the *bomboniere* to hit home. That really confirms the importance of things and their roles in a culture and the transmission of a culture. What are your thoughts?

A. I would absolutely agree! In my book *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century* (FSG/Macmillan, 2019), I track through letters the extraordinary number of things that one Sephardic family exchanged, preserved, lost, treasured, fretted and feuded over – over the course of generations, boundaries of nations, and the arc of a century. One matriarch in this family, Vida a-Levi, a woman who lived in inter-war Salonica, Greece whom I suspect may have been illiterate, sent her émigré son in Rio de Janeiro sweets and preserved fruit to express her love. When her other son and daughter-in-law went to the posh spa town of Wiesbaden, Germany to have their first child, a-Levi had a mystic prepare a *kemeá* [a Jewish amulet containing a strip of parchment with blessings meant to ward off the evil eye] for the child. A *kemeá* was the quintessential embodiment of Sephardic folk practices, Wiesbaden, the quintessential site of European Jewish modernity and bourgeois arrival – what an extraordinary material encapsulation of the transformations rocking a single Mediterranean Jewish family!

BOOK REVIEWS

States, Actors and Geopolitical Drivers in the Mediterranean. Perspectives on the New Centrality in a Changing Region, Francesca Maria Corrao and Riccardo Redaelli (eds.), Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. ISBN: 978-3-030-68999-5. Pp.354.

A decade ago, David Abulafia pointed out that anyone who intends to study the history of the Mediterranean faces a fundamental problem: how to avoid reducing such history to the mere history of the regions bordering this basin? The same question, moreover, is also valid for all large homogeneous geographical areas experiencing large movements of populations, trade routes and cultural exchanges, such as the Baltic Sea or the Sahara Desert. To overcome this difficulty, Abulafia proposed a focus on the Mediterranean strictly as a maritime reality: the sea seen therefore as a place of trade, migration and battles; the port cities that overlook it as centers of coexistence between different identities, whose relationships oscillate between cultural tensions and the development of a Mediterranean *koiné*. This ambivalence is well represented by Smyrna at the beginning of the eighteenth century: here the presence of the European communities had pushed the Turkish community to learn to assimilate, learning the languages and the customs of the former, while, at the same time, the powerful voices arising from Christian churches and taverns which generated the resentment of the local population, who interpreted such gestures as signs of disrespect.[1]

This interpretative key can also be useful to analyze the Mediterranean in our present times. Indeed, the seas are still physical places of vital importance for global geopolitics. Over 80% of world trade takes place by sea,[2] while the seabed is crossed by the precious infrastructure that supports the internet and – indirectly – the world economy: submarine cables through which almost all international data traffic is transmitted.[3] In this light, the importance of the Mediterranean depends on its nature as a basin that connects the Indo-Pacific region with the Atlantic, constituting a marine buffer between the North and South of the world. For this reason, although the

1 David Abulafia, «Mediterranean History as Global History», *History and Theory* 50, fasc. 2 (2011): 220-28; Daniel Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World, 1550-1650*, Publications on the Near East, University of Washington, no. 5 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

2 UNCTAD, *Review of Maritime Transport 2021* (United Nations, 2021).

3 Submarine Cables: Critical Infrastructure for Global Communications, itif.org; Submarine Cable Map, submarinecablemap.com. Consultato il 30 settembre 2022.

global competition between Washington and Beijing has concentrated in recent years in the Pacific, the ancient Mare Nostrum finds itself once again at the center of great commercial strategies.

The volume edited by Corrao and Redaelli is an excellent guide through these complexities. It was born from the synergy of Italian scholars who – through different disciplinary perspectives – shared their contributions, starting with a seminar organized, at the end of 2019, by the Master Program in Economy, Law and Institution of the MENA Countries (Luiss University of Rome) and by the Center for Research on the Southern System and the Wider Mediterranean (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan). Consequently, the collection of essays included in this book focuses on the balances and tensions that run through the Middle East and North African shores of the basin, while effectively framing these case studies in a broader geopolitical framework – the European neighborhood policy, the growing Chinese penetration – and within of a long-term historical perspective.

This contextualization is particularly useful for deconstructing the image that paints the MENA countries as condemned to a social and cultural backwardness without the possibility of redemption, prey to a violent and radical Islam – irreducibly "other" – a narrative that has become particularly popular in Europe after the 2008-2011 economic crisis, to support the rejection of migratory flows from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

It is undeniable that the MENA area is today extremely fragmented, plagued by widespread corruption and a patriarchal culture that digs the furrow of already deep social and territorial inequalities. Yet, it should be noted that this state of affairs was preceded by a millenary parable at whose initial point the balances were radically different: in the tenth century, the Arab world – albeit already differentiated internally – dominated the Mediterranean. As the dense excursus by Francesca Maria Corrao points out (pp. 3-44) for centuries the Islamic culture guarded the mathematical, astronomical and philosophical knowledge of the Greek and Indian civilizations, before the Ottoman Empire closed itself to the innovations of the XV-XVI century – namely the press and the modern scientific method – in a climate of growing opposition with the European powers. However, the slow decline of Constantinople and the history of the political entities that followed the disintegration of the Empire is punctuated by ambitious breaths of reform: the Ottoman Tanzimat and the Egyptian modernization of the mid-nineteenth century, the adherence of post-colonial leaders to the models of development of the Cold War – socialism or liberalism, the currents of critical Islam, which are highlighted in the essay by Mohammed Hashas (pp. 129-156).

The position of women in today's societies in MENA countries reflects perhaps better than any other aspect this persistent tension between conservation and progress, stasis and development. The theme is analyzed in the contribution of Ersilia Francesca (pp. 157-173), who underscores the persistence of social and formative imbalances capable of hindering the participation of women within the labor market. Despite the efforts made in the last twenty years by the governments of the region to promote women's education, a significant fraction of women over the age of fifteen are illiterate or poorly educated, especially in rural areas. Moreover, this condition is fueled by a "gender paradox" for which less qualified women find work more easily than those who receive tertiary education. This labor mismatch affects the young population transversally, as it derives from the distortions of the production systems of the region – often not very diversified and unable to provide jobs at the level of advanced training – it is reflected even more on women due to political and cultural reasons: legal, fiscal, and welfare systems structured on the model of the male breadwinner, which reinforce the still widespread belief that women's work is socially acceptable only if it does not question domestic and family care tasks. Consequently, women's participation in the labor market equates to low-skilled, underpaid, and irregular jobs.

The most original aspect of this essay consists in analyzing the importance of microcredit to overcome these obstacles. In North Africa, women have become privileged recipients of microfinance tools for at least two reasons: on the one hand, in fact, gender disparities make it more difficult for women to access ordinary credit; on the other hand, compared to men, women show greater reliability in repaying loans and a greater propensity to invest capital in activities useful for family well-being, with generally positive effects on entrepreneurship and – consequently – female independence. Of course, microcredit cannot be the only answer to gender inequalities in the labor market, in the MENA area. However, as the author suggests, this activity performs an enabling function for women's empowerment: microfinance institutions are able to reach women who – especially in rural areas – do not have access to essential health and social services and basic information on their sexual and reproductive health; they promote cooperation between women to achieve common goals and increase their influence in society. This is, of course, a fundamental requirement to achieve significant changes also in other legislative matters in which the effectiveness of current policies has proved largely insufficient, such as the fight against sexual abuse. The gender gap in North Africa and the Middle East, therefore, intertwines all the main divides within this region: between

urban and rural territories, religious fundamentalism and glimmers of secularization, authoritarian elites, and democratic demands. The recurring waves of popular mobilization – 2011 and 2019 – have restored the image of a society that is anything but static and hostile to change.

The main merit of the volume consists precisely in questioning binary contrasts between the societies that populate the different shores of the Mediterranean. It is essential to recognize the ferments that shake the latter and to identify the limits of the cooperation models adopted in the past between the European Union and MENA countries. The new global centrality of the basin cannot ignore the relaunch of this dialogue.

Samuel Boscarello
Scuola Normale Superiore
[samuel.boscarello@sns.it]

Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean. Sara Parks, Shayna Sheinfeld, Meredith J.C. Warren. New York: Routledge, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-138-54378-2. Pp. 370.

Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean is a well-needed resource for undergraduate courses pertaining to women's religious and leadership roles, as well as women as readers and writers of scriptures, in Judaism and Christianity, through a period that spans from the conquest of the Mediterranean by Alexander the Great (323 BC/BCE) to the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine I (357 AD/CE). Moreover, it is to note that the authors, as stated in one of their recent interviews, wanted to approach the question of methodology; they "wanted to be deliberate about promoting conscious use of methods as early as possible" and wanted their "readers… to pay more attention to marginalised experiences wherever we can find them in antiquity. We want them to imagine alternatives to the normative expectations of elite men from the various traditions."[4]

The book is divided into ten chapters, with the first two providing the tools necessary to investigate thoroughly and impartially through, first and foremost, the basic understanding of concepts of history, gender, texts, evidence, reading, the ancient Mediterranean world, and ancient religious

4 https://www.shilohproject.blog/jewish-and-christian-women-in-the-ancient-mediterranean-new-book/ (Nov 2021)

systems. Each chapter ends with a series of thought-provoking questions, glossary terms, further suggested readings, and possible activities for the class. Chapter three covers the major bodies of texts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods of Judaism and Christianity. The authors also introduce a woman or group of women from that corpus and additional resources to continue the investigation outside the classroom. Some of the women discussed here are Lot's daughters, Judith, Job's daughters, the women that helped to establish the Jesus movement or early Christianity (such as Mary Magdalene aka Mary the Tower and not Mary seen as a prostitute), and Beruriah, one of the very few women considered to be a Torah scholar. Chapter four focuses on accessing ancient sources while applying different interpretive lenses. Particular attention is given here to the Samaritan woman. Whereas in chapters five and six, the authors discuss at length women in early Judaism and in the early Jesus movement (underscoring the presence and powerful impact of the women followers of Jesus), they arranged chapter seven "according to the lived experiences of women from birth to death" (p. 180). The readers learn of the rituals of marriage, the tasks of potential mothers, mothers and midwives, the taboos and myths of menstruation and divorce, and the funerary practices of the times covered by this volume. Shifting from a more historical perspective to an exploration of women characters in literature, chapters eight and nine present the so-called Texts of Terror (because of the sexual violence toward women as punishment), as coined by biblical scholar Phyllis Trible, and noble deaths (or martyrdoms).

It is in chapter eight that some misinterpretations are found. Discussing the Annunciation, the authors state that Gabriel "came into" Mary to conceive Jesus. According to a Greek bible concordance,[5] this term is always used in the New Testament in a non-sexual context to refer to people entering a temple, synagogue, or other building (see Mathew 8:5, Matthew 12:45, and Mark 6:25 to name a few). Moreover, the New Testament uses another word for sexual activity, the word "γινώσκω" (ginosko), which is normally translated as "know." The authors also dedicate a section of this chapter to sexual violence toward men, including the crucifixion of Jesus as a moment of sexual molestation since he was stripped prior to the actual nailing on the cross. History teaches us that all crucified victims were stripped as a symbol of loss of power and dignity but also as a physical process to the final brutal outcome (the victim's body would have been naked during the scourging; additionally, the moving of a naked body

5 https://biblehub.com/greek/eiseltho_n_1525.htm

would have been more convenient and less burdensome when placed on the cross). Finally, the nails and the spear seen as phallic symbols thus implying sexual assault are the results of what seems to be a hasty analysis. It shows the authors are not very familiar with the practice of the crucifixion, an unfortunate but popular form of punishment used by Persians, Carthaginians, and Romans. The authors' disclaimer is that objectivity is not possible as one approaches texts and artefacts from one's unique perspective, hence they suggest to listen to the voices of scholars (and teachers and media and friends) from different positionalities (p. 279). I do hope that this text's young readers will be alert and voracious in consulting other texts and voices and able to be critical of what they have been provided here and elsewhere.

The volume closes with the period known as late antiquity at the core of chapter ten, where the readers can easily see the continuities and differences between the earlier religious practices and their iterations. In spite of the restrictions imposed by the Roman Empire and the discriminations between genders, Jewish and Christian women continued to be very active in their leadership roles. Thecla and Theodora Episcopa are great examples, which reiterate the importance of uncovering the untold stories in order to afford a complete assessment of the time and culture examined. The authors hope their "readers will see the interrelatedness of Judaism, Christianity, and other religions of the ancient Mediterranean, and see how common trends, for example in types of leadership options for women, changed in sync over the period."[6] This is an easy and enthralling read and one that will prove to be a very important tool for teachers and students not only of religious studies but also of sociology and cultural studies as well as women's and gender studies.

Giovanna Summerfield
Auburn University
[summegi@auburn.edu]

6 From the same interview of Nov 2021

CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Csillag studied History and European Ethnology at the universities of Innsbruck, Jean-Jaurès (Toulouse), and Yeditepe (Istanbul). He received a master's degree in both fields with papers on the reception of history in pop-cultural fiction. Currently, he is working on concepts of the Mediterranean as portrayed in nineteenth-century historical novels at the European University Institute in Florence. [Paul.Csillag@eui.eu]

Antonio D'amico is a Ph.D. student in the departments of Film and Media Studies and Italian Studies at Yale University. He obtained a B.A. in Film Studies at King's College London, writing his thesis on Pier Paolo Pasolini's documentary production. After graduating, he pursued an M.Phil. in Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge (St Edmund's College). His Master's thesis focused on Nanni Moretti's 2010s work. His current research focuses on the representation of religion in Italian post-Neorealist cinema, ethnographic documentaries depicting Sicily, and Western and Postcolonial Marxist Cultural Theory. [antonio.damico@yale.edu]

Elena Frasca is Researcher of Modern History at the University of Catania. She deals with the history of institutions, deepening the relationships between universities and urban power in the Southern Italy of the 18th and 19th centuries, focusing attention on cultural and scientific or lay-welfare associations. She also studies travelers' diaries in Sicily, underlining the relationship between the discovery of classicism and contemporary political instances, the criminal legislation in the Bourbon Southern Italy, the school regulations and that linked to marriage law. Her interests have mainly focused on the socio-political role of doctors and surgeons. She won the "Elide Stramezzi" award, bestowed by the Academy of History of Healthcare on November 26, 2015 in Rome for her publication *L'eco di Brown. Teorie mediche e prassi politiche* (Carocci, 2014). [efrasca@unict.it]

Paolo Militello is Associate Professor of Early Modern History in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Catania. At the same University, he is Scientific Manager of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree "TEMA+ European Territories: Heritage and Development". He holds a PhD in "Storia moderna", as well as his "Doctorat en Histoire et Civilisations" from the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, where he was a visiting professor in 2005, 2012, and 2015. He is member of the Mediterranean Institute of the University of Malta, of the Real Academia Burgense de Historia y Bellas Artes of Burgos, and of Red Cibeles – Red internacional de estudios interdisciplinares de ciudades (Universidad de Jaén). Specializing in Cultural History, Urban History, and History of Cartography, he is currently researching society, cities, and territories in the Euro-Mediterranean area during the Early Modern Age. [paolo.militello@unict.it]

Laura Restuccia is an Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities of the University of Palermo, Italy, where she teaches literary criticism and comparative literature. She is a member of the scientific committee of the Interdepartmental Research Centre for Migration; member of the "Seminar of French Philology," of the "Association for the Studies of Theory and Comparative History of Literature," of the "Italiques" Association, of the "University Society for French Language and Literature Studies" and correspondent member of the "National Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Palermo." In 2002 she was awarded the title of "Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques" for services rendered to French culture. She is a member of the editorial board of the journal *InVerbis*; director of the series "Literary Refractions" of the UNIPAPRESS publishing house and member of the scientific committee of the journal *Text & Context*. She was a member of the CUN 2007-2014 and of the CNAM from 2007 to 2010. Her areas of research are colonial and post-colonial literature; French-speaking literature; the relationships between Italian and French culture; literatures of migration; literature of the Italian diaspora; Italian colonial and post-colonial literature. [laura.restuccia@unipa.it]

Elena Emma Sottilotta is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Her research seeks to unearth non-canonical figures and narratives in the European fairy-tale tradition, with a focus on neglected women writers, collectors and storytellers. She also has a keen interest in the poetics and politics of adaptation of folk and fairy-tale narratives in

contemporary media. In 2022, she received her PhD from the University of Cambridge with a research project in women's studies, comparative literature and folklore, titled *Women Writing Folklore: Politics of Folk and Fairy-Tale Collections from Italian and Irish Islands* (1870-1920). She has presented and published her research widely in international conferences and peer-reviewed journals. During her academic path, she received several scholarships, prizes and awards, including the *Women's Studies Caucus Award* (2022, American Association for Italian Studies), the *St. Catharine's College Prize for Distinction in Research* (2021, St. Catharine's College, University of Cambridge) and the *Estella Canziani Postgraduate Bursary for Research* (2021, Folklore Society in London).

Veronica Vegna is Senior Instructional Professor, Director of the Italian Language Program, and Coordinator of the Languages Across the Curriculum Program at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *Donne, mafia e cinema: una prospettiva interdisciplinare* (2017), a critical study of gender roles within the mafia in contemporary Italian cinema. Her publications include "A Satirical Gaze on Sicily: Ficarra and Picone's *L'ora legale* (2017)" in *Sicily on Screen* (2020), "Il ruolo della madre in relazione alla mafia ne *I cento passi*" in *Il cinema di Marco Tullio Giordana. Interventi critici* (2014), "La mafia al femminile: un'analisi di *Angela* di Roberta Torre" in *Incontri culturali tra due mondi* (2014), and "La mafia senza gloria in *Placido Rizzotto*" in *Rivista Luci e Ombre* IV.2 (Summer 2016). Her research interests and publications are primarily on Italian cinema, migration, and language pedagogy. [vvegna@uchicago.edu]

The views and opinions expressed in *I.S. Med. Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, Editorial Board, or the Publisher.

Printed by
Digital Team – Fano (Pu)
March 2023