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Territory / Frontiers / Routes: Space, Place and Language in the Mediterranean

Abstract: How do we conceptualize the place of languages – and the literary traditions grounded in languages – in the Mediterranean? In a region crisscrossed by transit networks and flows of human travel, how do we locate language? In this essay, I draw upon a short list of key words used in the fields of literature, geography, history, and network theory – cosmopolitan language; space and place; territory, boundary and frontier – to map the movement of human and non-human actors, and to think about languages that are not instantiated in territory. My aim is to push back against national language ideology, which grants territorial sovereignty to language, seeing the national language as part of a portfolio of national behaviors and as a key component of state bureaucracy. Rather, I focus on specific linguistic behaviors of the pre-modern Mediterranean, which I propose are typical also of the late twentieth and twenty-first-century Mediterranean. Languages, like people, move. They are carried on the networks of human migration. Rather than challenge human mobility, as the national languages of modernity do, they facilitate movement: language transforms the writer into a nomad. In so doing, they convert the "space" of the Mediterranean into a "place" defined by intersecting languages and attendant literary traditions. By studying the character and behaviors of language across the frontiers of state sovereignty and on the routes of Mediterranean transit, I argue that we can better understand the literature of the Mediterranean, as well as emergent linguistic behaviors in the twenty-first-century Mediterranean.

Does the term "Mediterranean literature" have a meaning that is useful to literary scholars? If so, what qualities distinguish Mediterranean from other regional literary traditions? "Mediterranean Studies," as an area studies formulation and as a way of thinking about literary history, must struggle with two foundational questions. First, historians define the region by its proximity to a sea: that is, an area that is not a place of human settlement. To anticipate an argument that I will develop later in this essay, the Mediterranean Sea is (for most of us) a space, not a place. At what distance from the littoral does the Mediterranean region begin and end? How do scholars differentiate the Mediterranean from other regions

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where maritime or territorial highways intersect at the edge of a blank space on the map: the North Sea, the Indian Ocean, or the Sahara, for instance?[1]

Second, the Mediterranean region poses unique difficulties for scholars of literature. Multiple language systems (representing spoken and written languages and multiple dialects of languages) converge around the shores of the sea. No scholar can claim familiarity with the portfolio of languages present around the sea as a whole. Even a relatively small section of the Mediterranean coast – the cities of the Italian peninsula, for instance, or (narrowing the scope even further) the cities of Sicily – may demand proficiency in multiple languages and literary traditions. From one century to the next, Sicilians may write in the Sicilian dialect, Italian, French, Spanish, Latin, Arabic, or Greek. No one scholar has expertise in such a range of languages and literatures. How should the literary scholar delineate the traditions that interest her – and justify the exclusion of others?

In this essay, I define and discuss keywords in Mediterranean literary studies, in order to clarify the methodological tools we use to approach the topic. "Place" and "space" are words used by geographers to describe the organization of territory into regions that have meaning, and to oppose meaningful territory to wide-open space. Historians as well as geographers use the words "boundary" and "frontier" to name the practice of drawing a line between regions and to discuss the habit of crossing borders and traveling between the regions they delineate. "Cosmopolitan language" designates mega-languages of trans-regional and trans-historical valence. Today, we think of the Mediterranean as a region of innumerable local languages. However, in the pre-modern past, cosmopolitan languages that mediated between the fractal languages of place made it possible for people and texts to circulate between the shores of the sea. My discussion focuses on pre-modern Mediterranean history and literature; but I assume that mobility (of people, texts and languages) is a constant in antiquity, the Middle Ages, modernity and post-modernity. Mediterranean connectivity goes through periods of abatement and intensification, but it never disappears.[2]

Discussing the work of the eighth century Arab grammarian Sībawayhi, Michael Carter (2004, 52) points out that "[i]t is in the nature of technical terms to be metaphors". In this essay, I bring a literary-historical methodology to bear on

1 For a discussion of comparative "Mediterraneans," including the Sahara and other seas, see Abulafia (2005). For a compelling analysis of the Indian Ocean and the "new thalassology," see Vink (2007).

2 The terms "abatement and intensification" are used by Horden and Purcell (2000, 263–270) to describe the cycles of Mediterranean agriculture and demography over the *longue durée*. They apply it as well to culture (see e. g. their discussion of religious culture; Horden and Purcell 2000, 428).

Mediterranean Studies by unpacking the technical terms – some of them metaphors, others antitheses – which we use to analyze both the geography and the literary traditions of the Mediterranean. Most of this essay will engage with language and geography in the abstract; this is an exercise in definition. However, I conclude with a brief discussion of literature, in order to demonstrate the relevance of this terminology to literary analysis. This essay contributes to what Sharon Kinoshita (2014, 314) describes, in a powerful essay on Mediterranean literature, as "a project of reterritorialization". It proposes lexical tools that we can use to see beyond the scope of the modern nation-state and talk about what Mediterranean literature shares: characteristics determined by the rhythms of Mediterranean history and by the convergence of multiple languages and literary and cultural traditions around the shores of the sea. Finally, it uses the work of geographers to argue that the literature of the Mediterranean turns *space* into *place:* more specifically, it represents a singular Mediterranean setting as metaphor for a greater Mediterranean geography and history.

I begin by defining the linguistic category *cosmopolitan language*, a term which recent scholarship on pre-modern literary traditions uses to designate trans-regional and trans-historical mega-languages. The cosmopolitan language is not associated with a particular period or place. It transcends geographical and historical specificity. The great cosmopolitan languages of medieval and early modern Mediterranean history, Latin and Arabic, were written languages used as literary media on all three shores of the sea.[3] Those who wrote the cosmopolitan language spoke another language, or a substantially different register of the written language, in daily life. Scholars and diplomats might speak Latin or Arabic in the classroom or court. However, they were primarily textual languages, with the capacity to boost the writer's thought above the quotidian, above the narrow time and place of the *vernacular.*

"Cosmopolitan language" has become a term of art in recent years. It rose to prominence in large part thanks to Sheldon Pollock's monumental and brilliant *Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, which traced the rise, spread and decline of Sanskrit as cosmopolitan language of the Indian subcontinent. The word "cosmopolitan" is a Greek portmanteau, combining the words for "universe" (*kósmos*) and "city" (*pólis*). The cosmopolitan is one who is a citizen not of a place but of the cosmos as a whole. In modern usage, it connotes internationalism: the connections that link places isolated by local languages and customs. Statistics provided by the Google Books n-gram viewer suggest that usage of the word in global English publications during the last two centuries declines during periods when

3 For further discussion of Latin and Arabic in the pre-modern Mediterranean, see Mallette (2021).

international tensions made such connectivity less appealing. During the period from 1800 until the present, in printed books in global English, the Google n-gram graph for the word "cosmopolitan" peaks and dips, but evidences a steady increase in usage from 1800, with notable exceptions. There is a downturn in occurrences of the word between 1915 and 1921; again between 1926 and 1946; and finally between 2009 and 2011.[4] The biography of the word during the twentieth and twenty-first century tells a clear story: at moments of skepticism toward internationalism – following World War I, between the uncertain 1920s and World War II, and following the global financial crisis of 2008 – the English-language press turns away from the word and the connectivity it connotes. The word has had pushback from scholars, too, who have criticized cosmopolitan universalism as a cover for the global export of Western values. They have described cosmopolitanism as an old ideology in new clothes: intellectual colonialism, an attack on particularism and local identities in the name of a "universal" humanism that is nothing more than the Enlightenment ideology of western Europe in disguise.[5]

Yet the allure of the cosmopolitan becomes apparent in a specific late twentieth and early twenty first century usage of the word, one particularly common in American English. In the years leading up to the turn of the millennium, "cosmopolitan" became a buzzword that described a cocktail of intellectual affections and visceral emotions. In the popular press, authors used the word to describe the compound linguistic, ethnic and confessional identity of certain cities of the eastern Mediterranean – Alexandria, Beirut, Izmir, Istanbul – viewed through the lens of nostalgia.[6] In a chapter describing the lost internationalism of twentieth-century Alexandria, Philip Mansel quotes singer-songwriter Georges Moustaki's memories of the "Arab, Greek, cosmopolitan and polyglot" city that he left as a 17-year-old in 1941. He reports that Moustaki remembered Alexandria as so "cheerfully cosmopolitan that he never subsequently felt out of place anywhere in the world" (Man-

4 https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=cosmopolitan&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=0 (access on 16 June 2021).

5 For overviews of critiques of cosmopolitan ideology, see Pollock et al. (2000) and Werbner (2006). For a linguistic discussion of cosmopolitanism, see Pollock (2000). Geographers have pointed out the economic inequities of cosmopolitan mobility in particular. The cosmopolitan elite is a person who travels in a certain way, consuming the cultures of the "other" as gourmand. But the poor also travel – out of economic compulsion rather than choice, and with less ability to curate and relish their experiences as travelers. See Cresswell (2015, 81–84) and Massey (1999, 146–156).

6 Although these books do not necessarily use the word "cosmopolitan" in this contested sense, I am thinking of works like Mansel (2010), Haag (2004), Kassir (2010), Reiss (2005), and Pamuk (2005). Though incommensurate in many particulars, these books all celebrate the complex past of cities now viewed as sadly reduced in stature – both economically and, more relevant to the current discussion, ethnically and linguistically.

sel 2010, 269). These sentences convey an urgent nostalgia for the cultural entanglements of the past, lost (Mansel argues) with the rise of the Egyptian state and its ethno-sectarian and linguistic nationalism. In American popular culture, during the late twentieth century, the word acquired a flirtatious quality. It came to suggest the edgy pleasure associated with big cities, people in motion and the anonymity of crowds. It connotes (in a word) naughtiness, and in particular the kind of naughtiness that urban centers and human mobility make possible. *Cosmopolitan* magazine has become a supermarket checkout lane banality in the twenty-first century. Today, it's easy to forget how risqué the magazine once was. It printed the first male nude centerfold (Burt Reynolds) in 1972 and continued to publish the occasional centerfold thereafter (Arnold Schwarzenegger, for instance, appeared in 1977). The cosmopolitan cocktail is of obscure origin, but seems to have been created in South Beach, Florida in 1985 by a bartender, Cheryl Cook, who understood that people feel sophisticated when holding a martini glass, even if they don't like the taste of gin. It became the last word in turn-of-the-millennium urban sophistication as the favorite cocktail of the character Carrie Bradshaw on the HBO series "Sex in the City." In the early 2010s, an ad campaign for the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Las Vegas – a sumptuous resort property that epitomizes the most recent iteration of the new Vegas – promised its clientele "just the right amount of wrong."

The cosmopolitan language needed these qualities – it needed to promise connection, even intimacy; sophistication, and a hint of flirtatiousness – in order to lure the writer away from the mother tongues and vernaculars: the languages of *place.* For geographers, that word is a term of art: a *place* is a location that has specific meaning for a human community (or – although they are beyond the scope of my argument here – for non-human actors). Place is articulated by the behaviors of those actors that intersect and interact in a specific territorial coordinate.[7] Looking back to the pre-modern Mediterranean, the vernaculars were languages of place, languages engineered to speak to the here and now. Before the standardization of the modern national languages, the vernacular changed from city to city and even from neighborhood to neighborhood within cities. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante located the vanishing point of linguistic complexity in the dialect of the individual household: the unique linguistic registers spoken by individual families (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* I, xix, 3; 1979–1988, 140). The vernaculars were bounded by narrow linguistic boundaries. They were languages of place, of the here and now.

7 For discussion and bibliography, see Cresswell (2015).

The geographers contrast place to *space:* inert territory that hasn't been demarcated by the behaviors of human or non-human actors. Space, for instance, is the Empty Quarter, the great desert in the Arabian Peninsula – although the Bedouins might see that desert as place. European settlers in the Pacific Northwest saw the sea as space and the land as place, while the indigenous peoples in the Pacific Northwest, who fished for their survival, saw the sea as place and the land as space. In a beautiful and suggestive discussion of the Pacific Northwest coast of North America, Jonathan Raban contrasts the meaning of sea and land to the indigenous peoples and the colonial settlers. To the European settlers, he writes, the land had meaning: they looked at it and calculated ways to extract value from it. To them, the ocean was a trackless void. To the Europeans' consternation, the indigenous peoples of the region saw it the other way around. Their living came from the sea. They knew the sea and read it in much the same way that the Europeans did the land. They knew how to identify signs of potential danger: "a contrary wind [...] a steepening sea, or a passage past a whirlpool, tide race, or dangerous rock" (Raban 1999, 101). They used these markers (one is tempted to call them not "landmarks" but "watermarks") to negotiate their way through a waterscape as familiar to them as the back of their hand. Raban (1999, 106) writes: "Indians were moving on the sea exactly as whites moved on dry land; but the whites steadfastly failed to wise up to this basic transposition of land and sea, place and space". Place has meaning for a community; space is inarticulate and unmeaning territory. One population, in this story, located place on dry land, and the other situated it at sea.

The cosmopolitan language is not the language of *place:* it is not instantiated in a particular territory. But at first blush, it makes no sense to situate the cosmopolitan language in *space* – in inarticulate and unmeaning territory. Rather, it was the linguistic medium of the border zones between vernaculars: it was the language of the *frontier.* In recent decades, fascinating scholarship has emerged on articulations of borders in both the modern and pre-modern world.[8] Pre-modern frontiers were not necessarily a no-man's-land between states like the border zones and green lines of the modern world. Rather, they were typically busy thoroughfares marked by heavy traffic. We might think of them not as boundaries but more accurately as transit zones. In fact, some of the key vocabulary used to designate the frontiers between distinct zones of political sovereignty originally signified not boundaries but a cleavage that ruptured a boundary. *Limes* in Latin, *thaghr* in Arabic, and *kleisoûra* in Byzantine Greek each meant first a narrow opening that breached a dividing line of one kind or another, and then acquired a broader

8 See e.g. Manzano Moreno (1999), Berend (1999), and Ellenblum (2002).

transferred lexical range referring to the frontier or boundary itself. In the popular imagination, we think of the Great Wall of China as symbolic of the transcendent significance of territorial boundaries between nations. Thomas Barfield (1989) showed that the wall functioned as a dividing line between polities but also as a zone of intensified contact between polities; it acted both as a barrier and a magnet for the nomadic tribes to the north. The widespread urban myth that the Great Wall is visible even from the moon seems to date to an English work written in 1754 (Stukeley 1882–1887, 3:142): long before the age of space travel, but at the dawn of the era of modern nationalisms – an age that was beginning to fixate on territorial boundaries.

These paths – following the contours of boundaries and crossing boundaries – held empires together. They enabled the communication of details of state across great distances; they allowed merchants, diplomats, and intellectuals (as well as corsairs, highwaymen, and slavers) to pass from one metropolitan center to another. In the scholarship, these routes emerge as the defining characteristic of the pre-modern Mediterranean in particular. Braudel follows Lucien Febvre in asserting that "the Mediterranean is the sum of its routes." A footnote to the English translation of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* tells us that Braudel took the French name of the chapter in which this comment appears – "Routes et villes, villes et routes" – from Febvre's response, when Braudel first showed him these pages in draft (Braudel 1995, 1:276). John Wansbrough's *Lingua franca in the Mediterranean* uses the term *orbits* to refer to the constant circulation of ships, sailors, commodities and linguistic matter through the Mediterranean basin (Wansbrough 1996, 1–75). Following Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's *Corrupting Sea*, the noun *connectivity* – referring in the first instance to the mercantile networks that linked port to port and shore to shore – has become the single most important term of art in scholarship on the pre-modern Mediterranean (Horden and Purcell 2000, 123–172).

The circulation of people, texts and ideas on the routes that led between the far-flung cities of empire played a generative role in the constitution of the mega-languages of the Mediterranean – from Arabic and Latin to the humble lingua franca.[9] Sea-lanes and roads brought these languages into being and sustained them through the long centuries. And the trans-regional cosmopolitan languages, not the regionally specific mother tongues, were the lifeblood of literary life in the pre-modern Mediterranean. It's hard to overemphasize this point, in part because it feels so awkward to a modern European sensibility. Cosmopolitan languages are not the linguistic register of hearth and home. They are, rather, koines

9 On the lingua franca, the trade language of the Mediterranean, see Mallette (2014; 2021, 156–167).

honed by communicative negotiations between speakers whose mother tongues are mutually incomprehensible. Languages like Latin, Greek and Persian were trans-regional and trans-historical mega-languages, and they got that way thanks to the travelers and the traveling texts that carried them between metropolitan centers (and between linguistically incommensurate quarters within metropolitan centers). Recent scholarship suggests that even the Arabic language was formed in contact between travelers and sedentary populations. Sentiment teaches that Arabic was the proud possession of the pre-Islamic tribes, spoken around the fire, carried from one encampment to the next but not adulterated by contact with the languages of sedentary peoples. It seems more likely, however, based on recent comparative linguistic studies, that the language took shape on the ancient trade routes that threaded through the Arabian Peninsula, to start upon its career as a world language following its apotheosis in the Qur'an.[10]

The cosmopolitan language was not located in a place. Rather, it lived in the mouths of individual speakers, language workers who were as a rule multilingual – they used the vernaculars of daily life in the home and in the marketplace – and moved nomad-like through territory. And it lived in the texts which moved physically with people between regions and metaphorically between languages via translation. Or, more precisely, the subject of the cosmopolitan language (be it the speaker or the text) negotiates a contingent, constantly changing relationship with territory: he, she or it, the writer or the text, is defined by motion. This dimension of the cosmopolitan language is difficult to defend. The rise of the European vernaculars as literary instruments is typically seen as a jailbreak from the prison house of the cosmopolitan language. Their sentimental attachment precisely to place is a quality that inspires urgent affection for the vernaculars. The nomad-writer in the cosmopolitan language, however, understands affiliation in other terms: with a tribe – perhaps a confessional community, perhaps a cultural public, but certainly a community identified first and foremost with language and constituted first and foremost in language.

In order to address this problem – in order to compensate for the loss of the vernacular, with its sentimental attachment to place – I return to a key term we have already seen. In recent years, geographers have begun to challenge the nostalgia for an idealized, unchanging concept of place. In a moving passage from her book *For Space*, geographer Doreen Massey reflected on her regular journeys *home*. She traveled several times a year from the metropole where she lived, London, to the north, where she grew up. In the pages she wrote about these journeys,

10 See Garbini (1972) and, for an application of the same ideas to the later development of colloquial Arabic, al-Sharkawi (2010).

she recalled the landmarks visible from the train, gradual changes in the landscape, the familiar homely foods that her mother prepared for her on her return. She concluded this vignette by countering the notion of *place* – and in particular the nostalgia for an imagined authenticity of place – with the reality that geography moves: it is articulated by agents that traverse space, the people, animals, vegetation and objects whose perceptions, actions and memories generate geography. Even the looks, sounds and smells of Massey's south Lancashire intersect with global trends, thanks to the steep increase in human mobility in late twentieth century Europe.

> You can't hold places still. What you *can* do is meet up with others, catch up with where another's history has got to "now," but where that "now" (more rigorously, that "here and now," that *hic et nunc*) is itself constituted by nothing more than – precisely – that meeting-up (again). (Massey 2005, 125)

Massey's definition of "place" acknowledges the agency of traveling actors (human and otherwise) and the network of connections that bind it to other places, relying on the mobility of people, things, information, ideas, and so on.

> Instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (Massey 2005, 154–155)

I am arguing that the cosmopolitan language of literary life is the tongue in which Massey's "meeting-up (again)" occurs. It is the dialect of extroversion. The cosmopolitan language is artificially constructed, bound by its rules and paradigms in order to create wormholes between the moments, far-flung in space and time, when language workers "meet up." It is the conveyance that allows us to travel to distant lands (and to the country of the past). This is the promiscuity that makes the cosmopolitan language alluring, that gives the mistress tongue the power to lure us away from the mother tongue.

The cosmopolitan language of literary life is a language of mobility, one that holds itself at a remove from "place" in order to colonize "space." While Massey's "extroverted sense of place" aims (mostly) to celebrate the networks that link places to each other, she also acknowledges the position of those on whom mobility is imposed, by strife at home or by economic necessity. The movement of capital iso-

lates others, born to less desirable locales, in backwater places.[11] In a similar way, the cosmopolitan languages of pre-modern literary life demanded a significant investment on the part of language workers: the intellectual discipline required to acquire a new dialect in which to express their thoughts. They punished those who failed to make the grade, those who could not achieve proficiency and eloquence by the standards set by literary history. Some language workers, inevitably, policed the boundaries of their beloved language and trolled those whom they believed did not belong. The would-be writer who could not perform was sentenced to irrelevance, or perhaps left to tell vernacular tales after dark to the women and children of the household. In late medieval Europe, the vernacular revolution promised to loosen the tongues of those who preferred not to spend the precious hours of their youth memorizing paradigms: they promised to put the instrument of literacy into the hands of all. If the mother tongue is the language of literature, then any man jack may be a writer! Over time, the familiarization of this paradigm encouraged distrust of those who used a learned language in order, presumably, to hide their work from others: from more honest segments of society.

It would be a mistake to idealize the cosmopolitan language, or to deny that it is a harsh taskmistress. At the same time, I believe it's important to honor the labor of the nomads who take it on as literary instrument, and to recognize what they gains by choosing the cosmopolitan language as literary instrument. *Routes* web out from his text; and *roots* feather into the ground – only to be dislodged as they move on. The language itself shelters the nomad writer. It puts a starry sky above his books and a tapestry of cultivated soil beneath him, and it furnishes a tent to shelter him from wind and rain. Perhaps most important in political terms, the cosmopolitan language does not limit its sphere of influence to imperial capitals. It traverses territory and expands through the provinces, allowing provincial elites to speak back to the metropole. The cosmopolitan language is the lingua franca of space, the language in which networked places may speak to each other. It wins the nomad's affection by liberating her from the narrow confines of the singular place.

Mediterranean literature may be written in a national language, not a cosmopolitan language, of course. However, the literature most of interest to the scholar of Mediterranean studies shares some qualities with the cosmopolitan language, because of its engagement with Mediterranean geography and history: the rhythm of transit, the outward gaze from the shore of the sea toward other ports, the consciousness of the entanglement of languages and cultural traditions. Here, it is use-

11 In addition to the works cited above, fn. 5, see also Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, especially chapter 11.

ful to draw the distinction between literature *in* the Mediterranean and literature *of* the Mediterranean.[12] Jean-Claude Izzo's detective novels, for instance, may be more relevant to a scholar of Mediterranean Studies than Andrea Camilleri's. Readers treasure Camilleri's Palermo for his closely observed *sicilitudine*, not his feel for broader Mediterranean sights and sounds, smells and tastes. Izzo, however, threads his Marseilles into Mediterranean circuits of migration. Its present is redolent of the Mediterranean past. His Marseilles is a mise-en-abyme of the history of transit and trade and the layering of languages that historians associate with the sea. His Marseilles trilogy exemplifies how the literature of the Mediterranean, like the cosmopolitan language, converts the *space* of the sea into a *place* – one in which, to return to Doreen Massey's suggestive and lovely phrase, "that meeting-up (again)" occurs. Mediterranean literature conveys a sense of the sea not as a border delimiting the edge of reason and the end of the story, but rather as a beginning. And, of course, the Marseilles trilogy demonstrates the anxiety about the criminality that reaches dry land from the "corrupting sea" of scholarship and myth.

Boccaccio's tale of Alatiel (*Decameron*, II.7) is in a sense the classic Mediterranean fiction, embodying the elements of movement, contact, linguistic complexity and a hint of naughtiness.[13] Daughter of the sultan of Cairo, she sets sail from Alexandria, destined to marry the Muslim ruler of Algarve (present-day Portugal). She is shipwrecked on Majorca, and there her adventures begin: due to shipwrecks and piracy, she is passed from one man to another, hooking up in a crisscrossing pattern of alliances with men from all the shores of the Mediterranean, princes, merchants, and sailors. Clearly, Boccaccio's story embodies the gender sensibility of his era. He treats his female protagonist as an object; he gives her no agency, beyond a Mona-Lisa smile – she loses the ability to speak once she leaves the lands of the Arabs – and the physical pleasure she derives from her many "marriages." More relevant to my argument, Boccaccio's tale reflects the dynamic energy directed outward from the port cities of the Mediterranean. In Mediterranean literature, the story doesn't end at the shore. Rather, possibilities ramify from the edge of the sea. The Mediterranean makes the end of the story unpredictable. Storms or contrary winds might sweep the ship in any direction; travelers might arrive in a port

12 I rely on Horden and Purcell's distinction between history *in* the Mediterranean – "contingently Mediterranean or best conceived under some other heading" – and history *of* the Mediterranean, "history either of the whole Mediterranean or of an aspect of it to which the whole is an indispensable framework" (Horden and Purcell 2000, 2).

13 For the story of Alatiel (*Decameron* II:7) see Boccaccio (1951–1952, 1:217–249). For a thoughtful discussion of this tale in the context of medieval Mediterranean history, see Kinoshita and Jacobs (2007).

city from any direction. Openness to the sea, and journeys that start at the sea, are a defining characteristic of Mediterranean literature. Compare, for instance, the classic works of American literature that see the Pacific Ocean as goal, the place where the protagonist's physical journey must end, and his gaze must turn inward. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, for instance, or Henry Miller's *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*, or Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* depict the Pacific coastline as the end of the road. For the protagonists of these books, like the European settlers of the Pacific Northwest described by Jonathan Raban, meaning ends where the ocean begins. Arrival at Land's End connotes a personal reckoning because no outward journey can commence from the shore.

It is in the nature of technical terms to be metaphors. The "Mediterranean" of Mediterranean literature is a metaphorical displacement: it represents the space of the sea and the history of the sea as place. It connotes a long history of being unsettled by the irruption of the foreign and the aleatory into the placid, even monotonous place of cities that are typically (following Horden and Purcell's formulation) isolated from their hinterlands and connected, sometimes sporadically, to other Mediterranean ports.[14] Mediterranean literature represents this history using spatial metaphors: the ship that carries Alatiel across the sea and the ports where her fate unfolds, for instance; the Marseilles of Jean-Claude Izzo; the Milan of Amara Lakhous; the Istanbul of Orhan Pamuk.

In an essay on the use of metaphors in cultural geography and environmental history, geographer David Demeritt reflects on the strategies that geographers and historians use to represent nature. Like Mediterranean literary historians, cultural geographers and environmental historians struggle to represent the nature-culture divide. How does the scholar attribute agency to the non-human without reifying "a transcendent nature beyond culture" and without "ignoring the ways in which nature is constructed for us in language" (Demeritt 1994, 180)? We might rephrase his question to ask: How does the Mediterranean literary historian attribute agency to the Mediterranean itself, as engine of cultural production, without ignoring the ways in which local languages and literary traditions condition the work of literature? Demeritt uses Bruno Latour's network theory and Donna Haraway's posthuman thinking to propose a workaround, a way to deconstruct the nature-culture dichotomy that vitiates scholarship on the intersection of geography and history. Demeritt argues that Latour's networks, which entangle non-human and human actors, and Haraway's cyborg, which acts autonomously yet without human con-

14 This description relies upon Horden and Purcell's (2000, 53–88) description of the "definite places" of the Mediterranean.

sciousness or emotions, together may serve as metaphors that reframe the nature-culture divide and may inspire the work of geographers and historians both.

Mediterranean literary historians, like cultural geographers and environmental historians, might mine network theory and posthuman thinking for metaphors to reterritorialize national literary histories in our work. The category "Mediterranean literature" relies upon the work of historians of the Mediterranean who have described the economic and environmental systems that act in concert to drive the cycles of Mediterranean thinking. It attributes agency to the non-human: the storms that blow Alatiel into the arms of yet another suitor, for instance; the ship that carries her from shore to shore; the capricious sea itself. Like the cosmopolitan language, Mediterranean literature rests upon a foundation of linguistic and cultural complexity. It transposes the logic of transit that drives Mediterranean history into a single time and place, metaphorically representing the space of the sea as place. Because of the importance of Mediterranean history and geography to our scholarship, we – like the cultural geographers who have learned to see the layered cultural traces present even in apparently isolated places – might frame a critical vocabulary to recognize and describe the connectivity and entanglements that animate the literary traditions that so enchant us.

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