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I. S. MED.

Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean

04/2024

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Isbn: 9788869774881

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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the fourth issue of *I.S. Med. Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean* which is specifically focused on literature and diligently guest edited by Martino Lovato and C. Ceyhun Arslan. This current issue opens with their introduction and a delightful interview with Angela Fabris and Steffen Schneider, editors, together with Albert Göschl, of the volume *Sea of Literatures: Towards a Theory of Mediterranean Literature* (De Gruyter, 2023).

While we pursue ongoing explorations of the Mediterranean through the attentive written analyses of our authors, we continue to organize annual symposia, held in different pertinent sites. After a successful symposium in Palermo, Italy, we will be hosted by the University of Seville for our annual event in 2026. In the meantime, feel free to contact the authors directly: their emails are provided in the contributors' section of each issue.

Enjoy reading this great collection of articles!

OLD QUESTIONS AND NEW HORIZONS IN MEDITERRANEAN LITERARY STUDIES

Martino Lovato and C. Ceyhun Arslan*

The last decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a return of academic interest in Mediterranean Studies, after decades of Cold War interruption.[1] The most influential scholarship on the Mediterranean that evolved since then has focused on how to study the history of the Mediterranean. Fernand Braudel, whose main work centered on the "Mediterranean of the historian," is by now a reference figure for this new scholarship. Braudel paid great attention to the analysis of how space and geography affects human history over the *longue-durée*, and approached the Mediterranean as "a sum of individual histories."[2] Among the protagonists in the academic return of attention to Mediterranean history, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell brought another seminal contribution to the field, differentiating "a history *in* the Mediterranean," which focuses solely on a fragment of the sea, from a "history *of* the Mediterranean," which pays attention to circulations and translations that affect the entire basin. Their emphasis on networks and connectivity aimed to generate a "history *of* the Mediterranean,"[3] and resonates with an age like ours, where the movement of people, goods and information became a main focus of scholarly attention. More classic in its structure yet innovative in its approach, David Abulafia's *The Great Sea* wants instead to be "a history of the Mediterranean Sea" itself; one that centers upon the region to reconstruct the interactions between its peoples, from the ancient period to the present day.[4] All these works have reflected on how to find the best methodology for studying the Mediterranean's complex and centuries-long history.

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1 J.R. Henry, "Métamorphoses du mythe méditerranéen," J.R. Henry and G. Groc, eds., *Politiques méditerranéennes: entre logiques étatiques et espace civil: une réflexion franco-allemande* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), pp. 41-56.

2 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), I: 13.

3 Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2002), 2.

4 David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Lane, 2011), xvii.

I.S. MED • 4/2024 • ISBN: 9788869774881 • DOI: 10.7413/ISME0023

While much of Mediterranean Studies has focused on the study of the history of the Mediterranean, around a decade ago Karla Mallette and Sharon Kinoshita called for more attention to the Mediterranean in literary studies: unlike historians and art historians, they argued, literary critics have not used the Mediterranean as a category of analysis mainly due to "the tenacity of the nation in literary studies."[5] As new publications such as Silvia Caserta's *Narratives of Mediterranean Spaces*[6] show that the Mediterranean is now receiving increasing attention in literary studies, the editors of the volume *Sea of Literatures: Towards a Theory of Mediterranean Literature*, Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider, recently confirmed that historical sciences "have already reached a high methodological standard of Mediterranean studies,"[7] but the emerging Mediterranean literary studies has not reached a particular consensus on its methodological approach. This current issue of *Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean* is devoted to the recent growth Mediterranean literary studies and originates from the desire to assess the current state of this scholarly debate. The essays included in this volume focus on texts that cultivate new politics of memory, counteract typical geopolitical assumptions, and question foundational narratives on selfhood and otherness in the region. Our attempt has not primarily been that of advancing on a definition or theorization of Mediterranean literary studies, but rather to intercept the new directions that this burgeoning field of studies is taking, as this academic debate coexists in dialogue with other academic and non-academic approaches to the Mediterranean. Distinguishing the institutional debate from the purely literary interest in the Mediterranean is not easy. Between the waning tide of the Cold War and Globalization's rising one, however, we document the growth in interest for the Mediterranean in writers and critics alike. Since then, the Herderian nation-state paradigm has been put under scrutiny due to the effects, among others, of migration and the diffusion of digital media. Mediterranean studies, in this

5 Sharon Kinoshita, "Mediterranean Literature." A Companion to Mediterranean History. Eds. Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 314-329.

6 Fabris, Göschl, and Schneider, eds., *Sea of Literatures*; Silvia Caserta, *Narratives of Mediterranean Spaces: Literature and Art Across Land and Sea* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

7 Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider, "Introduction: Mediterranean Literary Studies – Definitions, Purpose, and Applications," in *Sea of Literatures: Toward a Theory of Mediterranean Literature*, eds. Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 6.

sense, further contributes to this growing tendency to move away from nationalistic paradigms in humanities.

Recent works in Mediterranean literary studies often approach the Mediterranean as a taxonomic category or as an "optic" or "lens" of interpretation. For example, Barbara Pezzotti has used "Mediterranean crime fiction" as a taxonomic category to discuss novels of crime fiction that are produced throughout the basin between the 1980s and 2010s.[8] Interestingly, when the Mediterranean is viewed as a taxonomic category, it steers attention to languages and literary traditions that current disciplinary frameworks often overlook. As Hilary Kilpatrick has shown, once we start to categorize both Greek and Arabic literatures as Mediterranean, we start to see similarities between the two traditions to which we have not paid attention before.[9] Studying the Mediterranean as a lens or optic generates new and creative interpretations on well-known artistic and narrative sources. For example, Cecile S. Hilsdale has called for adopting a Mediterranean lens for the study of Hagia Sophia, so that art historians pay attention to the different Mediterranean cultural and political interactions that shaped the construction and, ultimately, reception of this site, meaningful in the history of different religious traditions.[10] In this possibility of providing a different regional look even to otherwise familiar subjects lays that attractiveness of the Mediterranean as "a site of endless epistemological provocation."[11] The study of the Mediterranean allows to pay attention to the diverse ways in which artists and critics undertake what Kinoshita called "strategic regionalism," which allows us to "interrogate or displace otherwise settled or self-evident categories of analysis."[12] Critics have been again drawn to studies for the past few decades because, as Christopher Bush has put it,

8 Barbara Pezzotti, *Mediterranean Crime Fiction: Transcultural Narratives in and around the "Great Sea"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

9 Hilary Kilpatrick, "Eastern Mediterranean Literatures: Perspectives for Comparative Study," in *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures*, eds. V. Klemm and B. Gruendler (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000).

10 Cecile J. Hilsdale, "Visual Culture," in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, eds. Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 307.

11 Adrian Lahoud, "The Mediterranean, a New Imaginary," in *New Geographies, 5: The Mediterranean*, ed. Antonio Petrov (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2013), 83.

12 Sharon Kinoshita, "Negotiating the Corrupting Sea: Literature in and of the Medieval Mediterranean," in *Can We Talk Mediterranean?: Conversations on an Emerging Field in Medieval and Early Modern Societies*, eds. Brian A. Catlos and Sharon Kinoshita (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33.

areas "break open the limits of the national while retaining enough specificity to allow for in-depth research and knowledge of the relevant languages."[13] As global approaches attempt to generate large "world-system theories," they can sometimes find the need to attain linguistic proficiency and develop a growing understanding for different historical contexts. Mediterranean studies can draw upon the strengths of both area studies and global studies. The regional scope of the field has inspired general literary approaches tailored upon the Mediterranean space, such as Dionýz Ďurišin and Armando Gnisci's "Interliterary Mediterranean,"[14] or that open to the possibilities of a multi-directional approach to memory by the focus on space such as Betrand Westphal's *geocriticism*.[15]

Our attempt is not to generate here a history of the sea, nor we do perceive the sea merely as a background in which different people circulate or literatures are translated into each other. Building upon Edwige Tamalet Talbayev and Yasser Elhariry's edited volume *Critically Mediterranean*, we intend to "foreground an alternative epistemology of time, one engaged in the subjective experience of temporal frames and dedicated to the reclaiming of historical agency in the quandary of current-day Mediterranean politics."[16] Our approach foregrounds the agency of authors and scholars that invoked the Mediterranean in the last few decades. We wish to understand how the sea serves not only as a passive object of representation but instead as a source for different literary, artistic, and political visions in Mediterranean narratives. After all, it is among the most exquisite specificities of literary studies that of focusing on individual voices and original authorial perspectives. Articles in this special issue, therefore, avoid generating "system-theories" for the Mediterranean that neatly divide the basin into centers and peripheries. They do not solely contribute to producing a theory of Mediterranean literature, but also show a deep knowledge of the geopolitical and historical contexts of the sources that they study. In so doing, they

13 Christopher Bush, "Areas: Bigger than the Nation, Smaller than the World," in *Futures of Comparative Literature: State of the Discipline Report* (London: Routledge, 2017), 172.

14 Charles Sabatos and C. Ceyhun Arslan, "Ďurišin's Interliterary Mediterranean as a Model for World Literature," in *Sea of Literatures: Toward a Theory of Mediterranean Literature*, edited by Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider, 1-16. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023. 335-348.

15 Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (Berlin: Springer, 2011).

16 Yasser Elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, "Critically Mediterranean: An Introduction," in *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis*, eds. Yasser Elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 183.

demonstrate how the Mediterranean has served for the authors they study as a "significant geography," which, as Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini put it, refers to "the conceptual, imaginative, and real geographies that texts, authors, and language communities inhabit, produce, and reach out to."[17] Literary authors do not necessarily stand at a distance from the Mediterranean, in order to represent the sea to either master or resist it. They draw upon the Mediterranean to rewrite the typical historiographies of their local and national communities, just as they reassess our typical understandings of the Mediterranean in the process. The Mediterranean functions as a geopolitical context through which these authors have defined who they are and what they wish to become. In the process, artists also reassess the Mediterranean and its complex history. When they write about the sea, they also start to question well-established historical narratives and understand that what one may count as the objective truth is ultimately a fictional and narrative construct. Literary critics should therefore not solely aim to use the Mediterranean as a taxonomic category under which all texts produced throughout the basin should be categorized. "Mediterranean literary studies" should not merely map out transcultural literary networks and translations; the field can also put emphasis on the agency of Mediterranean authors and artists, as the "literary Mediterranean" is not necessarily an object that one represents or maps out.

While mostly devoted to subjects and authors in the European South, where much of the scholarship in Mediterranean literary studies still focuses, the articles in this issue demonstrate that the Mediterranean inspired new concepts and metaphors at the turn of the century, and underscore the importance of studying together languages, literary traditions, and time periods that the Mediterranean studies has often overlooked. For example, both Alice Parrinello's and Roberta Micallef's articles in this volume reflect upon literary perspectives on modernity, resonating with the attention paid by Judith E. Tucker to the modernization process in the Mediterranean; a perspective, as Konstantina Zanou has pointed out, that "stirs the waters of Mediterranean studies by imagining the sea from the vantage point of its southern and eastern shores."[18] Whereas most of the essays here included center on the northern shore of the basin, the issue also hosts a contribution on Turkish Mediterranean works, and all the contributions reveal the diverse ways in which authors engaged with the Mediterranean. As a result,

17 Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini, "Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature," *Journal of World Literature* 3, no. 3 (2018), 290.

18 Judith E. Tucker, ed., in *Making of the Modern Mediterranean: Views from the South* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), back cover.

they contribute to a key aim that Giovanna Summerfield has pointed out for the field: that of "reconsidering the Mediterranean, appreciating and demarginalizing the peoples and cultures of this vast region, while considering the affinities and differences is a valuable part of the process of unframing and reframing the concept of the Mediterranean provided thus far."[19]

As Megan C. MacDonald and Claire Launcbhury suggest, to put emphasis on how the Mediterranean has served as a source of inspiration for artists throughout decades through the Mediterranean means to employ an "old name to launch a new concept."[20] We are aware of how the regional concept of the Mediterranean was born as a colonial construct, and that even Braudel's conception of Mediterranean history, as Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas put it, "was a by-product of colonial entanglements in the Mediterranean."[21] Michael Herzfeld's concept "Mediterraneanism" testifies to the impact of postcolonial studies, as in outlining the "two horns" of the Mediterranean dilemma he makes frequent comparisons between Orientalism and Mediterraneanism.[22] As the field pays attention to unequal power dynamics that have shaped "the colonial sea," postcolonial studies have warned critics against the tendency to romanticize Mediterranean sublime visions of co-existence. The articles in this special issue show a strong awareness about the lessons that postcolonial studies have taught us. Therefore, they frequently reflect on "the Orient" or "the Other" in the narrative sources that they study. More than forty years after the first publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), one relevant element appearing in the articles here included is the application of postcolonial critical tools on subjects internal to Europe itself. For example, as Giovanni Maria Dettori shows us, one needs to pay attention to the marginalization of Sardinia in the Italian official historiography or, as Paul Csillag demonstrates,

19 Giovanna Summerfield, "Introduction: Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities," in *Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities*, eds. Giovanna Summerfield and Rosario Pollicino (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 4.

20 Claire Launchbery and Megan C. MacDonald, "Introduction: Urban Bridges and Global Capital(s)," in *Urban Bridges, Global Capital(s): Trans-Mediterranean Francosphères*, eds. Claire Launchbury and Megan C. MacDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 4, emphasis in original.

21 Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas, "A Colonial Sea: The Mediterranean, 1798-1956," *European Review of History = Revue Européene d'Histoire* 19, no. 1 (2012), 2.

22 Michael Herzfeld, "The Horns of the Mediterraneanist Dilemma," *American Ethnologist* 11, no. 3 (1984): 439-454.

of the Byzantine Empire in much of the Western European historiography. Furthermore, some of the narratives that Dettori and Csillag discuss even view Sardinia and the Byzantine Empire as part of the Orient. While we should not overlook the colonial context in which the Mediterranean was first envisioned as a modern object of study, some of the articles in this special issue also demonstrate that many authors throughout the Mediterranean draw upon the Mediterranean to undermine typical and Orientalist assumptions about the sea. At the same time, these articles also demonstrate that Europe is not as monolithic as some works in the postcolonial tradition claim it to be.

To handle the contradictions and paradoxes inherent to this comparative perspective is another of the challenges that scholars in Mediterranean literary studies are facing. Therefore, the articles in this issue also complicate some of the Cold War binaries upon which early postcolonial scholarship was produced, as they no longer merely view "the East as the mirror image of the West."[23] The "strategic regionalism" that artists and scholars pursue makes them aware of the ongoing imperialistic uses of the Mediterranean and make a claim to the sea in order to contest entrenched assumptions and rewrite histories of their communities. Reading together Salvatore Pappalardo's study of Vincenzo Consolo's retrieval of Sicily's multiple genealogies, Jerikho Amores's study of Barcelona's reshaping as a Mediterranean metropolis through the ironic eyes of Eduardo Mendoza, and Jawad El-Annabi's analysis of power and representation between the US, Europe and the Mediterranean, also reminds of the long-dated divorce that occurred between postmodern and postcolonial criticisms during the 1980s and 1990s. On the one hand the realm of aesthetics and stylistic interrogation, on the other the investigation over the historical context literature interacts with, and to the imbalance of power existing between and within societies. This split emerged from the misunderstanding, nurtured by Edward Said himself in the heated controversies of those years,[24] that postcolonial studies would be interested only in history and politics. As Sangeeta Ray points out, however, postcolonial studies have always paid attention to aesthetics and the literary proper, without which the practice

23 Longxi Zhang, *Unexpected Affinities: Reading Across Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 11.

24 See, for example, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, where Said continued his polemic against the "denaturated and depoliticized" effects of postmodernism in academic politics. Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 55

of literary criticism would be simply impossible.[25] The debate on Mediterranean literary studies shows that what is at stake in the field is the conception of literature and literary studies themselves, and that this debate is suitably positioned to address – and perhaps redress – the relevance of literary claims in today's Mediterranean.

As in the past invoking the Mediterranean served imperialist projects, returning to the Mediterranean in the age of globalization calls into question the awareness brought by postcolonial studies of the challenge for scholars who do not have access to financial and institutional resources in the Global South. It is no coincidence, for example, that some of the most influential monographs on the basin are written by scholars who are based in well-endowed institutions in Europe and North America. The methodological approaches that we articulate in this introduction and observe in the articles featured in this issue can cultivate a more inclusive Mediterranean studies, as the hopes raised by the Mediterranean as a potential horizon remain a relevant subject of investigation in the field. Even a single author can be studied for increasing our understanding of the diverse ways in which the Mediterranean has served as a source for different visions and hopes. Parrinello's reading of LGTBQA+ narratives constitutes another sign of the liveliness of this debate, while it also continues the longer trend of critical solidarity expressed between European, Mediterranean, and Global "Souths" discussed, among others, in Franco Cassano's *Southern Thought*.[26] Both elements contribute to the novel version of the Mediterranean emerged from this generation of authors and scholars.

The issue opens with Paul Csillag's study of "negative Byzantism" in nineteenth-century historical novels, with a particular focus on Abel-François Villemain's (1790-1870) works. As Csillag shows, most Western historiographical works – including historical novels – have tended to project the Eastern Roman Empire as a decadent remnant of its Western counterpart. In contrast, ancient Greece was viewed as the root from which an advanced Western Europe emerged. Identifying this negative Byzantism as a particular form of Mediterraneanism, Csillag provides an in-depth analysis of Villemain's novel *Lascaris*, which gives us a representation of the Greek War of Independence. The article demonstrates how "[n]egative Byzantinism functioned as a supplement to positive Philhellenism"

25 Sangeeta, Ray, "Postcolonially Speaking?" *Modern Language Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2020): 553-566.

26 Franco Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

(5). At the same time, Csillag complicates the binary between a decadent Byzantine and an enlightened ancient Greek past as he also shows how Russian Tzars viewed themselves as legitimate successors of the Byzantine Empire, pointing out that critics should not solely study French sources to understand shifting attitudes towards the Eastern Mediterranean. Although Villemain does not receive much attention in academic and cultural circles, his ideas continue to shape the popular imagination.

Jawad El-Annabi gives a close reading of Paul Theroux's (b. 1941) *Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* to flesh out "Theroux's Mediterranean." In particular, he demonstrates how his text has resonated with a generation of American readers and continues a tradition of travelogues whose tradition dates back to the birth of the Grand Tour. Theroux fashions himself as a traveler who is able to grasp the essence of a place and of a people: "Theroux focused on encounters with ordinary people more than tourist attractions and beautiful landscapes. He sets himself apart from the tradition of the Grand Tour as well as the scenic descriptions other travel writers usually produce" (58). The text guides the American reader, as Theroux also enjoys a great sense of privilege as he moves across borders and enjoys exclusive access to different places. It also provides an American representation of the Mediterranean. As El-Annabi underscores, Theroux also expresses a strong desire to convey a sense of authentic Mediterranean to his readers, while serving as expression of "American exceptionalism" at the end of the 1990s.

Giovanni Maria Dettori examines the works of Sergio Atzeni (1952-1995) in order to contest conceptualizations of Sardinia as an island that has remained unaffected by historical transformations in the Italian peninsula and the Mediterranean. Numerous authors such as D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) have reinforced orientalist assumptions about Sardinia as an unchanging space. However, Atzeni fleshes out Sardinia's Mediterranean connections; his works thus augur the multicultural character of Italy that is receiving more attention in Italian studies today. Atzeni, unlike authors such as Lawrence, does not aim to portray a romantic vision of Sardinia, and is rather interested in "presenting a cross-section of society in an urban Sardinian context at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties" (87). Dettori also pays attention to the use of language in Atzeni's works in order to further demonstrate how the author posits Sardinia as a Mediterranean space.

In a similar vein, Salvatore Pappalardo examines the works of Vincenzo Consolo (1933-2012) to demonstrate how his writings, such as *Nottetempo, casa per casa*, *La ferita dell'aprile*, *L'olivo e l'olivastro*, and *Retablo*, flesh out Sicily's overlooked Mediterranean connections; in particular, the island's Jewish and Islamic heritages – or as Pappalardo puts it, "the Mediterranean of remnants" of the island. Pappalardo examines Consolo as a Mediterranean author who challenges traditional views about Sicily. His genealogical excavation is especially visible when Pappalardo notes: "Through his narrative archeology, Consolo unearths and reinterprets layers of Sicilian history, reimagining his own lineage in the process and challenging traditional views of Sicilian identity" (95). Consolo's works, therefore, challenge typical historiographical perspectives that have overlooked Sicily's Mediterranean connections. We also find Pappalardo's use of the concept of grafting inspiring, since "[f]or Consolo, grafting is not just a horticultural technique but a metaphor that epitomizes Sicilian civilization" (96).

Jerikho Ezzekiel Amores examines representations of Barcelona in the 1990s with a particular focus on Eduardo Mendoza's (b. 1943) novels, such as *Sin noticias de Gurb*, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*. They all testify to sudden transformations occurred during Barcelona's transformation into a Mediterranean metropolis after the Olympic games, and the impact of global capitalist modernity on the city's urban and socioeconomic fabric. Mendoza's works use satire and humor in order to steer attention to the sense of displacement that their characters experience as they confront the city's sudden transformation. Amores also demonstrates how recent economic and infrastructural shifts in Barcelona resonate with other parts of the Mediterranean that are also characterized by a sense of displacement that the rise of global capitalism has caused. Mendoza's novels ultimately point to "alternative mapping of narratives about Barcelona and the Mediterranean around the Olympic Games of 1992" (121).

Likewise, Alice Parrinello has examined narratives regarding LGBTQIA+ communities and subjectivities. She pays attention to some recent publications that challenge homonationalist understandings such as Mario Desiati's (b. 1977) *Spatriati*, *Polveri sottili* and Emanuela Anechoum's (b. 1991) *Tangerinn*. While most narratives of migration regarding the LGBTQIA+ community adopt a homonationalist stance and hence project the Northern Italy and ultimately Northern Europe as the beacon of modernity towards which all queer people aspire to migrate, the novels that

Parinello study feature queer characters who migrate from north to south. Many studies of migration also project Southern Italy as morally, temporally, and economically backward and valorize what Parinello calls a "modern homosexuality" that contrasts with the "Mediterranean homosexuality" that one sees in Southern Italy and Islamic countries of the Mediterranean. The novels Parrinello studies complicate binary assumptions about north and south that we see in these narratives, and open new perspectives on this research paths across the sea.

Roberta Micallef points to the relative lack of attention to women's writing from the Eastern Mediterranean in Mediterranean studies. As a case study, she examines Ayla Kutlu's (1938-2010) *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis* (Don't Leave Triyandafilis) and Bejan Matur's (b. 1968) poetry. Micallef demonstrates that these works can be categorized as Eastern Mediterranean works that capture the transition from empires to nation-states. Both Kutlu and Matur view the Mediterranean as a space that helps them rethink the national and political genealogy of spaces. They also add the voices of women, migrants, and minorities from the southern Turkish coast to the conversation about Mediterranean identities. Micallef ultimately demonstrates how these authors draw upon the Mediterranean to rewrite their histories.

Although these critics specialize in different languages and time periods, they all put emphasis on the agency of writers, and their creative ways of engaging with the Mediterranean. They show the relevance for the study of Mediterranean literature not only to map out what circulated in the basin but also to understand the diverse ways in which writers have engaged with the sea: just as writers redefine their communities, they help us rethink the sea anew.

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INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA FABRIS AND STEFFEN SCHNEIDER

Giovanna Summerfield, Rosario Pollicino

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Steffen Schneider is a Full Professor of Italian and French Literature at the University of Graz. He is head of the Core research aria *Transmediterranean Entanglements. Movements and relations in the Mediterranean and beyond* at the Faculty of Humanities/Graz and co-editor (with Angela Fabris and Albert Goeschl) of the volume *Sea of Literatures. Towards a Theory of Mediterranean Literature*. He has published numerous articles on the representation and the idea of the Mediterranean in French and Italian literature with a special focus on Sicily. Schneider is also a specialist of the Italian Renaissance. His book *Kosmos – Seele – Text. Formen der Partizipation und ihre literarische Vermittlung. Marsilio Ficino, Pierre de Ronsard, Giordano Bruno* (2012) received the Elisabeth-Richter Price of the Deutscher Romanistenverband – the Association of German scholars in romance studies. He spent two years studying in

I.S. MED • 4/2024 • ISBN: 9788869774881 • DOI: 10.7413/ISME0024

Italy, one in Genoa and one in Rome, where he researched the works of Giordano Bruno.

Q.Tell us about the inspiration and need that prompt you to write such an interesting and pertinent volume.

A.F. My interest in Mediterranean literature arose in 2013 at a conference organized by the European Union for young doctoral students that was held in Koper. On that occasion, driven by the desire to find a common and, at the same time, distinct ground of analysis for young scholars from all over Europe, I chose to talk about the distinct forms of representation and trafficking of people, objects and cultures found in Mediterranean literature of antiquity. My lecture, entitled *Mediterranean settings and urban spaces in the Decameron*, attempted to elaborate a construction of the rhetoric of place. It met with considerable success with an extensive series of questions in presence and at a distance which encouraged me to develop a model of analysis, beginning with some fourteenth-century novellas and extending to more recent eras.

S.S. I have been fascinated by Mediterranean studies for a good decade now: I started by giving lectures on the representation of Mediterranean port cities in modern literature. In doing so, I was able to observe that, in addition to the specific national contexts in which such representations must be seen, there are also many transnational contexts that require a comparative perspective on these texts. This is of course because the authors I presented to my students do not limit themselves to their national horizons, but also communicate with each other across linguistic and national borders, thereby creating an international Mediterranean discourse. Furthermore, limiting the discussion to a purely national perspective would also be a complete misrepresentation of the subject matter, as the Mediterranean has always been a crossroads and a marketplace where people of different origins meet and mix since time immemorial. But as indisputable as this fact seemed to me, I could find little help in literary studies. Even ten years ago, there were already many essays and anthologies on Mediterranean literature, but they were mostly individual accounts in which this or that novel or author was examined. Methodological questions and theoretical concepts of Mediterranean literature across languages and countries were hardly dealt with. At the same time, however, interest in such questions was noticeable everywhere and the first essays did appear, for example by Karla Mallette and Sharon Kinoshita, who started to develop concepts for

the study of Mediterranean literature. That encouraged me, of course, but I have to say that the greatest source of inspiration was historical research, such as Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's concept of 'connectivity', which has become very popular in literary studies in recent years. Despite these inspirations, it seemed to me that only the first steps towards Mediterranean literary studies had been taken and that a new level could only be reached in cooperation with international specialists. Fortunately, I found allies in my two co-editors who saw things in a similar way to me and so we decided to produce this book together.

Q. Oftentimes Mediterranean Studies and literature are not connected. We see more of a historical or geographical reading of the region. What is the reason, according to you?

A.F. School and university education, which is increasingly specialized, often unwittingly leads to a preference for one-sided readings of certain spaces, environments or historical realities. These are single readings that, in some cases, allow for real leaps forward, regarding a particular aspect. However, this is not the case with the Mediterranean and the narratives concerning it, which are the product of a close combination of the historical dimension, the space-related dimension and a number of comparative dynamics. For this reason, the approach to Mediterranean narratives requires a broader and more articulated view that, even while privileging one particular approach, does not neglect the others or a part of them.

S.S. I think that Mediterranean studies have to fight for recognition because they are partly competing with the very successful postcolonial studies. Finally, we must not forget that the fundamental works and ideas of Mediterranean studies – Fernand Braudel's opus magnum and Albert Camus's statements on 'pensée du midi' – are rooted in colonialism. By this I mean the idea that there is something like a Mediterranean cultural identity, a unity that encompasses the Mediterranean. This idea urgently needs to be decolonized: it not only obscures the existing cultural, religious, political, economic and linguistic differences in the Mediterranean region, but also obscures the unequal distribution of power.

Secondly, the traditional, but still extremely influential, idea of a Mediterranean unity has other disadvantages. It is used, again by Camus, but also by many of his modern followers, to distinguish it from Northern Europe (especially Germany and the United Kingdom) and the United States

and to represent an alternative to imperialism, capitalism and certain downsides of modernization. I think that many literary scholars are very skeptical of such identity claims, and rightly so. In our modern, globalized, social media-connected world, attempts to sharply distinguish cultures seem oddly antiquated. And finally, of course, the transnational approach of Mediterranean studies also poses a challenge, because most literary scholars tend to be specialists in the literature of a single country while looking across borders requires specific skills. The relevant training is rarely offered at our universities, so it is not easy to gain good access to Mediterranean studies.

Q. How do you think literature helps in the understanding of a multifaceted Mediterranean culture?

A.F. Literature employs an evocative use of words and varied narrative formulas that manage to bring people closer to space, history and the human being by generating synergies and convergences of different depths and giving rise to suggestions that manage to speak to the individual in a broad and specific way at the same time. Literature fosters a process of approaching different spaces and times on many levels, and this is even more true for a multifaceted and multidimensional reality such as the Mediterranean.

S.S. In general, literary texts are important agents of social communication. They play a major role in the self-reflection of societies, in the shaping of cultures and identities. Texts are essential media of cultural memory, in which communities decide which aspects of the past they want to remember and how these memories are to be evaluated. The study of literature therefore makes it possible to reconstruct the world of imagination and, more generally, the cultural 'knowledge' that is inscribed in it. Of course, this also applies to Mediterranean literature. It stores the experiences, ideas, values and desires of the people who created it and for whom it was written. The more of this literature we capture and the more we understand how this literature is interconnected, the better we will learn to understand Mediterranean cultures. Incidentally, I would prefer not to speak of a Mediterranean culture in the singular, but to use the plural in order to recognize the differences that actually exist. I would also see these Mediterranean cultures as historically changeable and emphasize that they have always been permeable to non-Mediterranean cultures. Therefore, we should always take into account the interactions between the Mediterranean and the rest of the world.

Q. Your book is divided into the three methodologies that you and your colleagues are introducing in the volume. Beside the comparative approach, you consider essential the use of appropriate spatial concepts when reading Mediterranean literature as well as a memory studies approach. Can you expand? Can/should we use one method at a time or more than one? Can you give us an example?

A.F. The three methodological approaches included in the book allow for individual critical paths while fostering fruitful exchanges on the analytical level. For example, in the volume, I address the Mediterranean crime narrative by bringing together two biographically distant authors, Amara Lakhous and Jean-Claude Izzo, who nevertheless have aspects in common: the recognition of crime as an obstacle that hinders the normal flow of life, in a heterotopic space marked by incommunicability and a multi-ethnic state of crisis, reflecting, on a smaller scale, the heterotopia par excellence represented by the Mediterranean. In this way, the essay combines a comparative path with the study of specific spatial components: for example, the urban spaces and the water surface of the Mediterranean are both places of crisis, where communication is disrupted, and spaces that are subjected to the control and exercise of power through continuous striations are incessantly reproduced as hegemonic forms of control.

S.S. I do indeed believe that we should start from suitable concepts of space and theoretically distinguish between them so that we avoid ambiguities in our terms and do not create methodological confusion. As far as concepts of space are concerned, in the introduction to the book, it was first important to distinguish between real space and its literary representation. This is not only to emphasize the difference between literature and reality, but also to show that real space can also become the subject of literary studies. By this we mean that literary production is often locally or regionally rooted, which is why it can be useful to examine the personal relationships between authors, readers, publishers, media and institutions on a local or regional level in order to better understand the emergence and dissemination of certain Mediterranean literatures or schools. Examples of this could include the translators in Toledo in the 12th and 13th centuries, who are exemplary of intercultural exchange in the Mediterranean region. Such centers and group formations are still important in the 20th century and in the present. There are many other circumstances of a political, social, cultural, linguistic or religious nature that have an impact on the production and reception of literature. In this

sense, a historical analysis of the conditions in the Mediterranean region plays a role in literary studies.

But unlike in history – and here I come to the imaginary space of the literary text – real space has no direct power to determine literature. Because literary fictions create their own imagined reality, extra-literary conditions have only a relative explanatory power. As I said earlier, the literary space of a text mixes the ideas of its author with the voices of a collective. The way in which the Mediterranean is presented to us in a literary text tells us a lot about values, cultural practices, political attitudes, fantasies and emotions. For the purposes of Mediterranean literary studies, the origin of the author is of secondary importance at this level of analysis. Mediterranean texts are interesting when the region does not merely appear as an interchangeable backdrop, but is itself an important object of action and reflection. Such texts generate a knowledge of the Mediterranean that reacts to earlier knowledge and that future texts can build on.

In this way, the third space, which we have termed conceptual space, finally emerges: Mediterranean literature forms something like an archive in which Mediterranean knowledge is gathered from a wide variety of sources, which every text draws on and into which every text adds new content. Ultimately, I believe that this conceptual space deserves our special attention because we can learn from it what meanings the Mediterranean has had for different cultures and individuals in different times. Finally, I would like to emphasize once again how important it is to mix and use all spatial concepts and methods. If we want to analyse an individual text, for example, we will look at the real contacts and networks in which the author was involved; we will come across numerous traces of conceptual space in his text and analyse their meaning, as well as the semantization and structure of the fictional space. Ultimately, all levels must be placed in relation to each other.

Q. The Mediterranean area has always been characterized by migratory waves. How does literature not only record these movements but reflect upon this important phenomenon and the cultural changes/reinventions stemmed from it?

A.F. I will use again some examples: on the one hand, the fiction in different languages of Amara Lakhous, in which the sufferings of migrants find space through the depiction of pacified and absolutely unhappy forms of coexistence. It seems to me that, in these terms, the fictional and/or testimonial power of literature can be an added value, that is, it is

a valuable asset that allows for an active immersion, including ethical immersion, in issues of stringent actuality. Takoua Ben Mohamed's Italian graphic novels are also, in my opinion, crucial for their ability to bring distinct narrative and visual forms into dialogue around the theme of migration and transculturality (for example, the case of recognizing aspects in common between distinct cultures as well as the case with *Sotto il velo* from 2016). Think also of the dissonant and heterotopic depiction of migrants in the glossy existence of the protagonists of Luca Guadagnino's psychological drama *A Bigger Splash* (2015).

S.S. The methodological distinction between the three spaces is also very useful to us when evaluating migration. First of all, because migration permanently changes the composition of the real space and thus also the literary scene. Newly immigrated authors bring with them new narrative structures, new linguistic phenomena and new content, they generate attention and initiate discussions. It can be shown, for example, how migrant authors or authors with migrant roots who have immigrated to Italy via the Mediterranean introduce completely new perspectives on Italy's connection to the Mediterranean. In their texts, they remeasure the sea, uncover hidden or veiled power structures and criticize them. I am thinking, for example, of Igiaba Scegu, who discovered Bernini's elephant in front of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome and followed this up with an intensive reflection on Italian colonial history in Africa, which was part of the fascist Mediterranean policy. She thus introduces new aspects into Italian cultural memory and changes the way Italians view the Mediterranean. This also changes the archive, our knowledge of the Mediterranean, and gives us a new, critical view of things, which is crucial in order to work towards a better future. Another text I would like to mention as an example is the novel *Leaving Tangier* (Partir) by Tahar ben Jelloun, which follows the migration story of a young man who fails in his adopted home of Barcelona. The reflective level to which you allude in your question is realized here precisely through failure. The hero's death illustrates the asymmetrical power relations between North and South that divide the Mediterranean. It can be read as an urgent appeal for a fairer economic order.

Q. Being Sicilians, we are very interested and happy to see not only the purposeful mention of Lampedusa's masterpiece *Il gattopardo*, in the introduction, and an essay on Terranova's *Addio fantasmi,* but Steffen's essay on Sciascia's *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. How do they illustrate the challenges

and methods of literary Mediterranean Studies? Are these case studies that could open the way to reading other literary works that thus far have been analyzed with a more traditional and national approach?

A.F. Although my essay is not dedicated to Sicily I feel like answering the question in the affirmative. Think of Gesualdo Bufalino's *Diceria dell'untore* (1981) and the Rocca, where the hospital is not only a place of monastic seclusion but is above all a place of enchantment in which one lives suspended in a dimension outside of space and time, in a kind of condition of exceptionality, within Sicily and, in turn, within the Mediterranean. Such a reading allows for a different framing of space in a multilayered and culturally dense place like Sicily.

S.S. Sicily is a particularly interesting case within Mediterranean studies. The island has produced an impressive series of important literary masterpieces since the national unification of Italy. For a long time, these texts revolved around the trauma of the unification process and were very much focused on a supposedly fixed, unchanging Sicilianity. The manifold Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean roots of Sicilian culture, on the other hand, were either ignored or rather negatively evaluated; in any case, they were marginalized. This is the reason why such texts pose a big challenge for a Mediterranean approach: they push aside the Mediterranean character of Sicily, focusing on the pain suffered, so that an interpretation that addresses the repressed aspects can initially seem alienating. Consequently, in these cases, Mediterranean studies bring up what has been excluded or marginalized, quite analogous to the approach of Serena Todesco, who in her essay on Nadia Terranova mixes gender studies and Mediterranean studies to make the repressed female voices of Sicily speak. Such an approach via the marginalized may be rather uncomfortable for traditional literary studies, but it has numerous advantages: after all, it opens up access to important aspects of Sicily's past, to the recognition of what has been split off from official culture and thus also to a completion and enrichment of Sicily's identity. There are certainly other texts besides the ones you mentioned that would also allow access via the margins, and I think that some of Pirandello's texts in particular lend themselves to this. I am thinking, for example, of *I vecchi e i giovani*, where the island's intercultural past is mentioned marginally a few times, but then immediately pushed aside again. However, a complete rethink is taking place in more recent texts from Sicily. This allows today's authors to address the island's connections to the Mediterranean and global societies, leaving the old myth of Sicily behind.

Q. Where do we go from here? What are your plans (or your plans for colleagues in the field) after *Sea of Literatures*?

A.F. The next volume planned in the open-access series I direct at De Gruyter publisher dealing with Mediterranean itineraries (AAIM https://www.degruyter.com/document/isbn/9783111073644/html?lang=en) is entitled *Fragili idilli. Per un'ecocritica del Mediterraneo.* Steffen Schneider and I are the editors. The volume aims to explore the image of the Mediterranean that has started to waver in recent decades following the drastic effects of climate change. This leads to conflicts between the traditional epistemology of the Mediterranean and new topics related to the fragile ecosystems of the region. The essays gathered in this volume discuss these topics and conflicts, bringing into dialog aspects of current ecocriticism with the most recent trends in Mediterranean Studies.

S.S. We continued to work on the Mediterranean after the volume was completed. The next book to be published will deal with ecopoetic readings of Mediterranean texts – this time starting with ancient texts – and will also include films and works of art. It is expected to appear next year in the same series as *Sea of Literatures* and is edited by Angela Fabris and myself. In the meantime, I have also succeeded in firmly establishing Mediterranean Studies at my faculty in Graz by launching an interdisciplinary research program together with some colleagues. It is called *Trans-Mediterranean Entanglements. Movements and Relations in the Mediterranean and beyond* and its special focus is on the global connections of the Mediterranean region in literature, but also in all other cultural areas.

Q. Please add anything that you would like to say about your volume, your research, or the field of Mediterranean Studies.

A.F. My research in the field of Mediterranean studies is actively continuing in the wake of this volume and the next one, which I hope and believe will be a stimulus to numerous scholars. When I think that the 2024 annual conference of the Association of Italianists held in Palermo chose as its title "Mediterranean Routes. Migrations and Hybridizations in Italian Literature" I think it is a booming field of study. Because we all, if we think about the variety of cultures, religions, travel, displacement, multiple perceptions between shores, water and sky, are children of the Mediterranean.

S.S. As far as my own research is concerned, I will be pursuing two projects in the near future: a book on literary Mediterranean port cities and a series of articles on constructions of the Mediterranean in Italian geo-philosophy. Incidentally, I believe that Mediterranean studies will remain alive for a long time to come, because the Mediterranean region is also in a state of permanent upheaval and is constantly facing new challenges.

ARTICLES

"QUE DES CENDRES"
Negative Byzantinism as an Imperial Ideology

Paul Csillag*

Abstract

In this chapter, I will deconstruct *negative Byzantinism* by analyzing Abel-François Villemain's historical novel *Lascaris, ou les Grecs du Quinzième Siècle* (1825). In French Romantic literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) Empire symbolized imperial degeneration. As a special form of Orientalism or Mediterraneanism, negative Byzantinism served Latin Christians to belittle Orthodox believers. Western writers used fictionalized tales of the Byzantine Empire as historical analogies to indirectly criticize the allegedly Oriental habits of the nineteenth-century Greeks. As a cultural alternative to Byzantinism, they proposed (Phil-)Hellenism. According to Philhellenes like Villemain, the Greeks ought to honor their Hellenic, ancient heritage and not their Christian, medieval traditions. Since Western authors deemed themselves the heirs of ancient Hellas – because of their supposedly enlightened education and liberal politics – they claimed tutelage over the current Greeks in the form of a historically justified civilizing mission. In contrast, they described the Russian Empire as a poor imitation of degenerate Byzantium unfit to rule its Orthodox coreligionists. Villemain spearheaded this worldview with his novel *Lascaris*. With my analysis of his book, I will demonstrate how the author instrumentalized the notion of Byzantine degeneration and Hellenic progress to argue in favor of French imperialism in the Eastern Mediterranean. The deconstruction of negative Byzantinism and the unveiling of its imperialist connotations is vital for a better understanding of past and present representations of the Byzantine Empire in historiography and historical fiction.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, Historical Fiction, Imperialism, Mediterraneanism, Negative Byzantinism

> But the subjects of the Byzantine Empire, who assume and dishonour the names both of Greeks and Romans, present a dead uniformity of abject vices, which are neither softened by the weakness of humanity, nor animated by the vigour of memorable crimes. […] A succession of priests and superstition: their views are narrow; their judgement is feeble or corrupt; […].[1]

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1 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. H. H. Milman, vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847), 284.

I.S. MED • 4/2024 • ISBN: 9788869774881 • DOI: 10.7413/ISME0025

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) held the Byzantine Empire in low esteem. The author of the by-now legendary historiography *The History of the Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) described the development of the Eastern Roman Empire as a slow process of degeneration and decay. Gibbon declared that the Byzantines continued the history of the Greeks and the Romans – the putative supreme civilizations of Mediterranean antiquity – only in name. According to the eminent historian, Byzantine culture was coined by "vices," "weakness," and "memorable crimes." For the British historian, the Byzantines' eventual downfall had been precipitated by the corrosion of their civilization, arts, and science. In his eyes, the heirs to the Romans and Greeks were subdued by the Ottomans in 1453 because of a deviation from their former ways.

In this chapter, I define Gibbon's act of pejoratively describing the Eastern Roman Empire as "negative Byzantinism." It is important to apply a closer scrutiny to this concept since Gibbon's ideas were influential in the academic and popular historiography of the coming centuries. Especially French novelists of Romanticism appreciated his evaluation of the late Roman Empire. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, various authors wrote about the demise of the so-called *Bas Empire*. Romantic novelists and historiographers – then categories difficult to separate – redeployed Gibbon's vision of the Byzantines. This common fascination for the Eastern Roman Empire raises the question of why European writers were attracted by its history and why they so eagerly imbibed negative Byzantinism.

To respond to this question, I will analyze the historical novel *Lascaris* by Abel-François Villemain (1825).[2] Other works, such as Count Vaublanc's *Le dernier des Césars* (1819), or Collin de Plancy's *La prise de Constantinople par Mahomet II* (1819), could also have been selected.[3] However, the novel *Lascaris* was the most popular book dealing with Byzantine history in the French 1820s and thus, constitutes an ideal source. An anonymous reviewer stated in the contemporary newspaper *La Pandore*: "We know that the author of *Lascaris* was one of the first to support this unlucky [Greek] nation whose destiny has caused pity among all Europeans."[4] Another critic writing for *Le Corsaire* remarked: "Without a doubt,

2 Abel-François Villemain, *Lascaris, ou les Grecs du quinzième siècle* (Pris : Ladvocat, 1825).

3 J. A. S. Collin de Plancy, *La prise de Constantinople par Mahomet II* (Paris: P. Mongie Ainé, 1819); Vincent-Maria Viénot de Vaublanc, *Le dernier des Césars; ou, La chute de l'empire romain* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1819).

4 "Mélanges littéraires de M. Villemain" *La Pandore*, Septembre 24, 1827, 3.

no one else but the author of *Lascaris* could make us fully understand the great personalities of antiquity."[5] These are but two of many voices in the choir singing the novelist's praise.

My analysis ought to visualize how Villemain instrumentalized Gibbon's dichotomy between bad Byzantines and good antiquity to argue in favor of French imperialism in the Mediterranean. First, I will explain the author's idea of negative Byzantinism, before illustrating how he used the concept to, on the one hand, promote French Hellenism, and on the other, decry Russian Byzantinism. Instead of focusing on the literary aspects of the novel, the analysis will mainly target Villemain's political incentives. The goal is to unveil what ideological worldview motivated nineteenth-century novelists to publish historical fiction on the Byzantine Empire.

Following the ideas of D. A. Angelos, Helena Bodin, and Cyril Mango, we can understand negative Byzantinism as a derogatory Othering of the Byzantine Empire.[6] Already in its origins, the term "Byzantine Empire" was used to *other* the late Romans, which means to present its inhabitants as uncultured and morally depraved foreigners as well as exotic opposites to the supposedly Occidental Hellenes of antiquity. The epithet was created retrospectively by the sixteenth-century historian Hieronymus Wolf, who used the term to differentiate between ancient Greek texts, which he loved, and medieval Greek writings, which he hated. Throughout early modernity and beyond, negative Byzantinism helped Latin authors express their admiration for Greek antiquity by comparing it with its medieval equivalent. In this Western literary tradition, Byzantium and Hellas appeared like night and day.[7]

In its function, negative Byzantinism dovetails with the phenomena of Orientalism or Mediterraneanism.[8] As temporally and geographically distant foreigners, the Byzantines served as a counterimage to the Western self. By

5 "Nouveaux mélanges historiques et littéraires, par M. Villemain," *Le Corsaire*, February 19, 1827, 2.

6 Helena 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 Smythe (London: Routledge, 2016), 16-19; Cyril Mango, "Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 32.

7 Hans-Georg Beck, *Ideen und Realitaeten in Byzanz. Gesammelte Aufsaetze*, Variorum Reprint ; CS 13 (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972), 169-93; Leonora Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

8 David Lawton, "1453 and the Stream of Time," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37, no. 3 (2007): 471.

describing the Christian East as exotic as well as uncivilized, Catholics and Protestants sought to elevate their own identity. Famously, Edward Said defined Orientalism as a rhetorical method through which Western intellectuals belittled the Orient as a cultural Other.[9] Michael Herzfeld developed Mediterraneanism as an equivalent that rather focused on the basin south of Europe instead of the landmass to its east.[10] Both concepts, however, converged in their definition and geographical scope. Negative Byzantinism may be comprehended as a side branch of these literary traditions. The qualities ascribed to the Byzantines overlapped with the stereotypical image drawn of other allegedly Oriental or Mediterranean people. Among these tropes, an enigmatic allure, a proclivity to treacherous behavior, and religious superstition were central.[11] Like Orientalism, negative Byzantinism was promulgated particularly through the historical novel. Both concepts depended heavily on biased interpretations of history. The fictional and popular style of the novel was ideal for mixing putative facts with broad generalizations and skewed images of past realities. Often, these alterations of history facilitated the creation of imperialist narratives.[12]

The connection between historical fiction and nineteenth-century imperialism in the Mediterranean has already been under repeated scrutiny. In the Greek case, the so-called Philhellenes – Western idealists inspired by Hellenic history – were partially identified by scholars such as Andrekos Varnava as imperialists. Their ideology became popular during the Greek Revolution between 1821 and 1829.[13] Instead of concentrating on Hellenism, the love for ancient Greek art, or Philhellenism, its political equivalent connected to the idea of Greek independence, I focus on its complementary narrative, negative Byzantinism. While Philhellenism advertised a Western intervention in the Greek war by evoking utopian images of ancient Greece, negative Byzantinism had a more sinister message. The latter implied that Greece could impossibly rule itself because

9 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

10 Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More. Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

11 Bodin, "Whose Byzantinism," 12; Brian R. Hamnett, *The Historical Novel in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Representations of Reality in History and Fiction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 97; Diana Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums. Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 11, 16-17.

12 Said, *Orientalism*.

13 Andrekos Varnava, "British and Greek Liberalism and Imperialism in the Long Nineteenth Century," in *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*, ed. Matthew P. Fitzpatrick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2012).

of its degenerate Byzantine heritage and needed the West to reacquire its Hellenic civilization, which promised progress and wealth. Since the Byzantines served as an Other to both the West and the ancient Hellenes, they connected these constructed civilizations through common adversity. The half-Western, half-Hellenic cultural program ought to replace Byzantine and Orthodox customs. Eastern Christendom and Byzantine rituals, so the idea, constituted a medieval residual and simultaneously Oriental influence that stood for backwardness. In their combined form, Hellenism and negative Byzantinism ought to prove the necessity of a Western tutelage over a new Greek state. This article argues that negative Byzantinism functioned as a supplement to positive Philhellenism, which ultimately justified the Mediterranean imperialism of the nineteenth century.[14]

The Fall from Olympus: Negative Byzantinism

Abel-François Villemain (1790-1870), linguist and writer, had been infatuated with ancient Greece ever since he attended the *Lycée*. The wealth of his father, a merchant and landowner, enabled the future novelist to study in Paris, while others fought in the Napoleonic Wars. In school, Villemain rapidly distinguished himself by reciting Greek verses and staging his own Hellenic plays.[15] Contemporaries described him as somewhat ugly, insecure, and unable to handle criticism. Yet, when Villemain could display his knowledge of languages and culture, he excelled.[16] Upon the eruption of the Greek Revolution in 1821, Villemain was a grown man, known author, and influential academic.[17] He had commenced to teach as a professor at the Sorbonne and strove to revive – among other things – idealized Hellenic culture through education. The erudite scholar would also dabble in politics, becoming a member of the French parliament. In Villemain's eyes,

14 With the term Mediterranean imperialism, I subsume all political action that aimed at the territorial, cultural, or economic conquest of the Mediterranean as a constructed region on behalf of specific empires. This observation has spawned many valuable academic publications in recent years. See for example: Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas, "A Colonial Sea. The Mediterranean, 1798-1956," in *European Review of History* 19, no. 1 (2012): 1-13.

15 Germain Sarrut and Edme Théodore Bourg, *Biographie des hommes du jour, industriels* ... (Paris: H. Krabe, 1835), 63.

16 J. D. Malavié, "Hugo et Villemain: un demi-siècle d'amitié littéraire," *Aevum* 46, no. 3 (1972): 237-282; J. D. Malavié, "Abel Villemain en verve. Malices et sourires d'un universitaire du siècle passé," *Aevum* 57, no. 3 (1983): 450-462.

17 Sarrut and Saint-Edme, *Biographie*, 65.

the Greek Revolution constituted a chance to reinstitute a civilized state on the Peloponnese and called for radical action. His honest allegiance to Philhellenic ideology is proven by his early entry into the Parisian Philhellenic society, which he joined as a founding member in 1823.[18] Eventually, he decided to promote the cause through his craft as a writer.

In 1825, Villemain published *Lascaris*. The story circles the Byzantine nobleman Konstantinos Lascaris (1435-1501) who fled the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. This fictionalized hero based on a historical figure rescues the Hellenic masterworks from alleged Turkish barbarity and brings them to Italy. The plot focuses on the travels of Lascaris and his interactions with Latin Westerners. Throughout the book, the protagonist describes current Byzantium as the degenerate rest of glorious Hellas.

> Sadly, the arts are the prettiest adornment of my people and the only thing it leaves for the future; but the arts do not triumph over the corruption of law, they succumb to it. For numerous centuries, we have died a slow death because of our *gouvernement tyrannique* and the aging of our society. […] Still young, when I saw our *querelles religieuses*, the weakness of our empire, the luxury of our magnates, I turned to study the monuments of another age, whose language we maintain, but which we cannot equal anymore. […] In our fallen people, the model of the *grand et du beau* remained conserved, but sterile and without imitators; it enriched our archives but did not inspire us anymore.[19]

The Greek scholar narrates how his "people" had once been prosperous and cultured. Melancholically, he admires the "monuments of another age" and the Constantinopolitan archives filled with ancient masterpieces. The erudite hero draws the image of a "fallen people" who revels in former glories while the present is coined by depravity. Villemain communicated through the words of his protagonist the concept of an "aging society." Lascaris circumscribed the author's idea of the steady decay of a once blossoming civilization until its eventual eclipse. In the Byzantine Empire, Hellenic wisdom was "maintain[ed]," "conserved," "and enclosed," but not further developed. The Eastern Roman Empire continued to preserve what it had inherited but could make no use of it. The century-long process of degeneration resembled a slow death (*nous mourions de langueur*), a continuous decay from antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages.[20]

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18 Armand, "Villemain," *Journal de Paris*, January 28, 1839.

19 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 17-20. All translations are my own.

20 David Lawton, "1453," 469; Marios Hatzopoulos, "Receiving Byzantium in Early Modern Greece (1820s-1840s)," in *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est*

For Villemain, the cause of this degeneration was to be found in Byzantine "vice." As a first reason for the fall of the Greek civilization, he adduced the "corruption of law" which would contaminate "the arts." The author saw a close link between society's high culture and jurisdiction, implying that an immoral bureaucracy and court system led to impure literature and vice versa. This argument fits Villemain's general narrative. As a Sorbonne professor-cum-parliamentarian, he maintained that culture and education provided the ability to rule justly but that, reversely, these entities needed a just rule to blossom. By drawing up such a chicken-and-egg scenario, the novelist explained the degeneration of Greek arts during the Middle Ages through their corruption by Byzantine politics. Simultaneously, Villemain made an argument for the importance of Hellenic art, insinuating that mastering it could foster just governance. It surprises not that a teacher of ancient Greek would make such a statement.

Secondly, through the words of fictional Lascaris, the author complained about the tyrannic rule (*gouvernement tyrannique*) of the Byzantine emperors. To ascribe Oriental tyranny to late Roman monarchs was common in the nineteenth century.[21] Under the term 'Caesaropapism,' historians and professional Byzantinists proposed that the head of the Byzantine realm had extraordinary, even absolute control over both his state as well as the Orthodox church.[22] This manner of governing the country was deemed despotic. In the 1820s, liberal Christians such as Villemain – increasingly used to a separation of secular and ecclesiastical power – saw their fusion in one person as problematic. To the outsider, it appeared as if the Byzantine emperor similar to the Ottoman sultan handled both the spiritual as well as political spheres of their realms, which would cause an impurification of both. This generalizing perception neglected the roles of other offices, such as the patriarch.[23] Implicitly, the figure of an all-controlling Byzantine *pan-*

à l'époque moderne et contemporaine, ed. Olivier Delouis, Anne Couderc, and Petre Guran (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2013), 219-29.

21 On the Oriental character ascribed to the Greeks in Romantic literature: Domna Moyseos, "Philhellenism as an Exploration of Identity and Alterity in the Literary Tradition of Travels to the East in the 19th Century," in *Concepts and Functions of Philhellenism*, ed. Martin Vöhler, Stella Alekou, and Miltos Pechlivanos (Berlin: Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 155.

22 Deno J. Geanakoplos, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire. A Reconsideration of the Problem of Caesaropapism," *Church History* 34, no. 4 (1965): 381, 399.

23 Moussa Sarga, "Méhémet-Ali au miroir des voyageurs français en Egypte," *Romantisme* 130 (2003): 19-20; Caroline Franklin, "'Some Samples of the Finest Orientalism.' Byronic Philhellenism and Proto-Zionism at the Time of the Congress of Vienna," in *Romanticism and Colonialism. Writing and Empire, 1780-*

tocrator ought to oppose alleged Hellenic ideals, such as republicanism, democracy, or liberal constitutionalism, for which the young Villemain harbored a certain sympathy. In the discourse of monarchic France, his then-provocative political ideas had to remain between the lines.

Thirdly, the allegedly constant religious conflicts (*querelles religieuses*) would have impeded the progress of the medieval Greek state. Instead of occupying themselves with urgent matters, the Byzantines ostensibly preferred to quarrel over ecclesiastic laws. At this point, Villemain – himself a moderate liberal – evoked the ideas of Gibbon, using superstition as a common trope to attack the Eastern Roman Empire. Both authors saw the Orthodox Church as a source of disunity and inefficiency, which finally cost the Roman emperors their throne. According to the Sorbonne professor, the Eastern Church was "a religion that made gullible and immobile."[24] Fourthly, the French novelist anathematized the "luxury of Byzantine magnates." As a usual marker of Oriental depravity and indicator of decadence, the luxury of the upper classes was a popular accusation leveled against the *bas empire*. Again, Villemain maintained that instead of occupying themselves with crucial political questions or fine arts, the powerful of the Eastern Roman Empire only paid attention to trivial and egocentric issues. For Villemain, the Byzantine lust for earthly pleasures contrasted with the stoic and literally Spartan values of Greek antiquity.[25]

Throughout the book, it becomes clear that negative Byzantinism constituted an essential requisite of Villemain's Philhellenic narrative. In his historical thinking, the Hellenes and the Byzantines enter a complicated temporal, genealogical relationship. They were simultaneously qualitative opposites and biological relatives. The author ascribed to them a drastic difference in civilizational value while defining both societies as changing phases of the same national, Greek teleology. His Hellenes represented an original ideal, whereas the Byzantines symbolized their medieval downfall. To explain this discrepancy, Villemain deployed the historiographical concept of 'degeneration.'[26] The image of an at first young and pristine but

1830, ed. Peter J. Kitson and Timothy Fulford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228-29.

24 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 55.

25 Przemysław Marciniak and Dion Smythe, "Introduction," in *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 2.

26 Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums*, 13; Peter J. Kitson, "Romanticism and Colonialism. Races, Places, Peoples, 1785-1800," in *Romanticism and Colonialism. Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. Peter J. Kitson and Timothy Fulford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19; Thomas W. Gallant, *Experiencing Do-*

then old, decadent, and frail civilization offered him an explanation for the dissimilarity between his ancient heroes and their medieval descendants. The narrative of an aging society seemed natural and understandable to a broader audience. By positioning different periods – Hellenic antiquity, Byzantine Middle Ages, and Greek present – next to each other, Villemain turned diachronic spaces into a synchronic ontology, making use of the time-bridging function of the historical novel.

Historians and novelists of the early nineteenth century repeatedly projected this teleological idea onto the Byzantine Empire. According to Gibbon, the Byzantine Empire constituted the final phase of Roman civilization.[27] Villemain reappropriated this idea and applied it to Greek history.[28] While he was not the only author to do so, his work was the most successful book of its kind. The Byzantine Empire symbolized Roman and, simultaneously, Greek degeneration. Its eventual – according to the author – inevitable demise in 1453 at the hands of the Ottomans meant the end of Mediterranean supremacy, which had shaped Europe and the Middle East throughout antiquity.

The novel, only around 150 pages long, essentially consists of a repetition of this narrative explained by the hero, Lascaris. Structured like a conversation between the protagonist and less knowledgeable characters, the plot is reminiscent of books from former centuries in which a young student and an old teacher exchange words about love, religion, or philosophy. Authors from different eras and backgrounds, such as Judah Leon Abravanel, François Fénelon, and Christoph Martin Wieland, used this stylistic gadget for didactic purposes.[29] Inserting moral theories into fictional dialogues turned sometimes-dry lemmas into interesting conversations. Especially in texts that were meant to be emulations of the Hellenic classics, morally superior teachers guide the books' protagonists. Fénelon's Télémaque, for example, heeds the advice of Athena disguised as "Men-

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minion. Culture, Identity and Power in the British Mediterranean (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 19-24.

27 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857), 69, 75, 121, 122, 163, 175, 231, 268, 352, 365, 481; Jonathan Theodore, *The Modern Cultural Myth of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016).

28 Villemain was familiar with Gibbon and even held lectures on his writings. See: "Guizot's Edition of Gibbon," *The Quarterly Review* 41 (1833): 278-86.

29 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Delfina Giovannozzi (Roma ; Bari: Gius, Laterza & Figli, 2014); Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, "Vom politischen Ideal zum politischen Idyll. Die Rezeption von Fénelons Télémaque durch Haller und Wieland," *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 87, no. 1 (2018): 24-34.

tor."[30] The moral authority of old teachers communicated a traditionalist doctrine in which it was paramount to follow the advice of the ancients. Hellas became the ultimate symbol for this retrograde worldview and narrative of civilizational continuities.

Yet, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, multiple Romantics rebelled against this traditionalist order. In Thomas Hope's *Anastasius*, Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and François-René de Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire,* no authoritarian mentor accompanies the youthful protagonists.[31] Instead of fetishizing ancient traditions, this new generation of writers melancholically bemoaned the demise of the Roman and Greek empires. The ruins they encountered around the Mediterranean and in the so-called Orient reminded them of the fleeting nature of human achievements and made them question existing social orders. Concepts of slow decay followed by the sudden disappearance of civilizations, so often exemplified by Gibbon's Byzantines, disagreed with the exaltation of long-lasting traditions favored by more conservative thinkers. Ironically, it was the alleged wildness and decay that enticed the Romantics' fascination for the southern sea and the Orient. Although the likes of Byron and Chateaubriand shared their fascination for everything Hellenic with classical conservatives, their first-hand impression of the nineteenth-century Mediterranean made them experience a sensation of loss. Erring around the eastern basin, they sought an answer to the question of how the powers of antiquity succumbed to the wheel of time.[32]

The novel *Lascaris* must be identified as a synthesis of classical and Romantic writings, traditionalist and progressive politics. It constituted a reaction to the recent vogue of Romantic and Mediterraneanist travelogues. Instead of telling the classical story of a pupil escorted by an all-knowing mentor or the Romantic tale of a guideless traveler, Villemain combined both archetypical protagonists. Villemain's hero, Lascaris, is simultaneously a classical teacher full of Hellenic wisdom and a disillusioned refugee who melancholically roams the basin. By adding

30 François de Salignac de La Mothe- Fénelon, *Les Aventures de Télémaque, Fils d'Ulysse* (London: Jean Hofhout, 1765).

31 Thomas Hope, *Anastasius, or, Memoirs of a Greek*, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1820); George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (London: John Murray, 1837); François-René de Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem et de Jérusalem à Paris, en allant par la Grèce, et revenant par l'Egypte, la Barbarie et l'Espagne*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Le Normant, 1811).

32 Compare: Jonathan Sachs, *The Poetics of Decline in British Romanticism*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

negative Byzantinism to Philhellenic euphoria, the author argued that the Eastern Mediterranean could be both the cradle of civilization and Oriental wildness. Despite past degeneration, ancient knowledge and classical traditions would remain valuable in the present. Ephemeral vices as in the Byzantine case could lead to civilizational decay, but the ideas and arts of ancient Hellas would last throughout the ages. This narrative can be subsumed as moderate, both in the literary and political sense, allowing notions of continuity and rupture, of conservative teleology and radical, cyclic historiography. To sell his book, Villemain rendered its plot digestible for conservatives and radicals alike. The amalgam of Philhellenism and negative Byzantinism enabled the moderate parliamentarian, Romantic author, and teacher of classics to arbitrate between different views on history and thus, politics.

Since Villemain's hero figured as a teacher and not as a self-doubting youngster, his words became all the more powerful. Where other authors chose a contradictive, inquiring style, the ideas of Lascaris were presented in the novel as unquestionable prophecies. Because of this, the novel resembles less a coherent story and more a series of philosophical lectures. However, these ideas stemmed not from the historical figure but from the nineteenth-century novelist. Lascaris transformed into a literary alter ego for the author. While Villemain depicted his putative spiritual ancestor as the bringer of Hellenic enlightenment in early modernity, he represented himself as Lascaris' reincarnation in the present. The assumption that Villemain sought to indoctrinate his readership with a Philhellenic ideology rather than to tell a gripping story is corroborated by the 250-page long epilogue. The much shorter novelesque part of the book appears as a veneer for the following commentary. Here, the author connects his unfavorable appraisal of the historical Byzantines to present politics, such as the Greek Revolution or the Eastern Question. The novel served to develop negative Byzantinism as a valuable historical argument for an imperialist Philhellenic narrative, which promoted a Western control of current Greece in opposition to other pretenders such as Orthodox Russia.

A mission civilisatrice to the Cradle of Civilization

In 1825, Villemain was presented with a conundrum. To promote a Western intervention in the Greek Revolution, he had to explain why the present inhabitants of the Peloponnese were so different from their Hellen-

ic forefathers. After all, most of Europe's involvement was propagated as a mission to rescue the descendants of Leonidas, Plato, and Socrates. The many Western volunteers and donors who supported the Philhellenic cause were motivated by tales of antiquity. If the current Greeks were not related to their ancient counterparts, as the Tyrolian scholar Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer argued, or if Greeks, in general, were not the superhuman specimens they were claimed to be, the idea of a rescue mission would lose most of its appeal. French enthusiasm for a Western intervention in the Revolution rose and fell with the conviction that the rebels were indeed the scions of the likes of Alexander the Great.[33]

Villemain sought to counter the criticism raised against Philhellenic ideology through negative Byzantinism.

> […] it is normal to ask oneself, where this forgotten people had been, suddenly resuscitated back to life after so many centuries. In the historical sources, the fifteenth-century Greeks appear as different from those of today as ashes to the essence of life (*que des cendres le sont de la vie*). We [Villemain] have tried to paint them [the Byzantines] as a people who is about to die […]. It is from this pompous void that a half-barbarian Greek race reappears, mutilated by the stigma and vice of long servitude but who has preserved its faith and rediscovered courage.[34]

The author's Byzantinist formulations cued not only a dichotomy between Byzantines and Westerners as well as Hellenes, but also between Byzantines and nineteenth-century Greeks. According to the professor, the current Greek-speaking Christians under Ottoman rule were the heirs of the heroic Hellenes but also of the medieval Byzantines. Villemain made the latter's vice and degeneration the cause of the disparity between the barbaric Greeks of 1825 and their imagined Hellenic ancestors.[35] In his opinion, current savagery was the product of centuries of Byzantine and Ottoman misrule. Yet, the new Greeks would be completely "different" from their medieval forefathers and hence, more receptive to Hellenic or

33 St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, 351.

34 Abel-François Villemain, *Lascaris, ou les Grecs du quinzième siècle,* 3rd ed (Paris: Ladvocat, 1826), IX.

35 Ioannis Koubourlis, "Augustin Thierry et l'« Hellénisation » de l'Empire byzantin jusqu'à 1853. Les dettes des historiographes de la Grèce médiévale et moderne à l'école libérale française," in *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque moderne et contemporaine*, ed. Anne Couderc, Olivier Delouis, and Petre Guran, Mondes Méditerranéens et Balkaniques (MMB) (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2021), 8.

Western innovation. Villemain's nineteenth-century Greeks were uncivilized but also "courage[ous]," heroic, and full of potential. In the author's eyes, the nation had come full circle in its development. From primitive beginnings, it would have risen to a civilizational height during antiquity, declined under the Byzantines and Ottomans to become yet again a primitive tribe. The excited Philhellene wrote that the rebels of the 1820s were like "these Greek refugees from Byzantium three centuries ago" but that "[t]his time, they will not be theologians and scholars, the debris of an aged people, but children of heroes."[36] This cyclic logic implied that the Greeks would now reemerge from their Byzantine ashes like a Hellenic phoenix and become a blossoming nation once more.[37]

To do so, the Greeks would have to reject their Oriental, Byzantine heritage. According to Villemain, "[i]t was an example for the barbaric life of the Middle Ages that continued in modern Greece."[38] Keeping their allegedly medieval customs would again lead to de- and not regeneration. In this Philhellenic narrative, Hellenism symbolized a golden past as well as a prosperous future.[39] Byzantinism, conversely, represented a miserable past and an avoidable future. Villemain insinuated that because the Greeks found themselves again at point zero of their civilizational development, they had the opportunity to choose which cultural legacy to pursue. To emerge as a successful nation in the nineteenth century, the Greeks ought to accept Western Hellenism and eschew their current Byzantine traditions. Through this argumentation, Villemain created, on the one hand, a connection between ancient Hellas and present Greece. On the other, he criticized the latter's allegedly Oriental and medieval culture.[40] In the liberal author's narrative, Byzantine degeneration equaled a cultural partition between the Greek rebels and their true Hellenic self. With this argumentative trick, the author tried to dispel the fear that the current Greeks might not be related

36 Villemain, *Lascaris*, XIII-XIV.

37 In his cyclic presentation of history, Villemain is reminiscent of later household names of civilizational history, such as Nikolay Danilevsky, Oswald Spengler, and Arnold Toynbee. See: Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "From the Vyzantism of K. Leont'ev to the Vyzantinism of I. I. Sokolov. The Byzantine Orthodox East as a Motif of Russian Orientalism," in *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque Moderne et Contemporaine*, ed. Anne Couderc, Olivier Delouis, and Petre Guran, Mondes Méditerranéens et Balkaniques (MMB) (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2021), 22.

38 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 210.

39 Constanze Guthenke, *Placing Modern Greece. The Dynamics of Romantic Hellenism, 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124.

40 Compare: Mango, "Byzantinism," 32.

to the ancient heroes and, at the same time, advocated their Hellenization because of an alleged cultural estrangement from their superior ancestors. This disposition helped Villemain to conjecture a Western civilizing mission to the Peloponnese.

To justify French incursions during the Greek Revolution, the Sorbonne professor linked imagined Hellas to Western liberalism. This rhetorical tour de force depended on the concept of negative Byzantinism. According to the French Philhellene, Occidental states such as France, represented the spiritual heirs of Mediterranean antiquity instead of the Byzantine Orthodox.[41] The essential message of his novel was that the scholar Lascaris transported the knowledge of the ancient Hellenes into the West, where, unlike in the case of the Byzantine Empire, it fell on fertile ground. "*La curiosité savante*, by which the whole of Europe was captured in the sixteenth century, made gazes slide to those famous lands where all arts came from."[42] Because of this relocation of Hellenic civilization, the West had allegedly a better right to identify with Greek antiquity than the people living in the region. According to Villemain, Occidental modernity was a continuation of utopian antiquity, whereas Byzantine culture represented its opposite.

The scholar Stathis Gourgouris has recently shown how European Philhellenes colonized and appropriated the Hellenic past to justify their imperialist endeavors in the Eastern Mediterranean.[43] Through this alleged *translatio spiritus*, Latin Christians positioned themselves as the heirs of Hellas, while they dismissed similar claims of the Orthodox currently populating the Aegean. "Hidden under the self-given name *Romaioï*, the Greeks had only a vague notion of their antiquities. They thought their country had been inhabited by pagan giants. They better conserved Christian traditions mixed with fabricated tales and strange costumes. Like every primitive people, they had many religious feasts."[44] Arguing with spiritual kinship, Villemain asserted that it was Europe's duty and right to interfere in the Greek Revolution on the grounds of its historical link to Mediterranean antiquity. According to the Philhellenic lobbyist, the West could claim sovereignty over Greece since Latin intellectuals preserved the Hellenic heritage in opposition to the presumed biological descendants. It would be the

41 Abel-François Villemain, *Études d'histoire moderne* (Paris: Didier, 1856), 329-30.

42 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 186.

43 Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation. Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 7.

44 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 255.

responsibility of the Occident to re-civilize the "*demi-barbare*" Greeks of the nineteenth century with the wisdom of their own ancestors. Villemain interpreted, somewhat haughtily, Western imperialism in the Aegean as a mission to teach the Greeks their own history and culture that they had lost during Byzantine times.

Although the author pledged to love liberty, he equally played with the idea of a French (re)occupation of the Peloponnese and its surrounding islands. As was usual for liberal authors of the beginning nineteenth century, Villemain advocated this imperialist policy with notions of civilization and humanitarianism.[45] He reminded his readership of the allegedly positive effects that French control over the Ionian Islands achieved during the Napoleonic Wars: "After the big war of 1807, the treaty of Tilsit gave this Italian conquest to France. Here, the French administration was *douce* and protective. She pleased the Greek spirit because of her artistic proselytism and scientific institutions which she had still with her although she stopped to propagate liberty."[46] In this citation, the author sees the French army as a bringer of arts and science in the Mediterranean. For him, these two aspects constituted Europe's Hellenic heritage in its essential form. Because French arts and science were natural to Greek soil, the "Greek spirit" would readily accept France's tutelage. This positive relationship, according to Villemain, could be maintained even if liberty was taken out of the equation. Contrary to his Philhellenic narrative, the Sorbonne Professor seems to forgo the idea of a free Greek state in favor of French imperialism. The author made clear that France's right to intervene in the Greek Revolution and rule the Eastern Mediterranean was rather based on the empire's mastery of arts and science than its love for freedom.

Member of the Philhellenic committee in Paris, Villemain envisioned a replacement of Greece's negative Byzantine customs with Hellenic and Western enlightenment. This intervention was to be of a military but also intellectual nature. It becomes apparent that Villemain wanted the West to export its know-how to Greece and the latter to accept the offer. With the title of his monograph, *Dangerous Gifts*, Hilmi Ozan Özavcı has recently

45 Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla, *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century. Setting the Precedent* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Fabian Klose, *In the Cause of Humanity a History of Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Human Rights in History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

46 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 363-64.

uncovered the double-faced nature of such proposals.[47] Implicitly, the liberal politician Villemain advertised a Western (and most of all French) influence in the eastern Mediterranean, which he declared a mission to reestablish ancient Hellas. According to the Parisian intellectual, European tutelage over Greece did not only serve to protect it from the Ottoman enemy but also to infuse a more progressive, European civilization into the reborn nation. The historian Varnava defined the justification of intrusions into Ottoman territories through a constructed Western connection to Hellas as 'neoclassical spiritual imperialism.'[48] Villemain's novel might be considered an unofficial summary of this concept. Yet, not only French Philhellenes sought to mobilize history to strengthen their claim to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Poisoned Heritage: Lascaris as a Pamphlet against Russian Byzantinism

The Russian tsars traditionally styled themselves the successors of the Byzantine emperors. It could be easily argued that shared Orthodox Christendom gave the rulers in Constantinople and the Muscovites a common religious as well as cultural link. After the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453, the tsars assumed the role of the Orthodox hegemon.[49] As a logical consequence, they declared Eastern Christians to be under their protection. This declaration included their own subjects but also Orthodox living under foreign rule, such as the Ottoman Greeks. By positioning themselves as the legitimate heirs of the Byzantine emperors and the defenders of vulnerable religious minorities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Russian monarchs gained a convincing *casus belli* against the Ottomans. As a constant doctrine of foreign politics, the identification with the Eastern Roman emperors spurned the tsars to repeated invasions of the sultan's territories.[50] During the 1770s and 1820s, Russia's government tried again to harness Byzantine heritage to justify their aggressive mingling in Ottoman politics. Utilizing their self-ascribed position as the guardians of Eastern Christen-

47 Hilmi Ozan Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts. Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

48 Varnava, "British and Greek Liberalism," 221.

49 Hélène Ahrweiler, "Conférence inaugurale - La présence de Byzance," in *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque moderne et contemporaine*, ed. Anne Couderc, Olivier Delouis, and Petre Guran, Mondes Méditerranéens et Balkaniques (MMB) (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2021), 15-21.

50 Sergey A. Ivanov, "Second Rome as Seen by the Third. Russian Debates on 'the Byzantine Legacy,'" in *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500*, ed. Przemysław Marciniak and Dion Smythe (London: Routledge, 2016), 58-59.

dom, Russian imperialists argued that their intrusion into Ottoman territories only served the safety of the persecuted Greeks.[51] Byzantinism, hence, occupied a completely different position in Russian political discourse. Instead of a pejorative Othering, the tsars and their courtiers understood it as a justification for their interference in Ottoman affairs and as an important part of their imperial identity.[52]

In his treatise, Villemain agreed that the Russian and Byzantine Empires shared important cultural and religious tenets: "The power of the Byzantine synod was not limited to the Greeks. It stretched over multiple nations […]. From here stems this at-first-sight strange connection between the Greeks and the *Moscovites*, this old and stubborn tradition that makes the Greeks hope to be saved by the Russians."[53] The author's judgment of this tradition, however, differed wildly from the opinion of his Russian counterparts. Villemain claimed that – in opposition to the honest intentions of the French – the tsars would rather pursue "invasion (*l'envahissement*)" than "liberation (*délivrance*)."[54]

To underpin his criticism of Russian imperialism, Villemain cited a Greek poem that had originally been translated by the British agent William Leake in 1815. Again, the Sorbonne professor ostensibly gave the voice to an indigenous Greek and secretly tinkered with the content of his words. While the dialogue of Villemain's fictionalized Lascaris in the novel was freely invented, the text of the anonymous contemporary poet was changed in its message. The poem describes an allegorical female figure who represents Greece. She accuses all three major powers – the British, French, and Russians – of instrumentalizing a Greek will for freedom to broaden their own imperial influence. According to the anonymous poet, these empires would profess their support for the subjugated nation only if it suited their economic goals. The poet lamented that they reneged their promises once the Sublime Porte offered a better deal.[55]

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51 Anna Vlachopoulou, "A Local Uprising in an Ottoman Province? Mora/Morea, March 1821," in *New Perspectives on the Greek War of Independence. Myths, Realities, Legacies and Reflections*, ed. Yianni Cartledge and Andrekos Varnava (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 100-105.

52 Lucien Frary, "Russian Historiography and the Greek Revolution. Trends and Interpretations (1821-2021)," in *New Perspectives on the Greek War of Independence. Myths, Realities, Legacies and Reflections*, ed. Yianni Cartledge and Andrekos Varnava (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 271-96.

53 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 199-200.

54 Op. cit., 281.

55 William Martin Leake, *Researches in Greece* (London: J. Booth, 1814), 140-54.

In Villemain's version, however, this general anti-imperial accusation became increasingly one-sided. Here, the imagined woman who symbolizes Greece deplores: "Russia declared three wars and called upon my children. In writing, she assured to save them; instead, she made most of them die in her cause and left the rest worse than before. France would also declare my liberty and approach my frontiers, but Russia and England came to take it away, one because it was paid, and the other because it wanted to save the Turks and sacrifice me."[56] For evident reasons, Villemain omitted the following verses from the original: "France too began, to proclaim liberty, arrived at my confines, and increased my sufferings; censured tyranny, but thirsted for money."[57] The French professor tailored both medieval history and current Greek literature according to his imperial designs. In his version, Hellenic France appears as the savior of Greece, while Russia epitomizes Byzantine decay.

Villemain sought to turn Russia's Byzantinist self-understanding on its head. He did not deny that the tsars and the nineteenth-century Greeks shared a special connection through Orthodoxy and a common Eastern Roman heritage. However, he depicted this relationship not as a fecund alliance but as a nefarious influence that the Russians held over their southern coreligionists. In the Philhellene's eyes, the Muscovite rulers repeated the errors of the Byzantines. His imagined tsars stood for corruption, despotism, superstition, and luxury. The negative description of Byzantine society so expansively elaborated upon throughout the novel was, indeed, meant to decry Russia's current presence in the Aegean. Although it was the late Roman Empire that Villemain criticized in his fiction, the following political commentary showed the true target of his diatribe. Russia represented for Villemain a reification of the civilizational backwardness that he ascribed to the late Romans throughout his bestseller *Lascaris*. For the historical novelist, negative Byzantinism only fulfilled a purpose if directed against a political entity still present in the nineteenth century. This target is to be found in the Russian Empire and the Orthodox Church, both of which claimed a cultural allegiance to the Byzantines.

Conclusion

The 1825 novel *Lascaris* constituted a political speech act in the transimperial discourse concerning the destiny of the Eastern Mediterranean.

56 Villemain, *Lascaris*, 371.
57 Leake, *Researches in Greece*, 154.

By interpreting the medieval history of the Byzantine Empire as positive or negative, Romantic novelists and historians indirectly claimed its former territories in the name of current empires. In the French case, negative Byzantinism served to discredit the Greeks and present them as immature Mediterranean people in need of tutelage.[58] The idea of Greek barbarity ought to justify a French interference that would restore true Hellenic identity. Moreover, the author declared Orthodox Russia a false cultural hegemon among the Eastern Christians by comparing it to the Byzantine Empire. According to Villemain, the Greeks should forswear inherent Russian affiliations and accept French rule instead. He defended an imperial doctrine through a cultural program based on historical narratives. To answer the nineteenth-century Eastern Question – the riddle of who should possess the Eastern Mediterranean – one would need to study the literature of the past, preferably the works of Hellenes and not Byzantines.

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58 Gallant, *Experiencing Dominion*, 15-55.

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THE LAST MEDITERRANEAN: PAUL THEROUX'S OBSESSIONS BEYOND THE PILLARS

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Abstract

When Charlie Rose asked Paul Theroux about his reasons for writing about the Mediterranean, the subject of numerous other books in 1995, he said, "I don't like other travel books, and this is *my* Mediterranean."[1] Theroux was a renowned travel writer and novelist known for his unconventional style and sharp satirical gaze. In 1993, he had set off on a journey of nine months through the Mediterranean and subsequently published *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (1995). The mid-1990s was an important period in American engagement with the world: the Cold War had ended, and the US, now the sole Superpower, had kicked its "Vietnam Syndrome" in the Persian Gulf War. While historians have begun to examine the renewed sense of American exceptionalism shaping political events of this era, my article contributes to understanding how cultural works reflected and also shaped this era by delving into this author's narrative choices, his craft as a travel writer and ultimately his silences. Theroux was an idiosyncratic author who still spoke to a generation of readers. My study assesses Theroux's narrative style as well as the people and places he chooses to visit and describe in his book. Theroux's Mediterranean thus provides a gateway to understanding what this sea meant to him as an individual while also providing insight into a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape in the US.

Keywords: Paul Theroux, Mediterranean, Travel Narratives, American Identity, American Exceptionalism

> "The very ink with which history is written is merely fluid prejudice."
>
> Mark Twain, *Following the Equator* (584)

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1 Manufacturing Intellect. "Paul Theroux Interview (1995)." *Youtube*. 04 Apr 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXJ_WSyLiNY&ab_channel=ManufacturingIntellect. www.youtube.com.

In 1993, Paul Theroux embarked on a journey through the Mediterranean Sea that resulted in *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (1995). French historian Fernand Braudel famously labeled this region as "a moving concept, a shapeshifting icon of a place that is constantly reconfiguring its own space."[2] The Mediterranean fostered the interaction of ancient cultures like the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Ottomans. To travel through it and gain wisdom was a rite of passage for upper-class Englishman of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the Grand Tour, a concept embodied in the title of Theroux's book.

Theroux's itinerary reflects an unparalleled freedom of movement. He invokes the Grand Tour trope, but, as an American, his plan of travel diverges from its original idea. He decided to set out on his own Grand Tour during yet another historical inflection point, a moment of transition when political and cultural tensions were remaking this region: the Yugoslav Wars, the Algerian Civil War, the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the first Chechen War, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On trains, in small villages, in big cities, on cruise ships and ferries, Theroux focused on encounters with ordinary people more than tourist attractions and beautiful landscapes. He sets himself apart from the tradition of the Grand Tour as well as the scenic descriptions other travel writers usually produce.

Theroux's modern American Grand Tour around the Mediterranean presents an author and travel writer attempting to disentangle himself from both European literary tradition and mass tourism, while paradoxically taking part in both. His travelogue, molded by American exceptionalism, projects an ambivalent engagement with the Mediterranean as both a landscape for historical and cultural depth and a stage for his own literary performance. In his quest for authenticity, Theroux often rejects conventional tourist experiences, choosing instead to focus on ordinary people and the seedy underbelly of the Mediterranean. Yet, despite his anti-touristic stance, Theroux's narrative is undeniably shaped by a nuanced Orientalist, if not imperial, gaze, reflecting the post-Cold War American mindset of superiority and detachment form the globalized world. As George W. H. Bush concluded his presidency, the U.S.' popularity surged, attracting numerous new allies eager to align with it.[3] Americans perceived themselves as citizens of the sole world superpower. Their blue passport was widely respected in the international arena, and they could go just about anywhere without a visa.

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2 Fernand Braudel. *Memory and the Mediterranean* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002).

3 Jeffrey A. Engel. *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 8.

This article argues that Theroux's account does not only document a journey through the Mediterranean but constructs a narrative that serves to validate an American-centric worldview. Through his sarcastic and often scathing tone, Theroux creates a Mediterranean that exists primarily as a reflection of American anxieties and exceptionalism in the 1990s. His travelogue is more than a personal quest – it is an exercise in self-fashioning, where the Mediterranean becomes a backdrop against which Theroux attempts to establish his uniqueness as a writer and traveler, while ironically falling into the same imperialist tropes he seeks to avoid. Geoffrey Moorhouse wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* that *The Pillars of Hercules* is "a valuable traveler's tale on which historians will feed gracefully in times to come."[4] This idea that historians can rely on this travelogue as a genuine account is exactly what Theroux aims to accomplish with his narrative choices.

The Pillars of Hercules ultimately revolves around a tension between the factual and the fictional, a tension that allows for a postmodern reading of the narrative. Michel Foucault's assertion that all history is a form of discourse, constructed through language and power,[5] is particularly relevant here. Theroux's narrative resists straightforward categorization as either factual or fictional. Instead, it occupies a liminal space where the Mediterranean is not so much a geographical place as it is a manifestation of the author's subjective imagination. The tendency to mix fact and fiction in his accounts and the ambivalence that results from that align Theroux with postmodernist approaches to literature; his travel writing can be seen, in essence, as fiction, ultimately challenging the distinction between reality and representation.

It also partially aligns with Edward Said's idea of "imaginative geography."[6] Even though Theroux would not be correctly categorized as a typical Orientalist author with an oeuvre devoted to Othering the East, his account does carry elements of colonial representation. The images of the Mediterranean he constructs hinge on his American-ness and that mythical frontier, where traversing conflict-ridden, or in his words "macabre" places represents the discovery of uncharted dangerous territories, echoing traditional themes of discovery and conquest.

The beginning of this article centers on Theroux's motivations to visit this Sea this late in his career and his obsession with creating his own

4 This quote was inserted as a blurb on the book jacket.

5 Michel Foucault. "The Unities of Discourse." *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

6 Edward W. Said. "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental." *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 49.

Mediterranean. Then I move on to unpack what it means to be an American author in the Mediterranean whose narrative choices betray an unconscious sense of exceptionalism. Then I shed some light on the plethora of literary allusions Theroux incorporates in the book. I demonstrate that these allusions paradoxically give the travelogue its supposed authenticity as well as undermine the author's claims of uniqueness. The last section of this article deals with Theroux's other source of authority over the text and the Mediterranean: his conscious choice to be silent.

Why the Mediterranean?

As the tradition of travel writing dictates, Theroux often reminds his readers that his book, his narrative voice, and his itinerary are unconventional. He attempts to establish this by using an anti-touristic tone and focusing on people presently living in the Mediterranean, rather than centering the old ruins that signify its bygone historical significance. Ironically, Theroux's narrative choices speak to his own personal investment in how he wishes to have an impact on his audience, and on a larger scale represent his reliance on the Grand Tour trope to bring his book to life. That is, Theroux, through his idiosyncratic depiction of the Mediterranean, inadvertently pushes his American readers to see every aspect of this region in light of his own multifaceted perspective. This begs the question: how does Theroux claim authority to write about the Mediterranean?

With a writing career that spans several decades, Theroux has been writing his fiction and travelogues during different periods in American history. Every book is as much a product of the author's narrative choices as it is of the time and circumstances he lives in. Theroux published his first book in the late 1960s, a time of social and cultural unrest: the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. In contrast, *The Pillars of Hercules* was written in 1993 when the Cold War had ended, and American society was experiencing a "more optimistic public mood…, the only other time the U.S. experienced a decade-long economic expansion."[7]

The Pillars of Hercules was published 20 years after the *Great Railway Bazaar*. By that time, Theroux was in his fifties and had just gone through a divorce. He boasts that "for years I was flopping along elsewhere, avoiding

7 Jesse Bennett and Rakesh Kochha. "Two Recessions, Two Recoveries." Pew Research Center. 13 Dec 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/12/13/two-recessions-two-recoveries. www.pewresearch.org.

the Mediterranean,"[8] but now he is undertaking a new beginning as a single man. The idea of the Grand Tour is suddenly appealing to him as the rite of passage for cultured young men seeking wisdom and adventure before settling down in marriage as he writes, "Such a trip had always been regarded as the Grand Tour, a search for wisdom and experience."[9] Ironically, Theroux remarries when he returns from his own middle-aged Grand Tour.

When directly asked about his motivations for this journey, however, Theroux shied away from the details of his personal life. He told Charlie Rose, "I don't like other travel books, and this is *my* Mediterranean."[10] If that's the case, the question would then be: why now? To which Theroux would retort in the first pages of the travelogue, "in the way that you don't really understand great novels until you are older and experienced, you needed to be a certain age to appreciate the subtleties of the Mediterranean."[11] This reflection implies that his journey entails much more than geographical exploration. He would not be satisfied with seeing and traversing this great sea, he would like to imagine and write it, just like a great novel. His Mediterranean is presented as a complex narrative to be explored, appreciated and unpacked; it is also aesthetically aligned with the fictional.

To set the tone for the travelogue, he writes, "half a lifetime of traveling had given me a taste for the macabre." He also ponders how "the Pillars [Gibraltar and Ceuta] marked the limits of civilizations, 'the end of voyaging.'" He then goes on to argue that "the Mediterranean has an odd character."[12] These moments, seemingly oblivious to the complexity of the region, speak to Theroux's unconscious anxieties about aging and writing. It becomes clear that *The Pillars of Hercules* goes beyond a genuine representation of a celebrated sea. The author has personal wild oats to sow through his narrative choices.

Theroux – with his satirical and unrelenting ironic style that sometimes unintentionally touches on his own supposed uniqueness – attempts to defy

8 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 6.

9 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 6.

10 Manufacturing Intellect. "Paul Theroux Interview (1995)." *Youtube*. 04 Apr 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXJ_WSyLiNY&ab_channel=ManufacturingIntellect. www.youtube.com.

11 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 9.

12 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 2-3.

the conventional way most other travel writers create their Mediterraneans. As mentioned above, he tries to legitimize his Mediterranean by avoiding the old ruins. Indeed, as Stephen Greenblatt writes, "there is something decidedly ugly about the mood that ruins seem to bring out in Mr. Theroux."[13] This confirms how hard he is trying to break away from the mold of conventional travel writing, and then he contradicts himself later by tracing the steps of his literary guides.

Despite Theroux's stated intention to establish his own style of travel writing, his narrative shows an adherence to the constraints of the genre. He makes consistent references to previous authors and artists who wrote about the Mediterranean, the recurring theme of adventure and exploration, and the itinerary that has been a tradition in Western travel for centuries. James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, T.E. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Edith Wharton and Lew Wallace are just a few examples of the prominent names Theroux covers in the travelogue. A certain pattern emerges here: most of the authors he alludes to are pillars of Western canon and primarily known as fiction writers. This directly raises question marks about his proclaimed uniqueness as a writer and traveler.

He does recalibrate, however, using the theme of anti-tourism. The first sentence of the book reads, "People here in Western civilization say that tourists are no different from apes, but on the Rock of Gibraltar, I saw both tourists and apes together, and I learned to tell them apart."[14] He then devotes the next couple of pages to arguing that apes are essentially better than tourists. His juxtaposition of tourists and apes is one of several images he uses to promote the travelogue as a challenge to the romanticized view of travel. He ridicules mass tourism, and by doing so he ultimately aims to distance himself from the established traditions of Western travel.

This tension between conforming to the genre and recalibrating it, between claiming unprecedented originality and falling back on the familiar is a recurring motif in the narrative. For instance, he shrouds *his* Mediterranean, and evidently every place he visits, in an air of national character. This is best shown as he defines the Mediterranean, this simple, almost tideless sea the size of thirty Lake Superiors, had everything: prosperity, poverty, tourism, terrorism, several wars in progress, ethnic strife, fas-

13 Stephen Greenblatt. "Bored Among the Ruins." *The New York Times*. 5 Nov 1995. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/06/18/specials/theroux-hercules.html?scp=14&sq=credit%2520cards%2520abroad&st=cse. www.nytimes.com.

14 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 1.

cists, pollution, drift-nets, private islands owned by billionaires, gypsies, seventeen countries, fifty languages, oil-drilling platforms, sponge fisherman, religious fanatics, drug smuggling, fine art, and warfare, it had Christians, Muslims, Jews; it had the Druzes who are a strange farrago of all three religions; it had heathens, Zoroastrians and Copts and Bahais.[15]

While highlighting the stark geographical, political and cultural dichotomies that make up the Mediterranean, Theroux's authoritative summarization comes across as uniquely tailored for the American readership. This enumeration of an extensive range of religious and ethnic groups, while seemingly informative, also subtly implies a position of an outsider looking in, categorizing and defining the region. His use of Lake Superior to contextualize the Mediterranean for American audiences directly underscores his narrative intentions. He uses the familiar reference of Lake Superior to quantify the unfamiliar foreign land and sea reinforcing an American-centric worldview. This travelogue, therefore, was not meant for a reader living in the Mediterranean.

His insistence on setting himself apart has indeed garnered him a wide appeal among American readers, but a closer look at *The Pillars of Hercules* provides more revealing insights into his ambivalent perspective. All authors project their own biases and perceived standards on the places they visit, sometimes through fascination or anachronistic interest in bygone histories and old ruins. Theroux, however, treads a fine line between fact and fiction, and the word "fact" in this context means his representation of what he experiences. It is not set in stone, as his description of Greece for instance highlights, "The whole of Greece seemed to me a cut-price theme park of broken marble, a place where you were harangued in a high-minded way about the Ancient Greek culture while some swarthy little person picked your pocket."[16] More than the striking "nastiness in tone,"[17] he tries to put forth his unfavorable opinion of the remnants of an ancient civilization as the only factual account of what any American should expect to see or perceive.

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15 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 7.

16 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 65.

17 Stephen Greenblatt. "Bored Among the Ruins." *The New York Times*. 5 Nov 1995. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/06/18/specials/theroux-hercules.html?scp=14&sq=credit%2520cards%2520abroad&st=cse. www.nytimes.com.

Even during interviews, Theroux can be cagey and somewhat difficult to read. One British journalist, Marianne Macdonald, writes, "[He] is notorious for mixing fact and fiction in his books and refusing to say which is which, but this is nothing beside his slipperiness in interview."[18] This ambivalent writing style that blurs fact and fiction allows Theroux to guide his readers' attention whichever way he deems fit in a specific context.

Theroux weaves his literary allusions into his own narrative fabric, creating a complex combination of personal experience, Western literary tradition and subjective interpretation. In one of his many random conversations, he answers the question, "what do you look for in a novel?" He replies, "Originality, humor, subtlety. The writing itself. A sense of place. A new way of seeing. Lots of things. I like to believe the things I read."[19] He wants to mirror his own writing style by emphasizing the importance of originality and humor, although his reliance on works of fiction to construct his narrative is not exactly original, especially for a firsthand account of what he experiences. Additionally, his response offers a window into his narrative approach. For him, fiction is a "new way of seeing," which is what he claims his travelogue offers. This aligns with his practice of blending fact and fiction, suggesting that he sees the fictional aspect of his writing as a reshaping and reframing of real-world experiences.

On the one hand, Theroux presents himself as an original traveler who defies travel writing conventions; on the other hand, he shows great respect and admiration to his literary heroes through constant allusions. The interplay between these two contradictory aspects contributes to the complexity with which he engages generic conventions. He manages to create a narrative that resists categorization to keep the reader engaged with the quasi-fictional world he established.

Theroux's narrative choices and the portrayal of the Mediterranean intertwine with his persona and life experiences. Over the span of his career, Theroux built quite the ill-famed reputation, even among family members, and it is by no means unintentional. "Paul affects 'a fake British accent. We in the family don't mind his affected gentility, his smug and self-important airs, his urgent starfucking insistence that he's a friend of lords and ladies,

18 Marianne Macdonald. "Who is Paul Theroux." *Independent*. 17 May 1997. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/who-is-paul-theroux-1262143.html. www.independent.co.uk.

19 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 92.

and only laugh at the fame he courts.'"[20] Theroux's older brother uttered these words as a response to a scathing representation of him in one of his "imaginary autobiographies,"[21] called *My Other Life*. This statement seems at first glance petty and somewhat unnecessary, but given its source and the status of its subject, it offers a raw glimpse into Theroux's tendency to imagine and fictionalize, not just as an author, but as an individual. One of the ways he secures this success despite his reputation is by relying on exactly that fictional and simultaneously unapologetic aspect of his writing. He ends up being perceived as the author who is not afraid to hurt anyone's feelings. The countless passengers, natives, shopkeepers, tourists and many other characters who become the subject matter of most of Theroux's dialogues and notes often find themselves unwitting participants in the creation of *his* Mediterranean.

Theroux's American-ness in the Mediterranean

One would assume a narrative about the Mediterranean is an exploration of Europe, remnants of the Ottoman Empire, the Greco-Roman sites and the holy land. Theroux, however, claims to offer a story about the people living there in the present; he makes the conscious choice to ignore what qualifies the Mediterranean as an attractive destination for Westerners, and that pushes his narrative to secure its surface authenticity, which can evidently be easily contested.

The Mediterranean Sea is impossible to define as one homogeneous place with a specific set of attributes. This fact poses a challenge to how Theroux defines himself in it. The complexity of the Mediterranean can go beyond the usual narrative techniques and test his ability to present himself as a knowledgeable travel writer. He carefully designed an itinerary that would prioritize places of war and conflict, and he travels during the low season as he writes, "… for a note-taker like myself, only the unpopular subjects are worth raising in any country."[22] He needs to dis-

20 Marianne Macdonald. "Who is Paul Theroux." *Independent*. 17 May 1997. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/who-is-paul-theroux-1262143.html. www.independent.co.uk.

21 Marianne Macdonald. "Who is Paul Theroux." *Independent*. 17 May 1997. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/who-is-paul-theroux-1262143.html. www.independent.co.uk.

22 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 43.

tinguish himself from the rest of the "ape-like" Western tourists by only visiting the seedier, more decrepit parts of the region. Far from highlighting his uniqueness, this serves to epitomize the then newly resurfacing American mindset of superiority or exceptionalism towards the rest of the world.

How does an author as apparently enigmatic, self-centered and harshly satirical, as Theroux manage to strike a chord with such a large audience and even speak to a generation of Americans? Everyone wants to identify with this seemingly carefree traveler without constraints who does not care for appearances but is curious about the unknown: Stephen Greenblatt in *The New York Times* book review stated that Theroux's "curiosity is not allied to sympathy or charity or faith; it neither links him to the sparks of goodness in this world nor leads him to dreams of past or future glory."[23] This statement highlights Theroux's characteristic blend of curiosity and detached observation, which he constantly strives to sell as deep interest in the people he encounters. For example, when he visited Pivka, a very small town in Slovenia, he felt like he had documented something. A typical tourist might have opted to explore what historical and natural attractions Pivka had to offer. Instead, he described the following, "walking along I heard a child crying inside a house, and a woman scolding; then a slap, and then the child crying louder, and then more scolding. Scold, slap, screech, scold, slap, screech."[24] The way he recounts this otherwise normal mother/child incident as a sequence of events is almost clinical in its precision. This interest is not necessarily rooted in empathy or a desire to connect on a personal level. It is, instead, more analytical and focused.

By attempting to downplay or conceal his American-ness, Theroux often ends up making it more pronounced. On his way to Istanbul, he puts his travel creed on hold and indulges in one of America's most extravagant tourist rites: the cruise ship. In the beginning, he distances himself from other passengers: "*The Seabourne Spirit* passengers said they were a bit disappointed in Sicily. But it wasn't really that. It was a growing love for the ship which eventually took the form of a general reluctance to leave

23 Stephen Greenblatt. "Bored Among the Ruins." *The New York Times*. 5 Nov 1995. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/06/18/specials/theroux-hercules.html?scp=14&sq=credit%2520cards%2520abroad&st=cse. www.nytimes.com.

24 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 235.

it."[25] By observing the passengers and using the third plural pronoun, he creates the illusion that he doesn't belong, but a few pages afterwards, his tone changes. "This ship was now more than home – it had become the apotheosis of the Mediterranean, a magnificent vantage point in the sea which allowed us to view the great harbors and mountains and cliffs and forts, in luxury."[26] He is all of a sudden one of the passengers and "they" becomes "us." The apparently subconscious shift in perspective underscores his inability to entirely shed his cultural identity and creates a nuanced negotiation between his narrative choice to sound unique and inevitably being part of a collective experience.

This continues even in his dialogues on *The Seabourne Spirit*: "I was absorbed in my meal and probably being a buffoon, saying, 'Yes, Marco, just a touch more of the Merlot with my carpaccio."[27] Even though Theroux attempts to veil his touristy enjoyment of this free experience behind this satirical parody of American and European pretentious indulgence, the reader can deduce his sense of belonging there more than in the cheap hotels in Italy or the war-torn streets in what was then still called Yugoslavia. What shows his American-ness decidedly is the fact that he can move in and out of different spaces in a way that a Serbian freedom fighter, for instance, cannot. Ironically, his dangerous itinerary during a time when empires are falling apart further emphasizes how much of a tourist he really is.

Compared to the jarring images of the Mediterranean he had painted in the beginning, this over-the-top ridicule of the cruise ship can be taken as a contradiction or a wry indication that he is in on his own joke. Just like a bad liar caught in his lie, he doubles down on his satire depicting an admittedly amusing but nonetheless transparent dialogue between him and a waiter,

'As I mentioned the other day, I try not to eat anything with a face,' I said. 'Which is why I had the asparagus and the truffles last night, and the stir-fried vegetables.'

'Yes, sir.'[28]

This interaction continues as Theroux pokes fun at the pompous entitlement of passengers such as himself, but at a certain point, his attitude almost seems to come naturally. The Mediterranean, as it were, was his

25 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 235.
26 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 238.
27 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 315.
28 Ibidem.

oyster. And as previously mentioned, that would be Theroux's bane, being perceived as a mass tourist. As David Foster Wallace writes in his essay about the same experience on a cruise ship, which he wrote during the same time Theroux published his travelogue in 1995: one becomes a "late-date American," "economically significant but existentially loathsome." Theroux ultimately falls within the category of tourists he devoted his narrative to ridiculing; he "imposes himself on places [and people] that in all non-economic ways would be better, realer, without him."[29]

One of the many examples of Theroux's detached encounters with natives takes place in a small village in Calabria – which he is visiting, unsurprisingly, because he had read about it in Carlo Levi's memoir, *Christ at Eboli*. Calabria is a small region in the southern part of Italy with a population of about 2 million people.

A conversation that might seem useless or forgettable in a narrative or literary context can be an amusing slice of Mediterranean life to the average American reader. He sees a small fireplace that reminds him of one he has seen before in Inca villages in the Andes, and notes to the old man showing him around, "it's very old."

"Giuseppe made the Italian gesture of finger-flipping that meant 'an incredible number of years – you have no idea.'"

"'When was the last time it was used for bread?'"

"'This morning,' Giuseppe said, and then barked an unintelligible word."[30]

There is nothing noteworthy about this moment. It is not clear why he includes it in the final draft of this narrative, and why it had been published, but even though he might not completely comprehend what he jots down, he does see the potential of showing himself as well-traveled and knowledgeable in these encounters. Such small details provide him with authority over his Mediterranean. By doing this, he appeals to his readers by displaying his "authentic," "realistic" and authoritative approach through his insider knowledge. However, to a fiction writer, a dialogue like this seems to serve absolutely no purpose.

Even though this conversation might not be significant in its narrative qualities, it is revealing of Theroux's approach to the Mediterranean and

29 David Foster Wallace. "Shipping Out". *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again and Other Essays* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 291-377.

30 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 201.

to history in general. He flaunts his supposed knowledge by claiming to know what Giuseppe's hand gesture means, and then describes a word that he might not have understood as an unintelligible "bark." The fact that Theroux finds similarities between the small fireplace in Calabria to those in Inca villages all the way in the Andes is important. Perhaps it is his way of feigning a belief in the universality of human experiences across cultures, but what he ends up accomplishing is a sense of anachronism in these disparate spaces. The artifact is historically significant but is still used in the present; that is why it did not remind him of something back in the technologically advanced U.S.

Theroux's unorthodox approach, if it can be called that, successfully underscores for the American reader a departure from the anticipated, which is exactly his intention. By stepping away from packaged, predictable experiences offered by travel companies, Theroux's method offered a more "authentic," ground-level exploration. This allows him to cater to the growing desire among American readers for a genuine and less commercialized travel narrative.

Theroux's Literary Pilgrimage

Although Theroux told Charlie Rose he sought out "his Mediterranean," it soon becomes clear that his book replicates the Grand Tour, made by English upper classes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of course, if the cagey Theroux was asked about it, he would have argued that it was a satirical jab at the British, but his satire can be a façade for other implications. In many ways, Theroux recycles a fictional Mediterranean of Western European novelists of previous ages. He often relies on British culture and literature even as he boasts of going off the worn trails of tourists and talking to ordinary people, which thus allows him to imagine his "own Mediterranean." He suggests an understanding of an authentic Mediterranean, even as he unintentionally pays homage to those who came before him.

He reduces this huge and diverse world to a set of incoherent ruins, and then likens it to a great novel. A couple of pages after he claims that understanding the subtleties of the Mediterranean entails a certain level of wisdom that only comes with age and experience, he writes, "James Joyce once wrote, 'Rome reminds me of a man who lives by exhibiting to travelers his grandmother's corpse.' I assumed the whole Mediterranean was like that, tourism as ancestor-worship and the veneration of

incoherent ruins."[31] Using this loaded analogy from Joyce adds another layer to Theroux's approach. The image of a grandmother's corpse implies a static and lifeless presentation of history, devoid of contemporary relevance.

Disparities like these show the nuance that frames, not only his motivations, but the persona he attempts to sell to his readers. And at the same time, they betray a certain anxiety. The way Theroux describes where he goes or who he meets, while captivating, is not the end-product of his narratives. It is a means to create an impression of himself, mostly to be liked and admired as the intrepid adventurer whose chosen dangerous itinerary and unique interest in individuals rather than landscapes positions him beyond a mere tourist, and more importantly for him, beyond his literary predecessors. His expressed intention is to document the Mediterranean, aiming to offer a new "way of seeing," but in reality, the narrative revolves around Theroux himself, resembling an exercise in navel-gazing.

By claiming uniqueness and then performing his literary pilgrimage via alluding to, quoting and at times ridiculing almost every writer who has written their Mediterranean, Theroux, consciously or not, instills an uncertainty in his readers. To further compound his ambivalence, Theroux writes, "My idea was to see [the Mediterranean] out of season, when the tourists were back home, to spend the fall and winter in the northern half, the spring and summer in the Levant and North Africa, going from the Pillar to the other; and to make a modern Grand Tour, seeking out wise people."[32] Although he partakes in the luxury of the cruise ship, it was short-lived, and he claims to have done it because it was free. He paradoxically puts forth the idea that the only way to gain wisdom from his Mediterranean journey is to go during the off-season and then calls it a modern Grand Tour, which has existed for centuries and is no different from Mark Twain's "pleasure excursion."

A few pages into *The Pillars of Hercules*, the literary allusions to American, British, and European fiction writers become more and more prominent. Theroux's interactions with British literary giants, however, are a particularly noteworthy facet of his narrative. His ex-wife is British, and his son, born in England, is also British. This adds an intriguing and highly personal layer to his connections to British literature, especially given that his brother had pointed out his fake accent: it becomes clear that Theroux

31 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 9.

32 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 11.

is fascinated by British culture and the writings of these literary pioneers. This strongly suggests that his narrative about the Mediterranean is framed by his literary guides, despite claims of seeking out "my" Mediterranean.

Based on Theroux's use of Evelyn Waugh, famous author of *Labels: A Mediterranean Journey* (1930) and *A Handful of Dust* (1934), he might wince in hurt disbelief at the contention that his narrative is built on others. He would conjure up his constant ridicule of Waugh's obvious narrative flaws and "snap-judgements" as evidence to the purity of his own work. This, however, would merely serve to confirm his need, and perhaps obsession to set himself apart, but eventually not being able to completely accomplish that. To bypass that, he attempts to take advantage of his confusing effect on the reader to hide these apparent paradoxes behind satire, irreverence and ambivalence.

For Theroux, the allure of travel lies in the opportunity to document and describe places that have escaped the typical tourist gaze or mainstream travel narratives. He writes, "*No one has ever described the place where I have just arrived:* this is the emotion that makes me want to travel. It is one of the greatest reasons to go anywhere."[33] By adopting this approach, he paradoxically distinguishes himself for his readers as the writer who avoids popular destinations in favor of more obscure, often challenging locales. It is as if he forgets how many authors he references wherever he goes, and that he is in the Mediterranean. In his quest to carve out a distinct niche for himself and his readers, he faces the well-documented reality of his chosen landscape.

As he is approaching Alexandria, he conjures up what he believes are fictional images of the city previously created by other authors, and then says, "But that fictional city was gone, if indeed it had ever existed."[34] His argument is that the space one visits, its history and what comes with it are fictional, in that they are one's own creation, their idiosyncratic projection on a foreign land. This, to him, is what makes that space real. If an author is skilled enough at writing *their* Mediterranean, they would make their readers see fiction as truth. And much like the images Theroux creates, his introspective musings can also be very convincing.

Theroux's insistence on meeting Naguib Mahfouz accentuates a different aspect of his literary obsession. "[His] conversations are rarely profound," writes Stephen Greenblatt, "the only real exception is a luminous hour Mr. Theroux spends with the Egyptian Nobel laureate, Naguib Mah-

33 Paul Theroux, *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 363.
34 Ibidem.

fouz, as he recuperates in a Cairo hospital from a terrorist's knife – but their cumulative power is considerable."[35] Mahfouz is indeed painted in the best light in this encounter. Theroux tells Charlie Rose that he had to choose between visiting the Pyramids and the Sphynx or going to see the bedridden Mahfouz, and that the choice was clear.[36] This is, however, one of those ironic statements he is consistently unaware of. Mahfouz, to him, is *part* of the Mediterranean, a living relic, a literary specimen to be read, cherished and appreciated, and the chance to personally meet him is nothing more than what he calls "literary pilgrimage." In Theroux's narrative, Mahfouz can never hold the same status of a British writer to be quoted and ridiculed like Evelyn Waugh for instance.

Theroux's Silences

Paul Theroux's numerous interactions with literary figures in the Mediterranean – either through face-to-face conversation or through referencing their writing – differ drastically depending on the specific situations he chooses to depict for his readers. Encounters with authors like Naguib Mahfouz in Egypt and Mohamed Choukri in Morocco reveal gaps or silences more than new information. These silences are not merely the omission of dialogues or avoidance of topics; they are spaces where Theroux's own American preconceptions and the limitations of his cultural understanding come to the forefront beyond his narrative control.

While Theroux is waiting for his meeting with Mahfouz, and as he is trying to explain what had happened to the author, he ropes the reader in with some of his irreverent rants about Egyptian towns, "They seemed to exist in that Third World dimension of poverty and neglect that held them outside of time."[37] After he relates the story of Mahfouz's assassination attempt, he continues to reflect on this seemingly anachronistic dimension that Arabs occupy, "Time had done very little to change the Arabic lan-

35 Stephen Greenblatt. "Bored Among the Ruins." *The New York Times*. 5 Nov 1995. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/06/18/specials/theroux-hercules.html?scp=14&sq=credit%2520cards%2520abroad&st=cse. www.nytimes.com.

36 Manufacturing Intellect. "Paul Theroux Interview (1995)." *Youtube*. 04 Apr 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXJ_WSyLiNY&ab_channel=ManufacturingIntellect. www.youtube.com.

37 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 368.

guage or the structure of Egyptian life."[38] As he describes the book that led its author to a close call with death, and had won him a Nobel Prize in literature – very real, tangible results in the present – he views the medium used as a language immune to change. His choice of words confirms his paradoxical approach to be silent; he reinforces his silence by implicitly appealing to the more modern, evolving English language.

After Theroux converses with Mahfouz for a bit in the ICU, mostly about the latter's current situation, he, perhaps unconsciously, refers to his silence. He writes, "I realized that I had been the one who had raised the religious issue and harped on the attack. But in retrospect, I had the feeling Mahfouz would have been much happier talking about something else – his work, perhaps."[39] As he proudly boasts, Theroux chose meeting Mahfouz over visiting the Pyramids acknowledging his stature and brilliance, and then he proceeded to do what any American would have: avoid this great writer's extensive career and view him instead as a symbol. Therefore, his fascination with Mahfouz does not necessarily translate into an in-depth exploration of the man's thoughts, but it is rather a touristic observation of a man that falls outside the usual sphere of Western literary and cultural experience.

Even when he appears to be praising the place, he maintains his preconceived notion about a "Third World dimension." Upon his departure from Egypt, he contemplates, "Alexandria on my return seemed serene, as Mahfouz had described it: 'Here is where love is. Education. Cleanliness. And hope.'" … "Alexandria made sense to me now. It was not a derelict or threatening place. It was an ancient city, founded by Alexander the Great around 330 B.C."[40] Alexandria is still an old, anti-modern city, but now it is seen in a new light. Not because he explored its streets and alleys and changed his mind, but because of his encounter with Mahfouz.

At the end of his journey, Theroux lands in Tangier, and of course this famously touristic city on the Mediterranean is not his main interest. He wants to meet the American expatriate writer Paul Bowles who has been living in Tangier for a few decades. Juxtaposing this encounter with Mahfouz before and Mohamed Choukri after is pivotal to understanding Theroux's approach.

He adopts a different, more journalistic tone in his conversation with Bowles, and his previous veneration of Mahfouz as a living literary relic

38 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 369.
39 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 373.
40 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 374.

disappears as he engages in a dialogue that shows the author as a contemporary literary peer. Although Theroux makes sure to highlight Bowles' idiosyncratic peculiarities, he nonetheless focuses on his career and stay in Tangier. He's not afraid to show this great American author in an unflattering light, which he would not dare do with Mahfouz. He writes, "He seemed at once preoccupied, knowledgeable, worldly, remote, detached, vain, skeptical, eccentric, self-sufficient, indestructible, egomaniacal, and hospitable to praise."[41] Ironically, this long and amusingly observant list of adjectives can just as well be used to describe Theroux himself: he sees himself in this veteran writer. However, he would not claim to know this much about Mahfouz even though he's met with both briefly. Mahfouz is like the Pyramids, not old and dilapidated, but wise and exotic and represents a different era.

The last encounter with another writer in *The Pillars of Hercules* was not planned. After Theroux leaves Bowles' house, he goes to an obscure bar in the alleys of Tangier and meets Mohamed Choukri. Their conversation, abrupt and brief, is arguably more interesting than the other two. Throughout their dialogue, Choukri's answers are direct and unpolished, something that Theroux wants to take advantage of. The following exchange is a good example:

> "'[Jean] Genet preferred me to Bowles'"
> …
> "Why?"
> "'Because I am marginal,' Choukri said. 'Bowles is from a great family. He has money. He has position. But I am a Berber, from a little village. Until I was twenty I was illiterate. … I had thirteen brothers and sisters. Nine of them died of poverty.'"
> "How long have you known Bowles?"[42]

Given his claim as a curious chronicler of the human condition in the Mediterranean, and after hearing all of that from Choukri, his follow-up question is about Bowles. This was not a planned meeting, and he could not help but silence the marginal genius sitting in front of him.

Theroux's silences are a revealing theme in the narrative that show the complex interplay of reverence, exoticization and detachment that

41 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, 518.
42 Paul Theroux. *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean,* 521.

shape his encounters with these literary figures, and ultimately with the Mediterranean.

In summary, *The Pillars of Hercules*' underlying tone of American exceptionalism is not only a manifestation the author's personal investment but the symptom of the larger encounter between American identity and the Mediterranean. Rooted in a post-Cold War context, Theroux's narrative choices highlight his attempt at being authentic during this idiosyncratic Grand Tour. By distancing himself from tourist attractions and focusing, to a large extent, on the Mediterranean as a lived experience, he manages to set himself apart from traditional travel writing about this space. His portrayal of the region, however, reflects an incongruous blend of reverence for literary giants and a selective gaze shaped by American biases.

Theroux's depiction of the Mediterranean is a testament to the complex exchange between American exceptionalism and the historical gravitas that the region carries. His narrative mirrors his own sense of detachment and superiority, and ultimately provides insights into the American mindset of the 1990s. This study of *The Pillars of Hercules* underscores the significance of analyzing American representations of the Mediterranean in understanding broader themes of cultural encounters: the other frontier, as it were.

Studying Paul Theroux in relation to the Mediterranean can spark necessary debates between scholars from American, Mediterranean and even Transatlantic studies. Theroux's work reveals the ways in which American travelers engage with the rest of the world, while offering a glimpse into their own identity make-up. This exploration allows for a deeper appreciation of the narrative strategies and cultural biases that mold our understanding of the world.

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SERGIO ATZENI: THE RETELLING OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SARDINIAN SPACE

Giovanni Maria Dettori*

Abstract

This article explores how Sergio Atzeni (1952-1995) deconstructs the crystallized image of Sardinia as an island outside time and space, untouched by the historical events occurring in the Italian Peninsula and the Mediterranean. Putting the author in dialogue with long-lasting representations of the island as found in travelogues and the Sardinian literary tradition, I investigate how the author in his latest works *Il quinto passo è l'addio* (1995) (The Fifth Step is a Farewell) and *Bellas Mariposas* (1995) (Beautiful Butterflies) creates a recounting of Sardinia. By challenging the fixity of a preconceived Orientalizing vision of the island, Atzeni engages in a totalizing representation of the insular space which expands the island storytelling into new settings, giving relevance to the previously neglected Sardinian urban space. My contribution, embracing Atzeni's postcolonial framework as investigated by Birgit Wagner, introduces a discourse of geographical repositioning and remapping of the island. While the traditional discourse on the island remarked Sardinian isolationism and peripheral localization, I claim that the Sardinian author reinstates Sardinian Mediterranean-ess and openness through the representation of the urban environment of Cagliari transformed by Atzeni into a quintessential Mediterranean harbor city. In the rewriting of the island Atzeni presents Sardinia as connected to the Mediterranean Sea, no longer conceived as a barrier but rather as a water highway which for millennia has favored the transit of people, the mixing of cultures and languages that forged the island's character. By repositioning the island at the center of the Mediterranean Sea, the island ceases to be a periphery and a marginal secluded insular territory. Thus, the island's cultural and linguistic diversity embodies in Atzeni the intrinsic nature of the Mediterranean space that opposes openness to the closeness of the Sardinian borderland narration. I state that the novelty of his works is the introduction of a contemporary and multicultural image of the island in the Sardinian literary canon, more representative of the complexity of Sardinian historical past and society. By representing a multifaceted multicultural and multilingual society, he conceives literature as a place where cultural and linguistic diversity meets anticipating contemporary Italian multiculturalism.

Keywords: insular space, multiculturalism, Mediterranean space, Sardinian literature, postcolonialism

Introduction

This article explores how Sergio Atzeni (1952-1995) deconstructs the crystallized image of Sardinia as an island outside time and space, untouched by the historical events occurring in the Italian peninsula and the Mediterranean. As outlined by Birgit Wagner (2011, 10) with the insertion of Sardinia into the Italian Kingdom in 1861, the relationship between the island and the Italian mainland became quasi-colonial, a case of internal colonialism, reminiscent of that of Ireland with The United Kingdom. The Austrian scholar identifies a post-colonial discourse in the work of Atzeni in his focus of retelling Sardinian story:

> Atzeni's task "was to put Sardinian literary in a written form" guided by "the impellent need to close gaps, create unexpected connections, fill up empty spaces with his writing." [1]

For Wagner, this process of 'talking back' counteracts the fixity of Sardinian image and official historiography with an autochthonous narration. This element along with the hybrid language Atzeni adopts in his later works recalls the creolized language in colonial Francophone literature (41) and inserts the Sardinian author in communication with postcolonialism and postcolonial writers.[2]

Focusing on Atzeni's latest works *Il quinto passo è l'addio* (1995) (The Fifth Step is a Farewell) and *Bellas Mariposas* (1995) (Beautiful Butterflies) and drawing on the work of Wagner, I remark how Atzeni challenges a preconceived Orientalizing[3] vision of Sardinia fueled by the stereotyping foreign gaze of visitors to the island and their travelogues like D.H. Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), Elio Vittorini's

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1 Birgit Wagner, "Sergio Atzeni. Zur Poetik des Postkolonialen," *FORUM: Postkoloniale Arbeiten / Postcolonial* (2005): 3.

2 Wagner, Birgit, *Sardinien – Insel Im Dialog : Texte, Diskurse, Filme* (Tübingen: Francke, 2008).

3 In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said critiques the way in which the Western World has historically, culturally and politically perceived the East. For Said the origins of "orientalism" goes back to the centuries-long era in which European powers controlled the Middle and Near East. From its position of power Europe identified "the orient" simply as "other than" the occident. This representation of the Orient as the "other space" is still rooted in the Western world and prevents a comprehension of the East and its true representation. As I will point out in my discussion, Orientalism was extended also to the representation of Sardinia.

Sardegna come infanzia (1954) or Amelie Posse's *Sardinian Sideshow* (1932).

While the postcolonial nature of Atzeni has been investigated by scholars like Wagner, Sulis (2008), Onnis (2011), Pala (2017), the Mediterranean discourse that emerges in his works has not been explored. I claim that Atzeni counterpoints the representation of an island outside time and space by reestablishing Sardinia Mediterranean-ess and giving representation to the urban environment of Cagliari, a quintessential Mediterranean harbor city. He sees Sardinia as fully connected to the Mediterranean Sea, not as a place of separation, but a water highway which for millennia has favored the transit of people, the mixing of cultures and languages that forged the island's character. By repositioning the island at the center of the Mediterranean Sea, the Sardinian author deconstructs the preconceived notion of Sardinia as a geographical, cultural, and linguistic borderland. Thus, reconnecting the island with its sea, Atzeni breaks with the traditional representation of Sardinia as an isolated, backward and primitive territory. He introduces a contemporary and multicultural image of the island in the Sardinian literary canon[4] which reflects the cultural and social changes brought by the migration wave of the nineties and a progressively globalized world. By representing a multifaceted multicultural and multilingual society, he conceives literature as a place where cultural and linguistic diversity meets anticipating contemporary Italian multiculturalism.

Atzeni was born in 1952 in Capoterra, in the province of Cagliari. He moved to Cagliari at a young age, where he spent his childhood and teenage years.[5] He made his debut in the literary field with a fairy-tale collection *Fiabe sarde* (Sardinian fairy-tales) and with poems in the Sardinian language in 1984. From the start, he showed an interest in the rich Sardinian oral tradition and language. In 1986, Atzeni quit his white-collar job[6] to travel throughout Europe while doing the most desperate jobs, including that of translator for a major Italian publishing house: this job will be central in the development of the hybrid language of his latest works. The nomadic European experience represents Atzeni's most prolific creative season in which he will publish *Il figlio di Bakunìn* (1991) (Bakunin's son), *Il quinto passo è l'addio* (1995) (The Fifth Step is a Farewell), and his most well-

4 With Sardinian literary canon we consider the literary production about Sardinia written by Sardinian and non-Sardinian authors in various languages.

5 Atzeni also worked as a journalist and started a a collaboration with the principal Sardinian newspapers. He was also politically envolved; he joined the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and actively participated in the political life of his city.

6 In 1986, he quit his job at ENEL (the Italian national energy company)

known novel *Passavamo sulla terra leggeri* (1996) (Lightly we passed on earth) which, along with the short novel *Bellas Mariposas*, were published posthumously. Atzeny drowned on the island of Carloforte in Sardinia in 1995; he was only 43 years old.

Sardinia outside the circuit of civilization

Italy, ethnically and culturally, is extremely diverse. Its territory harbors the greatest number of regional and minority languages in Western Europe (Sierp 2008, 304). However, to strengthen the weak unitarian ties that led to the creation of the Italian nation in 1861 (Banti 2004), its rulers and intellectuals pushed for a generalized monolingualism and monoculturalism which they also transposed into the Italian literary canon which was built as a collection of monolingual Italian works. As Gianfranco Contini (1912-1990) remarked, this narration is deceptive since academically the Italian literary canon includes exclusively works written in Italian despite the fact the literary production in the peninsula is multilingual including languages like French or regional dialects like Neapolitan[7] (Contini 1994, vi).[8] Atzeni breaks with the unitarian monolingual narration of the Italian literary canon describing the multicultural and multilingual reality of the island which, as Contini explained, is a prerogative of the whole Italian cultural production. Atzeni accentuates the multilingualism of his writing especially in his later works where he uses a hybridized language whose highest results are appreciable in the short novel *Bellas Mariposas* (1996) published after his death. Atzeni narrating his island inserts himself in the history of Italian literature from the perspective of a Mediterranean periphery and the cultural and linguistic minority of Sardinia breaking with the monolingual and monocultural Italian literary tradition.

The portrayal of Sardinia is ambivalent. On one side, the island is internationally recognized as the playground for the rich and famous and a glamourous destination for beachgoers from all over the world longing for its Mediterranean turquoise waters. On the other hand, behind its tourist allure, its history, culture, and language remain unknown to most Italians

7 Marco Polo's *Il Milione* (13th century) was written in Franco-Italian, Basile's *Cunto de li Cunti* (1634) in Neapolitan to cite some examples.

8 La storia della letteratura italiana è scolasticamente concepita come la storia della letteratura in lingua italiana, mentre per buona parte della sua estensione essa e perlomeno bilingue, senza che al volgare del SI venga sempre assicurata la prevalenza neanche statistica.

and the rest of the world. Few visitors venture outside the coastal areas of the island to discover the rich and stratified millenarian historical and cultural heritage of the second-largest island in the Mediterranean. Despite its touristy popularity, Sardinia remains a mysterious territory that centuries of narration by Italian and foreign visitors described as uncontaminated and backward, an island outside space and time with very little culture and literacy (Fuller 2000, 60). Sardinia's representation is dual:

> an island split into two distinct parts: the authentic Sardinian part with Nuoro and the Barbagia at its center, and the rest of the island, modernized and compliant with the standards of the world beyond the sea. (Urban, 190)

The first part is hidden, unreachable, and mysterious while the second one circulates in the media and its tourist promotion.

This crystallized image of the island originated in the Middle Ages. Dante himself denied the linguistic specificity and originality of the Sardinian language.[9] The undermining of Sardinian culture and the linguistic particularity of the island is also observable in travel accounts by foreign officials and travelers visiting the region. Among the travel reports written by non-Sardinians and foreign visitors *Sea and Sardinia* by D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), written in 1921 after a visit to the island in which the English writer was accompanied by his German wife Frida, remains one of the most influential portrayals of the island and its people ever made. Despite the short trip to Sardinia, less than a week, and Lawrence's limited itinerary on the island in which he did not take any notes, the travelogue of the English author left a permanent mark on the representation of the island. Excerpts from this work are still used nowadays in introducing publications about Sardinia and for its tourist promotion. Lawrence famously wrote: "Let it be Sardinia. They say neither Romans, nor Phoenicians, Greeks nor Arabs ever subdued Sardinia. It lies outside; outside the circuit of civilization" (Biggers, 105). Lawrence inserts himself in that tradition of observers of the island that highlight its fixity and extraneity to civilization and cultural influences. This insular Italian periphery was typecasted into a stereotyped Orientalized image that has been exploited to sell a product to tourists, that of a wild region that could appeal to travelers in search of exoticism and adventure.

9 Dante, in his linguistics treaty *De vulgari eloquentia* (On Eloquence in Vernacular), written between 1303 and 1304, underplays the specificity of the Sardinian language and states that the island's language is a mere imitation of Latin: its grammar copies Latin grammar just like monkeys copy humans. "gramaticam, tanquam simie homines imitantes" *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Book I, chapter XI.

The insular space coincided with the idea of separateness; a geographical element became a qualifying psychological trait used to capture the essence of the Sardinian people. Following Giovanni Lilliu's theory of the Sardinian permanence of resistance, a common misconception took hold that Sardinians were resistant to what came from the sea, being those ideas or people, and as a defense mechanism, they retreated into isolationism.[10] Therefore the image of the island solidified around this premise and the corollary of images of the island rooted in its traditional agropastoral world (Marci, 11).

Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) played a central role in the establishment of a Sardinian imaginary and became a reference for Sardinian writers who came after her. As observed by Gigliola Sulis, Atzeni too, on several occasions testified of his admiration for the matriarch of Sardinian literature. In an interview, he stated: "If only I were the little finger of Grazia Deledda, I could consider myself satisfied."[11] This statement shows Atzeni's admiration for Deledda's work. Valuing her work as a model to follow, he pays respect to her legacy and the mark she left in Sardinian literature.

Maria Bonaria Urban's *Sardinia in Screen* (2013), through a wealth of examples taken from literature and cinematographic works, focuses instead on the central role of Deledda's (1871-1936) literary production in the canonization of a Sardinian image (42) and for framing its insular and peripheral space. Deledda's narrative centers on her island, an endless source of inspiration for her writing. She describes the villages, the people, and the ancestral traditions of the local communities around Nùoro, her little town in the center of the island, which were her sole source of literary inspiration (Fuller, 65).[12] As thoroughly investigated by Margherita Caput-Hayer, Deledda's modernity has been overshadowed by critics who framed her work inside the limiting category of regionalism or as an epigone of "Verismo" and "Decadentismo" writers (6). According to the scholar

10 The illustrious Sardinian archeologist Giovanni Lilliu (1914-2012) formulated a theory based on the supposed cultural impenetrability of Sardinians from the most remote central and isolated areas of the island to external conquerors. He defined this cultural closeness as the 'costante resistenziale sarda' (The Sardinian permanence of resistance). Giovanni Lilliu edited by Antonello Mattone *La costante resistenziale sarda.*

11 Gigliola Sulis, "La scrittura la lingua, e il dubbio sulla verità. Intervista a Sergio Atzeni," in *La grotta della vipera*, 20, no. 66/67 (1994): 34-41.

12 In Deledda, Sardinian people came to be identified with the image of the title of Deledda's most famous work *Canne al vento* (Reeds in the Wind), 1913. Just like reeds, Sardinians are at the mercy of an unkind nature and land. One of the protagonists of the novel, the servant Efix who remains faithful to the Pintor sisters even after their family falls into misery, states "we are reeds, and fate is the wind." (156).

> Deledda's works emphasize the author's ability to metabolize extremely diverse and complementary cultural discourses, ranging from Positivism to nihilism, from Cesare Lombroso to Friedrich Nietzsche. In this capacity, Deledda emerges as a European writer and intellectual of modernity, far beyond the critical labels that have stigmatized her narrative (Caput-Hayer, 6).

The superficial reception of her work extrapolated an idyllic and remote image of the island which became paradigmatic of the representation of the island cementing the idea of a territory outside time and space, immutable and anchored to its past.

A Mediterranean New Wave

During the sixties, Sardinian society entered a phase of forced industrialization imposed by the Italian central state that rapidly transformed its traditional agro-pastoral economy and modified Sardinian social habits. The increased prosperity enhanced by the creation of new employment in the industrial sector created an identitarian vacuum since Sardinian cultural and linguistic identity had to be renegotiated face to modernity and technological progress (Marci 2006). The newly achieved modernity and a new way of narrating Sardinia, which reflected on the rapid transformation of Sardinian society, emerged in the cultural resurgence of the island during the eighties. The artistic flourishing of those years contributed to bringing Sardinian literature and cinema to the attention of Italian mainstream cultural circuits.

Goffredo Fofi labeled the proliferation of works by Sardinian authors as New Sardinian Literature while Alfredo Franchini defined it as Mediterranean New Wave.[13] The reference to the Mediterranean is particularly relevant because it allows the repositioning of the island in its natural Mediterranean context at the center of commercial, cultural, and linguistic exchanges. One of the features of the New Wave is the retention of the narrative focus on Sardinia. There is not a rejection of the previous literary and thematic tradition of the island's narration. However, there is a tendency to expand and vary the literary recounting of the island exploring settings and themes not previously developed. Broccia identifies an underlying urge that moves the creativity of Sardinian authors in those years, the rediscovery of the island by Sardinian themselves:

13 Goffredo, Fofi. "Sardegna, che Nouvelle Vague!" 13 November 2003. *Panorama*; Alfredo, Franchini "Chiamatela pure nouvelle vague Mediterranea" *Specchio* 14 May 2005.

> One of the main reasons, that brought about this cultural change, is above all the people of the island's strong and steady desire to discover and study Sardinians' history, traditions, language and search for a definition of what Sardinia is and what it means to be Sardinian.[14]

This desire to reappropriate the island historically is particularly strong for Atzeni's whose production focuses on re-narrating the history of the island from an internal perspective. While maintaining his focus on Sardinia, Atzeni expands the narration of the island beyond the central mountainous area of the region that was considered the stronghold of Sardinian culture and identity. He is dissatisfied with the idea that only a specific geographic area of the island could be the expression of the Sardinian essence:

> But I believe that also Cagliari needs to be narrated, and even Guspini, Arbus, Carbonia. If I live long enough, I will try to narrate all villages, one by one, and every person, one by one. (Atzeni *Si ... Otto!*, 66)

He wants to narrate the island in its complexity, believing that every single place from its capital city to its tiniest village had something to tell in the economy of Sardinian history.

Atzeni counterpoints the immobility and fixity of previous ideas of Sardinian identity with the openness of the Mediterranean space, repositioning the island at a crossroads of exchanges and cultural influences.

Atzeni's literary mission is the re-narration of the Sardinian insular space through a comprehensive account of the island, avoiding its folklorization. He reinvents the iconography of the island without disavowing its traditional ethnographic narration, and he goes beyond it. By exploring a more complex idea of Sardinianness he considers the intricacy of a multifaceted, stratified cultural exceptionalism. He confronts Sardinian identity with multiculturalism and global society and the effects they have on the traditional socio-cultural assets of Sardinia.

According to the writer Paola Soriga, Sergio Atzeni is the Sardinian writer who changed the way the island is narrated.[15] He breaks the mold of a stereotyped literary description of an archaic immutable island marked by a strong and impermeable Sardinian identity. His literary investigation

14 Michele Broccia. "The Sardinian Literary Spring: An Overview. A New Perspective on Italian Literature." *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* 9, no. 1: C3, 2014.

15 Paola Soriga, "Lo scrittore che ha cambiato il modo di raccontare la Sardegna," *Internazionale*, September 20, 2015.

counteracts the narration of the insular space conveyed externally by foreign dominant powers with an internal, insular narration.

An urban, multilingual, and multicultural Sardinia

One of the innovations introduced by Atzeni in Sardinian literature is the space he gives to the urban setting in his works. With Atzeni, the city, particularly Cagliari, the island capital, bursts into a prominent role and enters Sardinian literature as a protagonist and not as a mere background. As observed by Gigliola Sulis, traditionally the Sardinian novel is set in the mountainous area of the island interior. Its coastal and mining areas along with the urban realities have a marginal role and Cagliari when present becomes a liminal space, an urban reality not representative of the real nature of the island, a space "other" than that of real Sardinia (2008, 449). In an interview with Gigliola Sulis, Atzeni discusses Cagliari as one of his sources of inspiration for becoming a writer and a missing subject in Sardinian literature. He states:

> Narrating Cagliari has been one of the reasons that pushed me to write short stories. I had noticed that in newspapers, and on TV, descriptions of Cagliari or other peripheral areas were taken from non-Sardinian authors. As if there was no description of Cagliari or the Campidano region[16] in our literature. There is much more about Barbagia, while we do not have much about the Southern part of the island.[17]

However, the idea of Cagliari as a space "other" emerges both in Sardinian authors, like Deledda, and foreign writers such as D.H. Lawrence. The exceptionality of Cagliari as a non-Sardinian space is appreciable in this passage taken from Deledda's novel *Cosima* (1936) describing her first visit to the city:

> Large birds she had never seen, with iridescent wings, rose up from the pool as though springing out of the water and made a kind of rainbow in the sky.

16 The biggest plain in Sardinia, in the south-western part of the island

17 "Raccontare Cagliari è stato uno dei motivi che mi ha spinto a cercare di scrivere racconti. Avevo notato che nei giornali, in televisione, quando si prendevano descrizioni di Cagliari, o di alcune zone della provincia, si finiva sempre per citare autori non sardi, come se non ci fosse una descrizione di Cagliari o del Campidano nella nostra letteratura. C'è molto di più sulla Barbagia, mentre sul Sud c'è pochissimo." Gigliola Sulis, La scrittura, la lingua e il dubbio sulla verità. Intervista a Sergio Atzeni, in: *La grotta della vipera* 66-67, 1994, p. 38.

> Perhaps it was a mirage…The train stopped in a station that seemed a civilized oasis with its garden of palms… The first person she saw was a young man dressed in a golden brown color, with a marvelous mustache of the same color and long oriental eyes.[18]

In Lawrence's words, Cagliari was:

> lost between Europe and Africa and belonging to nowhere. Belonging to nowhere, never having belonged to anywhere. To Spain and the Arabs and the Phoenicians most. But as if it had never really had a fate. No fate. Left outside of time and history (Lawrence 2024, 84).

An ethereal place, not suitable for living, unreal:

> And that is Cagliari. It has that curious look, as if it could be seen, but not entered. It is like some vision, some memory, something that has passed away. Impossible that one can actually walk in that city: set foot there and eat and laugh there. (97)

And "strange":

> And suddenly there is Cagliari…It is strange and rather wonderful, not a bit like Italy… and makes me think of Jerusalem: … rising rather bare and proud, remote as if back in history…One wonders how it ever got there. And it seems like Spain ─ or Malta: not Italy. (97)

Cagliari causes the visitor a feeling of estrangement, it resembles other Mediterranean cities that do not look like Italy or Sardinia. It is a strange and peculiar urban space: "strange, stony Cagliari" (101). Lawrence underlines the city's strangeness several times: "Cagliari is very steep. Half-way up there is a *strange* place called the bastions, … curiously suspended over the town" (101). It is more Oriental and Arab than Italian: "… tufts of palm trees and Arab-looking houses. On the right, most curiously, a long strange spit of sand… It is a strange, strange landscape: as if here the world left off… this curious, craggy-studded town … (102).

In the perception of both Sardinians and non-Sardinians Cagliari, the capital city of the island and its largest urban area resembles a foreign body that does not partake in Sardinian history and culture. A space "other," more a reflection of Sardinian conquerors rather than Sardinians them-

18 Grazia Deledda *Cosima* translated by Martha King, (New York, Italica Press, 1988), 136.

selves. The distinctiveness of Cagliari is remarked through the Orientalizing lens which ascribes to the Sardinian capital more Oriental and Arabic features than Italian ones. All in the geography of this place is different, "other," impalpable, a mirage outside time and space.

Atzeni feels that the literary representation of the Sardinian urban environment is lacking, and it is mostly outer directed by non-Sardinian writers. Claiming back Cagliari as an integral part of the Sardinian social fabric, Atzeni abandons the Orientalizing trope in the portrayal of the city and its inhabitants.

In his third work, the autobiographical novel *Il quinto passo è l'addio* (The Fifth Step is a Farewell) published in 1995, Atzeni represents his city, and Sardinian urban environment in an unusual mimetic way. The time of narration in this work lasts twelve hours, the length it takes the ferry that departures Cagliari to reach Civitavecchia, near Rome. The passenger on the ferry is Ruggero Gunale, the protagonist and alter ego of the author.

The opening scene sets the city as one of the protagonists of the novel. Ruggero is on the ferry that is taking him to the Italian continent. The point of view moves from the top of the city to its port in a cinematographic bird-eye perspective:

> … Ruggero Gunale looks with watery and petrified eyes at the city fading away: the golden cross on top of the cathedral and the buildings that crown it decreasing… along the hill surrounded by unpassable stony bastions…He looks at the modern neighborhoods descending from the hills into the oily and dark green sea, the beautiful buildings, and the porticos… He says goodbye to Pisan towers and belltowers… (13)[19]

In a few lines, Cagliari becomes tangible and realistic to the reader. It is a real place not altered by the Orientalizing gaze and forged by its historical past. The city is not transfigured into an exotic, dreamy, and unrealistic location. If we exclude the novel's opening with the description of the city, Atzeni has no interest in outlining its beauty or alterity. He is more involved in presenting a cross-section of society in an urban Sardinian context.

Gunale's ferry trip unlocks a series of memories and sketches of a myriad of sordid characters living in Cagliari and its surrounding areas which be-

19 My translation from the Italian original "Ruggero Gunale guarda con occhi umidi e impietriti la città che si allontana: la croce d'oro sulla cupola della cattedrale e attorno a corona digradando i palazzi circondati da bastioni pietrosi invalicabili… Guarda i quartieri moderni fuori le mura scendere dai colli al mare oleoso e verde cupo, i bei palazzi e I portici…. Saluta torri pisane e campanili…"

long to Gunale/Atzeni's formative years. The city is a mere backdrop around which a series of episodes flashback into Gunale's memory and resurface into a stream of consciousness. Through Gunale's reflections, dreams, and hallucinations, the author tells the protagonist's story and that of Cagliari between the end of the seventies and the beginning of the nineties.

The city, although denoted as Cagliari and identifiable as such, is an urban space that could resemble any other port city in the Mediterranean. Cities that have expanded outside their original historical center and sprawled into a new, anonymous urban conglomerate with no charm and clogged with cars:

> Monica and Ruggero walk among the tall buildings and cars parked sideways on the sidewalks by people who are shopping in the parallel street. (The new city has devoured the almond trees, substituted by a parade of shining shop windows – looking at them with desire the crowd strolls – and from dark deserts where cars are left, where young people kiss each other, drug addicts exchange infected syringes and car radio thieves walk warily ready to grab a car radio and jump on the moped of the accomplice who is lookout around the corner. Dark deserts where Monica and Ruggero walk slowly. (20)[20]

Atzeni strips Cagliari of any idyllic element, he sketches a reality common to many cities in Italy and the world at that time where hedonism and prosperity coexisted with social distress and petty criminality. Differently from the examples of the description of Cagliari I have included above, there is no sense of estrangement in this passage, it is all very tangible and recognizable. The reader is confronted with a scene that they have experienced first-hand while walking in a peripheral and run-down dark area of their city.

Atzeni, without disavowing Sardinian tradition and cultural identity, needs to detach from them and physically exile himself from his native land: "Flee. After thirty-four years you eradicate yourself from the land where you loved, suffered, and clowned around…" (15). [21] The rift becomes physical when the ferry leaves Cagliari behind. This separation is

20 My translation from the Italian original: Monica e Ruggero camminano fra gli alti palazzi e le auto parcheggiate di traverso sul marciapiede da gente ch'è nella via parallela per acquisti. (La città nuova ha divorato i mandorli, sostituiti da una mostra di vetrine scintillanti – guardandole con desiderio la folla passeggia – e da deserti bui dove lasciare l'automobile, dove i ragazzi si baciano, i tossici si scambiano siringhe infette, i ladri d'autoradio si scambiano siringhe infette… Deserti bui dove Monica e Ruggero camminano lenti).

21 My translation from the Italian original: "Fuggi. Dopo trentaquattro anni ti strappi alla terra dove hai amato, sofferto e fatto il buffone."

necessary to achieve freedom from the constrictions of the insular space and to experience new identities: "In return, I will be free. The mask of the foreigner, islander, beggar, they will sew on me, will hide me. It will conceal my name and I will be a man among men…" (15).[22] The physical estrangement from the insular space retraces Atzeni's life experience. Like the protagonist of his novel, Atzeni had abandoned the island and lived a nomadic life around Europe before settling in Turin. The separation from the island generates in the author a more thorough reworking of questions of identities and belonging.

For Atzeni's poetics, it was fundamental the encounter with the works of postcolonial authors especially Patrick Chamoiseau (1953-) of whom he translated the novel *Texaco* in 1994.[23] The contact with the Martinican author contributed to the development of Atzeni's thoughts on Sardinian identity and past. He related the post-colonial condition described by Chamoiseau to the Sardinian socio-historical context. He was aware that as it occurred during and after colonization processes, the voice of Sardinians had been silenced. For the Sardinian author, it was time to regain ownership of the Sardinian past through a retelling that originated inside the island.

Texaco (1992) by Chamoiseau contains a creolized language which inspired Atzeni to develop a similar linguistic register for his short novel *Bellas Mariposas* (1996). This work presents a society in which the local and the global or 'glocal' are interconnected in the background of a progressively more globalized world. In Atzeni's posthumous novel, contemporary Sardinian society emerges as multicultural and multilingual.

The narration is centered around a stream-of-consciousness monologue uttered by Cate, a twelve-year-old teenager living in a degraded periphery of Cagliari. Throughout the story, we follow the young protagonist and her best friend Luna for an entire day: August third of an undefined year. Caterina will tell us, with a humoristic and at times poetic style, the stories of the neighbors in her degraded suburb of Cagliari, the capital city of Sardinia, and her adolescent dream of redemption from the misery and the decline of her family and surroundings. Her internal monologue unfolds freely, one thought after another without any control or articulation. The almost complete lack of punctuation, except for some question and exclamation marks, reinforces the connection with the spoken language and gives the reader the impression of dealing with a recorded speech transcript (Matt 2007, 200).

22 My translation from the Italian original: "In cambio sarò libero. La maschera che mi cuciranno addosso, lo straniero, l'isolano, il mendicante, mi nasconderà. occulterà il mio nome, sarò uomo fra uomini…"

23 https://rivistatradurre.it/le-berger-de-la-diversite/.

The protagonist, using a very peculiar language that mixes the regional Italian spoken in Sardinia that incorporates Sardinian elements, youth slang, and other foreign languages, recounts her wish for redemption, her dream of becoming a successful rock star, rising above the misery of her family and surroundings like a beautiful butterfly. Once again, Cagliari is crucial not only as an inspiration for the content of the work but also for the hybrid stylistic form which is taken directly from the idiolect used by its inhabitants. Talking about Cagliari and its language Atzeni declared:

> Living in Cagliari is an exalting experience for those who like linguistic confusion, the illegitimate mixing of language, the delirious play on words: often – with more or less awareness – people speak a fake Italian, unintelligible to people that are not from there, heavily influenced by the Sardinian language.[24] (Atzeni 1991 qtd. in Marci 1999, 220)

The narration is imbued with cultural and linguistic contamination to mimic the way people speak in Cagliari. Cate's hybrid language is marked by opacity which reveals the liveliness of the spoken idiom of the young characters of the work and that of her neighbors. Her monologue acts as a mouthpiece that conveys the voices of her neighbors of Santa Lamenera, the fictitious degraded suburb of Cagliari.

The reader gets lost in Caterina's continuous change of codes. In this short work of only about 30 pages, 178 sentences contain Sardinian words or expressions encapsulated in Italian phrases. The frequency with which the linguistic mixture occurs results in an almost perfect blending of the two languages, producing a unique idiom used by the protagonist Cate. This technique aims at reproducing most authentically the conversations of Cate and her peers.

The language of the text expresses the social malaise that dominates the neighborhood. The simple intrusion of a verb in Sardinian inside an Italian sentence determines the local color in the narration. Through Cate's monologue, the reader experiences life in this urban periphery; the young protagonist, for example, brings up in the narration one of her neighbors who repeatedly calls her husband's name: "Federico! Federico! *Zerria* signora Sias" (66; Federico! Federico! Shouts Madame Sias). The verbo "zerria" reported by Cate, immediately positions signora Sias inside the specific socio-cultural

24 "Vivere a Cagliari è un'esperienza esaltante, per chi ama la confusione linguistica, la mescolanza spuria degli idiomi, i giochi di parole deliranti: spesso – in modo più o meno cosciente – si parla un italiano contraffatto, incomprensibile a chi non sia del luogo, tratto di peso dal sardo."

context in which the young protagonist lives. Using the verb "zerria," Atzeni highlights the sudden and loud shout coming from her neighbor; the Italian verb "grida" would not have had the same effect on the reader. Naturally, a Sardinian speaker can better appreciate the power of the verb "zerria" inserted in this context. However, a non-Sardinian speaker can infer the meaning especially pronouncing the verb aloud; its onomatopoeic quality seems to reinforce and reproduce the shouting of the name "Federico."

The author skillfully doses the use of code-switching; he contaminates the narrative with Sardinian through the insertion of Sardinian words into Italian sentences. In his posthumous novel, the author outlines the permeable and global dimension of a Sardinian society which for centuries has been described as enclosed and impenetrable. In Atzeni emerges a detachment from the stylized and stereotypical idea of Sardinia molded by forces external to the island and crystalized in its forms. Atzeni revindicates the necessity of narrating Sardinia in its multifaceted expressions and of re-narrating its history from the insider perspective and not that of the outsider or ruler. As one of the most influential authors of the New Sardinian Literature, his works continue to resonate and influence the production of contemporary Sardinian authors (Marras 2006, 122).

Giving voice to the Sardinian subaltern, Atzeni fills up the gap of a narration that was superimposed on the island. He reappropriates areas of Sardinian society, like the urban space overlooked or Orientalized in the traditional representation of the island. He embraces an all-encompassing depiction of the island that does not exclude but includes and expands into its Mediterranean space. Atzeni's work challenges the idea that a supposed center still maintains its political, cultural, and linguistic supremacy over the peripheries.

Conclusion: a new Sardinian space

The importance of Atzeni's literature lies in his ability to anticipate contemporary literary tendencies which include a reflection on identity in a postmodern, multilingual, and multicultural key. Atzeni introduces into the Italian literary panorama a post-colonial reading of Italian culture and society and a discourse on Italianness. This element is particularly relevant in the progressively more multicultural and multilingual contemporary Italian society that sees the affirmation of migrant literature or second and third-generation Italian writers who re-write and re-interpret the category of belonging reflecting on the concepts of citizenship and nationality. Sim-

ilarly, Atzeni questions traditional representations of Sardinia through a remapping of identity, a journey that leads to a re-establishment of a fragmented and dispossessed identity.

For Atzeni, Sardinian identity is no longer static but rather dynamic, open, and non-defensive, it includes and does not exclude. He reappropriates an urban dimension of Sardinia generally disregarded in Sardinian literature since the city did not embody the quintessential identity of the island. He introduces linguistic and cultural divergences that Cronin (2006, 15) deems fundamental at a time when literary works trespass the national boundaries determined by the binomial relation of one nation and one language that characterized the nation-state. The Sardinian author forges from a decentralized, insular position an identitarian model extendable to the whole of Italy; he does so by overcoming the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces. He writes about a society rooted in cultural and linguistic exchanges open and porous which embodies the Mediterranean melting pot. Challenging preconceived ideas of islandness he is capable of repositioning Sardinia geographically as an island at the center of the Mediterranean, the crux of cultural and linguistic encounters.

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A MEDITERRANEAN OF REMNANTS: JEWISH AND ARABO-ISLAMIC SICILY IN VINCENZO CONSOLO

Salvatore Pappalardo*

Abstract:

In his novels, writer and intellectual Vincenzo Consolo (1933-2012) intricately maps the intersecting histories of Sicily's Mediterranean civilizations. This article discusses what I call Consolo's "Mediterranean of remnants," highlighting the author's approach to Sicily's historical narratives as he seeks to recover and emphasize the often neglected Jewish and Arabo-Islamic legacies embedded in the island's cultural fabric. Through his narrative archeology, Consolo unearths and reinterprets layers of Sicilian history, reimagining his own lineage in the process and challenging traditional views of Sicilian identity. The exploration begins with an analysis of Jewish Sicilian history as depicted in Consolo's novels *Nottetempo, casa per casa* and *La ferita dell'aprile*, linking these stories to his personal reflections on his suspected Jewish ancestry. The study then shifts to examining his representation of Sicily's Arabo-Islamic heritage, particularly through his aesthetics of grafting, which he uses to explain the cultural hybridity of Sicilians. Consolo's works challenge the erasure of Sicilian Jewish and Muslim histories, advocating for a richer, more inclusive understanding of Sicilian identity that acknowledges its profound connections to the broader Mediterranean basin. By weaving these complex narratives together, Consolo not only enriches our understanding of Sicilian history and literature but also contributes to a more nuanced appreciation of the Mediterranean's multifaceted cultural legacy. This study reaffirms his literary and philosophical significance, positioning his works as essential readings for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the Mediterranean's intercultural dynamics.

Keywords: Sicily, Jewish Sicilian history, Arabo-Islamic heritage, cultural hybridity, Mediterranean Studies

The Sicilian novelist and intellectual Vincenzo Consolo (1933-2012) is renowned for intricately mapping Sicily onto the cultural and historical geography of the island's myriad Mediterranean civilizations. This article

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I.S. MED • 4/2024 • ISBN: 9788869774881 • DOI: 10.7413/ISME0028

argues that a critical dimension of what might be called Consolo's "Mediterranean of remnants" has often been overlooked, i.e., his efforts to unearth from Sicily's palimpsestic archive two foundational yet marginalized and nearly erased cultural-historical traces: the chronicles of Jewish and Arabo-Islamic Sicily. The author's textual archeology delves deeply into Sicily's layered past, unearthing forgotten narratives from its Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Jewish, Arabo-Islamic, Norman, and Spanish histories. In the crevices of these ruins, Consolo discovers what he identifies as personal ties to a *marrano* heritage, through which Consolo reimagines his origins as born from "the carob tree and the rock, from a Jewish mother and a Saracen father."[2] For Consolo, the interconnected legacies of Sicily's Jewish and Arabo-Islamic past challenge historical erasures, assume a preeminent role in defining Sicily's identity, and ultimately surpass the significance of the island's classical heritage. This narrative reorientation positions Sicily not as a peripheral European outpost but suggests an alternative cultural geography that restores the island's position to the center of a Mediterranean crossroads of aesthetic and political mediations. This article will examine Consolo's "Mediterranean of remnants" through a two-part analysis. Initially, it will focus on the recovery of Jewish Sicilian history in the autobiographical novels *Nottetempo, casa per casa* and *La ferita dell'aprile*, in the context of the author's statements about his own suspected Jewish heritage. Subsequently, the discussion will shift to Consolo's aesthetics of grafting and the legacy of Sicily's Arabo-Islamic period, as portrayed in *L'olivo e l'olivastro* and *Retablo*. In these texts, the horticultural technique of grafting serves Consolo as a powerful metaphor with which he articulates the transcultural hybridity that has shaped and continues to shape Sicilian identity.

Consolo writes against the grain of prevailing narratives that have promoted a monolithic, ethnically, and racially homogeneous Italian nationhood.[3] With his literary recovery of fragmentary historical remnants, Consolo challenges what Francesca Maria Corrao has called "the memory of

2 "Sei nato dal carrubo / e dalla pietra / da madre ebrea / e da padre saraceno." Vincenzo Consolo, *Accordi. Poesie inedite di Vincenzo Consolo* (Gaetano Zuccarello Editore, 2015), 18.

3 Among the scholarly contributions that have placed Sicily and Italy within a Mediterranean dimension, see Claudia Karagoz and Giovanna Summerfield (eds.), *Sicily and the Mediterranean: Migration, Exchange, Reinvention* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme, *Italy and the Mediterranean: Words, Sounds, and Images of the Post Cold War Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); as well as Claudio Fogu, *The Fishing Net and the Spider Web: Mediterranean Imaginaries and the Making of Italians* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

oblivion," by which Italian historiography has traditionally ignored Sicily's Mediterranean networks. Corrao contends that as a result of this *damnatio memoriae*, in many history books "we do not find traces of constructive memories of the Islamic and Jewish presence in Europe."[4] This ongoing neglect is reminiscent of Fernand Braudel's earlier criticisms concerning the severed ties between Sicily and its North African neighbors. The consequence of this cultivated amnesia was a vocabulary that remained inadequate for describing Sicily's role within the broader archipelago of a Jewish and Arabo-Islamic Mediterranean.[5] Consolo's aesthetics of grafting, as we will see, also operates on a linguistic level, thus offering a lexicon that not only describes but also revitalizes Sicily's connections to larger Mediterranean networks. Instead of focusing solely on influences from Rome and Greece to the north and east, Consolo's literary re-orientation of Sicily directs attention to the island's south and west, towards the Maghreb and Andalusian Iberia.

Consolo's exploration of Jewish history and his identification with descendants of forcibly converted Jews remain largely unrecognized or underestimated, even by scholars of his Mediterranean paradigm. For instance, Nicolò Messina contends that Consolo "toyed with his last name of Jewish ancestry," suggesting a negligible engagement, although it appears that Consolo considered his alleged Jewish genealogy with profound seriousness, regardless of its historical distance. Conversely, Giuliana Adamo, in her eulogy of the Sicilian author, urges caution, reminding readers that while Consolo frequently speculated about his Jewish origins, these claims were never definitively proven. Yet, the very impossibility of providing concrete evidence for this genealogical suspicion might be precisely Consolo's point, reflecting the broader issue of a historical and cultural legacy that is irretrievably lost.[6] The lack of conclusive evidence regarding Conso-

4 Francesca Maria Corrao, "The Memory of Oblivion. Italian History and the Lost Memory of Arab Influence on Medieval Sicily," in *Claiming History in Religious Conflicts*, edited by Adrian Brändli and Katharina Heyden (Schwabe Verlag, 2021): 289.

5 "It is customary when discussing Sicily to keep looking to the North, towards Naples, and to regard their two histories as fundamentally opposed, the rise of Naples leading to the decline of Palermo, and vice versa. It is even more important to emphasize its links with North Africa, that is the value of this maritime world which our imperfect knowledge or lack of attention has left without a name." Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* 2nd Edition. Vol. 1. 2 vol (University of California Press, 1995), 117.

6 "Giocherellava con il suo cognome di ascendenza ebraica." Nicolò Messina, "Cartografia delle migrazioni in Consolo" in Gianni Turchetta, ed., *"Questo luogo d'in-*

lo's Jewishness should therefore not be viewed as a deficiency in his identity politics but as a central argument of his cultural criticism. Consolo's deep identification should not be seen as cultural appropriation; instead, it represents a form of Mediterranean transculturalism that embraces the hidden interconnectedness between self and Other, integral to one's personal and familial story. Consolo's "Mediterranean of remnants," therefore, carries significant disciplinary implications. By weaving Jewish history into his novels, he reveals layers of Sicilian – and by extension, Italian – history and culture that have been largely overlooked by dominant national narratives. Highlighting the importance of this perspective, Saskia Ziolkowski argues that acknowledging the role of Jewishness in modern Italian literary history is crucial, as it "offers a path for discussing the historical diversity of Italian culture and identity."[7] Read in this context, the works of Consolo, while also operating in contiguous spheres, contribute significantly to a Jewish Italian literary history.

Consolo's Jewish Sicily

Set in the early 1920s, in the coastal town of Cefalù in Sicily, Consolo's 1992 historical-metaphoric novel, opens with an unsettling scene.[8] The father of the young protagonist, Petro Marano, is barking and howling under the full moon, rolling amidst bramble thorns and limestone rocks, darting erratically as if haunted by beasts or demons. He is afflicted by the family's sinister and ancestral curse, the *male catubbo*, which local folk traditions interpret as lycanthropy, the grim metamorphosis into a werewolf. This alleged therianthropy renders Petro's family social pari-

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crocio d'ogni vento e assalto." Vincenzo Consolo e la cultura del Mediterraneo fra conflitto e integrazione." (Mimesis, 2021), 109. The Italian term *giocherellare*, "to fiddle" or "play around," trivializes Consolo's identification with what he perceives to be a long-lost Jewish heritage. Adamo reminisces: "Amava dire .... che il suo cognome aveva, probabilmente, una origine ebraica, rimasta tuttavia indimostrata. Di molto ebraico, però, aldilà del fatto onomastico, c'è di sicuro in lui l'enorme rispetto, culto anzi, della memoria a cui si accompagna il miglior umanesimo per quel che riguarda il senso della storia." Giuliana Adamo, "Ricordo di Vincenzo Consolo (1933-2012)." *Italica* 89.4 (Winter 2012): vii.

7 Saskia Elizabeth Ziolkowski, "For a Jewish Italian Literary History: from Italo Svevo to Igiaba Scego." *Italian Culture* 40.2 (2022): 132.

8 For Consolo's notion of the historical-metaphoric novel, see Joseph Francese, *Vincenzo Consolo. Gli anni de «l'Unità» (1992-2012), ovvero la poetica della colpa-espiazione* (Firenze University Press, 2015), 77-80.

ahs in the eyes of the superstitious townspeople. His condition thrusts the Maranos into a liminal state: they dwell on the threshold of a hybrid human-animal form, inhabiting the space of the monstrous that defies clear divisions in socially accepted taxonomical categories.[9] Consolo explores a broader range of mental health issues through the family's struggles. The Arabic etymology of the *male catubbo* suggests a "canine disease," hinting at the father's clinical lycanthropy, a condition that makes him believe to temporarily assume wolfish traits. His afflictions are compounded by "unbearable depression" and manic episodes that also affect Petro's two sisters, manifesting as schizophrenia.[10] The family's marginalization is exacerbated by their unexpected ascent to wealth after receiving an inheritance from a local aristocrat. This unexpected upward mobility is regarded with deep suspicion in the community, where Petro's father is seen as a bastard, a slur that underscores the family's mixed legacy and social illegitimacy.

For Petro, the enigmatic affliction that besets the family initially defies clear identification. While the cause and name of this condition remain veiled in obscurity, the nightly silhouette of the coast illuminated by the lighthouse evokes an eerie sense of wanderlust – an exile's yearning for distant shores. It is only later that Petro begins to articulate this longing, formulating questions that lead him toward a tentative understanding of their predicament.

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9 For a discussion of the relationship of human and animal in the novel, see Rossend Arqués, "Teriomorfismo e malinconia. Una storia notturna della Sicilia: Nottetempo, casa per casa di Consolo." *Quaderns d'Italià* 10 (2005): 79-94.

10 Vincenzo Consolo, *L'opera completa.* A cura e con un saggio introduttivo di Gianni Turchetta e uno scritto di Cesare Segre (Arnoldo Mondadori, 2015), 653. Via phonetic similarity, in the Arabic *catubbo* Consolo hears the Greek katabasis, the descent into a hellish state of irrationality. He explained: "Il lupo mannaro era l'incubo, lo spavento notturno, nella vecchia cultura contadina, carico di male e malefizio, contro il quale si opponevano crudeli gesti esorcistici. Lupunariu si chiamava in Sicilia l'uomo soggetto a quella notturna metamorfosi, e il male da cui era affetto, mali catubbu, nel cui suono arabo si sente un precipitare in basso dove solo si può trovare la via d'uscita. Melanconia chiamò questa condizione la medicina: un morbo di nervi e dello spirito, una depressione insopportabile ..." Vincenzo Consolo, "Paesaggio metafisico di una folla pietrificata." *Corriere della Sera*, 19 October 1977. Lycanthropy in Sicilian folklore had been described by the ethno-anthropology of Giuseppe Pitré, who described the phenomenon as "una sorta di pazzia, lupina o canina, detta dagli Arabi Catrab o Cutubut; onde i nostri presero occasione di chiamarla corrottamente mali catubbu e altresì dalle strida Lupuminaru." Giuseppe Pitré, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano* (Lauriel, 1889), 230.

> "From what offense, sacrilege does this atrocious verdict, this misfortune come from?" Petro wondered. Perhaps, he thought, from an ancient, immemorial fault. From his last name, perhaps that of a renegade, of a Marrano from Spain or Sicily, which meant a legacy of anxieties, melancholies, regrets in his veins. Or perhaps from the mixing of this with Judea or Samaria, with wandering seeds for winds of invasions earthquakes famines, of Arabia Byzantium Andalusia: Saliba the great-grandmother, Panassidi the grandmother, Granata his mother Salvatrice; and there was in the mix, in the ferment, Fazio Lombardo Valenza Provenzale.[11]

Struck by this epiphany, Petro notices in his surname a clue that hints at the Marano family's concealed Jewish heritage: they are descendants of Jews forcibly converted to Catholicism, pejoratively termed *marranos* by the Spanish Inquisition. This realization brings the sense of melancholy and inexplicable guilt into focus, revealing them as manifestations of the intergenerational trauma wrought by centuries of antisemitism, forced conversions, violence, and discrimination. Tracing his matrilineal genealogy in keeping with Jewish tradition, Petro locates his family's roots in historical regions such as Judea and Samaria, acknowledging diverse influences from the Arabian Peninsula, Byzantium, and Andalusia. Notably, his great-grandmother Saliba's surname points to a Christian family of Arab origin, while his father's lineage seems to suggest Lombard, Spanish, and Provençal origins. The recognition of his crypto-Jewish ancestry deepens his understanding of his own identity and his connections to Mediterranean migrations but leaves him, in the context of fascist Italy, even more isolated and marginalized.

Revelatory in this context is the protagonist's journey to reconstruct his origins as a Spanish or Sicilian *marrano*, which places a significant chapter of his family's diasporic wanderings in Sepharad, among the Jewish communities that flourished in the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic dominion. In the logic of the novel, then, the *male catubbo* transcends mere popular superstition; it signifies the remnant of a vernacular epistemology embedded within the dialect, mirroring a medical diagnosis

11 "'Da quale offesa, sacrilegio viene questa sentenza atroce, questa malasorte?" si chiedeva Petro. Forse, pensava, da una colpa antica, immemorabile. Da quel cognome suo forse di rinnegato, di marrano di Spagna o di Sicilia, che significava eredità di ànsime, malinconie, rimorsi dentro nelle vene. O dall'incrocio di questo di Giudea o Samaria, con semi erranti per venti d'invasioni terremoti carestie, d'Arabia Bisanzio Andalusia: Saliba la catanonna, la nonna Panissidi, Granata la madre Salvatrice; e c'era nell'impasto, nel fermento, ancora Fazio Lombardo Valenza Provenzale.'" Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 672.

deeply rooted in a tradition where Arabic is the language of scholarly discourse. Crucially, this Jewish sense of alienation is articulated through an Arabic expression, revealing Consolo's exploration of an Arabized Judaism that was a hallmark of both Al-Andalus and of Jewish Sicily under Arabo-Islamic rule.[12]

The novel subtly reveals the Marano family's Jewish history, with the presence of the Jewish quarter in Cefalù serving as a critical backdrop. In an early scene, the father, in a frenzied state, rushes along the road leading to Porta Giudecca, the arched gateway to the Jewish quarter.[13] As the novel accurately describes, this neighborhood was located in the northeastern section between the coast and the hills and was home to a small but active Jewish community. First documented in 1348, this community was notably involved in the tuna fishing industry. Pertinent to the historical and the extradiegetic background of the protagonist Petro is the fact that records indicate that a member of this Jewish community was once condemned for rebellion, and that their property was confiscated on at least two occasions.[14] Petro's family resides in a solitary house within this ghetto, a setting steeped in their extensive ancestral history, which suggests a deep, albeit unspoken, connection to their Jewish heritage. Throughout the novel, this setting not only anchors the narrative but also signals the family's continuing presence and isolation in the town, as they are haunted by the shadows of an almost unspeakable past.

The family's misfortunes tragically mirror the broader history of Jewish persecution. When fascist squad members violently break into their home and destroy traditional terracotta jars filled with olive oil, the act transcends mere vandalism – it becomes a desecration: "The jars were all shattered,

12 Under Islamic rule, Jewish medieval communities in the larger Mediterranean area used Arabic as their daily spoken language. An important source for the lives of Jewish merchants in Sicily (among other groups) is the Cairo Geniza archive, the largest extant collection of medieval manuscripts. Letters in Judeo-Arabic attest to the vital role that Jewish merchants played in connecting Sicily with Ifriqiya and Cairo between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean* (Cornell University Press, 2017), 206-212.

13 The father runs "lungo la strada di porta Giudecca" at the beginning of the novel. Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 630. Also: "Petro fumava nel letto della Piluchera con cui s'era intrezzato fortemente da poco tempo. Era la prima donna sua, dopo le altre che giungevano di fora alla casa solitaria alla Giudecca." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 731.

14 Schlomo Simonsohn, *Between Scylla and Charybdis: The Jews in Sicily* (Brill, 2011), 237-238.

the barrels overturned, the wineskins pierced, all in a slimy heap, the qafiz, jugs, bags scattered around, plunged in the lake of oil on the ground."[15] The spilled olive oil, sacred to the goddess Athena, symbolizes a profound offense against reason and sanctity. In an earlier article, first published in 1986, the author likened these traditional Sicilian terracotta jars to both the uterus and the tomb, evoking the burial customs of the Sicels, Sicily's ancient inhabitants, who interred their dead in fetal positions within large jars.[16] The episode of violence serves a dual narrative function. It reflects past atrocities against Jews and ominously anticipates future ones, adding a layer of historical resonance that underscores the novel's thematic depth. The brutal home invasion not only recalls the historical massacres of Jewish families in Sicily but also foreshadows the pogroms that would devastate Europe in the subsequent decades. The scene, central to the plot, therefore, finally clarifies the initially somewhat obscure title of the novel, which refers to the nightly rounds of fascist patrols, roaming in their destructive fury, from house to house.

The title of *Nottetempo, casa per casa* evokes a double historical context, the fascist *squadrismo* of recent memory and, more subtly, the suppressed narratives of the island's historical pogroms, with which Consolo revitalizes the nearly forgotten memories of Sicilian Judaism. Jewish communities were an integral part of Sicily's demographic composition since the first century C.E. During the Byzantine period, they faced sporadic social and political challenges but were generally able to practice their rites and maintain their synagogues in towns with a sufficiently sizable population. Their golden age came under Arabo-Islamic rule between the ninth and eleventh centuries when Sicily was a vital hub of commerce and scholarship, with Jews playing crucial roles in public administration and academia, trade and

15 "Le giare tutte eran frantumate, i fusti rovesciati, gli otri trafitti, in un ammasso viscido, e cafisi boccali imbusti sparsi, immersi nel lago d'olio del terreno." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 744. Notable here the term "cafiso," from the Arabic *qafiz*, a traditional unit of measurement for volume and weight. In Sicily, the term and unit of measure is still used for olive oil and corresponds to a quantity that varies locally and that ranges from about 11.5 to 17 liters.

16 As Giuseppe Traina has pointed out, this abuse operates on a number of levels. See his *Vincenzo Consolo* (Cadmo: 2001), 91. Traina connects this scene to Consolo's reading of Pirandello contained in the article "L'ulivo e la giara," collected in *Di qua dal faro*, where Consolo argues that the terracotta jar is "l'involucro della nascita, l'utero, ed insieme la tomba (i Siculi seppellivano i loro morti, in posizione fetale, dentro giaroni) ... E quell'olio che la giara avrebbe dovuto contenere viene sì dall'ulivo saraceno, ma anche dall'albero sacro ad Atena, dea della sapienza." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 1138.

medicine.[17] This period of relative harmony continued under the Normans, in what is often called the Arab-Norman period of Sicily, and under the Hohenstaufen dynasty, but began to decline in the fourteenth century as discrimination and persecution intensified.

A surge in antisemitic violence swept across Sicily during the years of the Black Death, the bubonic plague that devastated much of Europe and peaked in Sicily around 1350. During this crisis, Jews were wrongfully scapegoated and accused of spreading the plague. By the mid-fifteenth century, Jewish communities had established a significant presence throughout Sicily, with 57 communities spread across different cities.[18] The largest communities were in Palermo, Syracuse, and Agrigento, followed by Catania, Messina, Sciacca, and Trapani. Smaller centers included Agira, Paternò, and Savoca. At this point, the Jewish population in Sicily is conservatively estimated at over 25,000 individuals, constituting just over half of all Jews on the Italian peninsula and representing one of the highest Jewish densities in any European population at the time.[19] However, their social and political conditions steadily deteriorated, leading to increased vulnerability and extreme violence. Notable incidents include the massacres in the county of Modica in 1474, especially in the town of Modica itself and nearby Noto. The larger Modica shire was home to the island's largest Jewish community. On August 15th, following an incendiary sermon by a Dominican priest, an incited mob killed approximately 360 people and burned the synagogue to the ground.[20] Soon afterwards, the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 by Catholic monarchs Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon marked a drastic turning point in official attitudes towards religious minorities. The Alhambra Decree of 1492 mandated the expulsion of Jews from all Spanish territories, including Sicily.[21]

17 As *dhimmi*, people of the covenant, Jews enjoyed protection and freedom of religion under Islamic law in exchange of the jizya tax.

18 Isidoro La Lumia, *Gli Ebrei siciliani* (Sellerio, 1992), 18.

19 Simonsohn, *Between Scylla and Charybdis*, 285.

20 Dario Burgaretta, "Un'elegia in giudeo-arabo di Sicilia per il massacro di Noto e Modica nel 1474." *Sefer yuhasin* 4 (2016): 7-191.

21 Although Arabo-Islamic Sicily and Iberian Al-Andalus were governed by distinct Islamic caliphates and emirates, Consolo sees these regions as having followed parallel paths in their multicultural developments. A pivotal moment of contact between the two was the end of *convivencia*, marked by the expulsion of the Jews, which he poignantly laments as the Catholic kings expelling the Jews – "quando prendono il potere i Re cattolici e cacciano via gli ebrei." Vincenzo Consolo, *Autobiografia della lingua. Conversazione con Irene Romera Pintor* (Ogni uomo è tutti gli uomini Edizioni, 2016), 42.

Sicilian Jews were forced into exile or faced violent impositions such as forced baptisms during this period. For those who remained, additional restrictions included property confiscations, prohibitions of Judeo-Christian intermarriages and of the construction or repair of synagogues. Suspected clandestine practitioners of Judaism faced brutal persecutions, part of a broader campaign of ethnic cleansing that significantly reduced the Jewish presence in Sicily.

While wandering the streets of Palermo, overwhelmed by despair and concern for his sisters' mental health, Petro collapses from exhaustion in the public park of Piazza Marina, right in front of the Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri. He finds refuge in a hollow tree, whose long branches "snake monstrously into the ground," a metaphor suggestive of his family's interred memories.[22] The ominous location of Petro's nocturnal collapse is steeped in historical significance: the Palazzo served as the dreaded headquarters of the Inquisition from 1600 to 1782, while the piazza was used for the public executions. Operating in Sicily since 1487, the Inquisition made the cohabitation with other religions impossible, relegating converted Jews and Muslims – derogatively called *marranos* and *moriscos*, respectively – to marginalized categories in societal taxonomies. Petro's return to the sites of his family's intergenerational trauma leaves him physically debilitated. In his bodily response resounds an echo of Sicilian Jewish history. Within the prison walls of the Palazzo Steri, the inmates – Jews, Muslims, Lutherans, political dissidents, and those accused of heresy, witchcraft, and necromancy – faced harsh imprisonment, torture, and execution. With its arbitrary administration of ecclesiastical justice, the Inquisition represented for Consolo the most abhorrent abuse of unchecked power. Behind a façade of utter hypocrisy stood an institution of sanctimonious fanaticism that managed an efficient apparatus of psychological terrorism and brutal repression, supported by a diffused network of social informants in Sicily. When Viceroy Domenico Caracciolo ordered the closure of the Holy Office in 1782, all related documents and instruments of torture were destroyed, contributing in this way to an erasure of Sicily's Jewish history. In 1906, anthropologist Giuseppe Pitrè made a chilling discovery beneath the

22 "Girò le spalle e corse, corse per il giardino, oltre il cancello, per la strada, per tutte le strade, da Mezzomonreale a piazza Marina. Nella villa, a nascondersi dentro il grande albero, in faccia allo Steri, dentro la foresta, l'intrico di rami che cadevano dall'alto, s'interravano, mostruosamente serpeggiando andavano lontani. S'accasciò sfinito. Appoggiò la testa sui ginocchi, pianse." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 670.

plaster of the prison cells: extensive drawings that included hundreds of graffiti – maps, poems, prayers, and professions of innocence in Sicilian, Latin, English, and Judeo-Arabic. The most iconic illustration among these artefacts shows the Inquisition as a monster whose gaping mouth is poised to devour sixteen Jewish prisoners, transfigured as Old Testament characters, with their names inscribed above their bowed bodies. Petro's prostrate posture, his exhausted collapse outside of the building, mirrors the body language of these figures.

Consolo elucidated the Jewish heritage depicted in the novel on numerous occasions, revealing a deeply personal connection to the story of Petro.[23] Most significantly, in a 2004 interview the author disclosed the autobiographical elements of the story, as he identifies with the history of the *marranos*, believing himself to be a descendant. Through the lens of this personal stake, the novel extends beyond mere historical fiction, serving as a conduit for Consolo to explore and articulate his own complex heritage, which resonates with the experiences of forced conversion and hidden identity faced by Sicilian Jews.

> You should know that I, with my last name, believe I am a Marrano, that is, a converted Jew. Here in the north, all the Consolos are Jews. In Milan, Segre and Fortini used to ask me if I was Jewish. The fact is that my surname comes from "console," an elective office in the guild of arts and crafts. Three consuls were elected, and then the office became a name. Now, the guild of arts and crafts was controlled by Jews, and it happened that while those who were expelled maintained their culture and their religion, those who remained were forced to convert. The moral of the story, here, is that I believe I am a Marrano. I tried to represent this in my book *Nottetempo, casa per casa*, whose protagonist is named Marano, which comes from Marrano, a very common surname.[24]

23 "Ho voluto rappresentare la follia dolorosa e innocente che questa famiglia ha pagato forse per una ragione atavica, esistenziale, di razza, e per ragioni storiche ... Li ho chiamati Marano, da Marrano, rinnegato. Si portano dietro un coagulo di razze. Oltre a essere ebrei il narratore dice che dentro, attraverso la madre, filtra una memoria di nomi greco-bizantini, spagnoli, insomma il crogiuolo della civiltà mediterranea. Ed è come se assommassero nel loro destino il peso di tanti esili diversi." Vincenzo Consolo, "La follia, l'indignazione, la scrittura." Intervista a cura di Roberto Andò. *Nuove Effemeridi* 8.29 (1995): 9.

24 My translation. "Devi sapere che io, con il mio cognome, credo di essere un marrano, cioè un ebreo convertito. Qui al Nord tutti i Consolo sono ebrei. A Milano, Segre, Fortini, mi chiedevano se ero ebreo. Il fatto è che il mio cognome viene da "console," la carica elettiva della corporazione di arti e mestieri. Si eleggevano tre consoli e poi la carica diventava nome. Ora, la corporazione arti e mestieri l'avevano in mano gli ebrei, ed è successo che, mentre quelli cacciati hanno mantenuto la loro cultura, la loro religione, quelli rimasti sono stati costretti a convertirsi;

In Consolo's novels, a subtle yet powerful thread of nearly forgotten Jewish memory weaves through, capturing echoes of enduring antisemitism. His first novel, *La ferita dell'aprile*, published in 1963, already employs his signature method of textual and linguistic archaeology. The story centers around the repressive Catholic education of the young protagonist, Scavone, in the aftermath of the Second World War. The central character is placed in a religious school in a neighboring village, loosely based on Consolo's own Sant'Agata di Militello, where the youngster is taunted because he speaks the Gallo-Italic dialect of San Fratello, part of a linguistic minority introduced in the eleventh century by northern Italian colonists, who settled in central Sicily encouraged by the policies of the Norman king Roger I. In the small town on the Nebrodi mountains, antisemitism is depicted as so culturally and socially ingrained that it has become a part of the annual Easter rituals in San Fratello.[25] During the public festivities, Scavone's schoolmates are taken aback by their observation of a *sarabanda di giudei* ("a gaggle of Jews") dressed in ornate yellow and red fringed costumes, a sinister hood and a Roman helmet, in a grotesque reenactment of alleged Jewish participation in the crucifixion of Christ.[26] This carnivalesque performance, characteristic in the town of San Fratello, includes a cacophony of noisy and disruptive songs, rattling chains, and piercing trumpets, with which the *giudei* disturb the solemn and somber tone of the occasion. The antisemitic portrayal extends to the racialization of the Jewish characters in the procession; their costumes' color, referred to as *giallo giudeo*, ("Jewish yellow") perpetuates the stereotype of Jews having yellow skin.[27] In the complex social dynamics of marginalization, Scavone, a Sicilian who is also an outsider due to his barely comprehensible "Lombard" dialect, becomes associated with a group of Jewish actors who are encountered, silenced, and displaced on the outskirts of town. One disgusted schoolmate taunts him: "Go, look

morale della favola, credo di essere un marrano. Questa storia ho cercato di rappresentarla nel mio libro *Nottetempo, casa per casa* il cui protagonista si chiama Marano, che viene da Marrano, un cognome molto comune." Vincenzo Consolo, "Intervista di Maria Jatosti." *Il gabellino. Periodico della Fondazione Luciano Bianciardi* (May 2004): 6. Consolo emphasizes the negative connotation that the term *marrano* (from the Spanish for "swine") came to assume in its meaning of "vile marrano, traditore, uno che cambia religione" (Ibid).

25 What adds to this scenario is the suspicion that San Fratello itself may have been home to a Jewish community, although no documentary evidence has been found to prove such a settlement. Simonsohn, *Between Scylla and Charybdis*, 222.

26 "sarabanda di giudei." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 79.

27 Ibid., 65.

at *your* Jews, they have lost their inspiration. Is there air or flesh under those hoods?"[28] Surprisingly, Scavone finds his fellow townspeople less engaged in their usual antics and derisively calls them *zarabuini*, a dialect term without a direct Italian equivalent, used derogatorily to mean "Arab" and by extension, "uncivilized person."[29] Despite facing constant discrimination from his peers and Catholic teachers, Scavone rebels against this prejudice but has, to some extent, internalized his subaltern status. Thus, his character is shaped by both antisemitic and Islamophobic slurs, encapsulating the general rhetoric of demonization towards cultural, linguistic, and religious Others in rural Sicily. When the local priest questions the origins of Scavone's unfamiliar dialect, the young man explains that he is a *zanglé*, presumably a corruption of the French *les anglais*, referring to the Normans, a term used locally to describe the inhabitants of San Fratello. However, Don Sergio authoritatively corrects him, insisting that Scavone cannot be a *zarabuino* since he is definitely not Arab but certainly Norman, categories that for the priest are separate and incompatible with one another. In this categorical yet naïve denial of intermingling during the Arab-Norman period, Consolo highlights a historiographic revisionism motivated by questions of ethnic, cultural, and religious purity. In the end, for the rural community, Scavone's otherness is irredeemable. Neither the violence of the Inquisition nor the later impositions of Mussolini's fascism could alter the fundamentally distinct nature of a local community that arrived in Sicily during the Middle Ages.

The failure of religious redemption and cultural assimilation within a hegemonic power structure is driven by a key rhetorical strategy of othering, namely the demonization of the interconnected legacies of Jewish and Arabo-Islamic lore. The disheartened youth laments that "in this town, and all the towns around here, when people hear *zanglé* or *zarabuino*, they hear the devil. We are accused of having all the vices, and if Mussolini couldn't do it, no one could succeed to turn us into *cristiani*."[30] Consolo here cleverly plays on the dual meanings of the Sicilian term *cristiani*, which, in common parlance, rather than indicating a religious affiliation, primarily means "human beings." This pun underscores the ironic twist of seeking to transform the outsiders from an animalistic status into Christians, the only

28 "Vah," fa, "guarda i *tuoi* giudei, han perso l'estro: c'è aria o carne sotto quei cappucci?" (emphasis added). Ibid., 80.

29 Ibid.

30 "in questo paese, e per tutti i paesi in giro, quando sentivano zanglé, zarabuino, sentivano diavolo: tutti i mali vizii l'avevamo noi, se non ci ha potuto Mussolini, non ci poté più nessuno a farci diventare cristiani." Ibid., 25.

group endowed with the dignity and privileges of humanity. In Consolo's 1985 novel *Retablo*, the demonization of Judaism is once again a pervasive antisemitic trope. As the protagonists travel across Sicily, they encounter the city of Salemi, whose name, derived from the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning "peace," signals its Jewish heritage. However, local lore, steeped in antisemitism, cautions travelers to shun the city, maligning its Jewish residents as "enemies of the Cross, friends of Satan." The discrimination against Jews is culturally encoded in a rhyming tune, sung to the unsuspecting travelers.[31]

At the end of *Nottetempo, casa per casa*, the protagonist Petro embarks on a ship destined for Tunis, the Maghrebi city that shares deep historical and cultural ties with Sicily. This self-imposed exile represents liberation from the stifling environment of his hometown and an escape from the violence of fascism. In Tunis, a haven of safety, Petro finds the solitude necessary to commit himself to a new beginning as a writer. This choice of exile is profoundly influenced by the city's Mediterranean past: Tunis is built upon the ancient ruins of Carthage, the Phoenician colony that once rivaled Rome and whose sphere of influence extended across the sea to include Western Sicily, in particular Motya and Lilybaeum, centers of Phoenician Sicily that fascinated Consolo. Carthage, the city of Dido, provided refuge to Aeneas before he set out to fulfill his divine mission to found a new civilization. Reflecting this historical echo, the epigraph to the novel's final chapter is drawn from Vergil's *Aeneid*, featuring the prophetic words of Creusa's ghost to her husband, predicting his prolonged exile and sea journey. In the medieval period, Tunis evolved into a significant port city of Ifriqiya, the Maghrebi region under Islamic rule so closely linked with Sicily between the ninth and twelfth centuries. The enduring connections between the Tunisian coast and Sicily's western provinces are central to Consolo's conceptualization of an Arab-Italian Mediterranean, the space within which the destiny of Petro unfolds.

Consolo's aesthetics of grafting and Arabo-Islamic Sicily

The medieval Jewish communities in Sicily and Al-Andalus, integral to Petro's family history, flourished under the rule of Muslim caliphates and emirates. This Arabo-Islamic influence in Sicily spins a pervasive thread

31 The rhyme in Sicilian dialect reads: *Unni viditi muntagni di issu / Chissa è Salemi, passàtici arrasu: / Sunnu nimici di lu Crucifissu / Amici di lu Satanassu!* Ibid., 425.

that is intricately woven throughout Consolo's fictional and critical works. Space constraints do not allow for a more thorough analysis of Arabo-Islamic lore in this context. Giuseppe Traina's categorization of the Arab presence in Consolo's narratives offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the author's reception of Arabo-Islamic influences on Sicilian culture and literature and a solid foundation from which to explore broader questions about Sicily's complex societal fabric.[32] Yet, the enduring question remains: how did Consolo envision Sicily's syncretic identity and its role as a microcosm of the Mediterranean? Complex intercultural dynamics certainly play a crucial role in the coexistence of diverse languages, cultures, and the three Abrahamic religions throughout Sicily's history. These dynamics manifest as periods of open conflict or as mutual influences across both historical and contemporary contexts. While Consolo frequently employed the metaphor of archaeological work to describe the excavation of Sicily's multilayered past, he also deployed a horticultural metaphor to capture the island's cultural hybridity with the concept of *innesto*, or grafting. This tradition of grafting, which represents a deliberate and creative fusion of diverse elements, was an important agricultural practice that shaped Sicily's landscape. The techniques of transplantation and hybridization in horticulture serve as potent metaphors for Sicily's cultural hybridity. Consolo's works frequently explore grafting in various forms – literal, symbolic, and linguistic – with one of the most prominent examples being the olive tree.

For the author, the cultivation of the *olivo saraceno*, the Saracen olive tree represents a testament to the cohabitation of Greek and Arabo-Islamic traditions, simultaneously a symbol of Athena and Hellenic wisdom but also as a manifestation of Arab influences symbolically grafted onto this quintessentially Athenian motif. In *La ferita dell'aprile*, the Easter processional features the figure of a "dark-skinned and nervous Jesus," who looks like he was taken out of the "trunk of a Saracen olive."[33] This Greco-Arab synthesis is further explored in Consolo's analysis of Pirandello's "La giara," where the terracotta jar, emblematic of Sicilian craftsmanship, holds

32 Traina has systematically categorized the exploration of what he calls "the Arab presence" in Consolo's narratives into four distinct categories: memorial, historical-sociological, literary, and geopolitical. See «Da paesi di mala sorte e mala storia» *Esilio, erranza e potere nel Mediterraneo di Vincenzo Consolo (e di Sciascia)* (Mimesis, 2023), 77-102.

33 "Gesù dentro il tabuto a vetri, i capelli i denti veri, così scuro e nervoso, sembra tirato fuori dal tronco d'un olivo saraceno; somiglia ad un uomo di qua, di queste rive, nutrito di sarde e di cicorie ed asciugato al sole." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 80.

oil from the Saracen olive, associated with a supposedly different variety of olive tree introduced by the Arabo-Islamic domination in Sicily.[34]

Leonardo Sciascia had described the Saracen olive, which Pirandello wished to feature at the conclusion of his play *I giganti della montagna*, as a "symbol of a place, a symbol of Memory," emphasizing its role in Sicilian historical consciousness.[35] The Saracen olive is, according to Sciascia, a hardier variety introduced during the Islamic period of Sicily, planted to rejuvenate and repopulate the stretch of arid land between Sciascia's landlocked hometown and the Mediterranean coast. The Saracen olive tree is notable for its distinct appearance. Instead of growing vertically, its knotty and twisted trunk often extends sideways, staying closer to the ground. This growth pattern suggests that the variety has adapted to the unique soil and atmospheric conditions rather than indicating an entirely different subspecies. Paradoxically, though, despite Sciascia's insistence on the veracity of popular lore, Sicilian oil production under the Arabs declined significantly. Historical and botanical inaccuracies notwithstanding, the Saracen olive tree emerges as a powerful trope in Sicilian literature, from Pirandello and Sciascia to Consolo and Camilleri, representing the island as a crucible of cultural fusion where disparate traditions transplant and adapt. With its suggestion of cultural hybridity, the tree specifically symbolizes Sicily's enduring memory that persists despite attempts of erasure, bridging Greek legacies with Arab influences. This metaphor also becomes the vehicle of historiographic judgement, based on the perceived isomorphism of the Greek and Arabo-Islamic presences on the island, which, differently from other dominations, inhabited Sicily not as a colony to exploit, but as a home to cultivate.

In Vincenzo Consolo's 1994 novel *L'olivo e l'olivastro*, the Saracen olive tree symbolizes the complex interplay of barbarism and civilization, central to understanding Sicilian identity and history. Drawing parallels with Homer's *Odyssey*, the narrative follows a modern-day Odysseus navigating the fear of a failed nostos. In the Homeric text, Odysseus, stranded on Scheria after a shipwreck, hides between twin bushes of wild and cultivated olives, reflecting the novel's focus on the blurred lines between nature and culture. Consolo's protagonist, unlike the traditional Odysseus who returns to a familiar olive tree, encounters a Saracen olive, infusing the narrative with Arabo-Islamic influences and redefining the concept of home.

34 Ibid., 1138.

35 "L'olivo saraceno," argues Sciascia, is the "simbolo di un luogo ... simbolo della Memoria." Leonardo Sciascia, *Opere 1984-1989* (Bompiani, 2004), 489).

For Consolo, grafting is not just a horticultural technique but a metaphor that epitomizes Sicilian civilization. It symbolizes nurturing love and patient production, sustaining life and hope even amidst ongoing cycles of destruction. For Consolo, cultivation is the foundation of culture, fostering the growth of civil society and the rule of law.[36] This life-giving art flourished under Islamic rule, which revitalized Sicily with enhanced agricultural practices like irrigation and improved farming, along with the introduction of grafting techniques. Initially, Islamic rulers promoted grafting primarily for ornamental purposes to beautify their luxuriant gardens. Over time, however, the significance of grafting agricultural products grew. The Arabs introduced along with hydraulic engineering new varieties of fruits and vegetables. Their contributions also extended to launching a thriving silk industry and reviving wheat cultivation, fundamentally transforming Sicilian agriculture.

Building on the theme of grafting as a metaphor for cultural fusion and revitalization, the depiction of the wild olive in Consolo's novel serves as a stark contrast. Representing the absence of civilization, the wild olive remains untamed because it has never been grafted. This ungrafted state symbolizes a surrender to barbarism, eloquently captured in the narrator's reflections on the mythic punishments of Poseidon. The wrathful god turned the Phaeacian ship, which safely carried Odysseus to Ithaca, into stone, an image transfigured into the Provvidenza in Verga's *Malavoglia*: "Here, the wild olive was never grafted, never refined with the blooming of the scion; nor did the zaytuna olive ripen in the humid November, nor did the sterile and deciduous drupe yield oil for light or sustenance." [37] The narrator employs technical botanical terms to deepen this allegory. The "scion" refers to the new shoot that springs from the grafted stock, while "zaytuna," deriving from the Arabic word for olive, underscores the historical influence of Arab grafting techniques on Sicilian agriculture.

For Consolo, grafting techniques also apply to the linguistic realm. He claimed to write neither in standard Italian, as defined by official dictionaries, nor in traditional dialect, but rather in a rebellious language that employed a vocabulary that had been expelled or forgotten. He describes his effort to unearth forgotten idioms as "archaeological work." Once rediscovered, he likens the integration of these elements – the incorporation of dialects, local vernaculars, technical terminologies, and spe-

36 Francese, *Gli anni de «l'Unità»*, 182.

37 "Qui l'olivastro non fu innestato, mai s'ingentilì col fiorir della marza, né zaituna maturò nel novembre umoroso, né olio di lume, alimento, donò la sterile drupa, caduca." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 790.

cialized languages into his experimental literary style – to "the grafting of terms expelled and forgotten."[38] In this way, Consolo endeavors to document and confer literary dignity upon local vernaculars, preserving them before they are consigned to oblivion. In *L'olivo e l'olivastro*, the narrator characterizes the literary language of the poet Nino as a pure, classical language: "In that kitchen of couscous and fish, in that garden of children's voices, Nino writes poems in a high vernacular, in a pure, classical language akin to Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew."[39] Nino's Sicilian poetic idiom, a Dantean *volgare illustre*, transcends mere linguistic influence from Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew, resembling them in its fully developed range of registers and expressive possibilities. This "high vernacular" is not just a medium for expression; it embodies the versatility and vitality of Consolo's own linguistic repertoire, drawing from a rich archive of historical languages in Sicily. It is a language suited for the arts and sciences, for philosophical discourse, and for religious reflection, imbued with nuances and a richness of technical terms absent from standardized Italian. In many ways, Nino's language serves as a proxy for Consolo's own dynamic and multifaceted literary language.

In *Retablo*, grafting is portrayed as a creative principle that imbues life in the Mediterranean basin. A key scene involves a chance encounter with Don Carmelo, who extols the virtues of Mazzarrà, a small town founded by an Arab emir and renowned for its long-standing tradition of citrus flower nurseries. Mazzarrà, nestled in a warm, humid basin shielded from the Mediterranean Sea breezes, is where Arab botanists first introduced oranges to Sicily and honed the grafting techniques of citrus fruits and where many varieties of Sicilian oranges – *moro*, *biondo*, *sanguinello*,

38 "Fin dal mio primo libro ho cominciato a non scrivere in italiano ... Ho voluto creare una lingua che esprimesse una ribellione totale alla storia e ai suoi esiti. Ma non è dialetto. E' l'immissione nel codice linguistico nazionale di un materiale che non era registrato, è l'innesto di vocaboli che sono stati espulsi e dimenticati ... La terra da cui vengo è contrassegnata storicamente e quindi anche linguisticamente da stratificazioni linguistiche molto profonde: ci sono stati gli arabi e gli spagnoli, i bizantini e i piemontesi. Il mio è un lavoro archeologico." Vincenzo Consolo, "La lingua ritrovata: A cura di Marino Sinibaldi. *Leggere* 2 (1988): 12.

39 "In quella cucina del cuscùs e del pesce, in quel giardino di voci infantili Nino scrive poemi in vernacolo alto, in una pura, classica lingua simile all'arabo, al greco, all'ebraico." Consolo, *L'opera completa*, 862. In the same novel, the narrator echoes a theme Consolo often reiterated: Sicily's multicultural past has been erased not only by human actions but also by the ruthless forces of nature. The massive earthquake of 1693 devastated the city of Noto, destroying Sicel necropoleis, Byzantine hypogea, and Jewish catacombs. Ibid., 845.

and *tarocco* – are conceived. Don Carmelo describes Mazzarrà as the nurturing mother of all citrus plants, from lemons to oranges, citrons, lumia, bergamots, mandarins and chinotto, expressing the hope that the mystical grafts in the town's soil will continue to yield a plethora of unparalleled flavors.[40] In addition, for the narrator, the Arab tradition of orange grafting also encapsulates ancient Greek associations. Oranges, once used ornamentally in ancient Greece, symbolized love and fertility, reminiscent of the myth of the garden of the Hesperides. The narrator weaves an extended sexual metaphor to describe the work in the orange nurseries, highlighting a theme of general fecundity. The Greco-Arab genealogy of oranges represents a narrative of life and hope prevailing amidst despair and destruction, which dominate Consolo's more bitterly pessimistic views about Sicilian history. In his old age, Don Carmelo recalls exporting the art of grafting and pruning oranges to gardens across the Mediterranean. In his memory, these gardens – from Lentini and the Conca d'Oro in Sicily to the Greek Peloponnese, from Sevilla and Granada in Spain to Bizerte, Oran, Rabat, and Marrakech in the Maghreb – merge into a single cultural and geographical entity, a vast garden where life resists the encroachment of desertification.[41]

Conclusion

Consolo's literary historiography and ethics of remembrance diligently work to recover Sicily's Jewish and Arabo-Islamic past from the obscurity of discarded local and unofficial chronicles. His "Mediterranean of remnants" is informed not only by archaeological layers of historical remains but also by living cultural practices that continue to thrive, ingeniously grafted onto earlier cultural and religious infrastructures. This approach reveals a different Sicily; in many ways, Consolo rewrites and rescues, and in rescuing, he revitalizes. Unlike the cultural pessimism often echoed by his Sicilian contemporaries like Sciascia and Bufalino – a pessimism that he, to be sure, frequently shared – Consolo portrays Sicily as a dynamic crossroads of evolution and interaction, where ancient

40 "Spero che gli innesti arcani compiuti nel grembo tuo di nardo fruttino la fantasia di spere multicolori, di scrigni di sapori impareggiabili." Ibid., 426. See also "grembo, nutrice, madre di ogni pianta d'agrume, limone o arancio, cedro o lumia, bergamotto, mandarino o chinotto che si trovi in questa terra di Sicilia e oltre." Ibid., 427.

41 Ibid., 428.

roots foster new growths. He views the island's history of oppression alongside its narratives of solidarity and resistance as pivotal for reevaluating our perceptions of history and identity, urging a more inclusive approach to cultural memory.

His reevaluation of how regional histories and global diasporas are interwoven into broader cultural narratives are an invitation to reconsider the role of Mediterranean migrations in our understanding of current geopolitical landscapes. In the article "Porta Venezia," the personal becomes deeply political. Consolo described his own racial identity as white to be merely a historical accident: "I, of many races, belonging to none, the result of Byzantine weariness, of Jewish dispersal, of Arab withdrawal, of Ethiopian internment: I, born from a varied mixture, by chance white, carrying inside mutilations and nostalgia relished and I freed myself within this humanity as if on a beach warmed by the first rays of the morning sun."[42] Consolo's racial identity – his "accidental whiteness" – arises from historical contingencies that have established Sicily as a contact zone among Europe, Africa, and Asia. In this way, Consolo ultimately redefines the syntax of Sicilian cultural history. He rejects the hierarchical structure that subordinates local narratives to national chronicles, preferring a paratactic structure that places Mediterranean remnants alongside mainstream histories. His collaboration with philosopher Franco Cassano further underscores this view, advocating for the Mediterranean and the global South's philosophical autonomy. Read together, Consolo and Cassano promote a transcultural Mediterranean identity, asserting its significance as a vibrant and autonomous cultural sphere. Their texts invite us, a global audience, to reevaluate the interconnectedness of cultural identities within a rapidly changing world.

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42 Vincenzo Consolo, *Reading and Writing the Mediterranean: Essays by Vincenzo Consolo*. Edited by Norma Bouchard and Massimo Lollini (University of Toronto Press, 2006), 247.

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OLYMPIC BARCELONA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN THROUGH DISPLACEMENT AND SATIRE IN EDUARDO MENDOZA'S NOVELS

Jerikho Ezzekiel Amores*

Abstract:

This article aims to explore displacement and satire of ways of urban life in the Mediterranean before and after the Barcelona Olympic Games of 1992 in three of Eduardo Mendoza's novels: *Sin noticias de Gurb* (1991), *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (2001) and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (2015). These three novels testify to and fictionalize an alternative narrative (featuring the other side, the margins, the outskirts) of the euphoric development of contemporary Barcelona and how the city has undergone urbanistic, political, and structural transformation for the international event with its repercussions in the social fabric. Paying attention to their excentric narrators interacting with different classes of people, such developments are inscribed in Mendoza's novels through senses of displacement and effects of financialization, while interacting with the language of humour and satire as critical prism to the representation of the absurd happening to various characters mainly involved in a crime situation. Taking into account some of the ideas from influential and emerging studies on crime fiction and the Mediterranean especially by Barbara Pezzotti and Stewart King, this article's angle through satire in Mendoza's novels are considered creative displacements in language, geography, and narrators, rendering them a critical method of how culture and society in contemporary Barcelona (represented through characters, autochthonous and issued from migration) has distinguished itself from other places of the Iberian Peninsula but unites with the rest of the Mediterranean on its worldly aspirations and outlook at a certain cost to urban life. The article will develop displacement and satire through the construction of the city, the novel as space of interaction, and the role of money and financial imaginaries. Mendoza's novels that feature pre- and post-Olympic Barcelona fit the discussions within the framework of Mediterranean literature, as Mendoza's lucid satirical worldview in fiction commonly resonates with the complexities of contemporary life, such as the challenges that come with the transition and the perception of the local culture in a multicultural environment at a time when the state of politics and financialization that have become intertwined.

Keywords: Barcelona, Eduardo Mendoza, novel, displacement, satire, financial imaginaries

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I.S. MED • 4/2024 • ISBN: 9788869774881 • DOI: 10.7413/ISME0029

This article explores urban ways of life and the Mediterranean in three of Eduardo Mendoza's Barcelona novels and how senses of displacement interact with the satirical commentary of the city's financialization leading its consideration as a world-class city since the Olympic Games of 1992. As a drastic turning point for the urbanistic, political, and structural transformation of the city, the mid 1990s also established Barcelona as a site for discussing policies, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED). The city then serves since 2008 as the headquarters of the Union for the Mediterranean, an organization that promotes dialogue and cooperation in the region from the policy standpoint. Those events, collaborations, and organizations in the Mediterranean stand for, as Kristin Platt writes, "a kind of coexistence, a sense of peace between the people and the sea, sometimes even a mutual ignorance. It is the political powers that have caused enmity and destruction, while the sea promised advancement, emancipation, culture and freedom."[1] Intersecting current trends in the literary realm, the interest in the Mediterranean space has risen as well in search of a common practice through networks "in an era of migration, decolonization, and globalization, in which nation-states continue to perform important functions but no longer have the integrative power to create comprehensive identities."[2] In a way, Eduardo Mendoza's novels set in Barcelona participate in the interest of readers about the contemporary Mediterranean, thus exposing them to the dynamic realities and challenges of displacements that the world of fiction can open through the lens of satire as a critical discourse. I use displacement to interpret Mendoza's work as movement, mobility, and migration, but also re-emergence after disappearance and silence. Barcelona's situation counts among the important post-industrial port cities of Catalonia and Spain that connects to the rest of the Mediterranean through commerce, culture, and tourism. These highlight Spain's rapid economic growth and specialties as pivotal in the region, but they also come with challenges of its sustainability that is subject to criticism and thus open the discussion about urban identities in the Mediterranean through literary fiction.

Born in 1943 in Barcelona, Mendoza is a major literary figure in contemporary Spanish literature connected with displacements and as a witness of major world sociopolitical transformations from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. He has dedicated a career as a

1 Kristin Platt, "Constructing the Idea of 'Identity' in the Mediterranean: Patterns and Practices," in *The Mediterranean "Other" – The "Other" Mediterranean,* ed. Medardus Brehl, et al. (Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019), 43.

2 Angela Fabris, et al., Introduction to *Sea of Literatures* (De Gruyter, 2023), 3.

professional translator and a writer and has become a renowned novelist in the Spanish language having won several literary prizes, including the prestigious Premio Cervantes in 2016. He is also considered among the pioneers of the new Spanish novel by the end of the Francoist dictatorship and cultural censorship in late 1975. Mendoza happens to be immersed in this movement along with his peers Juan Marsé and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán that also have written about identity of characters living and representing different neighbourhoods of Barcelona, as well as the centre-periphery relationship with Madrid, thus asserting their autochthonous voices of Barcelona. Their novels claimed Catalan culture using the Spanish language as their vehicle of transmission to reach wider readership to express their cultural difference.[3] As Edgar Illas points out about the language choice: "Their success must obviously be attributed to the merits of their works, but the fact that they chose Spanish instead of Catalan was also key factor toward the dissemination and canonization of their fiction."[4] Language choice carries its implications of the exclusion of works not written in Catalan from the label of Catalan literature. That is why the frame of the Mediterranean gives a sensible space as "fictional representation and construction that evokes reality in different ways"[5] to consider the multimodality of Mendoza's fiction as an aspiration and an outlook to the sea but also as an interaction with a variety of literary forms through satirical content and the parody of the realist novel and crime fiction.

Displacement and satire: constructing Mendoza's Mediterranean city

Satire, for Simon Critchley, is a form of language and discursive practice that "is not an alien form of humour, not something remote from everyday social interaction, but is as much part of the communicative competence of adult participants as puns, jokes and funny stories."[6] This way, satire is a critical discourse that employs humour to point out, following the classical sense, the vices and the follies of society. In this sense, the narrating character's displacements (in many of the senses referred above), such as movement and mobility, allows the reader to experience the effect of satire. Thus, the relationship between displacement and satire is intertwined and dynamic, since they undergo a dynamic mutual activity

3 Stewart King, *Escribiendo la catalanidad* (Tamesis, 2005), 61.
4 Edgar Illas, *Thinking Barcelona* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62-63.
5 Fabris et al., 6.
6 Simon Critchley, *The Discourse of Satire* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2003), 4.

in written language. The satire that uses exaggerated, humorous, and absurd descriptions and dialogues is meant to criticize a group or an idea in a way that the reader of Mendoza's novels would imminently identify as a mechanism to displace meaning from the literal to the figurative sense that is subject to the interpretation of the reader. In other media, satire is a double-edged form of communication, especially in times of divisiveness and polarization. For instance, as Marijke Drees and Sonia de Leeuw point out, satire "crosses lines, contests boundaries and it operates at the limits of cultural values and principles."[7] Given that, satire is a necessary form of expression in healthy democratic societies with intelligent and well-read citizens. However, satire also presents a necessary danger of misinterpretation, that is, the misunderstanding of satirical content is related to the reader's encoding only of the literal sense, which satire inevitably tries to cross towards a more meaningful and playful manner. In Catalonia, for example, satire is a way of deflecting and projecting its sociopolitical problems in an entertaining way, like in the case of the television show *Polònia* that features humorous sketches of political figures that regularly revolve around the centre-periphery questions and relationship between the Spanish State and the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Returning to the novel as medium of satire, the intersection of irony, absurd, and humour in reading the language employed by Mendoza's narrators reflects similar ways Cervantes intended his monumental knight-errand character Don Quixote to act in its archetypal role of the fool with his clarity of thought and perception found during his visit in Barcelona. Both Cervantes and Mendoza construct satirical discourse in the language employed by the narrators of their respective novels. The discourse may intentionally appear and sound dense during the narration yet enhances displacement as a distraction or an escape from authorities that pursue the characters. Such fluctuations in thought, discourse, and movement reflect the waves of the sea, this time transposed to the humour novels *Sin noticias de Gurb* (1991)*, La aventura del tocador de señoras* (2001)*,* and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (2015)*.* Among Mendoza's contemporary works, these three novels serve as satirical commentaries of official discourses of Barcelona and align with the idiosyncrasy of their time as an important marker for the language and target of satire. They simultaneously reflect on the repercussions of Olympic Barcelona that altered the city through the years. As Joan Ramon Resina writes, "contemporary works […] fed off

7 Marijke Meijer Drees and Sonia de Leeuw, Introduction to *The Power of Satire* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2015), 1.

of the expectation generated by the announcement of the Olympic Games hosting, or that exploit the reputation of post-Olympic Barcelona which became a success on the back of the promotion of the city."[8]

Following Barbara Pezzotti's major recent contribution on the Mediterranean *noir,* I connect Mendoza's three novels with her formulations on the characterization of the detective and the city. Pezzotti describes Mediterranean detectives as "characters who need to negotiate their individuality in political contexts that impose cultural hegemony or an exclusive national identity."[9] Hence, Mendoza's narrators in the three novels are unnamed or tend to adopt several names to perform such negotiations. In such an insightful and playful performance in negotiations and obfuscation, this relates to the concept of framing and unframing that Giovanna Summerfield and Rosario Pollicino employ. For them, the concept acts as an anchor to the diverse angles that the Mediterranean "is identity and at the same time weakening of identity, a mediation between departure and arrival, contact and conflict."[10] Mendoza's novels, through the lens of Barcelona, engages with this through an interaction of the novelization of humour with urban phenomena where displacement and satire become a structure.

Mendoza's literary depiction of Barcelona in novels has mostly been a product of displacements since he wrote about the Mediterranean city while being away, besides the fact that he recreates a satire of the city, where crime and transgression are constant, thinking about its absurd extremes and possibilities, thus contributing to alternative mapping of narratives about Barcelona and the Mediterranean around the Olympic Games of 1992. As Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider identify, "different groups may refer in their memories to certain events, dates, or epochs that have significance for their identities, but arrive at quite different evaluations."[11] Mendoza's novels generally make use of humour as an aesthetic and as a way of crossing borders of traditional genres of fiction, such as the realist novel, and text but also the satire of society and classes it intended to make fun of through peculiar use of language and accents, as well as references to high art, popular culture, comics, cartoons, crime,

8 Joan Ramon Resina, "An Enchanted Barcelona Mirrored in Fiction," *Debats. Revista de cultura, poder i societat,* no. 1 (2019), 180.

9 Barbara Pezzotti, *The Mediterranean Noir* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 28.

10 Giovanna Summerfield, "Introduction: Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities," in *Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities*, eds. Giovanna Summerfield and Rosario Pollicino (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 3.

11 Fabris et al., 4.

food, fiction, history, music, television, and film that connect to the characters' way of being that result into a parody of forms.

Stewart King's *Murder in the Multinational State* excludes many well-known Spanish crime novel writers in the corpus, among them is Eduardo Mendoza, for "their crime fiction novels do not engage in a meaningful way with the issue of national or cultural identity."[12] In contrast, the focus on displacement and satire here highlights modes of giving meaning to a series of changes in human condition that literary fiction is able to capture. Contrary to King's more serious considerations and focus on national and cultural identity, Pezzotti finds that, through the figure of the detective, "Mediterranean crime fiction deconstructs monolithic ideas of national identities and puts liminality and hybridity […] at the centre of the narrative."[13] Mendoza's novels chosen for this study feature such liminal and hybrid characters that delve into a diverse setting around the discussions, developments, and repercussions of the Olympic Games of Barcelona of 1992. It is an event held under the socialist government (PSOE) led by Felipe González elected for office in 1982, as well as the respective governing powers in Catalonia (Jordi Pujol) and Barcelona (Pasqual Maragall). All political parties interacted and defended their own interests at the time mediated and deconstructed by history, identity, and money. Donald McNeill points out that "the city has followed a reasonably coherent and carefully rationalized urban policy, a situation which makes it unusual both within Spain and the wider European context."[14] The euphoric political turn opened the city to globalization that gives way to the present Mediterranean metropolis through its urban makeover. As Illas writes, it is "a process of restructuring of their spaces in order to produce an appealing image of the city."[15] This event symbolizes displacement and financial interests that intertwine the past, the euphoric present, and the hopeful future of Barcelona. John Hargreaves' study on the Olympic Games points out relevant sociopolitical aspects and tension of the region in the role of Barcelona as a metropolis in the Mediterranean, Catalonia as an autonomous community within Spain, and as a contributing part of the European Economic Community in 1986. Hargreaves writes:

> The host city is not only an important industrial metropolis within the Spanish state: it is also the capital of Catalonia, a historic nation with a strong sense

12 Stewart King, *Murder in the Multinational State* (Routledge, 2019), 15.
13 Pezzotti, 29.
14 Donald McNeill, "Barcelona Urban Identity: 1992-2002," in *The Barcelona Reader,* ed. Enric Bou and Jaume Subirana (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 324.
15 Illas, 43.

> of cultural identity. Given the past animosities between Madrid and Barcelona – not least during the civil war when Catalonia fought against Franco on the Republican side and suffered his 'politics of revenge' as a result – and given all that was at stake for Spain and for Catalonia economically, politically and culturally as a result of Barcelona's successful bid for the Games, there were bound to be tensions if not outright conflict between them, in which Catalan nationalism would play a major part.[16]

In such an intersection, it turns out then that the role of the 1992 Olympic Games serves "as a symbol of a re-emerging Catalan nation and a post-Francoist Spain."[17] In Mendoza's novels, this interaction is inscribed as an evocative tapestry of satirical commentaries through the passage of time.

Olympic Barcelona and the novel: dynamic spaces of interaction in the Mediterranean

Narrative voices and testimonies in fiction resonate with the puzzling and complex nature of urban and sociopolitical changes in Barcelona. Mendoza's novels refer to the real sites and spaces in the city to which they correspond or some of which already vanished, demolished, or repurposed these days, an idea that Pezzotti calls as the Mediterranean detective's infection to "a 'topographic' disease."[18] The novels offer a snapshot of the stratification of spaces through the characters' living conditions as processes of how Barcelona reached its status as a modern Mediterranean city and how displacements have affected the identities of local neighbourhoods as well as the city life with gentrification. Put through the first-person narrators that testify their displacements through the city as a sort of subversion of the role of the flaneur, Mendoza's novels play with narrative sequence, at times shifting chronological by employing a character's reminiscence and reflection on the past at a later occasion. Pezzotti refers to this as "nostalgic look" that "allows a scathing critique of a difficult present, configuring itself as an 'active nostalgia'."[19] This narrative technique provides a stratified and nuanced insight about the effects of events on the affected inhabitants years later. Since most of Mendoza's characters reflect voices and actions of marginalized types from mainstream society, these charac-

16 John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia?* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.
17 Illas, 2.
18 Pezzotti, 58.
19 Pezzotti, 58.

ters also hold a powerful satirical output whenever they voice a concern, which can be taken by readers as ironic, absurd, or humorous.

In the discussion of the Barcelona novel through Vázquez Montalbán, Resina signals important aspects of the tensions between the figure of the detective and the subject of crime from the Catalan upper classes: "for a quarter of a century, the bad guys in the Barcelona novels […] had been unfailingly identified as Catalans. That is, the evil was the *establishment* as a Catalan, and the detective, armed with moral superiority of his doctrinaire gaze, set accounts in the name of history, both Spanish and universal, as vengeful divinity that always knew the heritage of guilt."[20] For Resina, the crystallization of image of the Catalans as the bad guys is related to money and business, as they "live in the upper part [of the city], even though the visible effects of their criminality appear in the underworld or in the city's outskirts."[21] These elements appear as recurring elements in Mendoza's novels as well. Since Mendoza and Vázquez Montalbán interacted in the same circle of Barcelona writers, Mendoza seems to honour his late friend in fleshing out what Barcelona and Catalonia has become even more, two and a half decades in the twenty-first century Mediterranean. The question of Olympic Barcelona is the turning point of reflection on how the characters' lives have changed through displacement and satire.

In Mendoza's novels, satirical content connects with the diversity of ways of life and possibilities in the Mediterranean space, at times converting them into recognizable heterotopia. The anonymous narrator in *Sin noticias de Gurb* is an alien captain, practically a parody of the figure of Christopher Columbus,[22] that adopts a human figure and journals for the intergalactic spatial station all the misfortunes (according to our human understanding) it encounters in the city while seeking for its displaced (in the sense of disappearance and silence) subordinate travel partner named Gurb that has morphed into Marta Sánchez, a blonde Spanish singer. Both aliens learn about the planet Earth and especially how people in Barcelona live life before the Olympic Games. The city is filled with euphoria and excessive consumerism because of Spain's recent transition to democracy, as well as its entry in the European Economic Community in 1986, hence its rapid financialization, as the city of Barcelona was proposed to be the next site for the Olympics that same year. On the other, the anonymous narrator of *La aventura del tocador de señoras* and *El secreto de la mod-*

20 Resina. 178.
21 Resina, 177.
22 David Knutson, *Las novelas de Eduardo Mendoza: la parodia de los márgenes* (Editorial Pliegos, 1999), 108.

elo extraviada shares similarity with the alien voice but is better defined by its play between mental instability and clarity through actions and dialogues that result into a morphed Quixotic, street-smart detective, and preferred alienated scapegoat by authorities and powerful Catalan upper classes. Stacey Triplette writes that "Mendoza's social critiques are never truly aimed at marginalised groups. He plays on negative stereotypes in order to shame society, and by extension, the reader."[23] As a character, it serves as parody and transgression of the detective sifting through the spirit of absurd, criminal, and wasteful times in a postmodern and post-industrial metropolis. For Pezzotti, the setting exudes its importance because of "the insoluble nature of the Mediterranean city's problems of gridlock, pollution and political and financial corruption. It expresses a genuine concern for the urban environment whose scars have often been the result of such corruption."[24] Her reading of Petros Markaris and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán fits with Mendoza as well, since the common thread of the Olympic Games is considered as "an opportunity to create business and is symbolic of a globalisation that – with its frenzy for building new infrastructures – erases history and local culture" and that "the Olympic Games business feeds political opportunism and crime,"[25] themes with processes that are worth examining in fiction.

In the satire of Mendoza's Olympic Barcelona, the displacements of the narrating characters are propelled by curiosity and serve the purpose of interrogating the absurdity of the world that exerts violence toward them, thus making satire an effective discourse. Displacement translates to an active way of life, a life of wandering aimlessly to get to a certain point that gives way to make sense of the world. Readers get to know the identity in constant construction and change: this also makes obfuscation of these characters adaptable to their environments to shape in conversations but as well appear subtle in resolving their own issues and criminal enigmas thrown at them as challenges to surmount. This situation corresponds to what Pezzotti characterizes as their "transversal relationship with the city that allows them to experience both the spaces of the rich and the poor, and to interact with different social classes and ethnic communities."[26] In some cases, the Mediterranean climate act in contrary to their futile success. Pezzotti writes, "heat, traffic and pollution problems are an ongoing

23 Stacey Triplette, "The Quixotic Detective," in *Connecting Past and Present,* ed. Aaron M. Kahn (Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2015), 39.
24 Pezzotti, 64.
25 Pezzotti, 65.
26 Pezzotti, 75.

metaphor for the Mediterranean detective's inability to see past the web of lies and deceit preventing the resolution of their case."[27] For example, in Mendoza's novels, Barcelona's dry summers and brutal cool season, as well as sudden thunderstorms that appear as a natural force that becomes an antagonist, countering the alien's radioactivity that sparks fire on *chiringuitos* (Spanish) or *xiringuitos* (Catalan), these mobile businesses on the burgeoning streets of pre-Olympic Barcelona in *Sin noticias de Gurb*.

Money and the financial imaginaries of displacement and satire in Olympic Barcelona

Reinhold Martin defines financial imaginaries as "cultural constructions through which circulate other cultural constructions, like 'money,' 'credit,' and 'architecture'."[28] The concept is worthy of attention and is present throughout Mendoza's novels in the spaces of Barcelona that have gone through the exchange of money resulting from investments and speculative financing. This also includes usage of these spaces for activities related to mass tourism of the region, as Illas writes that Barcelona not only "adjusted to this new situation rather quickly and became specialized in the industries of tourism, real estate and culture" but also "took on a dominant role in the transformation of the city."[29] Moreover, this type of activity is a product of the shift in the political realm as a displacement. Hargreaves attributes those shifts in political systems and corresponding financial activities that permeate into public culture and life, mainly through the emergence of "multinational capitalist enterprises; […] vast population movements; growing environmental problems that transcend frontiers; and the apparent emergence of a hybrid, cosmopolitan 'global culture'."[30]

In the discussion of those elements, Mendoza's novels depict power and conflict relations through the lens of money. Through descriptions and dialogues by characters around these spaces, financial interest expresses an initial desire of compensation and recognition for their precarious yet noble work by getting through their unusual lives. For instance, they must do transgressive activities in the margins away from public attention, for which the process, rather than the result, takes a major role. On the con-

27 Pezzotti, 61.
28 Reinhold Martin, "Financial Imaginaries. Toward a Philosophy of a City," *Pavilion: Journal for Politics and Culture.*
29 Illas, 1-2.
30 Hargreaves, 39.

trary, characters obsessed with finances would deal with transactions of illicit and suspicious nature that expose their status through their investments, material possessions, money-laundering activities, and lavish upper-class interests. Here, Mendoza uses financial imaginaries to satirize human nature, particularly the egoistic desire of social groups by attributing them incongruent behaviour and language, thus provoking laughter or rejection from the readers of the novels as a response. In this way, Mendoza takes advantage of satirical humour to address such an absurd way of life in a dynamic region of the Mediterranean.

The intertwined roles of displacement and satire with financial imaginaries in these three novels, *Sin noticias de Gurb, La aventura del tocador de señoras,* and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* employ humorous and absurd references to money. Its effects on people's behaviour are juxtaposed to the impoverished state of the urban space and culture for the sake of making accelerated profit or, if not, suffering from deficit, irresponsible handling or allocation of finances, especially as part of the urban renewal that came before and after the Barcelona Olympic Games.

In *Sin noticias de Gurb,* references to financial imaginaries goes in tune with the frenetic and frenzy constructions happening in the city of Barcelona, as the alien narrator observes throughout its displacements. The alien wanders the city and arrives at the Liceu, the Catalan opera house, even believing ironically that it must be the first coliseum of Spain and one of the best in Europe. There the alien finds out that actors and musicians are displaced due to lack of funding ("crisis financiera endémica"[31]) that permeates the cultural scene, but the street engineers and construction workers are curiously there to compensate for such lack, most likely through drilling and hammer noise which Mendoza puts to ridicule.[32] This situation corresponds to what Pezzotti formulates as "part of the efforts to gentrify the urban environment which often feed – not always legally – into political and economic interests. Incessant roadworks and building sites are an everyday experience for the Mediterranean detective."[33] Driven by the same curiosity as a detective narrator, the alien repeatedly observes that many museums as supposed repository of human culture, such as Museo de Arte de Cataluña, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, and Museo Etnológico, are closed due to constructions ("[c]errado por obras"[34]), out of access and repurposed for the time being. While visiting the Museo de Arte

31 Eduardo Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb* (Seix Barral, 2019)*,* 67.
32 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 67.
33 Pezzotti, 64.
34 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 145-46.

Moderno, the director tells the alien narrator that all the artworks are on a shipping container that might already be floating on the sea ("a la deriva por el Mediterráneo"[35]) that explains the lack of cultural funding and immediate interest from the city agency, as the latter decided to demolish the warehouse where the containers originally were located. The director adds that the museum is currently functioning as a multipurpose space and is planned to become an amazing amusement centre. The only problem is that it would not be ready for 1992 because the construction could only start by 1998.[36] Through the lens of the alien, Mendoza pokes fun of the efficiency of extravagant urban projects and reconversion of spaces.

In other occasions, the alien finds out, as opposed to Don Quixote that does not believe in the use of money from his reading of chivalric novels, that one needs to have enough money to live in the city. The alien sneaks into a bank branch minutes before closing, requests to open an account and manipulates the financial system and bank transactions by adding several zeros ("catorce ceros al saldo de mi cuenta"[37]) to his account balances in peseta, resulting into a satire of money laundering, a common narrative element in Mendoza's novels. This financial manipulation insists on the image and concept of money as, in Fredric Jameson's words, "abstract … and empty and uninteresting."[38] In the use of humour and satire, however, money rather becomes a dynamic component of critique in Mendoza's world seen through the lens of an alien, especially that it learns the mechanisms of overconsumption in his repetitive journal[39] where it would enter a shop and buy compulsively in different shops and that in the end the alien decides that it does not give fulfillment ("Decido que el dinero no da la felicidad"[40]). Out of ignorance, the alien does not realize that it already is a common saying for humans and proceeds to discarding all purchases without a trace. At some point, the alien observes some speculation of replacing the gold standard by a Spanish chocolate brand of Basque origin, Elgorriaga, as a reserve basis for world currency. Chocolate also relates to the alien's singular addiction to churros, a pastry snack dipped into liquid chocolate; it becomes a comfort food for a stressful city life.

Characters issued from migration seeking a better life takes up importance as visibility of diverse communities in Mendoza's novel. In *Sin noti-*

35 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 145-46
36 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 145-46.
37 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 42-43.
38 Fredric Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital," 264.
39 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 43-44.
40 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 45.

cias de Gurb, the alien notices the presence of a Chinese restaurant in the neighbourhood and through the use of indirect speech gets to describe the owner Pilarín Kao and his family as well-integrated in society, humorous, industrious, running their own restaurant business for sustenance and saving funds to visit their homeland one day ("su ilusión es volver a China; que para eso trabaja y ahorra"[41]). As the alien captain later reports and reunites with his subordinate Gurb, practically absent in most of the novel, this reminded the captain of the countless possibilities of innovating in the city and thus staying on Earth, an idea that divides both aliens. Meanwhile the more eased classes of Catalans are represented through stereotypes related to business and finance world as being the most loyal and best bosses and executives in the world, as Mendoza characterizes them in other novels.

In *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* the narrator is confronted with starting life from scratch after being finally being released until the mid 1990s by Doctor Sugrañes from the asylum, a controlled biopolitical space.[42] He wanders the streets of Barcelona and notices significant changes of the newly renovated Raval neighbourhood filled with renewed energy of different demography and to make fun of changes, strangely, where the new walking paths serve exclusively for use with motorbikes, as part of the city's plan ("esta década (feliz) a un proceso de saneamiento y reordenación"[43]) that coincided with the Olympic Games. The narrator eventually manages to find his sister Cándida now married to Viriato. He later accepts to operate Viriato's beauty parlour, El Tocador de Señoras. An attractive female client named Ivet visits the parlour and makes a deal with the narrator for a criminal endeavour to steal sensitive files at the office of El Caco Español, an obviously suspicious organization. The narrator even remembers the moment the head of the organization Manuel Pardalot, who dies shortly after, explains him the difference of such an accounting mission between the rich and poor classes, where money and reputation are at stake ("En realidad, se trata de una operación contable, no del todo correcta, lo admito, pero tampoco ilegal"[44]), thus justifying the narrator's role as fit

41 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb,* 119.

42 This protagonist has previously been a key character from Mendoza's *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (1979) and *El laberinto de las aceitunas* (1982) conditionally liberated by authorities as a sleuth (character studied by Patricia Hart in *The Spanish Sleuth*). These novels represented the intersection of satire, crime and money situation in Spain in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, period that corresponds to the Spanish Transition to democracy after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco.

43 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (Seix Barral, 2001)*,* 31.

44 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 45-46.

to do the odd job. The narrator describes and identifies himself as *purria,* self-defining as not pertaining to any clearly marked social status, which is a clear marker of distinction from the rest of the characters in the novel:

> Yo no pertenezco a ningún estrato social. Que no soy rico, a la vista está, pero tampoco soy un indigente ni un proletario ni un estoico miembro de la quejumbrosa clase media. Por derecho de nacimiento pertenezco a lo que se suele denominar la purria. Somos un grupo numeroso, discreto, muy firme en nuestra falta de convicciones. Con nuestro trabajo callado y constante contribuimos al estancamiento de la sociedad, los grandes cambios históricos nos resbalan, no queremos figurar y no aspiramos al reconocimiento ni al respeto de nuestros superiores, ni siquiera al de nuestros iguales. No poseemos rasgos distintivos, somos expertos a afrontar riesgos y penas por resolver nuestras mezquinas necesidades y para seguir los dictados de nuestros instintos, resistimos bien las tentaciones del demonio, del mundo y de la lógica. En resumen, queremos que nos dejen en paz.[45]

As in *Sin noticias de Gurb,* self-reliance also characterizes the African characters in this novel as a strong community through the presence of Mesón Mandanga, a social bar and club, that piques the narrator's interest as well as his companion in mission Magnolio ("su clientela, compuesta exclusivamente de negros"[46]). On the contrary, local government and Catalan elites appear self-interested, power greedy, and unreliable.[47] Using Resina's characterization of the Catalan as the bad guys,[48] the distinction between the groups is clearly defined. In Mendoza's present novel, the corrupt mayor of Barcelona, representing the *establishment,* runs for re-election ("reírme como un cretino con las verduleras, inaugurar un derribo y hacer ver que me como una paella asquerosa"[49]), proudly calling himself as Alcibiades for favours and privileges.[50] He also tries to clean his image from past dealings with Pardalot and his associates ("unos negocios fructíferos que ahora preferiría que no salieran a la luz"[51]). Later, as a part of finding out the truth, the narrator arrives at a mansion in Castelldefels,

45 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 215-16.
46 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 243-44.
47 David Knutson, "Still Crazy After All These Years: Eduardo Mendoza's Detective," in *Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Detective Fiction*, ed. Renée W. Craig-Odders, et al. (McFarland Publishers, 2006), 55.
48 Resina, 178.
49 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 221.
50 Alcibiades was an ancient Athenian politician that was in his youth under the influence of Socrates.
51 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 223.

a beach town outside Barcelona, where he is confronted with Pardalot's business partners, such as Agustín Taberner and Horacio Miscosillas, as well as Pardalot's daughter, Ivet (as opposed to the other Ivet, the impostor that appears in the parlour). Money has a double-edged power, as Ivet Pardalot, behind everyone's back, takes over the El Caco Español's holdings to close it and decides to liquidate the assets of the shareholders ("el capital de los restantes socios asciende a pesetas cero coma cero"[52]) and donate the money ("donadas gratuitamente"[53]) to a foundation that finances NGOs whose beneficiary account is held in Singapore. To add to the absurdity of the acts, everyone involved in the scene deliberates on who among them killed Pardalot, insults the narrator for meddling with everyone, exposes each other's secrets, and finally ends up killing each other in gun shots. After the fact, the narrator and the candidate mayor miraculously survive the slaughter and a mutual recognition from both removes the barriers of their class difference.

In *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* the presence of two temporalities in the narration showcases the life of key characters through time. As Pezzotti suggests, "walking through the city's streets in search of clues often turns from a physical experience into an emotional journey where space and time collide in a mental 'time travelling'."[54] Previously an asylum inmate and a beauty parlour operator, the narrator now works for a Chinese restaurant owned by a giant franchise chain. In midst of a food delivery, he suddenly runs into a dog that bites him. The dog bite resembling drug injection, the chemical reaction suddenly makes him time-travel and remember the fine details of his subjectivity as an asylum inmate in a past case associated with the murder of an aspiring young model in search of fame and money. This serves as a frame story to pursue his detective role to find out what has been of the Linier family, Cándida, Señorita/Coronel Westinghouse, and Señorita Baxter/Señora Montpensier. As a crucial piece of the mystery, the latter eventually ends up as the client of the food delivery in the present and the assassinated young model who herself orchestrates the entire crime scene in the past. The novel assembles points of view of the case from the narrator, witnesses, contacts, and, ultimately, Señorita Baxter/Señora Montpensier as a stratification of details and sequences where fame and money get involved. At the same time, the novel also makes fun and reflects the effects of the urban destruction and reconstruction of

52 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 325.
53 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* 325.
54 Pezzotti, 68.

the old district, El Barrio Chino or El Raval, from the eighties to the late nineties famous for its red-light district, prostitution, petty crimes, and unsanitary living conditions, leading its endemic inhabitants to be displaced, either as continually homeless, squatters, or living in new neighbourhoods with humorous names ("en la urbanización de Santa Perpetua Bondadosa, más conocida popularmente como Yonkie Gardens"[55]) still in pitiful conditions far from the city centre, like Cándida.

As part of the city's architectural highlight, Antoni Gaudí's modernist oeuvres, such as the well-known Sagrada Familia, furniture, pavements, and several houses designed by him for influent Catalan figures has attracted visitors and cash flow that contribute to creation of employment in tourism and cultural sectors. Despite such success, Gaudí does not escape from Mendoza's humorous critique. Gaudí's emblematic abstract rooftop design at La Pedrera, a building on Passeig de Gràcia, in Señorita Baxter's satirical perspective, is the natural work of cows ("esto mismo, en más pequeño, lo hacen las vacas"[56]) in her hometown Figueres, a city in Catalonia that also attract tourism for Salvador Dalí's art.

The novel also includes a portion of young people on questions on recent Catalan independence, as they know about Coronel Westinghouse's far-right political show. The narrator in displacement hears them speculating, as a reaction to the show and its particularly provocative host ("si encuentras el estudio de televisión y tienes ocasión de hablar con el bujarrón"[57]), that in an independent Catalonia they would reset economical activities and the financial system from scratch, saying that they would be kicked out of the eurozone anyway and that there is no going back to the peseta and that there would not be rich, poor, and class struggle.[58] If Spaniards stop buying cava produced in Penedes, they propose absurdly replacing it by planting cannabis,[59] which may be a plausible yet ironic proposal of displacing a Mediterranean product. Contrary to the youth perspective, Coronel Westinghouse's disillusion with governments echoes the way Barcelona's modernization takes to be prosperous and filled with glamour also deceptively turns out to become instead the world capital of junk and idiocy ("la capital mundial del baratillo y de la idiocia"[60]).

55 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (Seix Barral, 2015), 205.
56 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 289.
57 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 254.
58 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 254.
59 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 254.
60 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 271-72.

Along with *Sin noticias de Gurb* and *La aventura del tocador de señoras,* the implication of money laundering and living double lives gets inscribes in the case of Señor Larramendi, an alias to hide his real Catalan identity as Magí Amigó i Santaló. Larramendi works as a chef at Casa Rioja by day and a secret financier and executive at night, as he confesses in a letter,[61] hired as a young graduate by discreet Catalan businessmen known as APALF,[62] like El Caco Español, known to concentrating their efforts in developing the construction, transportation and tourism sectors, as previously referenced by Hargreaves and Illas. Moreover, as opposition to Madrid's economic plans for the Catalan region, APALF does evasion of capital to Switzerland, traditionally known for its financial secrecy. After Señorita Baxter's simulated disappearance from the public eye, Larramendi too disappears until he suddenly reemerges in politics as if by miracle to promote the upcoming Olympic Games. His character has an unfortunate fate because of his accidental death away from the chaotic city while swimming in Tamariu, Palafrugell, on the picturesque Mediterranean coast, as it coincided with the inauguration event of the Olympic Games in the summer of 1992.[63] In Mendoza's novel, Larramendi's death and the inauguration of the Games symbolize Barcelona's transfiguration: "el 25 de julio, justamente el día en que Barcelona celebraba con redoble de tambores el venturoso inicio de su transfiguración, el señor Larramendi fue enterrado con cargo al erario público, sin ceremonia ni testigos, en un pequeño cementerio situado a escasa distancia de Son San Juan."[64] The Linier family appears mentioned at the beginning and the end of the novel as a complete circle of money, opulence, and the appliances business turning bad. According to the new owner of the house, Lola Campos, their implication with trafficking, money laundering, and old methods of working with money, like APALF, have not gone to their favour ("actuaron de manera tortuosa y chapucera y se acabó enterando todo el mundo"[65]). This indicates the classical Catalan cycle from the poor to riches to prisoner serves as a caution of high ambitions in social mobility ("favorece la movilidad social y previene la sobrecarga de la tradición"[66]). Even the dog holds grudges against the family: the cleaning lady remembers the day the family must vacate their house for the last time when the dog suddenly appears by

61 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 185.
62 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 128-29.
63 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 300.
64 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 300-301.
65 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 311.
66 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 311.

surprise and bites Señora Linier as an expression of revenge.[67] The presence of the story about the dog bite in this novel refers to a sudden cynical point at the beginning and the end where the desire of revenge and closure sheds light to uncovering mysterious and obscure details about each of the characters involved in the cases. By using the same narrator throughout the series, this novel by Mendoza resolves the problem of the rich and corrupt Catalan that needs to pay retribution for thriving in crime throughout their life. Interestingly, Pezzotti writes, "The individual villain may be arrested, but the great villains, capitalism and a corrupt political elite, continue to plunder the city undisturbed and erase its history and memories."[68] This shows that not all matters that appear resolved may remain unquestioned, even when money take precedence to displace problems where better resolutions are needed, such as the urban and social repercussions of the Barcelona Olympic Games to the entire city, involved in a satirical worldview in Mendoza's novels.

All the novels explored never provide a satisfactory resolution, since it is a world of satire and an absurd random event by the return of some displaced character would sabotage the narrators' plans, leaving them in an eternal helplessness, a common sort of Mediterranean detectives following Pezzotti's interpretation. Here in Mendoza's world, the journey and troubles as processes mattered more than the result in the end of the narrative. As Jasper Guldall, Stewart King, and Alistair Rolls point out, "the crime novel ends with an act of self-interpretation, presented explicitly in the form of the detective protagonist's solution, which replaces mystery with what appears to be complete clarity in regard to actions and motivations."[69] Although Mendoza does not strictly adhere to crime fiction but rather makes a parody of it, his novels nevertheless contribute to the understanding of urban settings but also the dynamic interaction of social groups in this part of the Mediterranean, affecting the last decades of the twentieth century into the new millennium. His representation of Barcelona, full of possibilities and contradictions, from different time periods surrounding the Olympic Games puts into dialogue different forces, such as displacement, financial imaginaries, and satire, to entertain and warn readers about the potential implications and consequences of the ambitions of a world-class city to a diverse stratum of populations. In Mendoza's world, not everyone benefits from the changes, and these types of people affected are

67 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada,* 314.
68 Pezzotti, 68.
69 Jasper Guldall et al., Introduction to *Criminal Moves: Modes of Mobility in Crime Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2019), 5.

the ones that possess the clearness of thought rendered absurd to voice their critique. This includes emerging concerns of overtourism in major Spanish cities from the concerned locals because of the industries in which Spain has specialized for decades.

The Mediterranean imaginary in Mendoza's novels becomes a space that would continue to spark discussion about the unusual and unique challenges of the Barcelona Olympic Games of 1992 to society. This can be characterized as a turning point of the dialogue between past, present, future, considering continuity, disruption, and sustainability. In the Mediterranean coast of the Iberian Peninsula, the diversity of local and foreign perspectives morphs into a mosaic of renewed Catalan and Spanish cultures through contact with the cultures of the world issued from displacements and financial interests, while its writers especially enjoy editorial and book publishing industry concentrated in Barcelona as a cultural location. Resina contemplates that Barcelona "does not yet know itself, given that it still has not crossed the invisible line that separates the world from its representation."[70] Through Eduardo Mendoza's novelization of humour, Barcelona intertwines the challenges and contradictions of the unique lifestyles and identities in the Spanish Mediterranean (as opposed to Madrid, the interior capital away from the sea) and their effects as a reflection of displacement and satire of life worth examining its absurdities over time through the novel as an outlet of creativity, reflection, and renewal.

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70 Resina, 183.

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MEDITERRANEAN THOUGHT: QUEERNESS AND MIGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN LITERATURE

Alice Parrinello*

Abstract

Today, mainstream narratives about migration centre around an imagery of attack, portraying Europe as a Fortress under siege and migration as an invasion. Significantly, in Italy, these narratives intersect with homonationalism. While the term was coined for the U.S. context (Puar 2007), in Italy homonationalism places openness and acceptance at the heart of Europe (in countries like France, Germany, and the Netherlands), and simultaneously promotes the need to protect the country and its LGBTQIA+ citizens from migrants (Colpani and Habed 2014). At the same time, Italian homonationalism intersects with antimeridionalist discourses, which deem Southern Italians as a hindering factor in the socio-cultural advancement of the country towards Northern Europe (De Vivo and Dufour 2012; Colpani and Habed 2014; Acquistapace et al. 2016). Consequently, this rhetoric endorses a push and a migratory movement towards Northern European countries, and a simultaneous rejection of both its Southern regions and the Mediterranean context (Colpani 2015). However, the Italian literary scene features a new trend: novels depicting LGBTQIA+ characters refusing these pre-set mainstream narratives. The article analyses *Spatriati* (2021) by Mario Desiati, *Polveri sottili* (2023) by Gianluca Nativo, *Baba* (2023) by Mohamed Maalel, and *Tangerinn* (2024) by Emanuela Anechoum, as case studies, in order to investigate how they chart different cartographies of migration, how they challenge a homonationalist rhetoric, and how they even trouble a linguistic standard. While Nativo tackles movements between Campania and the United Kingdom, Desiati instead focuses on a journey from Apulia to Berlin. However, both *Spatriati* and *Polveri sottili* simultaneously reproduce and challenge the homonationalist view of the Mediterranean, ultimately rejecting Northern Europe and promoting a view from the South. Significantly, the novels by Maalel and Anechoum reverse the perspective provided by Desiati and Nativo, opening Italy's Southern shores towards other Mediterranean regions and towards Tunisia and Morocco in particular. Ultimately, the article argues that the novels foster an in-betweenness mirrored by the space of the Mediterranean sea, which paves the way for a Southern thought (Cassano 2012), or rather, for a Mediterranean thought of complexity, fluidity, and liminality.

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I.S. MED • 4/2024 • ISBN: 9788869774881• DOI: 10.7413/ISME0030

Keywords: Mario Desiati; Gianluca Nativo; Emanuela Anechoum; Mohamed Maalel; Queer Meridionalism

Introduction

In September 2023, the EuroMed 9 Summit took place in Malta. EuroMed 9, also known as EU Med or MED9, is an alliance consisting of the leaders of EU countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea (Cyprus, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain). As reported by Italian newspapers, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's speech at the Summit on migration in the Mediterranean distinguished itself due to its harshness, as she strongly remarked that "you cannot show solidarity with other people's borders,"[1] reinforcing the function of Italy's confines as barriers, and her role as the defender of the country's perimeter. In this way, her speech rejected the notion of border porosity for Mediterranean countries, and instead fostered a specific narrative for her role and for that of the other EuroMed 9 leaders: they each have one land and one border to defend. By highlighting the need to shield the country's borders, Meloni's speech exemplifies the single narrative of invasion that has taken hold of right-wing and far-right discourses and policies in Italy in the last 20 years.[2] However, this narrative completely erases the fact that both historically and socio-culturally, Italy is a country marked by migration and by continuously crossed confines, both inbound and outbound. Furthermore, the location of Meloni's speech, the EuroMed 9 Summit in Malta, highlights the contradictions of this narrative, as the Mediterranean itself has fostered and continues to foster a border porosity for these nations.

The influence that the Mediterranean has on Italy and its identity has been at the core of many transnational analyses (Chambers 2008; Gualtieri 2018), which focus on the "liminal and pluralized conditions predicated

1 "Meloni sui migranti critica Berlino: 'Non si può fare solidarietà con i confini degli altri'", RaiNews, 30 September 2023, https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2023/09/vertice-med9-migranti-meloni-a-malta-senza-risposte-strutturali-tutti-quanti-verranno-travolti--516242f5-15f6-43e2-ab34-4f1f84bbe5ea.html. "Però non si può fare la solidarietà con i confini degli altri." All translations from Italian to English are made by the author of this paper.

2 "Migranti, Salvini dal palco di Pontida: 'Contro l'invasione useremo qualunque mezzo permesso dalla democrazia'", IlFattoQuotidiano, 17 September 2023, https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2023/09/17/migranti-salvini-dal-palco-di-pontida-contro-linvasione-useremo-qualunque-mezzo-permesso-dalla-democrazia/7294999/.

on cultural exchange as well as physical movement between or beyond the sovereignties of individual nation-states."[3] Moreover, in recent years the transnational element has played a central role in the country's literary production.[4] The number of contemporary novels that feature narratives of migrations, second-generation Italians, and transnational journeys across the Mediterranean have meaningfully increased, including *Io, venditore di elefanti* (1990) by Pap Khouma, *Immigrato* (1990) by Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato, *Madre piccola* (2007) by Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010) by Igiaba Scego, among others. These novels counter the mainstream narrative promoted by far right and right-wing politicians, providing a more nuanced perspective. Moreover, in recent times, this literary proliferation has resulted in the publication of novels that intersect with other themes, such as LGBTQIA+ narratives.

If migration novels about heterosexual and cisgender characters develop alongside the mainstream narrative of invasion, novels about LGBTQIA+ migration engage with a specific version of the same discourse: policies and guidelines are developed following the notion that the State needs to scrupulously and securely manage and regulate it to protect the country from 'lying' asylum seekers i.e. those who falsely testify to being discriminated against in their own countries on the basis of their non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations.[5] Additionally, both inbound and outbound LGBTQIA+ movements are associated to another flattening narrative, that of homonationalism. The term derives from Lisa Duggan's 'homonormativity,' which indicates the respectability practices adopted by the LGBTQIA+ community to be accepted by the wider cisheteronormative society, resulting in the exclusion of those who are not regarded as acceptable, usually those who are not white, upper-class, virile, male, and cisgender.[6] Homonationalism operates following a similar discriminating racialising mechanism and hierarchical division.[7] The term, coined by Jasbir Puar for the U.S. context,

3 Jennifer Burns, "Mapping Transnational Subjecthood: Space, Affects and Relationality in Recent Transnational Italian Fictions," *California Italian Studies*, no. 8 (2) (2018): 2.

4 Emma Bond, "Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?," *Italian Studies*, 69 (3) (2014), 415-424. https://doi.org/10.1179/0075163414Z.00000000080.

5 Massimo Prearo, "Stato, politica e morale dell'asilo LGBTI," in *Migranti LGBT: Pratiche, politiche e contesti di accoglienza*, ed. by Noemi Martorano and Massimo Prearo (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2020): 46-47.

6 Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, Boston MA, 2003): 45.

7 Lorenzo Bernini, *Le teorie queer: Un'introduzione* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2017): 112.

delineates the inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community into the country's national identity and the simultaneous exclusion of Black migrants and migrants of colour: the U.S. government aims at protecting its LGBTQIA+ citizens from the discrimination that could arise by allowing migrants of colour into the country.[8] Consequently, unjust exclusionary politics are justified by the country's self-appointed progressiveness.

In Italy, homonationalism was adopted by both political parties and LGBTQIA+ activist groups and adapted to the country's socio-cultural anxieties.[9] Alongside focusing on incoming migratory fluxes, Italian homonationalism reflects the desire to conform to a perceived Northern European standard, to a push towards the North of Europe (namely, towards France, Germany, and the Netherlands).[10] While this view accurately accounts for Italy's lack of civil rights in comparison to other European countries,[11] it also reproduces a damaging narrative: progressiveness is not only achieved by limiting arrivals from the Global South, which assumingly embody outdated views and behaviours, but also by rejecting Italy's South. In this, Italian homonationalism is moulded by antimeridionalism, a widespread rhetoric consisting of various negative stereotypes associated to the South of Italy, due to its presupposed moral and economic backwardness.[12] This view fully developed around the time of the Italian Unification in the mid-nineteenth century and continues to influence Italian culture, politics, and economy. In a homonationalist perspective, Southern Italians limit the progression of Italy because of their mind-set:[13] if Central-North-

8 Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

9 Barbara De Vivo and Suzanne Dufour. "Omonazionalismo: Civiltà prodotto tipico Italiano?," in *Femministe a parole: Grovigli da districare*, ed. by Sabrina Marchetti, Jamila M.H. Mascat, Vincenza Perilli (Roma: Ediesse, 2012): 204.

10 Gianmaria Colpani and Adriano José Habed. "In Europe it's Different: Homonationalism and Peripheral Desires for Europe," in *LGBT Activism and the Making of Europe: A Rainbow Europe?*, ed. by Philip M. Ayoub and David Paternotte (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014): 76.

11 While in Italy, Civil Unions were approved in 2016, marriage equality and the possibility to adopt the children of one's own partner, the so-called 'stepchild adoption,' are not legal.

12 Alessia Acquistapace et al., "Tempo di essere incivili: Una riflessione terrona sull'omonazionalismo in Italia al tempo dell'*austerity*," in *Il genere tra neoliberalismo e neofondamentalismo*, ed. by Federico Zappino (Verona: Ombrecorte, 2016): 61.

13 Gianmaria Colpani, "Omonazionalismo nel Belpaese?" in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani (Milan: Le Monnier, 2016): 197.

ern Europe homosexuals are seen as 'modern,'[14] Southern Italians are characterised by the so-called 'Mediterranean homosexuality.'[15] The term was coined to Giovanni Dall'Orto to refer to a supposed backward form of sexuality revolving around the active/passive dichotomy, connecting Southern Italy to "a paradigm of homosexual behavior found in the Latin countries of Europe and the Americas, in the Islamic countries of the Mediterranean, as well as in the Balkans."[16] To summarise, Italian homonationalism predicates a single, linear, movement from the South to the North and a double rejection of subjectivities from the Global South and from Southern Italy to supposedly protect the advancement of the wider LGBTQIA+ community and its inclusion in the State.

However, the single, linear movement from the South to the North can be challenged by a perspective that looks at Italy's Southern periphery (Polizzi 2022). In the words by Franco Cassano, "as long as we continue to believe that the inevitable running toward the West is the only possible motion […], and that the Mediterranean is a sea of the past, we will be focusing our eyes in the wrong direction."[17] Additionally, according to Colpani and Habed, Italian homonationalism can be troubled by an ambiguous and oscillating move that starts from the South and is "located 'in and out' of the European map of liberal sexual politics, [which] can unmask not only the disciplinary mechanisms of European gay modernity but also its biopolitical operations."[18] It is a "paradoxical position" that rejects fixity.[19]

Because of the relevance that narration has both in the invasion and homonationalist rhetoric, and their influence in shaping Italy's migration policies and the country's imaginary, tackling the cultural representation of movements of the LGBTQIA+ community seems paramount. Literature can chart new journeys and map new narratives, questioning a single perspective and accounting for the complexity of reality. Hence, this article traces different journeys from Southern Italy to Northern Europe and from the Global South to Southern Italy in four contemporary Italian transnational novels that feature LGBTQIA+ characters. The four case studies

14 Colpani and Habed, "In Europe it's Different," 82.
15 Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Tutta Un'altra Storia: L'omosessualità Dall'antichità Al Secondo Dopoguerra* (Milano: Il Saggiatore): 2015.
16 Giovanni Dall'Orto, "Mediterranean Homosexuality." *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, ed. by Wayne R. Dynes (New York: Garland, 1990): 796.
17 Franco Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*, trans. by Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2012): 38.
18 Colpani and Habed, "In Europe it's Different," 88-89.
19 Colpani and Habed, "In Europe it's Different," 89.

are the novels *Spatriati* (2021) by Mario Desiati, *Polveri sottili* (2023) by Gianluca Nativo, *Baba* (2023) by Mohamed Maalel, and *Tangerinn* (2024) by Emanuela Anechoum, which constitute a queer[20] migratory trend in Italian fiction.[21] *Spatriati* focuses on Francesco Veleno, a young man from Martina Franca, Apulia, who moves to Berlin for a few years following his best friend, Claudia. Similarly, *Polveri sottili* follows the relationship of Eugenio and Michelangelo, who are from Naples, and move together to the suburbs of London. *Baba* expands the narrative borders beyond Europe, as its protagonist Ahmed grows up in Andria, Apulia, but traces his family's footsteps back to Tunis. Similarly, *Tangerinn* follows the journey of its protagonist, Mina, from Reggio Calabria to London and then to Tangier.

First, the article will analyse all four novels, investigating the representation of migration in conjunction with queerness. The transnational element of each novel will be highlighted, as well as their relation to Italian homonationalism. In the second and third section, the article will contend that the selected novels promote an ambiguous and paradoxical status, which is reflected in the characters' movements and in their language. Finally, the article will explore the "in and out" position and its relationship to the Mediterranean, arguing for an epistemological alternative that challenges a linear narrative of migration.

Queer Displacing

Italian homonationalism encourages a move towards Northern European countries that is both mental and physical, a full integration to a non-Mediterranean standard. In a way, this view replicates on a larger scale the so-called 'metronormative' rhetoric, which refers to the need for the LGBTQIA+ community to move from the countryside to the city in order to experience freedom and openness (Halberstam 2005; Herring 2010; Weston 1995). While various contemporary Italian novels contest this in-

20 The term 'queer' is understood in this article in an expansive way, i.e. it refers to non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations, and also to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically". Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 8.

21 Mario Desiati, *Spatriati* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021).
Gianluca Nativo, *Polveri sottili* (Milano: Mondadori, 2023).
Mohamed Maalel, *Baba* (Milano: Accento, 2023).
Emanuela Anechoum, *Tangerinn* (Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2024).

ternal trajectory (Parrinello 2021), this article shifts the perspective onto the broader field, looking at transnational movements.

For instance, in *Spatriati*, Francesco feels trapped by his small-town environment; while his best friend Claudia frequently travels abroad and moves to Berlin, he is initially stuck in Martina Franca's environment, which is described as ruinous. Moreover, while his first kiss with a man takes place in Apulia, it is infused with homophobia and fear. He is only able to fully and openly explore his sexuality once he moves to Berlin to follow Claudia. Once there, Francesco is brought by her to the KitKat Club with her friend and lover Andria, a Georgian man. The Club is a synecdotal space representing Berlin's openness, a place where "a humanity in disguise" can let loose.[22] The place paves the way for Francesco's relationship with Andria and changes him to the point that he thinks: "I was in disbelief, shaken, I wanted to cry and scream, inside I felt the dams burst and the walls crumble. For a lifetime I had silently taken in the same questions: 'Do you have a girlfriend?', 'Do you have a job?', 'Do you have a home?', 'Do you have a future?', 'Do you have a plan?', 'Who are you?', 'How do you fit in?"[23] And again, "What would that world I had left behind say?"[24] Berlin dissolves the rigid social norms that trapped him in Martina Franca.

However, it is evident that these norms are almost self-imposed by Francesco. While they might have been sustained by some inhabitants of Martina Franca, Desiati accounts more than once for the fact that attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community in Apulia are changing, that an 'Apulian Spring' is taking place in the main narrative's marginalia and that it is Francesco who is choosing to disengage from it. His attitude is derivative of those pre-set narrative of Northern openness, which move him to dissociate from Martina Franca and adhere to the idea of strictness to the South and sexual freedom to the North. Significantly, *Spatriati* begins untangling this dichotomy, as Francesco becomes disillusioned with Berlin's environment due the limitations that EU migrant policies enact:

> We were Europeans free to move within an enclosure, but outside that enclosure was the world to which Andria belonged. Our free Europe, without

22 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 198. "Un'umanità camuffata."

23 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 199. "Ero incredulo, scosso, volevo piangere e gridare, dentro di me sentivo saltare le dighe e crollare i muri. Per una vita avevo accolto in silenzio le stesse domande: 'Hai una fidanzata?', 'Hai un lavoro?', 'Hai una casa?', 'Hai un futuro?', 'Hai un piano?', 'Chi sei?', 'Come ti metti?'."

24 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 200. "Cosa avrebbe detto quel mondo che mi ero lasciato alle spalle?."

> walls, was not the same as Andria's. Georgia is not an EU state and Andria was forced to leave Germany due to the expiry of his visa.[25]

Francesco criticises the apparent freedom and queer paradise afforded by Berlin, as well as the norms and regulations that limit those who can benefit from it.

Due to his disappointment, Francesco moves back to Martina Franca at the end of the novel. His homecoming is not unscathed, as he has been permanently changed by his time in Berlin, "back but forever displaced, *spatriato*."[26] Therefore, he does reject the North, and he also exists in the in-betweenness. Furthermore, Francesco's return embodies a different perspective that looks towards South. Not only he changes his physical location, but he is also explicitly compared to other Mediterranean migrants: when his father sees newsreel footage of the Vlora ship arriving in Bari, he comments: "Look at them, you are like them."[27] Despite the pettiness of his remark, Francesco's father spotlights the similarities between his son and migrants on a ship that Desiati indexes as instrumental in allowing Apulians and Albanians to rekindle their relationship,[28] following an event that he sees as the most significant event for the South in the last thirty years.[29] Thus, *Spatriati* paves the way for a critical approach towards the homonationalist view of the North and the limits it imposes to non-privileged individuals, but also towards the invasion narrative, presenting various local and foreign subjectivities as moving throughout the space and creating alliances in the space of Southern Italy.

Polveri sottili by Nativo similarly tackles questions of movement and queerness, as Eugenio moves to the UK to work at a hospital, and he is soon followed by his boyfriend, Michelangelo. While Michelangelo opposes the move itself, Eugenio expresses multiple times his feeling of entrapment in Naples. Meaningfully, he does not want to move simply for professional

25 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 212. "Eravamo europei liberi di muoverci dentro un recinto, ma fuori da quel recinto c'era il mondo cui apparteneva Andria. La nostra Europa libera, priva di muri, non era la stessa di Andria. La Georgia non è uno stato comunitario ed Andria era costretto a lasciare la Germania per scadenza del suo soggiorno."

26 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 254. "Tornato ma per sempre."

27 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 185. "Guardali, sei come loro." The Vlora cargo ship is a ship that brought several thousand Albanians to the Bari harbour in 1991, opening to region to the Mediterranean.

28 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 274.

29 Valentina Cremonesi and Stefano Cristante. *La Parte Cattiva dell'Italia : Sud, Media e Immaginario Collettivo* (Milano: Mimesis, 2015): 83.

reasons, but also to live freely as a gay man. Before Michelangelo, he never dated Neapolitan men, and instead preferred dating tourists, with whom he could practice his English skills, as "in Naples he was convinced that the gay scene was not suitable for him."[30] Eugenio's move initially point towards a homonationalist motive, and he also breakups with Michelangelo due to the latter's inability to adapt to the new context.

However, the end of the novel changes the character's trajectory, since he decides to rekindle his relationship with Michelangelo and to not sell the family's home in Naples despite his mother's wishes. When she suggests selling the house, Eugenio immediately thinks of Michelangelo and the time they spent there, "he recalled the isolated flat between the buildings, the promise he had laid on Michelangelo within those walls. A refuge."[31] While he does not resign from his job in London, he resolves not to severe his Italian roots. In this way, Eugenio challenges the need for LGBTQIA+ people to move to Northern Europe and instead promotes an in-betweenness between the UK and Italy, embodied by his relationship with Michelangelo.

While both *Spatriati* and *Polveri sottili* draw a similar path towards the North and a return, or a partial return, to the South of Italy, *Baba* by Maalel expands and complicates the map drawn by Desiati and Nativo. The main character, Ahmed, nicknamed Ahmouda, grows up in Andria, a small town in Apulia. While his mother is from the region, his father, Taoufik, is of Tunisian origin. As a child, Ahmed acts in way that does not conform to normative views of gender roles; he uses his mother's make up, plays with dolls with his cousin, and even cross-dresses for fun with her. While his non-normative gender performance is criticised by a particularly extremist imam, who moves him to destroy his cousin's dolls, Taoufik challenges this, saying:

> "But he read the Koran, he relied on the words of God."
> "They were made-up words, not God's words. Ahmouda, you made a mistake breaking all your cousin's dolls."
> "God says..."
> "God says to love family, to love even those who are not Muslim. We must follow God, not a man who says he knows God."[32]

30 Nativo, *Polveri sottili*, 99. "A Napoli si era convinto che la scena gay non fosse adatta a lui."

31 Nativo, *Polveri sottili*, 197. "Ripensò all'appartamento isolato tra i palazzi, alla promessa che aveva riposto con Michelangelo tra quelle mura. Un rifugio."

32 Maalel, *Baba*, 119. ""Ma lui leggeva il Corano, si affidava alle parole di Dio". "Erano parole inventate, no parole di Dio. Ahmouda, tu ha sbagliato a rompere

Through his words, *Baba* sets the stage for Ahmed's queerness and for a more nuanced representation of migrants. Indeed, while Ahmed initially has to overcome his internalised homophobia, he does not need to move abroad to do so. He meets his first boyfriend in Apulia and, after he decides to spend some time as an Erasmus student in Tunis, he has a flirt with a local man, Talal. Although the latter is forced to hide his identity, their kiss troubles a monolithic narrative of queer migration. Similarly, when Ahmed moves to Palermo for work to become a journalist, he is not limited by the environment, rather, to him the place embodies openness. He argues that the city is: "a small city that fascinated me because of the multitude of cultures that meet there, respecting one another."[33] Moreover, it is in Palermo that Ahmed meets the person who becomes his long-term partner. Whilst moving between different spaces and identities, "Tunisian, Italian, unsteady,"[34] Ahmed remains firmly rooted in the South.

Tangerinn follows a similar transnational journey, as the story unfolds tracing two narratives, Mina's, from a Calabrian city (assumingly, Reggio Calabria) to London, and her father's, Omar, from Tangier to Reggio Calabria. In London, Mina lives with Liz, an English upper-class woman who treats her as a charity case. While it is not motivated by a need for sexual freedom, Mina's stay in London is infused with queer tones as Liz and her occasionally have sex together. However, the move to London becomes a form of oppression for Mina, as she says: "I had a subaltern relationship with the city like an unrequited love."[35]

Similarly, her father's movement from Tangier to Reggio Calabria, while not explicitly queer, follows a well-known paradigm of queerness in the South of the Mediterranean. In Tangier, he is shocked by the city's debauchery and *Tangerinn* fictionalises the colonial mentality of many white Northern Europeans who moved towards South looking for sex with other men. As written by Joseph Allen Boone, "whether feared or desired, the mere possibility of sexual contact with or between men in the Middle East has covertly underwritten much of the appeal and practice of the phenom-

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tutte bambole di tua cugina".
"Dio dice…"
"Dio dice di amari familia, di amari anchi chi non è muslim. Dobbiamo seguire Dio, no un uomo chi dice di conoscere Dio."

33 Maalel, *Baba*, 219. "Una cittadina che mi affascinava per la moltitudine di culture che vi si incontrano, rispettandosi a vicenda."

34 Maalel, *Baba*, 182. "Tunisino, italiano, incerto."

35 Anechoum, *Tangerinn*, 44. "Con la città intrattenevo un rapporto subalterno come un amore non corrisposto."

enon we now call Orientalism."[36] However, this orientalist perspective is challenged by Rashid, a young high-class homosexual from Tangier. Before being forced into an arranged marriage, he decides to embark on a Grand Tour and to take Omar with him, not asking for any sexual favours in return. Hence, Rashid reverses traditional Grand Tour journeys, as well as the trajectories made by white Europeans towards Morocco. Additionally, Rashid's generosity allows Omar to enter Europe and then to move to Reggio Calabria and open a café.

Furthermore, the homonationalist trajectory from the South to the North is not only troubled by Mina's dissatisfaction with London and with Rashid's generosity, but also by the fact that her sister Aisha, who never moved away from Reggio Calabria, comes out as a lesbian. She firmly stands in her environment, refusing to move because of her sexuality and keeps wearing her hijab proudly. The complexity that she embodies questions the simplicity of both the invasion and homonationalist narratives.

A linear trajectory is also complicated by Omar's sudden death, which moves Mina to return to Reggio Calabria. In the course of the novel, Mina decides to spend more time in Reggio Calabria to help her sister Aisha run the family's café, Tangerinn. At the beginning, Mina desperately tries to reproduce the paradigm she experienced in her move towards the North, and she even tries to convince Mahdi, a young man who works at the Tangerinn, to move to Germany because she believes there is no future in Calabria. However, she gradually changes and her time in Reggio Calabria renders Mina unfit for London. After she decides to move back again to the UK, she realises it is an unfortunate choice: "[London] was as beautiful as I remembered it [...] But my outlines and I had become sharp in the wrong corners."[37] She then goes to Tangier to visit Rashid, but similarly feels displaced. At the end, she moves back to Reggio Calabria, after realising that her sense of belonging is tied to those who love her. She does not find belonging in specific cities but in people, rebuffing the association between a good life and a specific location.

If Italian homonationalism predicates that both moving to Northern Europe is the only way to live openly and freely for the members of the LGBTQIA+ community and if it simultaneously appoints the Italian state as their protector from the supposedly backward mentality found in the Global South and in Southern Italy, *Polveri sottili*, *Spatriati*, *Baba*, and

36 Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015): xxi.

37 Anechoum, *Tangerinn*, 227. "[Londra] era bella come la ricordavo […] Ma io e i miei contorni eravamo diventati appuntiti negli angoli sbagliati."

Tangerinn constitute a trend that changes the picture. They localise queerness in Southern Italy and display transnational alliances. At the same time, the novels do not promote an uncritical vision of the South, as they still trace the homophobia and misogyny present in Southern Italy, Morocco, and Tunisia. For instance, homophobic and discriminatory views are exemplified by the character of Talal in *Baba*, by Martina Franca's reception of Francesco's return in *Spatriati*, by the environment of Reggio Calabria in *Tangerinn*, or even by Eugenio's own internalised antimeridionalism in *Polveri sottili*. Desiati, Nativo, Anechoum, and Maalel refuse an exoticisation of the South, in favour of a nuanced standpoint. Finally, the novels uphold a productive in-betweenness, as the characters embrace liminality and oscillate between different places. They find a home in a "temporary, interstitial residence,"[38] adopting the 'in and out' position theorised by Colpani and Habed.

Language Decentring

Language skills are a crucial factor in displaying one's own cultural capital, in showing one's own adaptability and ability to move in the world. If homonationalist subjects are those that adhere to the norms delineated by Duggan, language proficiency is a category that could be added from a transnational perspective. For instance, in *Spatriati*, the inability to fluently speak German, or even a common language, becomes a connecting factor for Francesco and Andria. Mutually excluded from the soundscape surrounding them, they forge their own vocabulary, as it emerges in Andria's goodbye letter. In it, he writes that "he had always liked the linguistic chaos, the world in which I had invented a language, our language, the one only he and I understood."[39] In this way, Francesco and Andria step away from a complete assimilation to the Northern European territory and instead form their own dissenting path, one rooted in their migration background and in a non-structured and chaotic new language.

Polveri sottili does not feature a similar linguistic mélange, but it still presents language as a defining category. On the one hand, the novel opens with the Eugenio's appreciation of the discreetness of the English language

38 Dylan Winchock and Jessica Elbert Decker, eds. *Borderlands and Liminal Subjects: Transgressing the Limits in Philosophy and Literature* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 77-79.

39 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 213. "Gli era sempre piaciuto il caos linguistico, il mondo in cui avevo inventato una lingua, la nostra lingua, quella che capivamo solo io e lui."

compared to Italian, "the way the English language restored discrete meanings to words was one of the many reasons why he left. As he wrote in giant letters: MICHELANGELO CICCARELLI, with a broad, solemn manoeuvre, he added: *my significant other*."[40] His ability to value the (gender) neutrality of English and his proficiency are the direct result of the expensive private classes he took in Naples. While he has minor issues right after his move to London, he is soon able to fully integrate into English society and become one of its productive members. On the other hand, Michelangelo, who comes from a lower class compared to Eugenio, is frequently defined by his poor English. Once in London, where he seemingly moved to attend English classes and not just to live with Eugenio, he fails in communicating with the outside world, being unwilling to socialise with Eugenio's colleagues or being too shy to call a letting agency. He troubles Eugenio's homonationalist and homonormative move. Eugenio's decision to keep the flat in Naples ultimately troubles not only his move but also the importance of English and Michelangelo's need to learn it.

Baba, instead of a conflict in relation to a hegemonic language, presents a linguistic Babel, which is embodied by the protagonist's father's broken Italian and his mother's Apulian dialect. The very beginning of the novel displays a dialogue between them:

> "Paola, Paola! Where did you put my cigarettes?"
> "On the bedside table, I haven't touched them."
> "No they're not here"
> "Don't bother me, I'm cleaning. Check under the bed, move."[41]

In *Baba*, Maalel troubles linguistic purity and instead intermixes his parents' idioms, meaningfully including a Southern dialect.[42] However, this linguistic blending is initially destabilising for Ahmed, who does not feel at home in either language, and resorts to creating an imaginary language.

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40 Nativo, *Polveri sottili*, 11. "Il modo in cui l'inglese restituiva alle parole significati discreti era uno dei tanti motivi che l'avevano spinto a partire. Mentre scriveva a lettere giganti: MICHELANGELO CICCARELLI, con una manovra ampia, solenne, aggiunse: *my significant other*."

41 Maalel, *Baba*, 12. ""Paola, Paola! Dove ha mes sigar?"
"Sul comodino, non le ho toccate."
"No c'è."
"Non rompere, sto pulendo. Vedi sotto al letto, muvt."

42 Palomba, Giusi. "Zerocalcare, l'accollo Linguistico e Il Conflitto Tra Centro E Periferia." Valigia Blu, 26 November 2021, www.valigiablu.it/zerocalcare-strappare-lungo-bordi-romanesco/.

Baba features a list of words imagined by Ahmed and their translations, such as "Miskrbada = something melted, like ice cream left in the sun."[43] Significantly, Ahmed does not turn to languages like Italian or English to feel safe, but he creates one from scratch that unconsciously derives from his parents' languages, Tunisian and Apulian.

In *Tangerinn*, Mina also moved to London to improve her English, and her same-sex attraction is narrated in the context of the English language classes taught by Liz. However, Liz's English is subject to her performative activism:

> That afternoon Liz sat down without taking off her hat [...] and announced that a word had to be taken out of our vocabulary. I say our because she was the one who helped me learn English, and as my tutor she took the liberty of adding and sometimes even removing words that she felt should take priority over others in my education.[44]

Language learning becomes for Liz another way to show off her politics (and not necessarily her activism), unaware of her hegemonic attitude towards Mina, of her silencing the latter's cognitive abilities. When Mina returns to Reggio Calabria, she distances herself from the linguistic hegemony embodied by Liz and is instead exposed to a linguistic mélange. Both her father and her sister created a welcoming environment for migrants arriving on the Southern Italian shores. He spoke French, Arabic, and German, while she is fluent in English. In this way, Omar and Aisha created "a community around that small hub of travelling souls, of misunderstood cultures, of mother and stepmother languages."[45] The café becomes the location of transnational encounters and translingual affective connections not based on hierarchical power relations.

The characters in *Spatriati*, *Baba*, *Tangerinn* and to a lesser extent, *Polveri sottili*, trouble the hegemony of English, or of a single language, and instead build different linguistic contexts for themselves. In particular, the characters of *Spatriati*, *Baba*, *Tangerinn* embrace translingual practices, which are "always in movement, connected to the landscape, and at the

43 Maalel, *Baba*, 32. "Miskrbada = qualcosa di sciolto, come il gelato lasciato al sole."

44 Anechoum, *Tangerinn*, 16. "Quel pomeriggio Liz si era seduta senza togliersi il cappello […] e aveva annunciato che dal nostro vocabolario andava tolta una parola. Dico nostro perché fu lei ad aiutarmi a imparare l'inglese, e in quanto mia tutor si prendeva la libertà di aggiungere e a volte anche togliere le parole che per lei dovevano avere, nella mia educazione, priorità sulle altre."

45 Anechoum, *Tangerinn*, 65. "Una comunità attorno a quel piccolo centro nevralgico di anime di passaggio, di culture incomprese, di lingue madri e matrigne."

same time [are] bound by the inequalities inscribed in the relationships between languages and between human destinies speaking through languages."[46] According to Tiziana De Rogatis, translanguaging creates homing, which is "familiarity through unprecedented paths. The drawing of these maps […] can lead to new visions and creative metamorphoses."[47] Hence, language meaningfully contributes to the alternative movements traced by the protagonists of these novels, since "being in between languages constitutes a vantage point in deconstructing identity."[48]

Mediterranean Homing

In the final pages of *Tangerinn*, Mina's father dies, and his funeral is performed at sea. As his loved ones are gathered on a small boat, his ashes are dispersed in the Mediterranean:

> We had rented a boat, in which seven of us got on: me, Aisha, Berta, our grandmother, Magda, the imam and the fisherman who had rented it to us. Aisha wore a black djellaba with a beautiful lace hijab: I was surprised how the Arab and the Southern Italian overlapped in her.[49]

In the space of the sea, the plural and palimpsestic identity of Aisha, a queer, Muslim, Italo-Moroccan woman is enacted, as she challenges "metaphysically fixed, steady identities" and embraces an in-between identity and lives across borders.[50] Furthermore, because of the long history of overlapping and intermixing movements and cultures that crossed and continuously cross the Mediterranean, the sea is a central part of Aisha's in-betweenness, acting as both catalyst and metaphor. In *Tangerinn*, the Mediterranean and its

46 Tiziana De Rogatis, *Homing/Ritrovarsi. Traumi e Translinguismi Delle Migrazioni in Morante, Hoffman, Kristof, Scego e Lahiri* (Siena: Edizioni Università per Stranieri di Siena, 2023): 6.

47 De Rogatis, *Homing/Ritrovarsi*, 3.

48 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 12.

49 Anechoum, *Tangerinn*, 195. "Avevamo affittato una barca, dove salimmo in sette: io, Aisha, Berta, la nonna, Magda, l'imam e il pescatore che ce l'aveva affittata. Aisha portava una djellaba nera con uno splendido hijab di pizzo: mi sorprese come coincidessero in lei l'araba e l'italiana del sud."

50 Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects,*5.

"liquid materiality" foreground the permeability of borders,[51] being a crucial "Third Space," neither fully Italian nor fully foreign.[52]

As the Mediterranean in the novel allows the creation of meaning through liminality, through intersections, and in a place geographically and culturally located in the South, *Tangerinn* can be connected to Cassano's Southern epistemology (2012). Challenging the binary constituted by an advanced and modern North and a backward and underdeveloped South, both in a local and global context, Cassano argues for a Southern thought, which can reclaim a Southern epistemological independence.[53] In particular, *Tangerinn* echoes Cassano's thought, as he highlights the importance of the Mediterranean, looking up to its contradictory characteristics and diving in its complexity, as it "is an irreducible pluriverse that does not allow itself to be reduced to a single verse."[54] This epistemological shift is embedded in the material formulation of the sea, in its complexity, as, "this sea, which is at once external and internal, inhabited and waded into, this sea-as-border interrupts the rule of identity, forces one to accommodate division."[55] A Mediterranean thought thus thrives in the oxymoron.[56] In this way, the Mediterranean exemplifies an epistemological humility, that is "an acknowledgement of the impossibility of full and definitive knowledge and a corollary surrender of the teleological assumption that we might possibly, at some future point, achieve full mastery over ourselves and the world around us."[57] In the Italian context, the Mediterranean is central in formulating an alternative against fundamentalisms and monolithic discourses, like the invasion narrative, the notion of the fixity of borders, and the push towards the North promoted by far right and right-wing parties in Italy, but also by some members of LGBTQIA+ activists groups.[58]

Cassano's thinking is not only echoed in *Tangerinn*, but he is also briefly featured in *Spatriati*, both as a character in the narrative and in the novel's footnotes, where Desiati highlights the importance of his writings for his work. In particular, he spotlights the relevance of Cassano's *Southern*

51 Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean crossings: the politics of an interrupted modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 5.
52 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1994): 53.
53 Cassano, *Southern Thought*, xxxviii.
54 Cassano, *Southern Thought*, xlvi.
55 Cassano, *Southern Thought*, 18.
56 Cassano, *Southern Thought*, 33.
57 Samantha Frost, "The Implications of the New Materialisms for Feminist Epistemology," in *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, ed. H. E. Grasswick (Berlin: Springer, 2011): 79.
58 Cassano, *Southern Thought*, xlvii.

Thought for a wider generation of scholars and readers, since it "has marked the identity of many Apulian scholars or simple readers on the value of time, slowness and the countryside."[59] Cassano's thinking is implicitly reflected also in the novels by Nativo and Maalel because of their decision to prominently emplace a Southern perspective, one that opens Italy's Southern borders to the Global South and does not privilege Northern Europe.

Hence, a Southern, Mediterranean, thought can trouble European and Italian homonationalism because of its insistence on complexity, ambiguity, and oxymoronic strata, and because of its openness to the South. If Colpani and Habed argue for a more general "shift of the critical focus from the centers to the peripheries of the continent [which] works rather *diffractively* and delivers us a different image of Europe" (86), the Mediterranean, as a fluid and ever-changing landscape, provides a further challenge to the monolithical image of Europe. As evidenced in the novels by Desiati, Nativo, Anechoum, and Maalel, the Mediterranean is the productive metaphor for stratified discourses, languages, and identities, which simultaneously contrast and corroborate each other, rather than a single, linear perspective.

Conclusion

Despite being often presented as a linear narrative of invasion, migration in Italy presents various ambiguities, contradictions, and antithetical elements. Simultaneously, this narrative reiterates several discursive tropes and obscures other core elements. For instance, migration discourses for the most part only refer to incoming fluxes into the country, while Italy's own outbound migration and the one taking place inside Italy's borders are rarely mentioned.[60] Similarly, incoming migrants are simultaneously "being perceived from the outset both as a potential solution to growing shortages in the labor market and a threat to the security, prosperity, and cultural traditions of Italians themselves."[61] Furthermore, newspaper articles, politicians' speeches, and other media usually discuss arrivals via boat, although many studies argue that the majority of people

59 Desiati, *Spatriati*, 271. "Ha segnato l'identità di molti studiosi o semplici lettori pugliesi sul valore del tempo, della lentezza, della provincia."

60 John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007): 10.

61 Áine O' Healy, *Migrant Anxieties: Italian Cinema in a Transnational Frame* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019): 1.

enter the country legally via other routes.[62] These multiple elements challenge a single discourse around migration and demand for more nuance in its discussion.

Stemming from this complex background, the article analysed a queer trend within contemporary Italian literature, which on the surface follows well-established narratives of internal migration and movement from the Global South to the Global North, queer metronormative narratives, as well as internal narratives from the South to the North, but displays a more nuanced picture upon closer inspection. The novels *Spatriati* by Mario Desiati, *Polveri sottili* by Gianluca Nativo, *Baba* by Mohamed Maalel, and *Tangerinn* by Emanuela Anechoum dive into complexity and in-betweenness, formulating narratives that develop on the shores of the Mediterranean and that are mirrored in their multiplicity by the sea. Ultimately, the article argued that they exemplify a Southern, or rather, Mediterranean thought, which troubles far right, right-wing, and homonationalist narratives about migration and about Italian assimilation. Moreover, while the novels by Desiati, Nativo, Anechoum, and Maalel were investigated as case studies in this instance, other novels could have been instead included, such as *Ragazze perbene* (2023) by Olga Campofreda, *Autoritratto newyorkese* (2023) by Maurizio Fiorino, or *Hijra* (2024) by Saif ur Rehman Raja.

A queer perspective, such as the one represented in *Spatriati*, *Polveri sottili*, *Baba*, and *Tangerinn* embraces complexity and liminal identities. Moreover, as argued by March, liminality "might shift us […] towards a politics of relationality that is rooted in our being in the world and speaks to shared histories of loss and shared responsibilities towards one another."[63] The novels explored in this article foster a new epistemology and hint at a future of multifaceted, oxymoronic, but shared co-existence.

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62 Iain Chambers, "Maritime Criticism and Theoretical Shipwrecks," in *PMLA*, no. 125 (3) (2010): 679.

63 Loren March, "Queer and trans geographies of liminality: A literature review," in *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(3) (2021): 465.

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AYLA KUTLU AND BEJAN MATUR: TWO PIONEERING MEDITERRANEAN TURKISH WOMEN WRITERS

Roberta Micallef*

Abstract

In this article, I examine Ayla Kutlu's "Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis" (Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis), a novella included in the collection of the same title and selected poems by Bejan Matur to gain a deeper understanding of what the label 'Mediterranean' signifies regarding the authors and their work, I apply tools afforded by Area Studies, and Comparative Literature to argue that these two authors provide readers with a deeper understanding of Mediterranean identities and literature. Shaped by the Mediterranean region, Matur and Kutlu write about overlapping themes from different vantage points and think about the past in distinct ways. Kutlu, a generation older and a proud daughter of the Turkish nation-state although of Chechen origins and Matur, a local Kurdish woman, are separated by age, ethnicity, religion, and mother tongue; however, their texts are united in their exploration of women's experiences of the Mediterranean. Examining the texts in their source language with conceptual frames and close reading allows the reader to see that despite Kutlu and Matur's vastly different relationships to the Turkish state, both authors yearn for the days when diverse communities could live side by side on the Turkish Mediterranean coast, in a cosmopolitan milieu.

Keywords: Ayla Kutlu, Bejan Matur, Turkey, women writers, novellas

Following extensive debate, the First Geography Congress in Türkiye in 1941, ostensibly based on similarities in climate and geographic characteristics, delineated the nation into seven regions,[1] leaving pioneering and much-celebrated Turkish authors Ayla Kutlu and Bejan Matur's hometowns Antakya and Maraş in the "Mediterranean region." Writing from what is today the Mediterranean periphery, narrating the stories of margin-

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1 Yılmaz Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004), 80-81.

alized people, women, migrants, and minorities from the southern Turkish coast, Kutlu and Matur's work enriches the meaning of the concept of "Mediterranean" while contributing to the conversation about Mediterranean modernism and cosmopolitanism.

In this essay, I will examine Kutlu's "Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis" [2] (*Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis*), a novella included in the collection of the same title and selected poems by Matur to gain a deeper understanding of what the label 'Mediterranean' signifies regarding the authors and their work. Kutlu, whose lyrical prose is deeply rooted in the fabric of Iskenderun, said in an interview, "In every part of the stories in *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis* there are many features stemming from the structure and nature of Iskenderun. If I had grown up in a different city, not in Iskenderun, these stories might not have emerged."[3] Matur, whose mystical and tragic poetry acknowledges the secrets witnessed by nature and history, describes her origins with a unique blend of identities: "I was born in Maraş, which is on the edge of the Mediterranean. I would call myself a Mediterranean Kurd! My father is a farmer. I grew up between the cotton fields and the snowy mountains, which used to be the land of ancient Hittites."[4] For both authors, the specific geographic locations of their birth and upbringing played a crucial role in their personal and creative development. However, it is not a mere accident of birthplace that allows us to include Kutlu and Matur in the category of Mediterranean writers.

Using a methodology that comparativist C. Ceyhun Arslan refers to as "disciplinary utopia"[5] that allows scholars to combine different approaches that best fit their needs, I will apply tools afforded by area studies and comparative literature to argue that these two authors provide readers with a deeper understanding of Mediterranean identities

2 Kutlu launched her literary career in 1978. She has won many awards, and her texts have been translated into several languages. *Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis* won the prestigious Sait Faik short story award in 1990. Adapted into a screenplay, the novella of the same name earned the author the Golden Boll Award for Best Screenplay. It was made into a film titled "Sen de Gitme" ("Don't Go"), which achieved remarkable success by winning a total of fourteen awards at the Golden Orange and Golden Boll Film Festivals in 1996.

3 Şemsettin Ünlü, "Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis Üzerine Ayla Kutlu ile bir Söyleşi," in Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis, by Ayla Kutlu, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 211.

4 "5Q Interview with Bejan Matur." Writing University. August 2018. https://writinguniversity.org/news-archive/2018/08/5q-interview-bejan-matur-2018-iwp-resident.

5 C. Ceyhun Arslan. "Disciplinary Utopias: The Mediterranean as a Context and Artistic Mediations." *Utopian Studies* 35, no. 1 (March 2024), 133.

and literature. Shaped by the Mediterranean region, Matur and Kutlu write about overlapping themes from different vantage points and think about the past in distinct ways. Kutlu, a generation older and a proud daughter of the Turkish nation-state although of Chechen origins and Matur, a local Kurdish woman are separated by age, ethnicity, religion, and mother tongue, however, their texts are united in their exploration of women's experiences of the Mediterranean. Examining the texts in their source language with conceptual frames and close reading allows the reader to see that despite Kutlu and Matur's vastly different relationships to the Turkish state, both authors yearn for the days when diverse communities could live side by side on the Turkish Mediterranean coast, in a cosmopolitan milieu.

Is Geography Destiny?[6] From Triyandafilis to Filiz: Kutlu's Silent Protagonist

Reflecting on the images conjured by the term 'Mediterranean,' eminent scholar David Abulafia wrote: "Mediterraneans conjure up the history of coexistence – commercial, cultural, religious, political – as well as that of confrontation between neighbors aware of their often powerful ethnic, economic, and, again, religious differences."[7] The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the transition from empire to nation-state, a process laden with trauma, alongside the rise of homogenizing nationalism, the impending Second World War, and the persistent conflict and violence on the Turkish Mediterranean coast and borderlands, set the stage for Kutlu and Matur's literary works, which resonate with Abulafia's observations and Ibn Khaldun's ideas about geography influencing the formation of societies and impacting the rise and fall of empires.

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6 In his illustrious text *Muqaddima* Ibn Khaldun argued that the earliest societies were formed by nomadic peoples in the rugged steppes, deserts, and mountains who constructed relations of authority through ties of kinship and "group feeling" (*'asabiya*). Groups with pronounced *'asabiya* were the most capable of forming expansive dynasties and empires, and stable empires in turn offered the most promising conditions for productive agriculture, prosperous cities, and refined urban life. But every empire bore the seeds of its own demise since the luxuries of rule were all too likely to result in corrupt and tyrannical rulers. New groups from the severe margins would eventually displace the old dynasties, according to Ibn Khaldun, and the cycle of imperial ascent and decline would begin once more.

7 David Abulafia. "Mediterraneans." In *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, edited by W. V. Harris (Oxford University Press, 2005), 92-93.

In their "Introduction" to *Mediterranean Modernism*, Godwyn and Silverman write that modernism in the Mediterranean emerged from broad political, historical, and cultural influences during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[8] In Kutlu's novella, we see the depiction of the impact of these global events on a local household. The form that Kutlu chooses for her text, the short story, is evidence of a new modernist aesthetic. The short story is a change from traditional genres and is better suited to capture the events of the early 20th century.

Set in the mid-1930s towards the end of the French mandate in what is today Hatay, the reader is introduced to Monsieur Antuvan, a prosperous Greek merchant whose wealth flourished under the French occupation and mandate, who in addition serves as the food steward for the French army. He resides in an opulent mansion with his wife, Teodora, their children, caregivers, and servants. However, if we examine household members' mobility, we see how fluid and complicated power and hierarchy are within the household. This is a household where Monsieur Antuvan, the patriarch, "the son of a poor fisherman, who grew up in a one-room flat in one of the poor neighborhoods of Mersin,"[9] who then became a wealthy businessman was only allowed to marry Teodora, the daughter of a wealthy Levantine family, on the condition that they remain in her hometown. He travels a great deal and is away from his home and family for extended periods. When we meet Teodora, she is no longer enamored with her husband and is happy to have dinner and conversation with the outstanding men of their entourage. While she does not break her marital vows, she is bored and less than thrilled with her husband. Their oldest child is Aleksiya, a beautiful spoiled, and shallow twenty-one-year-old young woman who has broken off engagements but is soon to be wed. The twelve-year-old twins, Niko and Elenia, are lively and somewhat out of control. The protagonist, Triyandafilis, the fifteen-year-old is daughter, is remarkably beautiful but intellectually challenged. Her cognitive development is fixed at the level of a seven-year-old due to her parents' RH incompatibility and the era's limited scientific understanding. She is described as: "Triyandafilis the beloved of the servants, was such a gentle child that she didn't have any problems with

8 Adam J. Goldwyn and Renée M. Silverman, eds., *Mediterranean Modernism: Intercultural Exchange and Aesthetic Development* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-27.

9 Ayla Kutlu, *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis (Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis)*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 16.

anyone but her siblings." [10] Triyandafilis is the one that the entire household works to keep within the confines of the estate. "She always wanted to escape. That's why the front door and the side garden door were always locked. The servants and the members of the household were always checking the doors."[11] The belief in science and that this young woman's life might have been radically different had she lived in a time when medical knowledge was more developed is also a modern approach to a problem and a departure from assuming that everything is "God's will."

Triyandafilis' home life is far from trouble-free. Her siblings are unkind to her. The twins relentlessly torment her, seeking to subtly inflict harm. Her parents love her dearly in particular her father has a soft spot for her. They worry about her future, and they feel great sorrow for her, but they do not know how to help her other than imprisoning her in the house to keep her out of harm's way. The household includes several nameless servants and two caregivers Sultan and her hearing-impaired husband. While Sultan[12] may not be the lady of the mansion, she lives up to her name which came to Turkish from Arabic and means power, strength, or ruler. Sultan is the one who knows exactly what is happening in the house, who is doing what, what is needed, and she has access to the key which allows her freedom to go and come as she pleases or is necessary. She is strong as we see later in the story. The mansion, home to Triyandafilis, her family, and their servants, stands as a symbol of functionality amidst adversity. Within its walls, marital discord and sibling rivalry unfold – commonplace issues that, while distressing, fall within the bounds of normalcy.

Triyandafilis can feel sorrow, love, and desire but she cannot understand what is going on around her and she cannot explain her feelings and thoughts. Although she is growing up in a household where she hears Greek, French, and Turkish she cannot make herself understood in any language. Confined within the estate, her world ends where the high garden wall, crowned with glass shards, begins. Triyandafilis is simple-natured and feels desire but does not understand concepts such as shame. She yearns for freedom, and from her window she sees and becomes enamored with a

10 Ayla Kutlu, *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis (Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis)*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 15.

11 Ayla Kutlu, *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis (Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis)*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 15.

12 Sultan is a girl's name in Turkish. It was an honorific used by the Ottoman ruler but also used by female members of the Ottoman family. When used for women their first name came before the title for example Hürrem Sultan as opposed to when it was used for the ruler Sultan Süleyman.

French soldier named Pierre. During this time, Iskenderun, teeters on the edge of transfer to Turkish governance. The family starts preparations to move to Beirut. Kutlu captures the chaos of the moment, and the haven provided by the home: "The chaos taking place outside the home was not seeping into the house. The Turks, Arabs, Greeks, and Armenians were in flux about Hatay's becoming part of Syria, which was under the French mandate, or joining Turkey, or becoming an independent republic. They were trying to make sure that they would survive any of these outcomes."[13] The impact of this international political moment would be felt for decades by this family and the entire region for decades to come.

Sultan who feels great pity for Triyandafilis facilitates her meeting with Pierre who does not understand that her mental level is that of a young child. He believes that their communication issues are due to language problems. Every time they part, she asks him to "Ne pars pas" or "to not leave." Triyandafilis utters this phrase whenever she sees a young man in uniform until the end of her life. As the family prepares to relocate to Beirut, Triyandafilis seizes an opportunity to flee during the chaos of moving. She is looking for Pierre.

She vanishes without a trace, and despite an exhaustive search, her distraught family has no option but to leave without her. The family must leave because with the departure of the French from the area they will lose their livelihood, and they may be seen as traitors. The transition and political chaos have a direct impact on the household. This household where people, languages, and religions have coexisted sometimes imperfectly is no longer intact. The fluid and everchanging power dynamics within the web that formed the household have fallen apart. The members of the household are scattered and those who remain in Turkey must fend for themselves. Sultan and her husband lose their livelihood and must take on physically heavy labor to make a living. Triyandafilis has disappeared and the rest of the family has had to move leaving behind their vulnerable daughter. While Teodora and Antuvan leave Hatay physically they have left a piece of their hearts and minds behind.

After running away our protagonist gets lost in the chaotic city. People and soldiers are leaving. There are trucks full of soldiers passing by her. "Their songs, marches, shouts, laughter makes her feel happy." Thinking that she recognizes Pierre in one of the trucks she chases after it shouting,

13 Ayla Kutlu, *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 25.

"Ne pars pas Pierre."[14] This truck passes her by but eventually, a truck full of soldiers slows down and pulls her in but rather than finding Pierre she is met with sexual violence. Her parents have asked the French authorities, the Turkish authorities, and the Greek church for help but to no avail. In a brief time, everyone except for Sultan and her parents forget about her.

When she manages to finally stumble back to her hometown and find Sultan, they learn how much she has at the hands of various men who abused her and sold her. Like the epic heroes, of the distant past, after enduring many challenges and hardships, she has returned home and been given a new name "Filiz." In this case, rather than earning a name fitting heroic exploits, conquests, and bloodshed, she has earned a name as a survivor of a violent era of transition. This mentally challenged female survivor of sexual violence during an era of grave political turbulence has been cast as a hero. Her two names may be different, but they are related. The name she was given at birth means Rose in Greek. The name she is now called Filiz means sprout, bloom, or blossom. The three form a non-biological family. They happily coexist in a decrepit house and struggle with great poverty as the only one who can earn any money is Sultan and the times are difficult. But they are happy and protective of each other. This still means limiting Filiz' mobility. When three young men move into their neighborhood once again Filiz decides that she wants love. She escapes from her home. These young men are simply poor young men with good morals from the country who've arrived in the city to make a living. This time Filiz enters a relationship with a naive Turkish young man who doesn't understand her limitations. When Filiz gets pregnant Sultan ends the pregnancy without consulting either parent, or without Filiz even being aware of her pregnancy. Sultan does not believe that Filiz is capable of being a mother or that the young man can take care of both Filiz and a baby. This union is not allowed to be fertile. With time Sultan and her husband die and a new war appears on the horizon. Filiz's partner is conscripted. She sees him in his uniform and understands that she will never see him again. Filiz is left alone in a crumbling abode, regarded as a specter by those around her. Triyandafilis, who was born to a mansion, is voiceless, her inability to communicate mirroring the silenced history of a region rich in diversity. She becomes akin to a ghost, a spectral presence echoing the lost vibrancy of her homeland repeating time after time "Don't' Leave." It

14 Ayla Kutlu, *Sen de Gitme Triyandafilis (Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis)*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 32.

is not clear whether she is speaking to her lost loves, her parents, Sultan, or husband?

The Mediterranean has long been a muse for writers. Eminent scholar David Abulafia notes that most classic Mediterranean narratives—the stories of epic heroes, religious figures, lone travelers, or adventurers—are frequently, by and about men.[15] The dominance of male narratives, from *The Odyssey* (725-675 BCE) to The *Epistles of St. Paul* (48-68 AD), or *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (1183-1185), persisted into the 20th century with works like Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1942). As distinguished historian Judith Tucker notes this extensive and renowned collection of Mediterranean literature frequently lacked stories about or by Mediterranean women and girls who were more than mere plot devices, objects of desire, or ornamental figures.[16] Kutlu's narrative provides us with the missing stories of the silenced and silent women of the region.

Bejan Matur: Geography Poetry's Muse

The literary form that Bejan Matur chooses to express herself in, poetry, is an ancient and much-loved genre in Anatolia. However, the number of women poets are far and few in, and women poets who write with a female aesthetic focusing on women's reality are even fewer. Her poetry does not adhere to any traditional forms and points to a clear break with tradition. It is revolutionary in form and content, making it part of the Mediterranean Modernism. It is a new form for a new subject that allows her to voice her reality.

Matur was born in Maraş in 1968 to a large farming family. Matur has fond memories of a strong community and solidarity among women in a large tribal family.

> I grew up in a Mediterranean village. My father was a farmer who grew cotton. The earliest scenery I remember from my childhood is the vast cotton fields with reddish soil which were covered with snowy mountains from afar. I grew up in a big tribal family. I remember our big house always full of life

15 David Abulafia. *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2011), 643.

16 Judith E. Turner, "Introduction." In *The Making of the Modern Mediterranean: Views from the South*, edited by Judith E. Tucker, 1st ed., (University of California Press), 2019, 7. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh1dt10.6.

> with never-ending guests visiting, cotton fields, workers, and three generations of women cooking together in the kitchen.[17]

The very commonalities among Eastern Mediterranean literatures discussed by Hilary Kilpatrick are found in Matur's utterances and poetry: "the loss of a homeland, economic migration, the treatment of modern writers of salient events of the past, and finally their treatment of the ancient past more significantly what is remembered and what is forgotten and how what is remembered is treated." [18] In a recent interview Matur said: "There was no master of my poems, but if a root is to be sought, it can be found in the geography where I was born, in the sorrow that geography has carried throughout history."[19] Like Kutlu for Matur, the region is her muse.

> Imagine growing up in a plain, a true transition area between Antep and Maraş, a place where archaeological findings still exist. As children, we played among Neolithic graves. We played among half-finished stone lions, Armenian skulls, or graves; you grow up in a geography connected with the ancient. Naturally, your identity has a claim on you.[20]

In this brief paragraph, we see that in her childhood Matur has seen firsthand the remnants of the destruction of the Armenian community, the ever-present ancient past, and the salient historical events of the past. The idea that nature reveals what people try to hide with their after-the-fact-constructed narratives and claims of ownership of land is a recurring theme in her work.

After completing her middle and high school education in Gaziantep, Matur attended Ankara University. However, rather than receiving a diploma and a job, she was arrested during her second year as a student in the Faculty of Law.

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17 Anahit Poturyan, "Writing Became a Part of My S oul: A Conversation with Bejan Matur," *L.A. Review of Books*, January 31, 2020.

18 Hilary Kilpatrick. "Eastern Mediterranean Literatures for Comparative Study." In *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures: A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Verena Klemm and Beatrice Gruendler, 84-94. Reichert, 2000.

19 Saadet Saral and Burcu Tokat, "Şiir, Kadın ve Dil: Bejan Matur ile Söyleşi," ("Poetry, Women and Language: A Conversation with Bejan Matur,") *Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar* 5 (June 2008), 138

20 Saadet Saral and Burcu Tokat, "Şiir, Kadın ve Dil: Bejan Matur ile Söyleşi," ("Poetry, Women and Language: A Conversation with Bejan Matur,") *Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar* 5 (June 2008), 140-41

> I was 19 years old. The custody lasted almost one month! I was tortured. All these heavy and dark memories. They were trying to find out if I was involved in a political movement or not. The reason it took so long was because I didn't want to speak any word to the police. Although I was under heavy pressure, I stayed strong enough to keep my sanity[21]. Their aim was to paralyze my being. I stayed silent for 28 days in a dark cell.[22]

Matur, who spent a year in prison, started writing again once she recovered her voice. Her first book, *Rüzgar Dolu Konaklar* (*Winds Howl Through the Mansions*), was published in 1996 to international acclaim, and in 1997 this collection of poetry won the Halil Kocagöz Poetry Award as well as the Orhan Murat Arıburnu entry award.[23] Matur, whose poetry has been translated into more than twenty-five languages, was an active force in the cultural life of Diyarbakır.[24]

Matur's 18-page 16-section poem, "Winds Howl Through the Mansions," engages in a profound dialogue with the themes of "Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis," albeit through an indirect historical lens. The poem opens with a poignant scene:

> When we were born
> It was our mother
> Who had caskets made for us
> And filled them with silver mirrors
> Dark blue stones
> And fabrics smuggled from Aleppo
> Later
> She would put us in those caskets
> And whisper in our ears
> Of roads
> And winds
> And mansions.
> To stop us being lonely in the dark
> She would add our childhood too
> To comfort us
> With that childhood.[25]

21 Anahit Poturyan, "Writing Became a Part of My Soul: A Conversation with Bejan Matur," *L.A. Review of Books*, January 31, 2020.
22 Anahit Poturyan, "Writing Became a Part of My Soul: A Conversation with Bejan Matur," *L.A. Review of Books*, January 31, 2020.
23 "Bejan Matur Kimdir?" ("Who is Bejan Matur?") *Artı Gerçek,* October 26, 2022.
24 "Bejan Matur Kimdir?" ("Who is Bejan Matur?") *Artı Gerçek,* October 26, 2022.
25 Bejan Matur and Ruth Christie. "From Winds Howl through the Mansions." *Grand Street*, no. 70 (2002): 107-107. https://doi.org/10.2307/25008599.

In these lines, we encounter children preparing for an inevitable departure from their mother and their homeland. Aleppo, a major trading center between the Mediterranean and the Middle East, is invoked, along with the goods accompanying the children. These concise but rich lines evoke the importance of trade routes that transcend boundaries and connect the loss of innocence and trade. A childhood lost to necessity and trade and the separation from the mother and natal house is likened to death.

The opening section of the poem continues with images of blood and water mingling and children telling the water that they left while the mother was sleeping because she would not have been able to bear watching them leave while awake.

The poem concludes with a reflection on the aftermath of flight:

> What's left from that flight
> Everything, everyone is here.
> I am here
> My brothers and sisters are here with their loss
> My mother with her dresses
> My brother with his fear of war
> My father's here, but not awake
> Around me the world has shrunk
> All like a dream
> That hurts the longer it lasts.[26]

Just as Triyandafilis' father was not able to protect her from her siblings or the outside world, in this poem the father figure is also absent and unable to exert power. He is asleep. Neither Matur nor Kutlu writes of the boy who goes to war as going to fight for lofty ideals or to protect the young maiden: "the one worth fighting for,"[27] and neither Kutlu nor Matur has an archetypal "girl" waiting for her soldier lover. The reality of the girl caught up in Kutlu and Matur's war narratives is that she is defenseless against men with guns who freely abuse her, or she is the sister who is unable to help her brother who is afraid of war. The mother is preparing caskets for her children. The children and their mother remain but with their loss. The mother is unable to protect her son, and the sisters are unable to help their brother or protect their mother from her grief. In Matur's verse, as in Kutlu's novella, men don uniforms and depart, often never to return, leaving behind diminished, wounded women.

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26 Bejan Matur and Ruth Christie. "From Winds Howl through the Mansions."

27 This archetype was best depicted in Disney's Mulan with a song: "Since we went off to war/What do we want? /A girl worth fighting for!

In fact, in the second section of the poem we read that the brother has died.

When our brother
Older than all of us
And afraid of the distant war
Never came home
We too feared the war.
But it wasn't war that kept him away.
On his way back
He fell asleep with his horse

The poet tells us that he fell asleep on the mountain across his father's. The patrilineal line is broken. The two men are not even side by side in death but rather across from each other. The mother starts to shrink in the face of these deaths. Like Sultan in "Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis," the mother figure prepares them to part and suffers tremendously when she loses her husband and her son. By the fifth section of the poem their mother has become a rootless oak tree:[28] The oak tree which is native to the Mediterranean region helps against erosion, protects against the wind and provides firewood. The mother who holds the household together has lost her moorings in this poem.

Every night
In her black velvet dress
Our mother wandered among the mountains
She was a rootless oak
Silent, now and then weeping

The cycles of poverty, violence, and stolen innocence continue and become the speaker's reality. The poet describes the fate of four sisters in section VIII as being like stones rolling down a mountain, searching for beds that weren't theirs anymore, the distances between them. After 10 years the speaker meets a green-eyed man who leaves her to go to military service but returns. She has two sons one of whom she buries. The speaker describes carrying his body holding up his hair as he was placed on a horse facedown.[29] By section XVI the speaker is an old woman waiting for death and asks that if God is listening, he give her a narrow grave that will let her

28 Bejan Matur, *Rüzgar Dolu Konaklar* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1999), 19.
29 Bejan Matur, *Rüzgar Dolu Konaklar (Winds Howl Through Mansions)* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1999), 30.

forget the largeness of the mansions through which the winds howled.[30] In both Kutlu's novella and Matur's poems we start with girls who are parts of large households with many members who are then separated from their homes, an ever-present fear of large-scale violence the death of children, and end with lone women waiting for death. Kutlu's novella ends with a frail old woman dressed in white who wanders alone, in Matur's poem the mother is a rootles oak and the daughter asks for a narrow grave once she becomes an old woman. Triyandafilis, Teodora, Sultan and mother and the daughter in Matur's poems have more in common than national, ethnic, or religious ties. At the most fundamental level the transition to the homogenous nation-state has rendered them or their loved ones a "rootless oak." They are not participating in the communities that make up the nation, the imagined communities. They are not participating in the narratives that attempt to make these nation-states natural or eternal. They are finding commonalities with each other.

Matur not only writes about the people inhabiting the shores of the Mid-Sea but also writes about the Mediterranean Sea itself. The lines from her poem "Sea of Fate" echo sentiments raised in "Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis," and the themes of her aforementioned "Winds Howl Through the Mansions." These lines also resonate with the themes of brilliant writer and intellectual Toni Morrison's exhibition, and lecture series at the Louvre titled, "The Foreigner's Home."[31] The Foreigner's Home expresses Morrison's questions about home, inclusion, belonging, estrangement, and "the blatant, violent uses to which foreignness is put."[32] In Matur's poem, the people crossing the sea are part of what Morrison calls the greatest mass movement of peoples excluding the height of the nineteenth-century slave trade.[33] They are all made equal by their journey. Any distinctions based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender are erased. As Matur puts it so eloquently the Mediterranean which can be at once a barrier or a bridge between continents and nation-states unites those "divided on land."

30 Bejan Matur, *Rüzgar Dolu Konaklar (Winds Howl Through Mansions)* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1999), 31

31 Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019).

32 Liedeke Plate (2022) Portrait of the postcolonial intellectual as a wise old woman: Toni Morrison, word-work, and The Foreigner's Home, *Transnational Screens*, 13:2, 96-110, p. 96 DOI: 10.1080/25785273.2022.2069754

33 Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 5.

This encounter
An encounter of continents.
God's will.
God wishes the same death to all.
Will summon fate
And those divided on land
Be merged in the waters.

In the following lines, people are reduced to their lowest common denominator the atoms that form them. When they embark on this journey their identities are negated. They face dangers and obstacles to get to the shore and discover that the main impediment to their journey is those collections of atoms that maintain their status as humans. These humans are those orchestrating what Toni Morrison called the political maneuvers to monitor the journey of the colonized to the seat of the colonizer.[34]

For we
are created from atoms
divided and set free.
Removed from memory
from perfection
we fell into this desert.
Climbing over the mountains
we came to the border.
It seems the border was human!

The border was human
between the angel
and death.

The issue with memory raised in these lines is also an important theme in "Please Don't Go: Triyandafilis." Sultan who is the all-knowing servant only knows Turkish and can relay information and discuss the past in Turkish. She is not privy to the private conversations that take place among the family. Her husband misses a lot of information because he is deaf. As Triyandafilis cannot express herself with words while we know that she feels strongly we do not know what she knows or remembers. At the same time as the stones in Matur's two-line poem titled, "Truth," Triyandafilis knows the truth that has not been adulterated with words and narratives constructed by people.

34 Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 5.

TRUTH
What Stones know
Humankind Forgets![35]

What humankind forgets or wants to forget the stones know. Language and the ability to or the inability to express oneself with words and language is important for both authors. The construction and imposition of national languages to create a homogenous citizenship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is not unique to Turkey but an ordinary step in creating modern nation-states. For both these authors nationalism gives rise to forced displacement and mute characters. However, there is some knowledge that cannot erase what nature knows and what Triyandafilis who may not have book learning or mental capacity beyond that of a seven-year-old knows. Nature does not forget and Triyandafilis knows how to love, and how to feel sorrow. In some ways, she embodies the purest instincts that are part of being human, rather than adhering to constructed social norms.

Matur's poem "Growing up in Two Dreams" bears witness to her own story regarding language. The stanzas below link the region to cycles of violence and trauma.

History has already opened these wounds.
Fragile, the scars, thickened
with anger.

This poem is looking for a language that unites, that is heard and understood. Like the protagonist Triyandafilis, the speaker in this poem is looking for a way to make herself understood.

Our voices are our only shelter in the lit night.
Who can we turn to?
What words can we use to speak of pain,
in what language can we ask to be forgiven?
We need a clean slate,
a sunrise of words,
dawn of the soul.

The speaker is looking for a refuge where silence is not suppression or an inability to speak but rather peace and tranquility.

35 Bejan Matur with Canan Marasligil and Jan Hadfield, "Truth," Poetry Translation Center, 2017, https://www.poetrytranslation.org/poem/growing-up-in-two-dreams/#translated-poem. Accessed 8/2/2024.

We need the gentle home with chimney smoking.
To walk by its walls on forgiving soil.
We decide this is somewhere
we can take refuge
and fall quiet
we fall quiet[36]

This is what each character in "Please Don't Go Triyandafilis" and Matur's poems is looking for. The house that is a home built on forgiving soil not one that reminds the citizens of the prior atrocities. They are searching for a home that is a haven where silence is peaceful and not imposed.

Conclusion

In beautifully written prose or economical and yet moving poetry Bejan Matur and Ayla Kutlu, despite their different vantage points and their differing relationship to the Turkish state, reflect on the experiences of marginalized people whether, women, children, or people with mental and physical challenges trying to survive against the backdrop of large-scale political turmoil and violence. Their texts share the aspects of Eastern Mediterranean literature highlighted by Kilpatrick and resonate with Abulafia's understanding of the concepts evoked by the term Mediterranean.

Examining the texts in the frames provided by area studies and comparative literature allows us to examine them in their source language while paying attention to the historical and political circumstances unique to the area. The Mediterranean region of Türkiye has a unique history that differs from that of other regions of the country. Hatay joined the nation-state later than the other provinces and the impact of the French mandate and the tragic history of the Armenian genocide have left their traces which are not always evident when we think of Türkiye as a Mediterranean nation-state as a whole. Scholars of Modern Türkiye have referred to the state as the father and the land as the mother *ana vatan* and *baba devlet*. The mother feeds and nourishes, the father taxes and sends him to military service or war. In the Kutlu and Matur texts that we have examined for this essay, the patriarchal bargain is broken. Fathers are unable to protect their children from harm. Mothers are unable to socialize their children to survive and live as productive members of society. The Empire has collap-

36 Bejan Matur with Canan Marasligil and Jen Hadfield. "Growing Up in Two Dreams." link. Accessed 8/2/2024.

sed and the nation-state is still in transition. The patrilineal and matrilineal lines are broken. Children and husbands die and old and frail women are left alone to wander. Their Mediterranean is not traversed by a conquering hero. Those wondering the shores of this sea face violence and destruction. Those crossing the sea meet a watery grave or human-made borders to keep them out. Science isn't developed enough to save them and God is like the father figure in Matur's poem, asleep. Matur and Kutlu add the experiences of the subaltern to the layers of discourse by Mediterranean subjects to the available conversation while also making the reader question who the subaltern is. The fluidity of power dynamics is evident in the backdrop of shifting national borders and within the household the mobility of the subjects. While Teodora and Antuvan love Triyandafilis very much, she loves Sultan more than anyone. While she tells her father to go away when he tries to show her love and affection, she calls on Sultan to tell her bedtime stories.

Both authors profess a nostalgia for a time gone by. In Kutlu's novella, we start with a mansion that houses people of different religions, who speak a variety of languages and end up with an old woman who has the mental capacity of a seven-year-old in a decrepit house a reminder of times gone by. In Matur's poem nature which may not have the capacity of human speech remembers and reminds. Both authors are reacting to nationalist efforts that imposed a national language attempting to erase the imperial past in favor of the modern nation. On 1 November [1928] the Grand National Assembly passed Law No. 1353, 'On the Adoption and Application of the New Turkish Letters,' which came into effect two days later (Lewis 37-38). After a hard-fought war of independence, very much due to the initiatives of the central government and emerging bourgeoisies, Turkish was established as the official language of the land in the first constitution of 1924. After the Language Revolution of 1928, the Arabo-Persian alphabet became obsolete and was replaced with Turkish letters in Latin script. By 1934, the "Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş!" (Citizen, Speak Turkish!) campaign prohibited the use of non-Turkish words in public as well as teaching in other languages with few exceptions.[37] Since then the approach to Kurdish and other minority languages has varied.

In *Istanbul Memories and the City* Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish Nobel Laureate, an Istanbulite par excellence, describes a communal melancholy or

37 Yılmaz Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004), 80-81.

"hüzün" shared by the denizens of the city.[38] He writes that being surrounded by the ruins of a once great empire in a former imperial capital encapsulates the city in a melancholy peculiar to Istanbul. Matur and Kutlu's nostalgia or melancholy is based on the loss of a time when people of different religions, ethnicities, and linguistic backgrounds could live together side by side however imperfectly. Nazım Hikmet another celebrated Turkish poet wrote:

> To live, free and single like a tree
> but in brotherhood like a forest –
> this longing is ours.
> Nazım Hikmet, Moscow, 1953

Despite their different backgrounds and perspectives, Kutlu and Matur share a common yearning for a more inclusive and cosmopolitan Mediterranean, where diverse communities can coexist. Their literary contributions not only enrich the concept of 'Mediterranean' but also challenge us to rethink the boundaries and possibilities of this vibrant and multifaceted region. They ask us if we can imagine a "gentle house" where we can coexist.

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Printed by
Digital Team – Fano (Pu)
December 2024