

Sea of Literatures

Alpe Adria e dintorni, itinerari mediterranei

Letteratura e cinema di confine

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Edited by

Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl and Steffen Schneider

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Introduction

Mediterranean Literary Studies – Definitions, Purpose, and Applications

1 The Mediterranean as a System

The study of the Mediterranean region has long since become a classical field of research, and is well established in the academic world, especially in Historical Studies. This can be seen in the existence of numerous standard scholarly works, such as Fernand Braudel's magnum opus *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Peregrine Horden's and Nicholas Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* or David Abulafia's *The Great Sea. A Human History of the Mediterranean*, to cite just a few particularly prominent texts as examples. Fernand Braudel's role here is that of a founding figure, for he demonstrated that the Mediterranean region shares a unity based on climatic and natural features and that these natural conditions decisively shape Mediterranean civilizations and their history. Braudel thus formulated, on the one hand, the dependence of history on nature and, on the other hand, the need to understand Mediterranean history not only as a sequence of events but also as a manifestation of the overall Mediterranean system. This notion of the Mediterranean as a system whose parts are determined by their connection to the whole set a standard that has not been abandoned by recent historical research, although modern historians certainly distance themselves from Braudel's grand design. David Abulafia, for example, criticizes Braudel for neglecting the actions of people, the exchange of goods and ideas, and the relationships between cultures. The subtitle of his Mediterranean book, *A Human History of the Mediterranean*, even expresses this distancing with its emphasis on the human (as opposed to Braudel's geographical thinking). And yet, even for the British historian, the systemic idea is preserved, as one must always keep the whole in view when devoting oneself to the detail. An essay by Peregrine Horden points in a similar direction, succinctly distinguishing between two historiographical approaches to the Mediterranean. One he calls "history in the Mediterranean," by which is meant an account of individual items in the Mediterranean but not strongly reflecting the Mediterranean context; the

other, “history of the Mediterranean,” whose interest is the Mediterranean as a whole. (Horden 2005: 27)

This fundamental distinction between a systematic and an episodic approach to the history of the Mediterranean can also be applied to literature. If one wants to establish a methodologically independent literary studies of the Mediterranean, it is not enough to deal with individual texts that originated in the Mediterranean region and/or represent it. We should only speak of a Mediterranean literary studies if the context of the Mediterranean region as such comes into view. Let us briefly explain this with an example from Italian literature, namely Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel *Il gattopardo* (1958, English translation as *The Leopard*, 1960). It is a modern Italian classic that, in the background, tells the story of Sicily in the second half of the nineteenth century: beginning with the arrival of Giuseppe Garibaldi’s troops in Sicily in May 1860, it tells of the end of the rule of the Spanish Bourbons, the unification of the island with the newly founded Kingdom of Italy, the decline of the old aristocracy and the rise of new bourgeois classes linked to organized crime. The novel focuses on the fate of the family of Prince Don Fabrizio, which illustrates the impact of historical developments on the Sicilians. For long stretches of the novel, the protagonist’s point of view dominates the interpretation of events: for Don Fabrizio, the new Italian government merely continues the series of foreign dominations over Sicily, while the Sicilian population, in habitual apathy, bows its neck under a foreign yoke. Instead of being enthusiastic about the new, for the prince, this newness is only a repetition of the ever same. For him, Sicilian identity is the result of the interplay of a cyclically repeating history with the extreme nature of the island, especially the mercilessly blazing sun. Lampedusa’s novel thus sketches the image of a closed, impenetrable Sicilianity and has thus entered the canon of modern Italian national literature.

But what changes if *Il gattopardo* is considered a Mediterranean novel, or if it is analyzed from a Mediterranean point of view? It is clear, first and foremost, that such an analysis must read the novel against the grain, that is, it must uncover repressed and hidden relationships between Sicily and the Mediterranean that are rather concealed in the novel. Thus, instead of seeing the work solely in the context of Italy’s national history, one could take the prince’s statements about the series of conquerors of Sicily as an opportunity to critically inquire how differentiated this view of the so-called invaders is in the first place. The text goes to great lengths to construct an intrinsically rigid Sicilian identity, demarcated from the nation-state of Italy as much as from the island’s Mediterranean environment – but we need not adopt this construction; we can expose it as an ideology, explore its causes and functions. A critical deconstruction of the discourse of identity would be able to recognize the radical distinction made in the novel between the Sicilians and their Mediterranean conquerors as a form of historical falsifica-

tion; it would thus allow us to pose the question of Sicily's relationship to the rest of the Mediterranean in a new way. From a methodological point of view, other texts could be consulted that offer alternative historical narratives, or *Il gattopardo* could be compared with works of other Mediterranean literatures to identify commonalities, etc. In any case, the viewpoint of national philology would have to be abandoned and replaced by a decidedly Mediterranean contextualization. As Sharon Kinoshita urged with regard to other literary phenomena, abandoning the confines of national philology is absolutely necessary if such relationships are to be given space. Indeed, national historiography and single-language limitations must be replaced by transnational and pluri- or translingual approaches (Kinoshita 2009, 602; Kinoshita 2014, 314; Akbari 2013, 5) if the real textual, cultural, and other interconnections of the Mediterranean are to be adequately addressed. The strong contemporary interest in Mediterranean studies is probably due in part to the fact that we live 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. This explains the fascination with the comparative, transnational challenges of Mediterranean literatures.

2 Memories and Identities

In addition to a comparative approach, which is capable of uncovering relationships between the literatures and languages of the Mediterranean region, memory studies, as established in the German-speaking world by Jan Assmann (e.g., Assmann 2011) and Aleida Assmann (e.g., Assmann 1993) who developed the methods of Maurice Halbwachs (1925; 1939), are of outstanding methodological importance. The basic assumption is that the social cohesion of groups – which also include states – is created by collective processes of memory. These procedures include, among other things, the creation of canons that define, for example, what is to be counted as literature of a country and what is not, or which historical events are to be given special value and which are not. The founding of modern nation-states is often accompanied by a preference for certain linguistic developments and by the identification of outstanding cultural achievements that are appropriate for creating a national identity. A closer look, however, reveals that such canonization processes and memory endowments come at the expense of alternative versions. Thus, fundamental works on medieval literature (Menocal 1987; Mallette 2005) have shown that, for example, the exclusion of Arabic as a cultural language from the national memory of Italy or Spain by modern philology must be revised, because without the consideration of Arabic, which may stand here only as an example for other, similar cases, real conditions in the Middle Ages can-

not be adequately described. How Mediterranean memories are formed and what consequences this has for the identities of groups, but also for the cognition of texts, is one of the most important fields of research in Mediterranean literary studies. Cases of shared and contested memories are of particular interest in this regard: 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. A shared Mediterranean memory is therefore always a contested, disputed memory.

Several articles in the present volume are dedicated to the analysis of Mediterranean memories. The opening article *Tales of the Adriatic* by Cristina Benussi presents a historical and geographic journey through genres and texts that narrate events set in or related to a macro-region of the Mediterranean, namely the Adriatic Sea, in what appears to be a broad literary reconnaissance extending from the manuals and portolans of Humanism to the reportages of the present. This series of selected narrative, memorial, odeporic or poetic references shows how the Adriatic area – in the different seasons that have characterized it and that are punctuated by the account of pilgrimages, voyages of discovery, conflicts, and myths that span from *The Argonautica* to Claudio Magris' Danubian readings – reflects the multiplicity of Mediterranean cultures that have scattered significant traces along its shores.

Central to Sara Izzo's contribution *Interconnected Histories and Construction of Collective Memories* are the *lieux de mémoire* (Pierre Nora). A related analytical approach derives from the studies of Maryline Crivello who has applied the concept of *anti-lieu de mémoire* to the Mediterranean (Crivello 2010, 19), as a cross-roads of multiple narrative identities that are based on the continuous overlapping of different memories, in a constant process of inscription and reinscription, that, according to Izzo, operates in a rhizomatic vision of a palimpsest-like memory. Crivello's considerations are equally in tune with Michael Rothberg's (2010, 3) concept of the *noeuds de mémoire*, which aims to examine the interactions and conflicts that develop on a supranational scale. Izzo analyzes French and Italian travel writings in the context of the imperial and colonial expansion of the late 19th and early 20th centuries from this perspective, particularly regarding Carthage, which becomes an exemplary case of nationalistic and/or interconnected memories (with Gabriel Audisio's 1936 travelogue *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée II. Le sel de la mer* [Youth of the Mediterranean II. The Salt of the Sea] and the travel writings of Giacomo di Martino and Gualtiero Castellini).

In *A Story of Two Shores – Transnational Memory and Ottoman Legacy in Modern Greek Novels* Charikleia Magdalini Kefalidou focuses on the forms of representation of the Ottoman legacy – in terms of identity and otherness – in two Greek texts: Dido Sotiriou's biographical novel *Ματωμένα Χώματα* (Farewell Anatolia,

1962) and Soloup's graphic novel *Aivali* (2016). The era portrayed – in the wake of a series of memoirs also diversified by genre – is that of the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire between the end of the First World War and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). From Brian Catlos' (2014, 375) historical considerations and Nicholas Doumanis' (2013) concept of intercommunalism to the places of memory theorized by Pierre Nora (1989), the contribution opens up a series of varied considerations around genre (i. e., biographies and autobiographies *in primis* and the thematization of the boundaries between reality and fiction) and different ethical approaches towards memory, on the one hand, and forms of connectedness such as intertextuality, intermediality (regarding the different semantics of the graphic novel), and especially the presence of multiple languages on the other, as a function of transnational narrative modes that hypothesize a reterritorialization (Kinoshita 2014, 314) of the area in question.

Elisabeth Stadlinger's essay *The Literary Construction of Mediterranean Identity – Memory and Myth in Maria Corti* weighs distinct aesthetic approaches in the construction of Mediterranean identity. Her references are Maria Corti's *L'ora di tutti* [Everybody's Hour], a novel in three parts that deals with the conquest of Otranto by the Ottoman Empire in 1480, and *Il canto delle sirene* [The Sirene's Song], a hybrid text that transforms ancient Mediterranean mythology (in which mermaids are timeless metaphors) into a global literary discourse. Examining memory and myth, Stadlinger's essay focuses on Maria Corti's aesthetic construction and conceptualization of the Mediterranean in relation to the two texts under consideration. The Mediterranean acquires importance in this regard as a mental space, that is, as an interaction between imagination and reality and as a symbolic construction. In this sense, for Maria Corti, the Mediterranean presents itself as a semiotic universe, based on the connectivity of knowledge.

Adrian Grima shows in his contribution *Elusive Mediterraneans – Reading beyond Nation*, that Malta presents a special case concerning the question of whether one can truly speak of a Mediterranean literature. Indeed, historical, or political circumstances can occur that create temporal interruptions or prevent an awareness of the existence of a Mediterranean literature. That seems to have happened in Malta, as Grima demonstrates. He bases his indictment on a series of negative examples that reveal forms of concealment or certain shifts in perspective. After attempts to recalibrate the national imaginary before and after Maltese independence, the 1990s reveal a clear orientation that goes beyond the regional and national. To illustrate this, Grima analyzes the poems of Antoine Cassar and the autobiographical novel *L-Eżodu taċ-ĊIkonji* (*The Exodus of the Storks*) by Walid Naban, which refer to representations of the Mediterranean on a discursive level. In doing so, the analysis follows the hypothesis of a Mediterranean literature that can function as a “heuristic tool” as proposed by Michael Herzfeld (2005) and Shar-

on Kinoshita (2017). Whether this can apply to Maltese literature, especially in relation to the question of the existence of a Mediterranean literature that avoids euro- or arabocentric traps, i.e., the barriers set by religion, remains open.

The analysis to which Steffen Schneider's contribution *The Forger as an Ambivalent Muse* subjects Leonardo Sciascia's *Il consiglio d'Egitto* (*The Council of Egypt*, 1963) illustrates a similar ambivalence of Sicily towards the Mediterranean. The novel is about the true story of a forger named Giuseppe Vella, who, in the eighteenth century, created two faked Arabic codices on the medieval history of Sicily. The prerequisite for the success of this extraordinarily popular forgery was the almost complete suppression of the island's Muslim past. Leonardo Sciascia uses the figure of the forger to revise the common interpretation of Sicilian history. In place of the fixation on the traumas of Sicily's unification with Italy, characteristic of twentieth-century literature, Sciascia sets a new, culturally open version: with Vella begins the rediscovery of Sicily's Arab history and the island's Mediterranean connections.

3 Social and Linguistic Spaces

If this introduction to the main features of a Mediterranean literary studies has been opened with a reference to the historical sciences, it is because the latter have already reached a high methodological standard of Mediterranean studies. In addition, the concept of a geographic-climatic-cultural unity of the Mediterranean (Braudel) and the notion of connectivity (Horden/Purcell) are readily adopted by literary studies. To all appearances, then, a literary study of the Mediterranean may closely rely on historical studies. However, for literary studies, following the methods of the historical sciences bears the danger of neglecting the aesthetic characteristics of literary texts.

It is therefore essential for Mediterranean literary studies to use appropriate spatial concepts to describe the fictional and non-fictional Mediterranean region. To this end, it can adapt the variety of approaches and methods that have developed in relation to the so-called spatial turn in cultural studies. It is useful to distinguish three literary manifestations of the Mediterranean space: (1) First of all, the Mediterranean Sea is a geographic space: it consists of the water as a habitat and transportation route, the surrounding coastal zone, the islands, the settlements, and the different peoples along with the languages spoken there. This space is studied by historians, geographers, biologists, and experts from other disciplines, but it also plays a role for literary scholars. (2) The space encountered in literature, however, is not reduced to this physical space, but includes its fictional representation and construction that evokes reality in different ways. (3) Finally,

the Mediterranean can also be described as a conceptual space, that is i.e., a space that in the course of the time has generated an enormous variety and abundance of ideologies, discourses, and concept about the Mediterranean. These three spaces, described in detail below, are obviously separable only in theoretical abstraction, while in the reality of the phenomena under consideration they interpenetrate and support each other.

Real space plays a role for literature to the extent that producers are taken into account: indeed, the places where authors, translators, publishers, and critics live, or the dynamics of relevant literary markets, play a significant role in the creation of literary texts. Personal networks, social conflicts, and linguistic realities shape the poetics and aesthetics of literature. The Mediterranean is abundant with such literary sites: there is the translators' school of Toledo, where the Arabic, Jewish and Latin worlds meet and share their knowledge; there is the court of Frederick II in Palermo, where the world of Occitan troubadours and Arabic poetry meets Sicilian courtiers who begin to write poetry in their vernacular and thus initiate Italy's medieval lyricism. There is the Tangier of the International Zone, where Western emigres and bohemians congregate and produce texts. There is colonial Algeria, where in the 1930s the French intellectuals Gabriel Audisio, Albert Camus, Emmanuel Roblès and others meet and decisively shape the Mediterranean thinking of the twentieth century. The conditions of literary production can be investigated with a combination of approaches and questions; for example: what are the relevant constellations and networks regarding Mediterranean literary production? Through which institutions, personalities, or networks do texts move back and forth between cultures, languages, or dominion territories? In addition to the places themselves, the movements in these spaces are of importance for literary production. Migration, flight, travel, tourism, mercantile movements, or enslavement are factors that affect the producers of literature. The experience of exile, flight, and displacement, as well as that of travel, affect the texts in different ways. Moreover, it is not only people who move through the Mediterranean, but also texts or literary materials. The study of migratory texts is of great relevance to Mediterranean literary studies because it can shed light on the extent to which there is a shared Mediterranean textual archive: which texts from a particular social group or language were actually studied, read, received by other groups in the Mediterranean? How were they adapted and modified to meet their respective cultural needs? And what role do translations play in all this?

The translation, reception and circulation of Latin and Arabic texts are investigated in Daniel G. König's contribution *Latin-Arabic Literary Entanglement and the Concept of "Mediterranean Literature"*, which proposes a possible definition of Mediterranean literature, namely as "the sum of literary themes and concrete works shared between different linguistic orbits that form part of the historical

and contemporary literary landscapes of the geographical Mediterranean". The article investigates to what extent forms of "Mediterranean literature" have emanated from the entanglement of different literary spheres, each characterized by a particular language. In view of the many languages spoken in and around the Mediterranean since prehistorical times (Grévin 2012), it is impossible to trace the history of literary entanglement both in the *longue durée* and by considering more than two linguistic systems. By focusing on the literary entanglement of Latin and Arabic, this article – written by a historian – contributes to this volume as a kind of "pre-history" and "collateral history" to the role played by Romance languages in the formation of Mediterranean literature(s).

Marianna Deganutti's *Mapping the Mediterranean with Language – Matvejevi's Mediterranean Breviary* questions real space, actors, and languages in light of a range of possible classifications. Predrag Matvejevic argues against a coherent and unified reading of Mediterranean space as it is subject to continuous shaping over time. For this, the author resorts to a specific literary genre, the breviary, which he interprets independently, emphasizing its accommodation of a considerable amount of information in a scattered order. In this direction, in addition to examining the similarities and differences that characterize the area (which denotes a certain affinity with the categories of connectivity and fragmentation identified by Horden and Purcell), the breviary is characterized by a variety of approaches in which linguistic interactions between neighboring or contacting civilizations (e.g., in marine lexicology) are of particular importance and allow for unconventional boundaries to be drawn around the Mediterranean space from a transnational and transdisciplinary perspective.

Karla Mallette in *Territory / Frontiers / Routes: Space, Place, and Language in the Mediterranean* focuses – in light of a series of constructive questions regarding the role of languages and literary traditions within Mediterranean Studies, in what she calls "a defining exercise" – on several key terms, in particular that of cosmopolitan language (i.e., that which makes possible the circulation of people and texts as opposed to the languages of the here and now) along with the concepts of space and place and of frontier and boundary in a discourse that intends to reconsider their specificities beyond individual disciplines such as history and geography. The time span covered via a selection of literary examples – from Alatiel's Decameronian novella to Jean-Claude Izzo's *Marseille* – is broad, reaching from the pre-modern era to the twenty-first century, and allows for the assertion that, beyond periods of intensification or attenuation, Mediterranean connectivity – and a critical vocabulary that takes into account their suggestive literary traditions – is ever-present.

4 Fictional Spaces

The relationship between text and space changes as soon as one enters the level of representation, which no longer presupposes in any way the presence of the person writing in the Mediterranean since the limitation is determined solely by the object of fiction. The fictional space both represents as well as constructs the Mediterranean or its parts. Its analysis is concerned with the semantic, aesthetic, and political values that fiction ascribes to the geographical space. Literary representations often draw on real space, using the experiences of merchants and sailors, pilgrims and warriors, to lend authenticity to their depictions. But no matter how close to reality a literary representation of the Mediterranean may be, texts always subject what is depicted to secondary coding, ascribing to it new semantic meanings and aesthetic value.

As far as literary space is concerned, although it is not possible to delve here into the large number of literary theories investigating its substance, perception, or forms of representation in relation to Mediterranean studies, some significant approaches or readings can be identified; for example, those aimed at considering space in a symbolic, moral, or religious key. This is accompanied – beginning with the Renaissance – by a vertical or horizontal perception of space through the use of pictorial or cartographic perspective until the postmodern era in which one can see the prevalence of a heterogeneous reading of space and its changing nature (e.g., according to the smooth or nomadic space codified by Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Bertrand Westphal's (2007) geocritical approach may also play a significant role in some cases for the purposes of the legibility of literary places located within or on the margins of the Mediterranean.

Of course, emphasizing the autonomy of literary representation of Mediterranean topography does not preclude literature from emphasizing the characteristics of geographic space. Regarding the *Decameron*, for example, Kinoshita notes that “this unruly patchwork of states and political actors, combined with the fragmented geography of myriad islands and rugged coastlines, made for an ideal environment for piracy and corsairing to flourish.” The same is true for its literary representation. In this regard, and in relation to the connectivity identified by Horoden and Purcell (2000) and the interdisciplinary approaches of what is informally referred to as the “California school” of Mediterranean studies (to which Brian Catlos also belongs), Sharon Kinoshita in “Avendo di servidori bisogno”: *Decameron* 5.7 and the Medieval Mediterranean Slave Trade focuses on a specific medieval novella from a demonstrative perspective. The intent is to illustrate, through precise analysis, the importance of historical studies and perspectives in ensuring the proper interpretation of Mediterranean literary texts in the totality of their references

(where the more explicitly Mediterranean elements are present in the notes or in the glossaries and via the comparison between the primary sources and the text itself).

Representations of the real and the metaphorical sea together with the heterotopias that are produced in the Mediterranean is another one of the essential keys to interpretations of the space under consideration as demonstrated by Roberta Morosini, in *For a Geo-Philology of the Sea. Writing Cartography, Mapping the Mediterranean Mare Historiarum, from Dante to Renaissance Islands Books* questions the ways in which the sea can be read as a narrative space, starting with Dante's *Commedia (Divine Comedy)* and continuing through the Italian Trecento and the first nautical charts until granting space to the island books. Focusing on geo-cultural aspects, Roberta Morosini's investigation thus produces an image of the sea as a "geographic space that ultimately tells the story of humanity". In what she calls "an exercise in philology and mapping the Mediterranean with the support of geocriticism," Morosini proposes a set of epistemological tools useful for reading the sea from Dante to the genre of Renaissance island books, namely "space, maps, crossings, symbols and time."

Renaissance island books are also covered in Verena Ebermeier's and Jonas Hock's contribution *Concepts of Mediterranean Islandness from Ancient to Early Modern Times – A Philological Approach* which examines the literary concept of Mediterranean insularity from antiquity to the early modern age. Their analysis focuses on the literary forms that shaped the access to the spatiality of islands located within the Mediterranean or related to it, for example, as a place of departure. It then goes on to consider the Mediterranean as a palimpsest in which various forms of insularity can be seen as metaphors (the most frequent case) or allegories that prepare one for courtly life; in which the question of different paradigms of travel is addressed, from the life of Ulysses to that of the character thematized by Cristoforo Buondelmonti's *Descriptio Arcipelagi insularum [Description of the Island of Crete]*; as assessing the connection established with the semantics of paradise, between real and fantastic island spaces and between what is known and what is unknown; between utopias of different signatures that refer to spaces located beyond the Mediterranean; and where what is signified is more the landing place (also in relation to archipelagos connecting islands and micronarratives) than the voyage or the itinerary itself.

Marília Jöhnk's essay *Marseille and the Mediterranean in the Writings of Yoko Tawada and Tahar Ben Jelloun* analyzes Marseille both as an intertextual paradigm of Mediterranean literary studies and in relation to its nature as a multicultural port city and its function as a link between different authors, languages, and backgrounds. It starts with Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Marseille, comme un matin d'insomnie* [Marseille, Like a Sleepless Morning] (1986), then continues with Yoko Tawada's

short story *Die Zweischalige* [The Two-Shelled] (2002) to Jules Supervielle's poem *Marseille* (1996). While the German-Japanese writer Yoko Tawada focuses on the port and the role and significance of language and translations, the Uruguayan-born French poet Jules Supervielle welcomes the multicultural dimension and allegorical reflections of the city in his verses written in 1927; greater prominence, however, is given to the combination of Tahar Ben Jelloun's poems and Thierry Ibert's photographs depicting the Port d'Aix quarter in its transformation and gentrification, granting space to nostalgia and aspects linking it to Camus, a name that, together with Izzo, recurs frequently in multiple contributions in this volume. In this fabric of different identities, the literary Mediterranean with Marseille at its center thus qualifies as a complex system dense with intertextual connections.

Angela Fabris in her essay *Heterotopic and Striated Spaces in the Mediterranean Crime Fiction of Amara Lakhous and Jean-Claude Izzo* focuses on the one hand on the presence of heterotopias (as particularly significant counterspaces in the variegated and multiethnic landscape of Mediterranean metropolises, even those that can be defined as such despite not benefiting from a direct sea outlet). On the other hand, her contribution considers the presence of smooth and striated spaces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) which, in their constant mutation in the face of ever new hindrances or infractions – in singular analogy with crime which also constitutes an obstacle or a sort of interruption in the normal flow of life – represent the texture of the geo-socio-political space of urban environments reflected in the detective stories of J.-C. Izzo and A. Lakhous. In these novels, Mediterranean space is connoted in a multi-ethnic sense as a space of resistance and, in its urban offshoots, as a palimpsest undergoing continuous redefinition.

5 Conceptional Spaces

The Mediterranean is an intensely discussed place in every sense of the word. Literary, scientific, and other conceptions of this space have existed for millennia, and it does not appear that the production of Mediterranean discourses will come to a halt in the near future. It is therefore not just a metaphor to understand the Mediterranean as a discursive, epistemological, or conceptual space. Thus, it is impossible to comment on the Mediterranean without drawing on the enormous archive of discourses that have already been expressed. The fictionalization and representation of the Mediterranean and the development of Mediterranean aesthetics and poetics moves within this conceptual space, it is never free of the discourses and epistemologies of the Mediterranean, it is always shaped by them. The ways in which texts refer to the Mediterranean discourses are never limited to the adoption of existing conceptions, but include their critique, transformation, actu-

alization. It is equally clear that literary texts are also part of the conceptual space insofar as they contribute to its constant ‘discursivization’. From a methodological point of view, examining the Mediterranean as a conceptual space means focusing on the intertextual space that connects the literary works within the discursive network, and in doing so, examining what kind of relation is involved in each case.

Albert Göschl’s article *A Mediterranean Utopia – The Renaissance Fiction of Plusiapolis as an Ideal of Mediterranean Connectivity* examines the utopian impact of Mediterraneanism. Literary utopias serve as manifestations of this phenomenon, such as Filarete’s *Libro architettonico* (*Treatise on Architecture*). Written shortly after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the manuscript is traditionally regarded as a testament to theoretical architecture. However, adopting a literary perspective, it reveals a complex metadiegetic novel that envisions an imagined society infused with an abundance of ‘boundless’ Mediterranean elements. Göschl shows how within this narrative, the protagonist establishes an ideal utopian city, uncovering remnants of an ancient counter-town named Plusiapolis, characterized by urban structures and influenced by the imagery of oriental and eastern Mediterranean architecture. Göschl thus re-interprets Filarete’s *libro architettonico* as one of the first early modern Mediterranean utopias, investigating the influence of the Eastern Mediterranean on literary utopias and exploring the potential impact of the book on the post-Ottoman conquest and reconstruction of Constantinople.

In *La pensée de midi Revisited: Mediterranean Connectivity Between Paul Arène, Albert Camus, and Louis Brauquier* Sophia Schnack and Daniel Winkler favor a form of interchange between different literary spaces and topoi as a challenge to hegemonic forms of literary representations of that space. In considering a range of French texts – canonical and non-canonical – from the 1880s to the 1950s, the two scholars elucidate different forms of regionality and transnationality as an alternative to a Mediterraneanity understood from a unilateral perspective. If Paul Arène’s novel *Paris ingénue* (1882) connects north and south, city and country, modernity and archaism to the point of reversing the hegemonic gaze, Jean Grenier in his lyric texts and Albert Camus in his nonfiction excursions look to the South – that is, to Lourmarin in the Provençal hinterland in one case and to Algeria in the other – as proof of a transnational connectivity in which present and past and north bank and south bank converge in a Mediterranean and transnational model of life. The intent here is to contextualize the *pensée de midi* by putting it in perspective as a symbol of connectivity and as a representation of an antihegemonic vision of the South. Again, based on the studies of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, Mediterranean connectivity is understood as a multi-level interaction of highly distinctive Mediterranean micro-regions.

Beyond the traditional divisions based on national affiliation, there is a growing tendency to develop discourses of a transnational character. According to Stéphane Baquey's *The Possibility of the Mediterranean and the Contribution of Poetic Cross-Cultural Philologies*, this is the case of poetic formulas that, while belonging to distinct epochs and spaces, still share a common reference to al-Andalus, which serves as an illustrative model for Federico García Lorca's poetry in 1920s and 1930s Spain, for Louis Aragon as the author of *Le Fou d'Elsa* [Elsa's Fool] (1963) in post-World War II France, and Mahmūd Darwiš with his 1992 poetic suite *Aḥad 'Aṣar Kawkabān 'alā Ajir al-mašhad al-Andalusī* [Eleven Planets over the Last Andalusian Scene] in 1980s/1990s Palestine. These authors expressed themselves in relation to different spaces and times – based on the layered and contrapuntal reference of al-Andalus – in a de-territorialized philology, highlighting a transregional Mediterranean perspective in literary studies.

Thus, it is possible to observe the production of echoes and influences that determine successive intertextual relations and spillovers alongside a chronological succession of different figurative coagulates. Such a case is presented in the article by Charles Sabatos and Ceyhun Arslan, *Đurišin's Interliterary Mediterranean as a Model for World Literature*, who rely on Đurišin's interliterary theory of the Mediterranean in their examination of a specific Arabic prose text, *Al-Sāq 'alā al-sāq* (Leg over leg, 1855) by the Ottoman-Lebanese writer Ahmād Fāris al-Shidyaq. In it, we witness the journey taken in the Mediterranean and beyond by an autobiographical narrator who, on his travels, is confronted by different linguistic and political hierarchies. From this it becomes clear that the interliterary Mediterranean – as a space of knowledge – is an ideal environment for comparatists to study world literature and its ability to accommodate geographical criteria broader than national or linguistic ties (Đurišin 1992, 156) and to recognize the role of minor literatures (in the wake of the lucid reflections of Deleuze and Guattari 1986). It thus highlights the possibility, on the one hand of undermining specific hegemonies and, on the other, the fact of opening to the cultural hybridity of the Mediterranean (Sabatos 2016, 52–53). This critical path leads to the assumption of “the existence of a trans-Mediterranean geographical space” in its bringing together different textual and linguistic textures and fabrics (MacDonald 2013, 58, 59), which brings Đurišin's concept of interliterary communities closer to the “connectivity and fragmentation” identified by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000, 5).

Conceptions of gender and of a gendered Mediterranean South are discussed in Serena Todesco's *A Female Mediterranean South? Italian Women Writers Gendering Spaces of Meridione*. Todesco's theoretical considerations inquire into the narrative strategies used by several contemporary female writers to identify and break down patriarchal stereotypes related to the South, opening up to a non-



Figure 1: Prunes, Mateus, active 1553–1599 [Chart of the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and the coasts of western Europe and northwest Africa], In civitate Majorica: Mateus Prunes, anno 1559. © Library of Congress.

regulatory configuration of Sicilian southern spaces. Along with the resumption of a series of wide-ranging theoretical propositions, the essay offers a close reading of the novel *Addio, fantasmi* (2018) by Sicilian writer Nadia Terranova, in which she observes how the gendered conceptualization of space involves a complex destabilization of identities and social relations. Considering the narrative reinventions of the South as a “female psychic-body-spatial landscape” (Milkova 2021, 4), we witness the analysis of different strategies implemented to link the often-stereotypical representations of a backward and patriarchal Meridione with the presence of female subjectivities that oppose forms of resistance and reinvention of that reality.

Iain Chambers’ essay *Learning from the Sea – Migration and Maritime Archives*, which proposes alternative ways of mapping the Mediterranean in order to challenge prevailing historical and geopolitical accounts regarding this marine perimeter, also takes this antihegemonic view by positing that to ask “who gets the map, frame and configure the world, that is to understand geography as power, is also to ask who has the right to narrate”. This is accompanied by the consideration that “the sea promotes an irreducible otherness.” In this sense, paraphrasing what was argued by Deleuze on cinema, a theory of the sea for Chambers is in essence a theory about the concepts to which the sea gives rise. This means opening oneself to an understanding of the Mediterranean as something that is subject to reconfigurations, that is, to processes that attempt to subvert resistant hegemonies.

Concluding this journey through genres, languages, traditions, epochs and critical and theoretical approaches, methodologies and connected disciplines, we would like to refer back to the image that accompanied our international conference in 2019, namely Matheus Prunes’ 1553 portolano, which seems to visually synthesize to perfection many of the aspects that resurface from one essay to another in this volume.

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Part I: Memories and Identities

Cristina Benussi (University of Trieste)

Tales of the Adriatic

Abstract: The tales set in the Adriatic Sea show the different cultures that have crossed it and the different situations experienced by those people: pirates, trade, pilgrimages to the holy land, wars, relief, sporting events and more, in different historical periods have left significant traces along its coasts. They reflect the multiplicity of Mediterranean cultures.

1 Geography and History

The Adriatic is a stretch of the Mediterranean, a sea longer than it is wide, oblique, oriented as it is from north/west to south/east. Its low, sandy west coast has no ports, unlike its rocky, jagged west coast, which is rich in moorings. This particular configuration, in addition to the system of winds and currents, for many centuries has forced sailors to zigzag between the Italian and Illyrian coasts, at least until the advent of steam ships. The trade of typical products of the two coasts has been therefore intense, and the movements of entire family groups belonging to the ethnic groups located on the opposite shores were frequent: from the Balkan area workers of various kinds arrived in the west, while Italian entrepreneurs left from here towards the east.

Since the year 1000 the Adriatic waterways were controlled by the Republic of Venice, which aimed to expand to the east. The opportunity was offered by the victory of its fleet, led by Pietro II Orseolo / Peter II Orseolo, against the Nazarene pirates that infested the Mediterranean: the coastal towns of Istria and Dalmatia spontaneously submitted to the power of the Serenissima. Reported since pre-Roman times, the attacks of the pirates, especially Saracens and Turks from the Ottoman Empire, were confirmed in the late Middle Ages by merchants and pilgrims to the Holy Land: in those waters they risked, if not the loss of life, certainly that of their property. The various merchant fleets that sailed the Adriatic, as Fernand Braudel tells us (1987), were still governed by sailors from the North Sea, or from the Illyrian coast. Even the deep-sea fishermen found a valuable help in the most experienced colleagues from the north or from the east coast. The Adriatic was a sea where many people could meet, crossing on its different shores: Ashkenazi Jews arrived mainly in Trieste and Venice; Corfiots and Sephardites found a home along the Italian peninsula, where there were also many settlements of Slavic, Turkish, Armenian, Albanian, Montenegrin people, etc. The contamination of different religions and cultures made the Adriatic Sea the backdrop of tales that

very often began with the stories of the origins of different cities, especially coastal ones. From the very first centuries, in fact, narratives of Ragusa, Sibenik, Trogir, on the one hand, Venice, Ravenna, Rimini and Ancona on the other were elaborated. Pirate conflicts, wild clashes for survival, linguistic crossbreeds, intense trade and so on had given rise to a real Adriatic repertoire that recounted the birth and rise of its dominant cities.

2 Mythical Historiography: Humanism

An example of the mythical historiography of the humanistic age is the poem by Gian Mario Filelfo, born in Constantinople, who in the 1470s composed his *Chroniche de la città de Anchona* (1979). He told of the fortunate journey of Fidefora, a queen forced to flee from Schiavonia after the death of her husband. Like Dido, who had escaped from Tyre to Carthage where she founded a kingdom, Fidefora, too, stopped on that Adriatic promontory and gave rise to a city, Ancona. However, it is puzzling that in describing the conquest of power by Ancona's inhabitants, no explicit mention is made of their victory over the Turks. Obviously, the author had good relations with them, since he called them generically “*popoli d'oriente*” / “peoples from the East”, arrived nearby to plunder the rich Ravenna. Their defeat was not attributed to their tactical inferiority, but to the perilousness of the navigation along the coast of the Adriatic's eastern shore, on whose rocks their ships would easily get stranded. In this blatant manipulation of historical data, Filelfo therefore appears much more diplomatic than Enea Silvio Piccolomini who, still shocked by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, when writing his *De Europa* five years later described the Turks as a “*truculento, svergognato, fornicatore*” / “truculent, shameful and fornicating” people. But he was to become Papa Pio II / Pope Pius II and precisely against them he wanted to organize a new crusade, which however he was unable to set up. Historiographically more correct, he sought to disprove fabulous allegations, starting with those about the Argonauts: according to him Jason and Medea did not sail from the Black Sea to Istria along the inland river system, nor did they follow the course of the Istro, before taking the Po. The documents he consulted, of course, did not mention such accounts.

3 Manuals, Diaries and Pilot Books of the Renaissance Bourgeoisie

It was the merchants who gave a new face to the Adriatic, such as Benedetto Cotrugli, a Dubrovnik citizen who lived between 1410 and 1469. Not only did he write the first *Libro de l'arte de la mercatura*,¹ but he also composed a *De navigazione* (1464/65), a description of life on board. With the pragmatic sense of those who look at the result rather than at theoretical hypotheses, Cotrugli taught the use of instruments useful for navigation and suggested ways to avoid possible dangers. He recommended sailors to maintain a friendly relationship with all those who practiced the trade, including Turks, beyond flags and religions. The two manuals have as corollary a firm principle of the early capitalistic economy, that is the need to profit from the enterprises but to limit it to a just profit, in order to distribute benefits also to the customers, who would be well disposed to buy other goods, if the merchant was honest.

A Venetian probably of Longobard origin, Marin Sanudo (1466–1536), called the Younger, was rather reluctant to take up positions in the maritime colonies of his Venice, which he loved deeply. In his *Diaries* (1879–1903) he has described in detail, in the form of a chronicle, the historical events that involved Venice from 1496 to 1533. The most interesting part of the story is the portrayal of the real strength of the Maritime Republic, that is to say its merchant fleet: Sanudo described the preparations for the departure, the assessment and planning of supplies, the forecast of risks such as pirate assaults and shipwrecks, basing his depiction on the reports provided by survivors. The powerful narration of the Arsenal, founded in 1104, is so famous that Dante took it as a benchmark for the Circle of Malebolge: in the XXI Canto of *Inferno / Hell*, the poet condemned those who used public office for personal benefit, to be immersed in boiling pitch like that of the Venetian shipyard. This place was actually a superb manufacturing site in which specialised workers carried out the individual operations of assembling standard components along an assembly line. It was one of the oldest examples of a pre-industrial economic-productive structure. Another subject of the Serenissima, originally from Rhodes, Giuseppe Rosaccio, in 1598 wrote a *Viaggio da Venetia a Costantinopoli. Per Mare, e per Terra, & insieme quello di terra Santa / Journey from Venice to Constantinople. By Sea, and by Land, & together that of the Holy Land* ([1598] 1992). The trauma of the collapse of the Eastern Empire had been overcome and this geogra-

¹ *Il trattato De navigazione di Benedetto Cotrugli* (1464–1465). Commented edition of ms. Schoenberg 473 with the text of ms.557 di Yale. Ed. Piero Falchetta. *Studi veneziani* LVII (2009): 16–334.

pher celebrated Lepanto where the Holy League, of which Venice was a member, had beaten the Ottomans. He could not possibly know that, despite such victory, from that moment on the decline of the Serenissima would begin, and therefore he wrote with all the pride of the son of a powerful homeland to which he owed obedience and respect. The route, the ports, the winds, the morphology of the coastal and inland territories, the agricultural and manufacturing production of the individual localities, the trade rules, the rarest goods, the descriptions of the habits of the locals, but also the legends of the foundation of the main places and their subsequent history, are accurately reported because, as the subtitle states, his study is “*utile, a Mercanti Marinari, & à Studiosi di Geografia*” / “useful, to Sea Merchants, & to Scholars of Geography”. The pirates, especially the Turks, and the garrisons of the fortifications erected in defense, became characters of a passionate representation. Rosaccio, however, wanted to reassure travellers that the Venetian Republic was very careful to make the Adriatic and Middle Eastern traffic safe. The good merchant did not hesitate to underline that the two civilizations, Christian and Ottoman, had both left impressive signs and that they could coexist with fruitful mutual exchanges. And this was true also for another purely Italian matter: nothing to object that in 1525, in his *Prose della vulgar lingua / Prose of the vulgar language*, the Venetian Pietro Bembo had recognized the primacy of Tuscan as a literary language. The important thing was that the Mediterranean commercial language remained Venetian.

4 Dossiers, Autobiographies, Letters: Towards the Modernity of the Enlightenment

The Serenissima had to contend with other forces in the Italian peninsula and in the rest of Europe that were changing the political balance and control of trade with the Levant through the Adriatic Sea, otherwise known as the Gulf of Venice. After Lepanto (1571) and seventy years of peace with the Turks, the conflict resumed. With the peace of Passarowitz (1718), the trade flows were strongly threatened by the competition from France and England, while the Habsburgs stepped in and in 1719 founded the new free port of the Austro-Hungarian empire in Trieste, which was to compete strongly with the city of the Doges. In fact, in the second book of his *Mémoires*,² Giacomo Casanova recounted the delicate diplomatic task

² *Le Mémoires de J. Casanova de Seingalt, écrits par lui-même* is the title of the old edition of Giacomo Casanova's memoirs. Written in French between 1789 and 1798, they were published posthumously around 1825 in a censored version, and placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1834,

entrusted to him by Venice, in 1741/42, at the court of Constantinople, when he was just twenty years old. As an old man, he recalled his round trip from Venice to Constantinople and back again along the classical route, the Istrian Vrsar, the Dalmatian and Dubrovnik outposts, the commercial, military and cultural settlements located in Kotor, Corfu and Korcula. He described vividly his sea voyage, insisting, however, above all on his romantic vicissitudes, without forgetting to equate the art of sailing with the wisdom of governing oneself and the things of the world. When he then fled from the Piombi, to earn merits and be able to return to his motherland in 1772 he went to Trieste. Here he spied on land and sea traffic, sending precious Adriatic information to Venice: number and type of ships, imperial concessions, goods traffic of the Habsburg fleet, and other useful information for the competition.

The relevance of factual information, the abandonment of mythology, and the need to adhere to the historical truth are the basis of the eighteenth-century narrative, born from the need for rational clarity invoked by the Enlightenment. Travellers and historians presented essential and objective facts, possibly free from prejudice. The legendary and adventurous aura disappeared and the Adriatic turned into a sea described with historical and scientific interest, according to the new genre inaugurated by the reports of the *Grand Tour*. The odeporic perspective, which at the end of the eighteenth century was promoted by members of the bourgeoisie in search of success, underpins, for example, the short story by Antonio De Giuliani (1785)³ from Trieste, who used economic terms to describe the morphological, climatic and political characteristics of the free port of Trieste, which he believed to be underexploited. An example of an epistolary novel is the *Journey to Dalmatia / Viaggio in Dalmazia* (Fortis [1774] 1986) by Alberto Fortis, one of the precursors of the genre. The nine letters of the collection are grouped according to the topographical districts explored by the author considering three aspects: geology, ancient history and the retrieval of information economically useful to identify possible resources for the Serenissima. And so, we find detailed historical reconstructions, which come from the observation of the stratification of the different civilizations exposed by the force of bradyseisms and now visible under the water line. There are accurate descriptions of shells, marbles, phosphoric marine lights, stones useful to detect the fertility of the land. The intent is to push the motherland to refine agricultural and fishing techniques so as to draw

along with all the author's other works. A new edition, in line with the original manuscript, has replaced the old title with its original one by *Histoire de ma vie* (12 vols.), Wiesbaden-Paris, F. A. Brockhaus-Librarie Plon, 1960–1962.

³ Other eighteenth-century travellers on the Adriatic: Carlo Gozzi 1797; Ruggero Boscovich di Ragusa 1759–1760; Zaccaria Valaresso 1769/70; Francesco Griselini 1780; Francesco Apostoli 1801.

more resources and thus reduce the import of goods. Often the author, distracted by the beauty of the places and the flavours of their cuisine, indulged in discussing navigation techniques. Another eighteenth-century traveller, Giambattista Casti, in a refined literary prose, suggested itineraries and seasonal times suitable for avoiding bad weather when undertaking a journey of extraordinary tourist interest: Venice, Corfu, Zakynthos, the Dardanelles, Constantinople, and then back via Athens. Also Casti did not fail to inform the reader about the military power, the state of finances, religion, customs, administrative, legal and school legislation, and the gastronomy of the areas he was passing through; he also gave precious information about Turkey, against which the Austro-Russian coalition had just been formed.⁴ The point of view was always that of a Venetian, who considered western civilization absolutely superior and who took care to confide it also to his female readers. In fact, a female public began to form, made wider by the incipient industrial revolution which favoured the inclusion of the bourgeois classes. Giacomo De Concina, with his *Journey to Coastal Dalmatia / Viaggio nella Dalmazia litorale* (De Concina 1809), twenty-three letters addressed to a friend, portray Fortis' itinerary, focusing on certain themes, such as topography, soil fertility, the river and road network, ports, cities, mines, natural resources and the products derived from them. The perspective of the government officer, of the scholar and of the scientist did not exclude that of the man of culture, who managed to grasp the link between the different civilizations and to appreciate artistic details that reminded him of the great Venetian school, from Titian to Tintoretto, from Palma il Vecchio to Veronese. While admiring the beauty of that steep coast, Casti also found time to make frequent observations on navigation techniques. But in the meantime something had changed: with the advent of Napoleon, that shore had ceased to be Venetian and was about to become Austrian. A fact well known to Ugo Foscolo, a native of Zakynthos, an island of the Serenissima, where his father, a ship's doctor, had chosen to live. Although immersed in the culture of classical Greece, Foscolo felt Venetian and therefore, as a betrayed patriot, reacted vigorously to the signing of the Treaty of Campoformido, with which in 1797 Napoleon handed over Venice, Istria and Dalmatia to the Habsburgs (Zakynthos remained French). The theme of exile was thus strongly raised in Foscolo's *A Zaccinto* written between 1802 and 1803, one of the most famous poems in Italian literature. The writer, fleeing from the Austrian police, compared his wanderings to Ulysses' perilous *nostos*,

⁴ *Relazione di un mio viaggio fatto da Venezia a Costantinopoli l'anno 1788, con alcune osservazioni attinenti al medesimo, particolarmente sul Serraglio attuale del gran Signore. Operetta inedita piacevole ed istruttiva dell'abate Giambattista Casti*, 1802. It is an epistolary novel with a complex editorial story. To learn more about it please refer to Pavarini (2009).

but unlike Ulysses who managed to see his homeland, the “petrosa Itaca”, again, Foscolo sensed that he would never be back.

5 Poems, Opera Librettos, Novels: the Birth of Nations and Romanticism

After the Congress of Vienna, which restored the dynastic equilibrium of the past, the bourgeoisie of trade and industry began to regain power, encouraged by the results of the French Revolution and Napoleon's achievements. Romanticism was the movement that accompanied the demand for autonomy, including national autonomy. The struggle against absolutism in the name of constitutional liberalism was in fact identified in many national communities with the struggle for unity and independence of the various peoples dismembered or enslaved by the policy of restoration. The Italian Risorgimento, one of the many movements that perturbed nineteenth-century Europe, experienced defeats and victories: the Adriatic began to tell other stories, which reversed the roles and made the sea a liquid plain that divided instead of united. In the romantic nineteenth century, Venice the conqueror, which had placed the “schiavi”, that is the Slavs, at its service, became the emblem of an oppressive system of power that provided content to the melodrama, a new popular narrative genre: powerful emotions, underlined by the power of musical romances in which good and bad guys, heroes and traitors, patriots and spies were clearly recognizable, made opera librettos vehicles of political propaganda too (Sorbi 2015). Venice became a negative example of an evil power. Melodramas such as Verdi's *I due Foscari* (1844) with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, or Enrico Petrella's *Morosina* (1859) with a text by Domenico Bolognese, or Alessandro Magotti's *L'ultimo Faliero* (1877) with words by Luigi Scalchi, now put the figure of the pirate in a positive light, the Uskoks became the bearer of alternative values to those of the Serenissima. The archetype was Schiller with his *Die Räuber* (The Robbers) (1782) and, musically, *Il Pirata* (1827) by Vincenzo Bellini with lyrics by Felice Romani. Sailing by sea and attacking Venetian ships now meant opposing a civilization from which one would deliberately choose to walk away, because it was oppressive and unjust. That was the time when Niccolò Tommaseo gathered the *Tuscan, Corsican, Illyrian and Greek folk songs / Canti popolari toscani, corsi, illirici e greci* (1841/42) along the shores of the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic Sea, as a sign not only of respect for cultures neglected by the cultured class, but also of attention to the values and ethical principles of peoples until then subjugated. Tommaseo, who engaged in the Risorgimento struggle, would never forget his place of birth, Sibenik in Dalmatia, where a good part of the pop-

ulation in the hinterland was Slavic, like his mother. When he returned home, he felt the need to learn his mother tongue, especially after finding out that some Dalmatian folk songs had spread throughout Europe. From enemy to hero, the Uskok was the one who, in the name of freedom, had to become an outlaw to oppose unjust tyranny. Even the Trieste-born Leone Fortis, with the musical aid of Francesco Petroncini, arrived at La Scala in Milan with his *L'Uscocco* (1862). And in 1873 the *scapigliato* Antonio Ghislanzoni with Fosca, set to music by Antonio Carlos Gomes, sided with the enemies of Venice, in a story set in the first centuries of his fortune, in the year 900. Meanwhile, there had been Lissa, who for years remained a shame to be washed away for the Italian Navy. Another *scapigliato*, Arrigo Boito, in the verses of the *Mona Lisa / Gioconda* (1876) set to music by Amilcare Ponchielli, staged a Venice in ruins destined to drag any project of happiness into the mud. The Adriatic, like every sea, showed its funereal aspect more than ever.

6 The Epic of the Great War

D'Annunzio perceived this sense of gloominess following the red sails of *Canto novo* that left the coasts of Abruzzo heading to the shores of Dalmatia and Istria. The Adriatic was the place where the ships set sail from opposite ports and crossed their routes – as told in one of the *Novelle della Pescara, Il Cerusico di mare*, whose protagonist was a doctor who tried in vain to save a passenger. For this sea of death and glory, the poet wrote verses full of nationalistic ardour, starting with *March 12, 1882 / 12 marzo 1882*, a poem composed on the occasion of his nineteenth birthday. Towards the end of August 1887, together with Adolfo de Bosis, D'Annunzio decided to take a cruise on the small yacht "Lady Clara": the travel plan was to sail up the coast to Venice, then on to Trieste and Zadar, to finally reach the Bay of Kotor moving from island to island. The journey stopped before reaching Venice, as the inexperienced sailors lost their way, taking some risks. The following year, in an article on the "Tribuna", which later became the prologue to the book on *L'Armata d'Italia*, D'Annunzio recalled that episode; but the adventure was cloaked in a patriotic symbolism: the poet's experience was transfigured into the tragic destiny of Faà di Bruno, who was swallowed up by the sea in Lissa when the ship "King of Italy" / "Re d'Italia" sank with its four hundred sailors on board. Through a series of successive passages, the poet concludes with a complaint about the loss of Italian dominion over the eastern Adriatic coast, which he hoped would be regained. The season of irredentism began, a movement that claimed the need to conquer the lands where Italian was still spoken. Venice became a positive example again. Moved by some political intention, D'Annunzio spent some time composing *La nave*, in which the Venetians, confined in the lagoon, became the protagonists of

a struggle for the conquest of their Adriatic dominion. When the war broke out, D'Annunzio retired to Venice, from where in January 1916 he thought of making an inspection in Trieste, which he intended to fly over by airplane. But a defect in the carburetor forced him to make an emergency landing: it was on this occasion that the poet suffered the eye damage that forced him into darkness, and that led him to the extraordinary experience of the *Notturno*. In October 1918 he organized the famous Bakar raid, an incursion against the Austrian navy that had a resounding echo.

During the First World War, the Adriatic Sea, on which trade routes had been suspended, became the scene of clandestine events: from its shores one sailed to escape conscription, and so, in Trieste, the Austrian Admiralty (Haydée 2015) illuminated the surface of the water with a spotlight placed on the heights of Opicina. Stuparich, too, in his novel *Ritorneranno / They will return* (1942), has his characters look at the horizon, waiting to see the Italian ships appear, a sign of victory. This victory finally arrived, but looked so "mutilated" that D'Annunzio decided to occupy Fiume with his troops of legionnaires.

7 A Mass Society: Reportages

Arturo Marpicati was among D'Annunzio's followers. Soon after the end of the "Impresa di Fiume" (the Italian Regency of Carnaro) he wrote about his experience in his *Piccolo romanzo di una vela* (1922). It was a travel diary, a competitive and relaxing journey at the same time, a bit of a regatta and a bit of a cruise, that the writer made aboard a cutter between Fiume, Venice and Zadar, in waters that were Italian at the time. The irredentist satisfaction is evident, while the tension of the sporting challenge made the novel a sort of symbolic initiation into life: youth became the season of transition from the firm security of the mainland to the fascinating liquidity of the sea, full of uncertainties. The desire for adventure made the daring protagonist similar to Homer's Ulysses, although more attentive to the charm of the changing shades of colour of the seascapes than to the search for existential and cognitive experiences. A narrative genre emerged that followed the *reportages* made popular by Paul Morand, Evelyn Waugh, Pierre Loti, Valery Larbaud. This was also the genre used by another legionnaire, Giovanni Comisso, for his *Il porto dell'amore* (1924), an account of the "Impresa di Fiume" provided from a non-politically oriented point of view: war aggressiveness, patriotic ideals and sexual impulses were correlated in D'Annunzio-esque expressions, which had the blue sea of the Carnaro as their reference point. In some way this view anticipated the collection *Gente di mare* (1928): here the author described the joys of a small cabotage vessel that allowed him to come across fishing boats, colorful, dec-

orated and painted with sacred scenes able to protect them from the sea when it got rough. Comisso wrote of places between the lagoon coasts of the west and the rocky coasts of the east that had different characteristics but had all been forged by civilizations capable of dialoguing with each other. It was the wind, in all its directions and qualifications – sirocco, mistral, bora, libeccio – that unified the various stories: diaries, reportages, memories, chronicles, sketches or paper articles – the various pieces of the collection spoke of men and women of the sea able to measure themselves against the forces of nature. In the case of the futurist Vladimiro Miletti (Miletti 1937) waves and wind represented the challenge that has always attracted man. Indeed, the father of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, had emphasized the beginning of a new era by celebrating the strength of the primordial elements, which would sweep away the decaying archaic civilization: he did so in the novel *La Conquête des Étoiles*, written in French in 1902 and translated into Italian in 1920. Those were the years in which the exhibition of physical strength and overcoming challenges were the prerogatives of the new fascist man: Nico Ledvinca with *Remi sull'Adriatico* (1933) described the physical effort that rowers had to make on a *jole* (a type of boat) called “Vittoria” (Victory) to reach the finishing line. Ledvinca highlighted the competitive effort but also the enjoyment of the beauty of nature in moments of rest. The cruise became a sort of initiation journey for young people with a goliardic spirit, who, upon going ashore, would go wild engaging in dances, amorous adventures and imitations of pirates. Obviously, sailing on the sea of Buccari, their thoughts went to the intrepid D'Annunzio who had mocked the Austrian navy.

8 A Disturbing Symbolism and the Return to Myth

In the interval between the two world wars, the Adriatic Sea became a “training ground for life” but was threatened by a negative force. Another devastating war was on its way. One of Giani Stuparich's most beautiful stories, *L'isola / The Island* (1942), has the sea as its narrative backdrop: the author is on a boat scheduled to bring his terminally ill father back to his native land, Lošinj, for the last time. Beyond the enchantment of the landscape, the emotion felt in seeing the father find the places of his childhood, the lasting impression is that of the protagonist staring at the horizon that finally swallows the profile of the Dalmatian town. On the return journey, from the deck of the boat, Stuparich looked at the Lošinj island disappearing in the distance and perceived it as an epitome of his own life, spent between a melancholic adolescence and a missed youth, waiting nostal-

gically for something that sometimes had been lost and sometimes had never happened and that was now progressing towards an inevitable death.

Between 1921 and 1943, the Adriatic Sea experienced a steady flow of Jews from Trieste to Palestine or the Americas. The city, in fact, was the only Italian port from which ships would sail to the East. Until the 1930s refugees from Eastern Europe fled from the Russian and Polish pogroms, but then, with the advent of Nazism in 1933, Jews arrived in Trieste from all the territories occupied by Hitler: the city thus became a full-fledged "Shaar Zion", "Zion Gate" until 1943, when emigration ended with the Nazi occupation of the entire regional territory. More than 150,000 Jewish people fled, assisted by the Jewish Agency, which provided accommodations and material, economic and morale support.

Then, after the Nazi-Fascists lost the war, it was the turn of the exiles from Istria, Fiume/Rijeka and Dalmatia, who sometimes chose to flee by sea, in precarious clandestine boats or, from 1947 onwards, aboard the *Toscana* motor ship with regular service from Pula, a predominantly Italian city now under the dominion of communist Yugoslavia. In all cases, the pain for the loss of people and things, the nostalgia for what was being left behind, the anxiety for an uncertain future but also the hope of being able to start again elsewhere were feelings associated with the image of a sea that is one of the most tormented in history. In *Mai vele più / Never more sails*, Biagio Marin described his Grado through the chromatic language of the coloured sails, which resembled butterflies standing out against the blue sea; he wrote of the fishing boats with their polychrome decorations, of the stained *bragozzi*, and of the steamboats with their dark sides, which sailed towards the blue into a dreamlike and reassuring dimension. However, after the war the poet from Grado carried out an operation typical of those who had seen the lands of Istria and Dalmatia being annexed to Yugoslavia. Those lands entered into the realms of memory and were transformed into a fabulous entity, associated with the figure of the father, the helmsman of a lugger on which he would sometimes take his son: "*Ero tutt'occhi: E mio padre diceva il nome di ogni punta, di ogni secca, di ogni rada. E ogni nome suonava in me come una parola magica, che mi aprisse nuove prospettive*" / "I was all eyes: And my father said the name of every point, every shoal, every road. And each name sounded like a magic word in me, opening up new perspectives" (Marin 2007, 28–29). On that big yellow-sailed lugger, the father returning from his travels would bring nuts and sweet figs, raisins and wine, and stories of people known on the same paths travelled by Ulysses, so that the wood of the boat smelled of strange scents and retained the echoes of distant voices. Umberto Saba, instead, in his early poems, looked at sails and ships only from afar, firm on the shore, as if he were a Telemachus waiting for the return of Ulysses, the joyful and light-hearted father who had abandoned him before his birth. The sea was a symbol of adventure and openness towards a life still full

of dreams. In the poem *Ulisse* the roles are reversed. The poet, now an adult, embodies the Homeric hero, but in the version of the myth reworked by Dante: he doesn't return to his Penelope and does he renounce Ithaca as he is too strongly attracted by navigation, or by life, full of pitfalls yet fascinating, which is like the slippery rocks of Dalmatia, splendid like emeralds, but dangerous for sailors when they disappear under the surface of the water, made invisible by the tides.

Another death-related symbolism characterizes the sea portrayed by Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini. In one of his long stories, *L'onda dell'incrociatore / Cruiser wave* (1947), taking place during the fascist period, the writer staged the sordid relationships between his characters trapped in an unconscious and naive game bordering on sadism. The protagonists, perpetrators and, at the same time, victims of physical and moral violence, are fixed in the changing summery light of the sea. Devoid of any filial or fraternal loving piety, they were educated in a hedonistic and turbid sensuality that often led them to behave in an arrogantly, lively and ambiguously. Jealousy turned two boys into the involuntary killers of an Alpine soldier who was in Trieste to celebrate the victory in Africa and drowned in a *maona* (a type of boat) hit by the wave of a cruiser sailing offshore.

In addition to poems and tales that capture landscapes and soulscapes of the Adriatic, a number of works considered the human tragedies that occurred in this sea over the centuries and re-proposed one of its strongest myths. So, Claudio Magris, from *Assirtidi*, in *Microcosmi / Microcosms* until the more recent novel *Alla cieca / Blind* (2005), has taken up the story of the Alexandrian poet Apollonius Rhodius, who in the fourth book of his *Argonautics* (III a. C) told the story of Jason and Medea and their companions; after the conquest of the Golden Fleece they sailed up the river Istro until they reached the Adriatic Sea. According to Magris, that river was most likely the Danube, which through the Sava and its tributaries flowed into the Adriatic. In a place along the coast of this sea, where the group had stopped, Medea's father, wanting to convince his daughter to leave Jason, sent his son Absirto to talk to her. But Absirto was killed by his sister, torn to pieces and thrown into the Carnaro. From its boiling waters emerged the three islands of Cres, Lošinj and Krk, called, in honour of the young man, Assirtids (or Absirtids). «*Il mare è luogo d'aggredire e di morte*» (Magris 1997, 166) / “The sea is a place of ambush and death,” said the author.

That violence has become an emblem of a constant destiny of division and dismemberment, both in the mythical past and in the recent history of those lands. This is confirmed by various narratives: Nelida Milani and Anna Maria Mori in *Bora* (1999) made it almost a prologue to the terrible story of the deportees in nearby Golj Otok, who arrived by sea to the island which housed the concentration camp where Tito's opponents were jailed. Pietro Tarticchio with *Nascinguerra*

(2001) has taken up the myth again, with the description of some ancient graffiti common to the two shores of the Adriatic, a symbolism that recalls stories of fragmentation, loss and rupture of an order. Because sometimes, unfortunately, history can repeat itself.

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Sara Izzo (University of Bonn)

Interconnected Histories and Construction of Collective Memory: Theoretical Approaches to the Perception of the Mediterranean Sea as a Palimpsestic *nœud de mémoire* in French and Italian Literature

Abstract: This paper aims to examine the Mediterranean Sea in the context of memory studies and to discuss its function as a transnational *lieu de mémoire* in French and Italian literature. In the case of the Mediterranean Sea the national perspective of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* has to be enlarged on a supranational scale. Indeed, the Mediterranean Sea can be considered as a privileged object of investigation to raise the question about interconnected pasts and memory conflict. For this purpose, we will take into consideration the theoretical model of *nœud de mémoire*, or memory knot, developed by Michael Rothberg, that imposes the vision of the Mediterranean Sea as a rhizomatic network of knotted memory. The treatment of *lieu de mémoire* in a Mediterranean context involves a pluri-dimensional interaction of diverse pasts and states that memory has to be explored somewhere in between of national and cultural cohesion, crossing and dispersion. These theoretical reflections will be supported by references and examples from French and Italian literary texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which Carthage is coded and recoded as one of those Mediterranean memory knots.

1 The Concept of *lieu de mémoire* in the Mediterranean Context

Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* conceptualizes "the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (Nora 1989, 7). In this context, the present paper aims to examine the Mediterranean Sea as a zone of entangled and superposed memories in French and Italian literature. Nora's study limits the notion of *lieu de mémoire* to national historiography; the study has, for instance, been widely criticized for neglecting the conflict-ridden imperial and colonial aspects of French history (Anderson 2009, 161–162). Further, Nora's oeuvre does not treat the Mediterranean Sea as a site of memory: the third volume,

Les France, incorporates a singular record of “Le front de mer” (Mollat du Jourdin 1997, 2721–2764) in the section titled “Conflits et partages – partages de l'espace-temps”. This entry attends to the two French coasts, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, to investigate the maritime identity of the French nation. The discussion of the overlapping or interconnected histories and memories within and beyond French and Francophone cultures is ignored despite the suggested heterogeneity of the collective identity in *Les Frances*.

The historian Maryline Crivello recently developed the approach of applying the concept of *lieu de mémoire* to the Mediterranean (Crivello 2010; 2017). She regards the Mediterranean as a preferred object of investigation through which interconnected pasts and memory conflicts can be examined on a supranational scale:

Les acquis de la recherche [...] s'exercent de manière privilégiée dans le cadre méditerranéen, qui est à la fois espace d'identification et espace d'affrontements de 'mémoires' ou d'identités narratives multiples. L'instrumentalisation du passé à des fins politiques n'est donc pas une spécificité méditerranéenne, mais elle a pris dans cet espace aux identités fragiles une coloration particulièrement vive. (Crivello 2010, 14)

The collective identification with the Mediterranean as a territorial and historical entity is described as a crossing of multiple narrative identities. Her envisioning of a more dynamic conception of the continuous overlapping of pasts is articulated through the notion of “anti-‘lieux de mémoire’” (Crivello 2010, 19). Indeed, memory is no longer crystallized in or embodied by the Mediterranean once and for all; rather, a constant process of inscription and reinscription is provoked by diverse memories that remain in contact or even clash. The conception of an “anti-‘lieux de mémoire’” describes the palimpsestic nature of the superposing pasts encompassed in the Mediterranean; namely,

une fabrication de ces 'lieux mémoire' [...] qui donne à voir des phénomènes de déplacement, de superposition, voire d'hybridation, qui résultent de la confrontation des regards et des usages. Ainsi certains lieux palimpsestes, multifonctionnels et polysémiques, dessinent une Méditerranée du partage, syncrétique et hybride, mais aussi hétérogène, intolérante et conflictuelle. (Crivello 2010, 20)

This characterization of a palimpsestic site of memory bears intimate resemblance to Michael Rothberg's theoretical conception of “knots of memory” (Rothberg 2010, 3). Rothberg's theory denotes an endeavor in the domain of memory studies to overcome Nora's omission of pluralized memory, as well as to create a transition from national to trans- or supra-national sites of memory. Rothberg recalls (Rothberg 2010, 7) that Nora himself used the word 'knot' as a loose translation of the French 'lieu', which is also understood in German as 'Knoten' (Nora 2001, 685).

However, Rothberg's theoretical conception of memory knots, the *nœuds de mémoire*, intends "to explore the 'knotted intersections' of history and memory that cut across categories of national and ethnic identity" (Rothberg 2010, 8).

Contrary to the more static image of the *lieu de mémoire*, the idea of the knotted nature of collective memory implies the intersection of diverse pasts, agents and catalysts of memory (Rothberg 2010, 9). In Rothberg's words, "[s]uch agency entails recognizing and revealing the production of memory as an ongoing process involving inscription and reinscription, coding and recoding." (Rothberg 2010, 8–9) The notion of memory knots represents the rhizomatic vision of a palimpsest-like memory, a concept that appears to be a promising point of discussion in the context of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean can thus be conceived and perceived as a rhizomatic network of knotted memory. To summarize, applying the concept of *lieu de mémoire* in the context of the Mediterranean involves the pluri-dimensional interaction of diverse pasts. Applying the concept in this way implies that memory must be explored in the spaces between national and cultural cohesion, crossing and dispersion.

2 The Function of Literature in Constructing the Mediterranean into a Sea of Memory

"La mémoire est un récit, et tout récit est une création. La mémoire, tout comme l'histoire, est le récit que nous produisons sur notre passé tant individuel que collectif" (Polycandrioti 2010, 183). The creation of an individual or collective memory narrative is based predominantly on the process of textualization. Crivello emphasizes the importance of the literary field in constructing a collective Mediterranean identity without offering details: "Le 'récit méditerranéen' dans ce contexte se repère dans la construction d'un espace méditerranéen dont les principaux acteurs se trouvent dans le champ littéraire [...]." (Crivello 2010, 18) The conception of a Mediterranean identity is grounded in a geographic, geo-cultural and often a geo-strategic mapping of the Mediterranean basin, which is conceived as an ever-changing spatiotemporal constellation. Literature has a crucial function in the creation of a Mediterranean chronotope whose specific narrative configuration reflects the geopolitical aspirations of nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Colonialism and imperialism act as engines for such nationally determined interpretations of the Mediterranean Sea. This circumstance is particularly depicted in literary texts that reflect the official memory politics of a country and perform the function of *legitimation* in terms of Aleida Assmann's typology of memory functions (Assmann 2009, 133). Assmann distinguishes functional memory

from storage memory; functional memory activates a selective process of keeping alive past events to promote a sense of cultural and national identity, whereas storage memory retains an amorphous mass of information. Further, three distinct functions are identified: the above cited process of *legitimation* that is mostly related to official memory, its *de-legitimation*, and the process of *distinction* as the symbolic shaping of a collective identity through memory. The production of literary texts consolidating the official memory of a nationally and culturally determined past achieves a creative peak with respect to the Mediterranean Sea in the context of the imperial and colonial expansion of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. A time lag is nevertheless observed between French and Italian literary productions relating to the invention of a sea of memory.

The construction of this narrative occurred in France in tandem with scientific expeditions to Egypt (1798–1801), the Morea (1829–1831) and Algeria (1839–1842). Bourget indicated the significance of these voyages for the geo-historical appropriation of the Mediterranean Sea as a common cultural heritage:

Ni la géographie, ni l'histoire naturelle, ni l'anthropologie ne suffisent à donner à l'invention de la Méditerranée ses points d'appui: définir un espace ou une communauté d'appartenance suppose encore un horizon temporel, historique. Dans la définition d'une aire méditerranéenne, l'histoire aussi est en jeu: par elle passe la recherche des éléments d'un passé commun qui, contre la réalité d'un présent fait de contrastes, d'oppositions ou de conflits, puisse servir à des fins unificatrices et fonder le projet d'une destinée partagée. L'archéologie fournit ici une base essentielle. Le relevé des sites en Égypte et en Grèce, l'inventaire des monuments en Algérie, les premières fouilles effectués lors des missions rendent possible l'élaboration d'un passé régional commun, à l'échelle de la Méditerranée. (Bourget 1998, 24)

These expeditions stimulated the formation of a scientific dispositif on the Mediterranean Sea and also triggered its literary representations. Saminadayar-Perrin emphasized the 'literary invention' of the Mediterranean Sea as an event that paralleled this 'scientific invention' (Saminadayar-Perrin 2012, 9–10). Chateaubriand's 1811 *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* marks the initiation of this literary development and is structured as a circum-Mediterranean route skirting the remains of numerous ancient civilizations. This text presents itself as a journey signifying the individual and collective return to one's roots: "du 'miracle grec' au tombeau du Christ, de la patrie des Muses au Saint-Sépulcre, le pèlerin refonde son identité en retrouvant la double origine, culturelle et spirituelle, de la liberté française." (Saminadayar-Perrin 2012, 11–12) Chateaubriand's itinerary may be considered a textual archetype for the construction of the Mediterranean Sea as a *lieu de mémoire* in French literature and remains a point of reference for subsequent colonial travel writing surrounding the Mediterranean.

A dispositive of literary texts highlighting the national and cultural heritage of Italy's own maritime past as represented by the Mediterranean Sea began to accrue in Italy only after the nation's unification in the late nineteenth century. The awakening of Italy's Mediterranean identity is strongly interconnected with the nation's entry into the age of colonial expansion. However, unlike France, Italy's colonial politics were marked by missed aspirations in Tunisia and Adua, failures the young nation-state intended to overcome through its military intervention in Libya:

Cancellata dal protettorato francese del 1881 l'aspirazione di Roma alla Tunisia, si può dire che la conquista della Tripolitania era rimasta, o diventata, l'obiettivo ricorrente della politica estera italiana sulla costa africana del Mediterraneo. Ve ne erano varie ragioni. In primo luogo perché gli altri territori di quella costa erano ormai già in mano ad altre potenze. In secondo luogo non tanto perché – in termini di risorse naturali o di spazi per la colonizzazione demografica – essa fosse particolarmente appetibile, ma piuttosto perché si riteneva che il controllo italiano della Tripolitania avrebbe perfezionato la posizione navale e strategica dell'Italia navale nel Mediterraneo centrale. (Labanca 2002, 109)

Italy's colonial disillusionment remains a cenotaph for its ensuing colonial pursuits in Tripolitania. The Italian-Turkish War for Libya in 1911/12 was diplomatically and militarily well-planned; it was also astutely thought-out in terms of propaganda, and a complete literary production was unleashed for promoting expansive politics pertaining to the Mediterranean Sea (Tamburini 2005, 44). Organizations such as the *Lega Navale Italiana* founded in 1899 or the *Istituto Coloniale Italiano* founded in 1906 published various texts about Italy's maritime past to trigger the Mediterranean consciousness of the nation. Alongside these official institutions, independent Italian writers also supported the invention of a maritime tradition to legitimize Italy's colonial claims in North Africa. Foremost among them were Gabriele D'Annunzio, Enrico Corradini and others representing the heterogenous conservative nationalist camp.

In summary, discrete events of a 'glorious' maritime past were selected and activated in the functional memories of both nations through the construction of memory narratives that were pivotal to the formulation of a collective Mediterranean consciousness. The two national memory narratives became subsequently entangled due to the colonial scramble that occurred in North Africa. This interweaving is especially evident in the diplomatic dispute regarding the colonial possession of Tunisia. Carthage becomes an example of the conversion of the Mediterranean into a zone of interconnected memories as both nations instrumentalized different episodes of their history in their literature to legitimize their colonial forays into North Africa.

3 Carthage as a ‘Knotted Intersection’ of History and Memory in Italy and France

Referencing Rothberg, Carthage can be labelled a ‘knotted intersection’ of history and memory at the time of colonial expansion along the Mediterranean. Carthage became an important crossover point for French and Italian literature at two key junctures of history: first, the Italian disillusionment with respect to its colonial possession of Tunisia after 1881 and its subsequent colonial aspirations towards Tripolitania and the Cyrenaica; second, the French reaction to fascist Mediterranean politics in Tunisia and beyond in the 1930s. Choate explains convincingly that the “[o]ngoing competition for influence in Tunisia goes to the heart of Italy’s contested role within the Mediterranean world.” (Choate 2010, 2) The sections that follow will demonstrate that this circumstance of a nodal political nature finds literary expression in three tendencies: first, the literary and cultural construction of a foundation myth for French colonialism in Carthage; second, the invention in Italian literature of a maritime tradition and identity based on the Punic Wars; and third, the recoding of Punic Carthage by French authors, in the vicinity of the so-called *École d’Alger*, as a symbol of an authentic Mediterranean spirit relating to a reminiscence of a Mediterranean under Carthaginian influence. The ensuing analysis of a selection of travel journals will demonstrate these inclinations.

3.1 Carthage as a Destination for French Crusaders

The French empire had already annexed the North African territory from the point of view of memory politics much before the French protectorate became a reality in Tunisia. The ruins of Carthage had been transmogrified into an object of national projection in French literature since Chateaubriand’s circum-Mediterranean *Itinéraire*. Carthage figured in Chateaubriand’s itinerary as a significant station along the Mediterranean Sea and is cited in his preface from 1826 and in the concluding segment of the travel journal. This section outlines the road map of the journey undertaken:

Je fis le tour de la Méditerranée sans accidents graves, retrouvant Sparte, passant à Athènes, saluant Jérusalem, admirant Alexandrie, signalant Carthage, et me reposant du spectacle de tant de ruines dans les ruines de l’Alhambra. J’ai donc eu le très petit mérite d’ouvrir la carrière, et le très grand plaisir de voir qu’elle a été suivie après moi. En effet mon Itinéraire fut à peine publié, qu’il servit de guide à une foule de voyageurs. Rien ne le recommande au public que son exactitude; c’est le livre de postes des ruines: j’y marque scrupuleusement les chemins, les habitacles et les stations de la gloire. (Chateaubriand 2005, 68–69)

His *Itinéraire* traced the routes of glory incarnated in the ruins of past civilizations; its references to Carthage comprise the feature that distinguished it from other contemporary travel narratives. This key differentiator is announced in the above citation by the verb 'signalant' and is also emphasized in the last chapter of the book, "Tunis et retour en France", which is dedicated to the ruins of Carthage: "On peut donc dire que le sujet que je vais traiter est neuf. J'ouvrirai la route; les habiles viendront après moi" (Chateaubriand 2005, 492) His description of Carthage includes references to key historic moments: from the foundation of the ancient city, to the Punic Wars, to the death of Saint Louis during the crusades. Chateaubriand announced in a quasi-prophetic vision that the last episode would be particularly momentous for the further national inscription of the site:

On approchait du carnaval, et l'on ne songeait qu'à rire, en dépit des Maures. Les cendres de Didon et les ruines de Carthage entendaient le violon français. On ne s'embarrassait ni de Scipion, ni d'Annibal, ni de Marius, ni de Caton d'Utique [...]. Saint Louis seul eût été respecté en sa qualité de Français. (Chateaubriand 2005, 489)

In fact, a scientific and archaeological exploration of the ancient Punic city was initiated after the French conquest of Algeria. The ruins were gradually transformed into a French colonial site of memory (Moumni 2018, 147), which served as a reminder of the Christian past of French crusades in North Africa through the newly constructed chapel (1841) and cathedral (1890) for Saint Louis. The French guidebook to Algeria and Tunisia may be cited as an example: it was published, *inter alia*, by Stéphane Gsell (1864–1932), the French archaeologist and specialist in ancient Africa. Carthage is semantized in this volume as a connecting point between the Oriental and the Occidental Mediterranean and is described as 'couronnée par la cathédrale de Saint Louis' (Jacqueton et al. 1903, 344), which 'dominates' the Mediterranean Sea from its location at the top of the hill of Byrsa. Chateaubriand's description of Carthage and his historical references to Saint Louis, in whose footsteps he followed in his itinerary, exert a significant impact on subsequent Mediterranean travel reports and consolidate the idea of a French sphere of influence across the Mediterranean. For example, Louis Bertrand's 1923 itinerary *à rebours*, entitled *Le Livre de la Méditerranée*, epitomizes such an intellectual affiliation by tracing a circum-Mediterranean route that reverses Chateaubriand's itinerary. Chateaubriand is remembered in this travel book as the traveler surveys the sea from the hill of Byrsa and establishes a national gallery of pilgrim-conquerors:

La Carthage punique, la Carthage romaine, les figures historiques et légendaires de tant de généraux, de poètes, d'orateurs, d'évêques ou d'apôtres, – tout cela défile instantanément dans la pensée qui déborde. Mais surtout pour une âme française, quel lieu exaltant que

celui-ci! Ceux de chez nous ont véritablement conquis cette colline. Pèlerins de l'art, ou pèlerins de la foi, ils l'ont marquée à l'empreinte de la patrie, depuis saint Louis qui vint y mourir sous le cilice et la cendre de la pénitence jusqu'à Chateaubriand qui, dans cette métropole de l'église africaine, poursuivait encore les vestiges de ses *Martyrs* jusqu'à Flaubert enfin qui conçut, à cette même place, son roman de *Salammbo!* (Bertrand 1923, 113–114)

3.2 The Punic Wars in Italian Literature

Conversely, the claims laid to Tunisia by the young Italian nation-state were more socio-economic in character, since Tunisia denoted a locale of political exile and an immigration destination during and after the *Risorgimento* (Choate 2010, 2). Tunisia became a manifestation of national dispersion since the second half of the nineteenth century, likely as a result of an absence of consolidating memory narratives. However, a full narrative mythification of Mediterranean traditions did emerge relating to the Punic Wars in Italian literature and film at the beginning of the twentieth century, encompassing Italy's colonial failure in Tunisia in diplomatic terms, and the subsequent battle for Tripolitania. In this context, the Roman past of the Mediterranean Sea was reflected more and more through the idea of an imperial *mare nostrum* and became increasingly significant as a historical allusion to the awakening of the Mediterranean identity in Italy. Bertellini states,

[t]he articulation of such mythologizing narratives achieved three goals in terms of public opinion. The first was the designation of the territories of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania with the older Roman term of 'Libya' (which had comprised sections of the Tunisian coast, including the old Carthage, and Egyptian desert). The second was the ensuing functionalization of Libya as a redemptive site against past colonial defeats, drawing upon timeless Virgilian dreams of rebirth. The third goal was a bipartisan association of nationalist sentiment with the immigration phenomenon [...]. (Bertellini 2016, 133)

The second and third objectives asserted in the text quoted above were particularly evidenced in Italian travel reports published at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, Giacomo De Martino's 1907 travel journal *Tripoli, Cirene e Cartagine* was written for the newly founded colonial institution *Istituto Coloniale Italiano*. Similarly, Gualtiero Castellini's¹ 1911 travel journal *Tunisi e Tripoli* was written for the *Lega navale italiana*. Both these North African itineraries were commissioned works that conformed to the prevailing political circumstances and aspirations pertaining to the Mediterranean and thus reflected political inten-

¹ Gualtiero Castellini was the secretary of the nationalist party *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, which was founded by Enrico Corradini. (Choate 2010, 11).

tions to instrumentalize the past as official memory. De Martino's journal achieved this goal through its final chapter "Cartagine – la disillusa del Mediterraneo", which incorporated a fictionally recreated dialogue between the traveler and Lord X, an English expert of contemporary history or "esperto nelle ricerche storiche del suo tempo" (De Martino 1912 [1907], 195). The English dialogue partner Lord X voices all the critique of France, explaining the presence of Saint Louis' devotional church in Carthage to the puzzled Italian narrator. He alludes to a purportedly memorable conflict between France and Italy to explain the rationale behind the erection of this Christian monument:

Ogni cosa dà occasione a meditare – replica Lord X. – I francesi, credetelo, hanno bisogno di dar sempre una forma esteriore e solenne, direi teatrale, alle loro cose. Leggete i loro libri più recenti sulla Tunisia: trasparisce dovunque una profonda uggia contro di voi italiani che, prima di essi, avete avuto il torto imperdonabile di creare una vita a Tunisi; non si sanno proprio assuefare all'idea che in una terra ormai francese, la popolazione debba pur rimanere principalmente italiana. E così si sono lambiccati il cervello per trovare un diritto storico, più antico del vostro, che legittimasse il predominio sopra di voi. (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197)

The French instrumentalization of a Christian past for Carthage is designated as a heraldic genealogy or "genealogia araldica" in the continuing dialogue (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197), which describes the French occupation of Carthage as a phenomenon that withstood the 'real' Roman tradition of the site where the Italian narrator discovers his roots:

L'Africa – disse Lord X – è tutta una contraddizione. Andate a Cirene. Della ricca ed opulenta città che cosa trovate? Un beduino a cavallo in una landa deserta. [...] E del nome italiano in Tripolitania, strombazzato da anni? Le alte torri del telegrafo aereo tedesco. E della Tunisia francese? Una popolazione italiana.' Ridendo chiusi il dialogo: 'e della Cartagine di Amilcare, Annibale e Scipione? Il convento e la chiesa del focoso cardinale Lavigerie! (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197)

This conversation reinscribes the Punic Wars in a setting that the Italian traveler considers one of "questi luoghi fatti sacri da tante memorie" (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197). The Roman ruins of Carthage incarnate the traces of the past conflict between Rome and Carthage over the domination of the Mediterranean. Their similarity with Roman ruins in Italy also promotes their interpretation of being a geographical prolongation of Italy's territory.

By recoding Carthage in the full dialogue in terms of its Roman past in the Mediterranean, De Martino censures France's 'illegitimate' possession of Tunisia and simultaneously envisions Italy's redemption in Tripolitania, where Roman maritime glory could be resurrected. His argumentation transposes the identification of the Roman victory over Carthage from one center of conflict to another po-

tential nucleus. The Punic Wars shift from a geographically sited memory figure to a leading thought pattern of Italy's Mediterranean identity.

A comparable argumentation, albeit more anti-French in tone, is expressed in Castellini's travel journal, which designates Tunisia as an 'African Sicily'. Tunisia is identified as an irredentist region of the Mediterranean and positioned beside Trento, Trieste and Tripoli (Castellini 1911, VII). In this context, the historical reference to the Punic Wars is not the only allusion intended to promote Italy's awareness of its national Mediterranean tradition; this suggestion is complemented by the vision of a *risorgimental* sea, "il mare dei mille" (Castellini 1911, 10), a term that here describes the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Adriatic Sea would thus be liberated from Austrian domination, and the Tyrrhenian Sea would be freed from French hegemony. This "irredentismo antifrancese" (Castellini 1911, 151) emanated from the supposed demographic imbalance between the French protectors and Italian emigrants who evolved into an irredentist force of power – "da emigrati ci trasformiamo in irredenti." (Castellini 1911, 151)

In brief, these travel journals demonstrate that both travelers attempted to coin a heraldic genealogy of Italy's Mediterranean identity vis-à-vis the Roman maritime power struggle with Carthage. They described Carthage as a palimpsestic site coded and recoded by different memory narratives; they also simultaneously transformed Carthage into a thought pattern representing Italy's Mediterranean roots by referencing the Punic Wars, especially in the context of the Italian-Turkish War. In fact, the theme of the Punic Wars flourished in Italian literary and cinematographic production at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was even expanded upon during the fascist rule when the concept of *mare nostrum* became an important value for Mussolini's propagandist cult of the *romanità*.

3.3 Carthage as the Symbol of an Authentic Mediterranean Spirit

French author Gabriel Audisio opposed this nationalist and fascist vision of Roman Mediterranean heritage and transformed Carthage into an anti-Roman site of counter-memory. This transmogrification is demonstrated in his 1936 travel journal, *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée II. Le sel de la mer*. This travel journal is dedicated entirely to Tunisia and can also be classified as an example of Étienne Maignan's definition of the "nouveau genre de l'essai méditerranéen" (Maignan 2018, 140). It bears witness to the refined regeneration of French-Italian political antagonism in Tunisia after the rise of fascism in Italy, which was also a subject of analysis by Bessis in her detailed historical study (Bessis 1986). Audisio's Mediterranean essay presents itself as a memorial narrative: "l'auteur a trouvé la Tunisie baignée

par les eaux du souvenir où il a re-pêché tous ses poissons, subrepticement.” (Audisio 1936, s.p.). Audisio implicitly compares the Mediterranean to a sea of memory, in which the author ‘fishes’ for symbolic recollections. However, the literary genre of the essay and the author’s self-identification with a fisherman both indicate a distance from heroic and monumental memory narratives such as epic novels or films. The first part of the essay entitled “Le sel” is particularly important in the rewriting of Carthage. Audisio’s reasoning advances in three stages: the deconstruction of Roman ruins in Gabès, the reconstruction of Carthage as an anti-Roman site of counter-memory, and a historical contextualization of the theme within the political debate of his time. Audisio claims Tunis and the ancient site of Carthage as the focal point of the Mediterranean from a symbolic as well as a geographical standpoint:

La Méditerranée contemporaine reste semblable à l’univers des Anciens, car leur univers c’était justement la Méditerranée: un cercle. Tous les points font également face au centre, tout y est ramené par une espèce de dynamisme centripète. Et précisément le centre [...], le cœur, la clef de l’équilibre est tout près de Tunis. (Audisio 1936, 57)

In a sense, the centrality of Tunis emanates from its positioning: Tunis (and Tunisia) is a Mediterranean melting pot that straddles Oriental and Occidental spheres of influence. Conversely, Tunis is also pivotal due to its relation to the ancient civilization of Carthage, which, for Audisio, symbolizes marine genius: “le sel de Carthage, le sel du génie marin qui fit scintiller Carthage au soleil de la Méditerranée” (Audisio 1936, 70–71). An entire dichotomous system is created between Rome and Carthage, denying Rome a maritime character: “C'est par son armée de fantassins que Rome s'impose au monde. Quelques victoires navales n'y changent rien. La marine fut étrangère à Rome, Rome fut étrangère à l'esprit maritime: c'est Carthage, c'est Athènes qui étaient dans le génie de la Méditerranée.” (Audisio 1936, 103)

This citation reveals the essay’s intention to deconstruct the nationalist and fascist rhetoric that emphasized Roman authority over the sea by recalling critical naval battles fought during the Punic Wars. The decentralization of Rome in the Mediterranean in Audisio’s text correlates with the recentralization of Carthage in the Mediterranean. However, Audisio’s argumentation is not grounded in a new cult that views the Punic ruins as a reflection of Roman myth creation. Rather, Carthage is intended to represent a timeless refiguration of the Mediterranean spirit incarnated in various sites, cities and places across the expanse of the Mediterranean Sea: “La Carthage que je dis, ce n'est pas là où elle fut que j'irai la chercher, comme font presque tous les voyageurs. [...] Carthage est partout où je la promène, partout où je la découvre.” (Audisio 1936, 72) Audisio thus recreated Carthage as a

site of counter-memory, pitting this conceptualization against the propagated Roman monoculturalization of the Mediterranean past and identity. His text served as a statement against the political circumstances that prevailed in Italy. Audisio thus endeavored to liberate Italy's Mediterranean identity from the distorted fascist interpretation by reconciling it with the Etruscan civilization of ancient Italy that was colonized by Rome: "Pas plus que Rome n'est la Méditerranée, elle n'est l'Italie. *Pas même l'Italie.* Laisser croire que Rome et l'Italie c'est la même chose, comme font les 'latins', encore une confusion qu'on ne dénoncera jamais assez." (Audisio 1936, 105) Carthage once again assumed the characteristic of an emblem through Audisio's contentions, symbolizing what he denominated in 1935 as "race bleue" (Audisio 2009 [1935], 22) in his first collection of essays *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée*. It could also be labelled 'blue memory' with reference to the Algerian author Waciny Larej (Larey 1999, 243) as a transcultural conception of the Mediterranean identity, even though at that time, Audisio had not yet overcome colonial patterns of thinking.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, Italian and French travel literature published at the beginning of the twentieth century evidenced an on-going process of the inscription and reinscription of Carthage. This ancient site was conceptualized as a setting that continually interconnected histories and memories to define and redefine a collective Mediterranean identity. Such encounters of multiple narratives evince that conceptions of Carthage oscillate between national, transnational and transcultural projections of identity. Carthage may be defined in terms of Bertrand Westphal's geocritical approach to the Mediterranean Sea as a "feuilleté temporal" (Westphal 2001, 8), that displays discrete historical stratifications and literary superscriptions, a palimpsestic *noeud de mémoire* that redefines the literary cartography of the Mediterranean identity.

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Charikleia Magdalini Kefalidou (University of Strasbourg)

A story of two Shores: Transnational Memory and Ottoman Legacy in Modern Greek Novels

Abstract: The article focuses on the representations of the Ottoman imperial legacy, characterised by both intense contact and conflict, in Modern Greek novels. It examines the questions of memory, identity and otherness in Dido Sotiriou's biographical novel *Farewell Anatolia* and Soloup's graphic novel *Aivali*. Different levels of memory are confronted in literary and hybrid texts pertaining to the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire between the end of the First World War and the signature of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

Introduction

The Mediterranean has a long history of intense contacts, conflicts and cross-cultural exchanges as a result of “profound and sustained ethno-religious diversity” and political-economic competition from late Antiquity into the early modern times (Catlos 2014, 375). With three quarters of the Mediterranean coastline under its control at its apogee (Greene 2014, 92), the Ottoman Empire was a diverse, multi-ethnic Mediterranean empire, stretching along the coasts of modern-day Albania, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. Despite its decline from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Empire remained until its demise in 1922, an important power in the Eastern Mediterranean where both its capital, Istanbul, and the major trading hub of Smyrna/Izmir were located. In the late Ottoman period, a culture of intense collaboration developed, “[accommadating] differences between cultural, ethnic, or religious communities that happened to occupy the same street, neighbourhood, village, or rural environ” (Doumanis 2013, 1), termed *intercommunal* by the historian N. Doumanis. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the newly formed or expanded nations would often adopt radical and violent strategies, aiming at homogenizing the populations to fit the national model of one people, one territory, one religion, one language and one culture (Eriksen 2002, 108). These strategies have had a major impact on the politics of memory, fostering acute competitiveness and tension, and on the salience of intergenerational traumatic memory associated with exile and massacres (Basset 2010, 35). The fragile identities that reflect the heterogeneity of populations have been countered with exclusionary na-

tional narratives highlighting the common destiny of the nation and its homogeneous character (Crivello 2016, 180). Discrepancies between official narratives and (sub)narratives from marginalized or traumatized groups have been breeding antagonism both on a national and on a regional level (Crivello 2010, 14–15).

In this article we will delve into the representations of different levels and types of memories pertaining to the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire in two Modern Greek novels (one traditional and one hybrid). Our analysis will explore the relationship between narrative, genre, time and memory. The elements that suggest connectivity (such as language, intertextuality and intermediality) both on a local scale (such as the Greek and Turkish shores of the Aegean Sea where the narratives take place) and on the scale of the Mediterranean, will also be studied.

1 Genres, forms and temporalities

Dido Sotiriou's *Farewell Anatolia*¹ was first published in Greek in 1962 and has been translated in many languages. The story is set in early twentieth-century Smyrna (Izmir) and in the village of Kirkintzés (Şirince in Turkish). It describes an ethno-religiously diverse society sharing customs and languages under a common ruler in a form of symbiosis that is both “antagonistic” and “collaborative” (Boyadjian 2018, 9). WWI, the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922 and the Exchange of Populations between Greece and Turkey stipulated by the Treaty of Lausanne, brought an end to the imperial symbiosis. A journalist and political activist born in Aydin in 1909, Sotiriou was inspired from the personal account of a Turkish-speaking Anatolian Greek refugee who witnessed the events. Soloup, whose real name is Antònis Nikolòpoulos, is a graphic novelist and political scientist born in 1966 in Athens, Greece. His 2014 graphic novel *Aivali* translated in English as well as in French and in Turkish², deals with the consequences of the Exchange of Populations in 1923. Although both works are comparable from a thematic viewpoint,

1 The title of the novel in Greek is *Ματωμένα Χώματα* [Bloodied Earth].

2 In Turkish, the original title was maintained: *Aivali*, as the name of the city is pronounced in Greek (Greek name of the ancient town: Kydonies [City of Quinces]) and not *Ayvalık* as in Turkish, even though the Turkish name *Ayvalık* appears in the qualifying subtitle *Dört Yazar, Üç Kuşak, İki Yaka, Bir Ayvalık* [Four writers, Three generations, Two shores, One Ayvalık]. The graphic novel was published in 2016 by the independent publisher founded by members of the Greek community (Rum) of Istanbul Istos (Istos yayın), specializing in Greek, Turkish and bilingual publications that pertain to the history and culture of the Greek and Armenian communities of Turkey and to the history and life of the region, predating the foundation of the Turkish state.

their significant differences in genre, perspective and narrative techniques, influenced by genealogical differences and by the general socio-political context, cast light on the development, instrumentalization and use of narratives of the past.

Perceived as the paradigm of modernity and cultural advancement of the West, the novel gradually replaced most of the traditional narrative forms and genres in the Eastern Mediterranean, facilitating a shift towards national literatures (Kinoshita 2014, 324). Sophisticated character analysis and detailed descriptions not only of places and people but also of “a whole era in terms that rival the effects of history” (Monroe 1965, 6) captivate and engage a mass audience (Pasco 2004, 382) and may trigger a deep emotional response in readers through the representation and the interpretation of the past, especially in the case of novels that deal with historical events. The autobiographical and historical novel was quickly favoured by Greek novelists in the 1930s, allowing them to cultivate the national myth surrounding the rise and fall of Hellenism in Asia Minor (Beaton 1996, 180).

The relationship between autobiographical and historical fiction and memory in Sotiriou’s *Farewell Anatolia* bears the seal of the reinvented Greek identity as an “equilibrium between modernity and tradition, Europeanness and Greekness” (Tziovas 2011, 311). It reflects the fruitful period of intense aesthetic and social insightfulness, inaugurated by writers in the thirties, but is also marked by the political engagements of the post-war generation (Moullas 2002, 340–341), associated with the rise of Communism in Greece, WWII and the trauma of Civil War. *Farewell Anatolia* is a biographical novel, based on the real story of the narrator, Manolis Axiotis, reimagined through the eyes of the writer, Dido Sotiriou, but also presumably backed up by other sources such as articles, history books, and archives which support the author’s claims to historicity³. A comparison of Sotiriou’s novel with the narrator’s autobiographies⁴ reveals discrepancies that couldn’t be solely attributed to fictionalization for the sake of the development and strengthening of the plot. *Farewell Anatolia* draws its strength from the “close but unaffirmed

3 “In order to write *Farewell Anatolia*, I read dozens of history books, both Greek and foreign, I researched in archives, newspapers.” [Για να γράψω τα Ματωμένα Χώματα διάβασα δεκάδες ιστορικά βιβλία, ελληνικά και ξένα, ανασκάλεψα αρχεία, εφημερίδες]. Raftopoulos, Dimitris. “Μια συζήτηση με τη Διδώ Σωτηρίου”. *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*, 16.92 (1962): 156.

4 Manolis Axiotis, the protagonist-narrator of *Farewell Anatolia*, published two different autobiographies following the tremendous success of Sotiriou’s novel: *Bertheméno Kouvari* [Entangled] (1965) and *Enoména Valkánia* [United Balkans] (1976) edited in one volume in 2016 by a Greek editor (Ekdoseis Balta). The motivation behind these publications is unclear; however, the often-opposing viewpoints adopted by Axiotis and Sotiriou indicate that Axiotis might have been dissatisfied with Sotiriou’s deviations from his narrative.

identification" (Blowers 2000, 105) between autobiographical or biographical novels and their factual counterparts (biographies and autobiographies). Statements made in the paratext of Sotiriou's novel concerning the reliability of the narrator and the writer's own commitment to the truth and objectiveness as a journalist⁵, anchor the narrative to historical facts and real-life events. They allow for the blurring of limits between fact and fiction and for factual readings and interpretations, which in turn reinforce the narrative's capacity to alter the ways that the past is remembered.

Farewell Anatolia was published in 1962 at a time when Greece was profoundly devastated by the Civil War, the Pogrom of the Greek community of Istanbul in 1955 and by the crisis in Cyprus which had just started to revive tensions between Turkey and Greece (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2010, 131). During the fifties and the early sixties, the Right would largely monopolize political power and promote conservative ideas, especially during the mandate of Field Marshall Alexandros Papagos (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2010, 127). Given the political climate, Sotiriou took into consideration the moral, political and social implications of her time and produced an overall more polished version of the facts stated by Axiotis. Although she remained loyal to her egalitarian and humanitarian vision that allowed her to promote anti-imperialism, blaming Western politics instead of the Turkish people for the uprooting of the Greeks, she didn't completely dismantle the official narrative that depicts the Turks as perpetrators and the Greeks as victims. The downplaying of the protagonist's relationship with a Turkish girl and the overemphasizing of a minor Greek female character are such examples of deviations from Axiotis's narrative that confirm Turkish stereotypes. Although Axiotis presents his relationship with the Turkish girl as very committed and significant and regrets abandoning her while pregnant, in *Farewell Anatolia* the relationship is depicted as purely sexual, with the Turkish girl compelling Axiotis to sin. The antithesis between the purity of the Greek girl that Axiotis intends to marry, and the Turkish girl's sinfulness, serves as a moral dilemma that the protagonist must face and as a plot device that enhances the story, while confirming the Manichean national narrative that opposes the immorality of the Turk to the purity of the Greek.

On the other hand, Soloup's storytelling is more nuanced and complex both in terms of the different media that are mobilized to tell the story (or rather *stories*), but also in terms of the structure of the story itself. The graphic novel, whose literary merits have been disputed by more traditional categorizations of narratives and fiction, has recently caught the attention of literary scholars. The advent of cul-

5 Sotiriou had worked as a journalist for decades before she published her first book of prose *The Dead Await*, in 1959.

tural studies was followed by a shift of comparatism towards interart and intermedia comparison: the idea of language or text is no longer restricted to verbal or linguistic elements but subordinated to the idea of medium (Baetens and Martínez 2015). The graphic novel's challenging ways of conveying spatiality and temporality combines text and image in a non-synchronous manner, producing a non-linear narrative which compels the readers to go back-and-forth in search of meaning and to fully engage themselves in the interpretation of the narrative, "fostering a kind of interpretative intimacy" (Chute 2008, 460). In the case of non-fiction works such as *Aivali*, the ability of the visual and verbal narrative to "spatially juxtapose (and overlay) past and present and future moments on the page" (Chute 2008, 453) but also to provide "double-coded narratives and semantics" (Chute 2008, 459) by juxtaposing what is said verbally and what is depicted visually, allows for an unconventional experience of time and space, challenging the reader's unilateral perspective of historical events. Due to the ability of the medium to constantly impose or suggest movement, readers are subject to different perspectives as they shift between texts, pages and frames and move through time and space.

Benefiting from the medium's ability, *Aivali* invites readers to examine solid, stable, essentialist visions of identity, memory and space and most precisely the nationalist narrative opposing Greeks and Turks, as well as to grasp the complex role of the Aegean Sea and its archipelago, which forms both a boundary between the two countries and the two peoples but also a transitional space that allows for travelling and communication. Juxtaposing the past to the present, the narrative swarms with images and texts of the crossing of the Aegean by Cretan-Turkish and Ottoman Greek characters in the early twentieth century, reflecting the intense mobility in the area but also the uprooting resulting from the exchange of populations. It also depicts the effects of history on the present, as the author crosses the Aegean to discover his origins, travelling back and forth from the Turkish coast to the island of Lesvos. Soloup stresses the importance of Lesvos as a foothold for the exploration of the "other side" but also as *lieu de mémoire*⁶ of the expulsion of the Ottoman Greeks from Asia Minor. He highlights the island's memorial heritage by explaining that the two opposing shores of the Aegean (Lesvos and Ayvalik) are forever connected in the collective memory, as the coastal town in Lesvos where the refugees settled after their expulsion was named after the ancient Greek name of Ayvalik.

⁶ A *lieu de mémoire* is defined by Pierre Nora as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community." Nora, Pierre. "Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire". *Representations*, 26 (1989): 7-24.

The interaction between text and image allows for very descriptive and nuanced representations of the Aegean as a dividing and connecting sea. Mehmet, the descendant of Turkish-Cretan refugees and the writer, a descendant of Greek refugees from Çeşme, discuss cordially about patriotism from each one's national perspective. Their cordiality and mutual identification with a long-lost pre-national past when they used to experience *intercommunal*ity, as opposed to their more recent, mutually exclusionary national narratives that force them to consider each other as enemies, are visually and verbally articulated by the two characters engaging in witty repartee while facing one another, one at the port of Nées Kydonies in Lesvos and the other at the port of Ayvalık (Ancient Kydonies), separated by the Aegean Sea:

Και τώρα κοιτάμε τη Μικρά Ασία και λέμε 'Τι γυρεύουν οι Τουρκαλάδες στα λιμάνια μας'. Κι εμείς 'Είντα γυρεύουνε στο κάτω-κάτω οι Γιουνάνηδες από την Anatolou μας' [And now we are looking at Asia Minor and say: 'What are those *Turkalades*⁷ doing at our ports'. And we say, 'After all, what are those *Yunanides* looking for in our Anatolou?'] (Soloup 2014, 366)

2 Intertextuality and intermediality

The differences in genre and temporalities observed in the works studied above mirror, to a certain extent, the relationship of each text or medium with other texts or media, defined as intertextuality and intermediality. Both Sotiriou's and Soloup's works allude to other texts (or media) and bear witness to the circulation, "absorption and transformation" (Kristeva 1969, 85) of texts from both sides of the Aegean and beyond. However, the nature of these relations varies from one text to another but also within the same text.

Sotiriou's representations of Anatolia reveal the writer's devotion to the myth of Asia Minor, introduced by the first generation of Anatolian Greek writers⁸, and

7 Τουρκαλάδες/ Γιουνάνηδες [Turkalades/Yunanides]: 'Turkalades' is a pejorative term for 'Turks' in Greek. 'Yunanides' is a transcription in Greek of the national epithet 'Yunan/Yunanlar' ('Ionian(s)'), which acquired the meaning of 'inhabitants of Greece, Greeks' in Turkish). Although inoffensive in Turkish precisely because it is the Turkish equivalent of the term 'Greek', the term 'Yunan/Yunanides' could be perceived as offensive by Greeks when used untranslated in Greek (instead of Greeks – Έλληνες); more so in the context of the graphic novel where the two characters are presented in opposition.

8 A group of writers (Fotis Kontoglou, Ilias Venezis, Stratis Myrivilis, Stratis Doukas) hailing from Asia Minor, and forming the "Aeolian School" which was very active from the late twenties to the sixties, contributed to the shaping of modern national myths pertaining to the expulsion of Anatolian Greeks from Asia Minor (Beaton 1996, 180).

to its expansion. Her descriptions of Anatolia are divided between exoticism “a desired elsewhere, which is nostalgically imagined as [...] temporally remote” (Bergahn 2019, 36) and cosmopolitanism, cultivating nostalgia for the Ottoman *Belle Époque*, the period of coexistence preceding World War I, during which the Christian minorities dominated Ottoman social life (Georgelin 2002). Sotiriou’s gaze reflects the strong attachment of Greeks to Asia Minor, but also their desire to dissociate collectively from the East, revealing the ambivalence of a country that was seeking to cement its place in the West (Koliopoulos and Veremis 98) while still cultivating emotional idealism for the East following the military defeat in Asia Minor. Linguistic variation (see *infra*: *Language and Connectivity*) and intertextual references that underline the circulation of texts and myths from the East to the West contribute to forging Sotiriou’s narrative of a charming, multi-ethnic but also Christian-dominated, turn-of-the-century Ottoman Empire.

The occasional appearance of frame stories highlights the narrative’s nostalgic exoticism. A frame story involving the singer with the most exquisite voice in the East named Ogdontakis, who is framed by a heartbroken Muslim lady and has to sing all day and all night to escape execution, draws a parallel with Shahrazad’s storytelling talent that saved her from death in *One Thousand and One Nights*. By introducing the pattern of fate and destiny inside a frame story, Sotiriou pays homage to the Arab art of storytelling and to the intermingling of different literary traditions of the once “Mediterranean Empire” (Greene 2014, 91). This frame story introduces an intermedial and intercultural reference, as the lyrics from the song that saved Ogdontakis’s life, *Aman Memo*, are quoted by Axiotis: “Aman Memo, [ufak Memo], şeker Memo, sevdali Memo” (Sotiriou 2008, 61). This song is a typical example of intense contacts between different ethno-religious groups in the Ottoman Empire and of the cultural transfers that made Ottoman music famous on both sides of the Aegean Sea and abroad, following the transatlantic migration of Ottoman Christians. *Aman Memo* features in a collection of Greek popular music introduced in Greece by refugees from Asia Minor⁹. The Turkish-Greek version of the song included in this collection was recorded by the Smyrniot Greek Kostas Nouros and the Imbriot Stelios Berberis. Another recording of this song by the Armenian Minas Effendi and The Oriental Orchestra was available in the American catalogue of Columbia Records as “Turkish music” in the 1920s (Graziosi 2018, 152). As is the case with many popular rhythms circulating in Anatolia and the Middle East, the exact origin of *Aman Memo* is uncertain. It is casually labelled as a Smyrniot Greek, Armenian, Turkish folk or Ottoman song (Trag-

⁹ The collection bears the title: *Rebetika: A journey through popular Greek Urban Songs Period A: (1850–1960)*.

aki 2007, 68; Graziosi 2018, 151). The rhythm of the song, *curcuna*, has Eastern Anatolian and Northern Iraqi origins but was incorporated in Ottoman music in the nineteenth century (Ekinci 2017, 57).

Aivali is divided in three parts, whose titles are based on types of music or musical compositions. The story begins with a part named *Zeybekiko* that forms the backbone of the story, exposing the motivations behind the work and symbolizing the hybrid identity of the author who is divided between the inherited memory of Anatolia and his love for his birthplace. Considered nowadays as one of the national dances of Greece, *Zeybekiko* is in fact part of Ottoman café music traditions (Pennanen 2004, 10). The author symbolically reflects on common cultural traditions that were subsequently appropriated by different countries of the Balkans (Pennanen 2004, 1) and whose origins are still a cause of dispute. The third part represents the “voices” of the exchange and is named after the *Fugue*, a type of musical composition alluding both to the variety of voices that helped shape the collective memory of the Exchange and to the notion of “fleeing” (*fugere* in Latin), thus to the exchange itself.

The greatest part of the book consists of adaptations of well-known Greek novels but also some unknown, such as Ahmet Yorulmaz’s *Savaşın Çocukları* [*Children of War*]. Intermediality puts different voices of the exchange into dialogue, such as the ones that helped shape the national narrative and those that are less known in Greece or that represent the perspective of the Other, such as Yorulmaz’s, in order to contest the nationalist exclusionary narrative. Intermediality in Soloup’s work also provides us with insight about the effect of literature on our ways of connecting with the past and interacting with space. Soloup’s juxtaposition of adaptations from different national literary backgrounds suggests a multidirectional and transnational perspective: Gazing back at the imperial configurations of identity, *Aivali* openly questions the essentialism of polished, unified and Manichean narratives in a post-imperial context. Soloup’s cross-referencing of different literary works of Turkish and Greek literature marks a vaster transnational approach that takes into consideration the complex web of interactions and constant movement in the Aegean Sea. It also reintroduces the Ottoman cultural heritage as a category of analysis in literature and in graphics novels, corresponding to “a project of re-territorialization” (Kinoshita 2014, 314), a shift from national literatures to transnational literatures and narratives.

Soloup’s intermediality underlines the third generation’s dependence on imagination, assemblage and collage of fragments of stories not only transmitted through generations (post-memory, see *infra*) but also “borrowed” or experienced through the media and scattered in different sites of remembrance in order to grasp the past. Soloup uses graphics and other media such as photography (of the refugees, of how the places looked like in the past) and music to conceptualize

his own role as a third-generation descendant of the exchanged populations: to “recover what [he] can and gaps of an “unremembered past” (Bayer 2010, 125) that cannot be represented but through a reimagined version of the past, a fabricated image, i.e., a reproduction of reality entirely created by man, in order to replace the emptiness. Painting and graphics are opposed to photography because photography’s objectivity, the reproduction of the originating object through a non-living agent (the lens, *objectif* in French), allows only for a limited number of misrepresentations of reality (Bazin and Gray 1960, 7). The intervention of painting and graphics can counterbalance the authoritative, archival aspect of “having-been-there” (Barthes 1977, 44) of photography for third-generation writers by insinuating that what was once there or might have been there, has been forgotten and is thus impossible to authenticate or confirm. Soloup’s intermediality aims at alternative ways of remembering that focus less on the power of witnessing or on the archive as proof or the historicity of the event and more on ethical ways to preserve the heritage of the exchange and reconcile with the past.

In the last part of the book, Soloup features as the main character of the narrative alongside the Anatolian Greek writer Fotis Kontoglou. Soloup doesn’t simply adapt Kontoglou’s short story in the graphic novel form but is depicted as the reader of Kontoglou’s story. As a character in his own graphic novel, Soloup is shown using Kontoglou’s narrative as a compass to discover the history of the place he is visiting, authenticating the narrative while visiting and experiencing the place described in the short story. He is interacting with the text and with the writer, who is seen replying to his questions while narrating the story. By staging a dialogue between the writer and himself, Soloup conveys the intimacy and complicity developed between Soloup as a reader and as an artist and Kontoglou as a writer. *Aivali* is thus no longer limited to intertextual references but adopts a metaliterary approach, providing the readers with insight and transparency about the author’s motivations and about the creative process behind *Aivali*.

3 Ethics of memory

Although an ethical commitment to the preservation of memory is explicit in both works, the meaning attached to it differs in both cases. The first part of Sotiriou’s book focuses on the marginalized memory of the common past shared by Turks and Rums¹⁰, preceding Turkey’s entry in WWI and the deployment of Western po-

¹⁰ Rum/Romios (Ρωμούς) from medieval Greek Ρωμαῖος – Roman: until the Fall of Constantinople, an inhabitant of the Eastern Roman Empire. During Ottoman rule the term described an Orthodox

litical interests in the region that led to growing enmity between the two ethno-religious groups. The narrator's long-term friendship with a Turkish boy and the mutual respect and friendship between Rums and Turks are described. Breaking bread together, exchanging goods, giving and receiving hospitality were parts of everyday life in Anatolia regardless of people's origins. Peaceful coexistence and cases of religious syncretism are also mentioned, although the references to the latter often betray feelings of superiority towards Islam and the Turks, who are depicted as secretly endorsing some Christian traditions such as praying to Christian saints for better health, acknowledging their effectiveness.

When Manolis Axiotis crosses paths with deported or impoverished Armenians, Sotiriou's narrative shifts from a unique perspective of the events and considers other traumatic memories, namely the memory of the Armenian genocide, reminding the reader once again that the Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic society and that other communities also suffered violence during WWI. However, violence towards Turks is hardly ever mentioned or is counterbalanced by violence towards Greeks. For instance, in the ending of the novel Axiotis is remorseful for previously killing a Turkish guerrilla fighter but considers that his crime pales in comparison to the carnage of his people. Sotiriou's historical and biographical approach and her choice of the Greek witness as the narrator who only gives an account of the past, undermine the novel's ability to adopt a more lucid and detached approach to the events, unlike the following generations of writers and artists. Although her book aims at reconciliation between the Turkish and the Greek people¹¹ by highlighting their common imperial heritage and by accusing those responsible for the tragedy –who according to her, are not Turks but Western imperialists– it doesn't quite venture to the conflictual memory of the Other, the Turk.

Conversely, Soloup's narrative exemplifies the metabolization of the experience through time and under the effect of post-memory defined as “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to – the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up”. (Hirsch 2012, 5). Photography is an essential aspect of post-memory, functioning as a relic, as an archive of the past for the second generation that relies on oral narratives and pictures to remember the past (Hirsch 2012, 36–40). Photographs of people and places are indeed present in Soloup's work but mixed with other media and supported by the

Christian of the Empire. Nowadays a Rum is either a member of the Greek Orthodox minority of Turkey or a descendant of the Orthodox Christian Ottoman citizens that left their homeland during or after WWI.

11 Sotiriou received the Abdi İpekçi Peace and Friendship Prize in 1983.

imaginative and creative power of graphics. The reason for this choice is obvious, as a century has elapsed since the events and many of the documents, pictures and even the stories have been lost in time. Next to an array of black-and-white, fading pictures of refugees, Soloup, the third-generation survivor describes: [φωνές που] με τον καιρό λησμονιούνται, χάνονται και αυτές. Συναντιούνται μ 'εκείνες που δεν μαθεύτηκαν ποτέ [voices that become forgotten with time and also vanish. They join the ones that were never heard.] (Soloup 2014, 37).

Soloup's approach to memory is multileveled, multidirectional and transnational, allowing for several viewpoints to emerge through a narrative that traces multiple trajectories (both spatial and memorial) in the Eastern Mediterranean and associates different fragments of stories spanning over three generations of survivors. In an online radio programme, Soloup defended his approach to the subject through his attachment to the Ottoman past and the communality of trauma as an outcome of intense contact and conflict:

I am Greek, I have this culture. [...] At the same time ... we are Rum, *Romios*, and we are feeling that Anatolia, Asia Minor is another place for our souls, for our origins. [...] We ordinary people from two sides, the Greeks and the Turks, we have the same stories [...] In a word, we are the victims. We have the same stories and the same feelings about the war and the trauma. (Lepeska 2019)

Images of water and travelling from one shore to another symbolize the double identity of the descendants of the exchanged populations and the flow of stories and memories between the two shores of the Aegean. The images of water and travelling reveal how the memory of the “*xerizomòs*” has been transplanted on both lands: the Cretan-Turkish memory transplanted in Aivali and the Greek memory of Aivali transplanted in Greece. The phrase “two shores” in the subtitle of the book indicates duality and reciprocity which is in turn reflected in images and narratives of travelling, describing the flow of memories across cultures, facilitated by the sea. The Aegean Sea is the vector of this flowing memory, as both countries share the memory of the exchange of populations, whose “inherent transcultural nature” transcends the national memory culture. (Erll 2017).

The transcultural nature of memory and identity is depicted through situations such as the dialog between Mehmet and Soloup. The flowing, transnational memory of imperial coexistence and the violent rupture caused by the exchange, clash with the nationalist discourse of linear and unitary memory. Marginalized narratives as remnants of the pre-national memory and identity persist to this day, troubling and destabilizing the heirs of the exchange but also allowing them to establish connections with one another and with their lost homelands. During a discussion pertaining to the duty of every people to defend their country, Mehmet claims that:

Ο καθείς αγαπά την πατρίδα του και τον τόπο των παππούδων του. Σε μας μόνο, στοι μπάσταρδους της Λοζάνης, ετούτηνα η αγάπη είναι πιο μπερδεμένη. [We all love our countries and the lands of our grandfathers. But for us, the bastards of Lausanne, this love is more complicated.] (Soloup 2014, 390)

The choice of the word “bastards” is in contrast with what was previously discussed by the two characters and with their visual symbolisms in the previous pages: as the two characters ponder about their duty to defend their countries they are visually represented as faceless twin figures in opaque black and white against a background of opaque white and black respectively, mirroring and at the same time confronting each other and brandishing knives. This representation, in par with the definition of a solid and uniform memory culture of the events and the places calibrated by the national perspective, is opposed to the shared past of the Anatolian peoples, represented as figures mirroring each other. As Soloup points out, the Turks still distinguish between Greeks and Rums:

Για τους Τούρκους 'Τιουνάν' είναι οι Έλληνες απέναντι, που ήρθαν το 1919 για να χαλάσουν τη χώρα. Ενώ 'Ρουμ', οι Ρωμιοί ήταν οι γείτονές τους. Ήδεις οι καταγίδες, ίδιο το ψωμί. [For the Turks, *Yunan* are the Greeks on the other side, that came in 1919 to destroy the country. Whereas *Rum*, Romioi, were their neighbours. Same troubles, same bread.] (Soloup 2014, 356)

Centuries of coexistence in a vast empire inhabited by different ethnoreligious groups and the experience of displacement and settlement in a different country have also forged what Astrid Erll defines as “mnemonic relationality” and “travelling memory” (Erll, 2017). As the exchanged people of Lausanne are divided between the country and the social context that they left behind and the new country, so is their memory. Soloup’s work, with its persistent references to “bastard” identities, the representation of movement, border-crossing and travelling across the Aegean Sea and the constant mixing and collaging of different stories and media (photography, drawing, literature) reveals that the memory of the exchange of populations transcends the barriers of the nation; it is transnational and transcultural, meaning that it is made up of complex networks of relations, spaces and cultural references that mirror continuous human and cultural interactions and the complexity of the hybrid identities in question.

The transcultural nature of memory also becomes apparent in the excerpt of Yorulmaz’s novel adapted by Soloup. The narrator, a Turkish-Cretan man who goes by the hypocorism of Hassanakis, a portmanteau of the Muslim name Hassan and

the Greek suffix *-akis*¹² meaning “little”, reveals the tragic irony behind the history of the Cretan village of Kandanos, stating that many Cretan-Turks died during the siege of the village by Cretan-Greek revolutionaries in 1897, while only forty-four years later its Greek inhabitants were massacred by the Nazis. The memory of national-socialism which affected all of Europe and beyond, the Cretan-Turkish memory and the Greek memory meet, or are rather superimposed, in this place which acts as a palimpsest, marked by the overlapping of different and conflictual memories “resulting in a complex web of historical markers that point to [its] continuing heterogeneous life” (Huysen 2003, 81). Yorulmaz’s juxtaposition of memories that could be qualified as *multidirectional*, meaning that they are subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and comparison (Rothberg 2009, 3), acts as proof of human and cultural interactions that take place in, but also largely surpass the Eastern Mediterranean, aiming at bringing different memories and experiences into a productive dialogue that allows for a better understanding of these events and for the development of a new sense of solidarity (Rothberg 2009, 5). Soloup’s ethical approach to memory and his multidirectional approach, aiming at developing a sense of solidarity but also educating people against violence and discrimination, compels him to delve into the more recent past (reports of human rights violations in detention camps in Guantanamo) but also into the Holocaust (concentration camps) to draw comparisons and examples of the consequences of forgetting and repeating the wrong deeds of the past.

4 Language and connectivity

Language is perhaps one aspect of Sotiriou’s novel where the manifestation of connectivity seems more obvious and conspicuously deliberate. Sotiriou was born in Aydin but moved to Smyrna with her family as a child. Travellers’ accounts from the late Ottoman period confirm the interpenetration of ethnic groups and languages even in smaller cities like Aydin, which was less cosmopolitan and more attached to Ottoman social habits (Georgelin 2005, 113). In Smyrna, several languages were spoken simultaneously by the different ethnoreligious groups that inhabited the city since ancient times, producing the Smyrna dialect which reflected linguistic coexistence and hybridity. The need for a common language for the development of commerce in the Mediterranean, on which Smyrna excelled as a major hub of trade routes from Anatolia, created the *lingua franca*, a “pidginized

¹² The suffix *-akis* is also a typical ending of Greek Cretan family names. Thus, the ending *-akis* conveys both an affectionate manner to refer to Hassan in Greek but also his Cretan identity.

Romance, with the occasional word lifted from Arabic, Turkish or Greek" (Mallette 2014, 341), which was also spoken in Smyrna. The city's Western Christian population, the Levantines, contributed greatly to the Smyrna dialect, as well as the merchants and diplomats from Italy, Spain and France but also from Britain. The dialect was influenced greatly from Turkish, but also from several Greek dialects, local or not, as Greeks from the mainland and from the islands migrated or traded in Asia Minor (Tzitzilis 2000, 20).

Farewell Anatolia bears the traces of this continuous interpenetration of languages. Sotiriou uses a very vivid and expressive demotic Greek language, enriched with many elements from the Greek dialect of Smyrna. This linguistic variant adds to the exoticist character of the text but also adds to the verisimilitude of the narrative. However, the narrator was a Turkish-speaking Rum farmer with very limited access to education. His use of the Greek language might have been satisfactory but couldn't possibly correspond to the discreetly sophisticated dialectal variant of Greek used by Sotiriou. It would be thoroughly justified to say that the language of *Farewell Anatolia*, which is an essential aspect of the charm of the novel, stems from creative reconstruction of a peasant's idiolect and the writer's own linguistic experience as a Rum hailing from the bourgeoisie of Smyrna. The Greek readers are submerged in the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism of Smyrna through a form of Greek that is comprehensive to the readers but at the same time slightly unfamiliar, containing a multitude of words ("βεγγέρα /vegghera (party), "τσαρσί /çarşı (market)," "ρεστέρης /rençper (farmer)," "κάντια /candy" "τσιτσιμπίρια /ginger beer" to cite just a few), expressions and constructions highly representative of the dialects spoken in and around Smyrna.

Soloup's dynamic patchwork of narratives from both sides of the Aegean contains solid proof of linguistic interpenetration and connectivity. As the graphic novel includes several literary "voices" from the region, pronounced language connectivity can be easily observed. Aside from a few exceptions, most of Soloup's own narrative is written in standard Modern Greek which is – naturally – also influenced by other languages of the Mediterranean and beyond. The literary adaptations in *Aivali* contain original text from Greek writers such as Ilias Venezis and Fotis Kontoglou, both native Anatolian Greeks who integrated elements of Asia Minor dialects in their literature as a way to preserve the memory of the languages spoken on the Anatolian coasts before 1923. In their texts, Turkish loans such as *ρουμάνι* (*orman*), *μπαχέδες* (*bahçe*), *γιαταγάνι* (*yatağan*), *ταμπάκης* (*tabak*) and *γιάγουμα* (*yağma*), appear alongside vocabulary from Romance languages such as: *ονόρε* (*onore*), *κοντραμπατζής* (*contrebandier*) and *αριβάρω* (*arrivare*). The presence of Ancient Greek and Medieval Greek vocabulary, the later alluding to the strong Byzantine influence in the dialect, compose the rich fabric of the dialects of Asia Minor. However, aside from Asia Minor dialects, the text showcases the his-

tory of the Cretan dialect. Soloup begins and ends his book with references to Crete: firstly, alluding to his search for belonging in Crete, secondly with the adaptation of Cretan-Turk's Yorulmaz's novel and lastly when he meets a third-generation Cretan-Turk while searching for traces of Greek presence in Cunda, Turkey. References to the practice of the Cretan idiom reinforce the salience of movement and connectivity in the Mediterranean region, literature and memory. The Venetian and Ottoman heritage of Crete and its insularity "derived both by interconnectivity and isolation" (Kouremenos 2018, 1) are manifest in the language which contains several elements from Italian and Turkish but also managed to preserve an impressive Ancient and Medieval Greek vocabulary. Coexistence of Greek Orthodox and Muslim populations in Crete for several centuries, combined with insularity created the factors for the development of a strong Cretan identity reflected on the exclusive use of the Cretan dialect, regardless of the religion of Cretans. When Cretan-Turks left Crete during the exchange of populations, they continued to practise their language on the other side of the Aegean, creating language enclaves (Ioannidou et al 2019). This phenomenon is depicted in *Aivali* through the third-generation Cretan-Turk Mehmet who inherited the language as a quintessential element of his Cretan identity, that he naturally uses to communicate with Soloup. Soloup maintained the original language throughout the dialogue in order to bring out this specificity that draws them closer together, as they are both heirs to an imperial past when connectivity and coexistence were the rule.

5 Conclusion

Both works refer to the Ottoman society and configuration of identity, revealing cultural encounters and cultural transfers in the Mediterranean and beyond, as well as strong cultural bonds between peoples that traded and lived in the Ottoman Empire. However, the discrepancies in the representation of the memory of coexistence and connectivity observed, can be attributed to different choices in terms of genre, medium and storytelling techniques and to generational differences between the writers, which are essential for the understanding of the approaches adopted. Sotiriou's adaptation of a single eyewitness's account in the form of a novel contributes to the static representation of the Other, whereas memory representation accommodates to the national myth of the Christian dominance in Asia Minor, further nourishing it. Soloup's work on the other hand proves that the auspicious political climate combined with the elapse of time can have a significant effect on the representation of memory. Narratives that variate in viewpoint and provide the Other with agency, combined with the plasticity of the medium and its capacity to represent the plurality of experiences, allows for a more ethical

approach to memory, aiming at mutual recognition of cultural affiliations and reconciliation in the present. In Soloup's work the Ottoman legacy and memory is liberated from the shackles and torments of exclusive national narratives in order to build bridges between the affected communities and beyond the confines of the Aegean.

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Elisabeth Stadlinger (Vienna)

The Literary Construction of Mediterranean Identity: Memory and Myth in Maria Corti

Non si sa mai veramente quando le cose comincino. Meno dubbi esistono sui luoghi dove le sirene trascorsero in secoli lontani non tutto, ma buona parte del loro tempo, luoghi iscritti nella mappa mediterranea.

Maria Corti (*Il canto delle sirene*, 22)

Abstract: Definitions of identity open a field of research crisscrossing several disciplines, not at least literary studies. This contribution is aimed to detect possible aesthetic approaches how to construct identity throughout literature, focussing on Mediterranean issues.

Matters of identity can be well observed in the works of the Italian writer, critic, philologist and founder of semiotics Maria Corti (1915–2002); the aesthetics of *L'ora di tutti*, a novel in three parts dealing with the conquest of Otranto by the Ottoman Empire in 1480, and *Il canto delle sirene*, a hybrid text consisting of fictitious as well as research chapters and turning ancient Mediterranean mythology into global literary discourse, allow to analyse the ambiguity of concepts about the individual I and its consolidation within, as well as its outbreak from beliefs, customs and traditions constituting culture. While Corti seeks in both works to interweave topics of individual identity with intercultural questions, she exposes her narration in between the poles of memory and myth, finally recalling memory of historic events through their myths and declaring mythology as cultural memory. As observations on etymology and on intertextual notions in Corti's works demonstrate once more the connectivity of Mediterranean cultures, in a conclusive moment Corti's interpretation of literature as a communicative system able to define a *luogo mentale* will emerge as basic aesthetics of constructing Mediterranean identity beyond cultural fragmentation.

Discourses about the construction of identity in literature reflect questions concerning the relation between real and imagined trueness and its perception through aesthetic and poetological methodology. Transferring this profoundly communicative conception of literature onto a spatial *topos* such as the Mediterranean does not imply that literature studies are limited to research on the depicted inner-, inter- or transculturality along the Mediterranean shores, but instead it calls for a focus on the aesthetic construction of the Mediterranean and its concep-

tualization within literary texts. The Italian philologist, critic and writer Maria Corti¹ articulates the term *luogo mentale* to describe the mental interaction of imagination and reality, which converges into cultural memory as conceptualistic phenomenon:

I luoghi mentali sono costruzioni della mente che nascono da idee, individuali o di gruppo; c'è quindi sempre all'origine del luogo mentale qualcosa di astratto, un'idea con carattere di assoluto, un'operazione simbolizzante applicata a un oggetto che può anche non essere stato mai visto. Perciò le realtà terrene inserite in un luogo mentale vengono a recitare nella storia della cultura un ruolo particolarissimo, a costituire nella società una realtà nuova. [...] Da qui l'importanza storica assunta nella cultura da queste costruzioni simboliche della mente, che spesso si presentano come contenitori di due punti di vista antitetici [...]. (Corti 1997, 33)

Expanding this abstract concept onto the figuration of the Mediterranean in literature, its pluralistic receptions, depictions and modulations become obvious, as Corti points out: “Può accadere che due culture, fra loro diverse per epoca e per valori, diano vita a uno stesso luogo mentale, ma per vie di approccio assai differenti sicché gli adepti alle due realtà storico-sociali coltivano un comune luogo mentale senza rendersene conto.” (Corti 1997, 33). Therefore, the detection of the Mediterranean identity demands a textual investigation on the prevailing concept of culture and its individuals; the dialectic interpretation of these polarizing but also converging terms then flows into an examination of identity.² This implies a dichotomous understanding of identity, which is proposed to consist of, on the one hand, a subject's congruency with, or delineation from, its experienced or imagined social and cultural surroundings (a kind of outer, cultural identity), and, on the other hand, of the subject's personality producing its capacities, thoughts, emotions, decisions and actions (the inner, individual identity).

Based on this notion, studies on literary texts are able to discern “the” Mediterranean identity as well as the plurality of identities constituting and constituted

1 The work of Maria Corti (1915–2002) is extensive and diverse; to recall all her scientific, literary and editing merits she obtained as scholar of philology, as University teacher at Lecce and Pavia, as co-founder of the journal *Strumenti critici* and as editorial member of *Alfabeta*, as literary critic and as collector of manuscripts of Italian writers stored in the Fondo Manoscritti at the University of Pavia (insights in its foundation are given in Corti's book *Ombre dal Fondo*), as collaborating editor at the publishing houses Einaudi and Bompiani, and not at least as novelist, is recommended to consult the detailed bibliography also including critics on her works provided by Cristina Nesi (Corti 2006, 217–345) and the memorial volume published in Corti's literature journal *Autografo* (Cremante and Stella 2002).

2 Otherwise criss-crossing several scientific disciplines, the questions of identity are here going to be seen both as subject of narration as well as derivations from aesthetic constructions in literary texts.

by the Mediterranean. The dichotomous reading of identity is intrinsically related to the imagining of the Mediterranean, which analogously happens to be the object of discourses on congruency and delineation when seen as synthesis or polarization between its cultures, languages and literatures. Hence it is not only necessary to adopt a pluralistic view on the Mediterranean reality, determined by exchange, integration, connectivity and also confrontation, but also to consider the various imaginings of the Mediterranean,³ capable of literary configuration as *topos* by symbolizing elaborations and variations of its memory and myths.

These reflections on identity and the literary Mediterranean lead to a further exploration of the philological genesis of the term *mediterraneum*.⁴ Etymological dictionaries declare the semantic of this Greek and Latin compound as originally related to regions inside the mainland and not along the coast.⁵ The comparatist Predrag Matvejević notes Cicero's use of the continental semantic of *mediterraneum*,⁶ which is also found in Boccaccio (DEI, 2404) and was in use up to the eighteenth century (DELI, 955). Nevertheless, according to Matvejević a transfer of the strict continental semantic onto the sea seems to have taken place as early as the seventh century, in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville.⁷ The term *mediterraneum*

3 The comparatist Armando Gnisci discusses various imaginings of the Mediterranean beginning with the “palimpsest” of the historian Fernand Braudel’s opus magnum *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, dissolving *exchange* (translations of the contribution’s author if not indicated otherwise) in *mixture* and transforming Braudel’s *stacking* into *slitting* of cultural layers (Gnisci 2000, 166, 168). Gnisci’s own imagination focusses on the notion of *net* (Gnisci 2000, 167) which accords with the idea of Mediterranean *connectivity*, established by the medievalist Suzanne Conklin Akbari as a fundamental concept in interpreting Mediterranean issues (Akbari 2013).

4 A deepened research on the various semantics and use of the term *mediterraneum* can only be fulfilled in separate contributions exclusively dedicated to this issue; therefore this examination refers on other sources giving a literary-historical synopsis.

5 According to etymological sources, the literal meaning of the calque of the Greek *mesógeios* and the Latin adjective *terraneum* (“in the middle of mainland”) was used as opposite to *maritimus* (*Dizionario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana* [hereafter DELI] 1999, 954–955; *Dizionario Etimologico Italiano* [hereafter DEI] 1952, 2404).

6 Matvejević (1998, 14). Matvejević refers to the following passage in Cicero’s second oration, book five against Verres, the trialed proconsul of Sicily: “Ad homines a piratarum metu et suspicione alienissimos, a navigando rebusque maritimis remotissimos, ad Centuripinos, homines maxime mediterraneos, summos aratores, qui nomen numquam timuissent maritimi praedonis, unum te praetore horruissent Apronium, terrestrem archipiratam.” (Cicero 1995, 494). Using the adjective “*mediterraneos*” in context with “*aratores*” and “*terrestrem*”, Cicero confirms its inner land’s semantic and its opposition to “*maritimus*”.

7 Matvejević (1998, 15). Matvejević points out Isidore’s description of the “Great Sea” under the heading “*De mediterraneo mari*” (Isidore 2006: 277–278): “This is also called the Mediterranean because it flows through the ‘middle of the land’ (*media terrae*) all the way to the east, separating

then acquired the semantic of a sea which is completely surrounded by continental coasts and became used as maritime adjective. The antonymic coexistence of these opposing semantics over several centuries characterizes a strong but polysemantic polarization of the Sea versus the Continent.⁸ The genesis of *mediterraneum* as an oxymoron also mirrors questions concerning cultural identity, which pertain to all the Mediterranean coasts. Connected- and otherness were already established in the Roman description of the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum*, emphasizing an inner and an outer aspect of cultural belonging.⁹ Further, the plurisemantic variety of expressions indicating the Mediterranean Sea in the different languages along its shores¹⁰ makes apparent the plurality of perspectives concerning questions of Mediterranean identity.

Literary correspondence to this essential theme is found in Maria Corti's novel *L'ora di tutti*, where she narrates using a pluriperspective form the conquest of Otranto by the Ottoman Empire in 1480 and the later liberation of the Apulian

Europe, Africa, and Asia." (Isidore 2006, 277, English translation of Stephen Barney et al.; italics within quotations from original version if not indicated otherwise).

⁸ This polarization finds expression within Fernand Braudel's analysis of Italy's predominant cultural and economic position around 1450 in Europe and the whole Mediterranean area, when he describes certain Italian dominions within the Mediterranean as "coast stripes without an inner mainland" (Braudel 2003, 25).

⁹ Elisabeth Arend summarizes this Roman ideology as follows: "Das Identitätsgewisse und besitzerstolze *nostrum*, das die Römer von den Griechen zur Bezeichnung des Meeres nahmen, an dessen Küsten sie ihr Reich ausdehnten, beschwört [...] Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Eroberern und Eroberten. Wer nicht in dieses *nostrum* eingeschlossen ist, steht auf der anderen, der falschen Seite." (Arend 1998, 263). Braudel describes Italy's domination of the Mediterranean rooted in its geographic position: "Die schmale Halbinsel hat sich dieses ganze Binnenmeer untertan gemacht, diese riesigen Wasserflächen, die sie, wie um sie besser beherrschen zu können, in zwei aufteilt, gerade als wollte sich eine hilfreiche Geographie in den Dienst ihrer Größe stellen." (Braudel 2003, 25; German translation of S. Summerer and G. Kurz).

¹⁰ Matvejević opened his lectures about the Mediterranean Sea as follows: "Le denominazioni del mare dipendono dalla sua posizione, dal rapporto con le terre che bagna e dai legami con i popoli che vivono sulle sue sponde. [...] Il mediterraneo venne chiamato anche Mare del Nord o del Sud, a seconda della posizione di chi lo solcava." (Matvejević 1998, 13). One paradigmatic case of this variety of terms figures the Latin translation of a probably Aristotelian text, where the Mediterranean is called "the inner sea" in delineation to the Ocean as "outer sea" (Arend 1998, 263; Matvejević 1998, 14). Even various colour attributions in the terminology of the Mediterranean Sea can be found in different languages (Arend 1998, 263; Matvejević 1998, 18). The Moroccan poet and scholar of literature Mohammed Benni relaunches a philological conscience of a cultural North-South-division of the Mediterranean by remembering the historic denomination of the Mediterranean Sea in Arabic with the terms "mare romano" (which referred to the Byzantine reign) and "mare siriano" (Bennis 2009, 3).

port city and its surroundings.¹¹ This former part of “Magna Grecia” works as a prism for studying Mediterranean issues, due to its role as a crucial medieval connecting port between the Occident and the Orient as well as the intense presence there of several Mediterranean powers and cultures over many centuries.¹² The assault of Otranto by the Ottomans and, above all, its cruel climax in the massacre on Minerva’s hill represent a historic moment that became steeped in religious myths and legends, which have also been iterated in literature.¹³ Perhaps owing to her biographical background,¹⁴ this ambiguity between memory of the events and their mythification became Corti’s basic narration strategy in *L’ora di tutti*: she commemorates on the one hand the historical events of the assault (also quoting local chronologies and underscoring their inflictions of myth: “[...] se ne riparte con un ritmo irreale, di favola, nell’anima, lo stesso ritmo delle vecchie cronache locali.”; Corti 2004, 12), but she also seizes on folkloristic myth to constitute a *luogo mentale* of this part of the Mediterranean, completely avoiding any miraculous de-

¹¹ In the days of July 1480 Otranto, reigned by Ferdinand I. from Aragon as part of the Kingdom of Naples, was assaulted by the Ottoman Empire on the background of Mohammed II.’s imperialistic strategy to dominate the Mediterranean’s Occident invading Puglia (and thereafter the whole Italian peninsula) across the Adriatic Sea and to isolate this way the maritime power Venice in the North (Andenna 2007, 274). Because of territorial rivalry and ongoing political tensions between the several reigns of the peninsula, Ferdinand did not send immediate military support to Otranto’s defenders, who were left alone during the sever Ottoman attacks and therefore had to give up after several days of heavy bombardment.

¹² In various historic studies on Otranto its geoposition between (Byzantine) Orient and Occident is focussed as central (e.g. von Falkenhausen 2007); in Marina Falla Castelfranchi’s observations on artistic culture in medieval Otranto the port city is also called “the Occident’s bosfor” (Falla Castelfranchi 2007, 281).

¹³ Some of these texts and their reproduction of myths are going to be investigated later on. Many myths have been created on the massacre from 12 august 1480 (problems of the precise dating and textual sources are discussed in Houben 2008, 14–15), when a high number of Otranto’s defenders and inhabitants was beheaded on the city’s hills – the most diffused myth treats the Pascià’s negotiations which apparently offered the prisoners to save their lives by converting from Christianity to Islam. But it seems indeed historical fact that in Otranto the Pascià did not demand religious conversion while the financial treatments for release are historically confirmed (Andenna 2007, 258–259, 274); nevertheless, the victims of the massacre were later sanctified and kept in memory as the eight hundred martyrs of Otranto (this number of victims is based on one of the rare testifying narrations of the event written down in 1539; Andenna 2007, 259).

¹⁴ Corti’s relation to Apulia is not limited to the cathedra at the University of Lecce, but derives from her childhood, when Corti’s family moved from Milan to Apulia, a period where her mother fell seriously ill. This loss and the following “orphanage” in Milan colleges (Corti’s father continued to work in Apulia) fundamentally influenced Corti’s work and especially *L’ora di tutti*; Gino Pisanò, one of Corti’s former disciples, gives valuable biographical insights on this aspect (Pisanò 2008, 212–213).

velopments and breaking with common expectations related to these myths, which, in the course of time, had become religiously canonized.¹⁵ These inversions turn out to be the fundamental methodology used by Corti for constituting identity, as we will observe later in the construction of the novel's feminine protagonist, Idrusa.

Within the tension between the commemorated history and its myths, Corti develops the polyphonic image of the Mediterranean through the introspections of five narrators, which are conceived as individual entities with different sociocultural origins.¹⁶

With the exception of the final chapter, they occur at the point of death, which assumes a meta-categoric significance throughout the novel and is employed as a fundamental narrative perspective.¹⁷ Further, that the novel's title is also announcing death, while additionally indicating the issues surrounding identity in the

15 That Corti's novel is in historical researches on the assault considered as precursor in spotlighting the betrayal on Otranto's defenceless inhabitants (Andenna 2007, 244, 274; Houben 2008, 9), confirms the historical veracity on which *L'ora di tutti* is mainly based and hence Corti's inversion of the myths as aesthetical construction. Among the vast field of research on the literary function of myth, the studies of Eleazar Meletinsky assembled in the book *The Poetics of Myth* (English translation by Guy Lanoue and Alexandre Sadetsky, 1998) also treat the variety of scholarly approaches to the subject. On the intrinsic relation of folklore and myth, Meletinsky applies a semiotic reading of myth very similar to Corti: "Another source of myth in literature is folklore. Although a later development than myth, folklore is impregnated with traditional symbolism and is a source of concrete mythical imagery that has inspired many writers over the years [...]." (Meletinsky 1998, 122).

16 Corti's narrative choir consists of Colangelo pescatore ("Per me niente stava al paragone con Otranto, [...]; non c'era sulla terra mestiere che i pescatori otrantini non avessero gusto di fare, quando i cavalloni della tramontana impedivano la pesca [...]."; Corti 2004, 1718); Captain Zurlo, announced gouverneur of Otranto and dying while combating the Ottomans ("[...] egli [Akmed Pasçia] nascendo portò in germe i dolori che avrebbe dato a me."); Corti 2004, 104); Idrusa, underestimated and solitary textile artist ("Andavo sì scalza, come tutte le mogli dei pescatori, ma a differenza delle altre annodavo con cura i capelli e li fermavo con cordelle di seta colorata, perché non mi lasciava mai la volontà di essere bella."); Corti 2004, 165); Nachira, imprisoned after the fall of Otranto and suffering martyrdom ("Contarono i primi cinquanta, fra cui capitai anche io, e ci avviarono al colle della Minerva, legati alle corde. [...] quegli oleandri del colle della Minera furono l'ultima cosa che vidi in vita mia. Chi l'avrebbe mai detto."); Corti 2004, 310-311); Aloise de Marco, representative of Otranto's nobility and one of the city's liberators ("Quando il duca Alfonso radunò le truppe per liberare la città dall'occupazione turchesca, mi trovai di mezzo fra gli agi pacifici della vita napoletana e il richiamo sottile della mia giovinezza [...]."; Corti 2004, 313).

17 This analysis is confirmed by Pisano's consideration that "[f]in dalle prime movenze narrative, aleggia nel romanzo un diffuso senso di morte" (Pisanò 2008, 210). Four of the five narratives are obituaries in terms of a retrospective search of identity, all of them confluent in the events of the assault and finally in death (Pisanò 2008, 211, describes this narration technique as "explicit del racconto").

novel, is expressed by the following reflection: “[...] a ciascun uomo nella vita capita almeno una volta un'ora in cui dare prova di sé; viene sempre, per tutti. A noi l'hanno portata i turchi.” (Corti 2004, 148–149). The observation on Corti's methodology, concerning the interplay of the memory of the historical battle and its myths as a narrative space for the construction of individual identities, finds herein a profound confirmation.

Due to Corti's scholarly observations on literature it cannot be ignored that she demands semiotic reading of these individual identities in the context of culture; she discusses literary characters as *personaggi-specchio*, representative entities with symbolic or emblematic significance (Corti 1997, 93).¹⁸ In an earlier approach that was even more imprinted by semiotics and structuralism, Corti considered these characters signs, which form with their complex of semantics a *hypersign* (Corti 1976, 8, 108, 122), transmitting a new configuration of knowledge (Corti 1997, 56, 93).¹⁹ This implementation of issues of identity, the dichotomy of the individual's polarization versus culture as well as its contextualization in culture, offers a field of conflict, prosperous to Corti's narration, that is constituted by signs; due to the signs' communicative capacities²⁰ their detection is important in research on literary constructions of the Mediterranean and its identities.

18 Corti's construction of the narrators between memory and myth underscores their semiotic significance: Colangelo is a mere imagination of Corti in act to figure the Mediterranean fisher forced into warfare and narrating the first moments of the defeat, while Captain Zurlo is in actual fact a historical character in the battle of Otranto, mentioned in documents of that time (see Andenna 2007, 254, 256, 259) and narrating the crucial abandon of helpless Otranto by Naples. Idrusa, embodying feminine emancipation, and the fisher Nachira originate from myth; the latter is mostly used to reject the glorification of martyrdom and to precisely narrate the terrified prisoners' anxieties. A further secularization of the mythical narrations is given by Aloise de Marco, representing Otranto's nobility enjoying Naples' wealth.

19 In this contribution Corti's notion of hypersign is transferred on the term *concept* to signalize the signs' semantic complexity; their connectivity and composition within the text is here suggested as conceptualistic methodology.

20 Considering literary texts as communicative system, Corti describes her semiologic approach on literature along the communication model of Roman Jakobson: “[...] la grandezza di un'opera è direttamente proporzionale alla forza della sua funzione segnica. Le grandi opere inoltre, adattandosi in virtù appunto del loro grado avanzatissimo di polisemia, alla lettura in funzione di molti e diversi modelli epocali [...] provocano la fase massima della comunicazione artistica come dialogo dei destinatari col testo lungo l'asse del tempo.” (Corti 1976, 67). This contribution uses the term *sign* in continuation to Corti's binary writing activity as scholar and as author, not only coexisting but emerging as confluence in Corti.

In *L'ora di tutti*, Corti transposes her conceptualistic methodology on the significant outer form of the novel as tryptich.²¹ As its frame, the introduction establishes the Mediterranean sea as a reference paradigm (“Mentre le piante dei piedi si espandono, illese, sul sentiero, esse [le donne otrantine] guardano con la pupilla fissa in direzione del mare, uno sguardo asciutto, ereditato da generazioni di otrantini vissuti in attesa dello scirocco e della tramontana, per regolare su di essi pensieri e faccende.”; Corti 2004, 9). This imagery is also supplied with the charnel memorial in the cathedral of Otranto, as sign of cultural memory but also of the individual fates of the martyrs: “Gravando sulla roccia con il peso dei suoi muri romanici, la cattedrale è il cuore di Terra d’Otranto, perché dentro ci sono Loro [the martyrs], in fondo all’abside, a destra, come il nocciolo in un frutto.” (Corti 2004, 10).²²

The tryptich’s middle and main part, which appears in contrast to the other parts, is not subdivided, and is by far the longest section. This is narrated by Idrusa, Corti’s feminine heroine, who embodies conflicts of individual and cultural identity embedded in the Mediterranean. The figure of Idrusa is much more related to myth than to memory, in that her literary construction is representative of Corti’s inversion of myth. While the name Idrusa does not emerge in most of the few historical sources about the assault, various literary works on the Ottoman conquest of Otranto predating Corti’s novel do mention a feminine figure called Idrusa, who seems to originate from folkloristic mythology of the Salento (Andenna 2007, 244; Fiore 1967, 3; Laporta 2008, 207). Dating back to the mid-eighteenth century, Idrusa is once named in Francesco D’Ambrosio’s *Saggio istorico della presa di Otranto e stragge de’ santi martiri*.²³ D’Ambrosio included her as projec-

21 As Cesare Segre concludes, the structural element in Corti’s narrative work is “unavoidable” (Segre 2018, 5). In this contribution Corti’s notion of hypersign is transferred on the term *concept* to signalize the signs’ semantic complexity; their connectivity and composition within the text is here suggested as conceptualistic methodology.

22 The martyr’s bones in the Cathedral of Otranto form a significant part of Corti’s childhood memories embedded in Otranto (Pisanò 2008, 212); reminiscent of this horrifying sight as she is confessing in the introduction (“L’autore di questo libro dovrà giustificarsi di averli destati, condotti a quell’lavorio della memoria che non sappiamo se per i morti sia più o meno struggente che per i vivi.”; Corti 2004, 12), Corti installs them as sign of death and also cultural memory.

23 Published in 1751, this report is obviously inspired by the many myths about Otranto’s martyrs; as primary textual source among others, D’Ambrosio indicates Giovanni Michele Laggetto’s *Historia della Guerra d’Otranto del 1480*, probably written in the middle of the seventeenth century (the problematic dating and origin of the latter as derivation of Francisco de Araujo’s *Historia de los martires de la ciudad de Otranto* from 1631 are revealed in Houben 2008, 9–14). D’Ambrosio, according to the frontispiece a catholic archipriest from Castiglione in Apulia, deepened in his narration the recurrent reading of the assault as religiously motivated and diffused the legend of the demanded conversion in exchange for life.

tion object of the Ottomans' atrocity during the siege of Otranto and presented the myth of the pure maid dying out of desperate compassion with the martyrs.²⁴ A first literary manifestation of Idrusa is found in Giuseppe Castiglione's *Il rinnegato salentino ossia I martiri d'Otranto*.²⁵ Published in 1839, this historic novel aims to enter into the literary contexts of the masters of Italian Romanticism, such as Alessandro Manzoni, through quotations from their works heading each chapter. Castiglione narrates in dialogical prose the assault of Otranto alongside the fate of Idrusa's parents; now gaining a central position within the sujet, Castiglione's Idrusa emerges, in a continuation of D'Ambrosio, as a symbol for the wise, innocent and devoted feminine, evoking in Christian contexts the Godmother Maria.²⁶ This image of the heroine is further developed in Francesco Tranquillino Moltedo's "cantica" *Idrusa ovvero I musulmani in Otranto* from 1871, but for the first time Idrusa emerges here as an engaged woman and appeals rather to pathetic morality than to loyalty to Christian belief.²⁷ Although suggesting Idrusa as the main char-

24 D'Ambrosio's Idrusa only symbolically joins with her death the martyrs' fate: "Nell'incamminarsi [...] al destinato luogo, occorse, che una bellissima giovane, per nome Idrusa, menata da due capitani turchi, i quali contendevano tra di loro, chi ne fosse il Padrone, vedendo due suoi fratelli legati esser condotti fuori della Città, spargendo dagl'occhi amare lagrime, disse loro: Fratelli miei, dove andate così legati? Cui rispose uno di essi: andiamo a morire per Gesù Cristo: Alle quali parole cascò tramortita a terra la povera Donzella; onde un Turco, volendola far alzare con impazienza, ed ira le diede un colpo sulla testa sì empicamente, che la fe subito morire [...]." (D'Ambrosio 1751, 49). As we will see further on, other elaborations of Idrusa imitate this construction of her death.

25 This romanticized novel is mostly appealing to belief and patriotic attitude in conflict with affairs of personal revenge. The "renegade" is Idrusa's father, who returns after years of exile as an Ottoman warrior to realize his plans of revenge; after archaic debates and the devastating battles in Otranto he completely reconverts to Christian belief. Otranto's renegade is a recurrent figure in the narrations of the massacre in tight relation to the religiously motivated conversion myth and occurs in many variations, also in a rather inverted depiction in Corti as a former Catholic priest (Corti 2004, 290).

26 Giuseppe Castiglione (1804–1866) used a metaphorical system based on religious comparisons and vocabulary when describing Idrusa: "bella come l'angelo casto d'amore" (Castiglione 1839, 46); "la calma della vergine innocente" (Castiglione 1839, 47). Castiglione elevated Idrusa to an angelic figure suggesting the mercy of Maria, the Mother of God, when she seems "il genio del dolore, piantegente sulla tomba dell'innocenza" (Castiglione 1839, 47). He knew D'Ambrosio's narration of the tragic events in Otranto, quoted this author as historical source (Castiglione 1839, 182) and adopted the motive of the virgin martyr. The literature journal *Rinascenza salentina*, which ceased in 1943, hosts a defensive article by Ettore Vernole, underscoring Castiglione's merits as a pioneer in depicting folkloristic traditions (Vernole 1942, 178) and a biographical information focussing on Castiglione's origin from Gallipoli (Mazzarella 1943).

27 The priest and educator Moltedo, born 1839 in Naples (further biographical information is found in Laporta 2008), claims the utility of the "cantica" to moral education in his introduction

acter of this highromantic elaboration, Moltedo creates a triangular construction of equal protagonists, involving Idrusa, her groom and his father, the mythical martyr Primaldo.²⁸ Some decades later, Giuseppe De Dominicis' patriotic reminiscence *Li martiri d'Otrantu* emerged; this was written in 1902 in the dialect of the Salento and therefore did not gain a high diffusion.²⁹ De Dominicis emphasizes the religious mediation of the assault and depicts Idrusa in only a few of the eight hundred verses as a feminine slave who consciously demands to die as martyr.³⁰ The image of a pious and merciful Idrusa representing feminine sainthood is obviously continued in this poema, hence De Dominicis choosing San Luca's Madon-

(Moltedo 1871, 3) and confesses to be entirely inspired by the heroine Idrusa (Moltedo 1871, 4). Because of the text's lyrical construction (each of the four "canti" is written in tercets with chain rhyme), Moltedo's ponderous "cantica" is even supposed to imitate stylistically Dante and to refer to Petrarch, Boccaccio and Leopardi (Laporta 2008, 203).

28 In his introduction Moltedo admits that although rendering Idrusa's role more important than in previous sources, this character should contribute to emphasize the fate of Antonio Primaldo (Moltedo 1871, 4), the first of the legendary eight hundred beheaded martyrs. Primaldo is at the centre of Otranto's mythology: it is narrated that after his beheading Primaldo's body remained in upright position until the last of the martyrs was murdered (Houben 2008, 17; there Houben is giving insight in the textual sources of this myth). In Corti, this myth occurs highly altered and marginalized, rendering this character secular and equal to the other martyrs (Corti 2004, 309). Moltedo's "cantica" is an example of the literary construction in between history and myth, which is, in contrast to Corti's novel, not developed as aesthetic strategy but as mere self-reference. Moltedo enriches every "canto" with explanations to sources and historical backgrounds in notes; considering Idrusa he admits her poetical, and not historical elaboration (Moltedo 1871, 4).

29 Probably in the 1960s, the poet Carmine Cucugliato transfigures the poema into standard Italian language accompanied by an introduction of the Apulian writer, scholar and critic Tommaso Fiore (contributions on his work are collected in *Tommaso Fiore. Umanista, scrittore, critico*. Ed. Giovanni Dotoli. Manduria 1986). Because Fiore published many contributions on the dialect poetry of the Salento, he obtained the merit to have provided academic recognition of Apulian dialect poetry (Giancane 1986, 163). Fiore was highly fascinated by the poems of Giuseppe De Dominicis (1869–1905), also known as "Capitano Black". This young poet gained a central position in the dialect poetry of the Salento at the end of the nineteenth century. A relevant view on De Dominicis' work is given in the volume *Giuseppe de Dominicis e la poesia dialettale tra '800 e '900* (Rizzo 2005).

30 The probable symbolic value of de Dominicis' eight hundred verses in context with the mythic number of the eight hundred martyrs of Otranto indicates a high presence of symbolizing strategies in this poema. In contrary to Alessandro Laporta's consideration of Moltedo's "cantica" as predecessor for the further imaginations of Idrusa (Laporta 2008, 208), there is no influence of Moltedo's *Idrusa* perceivable in De Dominicis' poema, which follows D'Ambrosio's emblematic appearance of Idrusa in the dramatic moment of the martyrs' procession towards their death: "Due rinnegati/ammanettano pure una ragazza/di nome Idrusa [...]" (De Dominicis 1967, 47; to provide full comprehension here is chosen the transfiguration of Cucugliato).

nas as Idrusa's pictographic equivalent.³¹ As a mere temporal predecessor to Corti's novel is Luigi Sansò's piece *Idrusa*, published in 1928 with disturbing imprints of ideologized aesthetics³² and presenting an implausible heroine resisting the Ottomans' suppression but completely subjugating herself to her groom.

That Idrusa gained a certain interest in literature not earlier than the nineteenth century³³ can be related to the increasing interest in Romanticism for investigating medieval history with a new sensitivity, actualising literary genres as the heroic epos on which the observed canticas lean; further, in terms of constituting cultural identity during the decades of the Risorgimento, the importance of local mythology as a microcosmos mirroring the nation, or as rejection of the new reign's centrism, increased. In fact, with the exception of the Neapolitan Moltedo (see Laporta 2008, 201–202), all the mentioned authors were local writers of the Salento; through their elaborations, the assault on Otranto becomes perceived as national tragedy, receiving the myth of Idrusa as its feminine component.³⁴

Certain emblematic motives of the mythical Idrusa are iterative: Idrusa's uncommon beauty, her devotion to faith and her loyalty to family, her emancipation

³¹ De Dominicis (1967, 47) declares Idrusa as “bella come una Madonna” and uses an iconographic metaphor: “San Luca, il santo dei pittori,/profuse i suoi colori,/per lo splendore della tua bellezza,/martire Idrusa” (De Dominicis 1967, 48). Aiming to dismantle the religious myths on the assault as ecclesiastical strategy, Corti mentions in her novel San Luca's Madonna, which probably once hung in the cathedral of Otranto and was said that it miraculously ascended as a gleam of light to comfort the martyrs the night before the massacre (Corti 2004, 321–325).

³² Although Tommaso Fiore considers Sansò's Idrusa as successor of Torquato Tasso's Christian heroines (Fiore 1967, 3), we rather meet a piece infiltrated by a certain kind of cultic symbols (fire and flames are frequently appearing in Sansò) and by an excessive glorification of martyrdom (“Rinunzia [...] feci a la gloria del martirio ed al premio del Cielo”; Sansò 1928, 136); the importance of martyrdom in “fascist mysticism” is outlined in Berghaus (1996, 54). Unquestionably, Sansò considered this piece of a pamphletic significance as it is called a “poema” on the frontispiece despite its purely theatrical style and paratexts.

³³ Indeed, Idrusa does not even emerge in a poem about the assault of Otranto from the seventeenth century, *L'Idriade* di Francesco Antonio Megha (1626–1701), which passed to us incomplete. Megha, an Apulian judge and politician, was inspired to versify in manneristic style the siege of Otranto probably by the process of sanctification of Otranto's martyrs, which was beginning then (Margiotta 1985, 5, 8; Margiotta enriches her introduction to the *Idriade* with further biographical indications about Megha). Megha emphasizes the religious aspects and cultural confrontation of the assault and chooses a heroic depiction of his main characters, according to the epic tradition of the “poema religioso” arisen after Tasso and influencing the Salento's literary tradition as described by Marco Leone (he quotes Megha as one of the authors remembering Otranto's martyrs by amplifying the mythical narrations of the Ottomans' cruelty; Leone 2005, 487).

³⁴ Expandable to all elaborations of Idrusa is the following consideration of Laporta regarding Moltedo's Idrusa: “Il poema [...] ha fatto emergere quel femminile che mancava o che, appena abbozzato, era latente nella vicenda otrantina.” (Laporta 2008, 206–205).

from enslavement, her death accompanying the other's martyrdom. However, Maria Corti does not continue this image and consciously breaks with the traditionally held expectations concerning Idrusa.³⁵ Corti's heroine is an outstanding figure because she follows her individual thoughts and emotions and no longer a requested devotion to faith or socially established customs.³⁶ Idrusa, as an orphan driven early into an unhappy marriage, is positioned in Otranto's poor social class of the fishermen; she asserts herself as a feminine subject in contrast to the repetitious and monotonous life that is the usual lot of Otranto's wives by an extramarital love affair, doomed to failure and culminating in a disillusioned vacuum of abandon. Idrusa's desperation is not caused by martyrdom as in the previously described literary elaborations, but by her otherness, which she perceives as guilt ("Io non ho fatto niente [...], però devo aver colpa lo stesso. [...] Io non sono come le altre [donne otrantine]. [...] Le altre sono meglio di me, ma a me la loro non pare vita.); Corti 2004, 195).³⁷ Idrusa is indeed struggling with her identity and questioning her decisions ("Io volevo distruggermi [...]. [...] Mi domando come sarebbero andate le cose, se invece che a me fossero successe a un'altra persona."); Corti 2004, 256–257). But at the Ottomans' arrival Idrusa does not flee, and confirms her solidarity and connectedness with Otranto's inhabitants: "Io di qui non mi muovo. [...] Farò tutto quello che faranno le altre otrantine e la loro sorte sarà la mia." (Corti 2004, 259). Corti's semiotic movements in constructing Idrusa's identity are in focus and best observed in the heroine's death:

35 This poetological movement of Corti is important to note, as she is discussing the literary iteration of motives and topoi embodied by imagined characters (Corti 1997, 89–90); Corti's inversion on this principle is a strong manifestation of Idrusa's fictitious self-assertment and of Corti's real emancipation as feminine writer. Regarding Corti's textual sources, Hubert Houben is convinced that she based her novel on the historical report of Giovanni Michele Laggetto from the late sixteenth century (Houben 2008, 9). But Corti probably knew De Dominicis' poem as he also mentions Nachira (De Dominicis 1967, 56) as Corti did, while this character is not traceable elsewhere.

36 Oreste Macri notes in his preface that the feminine element (which in first row means Idrusa) in *L'ora di tutti* is not based on sainthood and virginity as it was seen in other literary texts on the assault and relates this fact to a "biographical mystery" in Corti (Macri 2004, VIII–IX). However, Corti courageously develops Idrusa's ambiguous character as the main protagonist in search of truth in emotional and social relations throughout the first two parts of the tryptich (which means the narratives of Colangelo, Zurlo and Idrusa), never succumbing to sentimentalism as it is found in the previous Idrusas.

37 Corti declares fantasy (in the sense of creativity) as reason for Idrusa's otherness; in the novel a monk responds to Idrusa in crisis with herself and full of doubts about her integrity: "Sono cose che succedono alle persone piene di fantasia. [...] gli uomini di fantasia corrono sempre un grande pericolo a vivere." (Corti 2004, 215).

Tre o quattro turchi mi furono sopra [...] e un dellí mi venne addosso col pugnale in mano; vidi sotto le ali della zàrcola due occhi che mi guardavano con forza straordinaria e io pure lo guardai, ferma. Tardò col pugnale in aria, finché la sua faccia infuriata si aprì in una smorfia, che pareva un singhiozzo di gioia. Mise il pugnale nel fodero: "Bella, bella," grugnì nella nostra lingua, afferrandomi le spalle. Sentii le sue mani sul collo e barcollai, ma poi fui piú svelta di una gatta, e coprendogli gli occhi con una mano, presi con l'altra il suo pugnale e me lo ficcai nel petto. Scivolata sul pavimento vidi, per un attimo, sopra di me gli occhi del turco, che mi guardavano stupefatti, pieni di interrogazione; altri, vicino, scoppiarono in una risata e la faccia del turco scomparve. (Corti 2004, 270–271)

All polarizations of Idrusa's identity are solved in this moment: although perceiving and demonstrating once more her otherness, Idrusa integrates her strongly criticized capacities in defence of the other's life by giving way to the engrained sense of guilt and emptiness ("[...] io non trovo scopo, ecco."); Corti 2004, 216). Idrusa's death portrays a feminine subject emancipating herself and not accepting enslavement or any other form of limitation, through the most extreme gesture. The ambiguity between belonging and self-determination of the feminine 'I' is fully illustrated by this polysemantic perspective of her death, which is possible to interpret both as suicide or homicide in the context of martyrdom. In Corti's work, this secular martyrdom is treated as individual freedom of decision embodied in Idrusa, which results in a strong contrast to the previous literary elaborations of this character. Bipolar patterns are the basis of Corti's construction of Idrusa's identity: "Era una donna diversa da tutte le altre Idrusa [...]; mi viene alla mente l'idea che volesse appropriarsi di tutto, appropriarsi del dolore e della felicità del mondo." (Corti 2004, 61). Idrusa's desperate desire for life and her seeking of death ("E di me che cosa potevo fare? Tutto quello che avevo desiderato, era finito. Potevo morire."); Corti 2004, 232) reflect a bifocal vision of identity; her repetitious oscillation between other- and connectedness subsequently results in a transfiguration of the imaginations of the Mediterranean, discussed earlier on in this text.

Corti's Idrusa also becomes on other levels a paradigmatic sign of a Mediterranean identity: first of all, etymological, since her name is rooted in Otranto and descends from languages spoken along the Mediterranean shores, mirroring again its connectivity.³⁸ Further, the toponymic relation creates semiotically Idrusa's

³⁸ Fiore explains the name Idrusa as "eponym" of the river "Idro" and the historic name of Otranto, "Idruntum" (Fiore 1967, 3). Supposing that these names etymologically have the same origin, it is suggested that "Hydruntum" derives from Adriatic-Balcanic varieties meaning "mountain" (von Falkenhausen 2007, 21–22; Otranto is situated more in height above the sea). Several Greek inscriptions with slightly different terms can be found already from prebyzantine era on and later in the times of "Magna Grecia", wherefrom the Greek origin of the city's name cannot be denied, most probably deriving from Greek "water" or "watersnake" (Antonaci 1954, 2–3).

Mediterraneanism, which then becomes enforced by the mythological substrates throughout the earlier mentioned literary predecessors based on folkloristic notion of Idrusa. Corti explains the name as originating from Greek, meaning a race-horse soaked with sweat (Corti 2004, 214); this name's etymology with the function of metaphor results in a sign for Idrusa's personality. The high semiotic impact of the Mediterranean is evident in Idrusa's reflections and her self-image, mirrored by the surrounding nature: "La unica abitudine che mi fosse rimasta della vita di prima era quella, di stendermi sulle dune di sabbia a pochi metri dalle onde, e a guardare camminare la sorte fra i cespugli di finocchio selvatico." (Corti 2004, 259). Idrusa's creative production is also connected to the idea of the Mediterranean as she describes the motives of her embroidered artefacts as traditions "portati da oltre il mare" and "di uso antico" (Corti 2004, 183).³⁹

Synthesising this Mediterranean cosmos in a semiotic paradigm of questions on existence and identity, Corti's aesthetic construction is also constituted by shifting time levels, creating synchrony and diachrony at once and therefore establishing the Mediterranean as *luogo mentale*.⁴⁰ This strategy is manifested even throughout the introduction, when Corti overlaps present and past as well as memory and myth:

Ma mettiamo di soggiornare a lungo nella vecchia Terra d'Otranto, di scendere al crepuscolo verso il molo del porto, durante una bufera di tramontana, quando i pescatori siedono in terra alla turchesca, la pelle abbronzata, guardano pian piano il mare, riflettendo da soli, aspettando in silenzio, come suoi fidati amici, che quella furia gli passi. [...] Le cose allora cambiano, ogni distanza nel tempo cade [...]: sono ancora Loro che abbiamo davanti, gli stessi pescatori, salvo [...] qualche frastuono momentaneo attorno alla loro persona [...]. [...] ci si allontana dal molo pensando che quanto narrano le cronache non è lava impietrata, ma ancora calda in questo corno d'Italia, *sus la senestre corne d'Ytaile*, e che i pescatori d'oggi hanno solo dato il cambio, a metà del viaggio. (Corti 2004, 12–14)

39 The strong implementation of other Mediterranean culture's heritage from across the Orient side and its influence on artistic production in Otranto is also noted in Falla Castelfranchi (2007, 324).

40 Pisanò (2008, 210) describes this methodology as echo of Corti's contact with neorealist literature at this time and considers Corti's Otranto a mere allegory of the present (Pisanò 2008, 211); here is enforced Corti's appealing to a meta-temporal reading configured by semiotic interpretation which is perceivable in the novel's narrative construction. Corti herself confirms this approach: "[...] quanto più l'opera è artisticamente complessa e originale, [...] tanto maggiore è la sua disponibilità a differenti letture sul piano sincronico e diacronico; orbene, questo tipo di presenza, che produce un senso di perenne contemporaneità e universalità del capolavoro, consente al fatto che la carica polisemica del testo permette la sua fruibilità in funzione di modelli letterari [...] delle varie epoche." (Corti 1976, 18).

Bursting through time levels, Corti turns at the novel's end directly to the reader and reconnects the introductory frame to the finished narration: "Quanti anni sono passati da allora? Solo i vivi contano gli anni. Ed è mutato qualcosa?" (Corti 2004, 335). The paradoxical contemporaneity in Corti of present and past as well as here and beyond becomes even more evident in her book *Il canto delle Sirene*, a hybrid form of research and literary writing⁴¹ published in 1989. Temporality is transferred to metaphysical significance when the sirens, considered by Corti as timeless metaphors, comment on mankind: "C'è una grande quantità di intelligenza che gli uomini sprecano in operazioni dannose [...]; pare non sappiano distinguere bene quando vanno avanti e quando vanno indietro. 'E così non sanno se si trovano nel passato, nel presente o nel futuro.'" (Corti 2018, 182).⁴² Corti continues to construct the Mediterranean as *luogo mentale* where the sirens existed in myths and narratives ("luoghi iscritti nella mappa mediterranea"; Corti 2018, 22); seizing on this duplicity of the real Mediterranean and its imagining in Greek mythology, Corti's sirens embody the concept of *intellectual seduction*, the artistic or scientific curiosity for gaining and creating new knowledge. This concept was founded in *L'ora di tutti* with Idrusa's dichotomous search of identity beyond the borders of her regular everyday life, earlier considered as creative fantasy; this desire is now interpreted as seduction inflicted by intellectual thinking, which in the end demands the questioning of identity. The semiotic imagery of Ulysses and Orpheo navigating through the Mediterranean and tempted by the sirens becomes in Corti's narratives a dynamic *luogo mentale* based on cultural plurality and the connectivity of its texts, captured by the sirens: "Stiamo navigando nel mare delle scritture. [...] Qui non c'è silenzio marino, ma mille voci che [...] parlano insieme e raccontano." (Corti 2018, 105). Despite the sirens' Mediterranean semantic, Corti turns them into a global literary discourse as she outlines the reception of the sirens in various cultures and literary periods,

41 Corti's *Il canto delle sirene* is an extreme example of applied formalistic methodology. The book's construction between academic and literary writing becomes in many varieties also object of content. Due to the complexity of Corti's *Il canto delle sirene* and the survey on its Mediterraneanism, focused on here, it is noted that Corti investigates the different acts of writing (academic research and fiction) on the concept of *curiositas* embodied by Ulysses and Orpheo, giving way to autobiographical elements especially in the narration of a becoming author entitled *La sconosciuta* (Corti 2018, 137–178). Further insights on the mythological impact and on the importance of Corti's medievalist studies on Dante discernible in *Il canto delle sirene* are given in the already mentioned introductions by Macri and Segre, but also in a contribution of Alessandro Cinquegrani in the multi-volume *Il mito nella letteratura italiana* (Cinquegrani 2007).

42 Analogously to *L'ora di tutti*, the book's macrostructural construction turns from the past "back" into the presence perceived as future in contrast to the narration, giving a dark view on the *conditio humana*.

such as by Nordic Romanticism (“involgarimento ottocentesco”; Corti 2018, 110), while still being anchored in the Mediterranean: “La sirena, spintasi in traversata solitaria sino al fondo del fiordo, si scoprì bloccata ormai dal ghiaccio sulla via del ritorno all’oceano [...]. [...] Qui tutto taceva assolutamente come se le case fossero deserte, gli uomini le avessero abbandonate nell’orrore della notte nordica. [...] Non ci sarebbe stato né un Orfeo né un Ulisse e nemmeno uomini curiosi dell’ignoto.” (Corti 2018, 115).⁴³

The Mediterranean Sea as ancient, classique, byzantine, medieval and then (geographically transposed) modern topos for the navigator, a metaphor of the artist (and in Corti mainly the poet) and the scientist, not ambitious in relation to material prosperity but instead in pure curiosity, is emphasized in a glance to the initially noted semantic polarization of the sea versus the mainland: “L’alto mare offriva l’abbandono dei pensieri di terraferma; bisognava che il navigatore vivesse momento per momento secondo i voleri del mare, imprigionato nelle sue tempeste e nelle sue bonacce, passando senza soluzione di continuità dal giorno alla notte e dalla notte al giorno e rinunciando a tante ragioni dei comuni gesti terrestri; proprio come accade al mendicante e al poeta.” (Corti 2018, 25).

That knowledge can be configurated by cultural memory iterated through literature is visible in the sirens’ elevation of the Mediterranean poet Orpheo to the only form of existence that promises salvation: “Ricordate quando Orfeo ci vinse al tempo degli argonauti? [...] Il poeta si salva da sé e le sue relazioni sono fra le più brillanti che esistano al mondo. [...]” (Corti 2018, 184). Corti employs the aesthetic constructions described here to create Mediterranean identities, as was shown with the polyphonic example of *L’ora di tutti*, and to develop the Mediterranean identity through the navigating poet Orpheo and the seduced Idrusa, who was confronted with an existence between otherness and connectivity. The semiotic reading of the many intertextual notions⁴⁴ and the descending semantics con-

⁴³ The notion of *intellectual seduction* becomes transposed on Nordic mythology accompanied by remarks on language, as a Nordic fisher is pointing out: “Io conosco solo la storia dello Strömkarl, perché è uno spirito marino che suona uno strumento dolcissimo a corde, si può udirlo dalle nostre acque fin su alle terre polari. Di lui parlano le canzoni antiche, recitate nel vecchio dialetto, non nella lingua, che è molto meno avvincente e qualche volta viene a noia, cosa che non succede mai nel vecchio dialetto. Una volta ho scovato nella vallata a nord-est una vecchia canzone sullo Strömkarl, che faceva lavorare la fantasia [...].” (Corti 2018, 129).

⁴⁴ While *Il canto delle sirene* is mainly invaded by the ancient myth of Ulysses and Orpheo and its mediation through antique and classic authors as Homer, Plato, Cicero, Horace and Ovid (but also considering the sirens’ transpositions by Goethe, Kafka, Borges and Nerval) as well as by many quotation segments in Latin, also in *L’ora di tutti* we find languages and their literature employed as philological signs of the Mediterranean: Latin as the ecclesiastical language is juxtaposed to poetry in Italian (Corti 2004, 131; there Petrarch is quoted as reply to a psalm), singular elements from

verge into interwoven concepts that constitute an image which Corti aims to transmit in the form and content of her narration. This literary imagery built on history and culture is developed, as we have seen, in dichotomous confrontation with the individual in search of identity. Therein the Mediterranean rises as a semiotic universe, far from cultural fragmentation but instead leading to identity through connectivity of knowledge, conveyed in literature through its elaboration of memory and myth.

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Adrian Grima (University of Malta)

Elusive Mediterraneans. Reading Beyond Nation

Abstract: Malta supposedly lies at the “heart” of the Mediterranean and Mediterraneanists expect its literature to be something like the very “essence” of the Mediterranean region, an expression, as it were, of its “rich culture and identity,” of Mediterranean connectivity. And yet, Maltese literature in Maltese has, all in all, contributed little to the Mediterranean imaginary. It has bought into European stereotypes of Mediterranean spirit, culture, identity, and unity deconstructed by Michael Herzfeld and others, with their roots in colonial perspectives of Mediterranean backwardness, unruliness, and seductiveness. The Maltese pre-Independence Romantics and the post-Independence Modernists were busy constructing, and recalibrating, the national imaginary, while the postnational, cosmopolitan generation that emerged in the 1990s, looked beyond the national and the regional. But there are notable exceptions, like poet Antoine Cassar, with his long poems *Passaport* and *Mappa tal-Mediterran*, and Walid Nabhan, the Amman born Palestinian Maltese writer with his prize-winning autobiographical novel, *L-Eżodu taċ-ČIkonji* (The Exodus of the Storks), who acknowledge the discursive nature of representations of the Mediterranean and engage with them critically. This paper explores Maltese literature’s engagement with the Mediterranean imaginary and asks whether this evaluation has anything significant to contribute towards a theory of Mediterranean literature.

Recent studies of the Mediterranean have given prominence to its fluid nature, a sea, surrounded by an ensemble of hinterlands, that is “polymorphic,” “elusive,” and “traversed by multiple perceptions” (Albera et al. 2016, 9). Ever since the invention of the Mediterranean as a region in the nineteenth century by Northern Europeans (Horden and Purcell 2000, 532–533; Albera et al. 2016, 11), literature has attempted to explore this diversity, to come to terms with the paradox of a unity that is marked by changeability. But it has also attempted to smooth over the differences, to search for a core that somehow sums up the Mediterranean experience of constant human and cultural interaction marked by both contact and conflict. A great deal of literature has dealt with the Mediterranean, constructing an imaginary in which fact and fiction are “inextricably entangled” (Albera et al. 2016, 10), both shaping and being shaped by what common people say about the Mediterranean in their everyday lives.

In the concluding paragraph of his *Human History of the Mediterranean Sea*, a book that offers an alternative to the interpretation of history determined by geography, canonized by Fernand Braudel in the mid-twentieth century, David Abulafia identifies “the unity” of Mediterranean history “in its swirling changeability” (2012, 648). He mentions that he is fully aware of the “paradox” in this statement because very often, in our idea of history, “unity” and “changeability” are seen as incompatible. But Abulafia frames this claim within his interpretation of a Mediterranean that “became probably the most vigorous place of interaction between different societies on the face of this planet.” The “opposing shores” of this sea “are close enough to permit easy contact, but far enough apart to allow societies to develop distinctively under the influence of their hinterland as well as of one another.” One of the implications of his important qualification that “those who cross its surface are often hardly typical of the societies from which they come” (2012, 648) is that our reading of the Mediterranean should resist the temptation to essentialize.

1 Outside Mediterranean Literature

Despite its geographical location at the “heart of the Mediterranean,” and the way it marries its fervent Catholicism with its language of Arabic origin in which the God of the Bible is “*Alla*,” there is not much to suggest that Maltese literature has participated convincingly in the project of defining a regional identity or even a “Mediterranean literature.” The study of literature in Malta, while taking into account the direct and indirect influences of other literatures, is almost exclusively confined to national literatures, and there are no “Mediterranean literary studies” that challenge the borders. Sharon Kinoshita writes about “the tenacity in literary studies of the nation—with its ideal, if rarely realized, presumptions about the homogeneity of language, ‘ethnicity’ and religion,” and she proposes “Mediterranean literature” as “a project of reterritorialization” (2014, 314). There is an important example of this non-national or postnational approach in Antoine Cassar’s long poem *Passaport* (2009), a passionate plea against borders across the globe, including the Mediterranean. It is a rallying cry for freedom and human dignity and a manifesto that redefines physical space. *Passaport* exemplifies the ideas of Olivia C. Harrison who chooses to look at “the Mediterranean from a transcolonial perspective, moving from a critique of the term’s colonial genealogy to a reconceptualization of the Mediterranean as a site of (neo)colonial subjection and anti-(neo)colonial resistance” (2018, 202). Cassar’s stance implies the kind of “trans-regional South-South alliances” that she writes about in her conceptualization of a radical Mediterranean literature.

Oliver Friggieri (1947–2020), for decades the doyen of Maltese literary studies and a leading writer himself, is one of a few Maltese writers and intellectuals who have reflected on Malta's place in Mediterranean culture. Friggieri's Mediterranean is, in effect, a Malta writ large, an extension of Italy: European, Latin and Catholic (Grima 2018, 363). Braudel too was "in one sense a descendant of those Enlightenment and romantic Mediterraneanists for whom 'the Mediterranean' was really a metonym for 'Italy'" (Horden 2–3). Friggieri sees Maltese writing as a local variation on Italian literature (Grima 2018, 362–364), and only refers to the non-European Mediterranean when he writes about the origins of the Maltese language. The category of the nation dominates his conceptualization of culture and literature, and this is reflected in his definition of Mediterranean identity as a "deeper nationality," "*nazzjonalità aktar profonda*" (Grima 2018, 378), a kind of "*patrija ewlenija*" or primeval motherland (Friggieri 1995, 97; Grima 2018, 385). Maltese literature in Maltese was born in the mid-nineteenth century under the direct influence of the Italian Risorgimento; now, almost two centuries later, through the literature of Antoine Cassar and other postnationalist and cosmopolitan writers, it is starting to wean itself away from the call of the nation.

Very often Maltese literature refers to the Mediterranean as a physical entity and does not participate in discourse that constructs it as a cultural space. Ġorg Scicluna's Romantic historical novel *Il-Qassis Li Rebaħ* [The Victorious Priest] (1970), which narrates the story of the short-lived French occupation of the smaller island of Gozo in 1798 by Napoleon's fleet on its way to Egypt, mentions the Mediterranean five times: there are references to crossing "the Mediterranean" (Scicluna 2021, 118), and to the British fleet cruising or wandering in the Mediterranean, "*tiġġerra fil-Mediterran*" (Scicluna 2021, 330). The sea is a delimited expanse of water that can be crossed and explored. In Maltese, as in other languages, "*il-Mediterran*," which refers both to the region and to the sea, and the more specific "*il-Bahar Mediterran*" or "Mediterranean Sea" are established categories in popular discourse. Readers have no difficulty in recognizing these concepts, but they will have different views about the frontiers of the sea and the region, and the baggage that comes with them: Mediterranean literature thrives on this indefiniteness and elusiveness.

Towards the end of the novel, the heterodiegetic narrator speaks glowingly of Admiral Horatio Nelson and the way he had curbed French power in "the Mediterranean Sea" and cleared "the Mediterranean, the main artery," of all French ships (Scicluna 2021, 344). The artery metaphor is placed between commas and defines the novel's Mediterranean. This is a conventional body metaphor for geographical entities, and it works well because while arteries are channels of transportation, they are also parts of a body, the entire world, and can only function within it. The context is that of late eighteenth-century European politics in

which the two powers, Britain and France, were vying for supremacy in the Mediterranean region and beyond. David Abulafia uses the “artery” metaphor once in *The Great Sea* when he discusses what he calls “The Fifth Mediterranean, 1830–2010.” His book presents the history of the Mediterranean “as a series of phases in which the sea was, to a greater or lesser degree, integrated into a single economic and even political area” (Abulafia 2012, 573). In the nineteenth century, the falling productivity of the lands surrounding the Mediterranean and developments in other regions of the world changed “the whole character of this process,” and “the Mediterranean became the great artery through which goods, warships, migrants and other travelers reached the Indian Ocean from the Atlantic.” Up until the nineteenth century, the role of this artery was more intimately tied to the lands bordering the sea, creating an integrated whole. In the novel, Portugal is one of the ‘strongest’ or ‘largest’ (“*kbar*”) countries of “the Mediterranean” that had come together to rid “this sea” of the French (Scicluna 2021, 289). This comment suggests that the “Mediterranean” is being conceived of as both a distinct group of lands bordering the sea (even Braudel considered Portugal to be part of the Mediterranean, 1986, 228, see map on p. 232) and a confined body of water.

2 Postnationalism and a Polymorphic Mediterranean

When the Mediterranean was sidelined by developments in other regions of the world, according to Matvejević it retained its primacy only in the literature of the sea (1991, 106). Nevertheless, Maltese literature has had far less to say about the sea and seafaring than one would expect. One of the more notable exceptions that confirms the rule is an epic poem, *Il-Ġifen Tork* (The Turkish Galleon) written in 1842 and published ten years later (Aquilina 1975, “L-Awtur”) when literature in Maltese was still in its infancy. In it Ġan Anton Vassallo, the first major writer of literary Maltese who went on to become a professor of Italian at the University of Malta, celebrates the story of a mutiny in 1760 by Christian slaves on board an Ottoman galleon, *La Corona del Gran Signor*, or the *Corona Ottomana*, in what is today the harbor of Kos in Greece (Gauci 2018). Most of the mutineers were Maltese corsairs who were captured by the Ottomans when one of their raids on Crete went seriously wrong. The Ottomans had tied them to the oars of their powerful galleon to display them like trophies, as was the custom at the time, all around the Mediterranean (Gauci 2018).

There is some indication of the participation of Maltese seafarers in activity in the Mediterranean Sea in other Romantic texts, like Ĝużè Galea’s adventure novel

Raġel bil-Ġhaqal [A Prudent Man] (1948) and Gużè Bonnici's rather unusual *Lejn ix-Xemx* [Towards the Sun] (1940). If the mark of a Mediterranean novel is its engagement with the sea and the region, with the protagonist's eyes firmly on the sea, then Bonnici's novel set in 1701 fits the bill more than any other Romantic work of fiction in Maltese. The protagonist, Duminku Calleja, captain of a corsair ship, "sailed all the seas and visited half the world" (Bonnici 1974, 15), but he was never more at home than out at sea in the Mediterranean. At one point, the captain opens "a large map of the Mediterranean" in his cabin, spreads it out on the table in front of him, and after consulting it, folds it carefully and puts it back in its place (Bonnici 1974, 92). Like Diamantis in Izzo's *Les marins perdus*, Duminku is clearly very fond of his map, and his bond with the Mediterranean is expressed in the delicate way he handles it. His only home is literally his galleon, the *Nostra Señora*; his family is the crew that hail from different parts of the basin; his neighborhood is the Mediterranean Sea; and he is at home at sea even in the midst of a violent storm (Grima 2017a, 62–65).

Some more recent short stories in Maltese, like Walid Nabhan's "L-Art Mhux Imwieġħda" [The Unpromised Land] (2012) and Clare Azzopardi's "No Adjective Describe Story" (2006), narrate the precarious and often tragic voyage of migrants across the Mediterranean Sea: "*we leave Surt/to Italy/September/very calm/first night calm sea/then big wave/very big/many rain and wave/two day only wave and rain and wind/many wind/the eyes see people in sea/my eyes see this/shout/people cry/difficult explain sea/ [...]*" (2015, 30). Azzopardi presents two languages and many voices, but what is most striking is how broken and inadequate they are.

The only Maltese writer who has written about the sea from within, the Modernist bilingual poet Daniel Massa, titled his collection of poems in Maltese *Xibka-tuliss* (1989). It is a combination of the words "xibka" (net), "ta" (of), and "Ulisse," the quintessential Mediterranean hero. The title can be translated as "Ulysses' net" and suggests many of the images, themes and myths that feature prominently in his work. In his best-known lyric, "Delimara," the persona abandons land, the nation-mother, and slides into the sea-as-womb or "matrix," his ideal republic, to seek the freedom of the seas that wash away the marks of colonization and link up once again with the common womb of the Mediterranean Sea (Grima 2016). "Poetry Mediterranean," the subtitle of his collection of poems in English *Barefoot in the Saltpans* (2015), which features versions of many of his poems written in Maltese, suggests the identification of two nouns with each other, "Poetry" and "Mediterranean," rather than a noun followed by an adjective. The strangeness of the formula gives a new lease of life to these much used and abused concepts and immediately points to Massa's alternative "republic" of the Mediterranean Sea and coast. Most Maltese literature stands in awe of the sea and observes it from a distance, but Massa's persona comes to life in the sea. Jim Crace describes these poems as

“wind-blown, salty, sun-kissed and unambiguously Mediterranean” (2015, viii). Massa’s sensual, sensory and richly metaphorical and mythological sea poetry calls the Mediterranean Sea home.

Antoine Cassar’s long poem in Maltese *Mappa tal-Mediterran* (2013) [Map of the Mediterranean] is a provocation of sorts, a conscious manipulation of a Mediterranean that “has become an accumulation of commonplaces” (Albera et al. 2016, 9). It is a literary attempt to reshape and ultimately to rethink it. On every one of its pages, the 16-page booklet presents black and white images of parts of the map from different angles. They are visual interpretations that interpret the text and reinterpret not only our visual understanding of the region but also our complex conceptual and emotive relationship with it. Not only do some of the names given to the Mediterranean Sea become themselves physical bodies “rinsed and washed,” but also speech itself, with its “deepest crevice” (Cassar 2013, 3): “names upon names rinsed and washed / down to the deepest crevice of speech.” The poem thus constitutes discourse about the Mediterranean as object: like the sea and the lands that surround it, discourse acquires a physicality that allows the poem to explore and experience it. “Water trickles” between the names, and “the foam slides down the cuneiform wedges” and “circles the bulging consonants.” Cassar toys with the shape of the Mediterranean, constantly changing his angle of vision and reinventing it in ways that appear refreshing when one places it against the background of a literature that, as in Dun Frans Camilleri’s poem “Lill-Baħar Meditħarran” [To the Mediterranean Sea] (1952), often offers European and colonial historical perspectives.

The polymorphic approach in Cassar’s poem brings to mind Michael Herzfeld’s view of Mediterranean discourse: like facts themselves, “culture-area categories” such as the Mediterranean “have an existence by virtue of being articulated” (Herzfeld 2005, 47). The Herzfeldian post-modern approach acknowledges the centrality of discourse, and irony (Herzfeld 2014, 132), in the construction of the Mediterranean imaginary and implies that it is no less real than the facts about historical events or physical geography. Cassar disturbs our standard conceptualization and visual interpretation of the map of the Mediterranean and imposes his own imagination: seeing it as “The Middle Sea” depends on your angle of vision, “skont imnejn thares” (Cassar 2013, 4). Subjectivity is key and Cassar imposes his vision. There are figures from classical mythology, like Pelops, but also a grandmother, a farmeress who is possibly not too different from his own grandmother (about whom he wrote glowingly elsewhere in his poetry). It is a Mediterranean of constant movement and exchange: not a melting-pot but a vast array of peoples, cultures and places closely connected to each other ever since “with the force of half an ocean / the doors of the sea burst open” and flooded everything it found on its way “from Gibraltar / to Gaza” (Cassar 2013, 1). In *Mappa tal-Mediterran*,

as in previous works like his bilingual and multilingual poetry, Cassar distances himself from the kind of univocal Maltese literature that ignores its regional and global connections.

The physicality of Cassar's experience of the Mediterranean is expressed by the imaginative transformation of landmass into animal or human figures and by the alliterations, pauses, anaphoras, and other rhetorical devices that point to the physical experience of poetry. "For poetry is above all a physical experience. It is the stuff of sound and rhythm and speech, of muscle and voice box and vision and breath and pulse. It affects us physically when we speak it and listen to it. Without that physical basis there is no poetry" (Wormser and Cappella 2000, xviii). In this poem, sound, rhythm and breath communicate Cassar's experience of the Mediterranean, as in the first stanza: "*għal-lest, / mat-tielet, tektika, skiet*" ("at the ready; / with the third wave, a gentle knock, silence," alliterations lost in translation). Later on, in "*Minn Tangier, minn Tuneż, minn Tripli*" ["From Tangiers, from Tunis, from Tripoli"], the three T's and the many anaphoras in this line and in the lines before and after it connect us with these vibrant cities stretching across the North African coast and connecting them, through "vessels of all sizes, all shapes, / in all directions, with all sorts" (Cassar 2013, 9), with each other and with the rest of the Mediterranean.

3 Essentialism and Creative Engagement

At the human level, writes Abulafia, the "ethnic, linguistic, religious and political diversity" of the Mediterranean "was constantly subject to external influences from across the sea, and therefore in a constant state of flux" (2012, 641), but this diversity is not reflected in a Maltese literature that in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century was absorbed by a narrative shaped by Catholicism and Romantic Italian literature. It does not even tell the stories of the tens of thousands of Maltese economic migrants who were forced to go to North Africa and the Levant to try to earn a decent living: that narrative of emigration did not fit into the nationalist agenda of the writers who came largely from the privileged professional classes and the clergy, and represented a small minority of the population.

Maltese Romanticism portrayed the rural village, not the cosmopolitan port city, as the locus of Maltese national identity, and it was left to a handful of Realist, left-leaning writers of the early twentieth century to tell the everyday stories of poor and disenfranchised common people in both the rural villages and the urban areas. The Romantic novelists established the narrative of a strict moral code shaped by conservative Catholicism and a patriarchal ideology, and foreigners

or even returned Maltese migrants like Kelin Miksat in ġużże Ellul Mercer's iconic novel *Leli ta' Haż-Żgħir (Shadows of the Truth)* (1938) were seen as a threat to society and its order. This antipathy forces the enlightened but defeated atheist Kelin Miksat to return to French Algeria "to spend his last days with his distant relatives in Algiers" (Ellul Mercer 2003, 170). The narrator explains that in the 1920s, when Malta was granted self-rule by the British colonial government, "Some young people who returned to Malta from overseas incited the people against the clergy since they argued that they were the cause" of the "great social and political upheavals" that the country was going through (Ellul Mercer 2003, 211); but the parish priest warned the villagers "to open their eyes and to ignore those people who wanted to destroy their Religion" (Ellul Mercer 2003, 212). It is no coincidence that the fictitious name of the village, Haż-Żgħir, which roughly means "The Small Village," functions as a synecdoche (and metaphor) of the provincialism the novel grapples with. The novel ends with the defeat of the protagonist's critical mind and the victory of the beliefs, values and norms of the Catholic Church and the rabid capitalism of the Ta' Buċagħak brothers. Ellul Mercer was one of the few early twentieth-century novelists to at least acknowledge the suffering and structural injustice caused by poverty and widespread illiteracy and to refer to Maltese emigration and return migration from other Mediterranean lands. However, the novel is ultimately about the protagonist's spiritual and mental travails; although it engages with some of the classics of European literature and thought, it is essentially inward-looking, focusing on the Maltese in Malta. However, there is also much to explore in its references to the Mediterranean and beyond.

Works like *Leli ta' Haż-Żgħir* can be read from the perspective of a region in which "the varied shores, hinterlands and islands of the Mediterranean were linked by powerful cultural, economic and social bonds, even in the face of (and, to modern scholars, often invisible behind) those confessional and political divisions that formally separated them" (Catlos and Kinoshita 2017, viii). Despite the literary representation of Malta as an uncompromising bulwark of Christianity against Islam, history indicates that Malta was always active in the region. It was mostly history that conspired to create a Maltese language that bears testimony to the integration, over the centuries, of elements from different shores of the Mediterranean. With its origins in the repopulation of the Maltese Islands by the Arabs who came from Sicily in the mid-eleventh century, Maltese is not so much a "carrefour" (Vanhove 1994, 168) or crossroads where the Arabic of North Africa briefly meets Sicilian, Italian and English, but rather a Mediterranean "linguistic melting-pot" (Vanhove 2007, 1). In *The Bilingual Writer (Mediterranean-Maltese and English) as Janus*, Francis Ebejer sees the language as mirroring the culture when he talks about the "symbiosis" achieved in Maltese culture "out of a mixture of Latin, Mediterranean semitic and Anglo-Saxon languages and cultures" (1989, 11). Despite the

“distinct similarities between different Mediterranean constituencies,” Esposito focuses on the dynamism allowed by difference and plurality: “Seen through the medium of literature – and specifically of texts by writers who are at the very least bilingual and/or bicultural – homogeneity is impossible from the outset” (Esposito 2014, 163–164). The writing subjects themselves are “in perpetual translation and in-between languages and places.” At the same time, “there can be no ‘purity’ of idioms, of positionings, of values, transmitted through the works of writers who privilege alternate histories, transculturalism, the baroque and unfixed notions of gender”: language is always pregnant with multiple meanings and associations.

In Maltese the different linguistic elements integrate with one another to create a language with its own complex morphology that is based on the triconsonantal structure of Arabic and the stem formation of the Romance languages and English, and on the integration of the two systems. A word in Maltese of non-Arabic origin can create its own broken plural which is typical of Arabic, as in the case of “*skola*” (from Italian “*scuola*,” school), pl. “*skejjel*;” sometimes a word can have two plurals, with an Arabic and non-Arabic morphology, as in the case of “*bandiera*” (from the Italian “*bandiera*,” flag), pl. “*bandieri*,” or “*bnadar*.” And verbs of English origin, like the verb “*save*” in computer language, are conjugated in ways typical of Arabic and its dialects, “*jien nissejvja*” [I save]. Maltese is a language of the Mediterranean because it was made and continues to be shaped by the languages of and in the region. Maltese is not “the” language of the Mediterranean, which is characterized by a huge linguistic diversity full of similarities and connections; but having grown up in the region, Maltese has many resources to narrate that diversity. It is one of many varieties formed by predictable and unpredictable waves and events of history and marked by the various geographies of the region. In contrast to the Maltese language, the story of Maltese literature differs in some very important ways.

Literature written in a language that reflects the dynamic of relations and hybridity of the Mediterranean does not necessarily engage with the region, with its histories, narratives and mythologies. Predrag Matvejević has argued that “being Mediterranean is a decision you make; it is not something you inherit, but something you achieve; it is not an advantage, but a choice. Anyone could become Mediterranean; they say that there are increasingly less true Mediterraneans in the Mediterranean Sea” (1991, 106). It is not only a question of history and tradition, writes Matvejević in the aphoristic, lapidary style that distinguishes his *Mediterski brevijar* (1987), or about the past or geography, or memory or faith: the Mediterranean is also “destiny” (1991, 106). Not many Maltese writers and critics have made the Mediterranean their destiny.

I would argue that engaging with the sea and the region is a prerequisite for Mediterranean literature. The decision to talk about the Mediterranean may ap-

pear to compromise irremediably one's position because it implies "a framework that posits the space as homogeneous and unified" (Esposito 2014, 163). Whenever we talk about somebody's Mediterranean character and behavior, or about "Mediterranean music" and "Mediterranean diet," which Herzfeld describes memorably as "a fantasy of postmodern capitalism if ever there was one" (2014, 123), we run the risk of essentializing and ultimately believing the narrative ourselves. The point is to allow "the Mediterranean" to function, as Herzfeld (2005, 59) and Kinoshita (2017, 33) have suggested, as a "heuristic device," thus "enabling continual inquiry into ways of thinking of the present" (Esposito 2014, xiv). The question we need to ask is not whether the concept of the Mediterranean is ideologically innocent ("virginité idéologique") but rather how it can be heuristically useful (Albera et al. 2016, 14). Many scholars in Mediterranean literary studies are based in the so-called West and most of the literary texts they analyze were written in or translated into European languages. This might prompt scholars not based in the West to suspect that the Mediterranean is a subject (or perhaps a fetish) for Western scholars. If it is going to be a meaningful heuristic device, the project of reading and writing Mediterranean literature has to show that it is not another, albeit well-intentioned, *mission civilisatrice*.

Albera, Crivello and Tozy argue that despite its limits, "the Mediterranean comparative framework" retains great relevance (2016, 14). Its liquid dimension, so to speak, always constitutes an epistemological opportunity to grasp wider regional dynamics and escape the logic of the state which has always been identified with the land. This is what Malika Mokeddem does when she places her protagonist Nora adrift on a sailing boat in the Mediterranean Sea. This regional paradigm allows us to avoid the pitfalls of Eurocentrism and Arabocentrism and to build analytical bridges that surmount the barriers erected by religion and civilization, to capture the movements and influences that would remain invisible if we are made to adopt other angles (Albera et al. 2016, 14). Herzfeld argues that the idea of a "Mediterranean culture area, recast as a heuristic device," allows for "a sophisticated rethinking of globalization from the perspective of the regionalisms invoked by those who see various levels of local cultural unity as the only available source of resistance to domination by a few powers and cultures" (2005, 59). Esposito is interested in the "instances and differential moments" in which Mediterranean writers recreate and invent "their Mediterranean(s) often at odds with dominant historical and political discourses" (2014, xiv). This is a Mediterranean literature that engages creatively with individual features and events, but does not ignore the stereotypes that plague the Mediterranean.

4 Other Mediterraneans

Maltese literature and literary studies have not given much attention to the non-European and non-Christian cultures of the region. In what he describes as an “updated” Braudelian position paper on “the Mediterranean question” that introduces a collection of essays aptly entitled *L’alternativa mediterranea* (Zolo 2007, 19), a title which refers to an alternative position that aims to have both regional and global implications, Danilo Zolo writes about the “*‘pluriverso’ culturale mediterraneo*” (2007, 18), a “unity” of many universes, and then immediately goes on to talk about “the Arab-Islamic civilization of the Maghreb and Mashreq.” Works like the modern historical prose of Alfred Sant (b. 1948) and the prize-winning autobiographical novel *L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji* (2013) (*Exodus of the Storks*) by the Maltese poet and novelist of Palestinian-Jordanian origin Walid Nabhan (b. 1966), offer opportunities for Maltese literature and literary studies to break out of the stranglehold of its eurocentrism (Grima 2008a, 74).

The mass emigration of the Maltese to North Africa and the Levant in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries put the Maltese in contact with other peoples on other shores of their sea, yet Maltese literature has written precious little about a century and a half of migration. Concetta Brincat, the first known female author of literature in Maltese, who spent her childhood in Constantine, Algeria, between 1875 and 1885, wrote two unpublished novels, one about the French Revolution and another set in the time of the emperor Nero, but she did not deal with her experience of migration, even though her two brothers remained in Algeria. Most Maltese writers who stayed in Malta would have had family members or friends who emigrated, yet they never saw this as an important theme for them to write about.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made Egypt the gateway to the East and heralded a new era in the history of the Mediterranean, Abulafia’s “Fifth Mediterranean that became a passage-way to the Indian Ocean” (2012, xvii) and René Albrecht-Carrié’s “capital highway of trade and strategy which cannot be isolated from the rest of the world” (1948, 613). There is no denying that a passageway, artery or highway is also a place in itself, but like a port one visits on one’s way to another destination, it is only a stop along the way. Abulafia’s narrative of the sea and the region, “a history of conflict as well as contact” (2012, 642), like Dun Frans Camilleri’s poem “Lill-Baħar Mediterran,” is one solidly rooted in historical events rather than in some elusive core identity molded by physical geography and climate.

A Maltese novelist who lived for 17 years in Alexandria between 1919 and 1946, and whose work would benefit from a reading with a Mediterranean and not sole-

ly national perspective, is Ivo Muscat Azzopardi (1893–1965). He was very active in the community and wrote two of his three detective novels there. Abulafia writes at length about Alexandria and the mixed identity it possessed from the very start. Some of the port cities of the Mediterranean like Alexandria “acted as vectors for the transmission of ideas,” and they only lost this identity in the second half of the twentieth century, when “rising nationalism destroyed the cosmopolitan communities of the Mediterranean” (Abulafia 2012, 643). Ivo Muscat Azzopardi’s protagonist is the Maltese detective Bendu Muskat who was born in Alexandria and whose stories can be read against the background of Abulafia’s portrayal of a city that over two millennia was more of the Mediterranean than of Egypt; “for much of that period it was the greatest city in the Mediterranean” (2012, 149–150). Another Maltese immigrant in Alexandria, between 1913 and 1921, was the Maltese novelist Juann Mamo, who offers a very bleak view of the Mediterranean and what he sees as its chronic backwardness in his genre-breaking and irreverent novel *Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-Amerka* (1930–1931) (*Nanna Venut’s Children in America*) (see Grima and Callus 2017, 393). Mamo’s intrusive heterodiegetic narrator tells the story of a group of poor and uneducated Maltese villagers who emigrate to New York in the hope of making a fortune and returning to their villages to flaunt their new-found wealth. He may have been inspired by the story of his brother Giuseppe Maria Mamo, who emigrated to the US in the 1920s. The failure of the emigrants in the novel to embrace the modernity of the advanced metropolis condemns them to return to the “chaos,” backwardness, ignorance, superstition, and fanaticism that is the Mediterranean, to meet the fate that the novel has reserved for them (Grima 2008b, 196).

Students of Maltese Mediterranean literature that look beyond works written in Maltese might want to consider the novels and poetry of the self-proclaimed “Franco-Maltese” writer Laurent Ropa (1891–1967). Born in Gozo and brought up in colonial Algeria, he was strongly influenced in the 1930s by the literary and cultural movement of the École d’Alger. In his essays, Ropa saw the roots of Maltese culture firmly in Mediterranean humanism rather than in some soulless “*latinité*,” which Gabriel Audisio, Albert Camus and the other writers of the École d’Alger considered a threat to the marriage of East and West in the region. Mediterranean humanism is richer and vaster than the Latin culture that the French colonialists used to justify their hold over Algeria and other territories (Ropa 1938b, 3). Ropa romantically believes that “The soul of the Maltese, like their language, like their race, is the most complete synthesis of this humanism: this is what they must remain faithful to; this is what they come back to by reclaiming themselves, by giving themselves a literature” (Ropa 1938b, 3). In another article published in Tunisia in the Maltese weekly *Melita*, Ropa notes that the goals of like-minded Mediterranean humanists were “the union of the Greco-Latin, Christian, Jewish

and Islamic elites" and then "*la réconciliation des peuples*" (1938a, 1), reconciliation between all peoples.

The Mediterranean imaginary has roots in what Herzfeld has called "Mediterraneanism," a variation on Edward Said's "Orientalism" (2005, 48), and in European delusions of grandeur and superiority; but it's also an imaginary that some writers have sought to consciously reappropriate by problematizing and reconstructing it (Grima 2017b, 54). Novels like Malika Mokeddem's *N'zid* (2001), Massimo Carlotto's *Cristiani di Allah* [Christians of Allah] (2008) and Jean Claude Izzo's *Les marins perdus (The Lost Sailors)* (1997) can be read as works of Mediterranean literature, as can poems like "Les Mères et la Méditerranée" (2015) ("The Mothers and the Mediterranean") by Vénus Khoury-Ghata, and "Mediterraneo" (1925) by Eugenio Montale, to mention but a few. This attempt at reappropriation is evident not only in the construction of Nora, the protagonist of *N'zid*, as a female Ulysses, but also, and more explicitly, in Izzo's delineation of the "Mediterranean noir," which does not try to hide the fact that it is an invention. This genre is based on what Massimo Carlotto calls "a political intuition;" it recounts "great transformations," denounces organized crime and corrupt power structures, and proposes "the culture of solidarity as an alternative" (2013). It is first and foremost a narrative project but also a political one.

In an interesting example of a Mediterranean reading of national fiction, Mohamed-Salah Omri discusses the representation of the Mediterranean in five twentieth-century North African historical novels set in the early modern period, three written in Arabic, by al-Bashir Khurrayyif and Ahmed al-Tawfiq, and two in French, by Cukri Khodja and Abdelaziz Ferrah (Omri 2010, 280). These Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan novels tell stories of "intensive contact, complex intermingling and multi-layered conflict within the Mediterranean" but also "engage historiography directly, attempting to intervene in the way the period is remembered." Omri argues that these novels reclaim the Mediterranean as a component of the "national myth-creation processes" in colonial and postcolonial North Africa that they are part of (2010, 296).

In everyday life, the Mediterranean can offer us its cheap images and narratives, but through its literature, it can be a constant act of creation that speaks to diversity and connectivities; it has the potential to construct and reconstruct the people and environment of the Mediterranean and beyond, without being restricted by political borders, religious beliefs, individual languages, national literatures, and even literary genres and traditions. Mediterranean literature need not be merely thematic, a literature about this or that; it has the potential to engage with similar 'texts,' like the experimental film *Méditerranée* (1963) by Jean-Daniel Pollet and the documentary *Notre mer à tous* [Our sea for all] (2014) by Yann Arthus-Bertrand and Michael Pitiot, but also with elements of popular culture, like

oral traditions, advertisements and songs, and constructs (or fads) like Mediterranean music. As an element of popular culture itself, the Mediterranean allows Mediterraneanist literature to engage with the popular narratives of the twenty-first century. Thinking Mediterranean when we read certain literary texts “expands the limits of our textual world and provides us with a repertoire of different questions” which allow us to get “closer to the mentalities of the cultures and agents that produced the texts we read” (Kinoshita 2017, 46); it also allows us to read in an interdisciplinary way, because “Mediterranean literature” is not simply literature written in the Mediterranean.

5 Conclusion: Thinking Mediterranean Maltese Literature

In this paper I have argued that Mediterranean literature engages with the Mediterranean Sea and the lands it connects, with its complex network of shared routes and spaces, and with its histories and cultures. Mediterranean literature is influenced by the Mediterranean imaginary, but it has also an important role in shaping it. I am tempted to replace “Mediterranean” with “Mediterraneans”: it would reflect better the different Mediterraneans at any one time, or in different places. Abulafia would argue that the Alexandria that emerged from the nationalist wave of the mid-twentieth century, when thousands of “foreigners,” including many Maltese, had to abandon the city, is significantly less “Mediterranean” than it was for most of its history. The plural would suit the argument about how different Mediterraneans were shaped over time and in different places by quite specific “acts of history” rather than by predetermined conditions. Abulafia identifies five Mediterraneans. But the case for sticking with the singular is very strong: it is what allows us to continue to deconstruct and reconstruct the Mediterranean; it is what makes this category an heuristic device, a shared discursive space of sorts. This is also why it might be counterproductive to abandon the concept because of its roots in Mediterraneanism and European colonialism, and because it continues to “thrive” in these stagnant, sometimes toxic waters of twenty-first century discourse. Despite its many skeletons, the Mediterranean continues to give us a language with which to speak to one another. This is a Mediterranean, or Mediterraneans, constantly forged by new ethnographies and histories, by new angles of vision and literary experiences.

If it can steer clear of the commodification of the Mediterranean “character” or “identity,” this conceptual frame and literary category can offer new dimensions to inform our reading and understanding; it can offer new perspectives and allow

us to appreciate literary strategies and techniques that enrich our experience and understanding as active readers. A work of Mediterranean literature engages critically with the Mediterranean imaginary, with the connections between stories, peoples, places, cultures, and images that continue to define the region and the discourse that constructs it.

Thinking Mediterranean opens the text to new dimensions, shades, and associations, but not with the aim of essentializing the Mediterranean, of unearthing or even defining its elusive “true identity” or “cultural core.” The Mediterranean is an imaginary, an infinite continuum of imaginaries, but a place to connect nonetheless: it is both a meticulous investigation of interconnected histories and a conjuring up of mental images, exploring associations in all directions, and stirring all kinds of emotions related with human beings encountering each other, with the physical environment they live in, and with the worlds that preceded them. Elhairy and Talbayev write about the conception of “the space of the sea as a principle of integration,” about the “wide-ranging forms of mobility, interconnectedness, and analytical fluidity” in an “adjustable Mediterranean model” (6). Mediterranean literature functions in similar ways. There seems to be no limit, writes Horden, “to the ways in which the Mediterranean region may be reimagined, as a sea, as an area involving physical movements, maritime spaces, territorial arrangements, and political processes that seek to transcend national boundaries and enmities (even as they often also reinforce them)” (2). This is the stuff of Mediterranean literature.

Our post-modern reading, which identifies not one but many Mediterraneans from different angles and across time and space, is elusive and in constant need of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. It is not a given: it presents opportunities for the critical reader to interpret the diversity and complexities of a shared cultural space and to constantly reshape or reimagine the region. Thinking Mediterranean opens Maltese literature to a whole new discourse, to a multiplicity of regional connections and a plurality of perspectives. Harrison’s reconceptualization of the Mediterranean as a site of (neo)colonial subjection and anti-(neo)colonial resistance exposes the Mediterranean to the contradictory narratives that have allowed Maltese literature to imagine the Mediterranean as a locus of us and them, of good and evil, of belief and myth. Taking into account the wider perspective of Mediterranean literature allows us to reimagine Maltese literature, to redefine the Romanticism that gave birth to a literature in the vernacular in the early nineteenth century and to articulate a contested postnationalism and cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first.

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Steffen Schneider (University of Graz)

The Forger as an Ambivalent Muse: Leonardo Sciascia's Novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* and the Mediterranean Memory of Sicily

Abstract: Leonardo Sciascia's novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* (1963) is unanimously read by scholars as historical metafiction reflecting the possibilities and difficulties of writing about history. Although this reading of the work is legitimate, it is problematic because it has pushed other noteworthy aspects of the novel into the background. First and foremost is the fact that Sciascia creates an unusual image of Sicily in the novel, one that differs significantly from the conventions that prevailed until the 1960s, some of which Sciascia himself cultivated with his famous formula of *sicilitudine*. In this novel, however, he invents a new idea of Sicily as an island connected to the rest of the world and especially of the Mediterranean.

My thesis is that the figure of the forger Vella functions as an ambivalent muse who, because of his Maltese origins, is virtually predestined to thematise Sicily's Mediterranean connections. By using Vella's word, the author Sciascia criticises the notion of a trans-historical Sicilian identity and replaces it with a more dynamic, open form of belonging to the Mediterranean. At first glance, this thesis may seem surprising; it may even meet with rejection, since Vella's historical and linguistic competences are narrowly limited such that his narratives of the Arab-Norman past rely not on knowledge but on fantasies. Thus, the question to be addressed here is whether an unreliable, even criminal, figure such as Vella should be considered the authority of a new, Mediterranean conception of Sicily.

1 Preliminary Remarks

Leonardo Sciascia's novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* (1963) is unanimously read by scholars as historical metafiction reflecting the possibilities and difficulties of writing about history (Cannon 1989; Springer 1989; Glynn 2005; Albanese 2019). This is undeniably a legitimate reading of the work, and it will not be challenged in this essay. Its dominance, however, is problematic because it has pushed other noteworthy aspects of the novel into the background. First and foremost is the fact that Sciascia creates an unusual image of Sicily in the novel, one that differs significantly from the conventions that prevailed until the 1960s, some of which Scias-

cia himself cultivated. In novels, novellas and dramas by the Sicilian classics, Verga, De Roberto, Pirandello, Brancati, Messina and, not in the least, Tomasi di Lampedusa, whose bestseller *Il Gattopardo* was published only a few years before the novel discussed herein, we are presented with a Sicily isolated not only from the rest of Italy but also from the rest of the Mediterranean. Its essence, consisting of a mixture of archaism and decadence, is seen as the result of thousands of years of historical traumatisation by constantly changing conquerors from the outside. In particular, the national unification, which completely failed from the Sicilian point of view, was perceived as the annexation, subjugation or even colonisation of Sicily by the Piedmontese king and national government. It gave post-Unitarian Sicilian literature sufficient reason to interpret the entire history of the island in retrospect as a succession of foreign dominations that were merely suffered by the Sicilians and led to a lasting traumatisation that precluded a differentiated view of the past for a long time. The fact that there was intermingling, pacts and mutual exchange with the so-called foreigners on the island remained unthinkable.¹

Sciascia, who himself fed this Sicilian myth through his reflection on the 'sicitudine', invents in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* another Sicily, an island connected to the rest of the world, corresponding with scholars in Paris, Rostock or Vienna. Of particular importance is the Mediterranean context denoted by the two geographical and cultural reference points of Maghreb and Malta. The following reflections on *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* will deal with this Mediterranean Sicily of Sciascia. The thesis is that the figure of the forger Vella functions as an ambivalent muse who, because of his origins in Malta, is virtually predestined to thematise Sicily's Mediterranean connections. By using Vella's word, the author Sciascia criticises the notion of a trans-historical Sicilian identity and replaces it with a more dynamic, open form of belonging to the Mediterranean.² At first glance, this thesis may seem surprising; it may even meet with rejection, since Vella's historical and linguistic competences are narrowly limited such that his narratives of the Arab-Norman past rely not on knowledge but on fantasies. Thus, the question to be addressed here is whether an unreliable, even criminal, figure such as Vella should be considered the authority of a new, Mediterranean conception of Sicily. To answer this question, it is inevitable to first briefly discuss the relationship between fiction and history in the novel before the character of Vella can be examined from a new perspective in the sections that follow.

¹ From the extensive literature on this Sicilian myth, only the following may be mentioned here: Chu (1998), Rosengarten (1998) and Schwaderer (2000).

² Fascinating contributions to such a Mediterranean understanding of Sicily can now be found in Karagoz/Summerfield (2015) and Capecci/Corrao (2021).

2 Fiction and history: Content and traditions of interpretation

The metahistorical reflection in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* does not take place primarily at the level of the narrator but is already predefined by the novel's subject matter since it is the story of a historical forgery, and the interpretation and writing of history as well as the distinction between forgery and truth are negotiated by the novel's characters (Albanese 2019, 55). Narrated in broad agreement with the authenticated facts is a historically real case of document forgery centred on Giuseppe Vella, a native of Malta.³ Vella was a monk of the monastery of San Martino delle Scale in Monreale. One day, while looking at an Arabic manuscript from the monastery in the presence of a high-ranking diplomat from Morocco and some Sicilian dignitaries, he decides to commit fraud. He claims that the text is an important piece of writing about the Muslim period of Sicily, when, in fact, the codex contains only a widely circulated and therefore scientifically worthless biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Vella offers to translate the manuscript; when he receives it to work with, he begins to erase the existing text and overwrites it with freely invented content pretending to be an exchange of letters between the emirs of Sicily and Arab princes of North Africa. The entire project is encoded by Vella, written in Arabic-written Maltese, a language closely related to the Maghrebi variety of Arabic.

The enormous impact of this forgery, published in 1789–1792 under the title *Consiglio di Sicilia*, resonating throughout Europe, brings Vella not only prestige and prosperity but also the first chair of Arabic in Sicily in 1785, years before the completion of his work. Encouraged by his success, he continues his activities and writes the *Consiglio d'Egitto*, which contains the invented correspondence between the Norman rulers of Sicily and Arab princes of the Maghreb. The new forgery is, in a way, a continuation of the first one, since it deals with the Norman period in Sicily that followed the Arab domination and was characterised by a synthesis of Christian and Arab cultural elements. If the first forgery was motivated by a purely private interest, the situation is different in the case of the *Consiglio d'Egitto*, because both Vella's social environment and the political context have changed in the meantime. Vella has gained access to Palermo's high society and now possesses a keen awareness of the social and political developments of his time. These include the reforms of viceroy Caracciolo, who follows the political

³ Basic accounts of this case are as follows: Scinà (1827, 296–383); Amari (2002, 6–8) and Cederna (1999).

principles of the enlightened monarchy and strives to break the power of the Sicilian barons, who hold numerous privileges and most of the land. Vella follows these efforts with interest and decides to put the *Consiglio d'Egitto* at the service of this reform policy, although the novel depicts him as being driven less by his political convictions than by a desire for respect and authority (Sciascia 2012, 378). Be that as it may, the *Consiglio d'Egitto* has an even greater impact than the first codex. This is due to the fact that, in support of the aforementioned reforms, Vella provides 'proof' that the barons' claims against the monarchy are groundless:

Don Giuseppe avrebbe tirato fuori un codice arabo in cui le cose della Sicilia normanna sarebbero apparse, per testimonianza diretta e disinteressata degli arabi, per lettere degli stessi re normanni, in tutt'altro ordine: tutto alla Corona, niente ai baroni (Sciascia 2012, 380).⁴

Although the narrator seems to morally condemn Vella's motives, it is clear that the latter experiences a considerable intellectual development. To do justice to his subject, the forger begins to study the complex legal history of Sicily and therefore has contact with the historian and Enlightenment philosopher Francesco Paolo Di Blasi. The fact that this does not remain without consequences is particularly evident in the seventh chapter of the first part, which demonstrates how Vella now knows to assert himself within Palermo's aristocratic society as an astute participant in discussions. He joins a debate on the subject of feelings, which is an important topic for the Enlightenment, and earns Di Blasi's recognition with a clever contribution.

The discussion is triggered by the mockeries of Don Saverio Zarbo, a character of no further importance to the novel, who makes fun of the new fashion for sentimental speech. Don Saverio uses the word 'sentimento' in an entirely unsentimental and purely sexual sense to ironise the erotic flushes of aristocratic society, whose main pleasure is the cultivation of extramarital affairs. In contrast, the Enlightenment and Sensibility associated the term with values such as fidelity, friendship and sincerity. Quite deliberately, the bourgeois-enlightened discourse of sentiment is directed against the lifestyle of the aristocracy, which is perceived as immoral. This historical background to the discussion instigated by Don Saverio becomes extremely clear in the novel when, on a whim and with the intention of humiliating him, the latter addresses Giuseppe Vella with the following question: 'E

⁴ 'Don Giuseppe would bring to light an Arab codex in which the affairs of Norman Sicily would be shown in a quite different light by the first-hand, disinterested testimony of the Arabs and by documents of these same Norman kings; that is, his codex would establish the fact that everything belongs to the Crown and nothing to the barons' (Sciascia 2016, 41).

voi, abate Vella, avete sentimento?' (Sciascia 2012, 385).⁵ The seemingly harmless question actually contains a double humiliation: since Don Saverio has previously used the word in the sense of sexual sensations, he is thus publicly attributing a dissolute lifestyle to the cleric Vella. In addition, there is a second, social humiliation because Don Saverio's ironic speech insinuates the existence of a qualitative difference in value between people, since he cannot imagine that simple people are capable of differentiated feelings. Against such class conceits, the Enlightenment asserts the capacity of all people to feel, which is why this is an important basis for the principle of equality. This is precisely what Vella expresses when, after much hesitation, he answers Don Saverio:

Non sono sicuro del senso che voi date alla parola. Se vi riferite a una moda, a un insieme di cose che fanno moda, l'uomo di sentimento, il deliquio delle signore, I pecorai del nostro Meli, decisamente vi rispondo di no. Ma se vi riferite al sentimento come ad un elemento dell'uguaglianza, di cui anche la moda è inconsapevole frutto, allora vi dico che in qualche modo vi partecipo anch'io (Sciascia 2012, 388).⁶

For the metahistorical reflection of the novel, the critical consciousness, acquired by the forger over the years, possesses decisive importance. Indeed, Sciascia uses the character as an unmasking reflection of the strategies with which early modern Sicilian justice and historiography legitimised the social order that was so politically and socially unjust. The now enlightened Vella sees through this injustice no less than Di Blasi and the viceroy Caracciolo. When the latter calls the legislative effort with which noble privileges were constructed a (historical) forgery—'Ora al viceré riformatore e al regnante avido quel massiccio corpo giuridico veniva rivelandosi come un'impostura' (Sciascia 2012, 379)⁷—he finds an echo in Vella:

e don Giuseppe, che di impostura si intendeva, cominciava a capirne l'ingranaggio. E non ci voleva poi molto a rovesciarne i termini, a passare sottobanco le carte di una opposta impos-

5 'What about you, Abbot Vella, are you a passionate man?' (Sciascia 2016, 47).

6 'I am not sure what you mean by the word. If you are referring to something fashionable, to a combination of things that, taken together, create a vogue—the man who affects passion because it is the stylish thing to do and becomes the cynosure of all the ladies or, in another way, one of Meli's shepherds—I say I most definitely am not. But if by passion you mean a sense of human equality, of which the present fashion is an unknowing fruit, then I can say to you that I do in some manner share that' (Sciascia 2016, 52).

7 'Now, in the eyes of a reforming viceroy and a greedy monarch, that massive body of legal opinion was coming to assume the aspect of an imposture' (Sciascia 2016, 40).

tura al viceré, alla Corona: che certo le avrebbero avute a grado e con la concessione di una ricca prelatura, di un'abbazia, si sarebbero sdebitati (Sciascia 2012, 379).⁸

In the novel, the forger functions as a figure that can be used to expose the strategies of official, legitimising historiography: on the one hand, by criticising these strategies and, on the other hand, by using them himself. With his second forgery, Vella places himself in the service of the viceroy, albeit without his explicit request and without letting him in on his criminal activities. Nevertheless, even if the viceroy's political actions look more progressive from an enlightened point of view than those of the conservative aristocracy, he certainly uses means comparable to those of his opponents when he relies on the documents forged by Vella.

The novel's metahistorical reflection is thus based on how the past is used to legitimise present interests and on the willingness of historians and forgers to place their skills at the disposal of the powerful in exchange for the appropriate remuneration. Seeing through this, Vella develops a deep distaste for historiography. He declares the work of historians in general to be a tremendous fraud and claims that inventing history, as he and his assistant do, is far more meritorious than transcribing and interpreting sources that have long since yellowed. Although, on the one hand, this assertion can easily be understood as a mere attempt to appease a guilty conscience, on the other hand, the subsequent long diatribe against the historiographical practice of the time weighs more heavily because it exposes its blind spot. Vella invents a parable in which he represents humanity as a tree and the individuals as leaves. While the tree exists, the leaves fall off without ceasing and rot without leaving any trace. Only the powerful and great, whom Vella compares to the branches and twigs of the tree, remain. From his parable, Vella derives the principle that history is, in the end, only the history of the powerful because nothing remains of everyone else. He concludes with the following words:

'La storia! E mio padre? E vostro padre? E il gorgoglio delle loro viscere vuote? E la voce della loro fame? Credete che si sentirà, nella storia? Che ci sarà uno storico che avrà orecchio talmente fino da sentirlo?' (Sciascia 2012, 394).⁹

⁸ 'Don Giuseppe, who understood a thing or two about imposture, was beginning to understand the workings of this one. It would not require too much to reverse the terms, surreptitiously to deal Viceroy and Crown the cards of a reversed fraud; surely they would willingly accept the cards and discharge their debt by the conferral of a rich prelacy or abbacy' (Sciascia 2016, 40).

⁹ 'History! What about my father? What about your father? And the rumbling of their empty bellies, the voice of their hunger? Do you believe this will be heart in history? That there will be a historian with an ear keen to hear?' (Sciascia 2016, 59).

The passage is often read as a fundamental critique of historiography in general (Cannon 1989, 54, for example), but it seems more likely that Vella is implicitly calling for a different kind of historiography, one that deals with the common people and registers their lives. Certainly, however, the novel here again critically addresses the alliance of power and history.

Other important aspects of the novel's metahistorical reflection can be discovered if one includes the second protagonist, the philosopher Di Blasi. He is committed to an enlightened monarchy, as envisioned by the viceroy Caracciolo; he is committed to the ideals of the French Enlightenment but, simultaneously, loves the frivolous eroticism of the Rococo, as is made clear by the short passages in which his dealings with his mistress, the Countess of Regalpetra, are described. She appears, for example, in chapter nine of the first part in the pose of Marie-Louise O'Murphy, whom the French painter François Boucher elevated to a rococo icon in a perky nude portrait. He also loves the erotic tales from the *Arabian Nights* that he slips the countess. Nevertheless, despite these concessions to the spirit of the times, Di Blasi becomes radicalised after the failure of Caracciolo's reformist policies. When the reactionary viceroy Filippo Lopez y Royo (from 1794) makes it his goal to suppress all revolutionary activity in the viceroyalty, Di Blasi plans a revolt. Betrayed by a co-conspirator, he is tortured and finally beheaded. Shortly before his execution, he still has the optimistic thought that in a fully enlightened world, practices such as torture and executions would finally be obsolete; however, a long insertion by the narrator referring to atrocities of the twentieth century—explicitly mentioning the Shoah and the Algerian War—has a disillusioning effect (Sciascia 2012, 494).

At the same time, Vella's philosophical and political education finally takes a turn for the better in the face of the horrific crimes committed by the avenging judicial authorities against Di Blasi. Only now does he grasp what the Enlightenment's struggle for human rights and better justice is all about. Thus, the historical significance of Di Blasi's existence is revealed to him, even if he cannot decide to follow in his footsteps.

The previous reflections on Sciascia's metahistorical reflections in *Consiglio* can be summarised as follows: agents of reflection are essentially the two protagonists. In them, the tendencies of their time are embodied. In the course of their lives, both arrive at convictions concerning their relationship to history: Vella is decidedly sceptical about the reliability of historiographical accounts, and this scepticism is understandable given the extent to which official institutions manipulated historical sources to legitimise their interests. His criticism of the completely inadequate consideration of ordinary people in the historiography of his time is also not unfounded. Di Blasi shares Vella's scepticism, as he is a specialist in the feints with which the Sicilian judiciary knows how to manipulate documents. Un-

like Vella, however, he believes in the scientific and moral progress of humanity. The narrator's commentary, which relates Di Blasi's fate to crimes of the twentieth century, conversely, emphasises that there is no automatic progress of reason and no logic immanent in history but that progress requires endless work and effort.

Above all, the essential factor for the metahistorical discourse of the novel, apart from the reflections of the characters and the restrained comments of the narrator, is the plot construction. While Giuseppe Vella is in the foreground in the first part, the presentation in the third part constantly alternates the perspective between him and Di Blasi, which allows for a close interweaving of both characters and a mutual reflection of their positions. By contrast, the narrator's voice intervenes directly only in a few places to relate what is told to the present-day experiences of the author and his readers. Research positions that seek to read out of the novel a general questioning of the distinction between fiction and history based on Vella's history-sceptical statement seem less plausible (Cannon 1989, 55; Springer 1989), for if this were so, there would be a performative self-contradiction of the text, which adheres closely to the authenticated facts and hardly allows for fictional elements. Invented are only insignificant minor characters and, of course, the thoughts and speeches of the characters, which have not been handed down in this manner but can be successfully brought into line with what is known. This allows only one conclusion, namely, that Sciascia was extremely convinced of the narratability of history when he conceived the novel. Moreover, the text is highly respectful of the source material and historiographical works on the case, which also argues against a total relativisation of the difference between fiction and history. Sciascia is concerned with exposing the complicity between the forger and the powerful; however, the notion of exposure implies the assumption that literature is capable of demonstrating truth. The historical truth of the novel entails, among other things, an analysis of how various interest groups contend with representations of history. It describes how real or falsified documents are ascribed a cultural value regardless of their possible or impossible truth content and how the past is thus transformed into an interest-driven instrument.

3 Vella and the Mediterranean memory

Research on the novel rarely emphasises that the prerequisite for Vella's success was the extremely specific expectations of the Sicilian audience, which consisted of a mixture of complete ignorance of Arabic and considerable fascination. The enthusiasm of the Sicilian elites for the tales from the *Arabian Nights*, as described in the novel, also fits in with this Arabophile zeitgeist, which Vella cleverly managed to exploit for his own benefit. In the following paragraphs, it will be made plau-

sible that Vella can also be interpreted as a mediator: a figure who mediates between the Arab and the Sicilian worlds and enables a view of Sicily from a Mediterranean context.

Regarding the historically real figure of Vella, he was a highly unreliable intermediary who falsified documents, invented events and people and was unable to understand written Arabic. However, it is because of him that a chair of the Arabic language is established in Palermo, that Sicilians began to take an interest in their past and that, as a result of the exposure of his criminal activities in Sicily, a historical school emerged, with its most famous offspring being Michele Amari, whose *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (published in three volumes from 1854 to 1872) is still considered an unsurpassed classic. Vella's impact could be described with Hegel as a 'cunning of reason' because scientific progress could prevail in the process as an unintended consequence of falsification. For an excellent account of this connection, see Mallette (2011, 66). Vella thus functions as a catalyst of a collective desire for knowledge and memory, regardless of whether he is a profound connoisseur of Arabic.

Vella's historical ambiguity is demonstrated in the opening scene of the novel. The initial situation is as follows: Abdallah Mohamed Ben Olman, a Moroccan ambassador in Naples, lands in Palermo owing to a storm at sea and is received as the guest of viceroy Caracciolo. Vella, who is able to understand Moroccan Arabic to some extent because of his background, becomes his interpreter and accompanies him and Monsignor Airoldi, who has a sincere enthusiasm for Arab history, to the relevant monuments of Palermo. The novel begins at the moment when Ben Olman opens an Arabic codex in the monastery of San Martino:

'Il benedettino passò un mazzetto di penne variopinte sul taglio del libro, dal faccione tondo soffiò come il dio dei venti delle carte nautiche a disperdere la nera polvere, lo aprì con un ribrezzo che nella circostanza apparve delicatezza, trepidazione. Per la luce che cadeva obliqua dall'alta finestra, sul foglio color sabia I caratteri presero rilievo: un grottesco drappello di formiche nere spiaccicato, secco. Sua eccellenza Abdallah Mohamed Ben Olman si chinò su quei segni, il suo occhio abitualmente languido, stracco, annoiato era diventato vivo ed acuto. Si rialzò un momento dopo, a frugarsi con la destra sotto la giamberra: tirò fuori una lente montata, oro e pietre verdi, a fingerla fiore o frutto su esile tralcio.'

"Ruscello congelato" disse mostrandola. Sorrideva: ché aveva citato Ibn Hamdis, poeta siciliano, per omaggio agli ospiti. Ma, tranne don Giuseppe Vella, nessuno sapeva di arabo: e don Giuseppe non era in grado di cogliere il gentile significato che sua eccellenza aveva voluto dare alla citazione né di capire che si trattava di una citazione. Tradusse perciò, invece che le parole, il gesto: "La lente, ha bisogno della lente"; il che monsignor Airoldi, che con emozione aspettava il responso di sua eccellenza su quel codice aveva capito già da sé' (Sciascia 2012, 352).¹⁰

10 'The Benedictine whisked a brush of multi-coloured feathers over the top of the book, puffed

This carefully crafted and metaphorically charged scene already contains many significant motifs of the novel. The main theme is the act of interpretation, which causes an initial yet unintentional distortion of what is meant. Vella, in fact, does not understand the allusion to the Arabo-Sicilian poet Ibn Hamdis, with which the Moroccan ambassador, with friendly intentions, wishes to draw attention to the bond between the Arab and Latin worlds.¹¹ What Vella lacks, in this case, is the literary education that would have allowed him to recognise the quotation from one of the most important poets of Sicily. The failure to understand, however, is not the fault of the interpreter alone; it is representative of the collective oblivion to which the island's Arabic past has fallen.

The beginning of the novel thus presents the failure of a possible exchange or encounter between two close yet separate cultures: the outstretched hand and the friendly reference to a shared cultural heritage by the ambassador who does not speak the language of the country in which he lives and the failure to grasp the gesture by the interpreter who knows the colloquial language of the guest but has little education in that language dramatise the interplay of the desire for understanding and incompetence.

This still relatively harmless state of affairs intensifies as the conversation progresses. The readers learn that Vella had already decided in the days before to use the opportunity of the visit to the monastery for the purpose of a fraud:

L'idea di armare l'imbroglio al fracappellano Vella era venuta appena monsignor Airoldi aveva proposto la gita al monastero di San Martino: dove, si era ricordato monsignore,

out his plump cheeks like the god of the winds in an old nautical map, blew black dust from the leather cover and, with a shiver of what in the circumstances seemed delicate trepidation, laid the volume open on the table. The light fell slantingly from a high window onto the yellowed page, so that the dim characters stood out like a grotesque army of crushed dry black ants. His Excellency Abdallah Mohammed Ben-Olman leaned down to study them; his eyes, habitually languid, weary, incurious, were now sharp and alert. He straightened up after a moment, reached under his redingote with his right hand and drew forth a magnifying glass; the frame and handle were of gold, with green stones so set that the glass seemed a cluster of flowers or fruit on a slender stem. "The icebound brook," he said, displaying the glass. He smiled, for he had intended to compliment his hosts by quoting the Sicilian poet Ibn Hamdis. Except for Don Giuseppe Vella, however, no one present understood any Arabic, and Don Giuseppe was not qualified to grasp His Excellency's amiable intent in making the quotation, or even qualified to realize that it was a matter of quotation. Therefore, he translated not the words but the gesture—"The glass, he needs the glass"—which Monsignor Airoldi, who was eagerly awaiting His Excellency's pronouncement on the codex, had perfectly well understood' (Sciascia 2016, 3–4).

11 On Ibn Hamdis and Sciascia, see Pappalardo (2017) and Petrucciani (2021).

c'era un codice arabo che a Palermo aveva portato, un secolo prima, don Martino La Farina, bibliotecario dell'Escuriale (Sciascia 2012, 353).¹²

Vella, for this reason, begins to mistranslate in order to incite Airoldi's desire: for the monsignor has no more urgent desire than that there should also exist significant Arabic sources in Palermo that could have similar importance to the *Cambridge Chronicle* or *de Rebus Siculis*.¹³ Vella, sensing that the lack of sources on the Muslim Middle Ages in Sicily offers him a unique opportunity, therefore responds accordingly to Airoldi's question to the Moroccan of what the text might be about: 'si tratta di una raccolta di lettere, di relazione ... Cose di governo, insomma' (Sciascia 2012, 352).¹⁴

As will become clear later, Vella not only exploits Airoldi's desire for knowledge but also deliberately fills in the gaps that exist between the *Cambridge Chronicle* and *de Rebus Siculis*, namely, the period of Arab rule after the year 1000 and the Norman era. In doing so, he suggests to an eager audience that a comprehensive documentation of the medieval history of Sicily will soon be available.

Misunderstanding and intent to deceive thus intermingle in this novel's opening, preparing the ground for what is to come. The forger appears as sufficiently communicatively skilled and manipulative to convince those who do not understand anything about the history and language of the Arabs and the Normans. All this demonstrates the difficulties that stood in the way of dealing with Arab-Sicilian relations.

The situation is different on the discourse level of the novel: the narrator seems to hover over everything and to have the knowledge that the characters lack. The metaphors and comparisons of the novel's opening are part of the narrator's speech, not the characters', and endow the text with significant connotations. For instance, the comparison between the chubby-cheeked Benedictine blowing the dust off the pages of the codex with the putti symbolising the winds in ancient sea charts is only seemingly marginal. Indeed, the narrator invokes the concepts of cartography and navigation, which can be related in ambig-

12 'The idea of contriving the fraud had occurred to Chaplain Vella the moment Monsignor Airoldi had proposed the visit to the Monastery of San Martino: the Bishop had remembered that the library there contained an Arabic codex brought to Palermo a hundred years before by Don Martino La Farina' (Sciascia 2016, 5).

13 The *Cambridge Chronicle* is a tenth-century Arabic record of events in Muslim-ruled Sicily. This chronicle was published in 1720 by Giambattista Caruso (Amari 2002, 5). *De Rebus Siculis* is the short title for the *Liber ad Honorem Augusti sive de Rebus Siculis* written by Pietro da Eboli around 1196, a paean to Henry IV of Staufen (Kölzer/Sträli 1994).

14 'This is a collection of letters, reports—affairs of state, in a word' (Sciascia 2016, 5).

uous ways to the passage quoted as well as to the novel as a whole. Thus, the medium of the map can be interpreted as a metaphor for the narrator's survey-like, seemingly infallible knowledge. The mention of seafaring evokes trans-Mediterranean mobility and Sicily's multiple contacts with North Africa through trade, war and individual travel. I will discuss this theme in more detail when analysing Vella's recollections of the port of Malta.

From all that has been said so far, the impression must be that Vella is an exceedingly unscrupulous schemer who maintains a purely purposeful and cold relationship with Arab culture. However, there are some passages in the text that demonstrate that he has a deeper and more personal relationship with the Mediterranean world. Although, as the beginning of the novel underlines, he has no literary education, he has another connection, based not on erudite knowledge but on imagination, to the hybrid character of Mediterranean cultures, which is a product of the decades-old encounters and crossings between the people of this geographical and cultural area. This aspect of his personality makes Vella a muse of Mediterranean memory—it paradoxically gives his forgeries a dimension of authenticity. This is undoubtedly a bold formulation to which there are weighty objections, for Vella's highly deficient knowledge of Arabic and his intention to deceive prohibit ascribing authenticity to his texts if one understands by this a correspondence to an original. In addition, the script invented by him out of incompetence concerning the true Arabic alphabet is only a simulacrum, a jumble of lines that even the experts can read only with great difficulty.

If the concept of authenticity is nevertheless invoked here, it does not refer to the level of mimesis, that is, to the relationship between the original and forgery, but to that of poiesis in the sense of a creative force that can be seen as specifically Mediterranean. The text clearly points to Vella's productive connection with the memory of Sicily and the Mediterranean in two places. The first passage is found in the second chapter; it describes how Vella walks through the popular neighbourhood of the Kalsa, working out his forgery in his mind. The name of the neighbourhood itself reveals its Arab origin: al-Khālīsa was the name of the fortress that the Muslim rulers built here and from which the neighbourhood takes its name. The cityscape and the street names preserve the memory of a past that is only dimly known to the inhabitants of the eighteenth century. The foreign visitor from Morocco, whom they call a Turk—perhaps because Morocco was part of the Ottoman Empire but perhaps only because they do not want to differentiate in their rejection of the foreigner—has something uncanny, even threatening, for them, and Vella, the priest who interprets their dreams, is virtually soiled by contact with Ben Olman:

‘Immerso nei pensieri, si avviò verso casa attraverso il popoloso quartiere della Kalsa: le donne se lo segnavano a dito, i bambini gli gridavano dietro “Il prete che stava col turco, il prete del turco” poiché come accompagnatore del marocchino era diventato popolare. Don Giuseppe non li sentiva nemmeno: alto e robusto, lento e solenne nel passo, grave il volto olivastro, gli occhi assorbiti, la gran croce di Gerusalemme sul petto camminava tra quel pulviscolo umano. Nella sua mente era il giuoco dei dadi, delle date, dei nomi: rotolavano nell’egira, nell’era cristiana, nell’oscuro, immutabile tempo del pulviscolo umano della Kalsa; si accozzavano a comporre una cifra, un destino; di nuovo si agitavano martellanti dentro il cieco passato. Il Fazello, l’Inveges, il Caruso, la *cronica di Cambridge*¹⁵: gli elementi del suo giuoco, i dati del suo azzardo. “Mi ci vuole soltanto del metodo” si diceva “soltanto dell’attenzione”: e tuttavia non poteva impedirsi che il sentimento ne fosse sollecitato, che la misteriosa ala della pietà sfiorasse la fredda impostura, che l’umana malinconia si levasse da quella polvere’ (Sciascia 2012, 359).¹⁶

At this point, it is easy to see how deeply Vella is rooted in the shared Sicilian-Arab past and how vividly and tirelessly his imagination works. The others appear to him—or to the narrator? it is unclear—as ‘pulviscolo’, as ‘dust’, while the past forms the material for his work. Here, it becomes particularly evident how closely Vella’s deception approaches a literary creative process: he selects from the accounts of Sicily’s Muslim history available to him the data and facts that he needs and that he must combine to form his narrative from them. The difference consists essentially in the different intention and status of the statement because

15 Fazello, Inveges and Caruso: these are Sicilian historians who had tried to shed light on the darkness of the Arab history of Sicily. Tommaso Fazello (1498–1570) wrote a geographical and historical account of Sicily under the title *De Rebus Siculis Decades Duae, Nunc Primum in Lucem Editiae* (Palermo 1558). Agostino Inveges (1595–1677) was the author of several historical writings, including *Annali della Felice Città di Palermo*, published in three volumes in Palermo in 1649, 1650 and 1651. Giovanni Battista Caruso (1673–1724) was particularly notable for an edition of the sources of Sicilian history, which appeared in two volumes in 1723: *Bibliotheca Historica Regni Sicilie*. About these authors teaches Amari (2002, 4–5).

16 ‘Sunk in his own thoughts, he walked home through the crowded Kalsa quarter; women pointed to him, children ran shouting behind him—“That’s the priest who was with the Turk”—“The Turk’s priest”—for as the Moroccan’s companion, he had become a well-known figure. Don Giuseppe did not even hear them. Tall and vigorous of frame, slow and solemn in carriage, the great cross of Jerusalem lying on his chest, he strode through that human dust, his olive-complexioned face grave and his eyes abstracted. His mind was busy juggling dates and names: like dice, they rolled in the Hegira, down to the corridors of the Christian Era and through the obscure, immutable centuries of the human dust of Kalsa: now they rolled together to form a figure or a human destiny, now they bounced noisily along blind passages of the past. The historians Fazello, Inveges, Caruso, the *Cambridge Chronicle*—all elements of his gamble, the dice of his game. “All I need is a method,” he told himself, “and attention, close attention.” And yet he could not fend off a feeling that the mysterious wing of piety would brush against his calculated fraud, and that human pain would be born from the dust of the Kalsa’ (Sciascia 2016, 13).

while the literary text does not have to disguise its fictionality, this is indispensable for the text of the forger. In both cases, however, it becomes a matter of re-manifesting through writing a past that is only apparently lost and latent in the present.

Undoubtedly, this is paradoxical: one may ask how such a literary manifestation should be possible by a person who, as the opening chapter already demonstrates, has minimal knowledge of this past. The answer lies in the strong emphasis on a fantasy that participates in the Mediterranean, which has its roots in the protagonist's origins and earliest imprints. This is addressed late in the novel but all the more extensively for it, namely, in Chapter 15 of the third part, where Vella recalls his early years in Malta.

Poi, nella sera, le chitarre si accendevano come grilli, mentre dal porto giungeva il canto dei marinai siciliani, greci, catalani, genovesi: essenza della lontananza, della nostalgia. Di quei marinai che nei loro racconti di ubriachi aprivano il mondo come un ventaglio: e gli avevano rivelato la vasta e varia avventura che i luoghi offrono all'uomo anche il più miserabile, e che nello svariare dei luoghi è per il miserabile l'unica possibilità di cogliere le gioie della vita. E capitandogli a volte di sorprenderli, nei recessi della marina, in oscuri amplessi con le vene ri del luogo, veneri sformate e grevi come quelle che da Malta avrebbero poi avuto nome, quei marinai gli avevano rivelato la donna: nausea ed ebbrezza da cui era sorta la sua ardente curiosità *en voyeur* nei riguardi dei fatti erotici. In effetti, aveva cominciata dalla donna a falsificare il mondo: traendo da quel che di lei vedeva, intravedeva, indovinava gli elementi d'avvio a un fantasticare inesauribile e, con gli anni, perfetto. E attraverso la donna, decisamente era pervenuto a quella fantasia del mondo arabo cui il dialetto e le abitudini della sua terra, il suo sangue oscuramente, lo chiamavano. ‘Solo le cose della fantasia sono belle, ed è fantasia anche il ricordo ... Malta non è che una terra povera e amara, la gente barbara come quando vi approdò San Paolo ... Solo che, nel mare, consente alla fantasia di affacciarsi alla favola del mondo musulmano e a quella del mondo cristiano: come io ho fatto, come io ho saputo fare... Altri direbbe alla storia: io dico alla favola’ (Sciascia 2012, 485).¹⁷

17 ‘At evening, the guitars struck up like crickets, and up from the port floated the songs of the sailors—Sicilian, Greek, Catalan, Genoese—eloquent of far places and homesickness. As the boy listened to the drunken tales of the sailors, the world unfolded before him like a fan: he discovered the vast and varied adventures that new places offer to even the poorest men, and he saw that the only possibility for the poor man to pluck the pleasures of life lay in changing scenes. And it happened that sometimes he would surprise the sailors in secret places along the shore, locked in dark embraces with the Veneres of the waterfront, heavy women, abused like their prehistoric forebears from whom Malta was said to have taken its name; it was the sailors who also made women known to him; he responded with nausea and intoxication, from which sprang his burning voyeur's curiosity about all things erotic. Indeed, it was through women that he began to falsify the world; from what he saw, sensed and surmised about women he drew the materials that led him to an inexhaustible and, with time, flawless fantasizing. It was definitely through women, through the fantasy that he had conceived of women, that he had created his fantasy of the Arab world to which the language and customs of his country, and, obscurely, also his own blood, attracted him. “Only the things of fantasy are beautiful. And memory, too, is a fantasy ... Malta is nothing but a

The end of this extensive quotation expands the previous finding because it reveals the origin of Vella's imagination. The earlier passage had already demonstrated that Vella, by virtue of his imagination, participates in the common memory space that connects the Palermo of the eighteenth century with the multicultural Palermo of the Middle Ages. Maltese memory now establishes how this participation occurs. It has its origin in the early years that Vella spent in Malta. Of immense importance is the geographical position of the island: as with Sicily, Malta is located in the heart of the Mediterranean; however, unlike Sicily, it is small and barren and far more directly linked to the sea and seafaring because it has practically no inland. For this reason, sailors, along with sex workers, dominate Vella's memories. Here, the text develops a metaphoric of the sexes that is not free of orientalist clichés. The sailors who fascinated the young Vella with their songs all come from the Christian regions of the Mediterranean: the Greeks, Catalans, Sicilians and Genoese, as listed by the text. The women, however, are linked to an archaic, prehistoric cultural form: with their shapeless bodies, these women are reminiscent of famous figurative representations of the fourth millennium BC that were found on Malta. Sex with the women, to which the sailors introduced him ('quei marinai gli avevano rivelato la donna'), disgusted him, yet it was they who gave him the fantasy of the Arab: as Maltese women, they were Arabic by language and culture, like himself; like the Arab world, they were full of mysteries for him that he could only guess at but not reveal—and therefore provided ample material for his imagination. The male-Christian world of the northern Mediterranean and the female-Muslim world of the Arab south henceforth form two poles of his existence, the Christian of which is rationally accessible to him, while the other can only be conjured up with the help of memory and imagination. Vella's activity as a forger is a manifestation of suppressed and problematic memory work in which he feels increasingly trapped, preferring to enjoy the freedom of fictional writing and the glory of poetry.

4 Cultural heritage and shared memory

As we have seen, Giuseppe Vella takes on numerous different roles and functions in Sciascia's novel: he is a forger who educates himself and allies himself with the Enlightenment; he is a fraudulent interpreter and Mediterranean muse, failed au-

poor, harsh island and the people are as barbarous as when St. Paul was shipwrecked there. Only, being in the sea, it allows imagination to venture into a fable of the Muslim and Christian world, as I have done, as I have been able to do ... Others would say history, but I say fable" (Sciascia 2016, 178–179).

thor and fortune teller. For the author Sciascia, the character is so interesting because it makes it possible to deal with several important themes at once with the narrative about Vella: the relationship between history and power in Sicily in particular and in Italy in general as well as the dialogue between Muslims and Christians and between South and North in multi- and inter-cultural Sicily. It turns out that Vella's person only partially reflects on such questions; this is especially true of his reflections on history and power. Rather, insofar as his relationship with the Arabic world is concerned, he serves as an involuntary catalyst of an awakening serious examination regarding this subject while he himself is intellectually and educationally ill-suited to the related contexts. On the contrary, he almost emblematically represents a fantasy that is completely connected with the Mediterranean region, a fabrication that is fed by the earliest experiences, although it is by no means free of orientalist clichés.

These various aspects of the text are held together by their arrangement in the novel, which allows the paradoxes arising from the combination of contradictory roles to be de-paradoxed by being harnessed into the scheme of a character's personal development: Vella is first the dream-interpreting soothsayer who then evolves into a sophisticated forger, a self-thinker and, finally, a compassionate philosopher who regrets that he did not pursue a writing career.

As for the aspects of the novel regarding the cultural heritage of Sicily and the memory of the island shared with Arab culture, the figure of the forger serves the author as an agent that allows Sciascia to treat such issues for contemporary audience. This becomes clear at the beginning of the novel: whether the poet Ibn Hamdis was a household name to Airoldi and Vella is an immaterial question in the context of the novel. However, by putting a quotation from the poet's work into the mouth of the ambassador's character, the narrator actualises for his readers the importance of the Arab poet for Sicilian literary history. Thus, if the dialogue fails on the content level of the novel, the narrator, sovereignly in command of the text, here gives his audience a clear indication of how important it would be to know Ibn Hamdis. Other passages in the novel can be read in much the same manner, such as the crossing of the Kalsa, which is also examined here: the importance of Arab traces in the cityscape may not have been apparent to most of the eighteenth-century population or, at least, may not have seemed important, but the narrator uses his character as a memory media – as a Muse – to remind his audience of this.

Through such strategies, the narrator's discourse moves beyond the historically conditioned consciousness of the characters to the island's cultural heritage and the shared memories between the North and South. In doing so, he at least implicitly criticises the outdated ideology of a rigid Sicilianity and inscribes the belonging of the Arab past to the Sicilian identity in the collective memory of the Sicilians.

The possible objection that the facts regarding the Arab presence in Sicily were already well known in Sciascia's time overlooks the reality that what is at stake here is not the facts but the form of their memory. This raises the question of the extent to which those Arabs, who were still for Tomasi di Lampedusa only a horde of conquerors, could now even be understood as part of one's identity. Sciascia does not go so far as to affirm this without hesitation; however, by shifting the view of the cultural geography of Sicily toward the Mediterranean, he prepares the groundwork for a reassessment of the relationships between the cultures on the island.

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Part II: Social and Linguistic Spaces

Daniel G. König (University of Konstanz)

Latin-Arabic Literary Entanglement and the Concept of “Mediterranean Literature”

Abstract: Latin and Arabic as linguistic systems look back on a centuries-old history of entanglement, with periods of strong and intensive literary production coinciding in the medieval and the early modern period. However, the history of their literary entanglement is restricted to the exchange of a few literary works, narratives, and motifs. Even if we employ a wide definition of literature that includes holy scriptures such as the Bible and the Qur’ān as well as scholarly, theological, and pragmatic texts, the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement cannot compare in quantity and quality to the entanglement of modern European and Arabic literatures from the nineteenth and twentieth century onwards. In view of this, the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement rather seems to present a counter-example to the concept of “Mediterranean literature.” In terms of theory, however, this history raises a number of important issues. It highlights that our definition of “Mediterranean literature” significantly depends on what we define as “literature,” and that we must consider many factors if we wish to understand why certain literary spheres interacted more intensively with each other than others. Moreover, the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement illustrates that literary exchanges dating back centuries leave behind a complex legacy. Thanks to complex processes of transmission, readers from Iceland to Iran are acquainted with the feats of Aristotle and Alexander already since the medieval period. The first Latin translation of the Qur’ān stood at the beginning of a long polemical engagement with Islam in Christian Europe. From the nineteenth century onwards, Arab authors have described the massive Latin reception of Arabic scholarly texts between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries as a process that eventually facilitated the modern rise of Europe, thus inscribing the Mediterranean south into the success story of modernity usually claimed exclusively by the Mediterranean north. All this shows that Latin-Arabic entanglement has a role to play in a theory of Mediterranean literature.

1 Introduction

“Mediterranean literature” can be understood in different ways: it can denote a restricted corpus of texts that deal with the Mediterranean explicitly from a thematic and conceptual point of view, such as in the works of the French writer

and poet Gabriel Audisio (1900–1978) who redefined the Mediterranean as a “liquid continent” (*continent liquide*) and a “fatherland” (*patrie*) (Audisio 1935, 15). Alternatively, we can choose an extremely wide definition that regards every piece of text written within the geographical orbit of the Mediterranean as “Mediterranean literature.” Finally, we can also define “Mediterranean literature” as the sum of literary themes and concrete works shared between different linguistic orbits that form part of the historical and contemporary literary landscapes of the geographical Mediterranean.

This article takes the third definition as its starting point. It investigates to what extent forms of “Mediterranean literature” have emanated from the entanglement of different literary spheres, each characterized by a particular language. In view of the many languages spoken in and around the Mediterranean since pre-historical times (Grévin 2012), it is impossible to trace the history of literary entanglement both in the *longue durée* and by considering more than two linguistic systems. By focusing on the literary entanglement of Latin and Arabic, this article—written by a historian, not a specialist in literary studies—contributes to this volume as a kind of “pre-history” and “collateral history” to the role played by Romance languages in the formation of Mediterranean literature(s).

2 Latin-Arabic Literary Entanglement: A Restricted View

Latin and Arabic were important languages of literary expression in and around the Mediterranean for several centuries—Latin from classical Antiquity to the early modern period, Arabic from the early medieval period until today. Periods of strong and intensive literary production in both languages coincided in the medieval and the early modern period. The spheres of both linguistic systems, and the literary production in each of these spheres, overlapped in various times and places.

A short history of Latin-Arabic entanglement identifies a period of preliminary entanglement in the ancient Roman Middle East and the creation of a linguistic contact zone in the western Mediterranean in the course of the Arabic-Islamic expansion of the seventh to ninth centuries. Circumscribed by Northwestern Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, southern France, Sicily, and parts of southern Italy, this linguistic contact zone witnessed various processes of linguistic exchange and even hybridization. From the eleventh century onwards, various manifestations of European-Christian expansionism into the Mediterranean—i.e. the Norman conquest of Sicily, the so-called *Reconquista*, the crusades, and the commercial expan-

sionism of the maritime powers of Italy and the Crown of Aragon—introduced new actors to the existing linguistic contact zones, expanded these contact zones into the eastern Mediterranean, and produced additional forms of linguistic encounter, among others a massive translation movement of Arabic works into Latin. At the latest from the early modern period onwards, Latin-Arabic encounters retreated increasingly into the scholarly and academic sphere, not least because Latin was superseded by various Romance languages and the so-called *Lingua franca* in transmediterranean communication. In Europe, the academic study of Arabic produced new forms of Latin-Arabic entanglement, mainly in the form of translations and Arabic textbooks with Latin paratexts. In the Arabic-Islamic sphere, in turn, Latin was not studied systematically before the beginning of the twentieth century: the medieval period witnessed a short period of Arabophone Christian and Muslim engagement with Latin texts in al-Andalus of the ninth to eleventh century. In the early modern period, Arabophone interest in Latin writings was largely restricted to Oriental, specifically Maronite Christians, and a relatively small circle of scientifically interested intellectuals in the Ottoman Empire. Only within the emerging secular universities of the Arab world at the beginning of the twentieth century have Muslim Arab scholars begun to systematically study the Greek and Latin “classics” as well as a few medieval Latin historiographical texts (König 2016, 419–493).

Latin and Arabic as linguistic systems look back on a centuries-old history of interpenetration in various milieus and forms. To which degree we can speak of a history of “literary” interpenetration, depends on our definition of “literature.” We can define the entire textual production of a human community as literature. But we can also opt for an “aesthetic” definition of literature that restricts the latter to texts associated with particular genres (e.g. drama, lyric poetry, epic, the novel) which place value on the use of refined language, often admit fictional elements, pursue the aim of (intellectual) entertainment and refinement, but refuse to be reduced to their—e.g. scholarly, persuasive, or morally improving—function (Robson 1984, 1–19). If we resort to this restricted definition, then the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement is limited to the exchange and/or shared possession of a rather small number of literary works. This exchange manifested itself in different forms ranging from literal translations, via *traductions-réécritures*, to quasi-rhizomatic textual manifestations of shared literary themes. This can be illustrated in an exemplary manner with the help of two texts, i.e. *Kalila wa-Dimna* and the *Sirr al-asrār*. Due to their many complex ramifications, these texts’ histories of transmission can only be traced here in their broadest outlines.

Kalila wa-Dimna, a mirror for princes couched in animal fables, constitutes an originally Sanskrit text, possibly written around 300 CE in Kashmir. Its Pahlavi translation, produced at the order of the Sasanian king Ḥusraw Anūširwān (r.

531–579) by his physician Burzōe, was enlarged by adding fables from other Indian sources. From it derived not only the earliest Syriac, but also the earliest Arabic version written by Ibn al-Muqaffa^c (d. 139/756). This became the source text for various later versions in many different languages, including Syriac, Persian, different variants of Turkish, Ethiopian, Hebrew, Greek, Malay, and also Latin, all of which display particular variants, including omissions and additions. Variants of Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic text reached Latin via two channels: produced at the beginning of the twelfth century, Rabbi Jō'ēl's Hebrew translation of the Arabic text was rendered into Latin by the baptized Jew John of Capua (d. 1310) between 1263 and 1278. A second Latin version was made at a later time on the basis of a Greek translation of the Arabic text produced by a certain Symeon in the eleventh century. Apart from an independent Old Castilian version of Rabbi Jō'ēl's Hebrew text, all late medieval and early modern versions in Romance, Germanic, and Slavonic languages are based on these two Latin translations (Brockelmann 1997, 503–506; Riedel 2010). Since all versions mentioned derive from Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic text, but never reproduce it faithfully, it would be both imprecise to speak of "translations," or to claim that the Arabic original and its derivates were only connected by a "shared literary theme." Textual connections between the Arabic "original" and a Latin derivate were only significantly reduced to shared themes in the case of Petrus Alfonsi's (d. after 1130) *Disciplina clericalis*: this work merely integrates narrative elements of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* into a collection of novellae infused with Christian piety that witnessed an enormous diffusion throughout medieval Christian Europe (Alfonsi 1911; Reyna 2012; Leone 2010).

A similar history of transmission can be traced in connection with the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Sirr al-asrār* or *Secretum secretorum*. This text purports to transmit Aristotle's admonitions to Alexander the Great on a large variety of topics which were deemed of use to a ruler, including a discussion of vices and virtues, the issue of justice, as well as administrative, military, medical, and scientific matters. While the literary theme obviously takes up motifs that reach back into Greek antiquity, the text as such made its first appearance around the tenth century in an Arabic-Islamic sphere already influenced by the reception of Greek texts (via Syriac) in Arabic (Gutas 1998). Boasting around fifty extant Arabic manuscripts, the *Sirr al-asrār* was translated into several Oriental and European languages. Two Latin versions were copied more than five hundred times and served as source texts for later translations into various European vernaculars. The earlier version was produced on the Iberian Peninsula by a certain John of Seville and has been assigned to the 1120s. The later version was authored in crusader Antioch by a certain Philip of Tripoli in the early 1230s (Forster 2006, 1, 19, 114–130). As in the case of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, the many versions of this text differ with regards to

particular contents and their length, thus making it difficult to decide whether we are dealing with a “translation” or a “shared literary theme.”

Kalila wa-Dimna and the *Sirr al-asrār* can be regarded as representative of the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement in the medieval and early modern period because they stand for literary traditions of Indian and Greek origin that found their way into Arabic and Latin literature. An additional example of the reception of originally Indian texts or motifs in both Arabic and Latin is found in the many *traductions-réécritures* of the originally Buddhist legend of *Barlaam and Josaphat* and its impressively ramified history of diffusion, translation, and adaptation to new cultural and religious contexts (Forster 2012, 180–191). We can add the story of the Seven Sages, which specialized research has regarded as being either of Indian or Persian origin, and which received a wide western Asian, eastern Mediterranean, and western European reception, including Arabic and Latin versions (Steinmetz 2000, 8–18). An additional example of the reception of originally Greek texts is found in the legend of the Seven Sleepers, a story about Christian youths from the city of Ephesus fleeing persecution under the Roman emperor Decius (r. 249–251). Although the earliest written documentation of this legend is in Syriac, some scholars believe that it was originally put to writing in Greek by bishop Stephen of Ephesus between 448 and 450. In pre-Islamic times, the legend witnessed a very wide diffusion, both in Syriac and in Latin writings. It was taken up in *sūra* 18 of the Qur’ān, which figures under the title “The People of the Cave” (*Ahl al-kahf*). Subsequently, it was commented upon more than once in works of Qur’ānic exegesis (Griffith 2007, 109–138; Koloska 2015).

In addition to all this, the widespread diffusion of stories about Alexander the Great—whose feats inspired epic traditions both in Latin and Arabic and, in particular, in Western European vernaculars as well as in Persian (Wesche et al. 1977–1999, 355–365; Watt 1978, 127; Stock 2016)—suggests the following conclusion: in the medieval period, shared literary texts and literary motifs that formed part of both Latin and Arabic literatures were generally, maybe even without exception, of eastern Mediterranean, western Asian, or even Indian origin. This statement is also valid for the early modern period: the earliest generations of Western European Arabists made available in Latin pre-Islamic and Arabic-Islamic poetry, proverbs, and tales of western Asian origin, in the form of excerpts produced for the purpose of academic and linguistic study (Toomer 1996, 46; Loop 2017). Examples are Thomas Erpenius’s (d. 1624) parallel Arabic-Latin editions of Arabic proverbs and the quasi-Aesopian fables of the legendary Luqmān (Erpenius 1636), or Albert Schultens’s (d. 1750) parallel Arabic-Latin edition of al-Ḥarīrī’s (d. 516/1122) *Maqāmāt* (Schultens 1740). In all these cases, the direction of transmission moved from the southeast to the northwest, where texts or textual elements of eastern origin eventually found a Latin form.

To my knowledge, there exists no comparable Arabic reception of Latin literary motifs or literature (in the “strict” sense defined above) of western Mediterranean or European origin in the medieval and early modern period. One of the very few examples of the Arabic reception of a literary motif of Latin origin concerns the story of Aeneas’s flight to Italy in the wake of the fall of Troy. A short comparison of its Latin and Arabic history of reception illustrates how differently this literary theme was received and adapted in the Latin-Christian and the Arabic-Islamic spheres: in the very strong Latin tradition, the story of Aeneas fleeing Troy, founding Alba longa, and thus laying the foundations of Roman history, was treated in the works of Roman historiographers such as Quintus Fabius Pictor (d. c. 201 BCE) and Titus Livius (d. 17 CE), and eventually found poetic elaboration in the work of Virgil (d. 19 BCE) (Heckel 2002, 219–221). In post-Roman times, the myth of Trojan origins was taken up by the Franks and other collectives of the post-Roman Latin West. In this way, the reference to Trojan origins became one of the most popular foundation myths in Latin-Christian Europe (Ewig 1998, 1–17; Wolf 2008). In medieval Arabic historiography and literature, in turn, the story of Aeneas played no role whatsoever as a founding myth and is mentioned for the first time and with only few details in the late medieval universal history of Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808/1406). The latter did not have access to the epic tradition of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, but received information about Aeneas’s role in Roman history via the Arabic version of a Latin work of historiography originally written by the late antique historiographer Orosius (d. c. 417). Its Arabic equivalent, the so-called *Kitāb Hurūšiyūš* (“The Book of Orosius”), had been produced between the late ninth and the early tenth century in Umayyad al-Andalus and represents a restructured and enlarged version of the Latin original (Ibn Ḥaldūn 2000–2001, 232; Orosius 1990, lib. I, 18, 1, 68; Penelas 2001, 80–82; König 2015a, 84–85, 103–104). Whereas the learned both in the Latin-Christian and the Arabic-Islamic spheres regarded the story of Aeneas as “history,” not as “literature,” the narrative of Aeneas’s feats fulfilled a completely different function in both literary orbits with regard to the formulation of collective identities.

It is only from the twentieth century onwards that we can discern a substantial reception of Latin literary works in the Arab world. Largely confined to academia, this reception resulted in the translation of many texts pertaining to the Latin classics written by playwrights and poets such as Plautus, Catull, and Horace. This reception is related to the emergence of a system of secular academic education in the Arab world at the beginning of the twentieth century, which entailed the foundation of university departments for Greek and Roman classics (Pormann 2011, 123–141; König 2016, 471–473; 2019a, 107–118). The resulting engagement with the history of ancient Greek and Roman literature has been partly extended to medieval Latin texts (König 2016, 472–473).

If we stick to an “aesthetic” definition that associates the term “literature” with particular genres, refined language, etc., we must conclude that, in the medieval and early modern period, the shared literary heritage of the Latin and the Arabic linguistic spheres was largely confined to texts and motifs of eastern Mediterranean, western Asian, and Indian origin, which then found diverse forms of diffusion and reception in both literary spheres. Only from the twentieth century onwards did parts of classical Roman, i.e., western Mediterranean, literature also become part of this shared literary heritage. In view of all this, Latin and Arabic literary entanglement cannot compare in quantity and qualitative intensity to the later entanglement of modern European and Arabic literatures. The latter is represented by the many translations of both European (including Romance) works of literature into Arabic and vice versa, from the eighteenth and particularly from the nineteenth century onwards (Khoury 2004; Faiq 2004; Allen 2003; Shamma 2016; Hanna et al. 2019) as well as by Francophone literature in the Maghreb (Déjeux and Mitsch 1992, 5–6).

3 Latin-Arabic Literary Entanglement: An Extended View

Only by employing a much wider definition of the term “literature” are we able to significantly enlarge the corpus of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement. This wider definition allows us to include sacred texts such as the Bible and the Qur’ān, treatises pertaining to the field of Graeco-Arabic sciences and philosophy, Arabic and Latin translations of medieval historiography, and—by stretching the definition of literature to the utmost—bilingual political and commercial treaties as well as related correspondence (König 2015b, 478–483).

From the medieval period onwards, Arabic and Latin readerships shared a corpus of sacred texts and related textual material. The Bible was fully available in Latin from the late fourth century onwards thanks to Jerome’s (d. 420) translation efforts, which drew on earlier (partial) Latin translations which dated back to the second century (Brunhölzl 1999, 88–93). In line with the increasing linguistic Arabicization of non-Muslim populations under Muslim rule in the wake of the Arabic-Islamic expansion, Arabic translations of biblical texts began to be produced by Jews and Christians from the middle of the ninth century at the latest (Griffith 2013, 97–126). Only in Muslim al-Andalus, however, do we find evidence for Arabic translations of Latin versions of the gospels, the Pauline epistles, and the Psalter (Roisse 1999, 147–164; Urvoy 1994; Potthast 2011, 65–108). The Qur’ān, in turn, only became available to a Latin readership in the twelfth century (Bobzin

1993), when the abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable (d. 1156), commissioned its Latin translation as well as that of corollary texts on the life and deeds of Muhammad (Kritzeck 1964, 10–14, 36). The availability of the Bible and the Qur'an in both Arabic and Latin served various Muslim and Christian scholars in their polemics against the respective other religion (Fritsch 1930; Thomas 1996, 29–38; Burman 2007).

From the late twelfth century onwards, Arabic and Latin readers also began to share an extremely large corpus of what we may term *Graeco-Arabica*. A large number of originally Greek works dealing with philosophy and various sciences had been rendered into Arabic (often via a Syriac intermediate) in western Asia between the eighth and the tenth centuries. Writing in Arabic, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars commented and enlarged upon these texts in the following centuries. Although some of the original Greek works had already been translated into Latin in the late sixth century (Strohmaier 1997), many of them only found a Latin form when Latin-Christian intellectuals and their local aids began perusing Arabic libraries in regions conquered from the Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula, in Sicily, and the Syrian Levant from the twelfth century onwards (Burnett 2007; König 2019a, 88–92). A list of Latin translations included in the obituary of Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187), one of the most prolific Arabic-Latin translators, who was active in Toledo, gives an impression of the quantity and thematic range of the textual corpus that was now potentially available to both Arabic and Latin readers: the list features seventy-one Arabic works translated by Gerard and his aid into Latin. These include thirty-six Arabicized works by ancient Greek authors in addition to twenty-five Arabic works by medieval Muslim authors, four by Jewish, four by Sabean, and two by Christian authors, all of them commenting on and developing ancient Greek thought in the fields of logic and dialectics, philosophy, medicine, geometry, astronomy, and geomancy (Sudhoff 1914, 77–79). Dag Nikolaus Hasse's thorough study of Latin *Renaissance* editions lists several hundred translated Arabic works by forty-four Muslim, Jewish, and Christian authors, printed in Latin between the late fifteenth and the late seventeenth century. Thus, by the end of the medieval period, these works had become part of a transmediterranean literary heritage shared by readers of Arabic and Latin (Hasse 2016, 317–408). The earliest generations of European-Christian Arabists then began adding to these works a number of translations of medieval Arabic texts, including historiography and poetry, from the seventeenth century onwards (Pococke 1658; Pococke 1663; Fleischer 1831; Bevilacqua 2018, 136–166). These translations promised to provide solutions for issues of chronology and problems with Old Testament Hebrew, and—as only one manifestation of a wider engagement with the Arabic language—to facilitate access to Eurasian trade (König 2019a, 98–100).

An important corpus of Latin texts, which slowly became available to Arabic readers in the course of the early modern period, consisted of specifically Christian texts. From the late fifteenth century onwards, but especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Catholic missionaries and Oriental Christian, in particular Maronite, groups attached to the Roman church translated a huge number of Latin-Christian texts to Arabic. Thanks to their efforts, Latin works relating to the Christian faith from the period of the church fathers of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (e.g., Augustine, Thomas Aquinas) to Christian literature of the sixteenth to nineteenth century (e.g., Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Ávila, Johann Hermann Janssens) were made available in Arabic (König 2016, 449–455). Since the readership of such works consisted mainly of Arabic-speaking Christians, not Muslims, these translations represent a special facet of the shared Latin-Arabic literary heritage: they were mostly of interest to an educated Arabophone Christian elite until at least some of these works also began to be studied within the academic framework of secular Arab universities in the twentieth century (Issa 2017).

The previous deliberations show that the shared corpus of Latin-Arabic literature is rather small, if we choose to restrict our corpus to fully transmitted works and to opt for a purely “aesthetic” definition of literature. However, if we add *traductions-réécritures* and literary motifs to our corpus and admit sacred, scientific, philosophical, historiographical, and theological texts to our definition of literature, we are then faced with an enormous shared literary heritage of *Arabo-Latina* known both to Arabic and Latin readerships around the Mediterranean. By regarding the movements of transfer in chronological order, we can discern that, in the medieval and early modern period, most shared motifs and works were ultimately of eastern (Indian, western Asian, and eastern Mediterranean) origin. This applies to the mutual Arabic-Latin reception of the Bible, the epic feats of Alexander the Great, the Qur’ān, the philosophical and scientific enquiries of Aristotle and other ancient Greek scholars, and finally their medieval Muslim, Jewish, and Christian elaborations, many of which were written in Muslim al-Andalus. The non-Muslim Mediterranean north was clearly on the receiving side. Its reception of Arabic texts continued in later periods. Proponents of the emerging Arabic studies in Europe began engaging with Arabic poetry and historiography in Latin, until European scholars gave up Latin as a means of academic expression in the nineteenth century. From the early modern period onwards, however, Arabic-speakers also began to engage increasingly with Latin texts. Oriental Christians received increasing access to Latin-Christian theological and edifying literature in Arabic translation, whereas specialists in the emerging secular universities of the twentieth-century Arab world began engaging with the Latin classics and a few medieval Latin texts as part of their academic study of past societies and literatures.

4 Explaining the Dearth of Latin-Arabic Literary Entanglement

Although the history of Latin-Arabic entanglement reveals a relatively large array of shared texts and textual interpenetrations, the mutual reception of both Latin and Arabic literature in the restricted “aesthetic” sense, as defined above, remains comparatively meagre throughout the ages. We should consider, for example, that the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*, one of the most well-known works of Arabic literature in Europe, was translated first into French, and then into other modern European languages, but never into Latin (Littmann 1986, 358–364). Conversely, no work of ancient, medieval, or early modern Latin literature ever became famous enough to become an integral part of Arabic literary culture—as opposed to modern European literature, which became highly popular in the Arab world from the nineteenth century onwards, as Philip C. Sadgrove explains:

From the late 1840s, imported literary forms captured the public's imagination. The first wave of new fictional writing involved a process of translation, adaptation, or imitation of mainly French novels, short stories and drama. [...] The plays of Molière, Corneille, Racine, and the Italian Goldoni were an early source of inspiration. Works of questionable literary value, sentimental stories, historical romances, science fiction, crime and detective stories were popular; Alexandre Dumas père, Jules Verne, Ponson du Terrail, Leblanc (his Arsène Lupin detective novels), and Eugène Sue were amongst the favourite authors. Later translators were to adapt Walter Scott, Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Disraeli, Dickens and Thackeray. Translations ranged from Aesop's *Fables*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson*, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* and the stories of Hans Christian Andersen, to the edifying literature of the Catholic priest and writer Christoph von Schmid and the Belgian Jesuit Henri Lammens. With the rise of journalism in the 1860s and 70s, newspapers and magazines in Beirut, Alexandria and Cairo, heavily dependent on translated material to fill their columns, regularly published translated western fiction (Sadgrove 2000, 233; Hill 2015, 177–212).

In comparison, the shared textual heritage of Arabic and Latin literature seems comparatively “functional.” Since we can largely reduce it to texts that serve(d) the purpose of enlarging scientific, linguistic, philosophical, theological, or spiritual horizons, this heritage lacks an element of pure aesthetic enjoyment that reaches beyond the restricted milieu of specialists. The reasons for this can be summarized as follows.

First, it is necessary to consider the historical relationship between Latin and Arabic. As a written language, Arabic emerged in a late antique western Asian context influenced by Aramaic, Persian, and Greek. Roman imperialism also left its lexical mark on Arabic in Antiquity (König 2016, 423–427). However, the expanding

literary sphere of Arabic had already developed its own corpus of archaic literature in the form of pre-Islamic poetry and stories about pre-Islamic inner-Arab feuds (*ayyām al-‘Arab*), and had additionally absorbed Greek and Persian motifs and texts, before it began to textually interact with Latin in the Muslim West from the late ninth century onwards (Kontzi 1982; Ineichen 22–42; König 2019a, 51–62). Latin literature failed to influence Arabic literary production in the latter’s formative phase. Moreover, the impact of Greek and Persian texts also deserves some qualification: Arabic-Islamic intellectual culture of the medieval period received access to a large number of originally Greek as well as a handful of Middle Persian works during the great translation movement of the eighth to tenth centuries that took place in Umayyad and ‘Abbāsid Syria and Iraq. However, it largely ignored ancient Greek “aesthetic” literature (Gutas 1998, 193–196; Pormann 2006, 2–20), as is illustrated by the Arabic reception of Homer (Kraemer 1956; Kreutz 2004) and Menander (Ullmann 1961; Führer 1993), while assimilating Persian influences through persons rather than texts (Pellat 1989; Cereti 2009; Harb 2019).

Second, we must take into account that the literary spheres of both Arabic and Latin had to offer a very different range of texts to each other from the early medieval period onwards. Although Arabic literary culture had produced important specimens even prior to the late eighth century, literary production expanded significantly in the ‘Abbāsid sphere of the ninth and the tenth century. Digesting the abovementioned Greek and Persian influences, Arabic-Islamic intellectuals of this period developed a scholarly tradition building on Arabicized Greek texts and an ideal of behavioral and literary refinement in the concept of *adab* (Gabrieli 1986; Hämeen-Anttila 2014). Both were emulated in the Muslim West (specifically in al-Andalus) from the tenth century onwards (Beeston et al. 1993; Ashtiyani et al. 1990; Menocal et al. 2000). In this period, we can trace the earliest impact of Arabic on Latin texts in the Iberian Peninsula: what began with the transmission of a few mathematical and astronomical ideas in the tenth century, grew into a torrent of Arabic-Latin translations of mainly *Graeco-Arabica* pertaining to manifold fields of knowledge in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Burnett 2007, 1231). Up to this point, Latin literature as available in the Arabic-Latin contact zones in the western Mediterranean had been largely ecclesiastical in nature. In the entire corpus of Latin literature produced under Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula, we only find a handful of non-Christian authors, including Hippocrates, Cato, Virgil, as well as Persius and Lucanus, the latter only in excerpts (Gil 1973, index). Although Arabic-Islamic intellectuals were undoubtedly interested in Christianity (and the specifics of its Latin variant) as well as in collecting information on the non-Muslim peoples of Europe (König 2015a), highly specific Latin-Christian texts were of limited interest to them. Given the easier availability of Latin ecclesiastical than of “secular” Latin texts, we must ask ourselves to which extent Arabic-speakers

would have had access to, say, the idiosyncratic poems of the bishop Theodulf of Orléans (d. 821) or the *Carmina burana* (eleventh–twelfth centuries). As manifestations of a particular regional culture and world-view, these texts were probably as irrelevant to Arabic-Islamic intellectuals in Kairouan or Mosul as the poems of Imru l-Qays (d. c. 550) or al-Mutanabbi (d. 354/964) were to Benedictine monks in Magdeburg or Canterbury, had they been available to them. Throughout the medieval and early modern period, the corpus of Greek (and associated Graeco-Arabic) scholarly literature offered a range of topics of much larger—of transcultural and even universal—interest. These topics, including philosophy, the natural sciences, mathematics, astronomy, logic, medicine, etc., were relevant to all humankind, not only to the adherents of a particular interpretation of monotheism or a particular regional culture. This probably accounts for the fact that such texts were much more widely translated, first from Greek to Syriac and Arabic, then later from Arabic (occasionally via Hebrew) to Latin (König 2016, 480–486).

Third, the particular balance between oral and written forms of Latin in their respective relationship to Arabic also plays an important role. We must not only acknowledge that, in spite of the enormous amount of extant Latin texts, Latin-writing authors from Antiquity to the early modern period probably produced a smaller number of texts pertaining to genres classified as “aesthetic literature” than modern authors writing in a Romance vernacular, although we should not underestimate the amount of Latin “aesthetic literature” produced since ancient times and, in particular, in the modern era (Leonhardt 2009, 186–220). We must also take into account that oral regiolects of Latin, which would become full-fledged Romance languages in the course of the medieval period, dominated communication between Latin and Arabic speakers from the early medieval period onwards (Wright 1982; Ernst et al. 2003, 504–667). We may note, for example, that Arabic *Muwaṣṣāh*-poetry on the Iberian Peninsula of the tenth to fourteenth centuries contains Romance, not Latin verses written in Arabic letters (König 2019a, 57–59). Thus, while many Muslims in the western Mediterranean could probably understand and speak a form of Romance (König 2019c, 651–667), Muslim access to written Latin was barred by a kind of “ecclesiastical threshold,” which made it necessary to enter milieus strongly impregnated with the Christian faith to acquire Latin skills. At the latest from the high Middle Ages onwards, we find documentary proof of the increasing use of Romance vernaculars in the written sphere; for instance, in dozens of bilingual Arabic-Latin treatises, which were often negotiated and written down in a Romance dialect and then transferred to Latin by a professional scribe (König 2015b, 478–483). From the late medieval period onwards, these Romance vernaculars increasingly sidelined Latin as the preferred means of literary expression (see the entries “Frankoprovenzalisch”, “Französisch”, “Galicisch”,

“Italienisch”, “Katalanisch”, “Lateinisch”, “Lingua Franca”, “Okzitanisch”, “Portugiesisch”, “Spanisch” in Ammon and Haarmann 2008).

5 Latin-Arabic Entanglement and the Concept of Mediterranean Literature

Regardless of all the possible reasons for a dearth of “aesthetic” literary entanglement between the spheres of Latin and Arabic, it should remain clear that we can only register such a “dearth” of literary entanglement as long as we employ a very restricted definition of literature; one that excludes sacred, scientific, philosophical, historiographical, and theological texts. It is against this backdrop that we should discuss whether the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement should be regarded as a counter-example, or rather as one among several instructive examples enabling to develop a concept of “Mediterranean literature.”

We could choose to restrict our definition of literature to “aesthetic literature”, in line with the working definition applied above, and consequently highlight the dearth of the shared Latin-Arabic literary heritage, while emphasizing the role played by the boundaries of time, space, culture, religious ideology, and particular sociolinguistic milieus in limiting the exchange of texts to writings of largely functional value. In this case, we would be faced with two autonomous literary spheres whose “aesthetic” literary production rarely interacted or merged. Consequently, and in spite of their geographical inclusion in the Mediterranean sphere, these literatures could not count as “Mediterranean literature” proper, because they ultimately “failed” to transgress linguistic, religious, and cultural boundaries characteristic of the Mediterranean, thus also “failing” to become a shared space of intensive (trans-)cultural interaction and exchange.

By contrast, we could also choose to recall the array of Latinized Arabic works (mirrors for princes, scientific and philosophical *Graeco-Arabica*, the Qur’ān, historiography, proverbs, poetry), the range of Arabicized Latin works (works of medieval historiography, a large range of Latin-Christian theological treatises, classical poetry and plays), in addition to both Latin and Arabic versions of the Bible and elaborations on the Alexander-theme. Taking this view, it certainly seems possible to speak of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement as one particular facet of “Mediterranean literature” relevant in the medieval, early modern, modern, and even contemporary periods.

In view of these possibilities, the answer to the question of whether we are dealing with “Mediterranean literature” largely depends on what we define as “literature” and whether we prefer the geographical attributes “transmediterranean”

or “western Eurasian” to the term “Mediterranean.” Much more interesting, however, is what the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement teaches us about the parameters that can serve to comprehend a plethora of highly diverse phenomena of textual entanglement in the wider Mediterranean sphere.

The example of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement shows clearly that—in the process of theorizing about “Mediterranean literature(s)” —the deliberate choice of using particular languages, genres, regions, or periods as evidence also serves to bring about particular results. The analysis of Latin-Arabic textual entanglement produces insights that clearly differ from those obtained in an analysis focusing on the Mediterranean literary impact of one single language—e.g. Latin (Leonhardt 2009), Maltese (Kontzi 2005; Friggieri 1994, 59–69; 2007, 247–254), Judeo-Spanish (Altabev 2003), or the so-called *Lingua franca* (Dakhlia 2008)—or in an analysis of the literary entanglement of another pair of languages—e.g. Latin and Ottoman, or French and Ottoman. Regarding the latter, the highly stylized Ottoman literary language only remained in use approximately between the thirteenth century and the Turkish language reform in 1928 (Köprülu 1995). Consequently, the histories of Latin-Ottoman and French-Ottoman literary entanglement were much shorter than their Latin-Arabic equivalent. The very short history of Latin-Ottoman entanglement witnessed the translation of some scholarly texts from Latin to Ottoman in the seventeenth century (Brentjes 2005, 126–132; Bachour 2012; Emiralioglu 2014, 149–151), but ended when French supplanted Latin as the main reference language for European scholarship in the Ottoman Empire. French had risen to a written language in the course of the late medieval period and had already had an impact on the eastern Mediterranean during the crusading period (Aslanov 2006). When French became increasingly important both as a language of European scholarship and of early modern Levant trade in the seventeenth century, Ottoman elites began to draw more and more on French texts and French expertise to acquaint themselves with the latest developments in European scholarship, medicine, and technology. Consequently, the number and diffusion of Ottoman translations of French texts rapidly eclipsed the number and diffusion of Ottoman translations of Latin texts (Strauss 2007; Meral 2013; Krstić 2012). Vice versa, however, French translations of Ottoman texts were and remain of interest only to a limited number of Francophone specialists (Timur 1998; Demircioğlu 2005). Juxtaposing the different trajectories of Latin-Arabic, Latin-Ottoman, and French-Ottoman entanglement, we cannot fail to notice that—in terms of translations from one language to the other—each language pair features a different balance: in the case of Latin and Arabic, the balance tipped in favor of the more eastern language, among other reasons, due to the enormous transmediterranean prestige of Arabic scholarship in the medieval period; in the case of Latin and Ottoman as well as French and Ottoman, the balance tipped in favor of the more western languages,

given the rising prestige of European science in the early modern period. This shows, once again, that our choice of languages determines to a high degree which theories we are able to develop about “Mediterranean literature(s)” in terms of impact, power asymmetries, and so on.

By highlighting that Latin-Arabic literary entanglement was, on the one hand, particularly meagre in the sphere of what this article has defined as “aesthetic literature,” but on the other hand, particularly rich in the sphere of scientific, philosophical, and historiographical treatises, the previous deliberations in this article have shown that different genres permeated Mediterranean literary landscapes in a different manner and under highly variant conditions. In the case study at hand, functional texts that provided access to a particular kind of coveted knowledge, were of much higher popularity than texts projecting the aestheticized worldviews of particular groups. “Disinterested,” “non-functional” knowledge of world literatures in an idealized modern sense does not seem to have been the driving force of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement. However, we may arrive at other results by looking at other languages, times, and genres; for instance, the novel (Allen 1993, 180–192) certainly catered to other needs and experienced a different diffusion than the formulaic structure of chancery texts (Wansbrough 1996).

Regarding the orientation of textual flows, the example of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement shows that, in the medieval period, Christian societies on the northern shores of the Mediterranean were rather on the receiving end—in particular with regard to scientific texts. However, at the latest from the eighteenth, and particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, when European societies had embarked upon a course of scientific innovation, the Arab and Ottoman spheres began importing corresponding texts and terminology from European countries, thus re-orienting the direction of textual flows (Emiralioglu 2014, 143–156; Matar 2009, 237–241). That Latin only came into play here to a limited degree has to do with the fact that, by this time, Latin had already begun to succumb to the pressure of the European vernaculars even in the scientific and technical spheres (Issawi 1967, 110–133; Strauss 2007, 1247). This shows that it is necessary to consider the chronological dimension of literary phenomena in the Mediterranean. Centers and languages of literary production, textual flows, and entire literary landscapes shifted over the centuries.

Adding to this, the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement also shows that literary exchanges dating back centuries and even millennia can leave behind a rather long and complex legacy. Not only did the first Latin translation of the Qur’ān and related texts on Muḥammad in the twelfth century stand at the beginning of a centuries-long polemical engagement with Islam in Christian Europe that drew on literary motifs first formulated in Arabic (Kritzeck 1964, 193–206; Daniel 1960). Arabic-Islamic authors from highly different ideological backgrounds—rang-

ing from reformers such as Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1290/1873), Ḥayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī (d. 1307/1889) and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1391/1973) to early ideologues of Islamic fundamentalism such as Sayyid Qutb (d. 1386/1966)—have claimed from the nineteenth century onwards that the Arabic-Latin translation movement of the twelfth to sixteenth century contributed to European intellectual history to such an extent that it actually facilitated the rise of modern Europe to global power. According to their perspective, the medieval transmediterranean Greek-Syriac-Arabic-Hebrew-Latin joint venture of preserving ancient Greek texts for posterity inscribed the societies of the Mediterranean south into the success story of modernity, usually claimed exclusively by the societies of the Mediterranean north (König 2018, 50–51; König 2019a, 118–119).

In view of all this, we could claim that the history of Latin-Arabic literary entanglement may have produced only few concrete works that can be classified as “Mediterranean literature”—in the sense of literary works shared by two or more linguistic spheres in the Mediterranean. However, regarding the mobility of literary themes and entire texts, the history of Latin-Arabic entanglement has had lasting effects. Consequently, this entangled history constitutes an important part of the much wider history of Mediterranean literature(s) and should be considered when reflecting upon the building blocks needed to formulate a theory of Mediterranean literature.

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Marianna Deganutti (LMU Munich)

Mapping the Mediterranean with Language: Matvejević's *Mediterranean Breviary*

Abstract: Among the most relevant works on the Mediterranean, Predrag Matvejević's *Mediteranski brevijar* (*Mediterranean Breviary*) stands out. In this book, which was first published in 1987 and translated into several languages, Matvejević recounts the most remarkable aspects (such as the ideas, traditions, religions, and languages) of the area. Due to their complexity and heterogeneous nature, these elements do not seem to fall into consistent categories. Therefore, in opposition to other works on this topic (e.g. Braudel's contribution), Matvejević's breviary denies the existence of any possible classification of the Mediterranean. However, Matvejević provides an alternative way of reading the Mediterranean space, which seems aligned with Peregrine Horden's and Nicholas Purcell's formulation of "connectivity and fragmentation". By considering the linguistic mechanisms ruling the Mediterranean – in particular, those resulting from contact situations – Matvejević is able to draw unconventional but more fruitful borders around it.

Transcending classifications

The *Mediteranski brevijar* (*Mediterranean Breviary*)¹ is probably the most famous and internationally acclaimed work by Predrag Matvejević (1932–2017), a literary scholar born in Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who taught at the universities of Zagreb, Rome and Paris. This work stands among the most significant contributions to the Mediterranean discourse along with the classic works of Ferdinand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, just to mention a few. Matvejević's breviary was originally conceived at the *Mediterranean Cultural Traditions* symposium, which was organized in 1973 in Zagreb. However, it took a long time for the first edition of the book to be published in 1987. In fact, Matvejević revised the book, adding new material and re-elaborating the text multiple times, making it a real work in progress which struggled to reach its final version.

¹ Instead of using the English official translation of the title (*Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*), I use the literal translation of the title, *Mediterranean Breviary*.

In comparison with other works, Matvejević's *Mediteranski brevijar* seems to dismantle the possibility of providing a coherent and unitary classification of the Mediterranean space. All his efforts to identify converging elements that would lead to a unified whole collapse when faced with the heterogeneity and fragmentation of this complex area, which has been constantly reshaped over time. While Fernand Braudel's magnum opus considers the physical, geographical, historical, and economic elements of this "landlocked sea" in order to distinguish it from "the kinds of land that surround and confine it" (24), Matvejević cannot identify a single Mediterranean distinctiveness. In an interview he states: "Everything has been said on this 'primary sea' [...] We have known for a long time that it is neither a 'reality in its own' nor a 'constant': the Mediterranean as a whole is made up of many subsets that challenge or reject unifying ideas" (Matvejević and Gursoy 2006).

Matvejević's book belongs to a longstanding tradition of books that celebrate the interconnectedness of the Mediterranean basin, the links that exist between the different civilizations living there, their cultures and languages. However, the book also stands out as it questions the limits of the Mediterranean as a discourse in the traditional sense, corresponding to a sum of elements from which it could derive its definition². The Mediterranean, according to Matvejević, should rather be approached using alternative perspectives. Among them, languages certainly play a key role in understanding the Mediterranean core and its porous boundaries, as I shall demonstrate in this analysis, where I shall also consider passages taken from *Kruh naš* 'Our bread' (2009) and *Druga Venecija* 'The Other Venice' (2002). The former focuses on "bread", a food which is "older than books, and older than writing" (7) and travelled from Mesopotamia to the Far East, the classical civilizations, and the New World. *Druga Venecija* explores Venice in an unusual way, taking into consideration disparate topics, spanning from flora and fauna to history, trades, linguistic annotations etc. Not only do these two works share a similar approach and storytelling with the *Mediteranski brevijar*. They also further contribute to an understanding of the Mediterranean space and its inextricable links and networks.

Let me begin by introducing the way Matvejević approaches the Mediterranean. Depicting the Mediterranean for Matvejević requires the ability to find common – or at least compatible and assimilable – elements which would lead to drawing a border around the area. In other words, to find a criterion to distinguish elements which might fall into the Mediterranean space or be excluded from it. In

2 See, among others: Abulafia (2005); Chambers (2008); Minca (2003).

Matvejević's breviary, however, nothing seems to be more variable and changeable than borders:

Its boundaries are drawn neither in space nor in time. We know neither how to determine them, nor by what. They are neither economic nor historical, neither state nor national: they are like a circle of chalk that is constantly drawn and erased, that waves and winds, works and inspirations widen or narrow³. (8)

What seems to hinder Matvejević's ability to find a common Mediterranean ground is, as I have already hinted at, the heterogeneous nature of the elements that characterize the area. These are highly promiscuous and include sets of "ideas, religions, traditions, and languages", which have historically contributed to form this space (Dauverd 2002, 483–484). All of them put together, they seem not only to diverge and lead into separate directions, but they might also contradict themselves, as detailed by the writer in the following passage:

In every period, on various parts of the coast, there are Mediterranean contradictions: on the one hand, clarity and form, geometry and logic, law and justice, science, and poetics, on the other, everything that opposes it. The Holy Books of Reconciliation and Love and the Crusades or Jihad. Ecumenical spirit and fanatical ostracism. Universality and autarchy. Agora and labyrinth or aleteja and enigma. Dionysian joy and the stone of Sisyphus. Athens and Sparta. Rome and the barbarians. Orient and Occident. North and south coast. Europe and Africa. Christianity and Islam. Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The teachings of the Nazarene and the persecution of the Jews. (15)

The difficulty faced by Matvejević in seeking to outline the Mediterranean is already stated at the beginning of the book. Apart from the impossibility to delineate this space, even when supported by previous attempts, Matvejević is also challenged by the identification of a comprehensive list of necessary components to be considered part of the Mediterranean. Some may be forgotten, some are in contrast between themselves, others are simply hard to capture, such as the color of the sea. The latter varies considerably according to the weather and season but also to the linguistic framework available to the viewer. This is only a short series of uncertainties which troubled Matvejević's approach to the Mediterranean, complicating his starting point, which could be multiple: "shore or scene, harbor or event, cruise or story" (8). Despite lacking any explicit reference to these difficulties, Matvejević's *Kruh naš* and *Druga Venecija*, too, could have started in a similar way. Multiple elements could be indeed used to explore the history and travels of

3 The translations from Matvejević's *Mediteranski brevijar* are mine.

bread and Venice, a city which has been historically at the center of broad networks and therefore in contact with many other civilizations.

The strategy used by the writer to approach the Mediterranean in his breviary is an unusual one. Rather than advancing through the addition of new elements, Matvejević progresses by subtraction, drawing a picture through its negative. For instance, he underlines that the Mediterranean cannot be understood either only through geography – given that its boundaries are not easily detectable in space and time – or history. Religion and politics are also coordinates which struggle to be put into a system. For this reason, Matvejević's approach sounds very contemporary. As suggested by Giaccaria and Minca (2003, 345):

Mediterranean space today does not necessarily entail finding a 'solution' to this question but, rather, calls forth a critical reflection on the reasons why a stable and reassuring mapping of this sea has never been possible.

To describe the Mediterranean, Matvejević's text therefore requires a narrative able to accommodate disparate elements, which could appear and reappear in the narrative throughout the entire book. Not every literary genre is as flexible as the one needed by Matvejević. It follows that he had to create his own narratological space, through the personal elaboration of a rather peculiar genre, the breviary, as I will now explain.

The *Mediteranski brevijar*'s narrative

As the title itself suggests, Matvejević's work takes an unusual form, which is defined by the writer as a *breviary*. His breviary should not be conceived in the common sense. Originally, a breviary, also called a liturgy of the hours, is defined as a "liturgical book in the Roman Catholic Church that contains the daily service for the divine office, the official prayer of the church consisting of psalms, readings, and hymns that are recited at stated hours of the day" (Encyclopedia Britannica). Matvejević's book cannot be defined as a *breviary stricto sensu* because neither liturgies nor prayers are included in it but rather an amalgam of material belonging to the domain of the Mediterranean Sea. For this reason, in the *Introduction* to the book, Claudio Magris defines this work as a breviary that has its own form, which lies at the intersection of different genres such as the essay, the portolano, and the glossary. It is therefore a *breviary* in the less common sense of a *compendium* or *abridgement*, "a collection of concise but detailed information about a particular subject, especially in a book or other publication" (OED).

For the type of material Matvejević aspires to include in his work, he needs a fluid and potentially hybrid genre, which is flexible enough for a huge amount of information belonging to disparate fields, times, and spaces, written in multiple languages, to be arranged in a workable way, which does not necessarily follow a strict sequential order. As suggested by Anna Botta, the breviary format seems to provide a suitable answer to this challenge. It is indeed ideally shaped to “*trespass* [...] across languages, countries, genres, media, and even across Matvejević's oeuvre itself” in order to grasp “the very impetus for studying the borderless world of seas and oceans, for giving particular attention to the diasporic movements of people, ideas, and goods”, which would not be otherwise satisfied “with more traditional approaches which study cultures and histories from the national point of view” (Botta 2010, 8, my emphasis). To put it another way, Matvejević's narrative, organized in a *breviary* form, represents the perfect framework for a transnational and transdisciplinary work to take place.

The flexibility required by Matvejević is captured by the structure of the work itself, which is divided into three main sections: Breviary, Maps, and Glossary, which correspond to three different ways of travelling. The writer's travels do not, however, differ according to the mode used. As underlined by the writer himself, the same travels are repeated through the different modes; firstly, sailing the sea; secondly, via studying old maritime maps; finally, with the help of the writings made by travelers, sailors, and wayfarers of the past. Botta (2010, 19) points out that “[t]he three parts complete each other, and their boundaries are ceaselessly trespassed by their author, who returns time and again to descriptions of their shared elements”. The same story is therefore offered several times to the reader through a different perspective. The result is that the material might seem “disnarrated” (Botta 2010, 15) or composed by “a wealth of interesting but rather disconnected information” (Sedlar 2004, 249). This narrative, however, is the only one which offers Matvejević the agility he needs to tackle the complexity of the Mediterranean space.

This fluidity is also rendered by an accurate choice of the sections' composition. The three sections are carefully named and formulated. Just to give an example, Matvejević's third section is named 'glossary'. He underlines that: “Glossaries have more freedom than other dictionaries. They can be read in random order, whatever one needs or likes. They are a separate category: linguistic or literary” (155). As in the case of the *breviary* here, Matvejević also shapes his own meaning of *glossary*. The reader who expects a list of words, usually in alphabetical order and followed by their explanations, will be surprised by a narrative which includes philological, linguistic, and literary comments. However, strictly speaking, it is not structured in the way a standard glossary is. Matvejević's glossary rather includes comments and annotations – some of them already presented in the pre-

vious sections – and expands further the meaning and etymology of some key words and literary references.

The *Mediterranean breviary* is an unconventional work that also dismantles any traditional classification of the Mediterranean through its form – a form, which, as I have demonstrated, is carefully and unconventionally tailored by the writer. The goal of such a work follows a different logic, which has its own rules dictated by the material collected by the writer during his wanderings around the Mediterranean and not by the need to provide a classification.

One and different

In comparison to Braudel's magnum opus, Matvejević's work might seem to down-size the goal of attempting a comprehensive classification of the Mediterranean built around the dialectic relationship of geography and history. The *Mediterranean breviary* presents alternative goals, such as the examination of similarities and differences which characterize the area. At the beginning of his breviary, Matvejević provides a key to understand this mechanism: "Sometimes all the seas look like one, especially when sailing for a long time, sometimes each one is different" (7). In this sense, the breviary shows a greater affinity with Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* than with Braudel's work, given that they both disassemble the Mediterranean's areas into regions or micro-regions – this allows them to conduct more subtle investigations and establish more comparisons between the areas – ruled by "topographical fragmentation" and "internal connectivity" (2006, 733), to use Horden and Purcell's words.

Microregions are central in Horden and Purcell's examination because there is "no significant intermediate level between the very small and the very large" (2000, 518). Their formulation rather allows for a remarkable fragmentation of the Mediterranean, which could easily be detected through an analysis of its variable landscapes and the need for interactions and communication to coexist. In their words: "Because it [the model] is 'micro' in scale, it avoids the near-insuperable problems set by the pursuit of a single historical ecology of the Mediterranean region as a whole" (2006, 733). To clarify further the meaning of the antithetical unity and difference explored by Horden and Purcell, let me point out here that their idea of unity derives more from the "connectivity between structurally similar microecologies" than from any other sort of wholeness, for instance of an "ecological or cultural type" (2006, 734).

Even though the focus of Horden and Purcell's and Matvejević's works might appear rather disparate – the formers' ecological model diverges from Matvejević's poetic prose – they work around "a fragmented world, nonetheless united by the

connectivity that overcomes that fragmentation" (2006, 735). Additionally, for Matvejević, the Mediterranean "mosaic" – as defined by Magris in the *Introduction* to the breviary – is constantly dismantled and reshuffled through the mapping of differences and similarities. The writer provides a practical example on how he advanced along the coordinates of the mosaic:

Let me start from the Adriatic, from its eastern side. The north coast, from Malaga to the Bosphorus, is closer and more accessible to the one who leaves from here. On the south side, from Haifa to Ceuta, there are fewer bays and harbors. Visiting the islands, first the Adriatic, then the Ionian and Aegean, the Cyclades, and the Sporades, I looked for similarities and differences between them. I was comparing Sicily and Corsica, Mallorca, and Minorca. I did not dock along all the shores. I stayed at the mouths of the rivers the most. It is difficult to get to know the whole Mediterranean. We do not know for sure how far it extends: how much of the land by the sea it occupies, where it ends both on land and at sea. (7)

While Matvejević's attitude fits in with Horden's and Purcell's approach, it seems to diverge from it in the sense that Matvejević's similarities and differences only constitute a temporary methodological approach but not a pillar on which a system could be built. They should rather be part of a framework which works at its best when it is hybrid. The sum of multiple approaches, where to language is given a special place, is the only way to unlock the Mediterranean complexity.

Contact languages

In Matvejević's breviary, languages are used to understand differences and similarities that exist between different civilizations. The language issue concerns primarily the third section of the book, the glossary, but it is constantly recalled throughout the book as a whole to depict various recurrent aspects of the Mediterranean. Language seems to be used by Matvejević for multiple purposes. It is certainly a key ingredient of his writing soaked in cultures, landscapes, and traditions as well as in people's lives, in the flora and the fauna of the area. The maritime domain is strongly characterized by nomenclatures and terminologies, but it is also extensively used by Matvejević because it is an integral part of travelling. There is no travel – be it made by the writer or by travelers, sailors, tradesmen of the past – which does not involve linguistic issues.

Matvejević seems to be particularly interested in constructing a linguistic Mediterranean as the outcome of changes induced by the contact of different languages. The latter are the result of the interaction of two or more languages or varieties, corresponding to "any linguistic change that would have been less likely to occur outside a particular contact situation" (Thomason 2001, 62). This, in the Mediterra-

nean, happened as the result of trade, exchange, and commerce between the civilizations that, across time, operated in the area.

Language contact can have multiple outcomes, such as the creation of borrowings or loan words, calques, language convergence and relexification. It can also lead to the formation of pidgins and creoles, or to the use of code-switching and code-mixing. Matvejević's breviary is not a linguistic essay, however, and does not explore all the options the Mediterranean gives to him. His aim is rather to see itineraries through the language lens, to show words that still tell us about past connections and to explore lands through the privileged tool of language. Just to give an example, let me quote a passage in which Matvejević retraces the origin and the diffusion of words belonging to the lexical domain of the *market*:

The types of oriental markets and the paths that led to them are truly fabulous: their connection to the fables that have reached us is not accidental. Bazar and čaršija are Persian words [...]. The Crusaders admired the richness and diversity of the bazaars (markets). The Turks, on the one side, and the Arabs, on the other, transmitted the art of trade of the East to the West. Muhammad II erected his famous bazaar in Istanbul, a symbol of sultans' power and luxury. The Constantinople Kapali Bazaar became one of the main institutions in that city. The famous Bezziastan (vulgo: bezistan, silk market) surpassed the old cities of the East in its splendor. The Turks transferred the dučan, the shop, (from the Arabic dukkan) to the Balkans, the Arabs to other countries. The magazine (Arabic makhzin) has travelled around the world. (149)

The paths drawn by Matvejević clearly show linguistic interactions between neighboring civilizations. As suggested by Aikhenvald and Dixon (2006, 2): "Historically, every language must have undergone a certain amount of influence from its neighbours". The degree of the impact could be stronger or weaker according to a great number of factors and the fact that some linguistic features may be more *borrowable* than others. Nouns are certainly the most *borrowable* feature, as explained by Matras (2009, 168): "The high borrowability of nouns is thus primarily a product of their referential functions: nouns cover the most differentiated domain for labelling concepts, objects, and roles". In Matvejević's passage, one could notice that while some words were easily transferred or sometimes adapted into a neighboring language and more widely to the world (e.g. magazine), others (e.g. čaršija) spread around in a more restricted way.

The ways in which language contact work are manifold and their outputs could diverge considerably, leading both to an alteration or a preservation of the original linguistic system (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2006, 19–20). To be more precise, language contact could create three types of contact situations: language maintenance, language shift, and language creation (Winford 2003, 11–21). The one considered by Matvejević seems to belong to the first category, language maintenance,

which often occurs in cases of trade, immigration, and exchanges involving “varying degrees of influence on the lexicon and structure of a group's native language from the external language with which it is in contact” (Winford 2003, 12). This means that the recipient or borrowing language only incorporates forms, constructions, or patterns from the donor or source language, without switching into or becoming another tongue. This type of influence, Winford (2003, 12) argues, “is referred as 'borrowing'”, as I will explain in the following section.

Lexical Borrowings

When languages come into contact, one possible outcome is the transfer of foreign linguistic features from one donor language to a recipient language. This may include heterogeneous material. As outlined by Aikhenvald (2006, 15): “borrowed forms may include a lexeme, a pronoun, an affix, a phoneme or intonation pattern, or a way of framing discourse”, as well as nominal, verbal categories, syntactic features, lexical and semantic patterns (2006, 15–18). In Matvejević's work, however, the focus is mainly on lexical borrowings, in particular loanwords, which constitute one of the most common forms of contact-induced linguistic change (Grant 2015) and are certainly the most relevant type of borrowing to accomplish the writer's aim to travel with words.

In the breviary, Matvejević explores lexical borrowings multiple times, especially in relation to maritime lexicology. The writer, explaining the borrowing of words such as *sea*, *waves*, *winds*, *boats*, aims to demonstrate the linguistic interactions which constantly shape the Mediterranean space. Let us consider the words *sea* and *waves* in the language of the original Slavic populations who reached the Adriatic Sea for the first time, as well as in Greek, Castilian, and Albanian. While the word *sea* was already present in the language of the original Slavic populations, the word for *waves* was borrowed from Greek, as explained by Matvejević:

Populations went down to the sea and called it with different names. Breaking onto the Adriatic Sea, the South Slavs heard Greek and Roman names for the scene that opened before them. Some philologists claim that the dialects they spoke changed the phonetics and adapted it to the environment. They kept their own word for sea. In meeting the Greeks, they heard *thalassa*: so, they began calling the waves the sea that ripples. The name *pelagos* has been preserved in the south of the Adriatic, around the island of Sipan [...] Our ancestors brought from the ancient homeland the words *ada*, *brod*, *korab(lja)*, *veslo*, *jedro* for broads. They did not have a mast: it is from the Latin trunk. They had their own hook and net. The latter, which they used to hunt on the river, was lent along the way to Hungarians and Romanians, in whose languages it remained. [...] From the inhabitants of the former Roman province and the Byzantine theme, from the Illyrians and Dalmatian Romans, newcomers kept many terms: for fish they had not eaten before, for devices they did not have, for tools they did

not use. Italians, later Venetians, knew more about sea: from them everyone learnt something in the Mediterranean. (123)

What Matvejević's passage shows is that these original Slavic populations probably lacked the words for *waves* as well as several other terms for the different types of saltwater fish and maritime tools. Lexical borrowings typically fill a lexical gap in a language for two reasons: to fulfil a *need*, "the internal pressure of borrowing a new term for a concept in the language", and *prestige*, "the external pressure of borrowing a term from a more prestigious language" (Matras 2009, 150). Matvejević's cases illustrate the need to express a new concept, which is already possessed by the donor language. Greek, in particular, had multiple words for sea, even though somehow only *pelagos* and *thalassa* were borrowed by Slavonic languages:

The Greek had several names for the sea: *hals* is salt, the sea as a substance; *pelagos* is the high sea, the sea as a sight; *pontos* is the sea as vastness and path; *thalassa* is a general term (of unknown origin, perhaps Cretan), the sea as an experience or event; *kolpos* means the bosom or under protection of and in an intimate way signifies the part of the sea which has embraced the coast: a bay or a gulf; *laitma* is the depths of the sea, dear to poets and suicidal people. (118)

The names of winds were also mainly borrowed from the languages of neighboring civilizations or of the civilizations these Slavic populations came into contact with, such as Greek, Latin and Arabic:

For the winds on the Adriatic, the inhabitants often borrowed foreign names: *bura* (from Greek through Latin and Romance languages) blows from the north, *levanat* (Italian *levante*) comes from the east, *plenat* (Italian *ponente*) from the west; the one from the south is probably not a loanword: the desire for the southern wind surged the Old Slavs to migrate; *šilok* or *wide* (Italian: *scirocco*) is a hot wind in southern Europe and northern Africa (the word comes from the Arabic *shark*, which is not unimportant for some rains and their color); *burin* is a small *bura*, *buraca* a quiet breeze, and *buraska* sudden and cold; *neverin* is a diminutive of *nevera* (from the Italian 'neve', for snow, which sometimes flutters along the Mediterranean shores): a sudden storm or calamity, which folk etymology associates with faith(lessness) or (in)idelity; *garbin* and *garbinada* a blow from the southwest that can be unpleasant (in Arabic *garbi* means western); *lebić* and *lebićada* are southwestern, but not in every region (the name comes from the name of Libya, Italian *libeccio*, with a somewhat distorted idea of the position of that country, which is not unusual in the Mediterranean); *tramuntana* (Ital. *tramontana*) blows from the mainland, over the mountains. (162)

The logic of lexical borrowing is a complex one, as words are not simply transferred from one language to the other when needed or for prestige. There are unpredictable variations due to multiple factors such as the historical, political, social, and linguistic relationships that exist between different civilizations and

the type of contact established between them. In Matvejević's words: "The shores lend the names of the winds to each other, not hesitating to change their name or direction, encouraging, sometimes intentionally, misunderstandings. From this it can be concluded which side ruled the sea more and managed the fleet" (203).

The linguistic outputs of lexical borrowing may be rather erratic. For instance, the Castilian word *mar* ('sea') has two genders, both feminine and masculine – this is because in Latin *sea* was neutral and had to fit into one of these categories. *Sea* has different genders along the Mediterranean coast: "in Latin and Slavic it is neutral gender, in Italian it is masculine, in French it is feminine, in Spanish it can be both masculine and feminine, in Arabic it has two masculine names, in Greek it is, when put together with other names for it, of all genders" (186). Additionally, in Albanian the word for *sea* is "det", which exists only in that language. The Mediterranean is seen by Matvejević as a "theatre where semantic variety and constant semantic slippage feed on each other", leading both to the enhancement of "linguistic differences and campanilismo" and "facilitating borrowings and permeability, which both derive from and reinforce a common cultural substratum" (Botta 2010, 18).

This is also true for expressions which are borrowed from one tongue and adapted into another or are developed in different ways according to the context. That sort of unpredictability, which most of the time could be explained in practical terms, is often explored by Matvejević. For instance, in *Druga Venecija*, he compares the way eastern and western Adriatic peoples conceived the idea of twilight, which has to do with the geographical configuration of determined territories: "On one shore the sun rests at sunset on the surface of the water and sinks into it. On the other it sets at day's end behind the shore's own elevation. In the east, the twilight is called the *suton*, from the Slavic words *sunce tone*, "the sun is sinking". In the west it is the *tramonto*, from *tra i monti*, "across the mountains" (emphasis in the original) (16).

At the same time, differentiations and nuances happen also within the same context and do not necessarily have to be found far away from each other. Every context, in other words, develops its own rules and specifications. This is well exemplified in *Kruh naš*, where Matvejević details the kinds of bread which are typical of the Hippocratic diet:

Synkomostos, made of whole meal, unsifted flour, helps the intestines work better; *aleton katharon*, made of finely sieved flour, is nourishing but harder to digest; *xylos*, which contains yeast juice, is healthy and is not heavy on the stomach; *ipnitai* are rolls baked in an open oven, but one must be careful not to overbake them because then they become hard; *klibanitai* stick to the sides of the pan, have a soft crust and are recommended for older people; *enkryftai*, baked in ashes, and dry and tasty, retain the nutritious qualities of the grain; *semi-*

dalis contains semolina and is good for digestion; *hondros*, made with wheat flour and tasty, is harder to digest. (12)

Some parallels could be drawn with other contexts – for instance, to Acron of Agrigento's diet or the Schola Medica Salernitana's diet but also with Arab bakers etc. At the same time, the Hippocratic diet was developed primarily in its own environment. All these mechanisms lead to the definition of atypical borders, which better grasp the Mediterranean essence.

Drawing borders with languages

Languages represent a privileged way of travelling as they illustrate that the Mediterranean could be one and many at the same time. This attests to a specific logic that rules the area. On the one hand, the need to preserve specificities and peculiarities: every micro-area in the Mediterranean has its own unique shape due to the combination of geographical, historical, linguistic factors, which cannot be found anywhere else. On the other hand, the Mediterranean links and connects civilizations and the “names used for winds, colors, borders, peoples, insults and curses, ships, nautical items, tools” travel “from one culture to another mutually affecting each other and denoting a commonality of life practices” (Botta 2010, 18).

By following this logic, Matvejević draws unconventional borders around the Mediterranean, which are based both on local and transnational dynamics. The Mediterranean is divided into areas which have historically created their own distinctiveness, distancing themselves from the continent. This is constantly reiterated by Matvejević, who underlines a real fracture between the Mediterranean and its hinterland which could be best seen through the language. At the same time, the Mediterranean is connected to other spaces which are geographically distant from each other due to the connections established by the sea. By drawing alternative boundaries, Matvejević offers a new reading of the Mediterranean, showing the vulnerability of traditionally conceived borders and spurring the discourse into a new direction which cannot transcend linguistic contributions.

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Karla Mallette (University of Michigan)

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

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 Sibawayhi, 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” (*kόσμος*) and “city” (*pόλις*). 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 post-human 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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Part III: **Fictional Spaces**

Sharon Kinoshita (University of California, Santa Cruz)

“Avendo di servidori bisogno”: *Decameron* 5.7 and the Medieval Mediterranean Slave Trade

Abstract: Celebrated (along with Dante and Petrarch) as one of the Three Crowns (Tre Corone) of Italian literature, Giovanni Boccaccio is typically associated with the city of Florence. Yet he spent an impressionable youth in Naples, capital of the Regno (the Angevin kingdom of southern Italy), and up to 20 of the 100 novelle in his *Decameron* are set in the Mediterranean, with its politics and commerce as an indispensable backdrop. Drawing on recent work by scholars of the Mediterranean, this essay rereads *Decameron* 5.7 in that historical context—on the one hand, examining the ambiguities of the slave trade that brings its protagonist, Teodoro, from the Anatolian coast to Sicily and, on the other, the way modern editions and translations gesture toward the fractious politics of the medieval Mediterranean in ways seldom taken up in literary analyses.

In 2009 I observed that literary scholars lagged behind historians in exploring the potential of the then-emerging field of Mediterranean Studies. Now, over ten years later, more literary research is being conducted under the rubric “Mediterranean”—particularly in the areas of modern, postcolonial, and Francophone studies;¹ overall, however, the discrepancy still remains. In this essay, I examine the interface between medieval Mediterranean *literature* and medieval Mediterranean *history*, taking as my case study Novella 7 from Day 5 of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (c. 1350–1370). Told on the day devoted to “the stories of lovers who, after terrible accidents or misfortunes, finally found happiness” (384), tale 5.7 features a slave captured in a pirate raid on the Anatolian coast and sold in Trapani, Sicily, where he becomes the lover of his master’s daughter. Reading this tale through recent studies in eastern Mediterranean commerce, slavery, and crusades, I argue for the central importance of history to the field of Mediterranean literature and for the ways in which literary texts do more than “illustrate” or “reflect”

¹ See, for example, Tamalet Talbayev (2017), Elhairy and Tamalet Talbayev (2018) and Esposito (2014).

historical events or phenomena, using Wayne Rebhorn's 2013 annotated English translation as my example.²

Set "during the time when good King William ruled Sicily," novella 5.7 begins when Messer Amerigo Abate, a noble from Trapani in northwestern Sicily, finding himself "in need of servants" [avendo di servidori bisogno] (437/660.4), buys a number of children captured by Genoese pirates in raids on the Armenian coast. While most were obviously peasants,

there was one among them whose noble and better appearance seemed to reflect some other origin, and he was called Teodoro. Although he was treated as a servant [a guisa di servo trattato fosse], he was nevertheless raised in the house together with Messer Amerigo's sons, and as he grew up, Teodoro...became so well mannered and likable and he pleased Messer Amerigo to such an extent that Amerigo made him a free man [franco]. Believing him to be a Turk [credendo que turchio fosse], Amerigo had him baptized, giving him the name of Pietro, and he entrusted him with all his important affairs, placing the greatest of faith in him. (412/660.5)

Before long, Pietro and Messer Amerigo's daughter Violante fall in love and she eventually becomes pregnant. When they are discovered, the outraged father appeals to Messer Currado, the king's military governor, who sentences Pietro to death. As Pietro is being led to the gallows, however, he is recognized by Fineo, an Armenian nobleman on his way to Rome to negotiate with the Pope "on important matters concerning a crusade [un passagio] they were supposed to undertake" (416/666.32). Seeing Pietro's strawberry birthmark, the nobleman, Fineo, recalls his son, "kidnapped by pirates from the seashore of Laiazzo some fifteen years earlier and [never] heard of since" (442). On a hunch, Fineo calls out his son's name and addresses "Pietro" in Armenian, prompting a moving reunion between father and son. In a sudden reversal of fortune, in keeping with the theme of the *Decameron*'s fifth day, Pietro is pardoned and his marriage to Violante arranged. A few days later,

Fineo embarked on a galley with his son, the lady, and his little grandson, and took them with him to Laiazzo, where the two lovers remained in peace and tranquillity for as long as they lived. (419)

A rescrabbled Hellenistic romance in miniature, tale 5.7 has it all: piracy, slavery, conversion, illicit sex, near tragedy, and a just-in-the-nick-of-time recognition scene that leads to a happily-ever-after ending. Even the most conventional of plots, however, signifies differently in different historical circumstances, and here—as else-

² English translations, occasionally modified, are taken from Wayne Rebhorn. Italian originals are from Vittore Branca's two-volume edition; references give page number with section number.

where in the *Decameron*—Boccaccio tantalizes us with the specificity of the names, places, and circumstances: Trapani and the Anatolian coast, linked by Genoese shipping and slave trading; or negotiations for a new crusade conducted by the papacy and the kingdom of Armenia. Literary critics, on the other hand, as a cursory glance at the existing secondary scholarship shows, have been most interested in questions like classical sources and themes, and the social and the family matters elicited by the love between Teodoro and Violante.

The tale’s more explicitly Mediterranean elements, in contrast, are consigned literally to the margins: the footnote, the gloss, the annotation—the interface, that is, between primary source and secondary reading. As an example, let’s look at two endnotes to the Rebhorn translation. The first, noting that “There is no specific source for this story,” identifies some of novella 5.7’s proper names:

It takes place during the reign of William II, the Norman King of Sicily (b. 1155, ruled 1166–89). The Abate (Abbate) family, to which Amerigo supposedly belongs, were *capitani*, that is, leaders of the local militia, in Trapani under the Normans and, after them, under the Aragonese. There is no Amerigo among its members, although there is an Arrigo who was a privy counsellor to King Frederick II in the next century. (900n.1)

The second focuses on the land of Teodoro’s birth:

The Armenia in question here is what historians refer to as **Lesser Armenia**, which was founded in the twelfth century by Armenians fleeing from their homeland in what is now the northeastern part of Turkey (as well as in areas to the east) and settling in **Cilicia**, which lies on the Mediterranean in the southeastern part of Turkey just north of present-day Syria and Lebanon. The Armenians had actually been Christians since the fourth century and Lesser Armenia, being the easternmost Christian country on the Mediterranean in the later Middle Ages, was an important way station for Italian merchants trading with the East as well as a staging ground for various Crusades. **The Crusade that is mentioned later in the story is presumably the Third, which was launched in 1189**, although Boccaccio also refers there to the ‘King’ of Armenia, which is anachronistic, since Lesser Armenia only became a kingdom in 1199.³ Note that the **kidnapped boy’s name...is Greek** and means ‘God’s gift.’ (Rebhorn 900–01n.2, emphases added)

Drawn closely from Vittore Branca’s magisterial 1992 Italian edition, these notes clearly situate us in the medieval Mediterranean. The first one takes us from the one explicit historical marker contained in the text—the reign of William II (d. 1189)—to Emperor Frederick II (d. 1250), the Stupor Mundi who dominated Mediterranean politics in the first half of the thirteenth century, through the Sicilian

³ Not uncommonly, Boccaccio is slightly inaccurate in his history: is this inadvertent or intentional?

Vespers (1282), the revolt that overthrew the French king Charles of Anjou and ultimately installed Peter III of Aragon as king of Sicily, triggering what David Abulafia has called a “Two Hundred Years’ War” dominating, with intermissions, “the western, central and even at times eastern Mediterranean” (1997, xvi) in the centuries to come. Together, these two notes conclusively establish the “Mediterraneanness” of *Decameron* 5.7. Yet, I suggest, they leave us with a tale that, to borrow a phrase from Horden and Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea* (2000)—the work that helped launch the present post-Braudelian revival of Mediterranean Studies—remains set in the Mediterranean without yet being made part of it (2). If in 2009 Teodolinda Barolini could rouse students of Dante to the “massive work of social and historical contextualization [that] lies before us” (53), then the annotations provided by Rebhorn and other editors and translators, I submit, provide a kind of *effet de réel* of that kind of engagement. By appearing to saturate the historical as an explanatory field, such notes gesture toward an exploration of these tales’ Mediterranean imaginary while simultaneously foreclosing it.⁴

Boccaccio in the Mediterranean

Though closely associated with Florence, Giovanni Boccaccio was a thoroughly Mediterranean figure. He spent his youth, as is well known, in Naples, capital of the Angevin kingdom (Regno) of southern Italy, where his father worked for one of the great Florentine banking companies (likely the Bardi). He returned to Florence only reluctantly in 1340–1341, having exhausted all attempts to secure a position that would have allowed him to remain in this “cultural crossroads” (Lee 742) of the Mediterranean.⁵ Florence, of course, figures at the center of the *Decameron*, from the Prologue’s vivid account of the horrors of the Black Death in that city to the ten young people (seven women and three men) of the *brigata* who begin and end their flight from Florence and eventual return at the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella. And though, as we might expect, many of the *Decameron*’s 100 *novelle* are set in that city (especially those told on Days 6, 8, 9), up to 18 or 20 of the tales are set in places across the Mediterranean and feature what I have elsewhere identified as typically Mediterranean themes.⁶

4 A major exception is Morosini (2020).

5 For Boccaccio’s biography, see Wallace (1991, 4–12). On Naples as a literary and cultural center, see Lee (2016).

6 For an overview, see Kinoshita (2021, 154–157). For Mediterranean theatics in other *Decameron* tales, see Kinoshita and Jacobs (2007) and Kinoshita (2011, 44–49).

What happens if we embed novella 5.7 in the medieval Mediterranean? Set in the time of “good King William” of Sicily (d. 1189), it puts us nominally in the late twelfth century—over a century and a half before the composition of the *Decameron*. Geographically, the tale ranges across the eastern half of the Mediterranean, beginning, as it does, when Messer Amerigo Abate, “in need of servants” (avendo di servidori bisogno) (437/660.4) buys a number of children captured by Genoese pirates in raids on the Armenian coast.⁷ We will return to the chronological gap between the time in which the tale is set and the time when it was composed in due course. In Boccaccio’s day, the lands Rebhorn describes as “an important way station for Italian merchants trading with the East [and] staging ground for various Crusades” (900n.2) was in fact:

[a] world of dizzying physical mobility—crisscrossed by overlapping networks of nomads and seminomads, raiders, volunteers on their way to join military adventures, slaves of various backgrounds, wandering dervishes, monks and churchmen trying to keep in touch with their flock, displaced peasants and townspeople seeking refuge, disquieted souls seeking cure and consolation at sacred sites, Muslim schoolmen seeking patronage, and the inevitable risk-driven merchants of late medieval Eurasia.⁸ (Kafadar 1995, 61)

Teeming with Borgesian excess, this passage lifts the curtain on a riotous collection of characters that fall between the cracks of conventional histories told from the perspective of empires and nations. Constitutively on the move, they formed the perfect backdrop for the slave trade to flourish, for Genoese raiders to pluck Teodoro and other boys from the Armenian coast.⁹

Let’s return to tale 5.7, which begins, as we remember, when Messer Amerigo Abate finds himself “in need of servants,” so that

when some galleys arrived from the eastern Mediterranean [di Levante] belonging to Genoese pirates [*corsari*] who had captured a great many children while scouring the coast of [*corseggianto*] Armenia, he purchased a few of them, thinking they were Turks. (437/660.4)

7 Compare *Decameron* 4.4, in which King William’s (fictional) grandson Gerbino falls in love, sight unseen, with the daughter of the king of Tunis—an affair that ends tragically, in keeping with the theme of the Fourth Day, of “those whose love came to an unhappy end” (300).

8 This is Ottomanist Cemal Kafadar’s description of late thirteenth- through early fourteenth-century Anatolia. For a review of six book-length studies that illustrate the complexity of this region, see Kinoshita (2011, 369–385).

9 The Cilician coast had been a hotspot for such raids for millennia; cf. Pompey the Great’s expedition to clear the Mediterranean of pirates in 67 BCE (Backman 2014, 170–171). In *Decameron* 5.6, a nobleman’s daughter, Restituta, is abducted from the shores of the island of Ischia by a band of Sicilian youth and given as a gift to King Frederick [III?] of Sicily.

As in other Mediterranean locales featuring rugged coastlines and fragmented hinterlands, topography simultaneously connects spaces—so that merchants or their alter egos, pirates, can move between them regularly or even routinely—and separates them into discrete cultural spheres, so that individuals are easily removed from the social institutions and family structures that secure their identity.

In the fourteenth century, no one would have been surprised at the prospect of Genoese adventurers abducting captives to be sold as slaves. To the modern ear, translating “*corsari*” into English as “pirates” rather than the cognate “corsairs” might seem a mere choice of register, preferring a plain word to a more poetic or somewhat archaizing alternative. A crucial distinction, however, separates pirates and corsairs: the former, the maritime counterpart of brigands, act in their own interest, whereas the latter act under the authority of a state or other political entity. Boccaccio’s “*corsari genovesi*,” then, are not simply pirates who happen to be Genoese; rather, they are raiders operating legally under the auspices of the republic of Genoa.¹⁰

In the medieval and early modern Mediterranean, piracy or corsairing and the slave trade were “intimately linked” (Backman 2014, 175) in ways that both exploited and reinforced hostility between Christendom and the Islamic world. Christians and Muslims alike were forbidden from enslaving their coreligionists. Thus whether on land or at sea, their raids—officially, at least—targeted the perpetrators’ religious “others.” Many of these encounters took place in the Aegean theatre, “an amazingly complex contested region” in which the erosion of Byzantine power had resulted in a power vacuum in which

Greek states, French principalities, Turkish emirates, Venetians and Genoese colonies, the Hospitalers on Rhodes, Catalan adventurers, Serbian and Bulgarian kingdoms, and others established mixed relationships and fought among themselves to control [its] shores. (Epstein 2006, 110)

This unruly patchwork of states and political actors, combined with the fragmented geography of myriad islands and rugged coastlines, made for an ideal environment for piracy and corsairing to flourish. In the decades just preceding the *Decameron*, Turks from the coastal beyliks of pre-Ottoman Anatolia had begun raiding the Aegean islands, taking captives “who were usually Orthodox Greeks” (Carr 2015, 58). Outrage at this Turkish traffic in Christian slaves became central

¹⁰ The narrator, Lauretta, does not pause to condemn them here, though in *Decameron* 2.4, the crews of “two large Genoese merchant ships” are described as “greedy and rapacious by nature” (100).

to papal and crusade discourse, as in Clement VI’s proclamation of the Crusade of Smyrna in 1343:

For some time past [the Turks] have mobilised the strength of their nation and used a great number of armed vessels to invade by the sea the Christian territories in the region of Romania, and other neighbouring places in the hands of the faithful. Raging atrociously against the Christians and their lands and islands, they have taken to roaming the seas, as they are doing at present, despoiling and depopulating the settlements and islands of the Christians of those parts, setting them ablaze, and what is worse, seizing the Christians themselves as booty and subjecting them to horrible and perpetual slavery, selling them like animals and forcing them to deny the Catholic faith. (Carr 2015, 57–58, citing *Documents on the Later Crusades*, 78–80, doc. 22)

In such a context, reciprocal raids on the part of Christians, in the absence of explicit treaty agreements, could assume implicit justification as a maritime extension of holy war. It is not surprising to find in *Decameron* 2.4, when the failed merchant Landolfo Rufolo “bought a small, fast pirate ship [un legnetto sottile da corseggia]” to recoup his business losses, he “dedicated himself to making other people’s property his own, and especially that belonging to the Turks” (99/168.9).

Scratching the surface of the picture presented in Clement’s fiery proclamation, however, suppresses some inconvenient truths concerning the slave trade. Nearly three decades earlier, in his Crusade treatise the *Tractatus quomodo Saraceni sunt expugnandi* (c. 1314–1318), the Dominican William of Adam had fulminated against “the Catalan, Pisan, Venetian, and other maritime merchants, and above all the Genoese”: not only did they do business with “the Saracens of Egypt” in violation of papal sanctions but in fact collaborated with the Mamluks (r. 1260–1517) in the slave trade:

For they traverse the seas and travel through provinces, and from diverse parts of the world they buy boys and girls, that is, Greeks, Bulgars, Ruthenians, Alans, and Hungarians from lesser Hungary, **who all rejoice in the Christian name**, or Tartars, Cumans, and many other pagans whom their impious parents have offered for sale, as is the custom of these pagans, or who have been defeated or subjugated by the Tartars, Turks, or other impious foes. (William of Adam 2012, 27, 29, emphasis added)

In the official discourse emanating from the papal curia, corsairing and slaving neatly hewed to the division between Christians and Muslims. Equally inflammatory but uncompromisingly pragmatic, William’s diatribe, meant to goad the papal

cy of his day into taking action against the Latin mercantile powers, “above all the Genoese,” is under no such illusions.¹¹

As William of Adam makes clear, eastern Orthodox subjects often made opportune targets for Latin merchants, pirates, and mercenaries.¹² To his list of Greeks, Bulgars, Ruthenians, Alans, and Hungarians, “who all rejoice in the Christian name,” *Decameron* 5.7 adds Armenians from the kingdom of Cilicia (southeast of the Aegean, where the Anatolian peninsula meets the Levantine coast). From a distance of seven centuries, it is easy for us to assume that Latin Christians from western Europe had only the haziest idea of distinctions among all manner of ethnicities—Eastern Christians like Greeks and Armenians, “pagans,” even Latin Christians like the Hungarians.¹³ But beneath the reductionism of taking the high Middle Ages as an age of Crusades in which “Christianity” and “Islam” were arrayed in permanent opposition, we see the messy Realpolitik in which eastern Christian slaves plucked from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean were sold to Latin Christians not only by Turks (Carr 2015, 57) but by western “maritime merchants” like the Catalans, Pisans, Venetians, and Genoese.¹⁴

This, then, is the immediate context of *Decameron* 5.7.¹⁵ Let’s revisit the opening scene.

[I]n need of servants...when some galleys arrived from the eastern Mediterranean belonging to Genoese corsairs who had captured a great many children while scouring the coast of Armenia, [Messer Amerigo] purchased a few of them, **thinking they were Turks**” (437, emphasis added).

“[C]redendogli turchi” (660.4)—it’s a detail easy to read through at first: *of course*, if the Genoese are seizing captives from the coast of Armenia and if the noble Messer Amerigo is buying them halfway across the sea, *of course* they must be

¹¹ William’s treatise comes on the heels of “troubled times” (1305–1310) in the eastern Mediterranean: in retaliation for the assassination of their captain, Roger de Flor, the Grand Catalan Company captured and sold many Orthodox Christians—Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians—alongside Turks, to “merchants specializing in this trade” (Marcos Hierro 2017, 329).

¹² Citing the enslavement of Orthodox Greeks as a *casus belli* had to overcome Latin Christendom’s entrenched hostility toward the Byzantine empire. Cf. Carr (2015, 58) on Petrarch.

¹³ On the Hungarians as Latin Christians, see Catlos (2014, 230–241).

¹⁴ On the link between piracy and slavery in the early modern period, with the emergence of new political actors and the realignment of control of the seas after the battle of Lepanto, see (for the western Mediterranean) Hershenzon (2018) and (for the eastern Mediterranean) White (2018).

¹⁵ *Decameron* 5.7 is explicitly mentioned by historians Carr (2015, 58n.106) and Barker (2019, 163). Curiously, Steven Epstein, in his book *Speaking of Slavery*, says Boccaccio had little to say on the topic: “Having lived for a while in Naples, he put a few slave women in a story [*Decameron* 8.10] set in Palermo” (2001, 43).

Turks. Thus when Teodoro shows such unusual promise that Messer Amerigo manumits him, it seems logical, “thinking he was a Turk” (*credendo che turchio fosse*) (437/660.5), to have him baptized before entrusting him with his affairs.¹⁶ The words “Muslim” and “Christian,” we should note, never appear in the text; rather, Messer Amerigo’s world is divided between Turks, presumed to be of a different faith, while Christianity is implicitly signaled in the word “battezzare” (660.5). But as we have seen, the astonishing diversity of historical actors traipsing across the medieval Mediterranean stage makes a mockery of such ideologically comforting, but ultimately reductive, binarisms.

The dénouement of *Decameron* 5.7 hinges on the revelation of Teodoro’s identity as the son of an Armenian nobleman. Clues to his origin are there from the start of the tale, when we are told that the Genoese galleys “di Levante”¹⁷ (660.4) have been “corsegiando l’Erminia” (660.4)—a detail made legible by Rebhorn’s endnote on the short-lived coastal kingdom of Cilicia while at the same time explaining that Armenians had been Christian since the fourth century. As an Armenian, Teodoro should have been exempt both from seizure by the Genoese and from sale in the slave market of Trapani. What happened?

As William of Adam’s denunciation makes clear, the Genoese (along with other Latin mercantile nations) did not hesitate to traffic in Christian slaves. Such violations of official injunctions surrounding commerce in what historian Hannah Barker calls “that most precious merchandise” were facilitated amidst the fragmentation of the eastern Mediterranean. In this environment of “so many ethnicities in such a small place” (Epstein 2001, 110), criss-crossed by “slaves of various backgrounds” (Kafadar 1995, 61), Armenians frequently blurred conventional categories of classification. In the *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100), the Old French epic that most clearly articulates a vision of holy war between Christians and Muslims, Armenians figure right next to the “Moors” (l. 3227) in the army of the “Saracen” emir of Babylon (Cairo).¹⁸ On the Muslim side, Mamluk *shurūt* manuals—collections of model contracts akin to Italian notarial formularies—classified Armenians as “Turks,” a category of enslavable lighter-skinned northerners of various languages and religions (including Mongols, Kipchak, Circassians, Tatars, Georgians, and

¹⁶ The text does not specify how old he is when he first arrives in Trapani. Historically speaking, the median age for slaves sold in Genoa and Venice was between 15 and 20, but the youngest recorded sales were for children of four and five (Barker 2019, 68, 107). Since Fineo, at the end of the tale, recognizes in “Pietro” the son who had been snatched from the shores of Laiazzo fifteen years earlier, we can assume Teodoro to have been close to this minimum age.

¹⁷ Rebhorn renders “Levante” as “eastern Mediterranean” while the Mark Musa/Peter Bondanella and G.H. McWilliam translations both opt for “Levant.”

¹⁸ See Kinoshita (2006, 29).

Greeks) as opposed to “Sūdān,” the collective designation for darker-skinned southerners (Barker 2019, 49, 113). At the same time, Mamluk slave-buying guides dividing enslavable peoples into Arabs, ‘Ajām, and Sūdān listed Armenians as ‘Ajām, alongside non-Arab or non-Arabophone Muslims like the Persians, Turks, and Berbers. Even amidst the “riotous instability” of the late thirteenth-early fourteenth-century eastern Mediterranean, the Armenians are notable shape-shifters easily “othered” to fit others’ convenience.¹⁹

As noted above, readers both medieval and modern (the latter assisted by editorial annotations) are alerted from the outset to Teodoro’s Armenian connections. What of Messer Amerigo Abate? In the opening section, we are told, first, that he purchases the lot of boys “*credendogli turchi*” (660.4), and then that he arranges for Teodoro’s baptism “*credendo che turchio fosse*” (660.5). What are we to make of this? If taken at face value, it exonerates him from knowingly violating official injunctions against trafficking in Christian slaves. However, the repetition is just unsubtle enough to capture our attention; emphasizing Messer Amerigo’s belief rather than, say, any Genoese attempt to deceive him, it invites us to ask: Is he an innocent naif, acting in good faith? Is he a credulous dupe who should have known better? Or is he a complicit buyer, willing to turn a blind eye to this unsavory but common side of the Mediterranean slave trade? Is Boccaccio, through his narrator Lauretta, pointing the finger at Messer Abate?

Even in a group of boys who were genuinely Turkish, Teodoro should have stood out for his recognizably Christian name (Greek for “gift of God”—especially in Sicily, with its long history of engagement with Greek and Byzantine culture).²⁰ Then again, in Italy, masters commonly renamed their slaves (“Giorgio” being popular for men), even when their old names were already Christian—as in the case of Abkhaz and Russian “Marias” who were renamed Barbara and Marta, respectively (Barker 2019, 43).²¹ New names commonly entailed baptism, but this could

¹⁹ On the complexities of Armenian identity and cultural affiliations from the Middle Ages forward, see the essays collected in *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Words in Motion*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Michael Pifer 2018.

²⁰ Due to its period under Muslim rule, western Sicily (where Trapani is located) retained less Byzantine influence than the eastern part of the island. Although Boccaccio would not necessarily have first-hand knowledge of Sicily, images of Saint Theodore are found in the mosaic program of Cefalù cathedral and the *muqarnas* (Arabic-style ceiling vaulting) of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, two major Norman monuments from the twelfth century.

²¹ What’s in a name? As for the tale’s female protagonists, Rebhorn (following Branca) notes that Violante was the name of Boccaccio’s daughter, who died in 1355, as well as the daughter of the count of Antwerp in tale 2.8 (901n.3). McWilliam adds that the name was “[n]ot exactly commonplace” (835n.5); in fact, the name, a variant of Yolanda (deriving from an early twelfth-century countess of Hainault) was a common one in descendants of the royal house of Aragon, including

include the “theologically unsound” practice of rebaptizing non-Latin Christians (Barker 2019, 43–44) like Teodoro, whom Messer Amerigo has “baptized and renamed Pietro” (437–438).²²

Decameron 5.7, then, illuminates the complexity of identity in the medieval Mediterranean, placing Teodoro-Pietro at the nexus of religion, ethnicity, social status, and family. His nobility, drawing from “nature,” is evident from the start—seeming “better bred [gentileesco] and of better appearance [di migliore aspetto] than the rest” (437, modified/660.4)—even though Messer Amerigo believes him to be a Turk. Yet even when manumitted and baptized Latin Christian, he is still a servant; his religious assimilation means nothing without the social and familial rank that only Fineo can provide. In the premodern Mediterranean, when important people (as Teodoro is later revealed to be) were taken captive, they could reasonably expect to be ransomed. The plot of 5.7 thus occupies the gap between Teodoro’s capture and the novella’s culminating recognition scene, in which “Pietro” is literally hailed in his native language and by his original name.

The tale’s happy ending, in dramatic fashion, depends on the death sentence Messer Amerigo has imposed on the servant who has impregnated his daughter. On his way to the gallows, Pietro is “stripped naked from the waist up” (441), exposing to public gaze “a large red spot” [una gran macchia di vermicchio] on his chest, “not painted on the skin, but imprinted there by Nature, just like the ones that the women here call ‘roses’” (442/666.34).²³ The procession passes an inn housing three Armenian ambassadors who had stopped in Trapani “for a few days’ rest and relaxation” on their way to Rome for an audience with the Pope. Catching sight of Pietro’s distinctive birthmark, one of dignitaries, as we have seen, is reminded of his long-lost son, “kidnapped by pirates from the seashore of Laiazzo some fifteen years earlier and [never] heard of since” (442). Calling out “O Teodoro!” he asks in Armenian, “Where do you come from? Whose son are you?” (442). Hailed by name in his native language, the erstwhile Pietro responds, “I’m from Armenia, the son of someone named Fineo, and I was brought here as a little boy by I don’t know what people” (442).²⁴

the first wife of Robert I of Naples and, in Boccaccio’s day, the daughter of a count of Montferrat who was countess of Savoy by marriage.

22 In the early fifteenth century, this became—or was seen as—enough of a problem that Pope Martin V threatened those who baptized Greek slaves with excommunication (Barker 2019, 44).

23 A similar mark is thematized in the early thirteenth-century French romance the *Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dole*, in which a deceiver’s second-hand knowledge of a distinctive rose-shaped birthmark on the heroine’s thigh risks compromising her reputation.

24 “Io fui d’Erminia, figliuolo d’uno che ebbe nome Fineo, qua piccol fanciul trasportato da non so che gente” (667.39, my translation).

Instantly, Pietro—free and Christian, but condemned to death for his affair with his master’s daughter—is transformed into the son of “an elderly gentleman of great authority” (441), belonging to a people that renders his baptism at the hands of Messer Amerigo moot. At the beginning of the tale, his lack of voice was naturalized as the result of his lowly status, the language barrier, and his extreme youth. This scene reveals not just Teodoro’s identity but the fact that throughout his time in Trapani, he has retained both his knowledge of Armenian and memory of his origins, both ethnic and familial.²⁵

Fineo’s memory of the son kidnapped “from the seashore of Laiazzo” some fifteen years before lends further specificity to the primal scene of Teodoro’s abduction by pirates “scouring the coast of Armenia” (437).²⁶ Here Rebhorn intervenes with another endnote: “Laiazzo (Ayas), a port city in Lesser Armenia, was an important center of trade between East and West in the second half of the thirteenth century” (Rebhorn 901n.6),²⁷ especially in the wake of the Mamluk conquest of Acre in 1291.²⁸ It was also a transshipment point for the traffic in slaves from the Black Sea destined for the markets of Mamluk Alexandria—often brokered (as William of Adam tells us) by the Genoese and other Latin Christians.²⁹ By Boccaccio’s day, however, no one would have taken Laiazzo as a place to live “in peace and quiet” (444) as Teodoro and Violante do in the tale’s happy ending: the port

25 Compare Alatiel, daughter of the sultan of Babylon, in *Decameron* 2.7: shipwrecked on Christian shores in the western Mediterranean and unable to speak the language of her rescuers, she conceals her identity—revealing it only when fortune lands her back in the eastern Mediterranean, among people, including Christians, with whom she can communicate. See Kinoshita and Jacobs (2007).

26 Or “corseggiamo l’Erminia” (660.4) in the original. The closeness between corsairing and coastal sailing appears in tale 5.2, where Martuccio Gomito from the island of Lipari takes to the seas to acquire enough wealth to aspire to marry his well-born lover: “corseggiamo cominciò a costeggiare la Barberia” (610.6, emphasis added), rendered less economically in English as “he proceeded to become a pirate and sailed up and down the Barbary coast” (403).

27 Branca’s edition adds a quotation from the Italian translation of Marco Polo’s *Description of the World* (666n.5).

28 Acre, the last crusader outpost on the mainland, had been a major commercial entrepôt for goods from the Middle East and Asia. Laiazzo (along with Famagusta, on the island kingdom Cyprus) replaced it as the site where Venetians, Genoese, and other Latin Christians met merchants from Syria, Egypt, and—increasingly—Ilkhanid Persia (Ashtor 55–56). Venice and Genoa clashed over control of the city in 1293 (Barker 2019, 130).

29 In 1288, the Armenian king Leo II (r. 1269–1289) granted the Genoese freedom from tolls on the export of slaves and animals, while prohibiting the sale of Christian slaves to Muslim buyers (Cluse 2017, 459–460). Only three years earlier, however, he had signed a treaty with the Mamluks agreeing not to inhibit the flow of trade, including “all nationalities of slaves and all nationalities of slave-girls of their various kinds” (Barker 2019, 163).

had been captured by the Mamluks in 1337, and the loss of that commercial outpost, together with further papal restrictions on trade with Ilkhanate Persia, contributed to the spike in crusade fervor among the maritime republics, leading to the formation of a Naval League against Smyrna (seized from the Genoese in 1332 by the Turkish beylik of Aydin).³⁰ By the time Boccaccio composed the *Decameron* (c. 1350–1370), the spectacle of a diplomatic embassy from Cilician Laiazzo to Rome (which had lost its role as seat of the papacy to Avignon in 1309) would have served as a provocative reminder of Latin Christian, and specifically Italian, losses.

“[A]vendo di servidori bisogno”: Traduttore, traditore

This phrase, which I quoted at the beginning of this essay, is the starting point of Teodoro’s adventure: it is “avendo di servidori bisogno” (66.4) that Messer Amerigo buys a lot of “fanciulli” from the Genoese. English versions tell us that he was “in need of servants” (437),³¹ yet the narrative context—Messer Amerigo purchases Teodoro, frees him, then oversees his re-baptism as “Pietro”—leaves no doubt that we are dealing with an everyday case of medieval Mediterranean slavery. Now, the terminology of slavery is slippery, and varies over time and place. In Italy, the Latin term “servus” retained its ancient meaning of “slave” into the thirteenth century, when elsewhere it was coming to mean “serf.” In the course of the fourteenth century, archival evidence tells us, it was supplanted by the Latin *sclavus* (and dialectal forms of *schiaovo*), which came into common use throughout the Italian peninsula.³² The modern English “servant” downplays this history of slavery, but perhaps so too does Boccaccio’s choice of “servidori,” adopting a somewhat archaizing form over the vocabulary of slavery in current use in Italy in the second half of the fourteenth century.

³⁰ Carr (2015, 26, 49, 127). The League lasted from 1343–1352; it captured Smyrna in 1344, but the subsequent defense of the city was hampered by the Black Death and, especially, infighting among the Venetians (who sought a truce with the Turks), the Genoese, and the Hospitallers (Carr 2015, 75–78).

³¹ This is Rebhorn, but “servant” also appears in the translations by McWilliam (412 in the Penguin edition) and Musa and Bondanella (412 in the Signet Classics edition).

³² In Italy, “servus” retained its ancient meaning of “slave” into the thirteenth century even as elsewhere it began to be used for “serf” (Epstein 2001, 18–19). In Sicily, some records refer to “*laboratories*” rather than “*servi*” (Backman 1995, 253).

But Pietro and his captive peers are not the only “servants” with important roles in *Decameron* 5.7. Just before Pietro’s scheduled execution, Messer Amerigo sends “one of his servants...who was more inclined to do evil than good” (441)³³ to force Violante, who has just given birth to an illegitimate son, to choose between a dagger and poisoned wine to kill herself, and then to “smash [the newborn’s] head against a wall, and throw it away to be eaten by the dogs” (441). In English, then, both “Pietro,” who had distinguished himself by his better and noble-like appearance, and this underling, charged with forcing a suicide and committing infanticide, are indiscriminately called “servants.” In Boccaccio’s Italian, this unnamed would-be assassin is, rather, “un suo famigliare” (665.29)—which might more accurately be rendered by the English cognate “familiar,” in the sense of a household servant or agent.³⁴ In the very next scene, Pietro is led to the gallows by “a troop of soldiers” (441)³⁵ driving him along with a whip; but the Italian calls them “famigliari” (665.32) as well, thus conflating the subordinates charged with carrying out the death sentences of Violante and “Pietro” (privately and publicly, respectively) while distinguishing them from Teodoro. Traduttore, traditore.

This status is central to Fineo’s appeal to the king’s military governor, Messer Currado: “Sir,...the person you’ve condemned to death *as a slave* [come servo] *is a free man*, my son, and he’s ready to marry the girl he is said to have robbed of her virginity.”³⁶ If the label “servidori” for the lot of boys purchased by Messer Amerigo soft-pedals the reality of the Mediterranean slave trade, Fineo is under no such illusion: in his eyes, his son was abducted and sold as a slave, and his manumission and conversion have not altered the powerlessness of that status.

33 Again, echoed in both McWilliam (415) and Musa and Bondanella (416).

34 On the other hand, in the *Catholicon*, the dictionary compiled by the Genoese Dominican Pietro Balbi in 1286, *famulus* is a slave member of the family. Such dictionaries drew definitions of slavery from ancient Roman laws and practices (Epstein 2001, 20).

35 McWilliam, “a troop of soldiers” (416), Musa and Bondanella, “some soldiers” (416).

36 Rebhorn’s translation, “the person you’ve condemned to death *as a slave* is actually my son, *a free man*” (442, emphases added), emphasizes Teodoro’s lineage, obscuring the direct contrast between slavery and freedom in Boccaccio’s original: “Messere, colui il quale voi mandate a morir come servo è libero uomo e mio figliuolo, e è presto di torre per moglie colei la qual si dice che della sua virginità ha privata” (667.42, emphasis added). The name Currado (a Sicilian-inflected pronunciation of Corrado, Conrad) would have come to Sicily with the Hohenstaufen, just after the reign of King William II.

In lieu of a conclusion

If many *Decameron* tales play on the mutability of identities, few do so as dramatically than those set in the Mediterranean: failed merchants turn pirate, like Landolfo Rufolo of Ravello in novella 2.4; spurned wives cross-dress and become market inspectors for the sultan of Egypt, as in the adventures of Madonna Zinevra of Genoa in novella 2.9; Saladin poses as a Cypriot merchant for some undercover reconnaissance in northern Italy in the lead-up to the Third Crusade in novella 10.9.³⁷ This is no accident: “indelibly fragmented into its ports, islands, coasts, and their attendant interiors...divided into a set of city-linking itineraries, routes for the transmission of ideas, goods, and military forces, [and]... marked by...complex, overlapping, ethnolinguistic, commercial, and cultural identities” (Brummett 10), Mediterranean topography is ready-made to uproot people from their homes and drop them into places where the social and cultural networks that define them are broken. *Decameron* 5.7 functions as a laboratory to assay the variations and variables from the resulting complex, overlapping, or disjunctive identities. As I hope to have shown, recent work by medieval historians is indispensable in illuminating the ways in which the *Decameron* and other literary texts are not simply set in the Mediterranean but are quintessentially of it while the narrative turns in a text like novella 5.7 caution us against the perils of taking categories of religion, ethnicity, or race as stable categories of medieval identity.³⁸

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³⁷ On tale 10.9, see Kinoshita (2011).

³⁸ I thank Hannah Newburn for her research assistance.

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Roberta Morosini (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)

For a Geo-Philology of the Sea. Writing Cartography, Mapping the Mediterranean *Mare Historiarum*, from Dante to Renaissance Islands Books

In classical geography, location was used to describe relation, quantity, and process. It was the philosophical where (Lukermann 1961, 194)

Do maps add anything, to our knowledge of literature?” (Moretti 2007, 35).

Abstract: In this paper I share questions related to geographic poetics of the Mediterranean: how do we read the sea as a narrative space? In the attempt to put in place an alphabet of the sea, the paper tries to raise questions about the predominant role played by the Mediterranean in the Italian Trecento, in a intersection of geography and literature. Following the first nautical maps and the increased coast to coast activities of merchants, from Dante to Renaissance Island Books the definition of the geographical space pass through myths. Finally, following the itineraries and crossings of the sea, a cartography of poetry is displayed in a Mediterranean that emerges as a *mare historiarum*, a sea freed from sirens and marine divinities, a geographical space that ultimately narrates the history of humanity. The philology used in this approach is first used by Claudio Magris to speak about Matvejevitć’s maritime minimalism in his *Mediterranean Breviary*. It is understood in the broad sense of a series of historical operations which enlighten the context and the construction of text as well as the seafarer’s point of views, so it is essentially an hermeneutical approach, that enquires on the dynamics between map, space, place and literature.

Examining the geographic poetics of the Mediterranean, this paper asks, “how do we read the sea as a narrative space?” Attempting to imagine an alphabet of the sea, the aim is to raise questions about the predominant role played by the Mediterranean in the Italian Trecento, in an intersection of geography and literature. Following the first nautical maps and the increased coast to coast activities of merchants, from Dante to Renaissance Island Books, the geographical space of the Mediterranean moves beyond the mythical narratives of ancient times. Finally, the itineraries and crossings of the sea reveal a cartography of poetry in a Mediterranean that emerges as a *mare historiarum*, a sea freed from sirens and marine divinities, a geographical space that ultimately narrates the history of humanity.

The philology I use in this approach is not (of course) one that follows the “genealogical or Lachmannian law to establish a ‘critical text’”. First used by Claudio Magris to speak about Matvejevitć’s *maritime minimalism* in his *Mediterranean Breviary* this, “a philology of the sea” essentially consists in an hermeneutical approach that aims to underline the context and the construction of text, expanded by the seafarer’s points of view.

From the “Manifestos” to the Manuals: the Imaginary and the Real Sea

“The Mediterranean is not only geography” (Matvejevitć 2004, 18), Predrag Matvejevitć sharply stresses, almost inviting study of the artistic representation of the sea – that is, the sea read and studied as a literary space inspiring *Il mare salato* (Morosini, 2020). *Maritime minimalism*, after all, gives birth to poetry, but also to authentic philology. It provides the premise for “a philology of the sea,” as Claudio Magris defined the methodological discourse of and around the Mediterranean in Matvejevitć’s *Mediterranean breviary*, for the union of rigour and audacity (Magris 2008, 7-12), the same as the Catalan watchmaker that he had met in Alexandria. The Catalan had patiently tried to rebuild the catalogue of the devastated library of the city, the largest of antiquity on the basis of the few information he had available.

It may be useful to sketch its history, from its original “manifestos” or programs, to its fullest awareness of being a new discipline both for the subject matter as well as for the main lines of a methodology and approach.

“The best thing you can say to anyone about the Mediterranean is to read again the *Odyssey*”, states Georges Simenon in *Mare nostrum ou la Méditerranée en goélette*, (*mare nostrum or the Mediterranean on schooner*, Simenon 2019), a collection of reportages that the French writer wrote for the weekly journal “Marianne” between June and September 1934. In his seafaring in the Mediterranean from Poqrquerolles to Tunisia passing from Elba, to Sicily and Malta on a boat to understand and describe the Mediterranean, in the opening lines, he asks himself what the Mediterranean is: “The Mediterranean is, The Mediterranean is, The Mediterranean ...”, and many crossings later, he ends up saying: “the Mediterranean is so many things [...] my job, as Stevenson used to say, is of the narrator of stories”, linking the description of the sea to its narration.

In 2015, in a book titled *Narrating the sea*, Bjorn Larsson wonders about the sea and its literary representation:

First of all, what sea is it? Is it the real sea or the one represented in literature? Is it the seducing sea caressed by a light summer breeze or the stormy sea that does not forgive? [...] Finally, what kind of literature are we talking about when we say that it is inspired by the sea? Whether they are good or bad, aren't any generalizations about 'literature itself' abusive? Who can pretend to own a knowledge, a little precise and synthetic of what "literature itself" is? [...] After all, who are the writers that really narrate "the sea"? If it were true that the sea represents a source of privileged inspiration for literature, it should be easy to find many who use, and put to good use, this golden field of creativity. In order to clarify this question, some years ago I started a small search for the relationships between the sea and literature (Larsson 2015, 10–11).

The question raised by Larsson about the relation between the sea and literature has been haunting me for many years, and even more so with the rising interest in Mediterranean Studies. Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists of the Mediterranean each proposes different approaches and each, one can say, represents different research "manifesti", from Fernand Braudel (1949) to Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden (2000) to David Abulafia (2011) and Cyprian Broodbank (2013), there has been an effort to find evidence of an interaction between Mediterranean societies and identities.

Braudel understands the Mediterranean in geographic terms and within a vision of history mainly *événemmentielle*, trying to explain what happened in the territories that face the sea and their interactions at a certain time in history, while Abulafia, moving away from the French historian's "horizontal vision", privileges the study of a human history of the sea shifting the attention to what happens on the surface of the water and to those who crossed it. To the continental model of the Mediterranean basin, identified on the northern borders with the olive, and the southern oriental of the palm, that is the environmental approach, Horden and Purcell in their *Corrupting Sea*, propose to study the "connectivity" for the maritime proximities of the fragmented microecologies of the *microregions* of the Mediterranean in all its uncertainty, its risks and opportunities, while the archaeologist Broodbank adopts a "prehistoric" perspective to dig into the most recondite pasts of the sea, and often the humblest ones, in order to grasp the *making of the Middle Sea*, as promised by the title of his essay.

In a way we could talk about this diversity of approaches as representing a moment of a launch and development of a discipline, the moment, in which, let's say those "manifesti", the programs that they propose, promote and stimulate research in a certain direction. Migrations, restlessness across the traditional borders of the Mediterranean and a geopolitical and economical choice to an enlarged Mediterranean, urge all to rethink the role of literature in order "to bring it back to society", as the ultimate goal of geocriticism.

The numerous university academic positions and professional conventions dedicated to the Mediterranean all over the world, even in countries that do not face the salty sea, proves that the time has come to address a study of the literary Mediterranean, writing manuals that provide some principles to rely on for literary Mediterranean studies and articulate a methodology, especially in the light of teaching this new discipline together with migration and geopolitical studies.

In the efforts to articulate a poetics of the sea Sharon Kinoshita first in 2009 first focused on aspects of theory and methodology related to the study of medieval Mediterranean literature (Kinoshita 2009, 600–608). My investigation, however, moves away from Kinoshita’s historical approach, as I focus on geo-cultural aspects of the literary text and I ask: How do we read the sea? The question entails another one about how the sea is written.

Mediterranean Philology

“The Mediterranean is not only geography” reminds Predrag Matvejevitć. An encounter with Matvejevitć in 2009 at the International Theatre Festival in Venice, that year dedicated to the Mediterranean, redirected my approach to the study of the sea. He was in Venice with the show *Midrash / Hikayât*. These two words, one Hebrew and one Arabic, respectively mean “research” and “tale” and evoke the infinite aspects of the Mediterranean, addressing in particular the need to research the ways the sea narrates the world, or life, this is why his *Mediterranean Breviary* has the subtitle “Romanzo / Novel”), something that the historian Egidio Ivetic has done for il Mulino publisher: *Il grande racconto del Mediterraneo* (2023), privileging a reading of the sea that takes into account the history as well as literature, visual arts and many cultural agents that narrate the sea as a space of human history. Those two words *Midrash / Hikayât* can be rendered with the English “show and tell”.

In 2013, it was again Matvejevitć to finally give shape to a philological study of the sea as a geoliterary space when he sent a picture to thank me for the volume *Sindbad mediterraneo*, which opens with his essay *Pane zingaro* (Matvejevitć 2013, 21–24). This picture (Morosini 2020), with its detailed description of its foaming little wave in the lightness of the undertow, in its being incomplete, is the pulsing heart of Matvejevitć’s *poetic of the événement* (1979), and became the message in the bottle: why did Matvejevitć send me the photo, and why was he so generous in details about its title? That wave led to the study of a ‘Minimal Mediterranean’, as he calls it, and forced me to recognize that a wave in Capo Rizzuto is not the same as a wave in Tunis or Genova, namely that the study of the sea cannot move away from the consideration of its aquatic nature, inner mobility, and its

uniqueness and difference. From here arises his invitation not to underestimate “observation of the little but meaningful detail, and the choice of that detail,” as Raffaele La Capria would write in the introduction of Matvejevitć’s *Venezia minima* (La Capria 2009, 7).

It would be useful to have a guide and a methodology to read the sea as a literary space and teach Mediterranean literature. This intrusion of philology into the study of and about the Mediterranean could be surprising, but it is known that most philological studies are conducted on literary texts that “represent” the sea by means of words.

In this respect, our philology follows the general principles of the discipline as applied to all the subjects it touches, but it has a specific profile due to its main subject matter, that is the sea. Our philology establishes which texts present a “Mediterranean” with recurring symbolic and/or historic and existential values, a sea that is a space that limits and challenges, a world of possible adventure, of success or failure, of health, of liberty, of mystery. Our philology must decide in each case if the texts we analyze fit into a network of problems and make our inquiry relevant. Our philology must also study and evaluate the vital role that the sea plays in the narrative or in the symbolic network of meanings, in the historic and cultural context where it exists, in a way that helps us to see the difference between the sea found in Chaucer’s stories and in Dante, just to take an example. With this understanding of the presence of the sea in literary texts, we come to understand the sea to be an essential part of the literary construction, and we understand how literature helps to establish it as a cultural value. In sum, it is literature not as a document to study the sea but as the myriad forms of language representing the sea that assigns a function that can be now-descriptive and now-structural and assumes the role of a protagonist or enacts the function of agency.

Finally, each discipline has its own philology, and each philology has its peculiarity and necessities, some rules. The first rule of our Mediterranean Philology should define a precise scope and range, to be considered a discipline.

We know that in the Carolingian Middle Ages, as an example of a precise moment in history, the sea is a “notion” without a real content since the nautical culture had died long before. One may think of the first verses of the *Chanson de Roland* in which we read:

Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes
 set anz tuz pleins ad estet en Espaigne:
 Tresqu'en la mer cunquist la tere altaigne.
(Chanson de Roland, I 1-3)

Here “la mer” remains a mysterious obstacle, a pure limit to the land beyond which men do not venture. But when we approach the sea in so many stories of the *Decameron* one sees that is a busy space with men crossing its water, for much legitimate or apparently legitimate business was also carried on at sea. A first rule that we may teach in our classrooms is that there are imaginary seas distinct from experience, but that the Mediterranean is, instead, a real sea. When we get closer to a medieval text that speaks about the sea, we have to distinguish if that sea is a real one or an imaginary, metaphorical sea. Call it the “Bjorn Larsson rule,” since he has drawn a sharp distinction between the two.

To read the sea from Dante to the Renaissance island books, the methodology adopted here consists of criteria that can serve as epistemological tools: space, maps (and borders), symbols, navigations, itineraries and crossings, time, a sort of an Alphabet that does not follow the order of the letters, but as in the nature of the sea, that is regulated by the winds, it oscillates like its waves.

Space

A rule that has strongly emerged from reading the sea in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, is the strong relation between the artistic representation of the sea and its geographic existence. The study of the sea as a literary space in geocritical terms lends itself to an exploration of this space.

Matvejevitć says about the Mediterranean that is not only geography, urging the literary study of the sea, but he also alerted us to consider that the image of the Mediterranean and the real Mediterranean do not coincide at all: in other words, we cannot separate the discourse on and about the Mediterranean from its geo-physical existence. Ivetic also talks about “The two seas”.

Once we put things in this way, it became vital to ask, whether this would be the case for all writers of the Middle Ages. First of all, of the three poets, only Petrarch had actually sailed, while the other two never put their feet on a boat or crossed the sea. Second, the study of the sea in Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio’s works – but also in the case of a writer like Fazio degli Uberti who in the fiction of the *Dittamondo* navigates around three continents – cannot be separated from the knowledge that they all shared about the newly born maps and nautical maps. The discipline of philology expects that we apply its principles and rules, but it also demands letting the text dictate which principles and rules we may use to make our research fruitful.

When Simenon enquires on what is the Mediterranean “The Mediterranean is...” he writes: “For many people, the sea is this: people in bathing suits on the beach, players in the casinos, fishermen in the harbours, men with a white cap

on the yacht, and far on the line of the horizon, a boat that is passing by. For those, the Mediterranean is a very vast sea, with imprecise borders where appears some vague point of reference" (Simenon 2019, 11–12).

We may see the color of the water, its warmth, and other qualities, but they are hardly significant literary elements, unless some special circumstances say so. Most likely we notice the novelty of space, so unrestrained and boundless. So, the notion of space is one that we must grasp since it is a category that comes to play almost inevitably in literary Mediterranean studies, since it reads differently from the mainland. Indeed Egidio Ivetic speaks of "Il grande racconto del Mediterraneo", always a different one to the Phoenicians, as well as to the Greeks, to "Land and Sea" in the chapter of *Archetypes*.

Our first task will be to abandon many conceptualizations including the *ápeiron* of the pre-Socratics, a definition that Aristotle provides in his *Physics* and the fascinating explanations of Gaston Bachelard or Maurice Blanchot that do not serve our purpose. In this essay, the Mediterranean is Dante's "major valley of water" *Par. IX 82* (Morosini 2019a, 65–87). Having said this, I realize that I have opened a set of new problems. To start with, it is a liquid space that one crosses while remaining immobile, that is, allowing a boat or a small bark to move us, as Aristotle said in the *De anima* (II 3, 413a8). In that immobility, however, many things may happen. Someone can exercise violence on those they travel with; there is no way out, no escape; it is not unusual that during the journey there are conversations, mutations of personality, or a loss of one's identity and other phenomena that are associated with solitude, waiting, or even the fear of never reaching the final harbor. It is a space that the senses cannot measure because the horizon is almost always uniform. This brings another epistemological category to mind, of the sea that separates or unites. Since it is a liquid world where borders cannot be traced, the borders at sea remain invisible.

The sea replaces the forest, and the novella genre abandons the obligation to concentrate on a unique protagonist; these are the two factors that seal the passage from the *matière de Bretagne*, Arthurian literature and the *chanson de geste*, to the urban world built around the Comune, so distinctly Italian, and becomes a privileged point of view from which to observe the coasts and thus define Italy in a moment when those writers did not have a sense of borders and a modern sense of national identity (Della Dora 2010, 1–15).

The correlation between geography and literature, leads to an exploration into the perception of the image of the world and where the sea stands in different civilization, like the Arab. How did they portray the sea? What was it for them?

A medieval map of the Mediterranean in the cosmographical treatise *Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes* (ms. Arab. C. 90, fols. 30b and 31a, Bodleian Library, London, late 12th – early 13th century, E. Savage-Smith and

Yossef Rapoport 2012) compiled by an anonymous author between AD 1020 and 1050, possibly in Fatimid Egypt, shows the Western (from the Strait of Gibraltar on the left, indicated by the red line), and the Eastern Mediterranean sparkled by islands: those on the Western Mediterranean are simply noted as *jazirah* (island), those in the Eastern Mediterranean are more detailed. Sicily and Cyprus are represented as big rectangles, since they had important and vivacious trade. Carlo Vecce, in the attempt to trace the routes that brought Caterina, Leonardo’s mother, as a slave from Circassia to Venice and then Florence, draws maps with words in his novel “*Il sorriso di Caterina. La madre di Leonardo*” (Vecce 2023), and shows how Venice did not need to colonize by imposing their culture. Paolino Veneto in his treatise *De regimine rectoris*, in Venitian dialect on Candia, modern Crete, brilliantly displays how Venice used to rule over its colonies (Morosini 2018, 161-208). Venice had neighborhood warehouses or little churches devoted to St. Mark, the many Venices, scattered around the Levant.

In Vecce’s novel the sea is a geocritical space of enquiry: as real as it is, it traces routes mapping slavery by following Caterina’s journey as a good, a merchandise in a world of trades in the Eastern Mediterranean. Study of slave-trade in the Mediterranean reveals how a geographic knowledge and understanding of the sea, the quality of the space, the changing perception of this body of water, including its relation with the land, possesses scholarly urgency for literary studies. “Shaped from without, as well as from within”, as Goethe would say, (Goethe 1995, 55; Moretti 2007, 57) a study of the sea as a space, in a literary text draws discursive cartographies that attend to be read.

Maps

Maps interest us here for cartographic literature. “There is a very simple question about literary maps: what exactly do they do? what do they do that cannot be done with words, that is; because if it can be done with words, then maps are superfluous. Take Bakhtin’s essay on the chronotope: it is the greatest study ever written on space and narrative, and it doesn’t have a single map. Carlo Dionisotti’s *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, the same. Raymond William’s the *Country and the City*, the same. Henri Lafon’s *Espaces romanesques du XVIII siècle...* Do maps add anything, to our knowledge of literature?” asks Franco Moretti (2007, 35).

There is a fine line between mapping and map-making as justly highlighted by the cartographer David Wood (1993, 50–60). I am interested in the artistic construction of the map in a literary text, as places that can be “read”. The “rhetorical power of maps” – as Wood calls it (Wood 2010, 4) – becomes the key to tracking what those writers projected in that map as argued in *Il mare salato*.

As a general rule, maps provide a measure of a distance from one harbor to another, from one shore to another. Thus, from this basic notion stems the other notion of space/time so crucial for the studies of the Mediterranean. The knight that seeks adventure in the forest, for example, does not have the sense of space of the sailor who navigates the sea, and the map of the Mediterranean of the myths in Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the pagan gods*, will reveal that one can map the sites of poetry as on a portolan, a map that also offers a cartography of civilization.

According to Revelli, Dante saw the Mediterranean and derived its descriptions (Revelli XXXX, 20–21, 24), from portolans and nautical maps; for Casella however, they were based on the geographic maps of Orosius. But one thing is sure: Dante knew the Mediterranean, its fundamental subdivisions, its coasts, its islands. The same goes for Boccaccio who dedicated a section to the seas and their names in his geographical treatise, something that in the *Decameron* and in the *Genealogy* proves to be a poet-cartographer who maps all the sites of the coasts of the Oriental and Western Mediterranean while crossing the sea, as Dante does, with his own name, Giovanni. Take Petrarch's *Itinerarium* which is a guide for his friend Guido who is set to leave from Genoa on a sea-voyage to the holy land: he maps the sites of Mediterranean civilizations as he mentions ancient and Christian monuments that Guido can see from the water, offering a new perspective, one that initiates from the water (see also Lucherini 2014, 197–220).

So to answer his own question about literary cartography and replying to the Italian geographer Cerreti, Moretti argues that while “Cerreti reduces space to extension. Where objects are analysed in terms of reciprocal positions and distances....whether they are close or far from each other or from something else”, specific locations *as such* did not seem that significant, if compared to the *relations* that the map had revealed among them (Moretti 1998).¹

Symbols: The Boat

The sea (re)presents the paradox of immobile movement. In the boat there are adventures, but one cannot escape. This rule alters the narrative notion that often expects a movement. The sea cannot represent a parenthesis in the narration where navigation creates a sort of dystopia, with a time, and a fixed space and

1 According to Claudio Cerreti (1998), cartography of the geographers owns more polysemy than Moretti who, instead, admits to mainly use diagram structures able to make evident some narrative phenomena otherwise imperceptibles.

with a tension. The sea offers the elements of unknown: the storms, the monsters, the pirates, the shipwrecks, the disappearance in its abyss. The sea flows, but as the trades in the Mediterranean represented in the *Decameron*, is beyond the control of even the most powerful men and boats, who are as vulnerable to storms as the weakest (see Landolfo and Salabaetto in *Decameron* 2.5 and 8.10). ² Also, navigation introduces the element of “alterity,” although this is shared also with those travels run on the land, but what is rather different is the speed of the transition from one culture to another through the Mediterranean. As in a beautiful page celebrating the Mediterranean, Boccaccio praises the invention of the boat since navigation facilitated the discovery of other cultures and their closeness to each other, which shows the differences and resemblances between habits and customs that justify the curiosity and the fear of the “other” at the same time (Boccaccio, *Geneal*, X Proem, 1–6). An illumination in *De proprietatibus rerum* powerfully conveys the introduction of a human element, by illustrating men navigating in a section that usually features only water [Figs. 1-2].

A 16th century map kept at the BnF of Paris and that I am currently studying, reminds scholars of the literary Mediterranean about the close relationship that Medieval literature established with cartography and nautical maps role, raising questions about the importance that navigation holds in a text, and in particular, how pertinent this information is in our understanding the role a study of “the sea of paper” as I call it. The uniqueness of this map privileges the boat, assuming the point of view of the surface of the sea, and from there addressing the attention to what the sea brought to mankind as they organize life into community, for the wellbeing of the cities. As in the two images I chose, [Figs.. 11-12], costal towers, men weighing anchor, and a gallow fully convey what could be called ‘a humanistic map’ of Marseille and Genova.

Dante fills his poem with maritime and nautical images, at times also standing for political or religious values, like the boat of Peter that represents the Church. The poem starts with the almost shipwrecked Pilgrim-Sailor, who successfully crosses with his ship, that is his poem, the Pillars of Hercules, where his Ulysses dies (Par. 2 1-6). Boccaccio in the *Decameron* narrates a human history of the sea as if he were on the boat, while with his own name Giovanni defends the truth of poetry by sailing in his *Genealogy*. Petrarch, instead, does not get on the boat and limits himself to telling Guido what to admire from the boat that from Genova takes him to the Holy Land. Silvestri in the fiction of the *De insulis* crosses rivers to describe islands of the world, and the first Renaissance Island Book, Cris-

2 A geo-philological reading of the Mediterranean in *Decam.* VIII 10 in R. Morosini, “The Merchant and the Siren”, 2018.

toforo Buondelmonti is seafaring on a real boat in the Aegean islands (Morosini 2023).

Boccaccio's periegesis with his own name, Giovanni, in *Genealogy of the pagan gods* and Petrarch's choice for a coast-to-coast celebration of the ancient and Christian past in the *Itinerarium* reveal how the invention of navigation ultimately suggests the portulan. In the *Genealogy*, every shore and site reached by Giovanni's boat is a pretext for accounting for the beginning and flourishing of civilization, when men, with their laboriousness and industry, invented professions, started navigating the sea, and established commerce, built cities, worked the land, and developed machinery. One of those places is the Mediterranean, the space the narrator as seafarer needs to cross to reach the sites where mythical events took place; it is also a mirror of human industry and ingenuity in its own right. Boccaccio opens Book X describing the benefits of this sea to mankind, in a beautiful page which praises the invention of the boat and the effects of navigation in the Mediterranean:

with God in his liberality so providing us with benefits, a great boon was obtained for mortals. What is to see, with divine light showing the way, boats, conceived by human genius and fabricated by artifice, now furrowing the waves with courage, now with a stretched sail driven by the force of the winds, on which every great cargo is carried? What is to think of the daring of those who first entrusted themselves to unknown waves and untried breezes? It makes one tremble. But such, although not always, was for the most part the faith or the fortune of these daring men as they ferried in a long journey – I will say carried not only along a course but in swift flight – gold and other metals to the inhabitants of the East, purple garments and spices, precious stones and ivory to the inhabitants of the West, exotic birds and balsam, woods unknown in our forests, gums and other saps of trees, and roots not familiar to every land, from which they seek medications and innumerable delights as much for sound as for sick bodies. Furthermore, what is not the least benefit for the whole of the human race, as an effect of these navigations of this sea, it has come to pass that the Cimber and the Celt from the opposite corners of the world sometimes know who the Arabs are, what the Red Sea is, and what saps the woods of Sheba exude; the Hyrcanian and the inhabitants of Tanais know the Atlantic Hesperides and even taste their golden apples; the cold Hyperborean and Sarmatian tread seething Ethiopia, the Nile, and pestilential Libya; so also the Spaniard and Moor are visited and visit Persians, Indians, and the Caucasus; and the northern islander from Thule treads the far shores of Ceylon. While they exchange their goods with each other, it happens that they marvel at not only their customs, laws, and traits, but nay, while one looks at another as if he is from another world and thinks that he is not circled by one and the same ocean, he mixes practices, shares trust through the exchange of merchandise, and joins in friendships. While they teach their own languages they also become acquainted with foreign ones. *And so it happens that those whom geographical distance had made strangers to one another are joined by navigation and made harmonious.* In addition there are also many other things which, if they are not so conspicuous to the observer, are perhaps more precious because of their continuous utility. The sea offers infinite benefits to the sailing boats of fishermen from which it happens that the sumptuous tables of the rich are adorned

with great and delicious fish and the poor are nourished by smaller ones. In addition, when it offers calm, herds from fertile lands, beasts of burden, grains, and whatever is beneficial for food are carried from one mainland to another. It provides baths to the strong and infirm, and it makes the tasteless strong with its salt; it moistens the adjacent lands everywhere, it fills channels with subterranean movement, from which we have springs and rivers, which unless the sea were not present to receive them, would wither in their channels with the worst plague among men. (X Preface, 1–5)

Boccaccio celebrates the sea as a privileged space narrating the efforts that the ancients put forth in organizing themselves into civic communities, acquiring for the first time awareness of oneself and of the “other,” and of other spaces and races. “Horror equidem est” (X Preface, 15) writes Boccaccio: “it makes one tremble” to think of all the benefits derived from the invention of the boat and the advantages of navigation: it reduced the geographical distance that had made strangers of others, fostered the exchange of goods and of medical remedies, brought “the marvel” of others’ customs and laws, the awareness of “another” world different from their own, and with it another language, the mixture of practices, shared trust through the exchange of merchandise, and friendships.

The same is shown in the Egyptian *Book of curiosities*. The theme of navigation, nautical and maritime symbols, as well as the image of the boat in the text, traces itineraries, shapes space, indicates real geographic routes and through crossings facilitates the mapping of the Mediterranean and its coasts. Maps stopped being a mediator between the earthly and the divine as in the T-O map to be the “visible speaking” of the earthly, and it does it through the presence of a boat and men. By means of the boat, writers map the Mediterranean.

Navigations

A boat, a harbor, a coastal city on the BnF map ms. Fr. 2794 invite us to rethink the constant motif of navigation in a literary texts, to go beyond the *topos* as explored by E. R. Curtius. The *topos* becomes a tool of mapping and cartographic investigation in a text whether in Dante’s *Comedy*, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and *Genealogy*, or Petrarch’s *Itinerarium to the Holy Land*.

Locating the Mediterranean in a literary text, contributes to see how it shifted the image of the world on the maps. To see why these changes detected on different maps are important for the impact that they had on the writers, I chose a couple of maps, to visibly show the shift from the Greeks, who put the coast of Asia Minor in the center of the world and in particular the port of Mileto, which was the major port of the Mediterranean, to the Christians and their T-O map where East and Asia are at the top and the circle of the land is surrounded by the

Ocean [see Fig. 3]. Africa and Europe are divided below the Mediterranean, the stem of the T, which extended from the bottom of the map nearly to the center, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and at the top of the stem of the T, the Black Sea and the Don River to the left (north) and the Nile to the right (south), together extended horizontally to form the crossbar of the T which marked the boundary of Asia. Jerusalem is located at or near the center, within a moral-religious dimension. The only point of reference was God judge and omnipotent, the Pantokrator that we see celebrated in the Byzantine golden ceiling, in the Hereford and Ebstorf maps both of the XIII Century (think about the fact that the Hereford map was used as an altarpiece).

On this map of the Psalter [Fig. 3], on the top there is Christ the Pantokrator who has in his hand a globe TO, in the East that was usually on top with Asia, we find a circular coin – in order to indicate the separation from the rest – in which you see the faces of Adam and Eve, at the center Jerusalem perfect and circular, and the southern stripe, the circle of the land surrounded by the Ocean is made of little check boxes, each hosting a member of a monster population: Sternocephalii are visible. “Strange people” live in remote areas, far from the religious center.

However, in the 14th century, there is a big shift in geography: the Mediterranean witnessed the emergence of new, more empirically based forms of cartography. Those portolan or nautical maps, of which some thirty survive from the fourteenth century accurately represented for the first time the coast and the ports of the Mediterranean and of the Black Sea, and also the Atlantic coasts of Europe, beyond the Straits of Cadiz. The *Carta Pisana* and the Genoese cartographer Pietro Vesconte’s portolans (1310–1330), are among the earliest to map the Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean, and Black Sea regions accurately [Figs. 5-6]. They depict detailed coastal outlines and coastal towns on their portolan charts. The fact that the coasts regularly followed by Mediterranean ships, Portugal, English Channel, the Bay of Biscay were drawn far more accurately than those seldom visited by sailors is an eloquent example of how nautical maps narrate the sites of human industry, and proves how navigation became the enabler of “connectivity” (Purcell-Horden, V) within the Mediterranean.

A big impact on this shift in the visual image of the Mediterranean came from Scholastic thought and Arab geography, where Arab cartographic tradition and Ptolemy’s *Geography*, which had been copied and annotated in Baghdad as of the 9th century, gain a peculiar place in literature integrating travel accounts, descriptions of the world, and philosophical considerations. Arab geography penetrated through Sicily in the West thanks to the geography of al-Idrīsī who was at the court of the Norman king Roger II of Sicily. In Al-Idrīsī’s map [Fig. 7], the inhabited world is surrounded by the circular ocean, but at the center there is Arabia,

the heart of the Muslim world. The Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean are at the periphery of each side of the Islam empire.

Considering that geography did not exist as a discipline in the XIV century, it is quite remarkable that Boccaccio specifies very clearly in the opening of his geographic treatise *De montibus*, that he conceived it to benefit both students of poetry and history, in order to help them understand the geographic allusions made by the ancient writers, and in chapter XIV of the *Genealogy*, dedicated to the role and function of poetry, he emphasizes the importance of learning geography: “to have in one’s memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains” (XIV Preface, 3). Transmission of the knowledge of the past goes along with geographical awareness. Medieval writers such as Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Fazio degli Uberti in his *Dittamondo*, and in particular historians like Paolino Veneto, all addressed in their works a desire and a need to provide a space to narrate human history and the useful inventions that marked civilization. The Venetian historian, in his universal chronicles, carefully locates anecdotes and history in geographical spaces, by drawing maps, including one of Rome and Italy.

One visible sign of this change is recorded by Fazio degli Uberti who in his journey on the three continents has Ptolemy first and then Solinus to accompany him in the journey, a sign of the shift occurring in the fourteenth century, from “geography” in the original Ptolemaic definition – that consists of the calculation of the coordinates of a certain number of places, based on astronomical observations and estimated distances, and of technical instructions for constructing from these a world map in geometrical projection – to a “Mathematical” field of study that is in fact born with geometry. See how Mathematicians, astronomers and geographers were portrayed by Raphael in the School of Athens discussing together while Ptolemy has the globe in his hand [Fig. 10].

In the light of these factors, we see in the fourteenth century a turn from iconographic to discursive cartography, where we can consider discourse as a type of mapping that stems from the desire for spaces, which is in turn generated from the desire to understand the world we live in. Ricardo Padron calls it “the spacious word” as he studies the relation between maps and cartographic literature (2004).

This makes the *Comedy* but also Boccaccio’s works, and especially the *Genealogy*, up to Petrarch’s *Itinerarium* and the Renaissance Island books, all pieces of cartographic literature. Thus, from the iconography of God the geometer, the architect of the Universe that creates the world with the compass, a symbol of God’s act of creation, as in this thirteenth century manuscript [Fig. 9], to Dante’s God as the poet-cartographer, the maker of the universe who creates spaces that may be seen

as “scattered pages”, from “the Book bound with Love” (*Par.* 33, 86-87) that is Wisdom [Fig. 10].³

The universe is the book written by the Maker and writers become the makers of space, conceiving the literary geography of real spaces. Not only Dante, but also Petrarch, who annotated Pomponius Mela’s *Geography* and introduced Boccaccio to that reading, was attuned to the epistemological and representational issues raised by mapping, no less than they were to those raised by writing, especially as regards to the relationship between artistic representation and truth. The geographic accuracy and the mapping program served, in fact, as a means to reinforce the poet’s truth claims.

Itineraries and Crossings

Two guiding criteria have been space and crossings. In the *Commedia*, the movement of those who travel has a moral value. Although a human seems to see it for the first time, it does not assume a sense of a conquering expedition, since it is his own “fatale andare”. That leaves to the pilgrim the constant surprise of the spectator. Also, the notion of crossing proved to be inadequate when applied to Dante, although there are many characters represented in movement from one place to another. The difference between Dante and Boccaccio in this Mediterranean perspective is that the crossings of Dante’s characters are known, since they belong to mythology, this is why for the *Commedia* I chose the “itineraries” as an epistemologic-spatial category instead of the “topo-cronography” of Giovanni Agnelli. These itineraries are traced on an accurate geographic map by the poet-cartographer who, through discursive crossings, maps his world and the world he lives in. Dante draws on historical memory to retrace these itineraries in order to map the Mediterranean, from Scylla and Charybdis to the Pillars of Hercules, to the Hellespont using the myths as *genii loci*, since they contribute to locating geographically the Mediterranean and its seas, or the interior world of the poet.

Also, another example is the statue of the old man that represents the world in *Inferno* 14. Dante locates it on the island of Crete “in mezzo mar” (v. 94), at the center of the Mediterranean, a choice that suggests what role the sea has in the human geography (Morosini 2020, 2021).

³ Also in the *Book of the Ladder of Muhammad*, God is represented even more specifically with a Pen in his hand as he creates the world, see more in Morosini, *Dante, il Profeta e il Libro*, 2018.

Crossing the sea is an activity reserved for men and shows a gendered sea. In a society so fully and directly involved in the making of money, “every desirable object becomes a commodity, takes on monetary value, like a beautiful woman; possession becomes an end in itself, justifying any means,” writes Ferrante (1992, 163)

In Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus* a number of legendary women or goddesses are presented crossing the sea. Thus, we see Io/Isis at the helm in order to fulfill her mission to teach the alphabet to the Egyptians, while in the humanistic perspective of the *Decameron*, external factors, God, the weather and everything else fails to impact the destiny of the women traveling through the sea. One example is Zinevra who resorts to dressing as a man and embarks to Alexandria of Egypt (II 9) to run away from the fury of her husband, or Costanza who seeks death in the Mediterranean after leaving Lipari, although she knows how to sail, and survives the sea and fully integrates in Tunisia (V 2); both take full charge of their lives, by learning Arabic and adopting local customs. But these are exceptions to what crossing the sea and transgressing, here understood in geocritical terms, (Morosini 2023a), borders – physical, social and gender borders – mean for the women of the *Decameron* such as Ephigenia in V 1 and the princess of Tunis (IV 4) (Morosini 2017, 65–111).

Time

The theme of time in a consideration about the sea is brought to our attention by the historical perspective of Braudel’s *long durée* that takes into account, before Purcell and Horden the human aspect of transhumance in the Oriental Mediterranean, in timeframe. Here we talk about time as a letter in the alphabet of the sea.

Time at sea is regulated by the course of the sun, as on the mainland, but the time of the sea is made of a parenthesis within earthly time. There is no such thing as a calendar, and time becomes a sentimental dimension: of nostalgia, as one moves away from the place of departure and the distance is measured in hours. This dilutes or restricts space and reduces it to a psychological measure. Two examples to give an idea of time at sea: Torello magically flies from Alexandria of Egypt to his Pavia on a bed thanks to the Sultan’s help, to avoid the sea, its dangers and its dilated time, since if he does not arrive before his wife marries somebody else, he will lose her. Boccaccio introduces the idea that to cross this maritime bridge means to experience the time of the crossing as it happens in Torello’s story (*Decam.* 9.10). Torello has experienced the sea’s unpredictability when his letter to the wife drowned with the Genoese returning from Acre, around Sicily; thus, his only choice to arrive on time to prevent his wife from marrying another man is the flying bed. The sea is a productive space for those who cross, it is an economic

opportunity, it is the place of departure for a passage. The second example is the sea as a “passage”, a space of crossing for the Crusades; it is Genoa from whence Torello goes to fight in Acre for the Holy Land; the coast is the place to return and measure if you have become rich or richer or possess merchandise that you really want. Then we have the time of the pilgrims who cross the sea, or the saints. Storms and dangers at sea decide the phases of a crossing that coincide with the phases leading to a miracle. Time does not stop at night either because journeys at sea continue during the night, while those on land are interrupted. Also, time ends when the boat touches land.

For ancient mariners, there are no holidays or festivities to accompany time as on the mainland, or the ringing of the church bells, and what counts is what Pascal Arnout calls “common sense geography” (Arnaud 2014, 39–68). The idea behind this is that medieval maps were informed by the “lower form” of geographic knowledge of sailors, but were adapted for a “higher geography” map, in other words sailors would not draw professional maps or use them. This map reflects the knowledge of mariners, as he mentions that he wrote down what he had heard from trustworthy sailors.

Egidio Ivetic points out to the four calendars of Sarajevo, to give an idea about the impact of the Mediterranean on the calendar and vice versa: the canonical calendar, the Julian orthodox, the Hebrew and the Muslim calendar, an evidence of the presence of four civilizations that face and interact on the Adriatic between the centuries XV–XVIII. Besides being a coastal border between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the Oriental Adriatic became the most western area when XVI century Ottoman Islam settled on the coasts of Dalmatia and Albania.

These are all elements that fully belong to the studies of the literary Mediterranean, and a manual of Mediterranean philology should be able to take them into account and evaluate them in depth. With this in mind, I have conducted a number of geo-philological readings of space to argue that a study of the constant presence of the nautical metaphor and the maritime theme invites us to consider the efforts of the writers to represent the sea in their works, almost obsessively, by means of their pen that like a boat traces routes, as poet-cartographers.

Locating and Mapping the Medieval Literary Mediterranean

A preliminary step in reading the Mediterranean has been locating the Mediterranean of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, by means of boats that trace itineraries. Locating, as Boccaccio does in the *Genealogy* as a seafarer on his boat, the places

in which the stories unfold, means to map those places and the stories. In fact, locating the “where,” contributes to assessing the role and the signifying function that the Mediterranean had in their writings (Morosini 2021). Location means mapping, because maps allow places to be located, where location is understood, according to the geographer Fred Lukermann, less as “an analytic, descriptive concept as it was for the classical geographers, than as a tool of criticism” (Lukermann 1961, 194). In these terms, the “rhetorical power of maps” – to quote Denis Wood again – becomes the key to tracking what those writers projected in that map, and the modifications that occurred in cultural history, in relation to what position the Mediterranean holds on the literary cartography of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

Alain Corbellari’s studies (Corbellari 2006, 105–113) have proved to be fundamental in providing the tools to explore the role of the sea in a literary text. Tackling questions related to the mutable role of the sea in the Biblical, Greek, Roman and Celtic traditions, towards a realistic sea with the rise of trades in the Mediterranean, Corbellari’s argument facilitates reading and mapping the sea as a literary space.

Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio all present themselves as sailors, but an allegorical poem such as the *Comedy*, which starts with the similes of the pilgrim-sailor almost shipwrecked and ends with the boat successfully sailing through the pillars of Hercules where Dante’s Ulysses failed (Morosini 2023c), requires different epistemological tools to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and Petrarcha’s *Itinerarium to the Holy Land* (1356–1357). A text like Boccaccio’s *Genealogy*, built around the navigation of Giovanni the seafarer that in the fiction of the treatise sails through the *mare magnum* of the fables of the ancients to the sites of the myths and defends their truth of poetry, further proves that a geo-philology of the sea as a literary and a geographic place, each time unique and peculiar, is essential, especially in the light of Dante’s *Ulysses*.

As discussed elsewhere (Morosini 2019 and 2020), Dante’s *Paradise* IX 82–93, offers a starting point for localizing the sea in theoretical-geographic terms.

This is absolutely new: think back to before Dante when the definition of Mediterranean as a “medium terre tenens” had been also adopted by Italian historiography to summarize the main features of the Mediterranean representation among those people living along its coasts: a uniform space, inhabited by similar cultures, when it came to their uses, habits, languages, religious beliefs, economic activities, political organization forms, and so on. “Mediterraneus” was not thought as an attempt to conceptualise that sea – like, for instance, in the *Phaedo* by Plato, where Socrates talked about a “pond” with frogs and ants living all around (Plato, *Phed.* 109b). The word “mediterraneus” began to be used according to its maritime meaning – namely “inner sea”, located “across lands”, in the *Collectanea rerum*

memorabilium by Solinus, referring to a part of the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder (Pliny asked himself where the “maria omnia interiora” came from; Solinus, after reformulating the words of Pliny, changed the sentence to “unde maria mediterranea caput tollant” (Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, III, 31; Solino, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, XVIII). Instead, Isidore used it as a noun for the Mediterranean as the “mare magnum”, namely that sea across Europe, Africa, and Asia.

To Folquet, the most Mediterranean of the poets, Dante reveals his effort to conceptualize the sea geographically as an interacting space, since a “location of a place is not completely defined for the geographer until it is described in relation to all other interacting places”. In other words, the location of the Mediterranean is established in relation to the “discordant shores” a specificity showing an affinity with the leading cartographer of his time, Pietro Vesconte, who for the first time empirically based a nautical chart of the Mediterranean within the mappa-mundi scheme.

Also, when Folquet says that the Mediterranean is “the widest expanse of water inside shores”, that is the largest valley of water between its opposing shores, Dante first locates and conceptualizes the sea with extreme precision like a geographer, but also in geopolitical terms, since he specifies that the river Magra, separates the Genoese from the Tuscan, not Genoa from Pisa. As Dante notes that the river separates nations, that is people belonging to the same city, but not the cities themselves, another set of considerations comes forward regarding the idea of citizenship that for a man of the Duecento and Trecento has to do with the municipal pride (Morosini, 2022), since Folquet claims to be a “dweller on that valley’s shore” (v. 88). In doing so, Dante makes Folquet say that he does not consider himself a Genoese or a Marseillais, but a citizen of the Mediterranean.

In saying that the Mediterranean is between discordant or opposing shores, Dante proposes an in-depth analysis of the capacity of the Mediterranean to link or divide people and cultures, thus inviting to consider borders. But how to define borders given the essential mobility of medieval text – Paul Zumthor brilliantly defined it as the “*mouvance*” (1992). The constant fluctuation of borderlands and frontiers, as David Abulafia justly pointed out in his introduction to the volume with Nora Berend titled *Medieval Frontiers*, poses another set of problems (Berend-Abulafia 2002).

When Dante offers this hybrid and mobile localization of Mediterranean culture, he demonstrates awareness also of the differences within this world (among its cultures and among its neighbors), not only due to their geographical and physical variety, but also the diversity of their populations and religions.

Petrarch with his pen in the fiction of the *Itinerarium* goes coast to coast recreating the sense of distances as the portolan does, but only on paper. In fact, he tells his friend Guido for whom he wrote the *Itinerarium* and who is leaving for the

Holy Land, that the pen narrates what the poet has seen from far but which Guido will see from up close in his boat. The sense of this distance is determined by the places, the ports of call where Petrarch sees monuments and landscapes of the ancient and Christian past he impresses in his memory, in a sea that is a “pure space” and without any movement. Even more so in the *Africa*, where the sea divides two empires, in canto VI, the clash of civilization is witnessed by the sea, from the water to the coast (Morosini 2020b, 359–369). The three monologues are three different moments in which the protagonists are in the middle of the sea, away from the coast. The sea creates a fluid border between Rome and Carthage, a mobile border that the outcome of the war may change or nullify.

Each mapped site, each coast indicates not only a geographic place, but in Henri Lefebvre’s terms (Lefebvre, 1974), a productive space for Giovanni the poet-sailor of the *Genealogy*, a work that has never been read from a maritime perspective (Morosini 2019b and 2021). It is a space that recounts human labor and ingenuity, thanks to the advantages brought by the sea with the invention of navigation.

It is always a geographic space that those poets describe like cartographers but with words (Wood-Fels 2008).

Boccaccio in his *Genealogy*, aimed at proving the truth of the ancient fables and poetry, never offers an image of a generic sea, but a sea with routes and well-known harbors, with precise geographic and anthropological details, as he maps a cartography of poetry. The same is true for Dante who frees the sea from its monsters and divinity, referring to such myths only to locate them geographically, as with Scylla and Charybdis, and for Petrarch’s *Itinerarium*, all three proving the Mediterranean as an heterotopic space, or M. Foucault’s “counterplace” (Foucault 1966; Crampton-Elden 2007).

It is through sailing that Giovanni maps places of the myth as he experiences poetry and geography as the art of unifying the various scattered parts of knowledge. The places reached by the boat of the poet-sailor of the *Genealogy* are not mythopoetic spaces. They do not produce the myths, but often take their name from the mythical event that took place in those spaces, sometimes even determining a craft.

As Boccaccio looks for “the philosophical *human where*” (Morosini 2019b, 22; Lukermann 1961, 194), he locates civilization on the Aegean islands where he travels twice in the fictio of the treatise. Another Florentine, the priest Cristoforo Buondelmonti sails for six years to the Aegean islands. Buondelmonti’s *Liber insularum Archipelagi* (1420) is the first Renaissance Island book, where he provides a description and a colorful map of each island. Apparently the goal is the same as Boccaccio to give unity to the scattered relics of the Greek past that risks shipwreck

if not rescued, but Buondelmonti's intention is to rescue antiquity from the threats of the Infidel Turk in the wake of the Fall of Constantinople (Morosini 2023b).

In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio maps the Mediterranean through crossings and like in Al-Idrisi's *Geography*, he describes countries, main cities, routes and frontiers, seas, rivers, and mountains, commenting on those maps while following the itineraries as a tour guide. He gives geographical information, but also historical, religious, economic, and commercial information like when he for the first time in literature brings a custom house, the one in Palermo, into a literary text in the story 8. 10. When adopting a Meditarranocentric economic and political perspective, the sea is not necessarily a space of conjunction between *ici et ailleurs*, from one shore to the other of the Mediterranean, from East to West, and from Islam to Christianity and vice versa.

While mapping the Mediterranean, the sea also functions albeit rarely as a place of conjunction and unification where conflicts are resolved, thus qualifying itself ultimately as the "third space" in Bhabha's terms (1994), an in-between space. Its uniqueness in the *Decameron* is to be a place of hybridity rather than of homogeneity. It is a space of dissent, which, thanks to its plurality and hybridity, is where Boccaccio can narrate the world of merchants and their ports of call, but also the darkest pages of the trade in women and slaves in the medieval Mediterranean.

Conclusions

So, to return to the question I asked at the beginning about how to read the sea in a literary text, I have tried an exercise of philological mapping of the Mediterranean, with the support of geocriticism. Inspired by the map kept in the BnF of Paris, I first located the sea as a space and from Dante to the Renaissance island books the poets proved to be also cartographers as they share discursive maps that convey a realistic view of a sea that is geographically located, also made of meaningful detail of a lively, and lived, human space.

Also, thanks to the geocritical approach, the relations between space, place, mapping, and literature contribute to revealing the paratextual role of the map as an organizing principle of narrative and its anthropological interrelation with histories of people and places where place is here understood as a special ensemble. In this regard, Lukermann justly observes that "the place has a history and a meaning. It incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. It gives the perspective of the people who have given meaning to it" (Lukermann 1964, 170). So, what does the rhetorical power of Dante's, Boccaccio's, and Petrarch's maps tell us and how does this help towards a poetic of Mediterranean literature?

The advantage of reading maps or cartographic literature is to show that to “observe” with the mariner’s view, or in Abulafia’s terms with those who dipped their feet in the sea, for a geo-poetry (A. D’Ascenzo 2015).

Our poet-cartographers bring about a discursive map that narrates the geographic awareness of the poets and their desire of space, locating the Mediterranean in its relation with the story of men, trades, and alas slavery. When Magone who is dying and will die, when his boat is around Sardinia, Petrarch writes, “He said this and his spirit, lifted free in the air so to see from above and at a similar distance Rome and Carthage”. Here is the modern message where Petrarch overcomes his own idea of a sea that divides, when one can see it astronaut-like at a similar distance one from the other. Dante also assumes the astronaut’s point of view as he looks down at earth from Paradise, and encompasses it within the geo-literary perimeter of the Oriental and Western Mediterranean, between the strait of Gibraltar and Asia Minor (*Par. XXVII* 79–87).

This is a revolutionary moment for Mediterranean literature, especially if one thinks of Larsson, who is skeptical about the sea as a privileged source of creative inspiration, as the pilgrim-sailor assigns the privileged duty to describe the earth and identify its limits, to the poet Dante himself. This time the pilgrim sees with his own eyes how that “major valley of water” and its coasts are the representative space of earth. In doing so he let the limits of the Mediterranean coincide with those of the earth, through two myths, without sacrificing the geographic realism of his description: on one side “his” Ulysses that irrationally tested the “folle volo” through the Strait of Gibraltar, and on the other, on the coast of Phoenicia where Jove kidnapped Europa to indicate Asia Minor (*Metam. II*, 832–875), both pointing at two literary travelers of the Mediterranean, and one being a forced traveler like Europa.

In doing so Dante celebrates himself as the first poet who described and localized geographically that sea that from Orient to Occident, seen from above, features itself as a space of crossings, that from Cádiz to Phoenicia and Crete, at its center, traces the routes of the maps of the Mediterranean and gives unity to its “discordant shores”.

Finally, Dante’s astronaut looks from above to the earth, Boccaccio’s description of the advantages brought by the sea in the *Genealogy*, and Petrarca’s privileged look of the world from the water show their attempts to frame or better “encompass” the Mediterranean. *To encompass* is a verb that derives from the Latin *in*, that means “inside”, and from *compass* that is “to surround”, “to contain” “to wrap”, “to enclose through steps” (*com-passare*), as beautifully exposed by Gavin Francis (2020, 5). Like in the ms. Fr. 2794, the map stopped being a mediator between the earthly and the divine as in the T-O map to be the “visible speaking” of the earthly, and it does it through the presence of a boat and men.

The adjective ‘dolce’ that Dante chooses for the burden carried by Jove successfully conveys, with delicate irony, the entire notion of the sea as a space that narrates human history. This is the advantage of a geocritical Mediterranean philology, that is the study of the sea as a literary space : to embark on a study of the geographic poetic through the sea of myths that is the same as the sea of men, the *mare historiarum*, the stories of men that is coterminous with *History* of civilization that the poets-cartographers Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio locate and map in their works. Mapping the sea in a literary text contributes to conceptualizing and locating a culture in a fluid and hybrid middle. From the *pontos apeiritos* of the Oriental Mediterranean, “the sea without borders”, to the *peripheries* of the Western Mediterranean, the discursive of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Buondelmonti, as the artist of the *Decameron* preciously illustrates [Fig. 13] connects, through navigation, the “opposing shores”. Ultimately, a study of the geographic poetic of the sea, is an invitation to explore the power of writing cartography and mapping the literary Mediterranean. Those writers-seafarers, with their boats, that is their pen, offer a portrait in movement of a civilization and its sea. Sailing through the archives of a sea of paper.



Fig. 1: “Cy commence le XIII^e livre de l’eaue et de ses differances et de son ournament”: *Water and the Sea*, in Barthélemy l’Anglais, *De proprietatibus rerum*, (trad. Jean de Corbichon), ms. Fr. 22534, fol. 167v, 1st quarter 15th Century, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 2: *Water or....the invention of navigation*, in Barthélemy l’Anglais, *De proprietatibus rerum* (trad. Jean de Corbichon), ms. Fr. 22534, fol. 184, 1st quarter 15th Century, BnF, Paris.

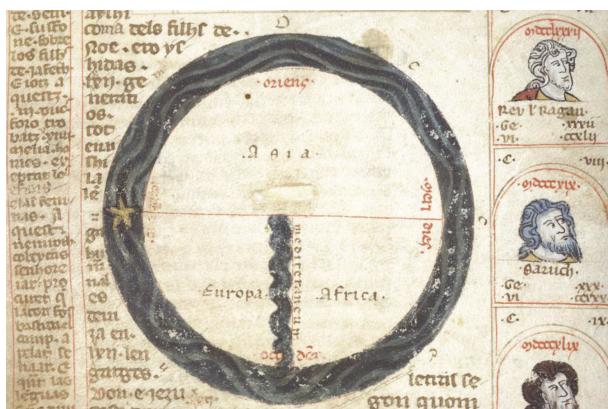


Fig. 3: T-O Map. In *Abbreviamen de las Estorias* or *Chronologia magna*, Paulino Veneto, ms. Eg.1500, fol. 3v, London, British Library.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> CC-BY Licence.



Fig. 4: *Psalter World map*, 13th century, London, British Library, ms. 28681, London.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> CC-BY Licence.

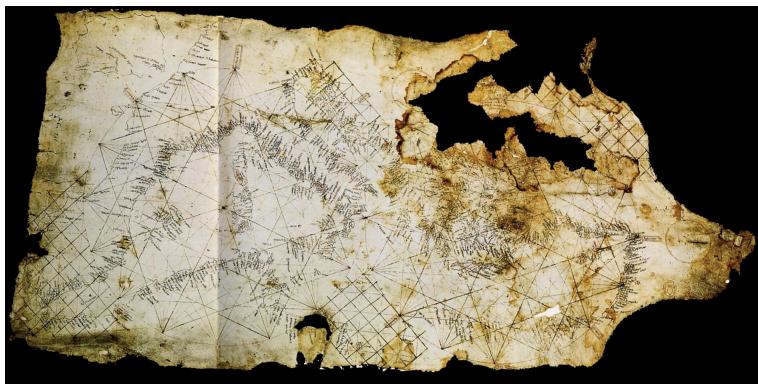


Fig. 5: *Carta pisana* (nautical chart, end of 13th Century ca.) BAF, Paris.

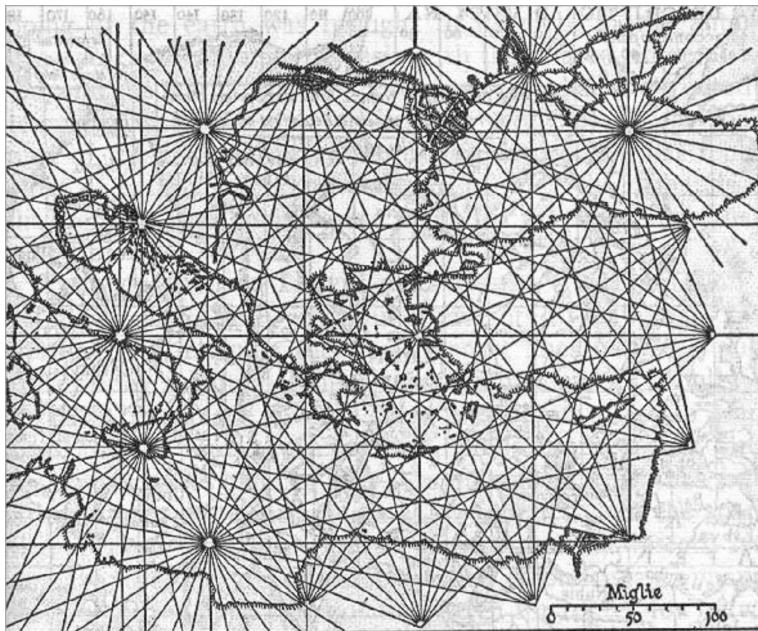


Fig.6: Pietro Vesconte's 1311 portolan of the eastern Mediterranean, the first signed portolan chart, Archivio di Stato, Florence.



Fig. 7: The Mediterranean at the center. *Map of the World* by Al-Idrisi (repr. 1456).



Fig. 8: Raffaello, *Astronomers, Mathematicians and Geographers* (NB Ptolomey with the globe), *Scuola d'Atene*, 1510, Stanza della Segnatura, Città del Vaticano.



Fig. 9: *God the Geometer*, in Guyart des Moulins, *Bible Historiale*, ms. Fr. 3, fol. 3v, BnF, Paris. 14th Century.



Fig. 10: *God the Poet writes the Book of the Universe*, in *Image du Monde* attributed to Gautier de Metz, ms. Harley 334, fol. 1, II quarter of 15th Century, British Library, London.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> CC-BY Licence.



Fig. 11: Genova, in *Description des îles et des côtes de la Méditerranée*, ms. Fr. 2794, fol. 11, 16th, Century, France, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 12: A coast of France: Men weighing anchor, in *Description des îles et des côtes de la Méditerranée*, ms. Fr. 2794, fol. 7v, 16th, Century, France, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 13: *The boat and crossings*, in *Decameron*, trad. Laurent de Premierfait, ms. Fr. 239, fol. 145v, Century, France, 15th century, BnF, Paris.

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Verena Ebermeier and Jonas Hock (University of Regensburg)

Concepts of Mediterranean Islandness from Ancient to Early Modern Times: A Philological Approach

Abstract: Islands have shaped literary forms just as those literary forms have structured our access to the specific spatiality of islands. This mediation happens via the figural, the trope; thus, representations of islands in literary texts are first of all to be considered as figures that reconfigure the topological space in a tropological way. This reconfiguration depends on historical and geographical conditions. The specificity of the Mediterranean island cannot be a supra-temporal essence, but only a characteristic or a bundle of characteristics that becomes visible through contrasts with other islands or literatures. There is no such thing as a single key concept of literary Mediterranean islandness. This paper does not delineate a literary history of the Mediterranean islands, nor does it claim to develop a finely grained matrix of analysis applicable to any literary example that touches on islands and the Mediterranean. In a necessarily superficial journey through certain parts of the history of literature, focusing on the period from ancient to early modern times, the paper's aim is to detect phenomena that repeat. Departing from these phenomena, more general concepts are approached. In this respect, the contribution is a proposal for reflecting on the island as a category in the literature of and on the Mediterranean.

1 Introduction

The border between land and sea does not correspond to the demarcation of cultural and linguistic realities, and it is often in a conflictual relationship with the drawing of political boundaries. What does this mean for the literary dimension of Mediterranean islandness? This paper does not delineate a literary history of the Mediterranean islands, nor does it claim to develop a finely grained matrix of analysis applicable to any literary example that touches on islands and the Mediterranean. In a necessarily superficial journey through certain parts of the history of literature, focusing on the period from ancient to early modern times, our aim is rather to detect phenomena that repeat. Departing from these phenomena, we seek to approach more general concepts that will be both a starting point for future detailed studies and useful for their critical review, refinement, and further development. We start with some key concepts of island studies which are claimed

to be highly generalizable without being sensitive to the specifics of macroregions such as the Mediterranean. The subsequent journey through literary history, in which these terms are repeatedly confronted with island phenomena found in literature, traces a necessarily narrowing and excluding perspective, as we must limit ourselves to a choice of literary works found within certain languages and epochs – and in so doing we relegate the late-modern period to the outlooks chapter. The most glaring and immediately apparent gap is due to our decidedly European perspective: there are also perspectives ‘from the southern shore’ that future, fully developed Mediterranean literary studies should explore in detail. In this respect, our contribution is first and foremost a proposal for reflecting on the island as a category in the literature of and on the Mediterranean.¹

In a program-defining article, the leading island-studies scholar, Godfrey Baldacchino (2006, 6), asserts that there are two features that “propel islands as sites of innovative conceptualizations.” The first is that “islands suggest themselves as *tabulae rasae*” (5) and the second is that they are very often credited with a certain peripherality. These two debatable features would thus need to be incorporated into the definition of islandness. While an island can be defined simply as “a piece of land completely surrounded by water” (*OED*, cited in Royle and Brinklow 2018, 4), “islandness” is much more difficult to define. According to Baldacchino (2004, 278), “[i]slandness is an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways.” Pete Hay (2006, 20) denotes a differential aspect key to the definition: “Whatever islandness is, it seems likely to be quite different for islands that are unambiguously small as against those that are not.” In the recent *Handbook of Island Studies*, Royle and Brinklow (2018, 11) opt for a promising, more descriptive approach: “Islandness is meant to embody the essence of island living, the attributes that make an island what it fundamentally is, and which it has by necessity, without which it loses its identity.” From a global perspective, the main characteristic of islandness would thus be the “insider/outsider dynamic” (12).

In his seminal article, Hay avoids specifying single key features. Instead, his phenomenological approach depicts dichotomies that, precisely because of their radical simplification, will serve for us as a useful starting point. The first of these opposing poles is that of vulnerability and resilience, “[p]erhaps the most contested faultline within island studies,” as Hay (2006, 21) suggests. Whether island territories are conceived as rather vulnerable or resilient depends directly

¹ We refer to the Mediterranean as a broadly geographical – and imaginary – macro-region and deliberately avoid the term ‘Mediterranity’, not least because the extensive debates in anthropology and historical studies concerning specifics or uniformity of the Mediterranean cannot be re-traced here.

on their accessibility. The second opposition consists therefore of whether islands are characterized mostly by connectedness or by isolation.

In the space between connectedness and isolation, resilience, and vulnerability, where might one find the literary dimension? Hay brings this up by way of metaphor, via the “island trope” or “island abstraction”, as he calls it. He distinguishes two different basic tropes: one that links the island to ideological discourses of radical individualism (as in the Robinson Crusoe tradition), while the other is quite the opposite, based on a wholesome relationship between the individual and a community, conceived as organic and linked naturally to the island (such as utopian islands). The specific form of these island tropes consists of “the island as fortress, heroically protecting the pure and the noble” on the one hand and “a symbol for concentrated evil” (Hay 2006, 27) on the other hand – and so basically as “paradise” or “prison” (Royle and Brinklow 2018, 16). Hay intrinsically cultivates a rather critical view of the island metaphor, considering that “[t]he island itself is seen to be a post-colonial trope, one traceable to Eurocentric assumptions of dominance.” His radical conclusion is that:

Island metaphors not only wrongly represent the politics of island identity as conservative, then, they also render irrelevant the realness of island lives. [...] They are continental, as well as colonial, constructions (Hay 2006, 28, 30).

Highlighting the opposition between island and continent, Hay takes a normative position and opines, in our opinion, a poorly differentiated view on the relationship between language and reality. It may be true that “[t]raditional island scholarship tends to discuss islands as tropes for a set of preconceived and fixed meanings (such as isolation, imprisonment, paradise, remoteness, etc.)” (Graziadei et al. 2017, 239). However, our focus here is on precisely how these meanings become fixed, and on the specificity of literary discourse within this process. We do not think that a specificity attributed to the cultural and historical dimension can be refused to non-Mediterranean islands, but it is obvious that the Mediterranean is a particular palimpsestic space and that the various islands and island phenomena can sometimes be seen as metaphors, standing for a more or less fixed signification; sometimes as metonymies, and often as antonomasias woven into the narrative and connected with the geographical space as well as with the intertextual space. In this sense, every Mediterranean island is an “île palimpseste” (Carile 2009, 23).

2 Mediterranean Island Travels – Paradigms of Travel?

The voyager most famous for traveling around the Mediterranean island region is Ulysses – a hero of the Trojan War, whom Homer sends on an arduous journey home to the island of Ithaca in his epic poem *Odyssey* from the eighth or seventh century BC. The journey takes a detour via the island of Kirke, the island of Polyphemus, and to Ogygia, the island of Calypso. The epithet of the enduring, *πολύτλας δῖος Οδυσσεύς* (XXIV, 537), shows that Ulysses becomes in the course of the journey more and more of a sufferer (Grethlein 2017, 105), while also revealing the physical journey to be a philosophically encoded narrative of a journey through life that is associatively linked to the Mediterranean. The significance of the events that befall Troy and those islands, which oscillate between reality and myth, remains relevant beyond antiquity and its epics of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid* for the Middle Ages – since quite a few dynasties include themselves in the genealogy of these heroes. The idea of (life) travel also remains topical in its *interpretatio christiana*. Homer's hero thus defines the cartographic, exploratory, and literary view of travel for centuries – and not just in the Mediterranean. Along with military expeditions, pilgrimages, trade journeys, messenger journeys, political journeys, and educational journeys,² life travel and Ulysses continue to be constitutive.

2.1 Navigation and Narration – the Possibilities and Limits of Travel in the Mediterranean Sea

The influence of antiquity on the central development processes of cartography is clear. Initially, knowledge of exact coastlines was primarily reserved for seafarers themselves (Schneider 2018, 38) who made notes that drew on their expertise.³ Based on ancient and also increasingly medieval coastal descriptions named *periploi* (Edson et al. 2011, 61), the spread of the compass and developments in ship-

² On the different types of travel, see Novoa Portela (2008, 159–195); Deluz (2008, 101–125); Reichert (2008a, 197–231).

³ Unlike in antiquity, written sailing instructions could only be found from the late Middle Ages onwards, since helmsmen did not necessarily have literacy skills. The basis for orientation lay in spatial memory and oral reports of experience. Thus, parts of Icelandic sagas can be understood as sailing instructions, as can be assumed of, for instance, the location of the island of Hennö near Bergen (Ohler 1991, 66–67; Ash 2007, 511).

building technology,⁴ portolan maps were created – the oldest having been documented in the thirteenth century. The maps offered a visualization of coastal descriptions (Horst 2012, 28), and they represented the sea as a fabric, *marteloio* (Reichert 2013, 102). However, interest was initially directed at a north-south gradient in areas close to one's own experience. This focus existed not least due to an anti-Nordic prejudice that has at times been detectable since antiquity and because of a contrasting emphasis on the relevance of central and southern Europe by classical authors such as Tacitus (Bremer 2008, 849). Also, the importance of the Mediterranean as a transport route required precise documentation of southern European areas – of the Mediterranean Atlantic, the waters beyond the Strait of Gibraltar.⁵ That caused a lack of knowledge and accuracy in relation to the north (Reichert 2013, 103), and led to its imaginative charges (Wunderli 1993, 2).

The connotative relevance of antiquity is revealed in the designation of limits to the accessible world, the Mediterranean, as the “Pillars of Hercules” (Edson et al. 2011, 72), as well as in references to ancient travelers in new nautical maps and genres. Closely related to the emergence of the maps particularly in the fifteenth century is an exemplifying view of islands (Reichert 2013, 103) in the form of the *Isolarii* – printed nautical charts that focus on individual islands (Barber 2006, 62).⁶ The *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* by the Florentine humanist Cristoforo Buondelmonti, whose own travels retrace the paths of Ulysses and Helen, introduces the reader to the journeys of the heroes as well as to the Aegean and the Ionian Sea (Reichert 2013, 103–105) – a region eminently important for the worldview and self-image of the fifteenth century (Reichert 2013, 105). The genre of the island book, *insularium*, was developed on this basis and remained of interest until the seventeenth century. This also led to the consideration of other areas (Reichert 2013, 106). Cartographic thinking in and with islands – also beyond the Mediterranean – is additionally visible in the fact that islands are inserted to secure a cartographer's copyright or for the self-stylization of supposed discoverers (Brooke-Hitching 2017, 9–11).

⁴ In particular, the hulk and cog types of ships were used in the Mediterranean for transport purposes. The Middle Ages took up and surpassed ancient technology by constructing robust ships to sail the Atlantic (Ohler 1991, 63–64).

⁵ On the relevance of Italian mariners regarding the exploration of those areas see Reichert (2013, 103).

⁶ On the connections between portolans and island books, see Harvey (1987, 283).

2.2 Ulysses's Legacy? Projections of Travel and Space

Medieval literature also inherited the legacy of the *Odyssey* and the journey of life. The meaning of Ulysses as *homo viator* as well as a journey that converts into knowledge retains a central relevance in Neoplatonism, in Plotinus and Augustine. Thus, in an *imitatio* of Ulysses, one is urged to recognize the potential phases of the soul's inner journeying home, and not to let oneself be distracted by the siren songs of the body (Fox 2017, 280–281). Recoded in Christian terms, however, the journey of life undergoes a modification as a return home to God. Since the tactical game of the ancient deities – who punish the long-suffering traveler with adversity precisely in the supposed tangibility of the destination – is countered in varying degrees of intensity by the protective hand of divine grace, the traveler is also able to venture out of the Mediterranean context into the unknown by placing their trust in God.⁷

In Konrad's von Würzburg *Trojanerkrieg*, from 1278 to 1287, a connection between physical and cognitive travel is hinted at in the considerations of Thetis, the goddess of the sea, who is looking for a safe place far away from war for her son Achilles. She translates Achilles's potential journey into her discursive thought process, in which she breaks away from mainland-centered thinking in the stages of Thrace, Macedonia, and the islands of Lemnos, Delos, and Skyros. Konrad also challenges his readers to embark on a journey of literary reception, cognitively connecting the island journeys assigned to each central hero and noting the consequences for their own life journeys (Ebermeier 2019).

A projection of the *Odyssey* into other spaces, linking the idea of the island in the West with the semantics of paradise, is shown in the saint's legend *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis* from the ninth or tenth century and its Middle German version that draws a parallel (Wagner 2011, 268) – the *Reise-Fassung* of the twelfth century. Both works send Brendan as an 'Irish Ulysses' (Semmler 1993, 104) on a *peregrinatio*, on a search for the *terra repromotionis sanctorum* away from the Mediterranean context, but they do not wrestle him away from its connotation. The combination of "elements of a saint's life, a marvellous sea voyage and an allegorical journey through life" (Strijbosch 2006, 1) unites ancient and oriental narrative concepts,⁸ Irish travel stories and Nordic thematic traditions (Boyer 1989, 37–44). Brendan's odyssey under the protection of God reveals in Ireland a space that is not only geographically, but also politically and culturally located on the periph-

⁷ A boldness that Dante's Ulysses had committed himself, but which ended neither with homecoming nor discovery, but shipwreck, as he tells in the *Divine Comedy* (canto 26).

⁸ On the interplay of oriental and ancient narrative traditions, see Kühn (2008, 113).

ery of the Christian world from the perspective of southern and central Europe, including England (Reichert 2001, 101). This space becomes tangible due to the concrete and familiar Christian coding of the destination.

The tension between reality and myth (Wunderli 1993, 1) remains relevant beyond the early and High Middle Ages, and so a projection of some facets of the *Odyssey* into other spaces can be seen in the voyages of discovery in later centuries. Thus, the work entitled *Columbus's Letter on the First Voyage* – written in the tradition of late-medieval travel literature, translated many times and printed in 1494 – includes versions that form the hermeneutical starting point for the European reception of Columbus's voyages (Wagner 2011, 265–266), and it also reveals a connection between reality and myth. In succession to the saint, Columbus seeks the earthly paradise (Grimm 1995, 73–113) and tends to transfer the corresponding semantics of salvation onto the encountered islands (Wagner 2011, 268). Columbus's self-image as a geographer and actor in salvation history (Watts 1985, 73–102) leads to the pragmatic exploration of the entire globe in a religious context. This represents the apocalyptic prerequisite for the Parousia of Christ, the premise for the realization of the biblical claim to the universality of faith (Wagner 2011, 269; Wehle 1995, 185) – the voyage of discovery becomes a journey home to God. Islands are thus associated with a paradisiacal potential and conceived as spatial forms to be discovered and accessed.

2.3 A Departure from the Mediterranean – A Change of Perspective

While literary characters' island journeys in the Mediterranean are not infrequently coded as journeys based on cognition from a mainland-centered perspective, for Mediterranean islanders, economic aspects are often the motivation for a departure on a long journey. A *homo viator* who undertakes a life journey and requires reflection, is juxtaposed with a *homo economicus* who has a pragmatic focus on their aims. Thus, abstract, cognitive travel to surveyable island locations is at odds with concrete, pragmatically intended travel to a vast mainland. This internal view of Mediterranean islands, and the shift in perspective of non-Mediterranean authors, colors the island connotation with a tendency toward mainland-associated familiarity and turns islands into hybrid constructs of the foreign and the everyday.

Thus, *Fortunatus*, as one of the first prose novels written in German by an anonymous author and without a literary model, was published in print in 1509. It presents Cyprus as *fruchtbar aller handen edler natürlicher früchten* (387, 22) (i. e., of natural abundance like a *locus amoenus*). From an outside perspective, Cy-

prus functions as a stop on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, while the internal perspective focuses on the economic fate of Fortunatus, who – because of the plight of his parents – leaves the island to travel to places such as Flanders and England. The pursuit of prosperity turns out to be a perverted odyssey that puts the return home to one's self in opposition to an expedition to seek out material things and prestige. Dangerous sea voyages recede into the background.

The *Odyssey* shifts completely into everyday contexts in its humorous presentation. Horace's *Satire 2.5* and medieval works conceived as a response to the reception of Roman satirists, such as the eleventh- and twelfth-century *Nummus*-satire, probably written by Thierry of St. Trond (Schmitz 2008, 63–64), as well as the twelfth-century poem *Post rabiem rixe* by Hugh Primas, outline Ithaca as a place of "trivial reality" (Schmitz 2008, 62) from which the returning Ulysses strives to escape. In the early modern period, the geographical decentering is reinforced. The attractive quality of eccentric spaces, which in the 'age of discoveries' are increasingly imagined as islands beyond the 'familiar' Mediterranean area, leaves its mark on some of the most well-known narrative works of the Romance languages. The protagonists in these travel stories will not travel across the Mediterranean. Mediterranean islands are integrated alongside Atlantic, Indian, unlocatable, and fantastic islands in a global spatial order that makes the Mediterranean recede behind the primacy of the exotic.

This trend is apparent in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516/32) although it is not a travel narrative in the strict sense. The multiplication of plot lines in this epic poem results in a multiplication of journeys, travelers, and travel routes. This tendency is reinforced by a new means of transportation: a flying horse called a hippocryph that makes vertical locomotion possible. The scope of the plot remains Mediterranean – due to the basic opposition between Christians and Saracens. Regarding islands in the poem, two stand out: the Isola di Alcina and Lipadusa (Lampedusa). The former is prototypical of a utopian and fantastical island home to a sorceress, modeled on Circe's Aiaia but of vague location, accessible only by hippocryph (Klettke 2017). The second, Lampedusa, is the stage for the final duel between the Saracens and the Christian paladins. Ariosto also integrates into his narrative a debate about the likelihood that this battle could have taken place on Lampedusa: a certain Federico Fulgoso, who knows the island from his own experience, doubts that the rugged rocky island could have been the scene of a clash on horseback. Ariosto then justifies his view by stating in the text that the battle site was later altered by an earthquake: "Un sasso che 'l tremuoto aperse, / le cadde sopra, e tutta la copperse" (XLII, 21). This would explain the actual appearance of the island and thus does not refute his narrative. In *Orlando furioso*, even those islands modeled after Homeric antetypes are no longer necessarily lo-

cated in the Mediterranean. In addition, it is remarkable that the discrepancy between literary representation and topological reality is discussed in the text itself.

François Rabelais's *Quart livre* (1548/1552) is not a Mediterranean oeuvre in itself, but here too does the tension between real Mediterranean islands and fantastic island spaces become tangible. In the first edition from 1548, Rabelais referred to himself as the "calloier des îles Hyères," i. e., as a Greek monk from the Hyères archipelago off the Côte d'Azur. In the 1552 edition, this reference disappeared, probably because the mention of the islands had become politically explosive after they had gained geostrategic importance. Nevertheless, the ephemeral reference suggests that the author may have spent some time on this archipelago, which would also explain the strong Mediterranean coloration of his nautical vocabulary (Demonet 2012). The voyage route that the main character Pantagruel undertakes on several ships, while searching for the oracle of the divine bottle, Bacbuc, is vaguely northward. Of greater relevance than the geographical location of the itinerary is its 'island-hopping' nature: the islands are lined up in an archipelago-like but paratactic manner; each of them offers a new, self-contained micronarrative of its own (Lestringant 1988, 249). According to Demonet (2012), the îles Hyères – and possibly their cartographic representation – might have been the model for this island order. The voyage is a journey into open waters that reaches no destination, but it enacts the potential connectedness of the islands by linking 'their' micronarratives, which would have otherwise remained isolated, to form a travel tale.

While Rabelais takes his characters to the Far North and from there into fantasy, Miguel de Cervantes's *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617) begins in the northern seas, between Greenland, Iceland, and Denmark, among a similar chain of islands. Again, the paratactic archipelago supports an elliptical narrative, as each island potentially comes up with a new micronarrative. Clearly, Cervantes chooses northern Europe as an adventurous setting for the beginning of the novel, because it is largely beyond the knowledge of his readership and thus offers more fictional scope without the author having to resort to the fantastic. The Mediterranean is still the frame of reference, with Rome the destination. The voyage correlates with a literary evolution: "As the novel journeys southward, it evolves from ancient chronicle to medieval romance to premodern novel; it becomes more realistic" (Moore 2013, 20). Mediterranean islands now seem to have become uninteresting to the novel's plot. They serve merely as a point of comparison – Friesland for example is "tan grande como Sicilia" (Cervantes 1997 [1617], 721).

Baltasar Gracián's *El Criticón* (1651–1657) also begins on eccentric insular ground: after a shipwreck, Critilio is stranded on the island of St. Helena, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, where he meets Andrenio, who lives in the state of nature. After managing to leave St. Helena, the two cross Europe on an educational and adventurous pilgrimage, with their route largely coinciding with that of

Persiles, including their destination of Rome. In this allegorical life journey, Mediterranean islands have become merely illustrative material, such as when Andreño learns to read the islands from Homer's *Odyssey* as allegories for the dangers of Spanish court life (chapter 11: "El golfo cortesano."). This example shows that a reduction in external action is more than compensated for by a journey to find oneself, or by an educational journey with the aim of learning how to decipher the world. Here, the *homo viator* model is evident. The narrative begins and ends on an island. The destination of the journey is the island of Immortality: it lies in a sea of ink that the two heroes cross in a ship made of book covers. The journey of life, coded in terms of salvation history, thus leads from the real island on the periphery between the Old and the New World to the transcendent island of Immortality set in the sea of *fama*, filled with ink in which the most famous writers bathe their pens – "tinta de los famosos escritores que en ella bañan sus plumas" (Gracián ¹⁰2007, 790). Here, the pure island metaphor stands not for another island, but for the immortality of everything written (and to be written): for a kind of hypertrophic literary palimpsest.

3 In Search of the Utopian – A Journey Beyond the Mediterranean?

Although islands that can be surveyed (Moser 2005, 409) and that initially appear to be flexibly located seem particularly suited to utopian and dystopian thematizations, it is precisely the utopias that are considered paradigmatic from today's perspective – Atlantis and Utopia – that are also located far from the Mediterranean. Mediterranean-associated imaginaries remain partially significant, but their spatial context is of decreasing relevance, especially as literature often prioritizes an island space itself over its local features, foregoing the tradition of travel encodings. Further, an island's referentiality is replaced by its functional use as a projective foil – an implication it shares with other spatial forms, such as tree gardens or *minne* (love) grottos beyond the Mediterranean, since these can also become a type of nonplace. The question of the relevance of the Mediterranean in a context of increasing empiricism is tied to the quality of the utopia or idyllic being staged as natural, salvation-historical, or political.

3.1 Mediterranean Islands as Ambiguous Spaces and Hints of the Utopian Beyond the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean islands, which are increasingly integrated into travelers' experiences from the late Middle Ages onwards, hint at the idyllic in their flora and fauna. However, this is shifted into a comparison with reality, so that these islands are not so much assigned a cognitive meaning, but become a representation of ambiguous spaces in a modified way. Crete, for example, is considered a luxury, fertile place that is worthy of comparison with the Isles of the Blessed. According to travel reports, however, criticism of the hygiene among the island society was common. Further, a holistic view on Mediterranean insularity also shows the ambiguity of utopian or dystopian codings, such as Rhodes revealing itself to be inhospitable, or Cyprus proving to be the best and most distinguished island in the Mediterranean, while also raising questions regarding usability and empiricism (Reichert 2001, 120–123).

An inkling of the paradisiacal, an unattained promise, is portrayed in the sixteenth-century *Historia of D. Johann Fausten*, in relation to, among others, the island of Crete. On his journey through the world and with the aim of seeing paradise – *auch endlich das Paradeiß sehen [zu] können* (916, 26–27) – Faust also contemplates the island of Crete and its fauna. This fauna does not consist of any threatening animals, except for *grosse giftige Spinnen* (916, 16) – poisonous spiders – which add a problematic aspect to the island. The characteristics of this island, as well as other islands, viewed with the help of Mephistopheles intensify the desire for the idyllic, but they cannot themselves be paradise. Depending on the tradition in the genre, the paradisiacal is sometimes found far from the Mediterranean, for instance, as an island of paradise in the Irish region, as in the legend *Navigatio*, or as Avalon or *insula pomorum* in the Arthurian narrative tradition.

The medieval world of thought localized utopias or the idyllic far from the influence of empiricism in the Atlantic – a local rendering that feeds on the ancient tradition of imagination at a distance. Here, the Isles of the Blessed can be found, the conception of which is linked to mental premises that have their roots in archaic times and can be traced back to Homer and Hesiod. Beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the furthest known point in Mediterranean navigation, the islands retain at first a mythical distance and are not furnished with geographical references until the Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula and the events of the Civil War in the first century BC. They often oscillate between the mere reproduction of geographical facts, their exaggeration, and the recurrent echoes of literary tradition. The location of the island of Thule or *Ultima Thule* – a cipher for a distant outpost in the ancient world – as the most northern of all the Britannic islands

around the Arctic Circle, or else in the south, is also characterized by spatial remoteness, which the Mediterranean area is only able to provide to a limited extent (Reichert 2008b, 641–643).

The same applies to natural utopias, which, like the island of Taprobana, are associated with *abundantia*, which has Indian connotations as a counter-world to one's own reality, thus recalling the ancient traditions of Hellenistic authors (Reichert 2008b, 644). Gold, gemstone, and spice islands are especially associated with the region of Southeast Asia. According to Folker Reichert (2008b, 651–652), a possible reason for cartographers in the Middle Ages to locate idyllic islands in the Atlantic⁹ is that those areas beyond the Pillars of Hercules were neglected in the geography of antiquity, while the maritime space in the east provided little room for speculation due to it being relatively easy to experience.

3.2 Sociopolitical Utopias Between Mediterranean Settings and Placelessness

In his works *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato also locates his sociopolitical utopia, Atlantis, as spatially and temporally distant from the Mediterranean realm of experience. Bearing connotations linked to the Pillars of Hercules, and sunk into the sea because of tremendous earthquakes (*Tim.*, 25c–25d; *Crit.*, 108e–109a), the island can only be experienced through memory and is located in the past. As an island of an extraordinary size (*Tim.*, 24e–25a), whose δύναμις βασιλέων, κρατοῦσα μὲν ἀπάσης τῆς νήσου, πολλῶν δὲ ἄλλων νήσων καὶ μερῶν τῆς ἡπείρου (*Tim.*, 25a) (as an island, that is characterized by intensive contact with other islands and with the mainland), Atlantis, as with the historical Mediterranean island states, proves to be interconnected, thus negating associations with isolation. As a distant concept, however, Atlantis is based in the Mediterranean only with regard to its thought trigger.

That ambivalence of the distant and the known is relevant for representations of the hoped-for, the caricatured and the criticized, in order to analyze the latter but also to revise it. Aristophanes's comedy from the fifth century BC, *Birds*, focuses on the Mediterranean's own experiential space, but balances reflections on political developments and their critique in a coordinate system by projecting a horizontal plane onto a vertical one. The drama deals with the questionable issues of political power in a city in the clouds. Sparta, τὸ μέγα τοῦτο τὸνκ Λακεδαιμονος Σπάρτην ὄνομα (v. 814), is considered in the characters' reflections to be a possible

⁹ Prominent islands of the Atlantic are also dealt with in detail by William H. Babcock (1975).

name for the city, but it is substituted by ‘cloud cuckoo-land’, *Νεφελοκοκκυγία* (v. 821), – an insular nonplace thus associated with the Mediterranean and with placelessness at the same time. As for philosophical journeys of thought, the messenger of the gods, Iris, remains relevant here, but turns into a character of the discourse of power.

In medieval literature, island societies appear less in the tradition of political concepts of thought than in concepts relating to ancient worldviews, such as those of Pliny the Elder. Counterworlds to the known are thus located, from a German-speaking perspective, in the Mediterranean – without them being declared as a utopia. Konrad's von Würzburg *Trojanerkrieg* presents Lemnos as an Amazon island, *dā niht wan vrouwen inne sint* (v. 13817). This island has been designed in opposition to the male-coded socialization of Achilles, for whom his mother seeks a safe place far away from Troy. However, the affinity for war of the Amazons and a proximity to the reality of life result in a preference for the island of Skyros. It, too, is a world of contrasts (Sieber 2002, 67), populated by women, but peacefully ruled by a king – a socio-referential game of ideas with a partially familiar structure. The ambiguity of the Mediterranean lends itself to Konrad's warning against war – a reaction to the peaceless context of the time (Freytag 1988/1989, 380).

In a satirical analysis of society, Sebastian Brant in his fifteenth century *Narrenschiff* narrates the ship's voyage to Narragonia as a journey of fools, nullifying a Mediterranean location not least because of a certain parodic displacement in the journey of life. The sixteenth-century *Lalebuch* also presents a satirical image of society, yet it is not located on an island but rather in the space *deß Großmächtigen vnnd weitläufftigen Königreichs Vtopien* (5, 3–4), that is, the powerful and expansive empire of Utopia, which alludes intertextually to More's work (Aurnhammer and Detering 2019, 116). The capital *Vthen* (5, 5) and *Vdeys[,] der Vtopische Keyser* (5, 11) or Utopian Regent, all refer to ancient traditions such as Homer's *Odyssey*, but they are part of a parodic inversion of humanist ‘Nemo’ and ‘Utopia’ literature; the work's title already caricatures philosophical discourses in its play on the Greek *λαλέω*, to slur, or *λάλημα*, chatter (Aurnhammer and Detering 2019, 116). The reading of the title *Lale* as an anagram hinting at ‘Alle’ (everyone) (Aurnhammer and Detering 2019, 116), also situates what is being depicted to be in the context of the near.

Insular utopias in the early modern period, however, follow utopia's etymology as a nonplace, and they dislocate it from the potential space of experience. Thus, at the beginning of the sixteenth century in his work *Utopia*, which is constitutive of the genre of literary utopias (Reisch 2010, 159), Thomas More locates the ideal of an existence in harmony with nature (Claeys 2011, 61) in the Republic of Utopia on

an island, whose key ideas respond to the social grievances of the time.¹⁰ The creation of an alternative world by the Renaissance scholar (Claeys 2011, 60) – a world identified as the goal of political action – leads the island to serve as a foil for concrete visions that include, among others, a vision of an organic community. It also lets the referential power of the island as well as the journey of life recede into the background.

For most utopias conceived using the model of Thomas More, the following features remain key: they are located on an island beyond the known world, i.e., beyond the Mediterranean; arrival at the *utopos* is accidental (e.g., after shipwreck or drifting away); and the representation of what is seen takes the form of a travelogue embedded in a frame narrative. More names himself as the narrator of the frame narrative, while the character of Raphael Hythloday reports on his discovery in or beyond the New World. In Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), it is an anonymous first-person narrator who reports how his ship drifts off on the voyage from Peru to Asia and lands at the unknown island of Bensalem, the *new Atlantis*. Bacon's island stands out from other utopian islands due to its emphasis on isolation through insularity, which protects the ideal moment from corrosive influences. In Tommaso Campanella's *La città del Sole* (1623), the titular city of the sun is located on Taprobana, presumably in the Indian Ocean. Here, the divergence from the familiar Mediterranean world is particularly palpable, as the setting comprises a dialog between a Hospitaller of the Order of Malta and a Genoese helmsman of Columbus recounting his discovery. Confronted with the account of the distant and utopian island and the presence of the transatlantic expeditions, the Mediterranean is clearly relegated to the background.

Thus, the question arises of whether the utopian 'nonplace' would have to be read as 'non-Mediterranean'. This is due to Mediterranean islands functioning as known places par excellence.¹¹ They are known not necessarily through one's own contemplation, but through a long literary tradition that, since antiquity, has continually updated mythical Mediterranean journeys. In this regard, François Fénelon's *Télémaque* (1699) must be mentioned in conclusion. This book, the actual title of which is *Suite du quatrième livre de l'Odyssée d'Homère*, fills a gap in the *Odyssey* – hence there is a natural fixation on the Mediterranean region. Accordingly, the islands visited or mentioned by the son of Ulysses are numerous: Calypsos, Sicily, Cyprus, Crete, and Ithaca. However, the Mediterranean island spaces disappear to some extent during an allegoresis that leads the reader less to a knowledge of dis-

¹⁰ Davis (2010, 40–47) considers the sociopolitical references of the work.

¹¹ Although more knowledge about distant islands has accumulated since the Medieval, which also gradually blocks their utopian potential (Glaser 1996, 234).

tant islands, and rather to the recognition of generally valid rules and patterns. As in Gracián's *Criticón*, the 'Homeric' islands become literary allegories, the decoding of which prepares one for coping with courtly and political life.

4 Outlook and Conclusion

4.1 Islands and Identity in Modern Times

In the European Mediterranean literatures of the late-modern period from the eighteenth century onward, two tendencies can be identified regarding islands; both of which are to be seen in the broader context of how collective identities relate to territories. We will only roughly delineate them, as the complexity and the potential literary corpus of 'islands and identity in modern times' would necessitate a separate work of its own. The first is an exoticizing continental view of spaces that have supposedly remained archaic, especially due to their being isolated by insularity; the second is the affirmation of a specificity characterized precisely by the openness and connectivity of insular cultures.

The re-exoticization of spaces known through literature and sometimes even through historiography has occurred in the transcription of personal travel experience: the island being no longer a place imagined solely from a distance or as a natural part of one's own lifeworld – instead, being compared, during a visit, with island images previously acquired through reading. In the eighteenth century, the protagonist is still the nobleman of the Grand Tour, replaced in the nineteenth century by the Baedeker tourist as well as the travel writer. Early on, the island stood metonymically for the foreignness of the south. Islands would be considered to represent the Mediterranean as a whole, or at least a larger geographical entity; this is something that Goethe's (1970 [1816/17], 246) well-known saying "to have seen Italy without having seen Sicily is not to have seen Italy at all, for Sicily is the clue to everything" reflects prototypically. There do exist interesting cases of this practice, such as Prosper Mérimée, who wrote one 'Corsican' novella before a trip to Corsica in 1839 and one afterward. Both narratives thematize the ideas of *vendetta* and Corsican mentality: while *Matteo Falcone* (1829) deals with the archaic restoration of family honor through the killing of a ten-year-old, *Colomba* (1840) describes a thoroughly complex web of insular and Mediterranean perceptions of the other and of the self; this would reflect the digestion of his travel experiences (Glosch and Losfeld 2000). During Europe's industrialization, then, the Mediterranean islands were increasingly credited with having preserved an archaic substance outside the grasp of modernity through their supposed isolation. Au-

thors as diverse as Walter Benjamin (Valero 2019) and Ernst Jünger (Benedetti 2019) discovered the last bastions of organic communities in Ibiza or Sardinia just before they were 'corrupted' by touristification or electrification.

Literary island representations have been charged with collective (self-)representation, the island being emphasized as the space of a community or of specific cultural phenomena that distinguish the islanders from outsiders. This becomes particularly vivid in the case of the large islands of the Western Mediterranean, which have not become politically independent nations yet have found a medium of collectivization in literature, especially during the twentieth century. The most established instance of this is the famous concept of *sicilianità* or *sicilitudine*, coined above all – but not only – by Leonarda Sciascia, to describe a mentality derived directly from insularity. In a seminal article, Sciascia (1970, 12) begins his considerations on *sicilitudine* based on the geographical position of the island. From this geographical fact, he then derives a strategic vulnerability of which the numerous invasions, ranging from the Arabic invasion in AD 827 to the American landing in 1943, are an ineluctable expression, a vulnerability that causes insecurity and fear. This fear would then provoke a certain folly and finally proudness because "a un certo punto l'insicurezza, la paura, si rovesciano nell'illusione che una siffatta insularità [...] costituisca privilegio e forza" (13). So, the natural vulnerability of the island would turn into resilience, and finally this specific islandness would be reflected in Sicilian literature and other cultural artifacts, like *sardità* in Sardinian or *corsité* in Corsican literature. In these cases, islandness as a specific cultural feature of island communities competes with the paradigms of national literatures and testifies to the fragile construction of collective identities even and especially when they invoke supposedly natural entities.

4.2 Toward a Specification of Mediterranean Islandness

In the *Handbook of Island Studies*, in an article named "Literature and the Literary Gaze" McMahon and André (2018, 297) assert that "island topographies and topologies have structured literary forms." Indeed, islands have shaped these forms just as those literary forms have structured our access to the specific spatiality of islands. This mediation happens via the figural, the trope, and this is why we must not disregard "the insights into misreading the discourse as a concept (an object) rather than a literary figure (a process)" (303). Although it is tempting to assign harmonizing concepts to complex representations of islands in literary texts, they are first of all to be considered as figures that reconfigure the topological space in a topological way. This reconfiguration depends on historical and geographical conditions. The specificity of the Mediterranean island cannot be a

supra-temporal essence, but only a characteristic or a bundle of characteristics that becomes visible through contrasts with other islands or literatures. There is no such thing as a single key concept of literary Mediterranean islandness. However, after our journey through literary history, we can plead that in the Mediterranean context the *tabula rasa* and peripherality features are less potent, while another concept does become apparent: the island as palimpsest. Compared to remote utopian islands, oceanic, ‘fortune’ or ‘desert’ islands, Mediterranean island spaces have accumulated particularly dense layers of meaning, or, as Roger (2009, 54) states: “*l’insularité méditerranéenne est une moire d’histoires, un archipel de récits distincts: c’est un chapelet de noms propres.*”

This chaplet of proper names alludes to the Mediterranean as a particular palimpsestic space. As we have stated in our introduction, the various islands and island phenomena can be seen as metaphors, metonymies, or anonomias, that only make sense when considered as woven into narratives and connected with the geographical space as well as with the intertextual space. This is what Carile’s (2009, 23) comment about every Mediterranean island being an “*île palimpseste*” may be taken to mean – and this is why the Mediterranean area is a central cradle for island imaginaries and island narratives.¹² Through this interplay of continuity and divergence, the Mediterranean has formed a stable associative foil for centuries, also having inspired imaginations and conceptualizations of islands beyond the Mediterranean.

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¹² We would like to thank the Center for International and Transnational Area Studies at Regensburg University (CITAS) for funding and the Mediterranean Studies on Island Areas research network (MS ISLA) for the discussions which helped to shape our article.

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Marília Jöhnk (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Marseille and the Mediterranean in the Writings of Yoko Tawada and Tahar Ben Jelloun

Abstract: This article explores the literary tradition of Marseille as a cosmopolitan and multilingual port city through intertextual analysis. It challenges the often-attributed construction of the city as primarily the site of detective stories in the tradition of film noir and instead argues for a comparative approach based on contemporary literary texts from Yoko Tawada and Tahar Ben Jelloun. The article shows how these writers use Marseille as a figuration of translation, memory, and nostalgia, evoking references to Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, and Albert Camus. By focusing on metaphors such as the ruin, the article highlights the importance of memory and nostalgia in Marseille's literary biography and its historical connectedness to Mediterranean history.

1 Marseille as Mediterranean Port City

In this article, I will explore a literary tradition that situates Marseille as a Mediterranean port city representing cosmopolitanism, the migration experience, and multilingualism. The literary history of Marseille is rarely situated in this context – rather, the image of a port city saturated with high criminality is cultivated; a phenomenon stemming from many literary and cinematic examples of detective stories associated with the port city. Indeed, a large number of literary and cultural studies focus on this side of Marseille, represented by authors such as Jean-Claude Izzo (see for instance Kalt 2018). However, relying on detailed readings and intertextual analysis, I will compare two authors as well as several literary sources from the twentieth century that stress the cosmopolitan nature of Marseille and its embeddedness in the Mediterranean.¹ By choosing the contemporary writer Yoko Tawada (*1960) and Tahar Ben Jelloun (*1947), the focus of the paper can be easily discerned: in the realm of Literary Studies, both authors represent a transnational approach to literature, opting for diversity and a non-binary per-

1 In an introduction to Mediterranean discourses in literature and film, the editors of the present volume state that the recourse to intertextuality in a “high degree” is typical for Mediterranean discourses in modernity (cf. Arend et al. 2010, 10).

spective on culture. Both authors have dedicated texts to Marseille, each of which stresses the cosmopolitan nature of this Mediterranean metropolis.

Port cities have always held a privileged position in the Mediterranean.² Their cosmopolitan nature does not only apply to Marseille but to many Mediterranean cities; it might even be considered a universal feature of port metropoles (cf. Angiolini 1994, 45, 48). The oldest city of France, Marseille, reached its glory after the Suez Canal opened in 1869 and became the most important Mediterranean metropole in the nineteenth century (cf. Kalt 2018, 106). It is worth noting that Marseille also influenced German literature in the 1920s and 1930s, which can be seen as indicating the importance of the port as a point of departure and escape from Europe (cf. Wilhelmer 2015, 179, 311). Authors such as Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer have depicted the city in various feuilletons. Kracauer, for instance, described the dynamic nature of Marseille by using the imagery of blood circulation, thereby stressing the intensity and importance of the port for the city supplying it with its lifeblood: “Der unausgesetzte Kreislauf der Reisenden, die täglich landen und abfahren, durchblutet die Stadt” (Kracauer 2011, 199).³ The dynamics of coming and going shape Marseille. This flow has also been described by the Uruguay-born French poet Jules Supervielle in 1927, who dedicated a poem to Marseille in the tradition of expressionist urban poetry. In the last stanzas, Supervielle depicts Marseille as an allegory using the following words: “Ô toi toujours en partance / Et qui ne peux t'en aller, / À cause de toutes ces ancrés qui te mordillent sous la / mer” (Supervielle 1996, 141).⁴ Decades later, another writer arrived in Marseille and once again regarded the city in relation to its cosmopolitan tradition.

2 In his biography of the Mediterranean, David Abulafia (2014) stresses the importance of port cities in the Mediterranean, such as Alexandria, Amalfi, Salonika, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, amongst many others. Those cities play a crucial role for the depiction of the five phases of Mediterranean civilization in *The Great Sea*. In April 2017, I organized a workshop with my former colleague Moritz Rauchhaus on port cities at the department of Romance Studies at Humboldt University, Berlin (“Verdichtung der Welt im Sprachraum des Hafens. Die kleinen Formen des Maritimen”). I thank all participants for their contributions, which helped us to conceptualize the importance of port cities from a global and comparative perspective and inspired the present paper.

3 My translation: “The incessant circulation of travelers, that land every day and depart, supplies the city with blood.” In the present article, I will quote from the original in the main body and include my own translations in the footnotes. For more literary references on Marseille see Edeling (2012). Edeling (2012, 263) also stresses in this article the importance of Marseille as a cosmopolitan place.

4 My translation: “Oh you, always about to leave / And who cannot leave / Due to all the anchors that bite you beneath the / sea.”

2 Yoko Tawada: Translating Marseille

The works of the German-Japanese author Yoko Tawada are a favored subject of studies on literary multilingualism. Tawada's short story *Die Zweischalige*, meaning: *The Two-Shelled*, published in her collection *Überseezungen*, follows the protagonist on her travels around the world, which also lead her to Marseille. The title of the collection, first published in 2002, challenges translators: on the one hand it sounds like 'Übersetzungen', meaning 'translations', but through the shift from 't' to 'e' the word also reads as 'over-the-sea-tongues'; I would propose the translation: *Transtongues*.⁵

The wordplay alludes to both the protagonist's travels between continents (Europe, America, Africa) and between languages. One stop on these travels is Marseille, a city in which the narrator visits a translation workshop and feels at ease, due to the fact that she does not feel foreign there: "Man merkt sofort, dass die Augen der Hafenstadt Marseille schon seit Jahrhunderten jeden Tag fremde Gesichter gesehen haben" (Tawada 2010, 36).⁶ The cosmopolitan character of Marseille, allegorized by Tawada and Supervielle, is also emphasized using references to Japanese sources and travelers. Marseille apparently occupies a privileged position in Japan's relationship to Europe, since, as the narrator in Tawada's story tells us: "[...] Marseille war meistens die erste europäische Stadt, die man be-trat"⁷ (Tawada 2010, 39). The author depicts Marseille as a gateway to Europe, referencing Japanese travelogues in general and the writing of the Japanese author and traveler Tōson Shimazaki, who arrived in the port city in 1918, specifically. The perspective on the Mediterranean is therefore expanded to include the point of view of non-European, Japanese travelers.

It is worth noting that this story – like all short stories and essays featured in *Überseezungen* – is especially concerned with the dimension and potential of translation. Throughout the collection Tawada likens language to water.⁸ The metaphor permits the author to express an ambivalence toward the universal potential of language while still stressing the specificity of each language. For example, in the following quote, the 'shore' symbolizes both another language and the crossing of the sea as acts of translation: "Wie lange braucht aber ein Gedicht, bis es das

5 For another interpretation of the title see Kraenzle (2005, n.p.).

6 My translation: "You instantly feel that the eyes of the port city Marseille have become accustomed to seeing foreign faces for centuries."

7 My translation: ".... Marseille was mostly the first European city to enter."

8 See for instance the short stories "Eine leere Flasche" oder "Die Ohrenzeugin" (Tawada 2010, 54, 98).

Ufer einer anderen Sprache erreicht?" (Tawada 2010, 40).⁹ For Tawada, the cosmopolitan character of Marseille, referenced by the narrator when entering the port, is thus also reflected in the dimension of translation, not just in the faces of the inhabitants she sees:

Velleicht ist jedes Gesicht vergleichbar mit einem Hafen, dachte ich mir, als ich abends allein in einem Café am Wasser saß. Und wenn jedes Gesicht eine Art Hafen ist, kann man nicht alles aufzählen, was dort schon angekommen ist, und alles, was dort noch ankommen wird.¹⁰ (Tawada 2010, 41)

As stated above, representations of Marseille are prevalent in modern German literature. The cosmopolitan nature of the city, for instance, was also mentioned by Joseph Roth in a small 1925 feuilleton article, in which he commented on Marseille. Both Tawada and Roth reflect on various belongings sticking to the face or feet of the inhabitants and travelers:

Marseille ist das Tor der Welt, Marseille ist die Schwelle der Völker. Marseille ist Orient und Okzident. [...] Das ist nicht mehr Frankreich. Das ist Europa, Asien, Afrika, Amerika. [...] Jeder trägt seine Heimat an der Sohle und führt an seinem Fuß die Heimat nach Marseille. (Roth 1994, 497–499, cf. Wilhelmer 2015, 178)¹¹

Referencing back to the title of Tawada's short story, the noun *Die Zweischalige* refers to the structure of a shell which consists of two halves. The word is unusual and is commonly only used in the context of construction. However, it goes hand in hand with the abundance of maritime images the reader encounters in the short story and can be traced back to the structure of the narration, which is clearly divided into two parts; the present article mainly concentrates on the part relating to the travelogue to Marseille.¹² The other half narrates a curious captivity story, in which the narrator does not seem human and may actually be a mermaid.¹³ She is

⁹ My translation: "But how long does it take a poem to arrive at the shore of another language?"

¹⁰ My translation: "Perhaps every face is comparable to a port, I thought, when I was sitting in the evening in a café by the water. And if every face is a kind of port, you cannot list, what has arrived and what still will arrive."

¹¹ My translation: "Marseille is the gate to the world, Marseille is the threshold of the people. Marseille is Orient and Occident. [...] It is no longer France. It is Europe, Asia, Africa, America. [...] Everyone carries their home on the sole of the shoe and on their feet, they carry their home to Marseille."

¹² For further information on the divided structure and another interpretation of the short story see Genz (2010, 480).

¹³ It is likely that Yoko Tawada uses Christian Andersen's fairytale *The Little Mermaid* as an intertext. In this sense, it is striking that the tongue – the most important metaphor and motif in

taken prisoner by a couple, although the reasons are unknown. The title, I would argue, describes the city of Marseille, the real protagonist of the story. The feminine noun alludes to the tradition of addressing cities as female allegories. Furthermore, the dual structure relates to the unity of sea, port, and the city of Marseille, which at the same time reflects the nature of translation, the duality of source language and target language.

The significance of the tongue also develops another dynamic, connecting Tawada's reference to Marseille with Walter Benjamin's famous depiction of the city. The image of the mouth is prominently used by Tawada and Benjamin, the latter allegorizing Marseille as "gelbes, angstrocktes Seehundsgebiß" (Benjamin 1981, 359), thus as "yellow, chipped set of teeth from harbor seal". Both Benjamin and Tawada connect the city of Marseille to the aesthetic emotion of disgust. Disgust is another feature commonly attributed to the so-called *cité phocéenne*, which became the epicenter of a bubonic plague outbreak in 1720 (cf. Kalt 2018, 102–103). Tawada references Marseille as a cosmopolitan port city, regarding it through the perspective of a narrator that – just as herself – identifies as German and Japanese and thus sees the city through the eyes of a multilingual and multicultural traveler.¹⁴

3 Tahar Ben Jelloun: "Mediterranean Nostalgia"

This cosmopolitan depiction of Marseille leads me to the core focus of this article: Tahar Ben Jelloun's poetic documentation *Marseille: comme un matin d'insomnie*, *Marseille: like a morning of insomnia*, which in its texts and images depicts a moment of transformation and destruction in Marseille.¹⁵ Although this poorly known text by Ben Jelloun inscribes itself in a literary tradition of Marseille, it paints a critical picture of both the port city itself as well as the treatment of its multicultural population. In 1983 and 1984, the central neighborhood of Marseille 'Porte d'Aix', named after the triumphal arch in the quarter, suffered massive destruction and gentrifying transformations. As a result, the people of Porte d'Aix, mostly mi-

Überseezungen – also plays an important role in Andersens' fairy tale, given that the little mermaid loses her tongue and therefore her capacity to speak, cf. Andersen (1949, 137).

14 The narrator reflects on her life in Hamburg and states that she arrived in Europe through Moscow. For the autobiographic dimension of the short story see Kraenzle (2005).

15 In December 2018, I held an unpublished presentation on Tahar Ben Jelloun and Marseille at Haifa University as part of the workshop on port cities: "Global History, Literature and Culture". I especially thank Susanne Zepp, Natasha Gordinsky, and Claudia Olk for the opportunity to join the workshop and their comments on my presentation.

grants and laborers, could no longer afford their homes.¹⁶ Together with photographer Thierry Ibert, Ben Jelloun documented these changes in his book of poetry *Marseille: comme un matin d'insomnie*. Ben Jelloun constructs a literary image of Marseille based on the history of its port and the migrant experience.

Marseille has a long history of migration, which took different shapes during the twentieth century. Before World War I, many Italians had come to Marseille. They were then followed by Spanish, exiled Russians, Greeks, and Assyro-Chaldeans, amongst other groups (cf. Témime 1985, 40–42). During the Second World War, the port city of Marseille also welcomed numerous political and Jewish refugees, who either stayed in the city or passed through it to continue their escape (cf. Témime 1985, 43). A new phase of migration started in the 1960s and 1970s, when many Algerians arrived in Marseille, constituting from then one the biggest immigrant group (cf. Témime 1985, 44). Long before the increased political presence of right-wing nationalist politics in the 1980s, Marseille had become a place of racist violence in the 1970s. Publishing a poetic documentation in precisely this moment of France's history amounted to a statement in this debate and an engagement in favor of the migrant community.

After the preface, Ben Jelloun includes a small and very dense article in *Marseille: comme un matin d'insomnie*, which he calls *Marseille est une énigme, Marseille is an enigma*. In this short article, the writer proceeds to think about Marseille and its tangled history of cultural mixture and immigration. Marseille is described through many textual images and several small scenes. In this sense, the reader can perceive the repetition of the phrase "Marseille est...", meaning: "Marseille is..."; Marseille is depicted as a riddle, as a house, as a migraine, as a palace. Furthermore, the small scenes feature numerous figures moving through and interacting with the city. A horse entering and leaving the scene, a spider, a painter, the wind, Maghrebian people sitting in a café, a cat, bulldozers. The scenes described are shaped by constant movement, transition, and displacement. These movements are also reflected in the presence of migration in Marseille:

Etre à ce point bousculée par des mains, des regards et des songes venus du Sud, fait de la ville un malentendu. [...] Calme et sereine, la mer assiste – en toute impunité – au démantèlement des hommes. [...] L'exode. L'exil et le labeur. [...] Les langues parlées mais pas entendues. [...] Un café où tout est faux rassemble des Maghrébins gris [...] (Ben Jelloun 1986, n.p.)¹⁷

16 Those historical contexts are reflected in the paratexts of the poetic documentation.

17 My translation: "Being to this point shaken by hands, gazes and dreams coming from the South, the city becomes a misunderstanding. [...] Calm and serene, the sea assists – with total impunity – the move of the people. [...] The exodus. The exile and the labor. [...] The spoken but not heard languages. [...] A café, where everything is artificial, gathers grey Maghrebians [...]."

Marseille seems to be an allegory of migration; the city is described as a constantly moving and transforming entity. It is characterized as an enigma and thus as something that must be read and deciphered like a text. In conclusion, Marseille is not only addressed in its referential meaning, but also as an allegory. In the last line, my interpretation is almost explicitly articulated: “Marseille n'est plus là. Elle a changé de pays.” (Ben Jelloun 1986, n.p.)¹⁸

The article cited above alludes to Marseille through substantives such as madness, cages, ennui, tiredness, a cemetery, blood, disquiet, bewilderment, debris, death. The image Ben Jelloun constructs of Marseille is thus profoundly melancholic. The prominent use of the “ruin” – not only in the preface cited earlier, but throughout all thirty poems – also indicates the importance of a literary and “historical emotion” (Boym 2001, xvi): nostalgia.¹⁹ This characteristic can be considered in dialogue with another poet of the Mediterranean, Albert Camus, who also created a melancholic and nostalgic scene where his narrator returns to both the ruins of the past Mediterranean and his past life. While melancholia, according to Boym “[...] confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory” (Boym 2001, xvi). Boym's *Future of Nostalgia* also helps us to understand that Ben Jelloun is concerned with “reflective nostalgia”, a nostalgia that “thrives in *algia*, the longing itself” and on the “ambivalences of human longing and belonging” (Boym 2001, xviii).²⁰ Returning shortly to Tawada, it appears that nostalgia also shapes her depiction of Marseille. Her narrator does not only look back to the historical arrival of Japanese travelers in Marseille, but also alludes to Tawada's own past: her arrival in Europa with the nostalgic image of the Trans-Siberian Railway that she took from Japan (cf. Tawada 2010, 39). Coming back to Ben Jelloun: in his preface, the author exposes the context of his poems, which also stresses the importance of nostalgia:

Voici donc des poèmes en préface à un constat: le travail de l'œil pendant que les bulldozers avancent à Marseille, dans le quartier de la Porte d'Aix, sur des vieilles habitations, des lieux pour le sommeil noir; des lieux pour l'attente où tout est fissuré, les murs et les visages, les rues et les mémoires. Heureusement que des enfants, échappés à ces ruines, se moquent de

¹⁸ My translation: “Marseille is not there anymore. She changed her country.”

¹⁹ See for the concept of “Mediterranean nostalgia” Winkler (2010, 222–223).

²⁰ On the other hand, there is restorative nostalgia, which Boym associates with the “recent national and religious revivals”, which construct two core plots: “the return to origins and the conspiracy” (Boym 2001, xviii).

tout. Leur avenir est là mais il ne veut rien devoir à ceux qui sont venus de l'autre côté de la Méditerranée. (Ben Jelloun 1986, n.p.)²¹

The destruction of the neighborhood Porte d'Aix goes hand in hand with the destruction of memories. The metaphor of the ruin stands for the state of the neighborhood and its people, between destruction and construction, between past, present, and future.²² The ruin is evoked twice in the preface, since Ben Jelloun (1986, n.p.) also describes that his poetic work is searching for something that cannot be seen in the “les ruines d'un paysage”, meaning “ruins of a landscape”.

It might be worth noting that the metaphor of the ruin is also used prominently by Camus.²³ In his essay *Retour à Tipasa*, meaning: *Return to Tipasa*, one can detect the use of the ruin metaphor to describe the Algerian city of Tipasa, which the narrator revisits:

Quinze ans après, je retrouvais mes ruines, à quelques pas des premières vagues, je suivais les rues de la cité oubliée à travers des champs couverts d'arbres amers, et, sur les coteaux qui dominent la baie, je caressais encore les colonnes couleur de pain. Mais les ruines étaient maintenant entourées de barbelés et l'on ne pouvait y pénétrer que par les seuils autorisés. Il était interdit aussi, pour des raisons que, paraît-il, la morale approuve, de s'y promener la nuit; le jour, on y rencontrait un gardien assermenté. Par hasard sans doute, ce matin-là, il pleuvait sur toute l'étendue des ruines. (Camus 1965, 870)²⁴

21 My translation: “Here they are, poems preceding a report: the work of the eye while the bulldozers approach Marseille, in the quarter of Porte d'Aix, above old dwellings, places for black sleep and for waiting where everything is cracked – walls, faces, streets, and the memories. Fortunately, the children, having escaped from those ruins, mock everything. Their future is there, yet doesn't want to be connected to those who came from the other side of the Mediterranean.”

22 Ruins play a significant role in Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*, which analyzes architectural proof of nostalgia such as the Kunsthaus Tacheles in Berlin. In her reflection on ruins Boym also alludes to Walter Benjamin's famous comment on ruins. She states: “In them all the contradictions of the epochs of transition are frozen in a standstill dialectic; they are allegories of transient times.” (Boym 2001, 208) See for additional comments on the ruin Boym (2001, 136, 204–209).

23 For additional information on Camus' Mediterranean poetics see Lekatsas (2014). In her contribution, Lekatsas (2014, 126, 138, 143) also comments on the “Mediterranean cosmopolitanism” of Camus, Cavafy, and Chahine.

24 My translation: “Fifteen years later, I rediscovered my ruins, a few steps behind the first waves, I followed the streets of the forgotten city, through fields covered by bitter trees, and above the hills ruling the bay, I caressed once again the bread-colored pillars. But now the ruins were encircled in barbed wire, and one could only enter through authorized thresholds. It was also forbidden, for reasons that, it seemed, morality approved of, to walk there at night; during the day one could find there a sworn guard. By chance, without doubt, it rained this morning on the entire expanse of ruins.”

For Camus, the ruins refer to the historical Roman ruins located in Tipasa, but, at the same time, the metaphorical ruins of the Mediterranean past and the memories of the narrator are also implied. Contemplating the ruins, the narrator evokes nostalgic and melancholic memories from his childhood and reflects on the Second World War. The barbed wire symbolizes the rule of Nazi Germany and its violence. Tipasa is furthermore described as a place where “le souvenir lui-même s'estompait” (Camus 1965, 870), where “memory itself thus fades away”. The landscape, shaped by ruins, therefore corresponds to the narrator's own inner landscape as well as to the cultural and historical landscape of the Mediterranean.

This entanglement of memory, history, past, and present, symbolized by the ruins, can also be found in Ben Jelloun's preface.²⁵ Alluding to “those who came from the other side of the Mediterranean”, the writer refers to France's and especially Marseille's history of migration, as evident in one of the thirty poems of *Marseille: comme un matin d'insomnie*.²⁶

Ainsi la ville se retire derrière le port
 s'érigé en ruines
 pour effacer la trace
 et oublier les chemins des visages
 travaillés par la fièvre
 Elle fait le propre dans son corps gras
 ferme les puits et éteint les miracles.
 Chaque rue est une forêt ancienne
 Chaque mur est une fissure dans le temps
 Marseille n'est plus un port
 ni une foire foraine
 Ce n'est plus une place pour les soirs d'été
 C'est une ombre épaisse et sans faste
 où l'étranger exile l'étranger (Ben Jelloun 1986, n.p.)²⁷

25 For additional information on the metaphoric dimension of the ruin that precisely derives from its shifting between present and past, see Waldow (2012).

26 None of the poems have titles.

27 My translation:

“Thus, the city withdraws behind the port
 rises in ruins
 to erase the trace
 and to forget the paths of the faces
 worked by fever
 She makes her own in her fat body
 closes the wells and extinguishes the miracles.
 Every street is an old forest
 Every wall is a crack in time

The poem is shaped by many references to the past: the track, the ruin, the path, the old forest, and the crack in time. It focuses on the changes of the cities, and repeats twice, “Marseille n'est plus un port [...] ce n'est plus une place”, the very formulation used in the foreword, stressing a nostalgic longing for the former Marseille. The changes in the city have a referential meaning, evoking the already mentioned transformation of Marseille in 1983 and 1984, but also pointing towards the literary tradition of Paris.

Poems about Marseille often refer to Paris, a city which has a much larger tradition of literary imagination.²⁸ In this way, Ben Jelloun's poem can be interpreted as an intertextual allusion to Charles Baudelaire's collection, *Les Fleurs du Mal* [*Flowers of Evil*], first published in 1857. In the famous poem *Le Cygne* [*The Swan*], Baudelaire describes a flaneur who is crossing the Place du Carrousel and lamenting the changes of the city that resulted from the work of the architect and city planner Baron Haussmann.²⁹ Those changes radically modernized Paris in the nineteenth century, outfitting the city with broad boulevards to make the city suitable for its growing population. In *Le Cygne*, the transformation of the city is deeply linked to memory, melancholy, and nostalgia. The Baudelairean flaneur exclaims: “Le vieux Paris n'est plus, la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel” (Baudelaire 1975, LXXXIX/85).³⁰ Ben Jelloun uses almost the exact same words as Baudelaire – “Paris n'est plus” / “Marseille n'est plus” – and, like his 19th century predecessor, laments through nostalgic and melancholic images the urban transformation. In another stanza, the Baudelairean flaneur cries out: “Paris change! mais rien de ma mélancolie / N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs, / Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie, / Et mes

Marseille is not a port any more
 neither is it a traveling carnival
 It is not a place for summer nights anymore
 It is a thickened shadow without splendor
 where the foreign exiles the foreigner.”

28 Marseille positions itself since the beginning of the nineteenth century against Paris (cf. Edeling 2012, 264).

29 The transformation of Paris and the repercussions for Baudelaire's lyric have been analyzed extensively in research. Karlheinz Stierle, for instance, analyzes the poem *Le Cygne* in relation to the modulations of Paris during Napoleon III. In his analysis, he emphasizes the importance of memory and focuses on melancholy (cf. Stierle 1998, 852–883).

30 My translation: “The old Paris is not anymore, the form of a city / changes faster, alas, than the mortal's heart.”

chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs" (Baudelaire 1975, LXXXIX/86).³¹ These verses further underline the importance of melancholy that results from the changing metropole.³² The intertextual dialogue of Baudelaire and Ben Jelloun confirms that the destruction and changes of Marseille are linked to the cultural concept of melancholy and, above all, nostalgia.

Ben Jelloun's poem is a critique. Marseille seems to be actively trying to erase and forget the traces of the past. Throughout the poem, Ben Jelloun describes Marseille through negations: "Marseille n'est plus." The only affirmation can be found in the last two stanzas: "C'est une ombre épaisse et sans faste / où l'étranger exile l'étranger". Ben Jelloun's poem ends with the foreign country exiling the foreigner. That said, *l'étranger* means both 'foreigner' and 'foreign country' in French and thus, the translation loses the ambivalence of the original. Using the word *étranger*, Ben Jelloun refers again to Camus, stressing the status of the people who migrated to France and are considered foreign. In doing so, Marseille becomes a shadow, and thus something separated and estranged from itself.

The comparison of Yoko Tawada and Tahar Ben Jelloun shows that not only the history of the Mediterranean but also its literary traditions are connected – transcending time, space, and languages. However, Ben Jelloun exposes a pessimistic point of view on Marseille's future in his literary text and dwells on nostalgic images of the port city. This shift can also be connected to the changed status of the Mediterranean: in his biography of the Mediterranean, Abulafia analyzes the history of the Mediterranean – from 22000 BC to the present. The port city of Alexandria especially strikes him as an example of a multicultural space that was, however, destroyed during World War II and its aftermath (cf. Abulafia 2014, 589). Abulafia relies on nostalgic images to describe the change of Alexandria and other Mediterranean port cities, such as the old cemetery of the Egyptian metropole: "The city reconstituted itself as a massive Muslim Arab city, but its economy nose-dived. Something remains of the old Alexandria, but mainly in the form of cemeteries – of Greeks, Catholics, Jews and Copts." (Abulafia 2014, 600) If the author of *The Great Sea* is right and one of the core elements of the Mediterranean has been lost, the true Mediterranean might only continue to live on in its literary works. Their readers, however, are left with nostalgic images and memories of the cosmopolitan past of the Mediterranean port cities.

31 My translation: "Paris changes! But nothing of my melancholy / has moved! new palaces, scaffoldings, blocks / old suburbs, everything turns to allegory for me / And my dear memories are heavier than rocks."

32 Baudelaire is referenced in *The Future of Nostalgia*, see Boym (2001, 21).

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Angela Fabris (University of Klagenfurt)

Heterotopic and Striated Spaces in the Mediterranean Crime Fiction of Amara Lakhous and Jean-Claude Izzo

Quand on n'a rien, posséder la mer – cette Méditerranée – c'est beaucoup. Comme un quignon de pain pour celui qui a faim. (Izzo 2015, 289)¹

Abstract: This essay focuses on the representation of space in Mediterranean crime fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The question is whether we can speak of a kind of heuristics in Mediterranean crime fiction of the last decades, particularly in the filigree of representations and perceptions at the spatial level. To this end, the contribution focuses on two authors, namely Amara Lakhous and Jean-Claude Izzo in whose work the multiethnic component plays a significant role. The first aspect analyzed concerns the presence of heterotopias (Foucault 2020, 11–28) as expressions of a state of crisis and a form of non-communication. This is the case in *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* (2006) by Amara Lakhous in which one of these small-scale counterspaces – an elevator – plays a particularly significant role as one focal point of the diverse and multiethnic landscape of a Mediterranean metropolis – Rome – that can call itself such despite not enjoying a direct outlet to the sea. The second area of investigation concerns the presence of smooth and striated spaces (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, 663–697) which, in their constant variation in the face of ever new impediments or infractions – in a singular analogy with crime, which also constitutes an obstacle or a kind of interruption to the normal flow of life – are at the center of Jean-Claude Izzo's trilogy dedicated to Marseille and Fabio Montale. In Izzo's three novels, the Mediterranean is connoted both as a space of crisis and of communication – that is, as a large-scale heterotopia – while Marseille, in its distinct offshoots, appears as a surface in constant redefinition, in which striations relentlessly oppose – in a hegemonic key – forms of deterritorialization.

¹ "When you have nothing, owning the sea – the Mediterranean – means a lot. Like a crust of bread when you're starving" (Izzo 2018, 35).

I

When considering Mediterranean noir, particularly that of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the tendency is to foreground a kind of approach entrusted to itineraries or topographical criteria. These include, first and foremost, being close to the sea surface and/or being located in a kind of European south, to which can be added, in many cases, the presence or the role played by the Mediterranean aquatic space in the narrated story.

Javier Sánchez Zapatero and Alex Martín Escrivà in a 2011 article titled *La novela negra mediterránea: Crimen, placer, desencanto y memoria* emphasized certain aspects common to the Mediterranean crime stories of Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, Jean-Claude Izzo, Andrea Camilleri, and Petros Márkaris.² Among them was the convergence towards the same reference authors who had preceded and influenced them (particularly George Simenon with the addition of other writers sensitive to the political element such as Leonardo Sciascia), the nimble combination of the daily routine, the investigative journey, and the continuous evolution of the protagonists beyond the individual case along with the role played by frequent and, at times, extensive cultural, linguistic, and gastronomic digressions or intertextual references of a literary nature. In addition, they emphasized the need to take into account the political disillusionment common to these communist-oriented authors with which was associated – in varying proportions – disenchantment (of a high degree in the Catalan writer) and a strongly critical posture towards the fascist drifts of the society depicted (particularly in Izzo's trilogy).

The two scholars also dwelt on memory, which was analyzed according to different categories and orientations: sometimes in view of a national or regional collective perspective, sometimes according to individual or supra-individual logics (the family memory or the memory of the social or political core of belonging) or, in some cases, with a dialectical approach between individual orientations and collective dynamics.

To these aspects it is necessary to add another, essential in the narrative economy and on the aesthetic level, namely the role played by metropolitan spaces, such as Barcelona, Marseille, and Athens. The by now already stereotyped representation of the investigator caught in the private space of his office, shrouded in a solitude interrupted by the sound of the telephone or unexpected visits, loses its relevance in the face of the depiction of specific Mediterranean urban latitude, often peripheral or marginal, which hold a certain significance on the page and in the construction of the story. The reference relates to the different physiogn-

2 See Sánchez Zapatero and Martín Escrivà (2011, 45–51).

omies of these investigators who – sometimes willingly but mostly unwillingly at least at the beginning of what is about to become an investigation – find themselves conducting their research operating at distinct latitudes, for example in the historic area of Barcelona or in the suburbs of Marseille (as expressions of precise social and economic categorizations) or in the chaos of the car-crowded arteries of Athens. These are metropolitan scenarios that, in this sense, become a backdrop which operates at different levels, as will be seen. In addition, the displacements are not exclusively centripetal; in fact, the investigator, or protagonists at the center of these crime fictions tend to flee from the chaotic nature of urban spaces and take refuge in nearby but isolated places. This is the case, for example, in Vallvidrera, a Barcelona neighborhood far from the urban center, where Carvahlo's intimate nature manifests itself in relation to a dual ritual, cooking and burning books in the fireplace.

Fabio Montale, too, used to take refuge in a small house outside Marseille, an inheritance from his parents; a modest dwelling with only two rooms, eight steps away from the sea and equipped with a small boat with which – in pursuit of further isolation and solitude – he went fishing. It is from a window of that intimate space that he, as he specifies, “a toute la mer pour soi” (Izzo 2015, 289).³ Isolated, then, and detached from Marseille, he spends his time in what is his space of disconnection – facing the sea that resurfaces in many pages of his trilogy – as an expression of what is manifested as we shall see, a heterotopic place par excellence.⁴

Alongside these spaces of disconnection, there are the urban scenarios that represent in their own way an element of stability and chaos (this is also evident from the title of the first volume of Izzo's trilogy, *Total Khéops*). Indeed, in these novels, the city takes on a specific role: it becomes one of the protagonists and not merely a scenic element or a backdrop relegated to a secondary role. The metropolitan space (cf. Peraldi 2016, 930–933), be it Marseille, Barcelona or Athens, is characterized by the constant movement and teeming of characters of different

3 “You open the window and you have the sea all to yourself” (Izzo 2018, 46).

4 Something similar and different at the same time also characterizes the private space of Salvo Montalbano, who lives in a house facing the Mediterranean Sea in the town, imaginary and real at the same time, of Vigata; an ideal location – even too much so in its acting as an oleographic, almost postcard-like space, albeit chiselled with a sufficient dose of realistic acumen – that allows him to swim throughout the year and enjoy a position of absolute privilege in front of the seascape. By heterotopia Foucault means those real places, found in every culture of every time that are defined spaces, but “absolutely different” from all others to which they are opposed and that are different places that serve as “mythical and real contestations of the space in which we live” (Foucault 2020: 12 and 14). The translation is mine.

ethnic and social backgrounds to which are added allusions to concrete architectural elements (for example, the cathedral of La Major or the old port in Marseille) or to specific subdivisions (neighborhoods, streets, areas, thresholds, real or implicit boundaries, and again forms of geographic and social verticalization along with gradients of distinct order). The characters, in particular Montale, travel streets and roads, drive through the arteries of the city, search for individual suspects and witnesses in different neighborhoods and distinct urban spaces. The outcome is that of a multifaceted portrait that proves capable of representing the physical, material, social but also ethical and human reality of the cities in which the characters live, think, and move. These are urban spaces, in essence, with which the protagonists seem to relate in a seesaw of love and hate, affection and annoyance, escapes, and returns.

Drawing attention to the significance of the urban center of gravity is Jean-Claude Izzo who, in the paratextual section of the second novel in the trilogy, writes:

Rien de ce que l'on va lire n'a existé. Sauf, bien évidemment, ce qui est vrai. Et que l'on a pu lire dans les journaux, ou voir à la télévision. Peu de choses, en fin de compte. Et, sincèrement, j'espère que l'histoire racontée ici restera là où elle a sa vraie place : dans les pages de ce livre. Cela dit, Marseille, elle, est bien réelle. Si réelle que, oui, vraiment, j'aimerais que l'on ne cherche pas des ressemblances avec des personnages ayant réellement existé. Même pas avec le héros. Ce que je dis de Marseille, ma ville, ce ne sont, simplement, et toujours, qu'échos et réminiscences. C'est-à-dire, ce qu'elle donne à lire entre les lignes (Izzo 2015, 255).⁵

Finally, in the third novel, after resorting to some introductory formulas of a similar tenor to the previous ones, in the *Author's note* he adds:

Quant à Marseille, ma ville, toujours à mi-distance entre la tragédie et la lumière, elle se fait, comme il se doit, l'écho de ce qui nous menace (Izzo 2015, 515).⁶

5 “Nothing of what you are about to read actually happened. Apart, of course, from what's true. And what you may have read in the newspaper, or seen on TV. Not so much, when you come down to it. And I sincerely hope that the story told here will stay where it should: in the pages of a book. Having said that, Marseilles itself is real. So real that I really wouldn't like you to look for any resemblances to people who actually lived. Even with the main character. What I have to say about Marseilles, my city, is once again nothing but a series of echoes and reminiscences. In other words, whatever you can read between the lines” (Izzo 2018, 18).

6 “As for Marseilles, my city, always halfway between tragedy and light, it naturally reflects the threat hanging over us” (Izzo 2007, 15).

These are the words that Jean-Claude Izzo uses at the paratextual level as a warning and synthetic depiction of the urban space of reference.⁷ They prove to be perfectly in line with the vicissitudes experienced by the character of Fabio Montale, a transparent evocation of a poet intimately connected to the Mediterranean – Eugenio – in whose production one can find linguistic echoes and motifs genuinely connected to that vast marine expanse.⁸

In the last thirty years – in the panorama of critical-literary hypotheses around and about the Mediterranean as the narrative engine in which mystery is produced, crime is committed, and investigations are developed – there has been a growing assumption of the importance of urban space that acquires its own significance – tending to be divisive – on the transcultural and multi-ethnic plane and that requires to be analyzed in terms that are both systematic and selective. It can be seen, for example, as a space that allows one to probe – in its being situated on or near the Mediterranean as an urban perimeter capable of relating West and East, Europe and Africa, North and South – the variants of a magmatic narrative at the center of which is a mystery and in which different ethnicities, religious beliefs, and notions of belonging or of being different, in their coexistence within a single space, intersect page after page. In this sense, the discourse uses, in some circumstances, the theoretical frameworks of decolonialism, transculturalism, and deconstructionism as approaches on the methodological level, and otherness and the logic of difference as relevant analytical paths.

The Mediterranean is considered in these cases – on the level of its epistemic and narrative construction, of the objects that characterize it and of the subjects that live there – as a space in which boundaries or thresholds are present and may be of different order and nature, often changeable. It is a space where at the same time a kind of clash and fragmentation – in some rare cases also of connection – between distinct cultures is generated.

The terms used to define these phenomena and their manifestations are distinct but in themselves convergent. Whether one speaks of contact zone, transculturality, third space or even clash of civilizations does not matter (cf. Soja 1996, 57; Lombardi-Diop 2012). Whichever way you look at it, these are formulas that allude to instances of clash, trespass, or the crossing of boundaries. The essential question relates to a specific fact, namely, whether or not we can speak of a kind of heuristics of Mediterranean crime fiction in recent decades, particularly in the watermark of representations and perceptions at the spatial level. To attempt to

⁷ Regarding the representation of Marseilles in Izzo see Kalt (2018, 51–83 and 246–267), Edeling (2012, 263–264), Burtscher-Bechter (2010), Sánchez (2009) and Winkler (2010).

⁸ See Montale (1984, 51–61) and, for example, the analysis of Lollini (2009, 357–372).

probe the tightness of this critical perspective, one must decipher the formulas and tools narratively employed to represent it. The first step in this endeavor lies in the fact that the literary depiction of the Mediterranean has in common with noir and especially with the investigation at its core a high threshold of sensitivity towards the perception of difference and liminal zones. With respect to the free motion of life, its liquid flux, the hindrance – that is, the crime – that intervenes to stop this flow allows access to a privileged observatory. It allows one to grasp the incongruity or ripple and to subvert the map of the urban surface or the quadrants of that marine space; in essence, it allows one to become aware of the disjointed element that interrupts the linearity of the liquid or solid surface and the boundaries – tacit or openly visible – present within it.

Moreover, the Mediterranean benefits from another peculiar characteristic, namely that of being both a frontier space and an area of contact where Europe meets Africa and its multifaceted declinations. This is perfectly grasped in the case of an author such as Amara Lakhous who, born in Algiers in 1970, learns classical Arabic (in the Koranic school), Algerian Arabic (with which he comes into contact in his hometown) and French, which he studies in school from the third grade, at an early age. The study of philosophy in adulthood leads him to question the religious fundamentals of the civilization in which he lives, the logic associated with the war of liberation along with the dogma of male superiority. At the end of his university studies, he begins working with Algerian radio, an activity for which he came under constant threat. For that reason and to save his life, being tired – as he writes – of waiting for his murderer, he leaves Algeria and in 1995 lands in Rome, exactly in Piazza Vittorio, without taking anything with him except a manuscript as a clear sign of his narrative vocation.

In 2006, he released his second novel, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio*.⁹ The title – in addition to exhibiting the issue of the problematic confrontation between distinct identities and notions of belonging (cf. Ponzanesi 2004; Brogi 2011; Comberiati 2012) – is anchored in a space understood in a double guise; generic with regard to the elevator, specific with regard to Piazza Vittorio as an urban space dislocated with respect to the sites of Roman classicism. The latter implicitly refers back to the concept of palimpsest, in its covering of different layers, manifestos, symbols, and messages that are often even contradictory or discordant, with a coming and going of beings from disparate places and countries.

The novel also condenses in itself other peculiarities: first, it is a kind of rewriting – and not a simple translation – of an Arabic novel by Lakhous published

⁹ Some reconsiderations about this novel echo what was analysed in Fabris (2021). The object and intent of the investigation are distinct.

in 2003 in Algeria (cf. El Ammari 2022). Second, it is an investigation entrusted to the first-person accounts of the various tenants of a building located in Piazza Vittorio in whose elevator takes place the murder of one of them, the worst, a violent and brutal being called 'The Gladiator'. Following the latter's death, the protagonist Amedeo disappears, fueling a series of speculations.

At the structural level, the novel is developed by lining up, one after the other, excerpts from Amedeo's diary, in which he traces his encounters with each of the tenants, along with fragments of his past, and which are collected under the title – suggestive and surprising at the same time – of first, second, third howl (until the tenth). Each of these sections alternates between the spontaneous statements of the same tenants and frequenters of the area, who were called upon to give their version in the wake of Gladiator's murder and Amedeo's disappearance. Such sections are titled "the truth according to Benedetta Esposito," "the truth according to Ibqal Amar Allah," etc., etc.

An interesting aspect concerns the anachronies of the sections in which Amedeo expresses himself; in them, in fact, diaristic fragments with alternating dates follow one another, suggesting how memory is shaped in magmatic form. These are fragments in which the main narrator Amedeo – Amara Lakhous' alter-ego – allows his own painful memories to flow freely. Not only that; he arranges them according to a kind of chronological anarchy that, in mixing distinct dates, cancels any form of linearity. In the face of this abandonment of the constraints of rectilinearity – in contrast with what happens, for example, in the multi-layered narrative textures set up by another author with a Mediterranean imprint such as Italo Calvino and which require a certain amount of effort to find a way out of in order to reshape the narrative – the reader is now no longer asked to put the puzzle back together. The synchronic perception appears dominant, in line with the quantity and variety of suggestions derived from the chaotic nature of the urban universe, with spaces that accommodate different codes and figures such as precisely Rome (cf. Derobertis, 2008, 218–221; Parati 2010, 432–446) and Marseille.

The perception of something magmatic that unites past and present, individual and collectivity, instant and eternity is manifested through howling as a form of liberation and venting. Amedeo, in this regard, questions: "L'ululato è l'aborto della verità?" (2006, 72).¹⁰ Its nature as a meaningless sound alludes to a form of aphasia toward what is found painfully compressed at the center of the human being. At the same time, another function of the howl is, in the opposite direction, social recall; in fact, it is through this sound that the animal makes its position

¹⁰ "Is wailing an abortion of the truth?" (Lakhous 2018, 73).

known to its fellows. In the case of Amedeo it is the call for all outcasts and immigrants, or for those who – like him – find themselves in an elsewhere they have not freely chosen.¹¹

Alongside Amedeo, the protagonists of this choral novel – who intervene in the first person through a mosaic of spontaneous statements – are characters from the Global South; in fact, we find a Sri Lankan immigrant, a Peruvian woman, an Iranian spillover, or the protagonist himself, Amedeo aka Ahmed, who claims to be from the South of the South. They are joined by a Dutchman, some Romans, a Neapolitan woman who feels in her own way, in an instinctive form, a déraciné, and then the Milanese Antonio Marini. The novel thus presents a kind of liquid modernity according to Zygmunt Bauman's indications (2008, 110), to be understood from an antihegemonic perspective. Through these figures, the knot of identity and that of nationalities and ethnicities is indirectly addressed according to criteria unrelated to a postcolonial logic, and, equally, without yielding space to the allure of sterile 'goodist' instances.

The neuralgic center of the narrative is provided by the heterotopic space of the elevator mentioned in the title, which is the subject of constant contrasts and discussions and is a clear example of a Foucauldian counter-place. It is in fact one of those real places, present in every culture of every time, that are defined but absolutely different spaces; places that are opposed to all others. Thus, the elevator in the novel represents a place connected to its surroundings, but in a way that suspends, neutralizes, or reverses the set of relations with external spaces (cf. Foucault 2020, 23); something similar to what happens in the semi-enclosed, large-scale space of the Mediterranean.

The elevator – the subject of heated disputes between the various tenants and visitors of the building in Piazza Vittorio – perfectly identifies a place open to other places, characterized by a system of opening and closing (the two doors) that in this case does not depend on religious dogma or military regulations, but is determined by the distinct ideological positions and geographical affiliations and origins (particularly from a global South) of the individual apartment residents or visitors.

In this real place we witness the overlapping of different attitudes and positions that are mutually incompatible; here then is the prohibition of access to it – established by the concierge – for the Peruvian caregiver because of her excessive weight, or Amedeo himself who spontaneously renounces using it in an open polemic against any form of exclusion. In essence, the issue is about the position or

¹¹ In addition to these aspects, in Amedeo's case, the howl also gives reason for his being an adopted son of the she-wolf, and thus of Rome, which he shows he knows perfectly well.

attitude taken by each of the tenants and visitors towards the use of the elevator and especially towards the logics of power related to it.

In this view, the elevator is the key place in the economy of the story not only because the murder is committed in it, but also because, like a mantra, it returns in the free depositions of the characters. In this counterspace, different forms of racial beliefs come to predominate – with the will to exert control over order and eliminate barbarism as evinced by Professor Marini's Leghist-like rantings – or it is the site of compensation logics; the latter being the case of the Gladiator who, defeated by life, violently imposes his will in that confined space.

Additionally, through the perceptions of the individual protagonists in the depositions or from Amedeo's diary fragments – one can grasp the urban spaces, peripheral or otherwise, experienced essentially on foot and which – in their narrative depictions – take on multiple valences. This is the case of the fountain in front of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where the political refugee Parviz sits to feed the pigeons and where he becomes the victim of prejudice along with forms of control and the exercise of public power. A different situation characterizes Termini station – whose name, as we read, indicates that “il viaggio è finito” (Lakhous 2006, 115)¹² – where a different, other city comes to light in which Peruvian immigrants gather. In this case the comparison promoted by one of them, the caregiver Maria Cristina, is with stray dogs in their allowing free flow to instincts, between small alcohol-induced fights or sexual acts consumed “sulla triste panchina di un giardino pubblico”, or on the pages of newspapers strewn on the ground, or even “su un treno abbandonato o sotto un albero nascosto” (Lakhous 2006, 67).¹³ The underlying goal of these fleeting relationships is a form of venting in that one weekly afternoon of freedom: “Ognuno di noi svuota nel corpo dell’altro la propria voglia, speranza, angoscia, paura in tristezza, rabbia, odio e delusione, e questo lo facciamo in fretta come gli animali che hanno paura di perdere la stagione della fertilità” (Lakhous 2006, 66).¹⁴

Moreover, in relation to the concepts of smooth and striated space formulated by Deleuze and Guattari (2003, 557), in some of the scenarios described by Lakhous in this novel, forms of enclosure or control or alternatively minimal spaces that eschew striations are recognizable. The latter is the case of Termini station, as a space removed from the control of the state apparatus and in which there is a re-

12 “In Rome there is the Termini station. ‘Termini’ means terminal, the journey is over” (Lakhous, 2018, 117).

13 “On an abandoned train car or under a hidden train” (Lakhous 2018, 67).

14 “Each of us empties into the other’s body our own desire, hope, anguish, fear, sadness, rage, hatred, and disappointment, and we do this quickly, like animals afraid of missing the season of fertility” (Lakhous 2018, 66–67).

turn to a kind of nomadic smooth space; this is also evident from the comparison with the animal world. Striated space, on the contrary, is that of law and control, as in the case of the fountain of Santa Maria Maggiore or other urban sceneries evoked in the text, where there are fences, barriers, and forms of control and limitation of individual freedom. The latter is especially the case with the elevator, which, in Professor Marini's view, should be subject to strict regulation and controlled access.

The discourse on urban spaces and the simultaneous perception of different times and forms of communication manifested in some of the scenarios present at the narrative level leads one to consider what Bertrand Westphal calls "a semantics of tempuscules" in which points, as minimal entities, escape all linearity in a context of hybridity and dialogue (Westphal 2009, 31).¹⁵ Accordingly, also included in *Scontro di civiltà* we find a semantic axis in which we witness the prevalence of simultaneity and a dialogical attitude; for example, in some fragments from Amedeo's diary, in the individual depositions or even in the segments set in the gardens of Piazza Vittorio or in Sandro's bar where mingling and verbal exchange reign.

In effect, even though Rome does not actually overlook the sea, a continuous reference in the text to the Mediterranean¹⁶ to be understood as a magmatic universe that serves as a threshold or space of communication or clash – in its ensuring or not the contact between East and West, between Europe and Africa and between North and South, in their multifarious declinations – for the figures that alternate in the novel. In this sphere, the urban fabric of Mediterranean crime fiction takes on the guise of a space in which there are boundaries that may be of a different nature and order, and of which we become aware through distinct paths of appropriation (in Amedeo's case, for example, as a function of his constant moving around the city on foot). Urban settings, therefore, do not merely serve as a scenic element, relegated to the background, but take on a specific role in gathering interests and manifestations of power along with successful or unsuccessful forms of communication.

The narrative texture, in its being sensitive to the perception of difference, also stands out for another aspect: with respect to the free flow of life to gain importance is the crime and the mechanisms of opening and closing that allow access to a given space. Thus, the discovery of the Gladiator's murderer comes to lose – in the course of the narrative – its significance; rather, what captivates the reader lies

15 My translation.

16 See Federica Mazzara, who analyzes the alternative Mediterranean of which Amara Lakhous is the spokesperson on the cultural and literary level and in relation to Italian borders. Cf. Mazzara (2012).

in the trajectories (including spatial ones) and the situatedness of those who revolve around the protagonist. In this regard, one of Lakhous' authors of reference is surely Gadda, who in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* had depicted the living space in the two vertical and horizontal gradients to represent the different social levels of the “palazzo dell’Oro” (Gadda 2018, 25) where there were two staircases, “A e B, co sei piani e co dodici inquilini cadauna, due per piano” (Gadda 2018, 16),¹⁷ of which the second “era un porto di mare”¹⁸ while “la A più tranquilla della consorella: tutti signori autentici da quella parte” (Gadda 2018, 32).¹⁹

In *Scontro di civiltà*, Lakhous, too, makes use of vertical and horizontal gradients (the elevator, the stairs, Piazza Vittorio), but he ascribes different meanings to them: the elevator is the heterotopic space par excellence, in its being the expression of a state of crisis on the communicative level and in which the relationships that are generated refer to a different regime than outside. The stairs in turn, as a place of passage, seem to take on the guise of a space of communication (this is where the Peruvian caregiver retreats to weep and where scraps of conversation between her and Amedeo take place). Finally, one has the square, as the focal center of the neighborhood, in which the characters involved in the investigation navigate or act.

The discourse around the depiction of space, in Lakhous' perceptual logic, acquires, in these terms, a heterotopic significance with regard to the elevator (as the space of crisis) and is characterized by an alternation of nomadic smooth spaces and regulated striated spaces concerning the places in which the multi-ethnic subjects move and also in relation to the unravelling of the enigma, i.e., the crime.

II

The discourse on urban spaces and on the role assumed by heterotopia in its reflection, to a lesser extent, of a vast semi-enclosed marine perimeter such as the Mediterranean, and on the synchronic perception of elements and objects as manifestations of a smooth or striated space in constant transformation induces almost spontaneously to consider the case of Marseille in Jean-Claude Izzo's noir constructions. The latter, in the Montale trilogy, advocates a sensitive narrative weaving of

17 “A and B, with six floors and twelve tenants each, two per floor” (Gadda 1996, 9). Regarding the analysis of Gadda's novel in relation to that of Lakhous see Camesasca (2009), Schwaderer (2013), Jaran (2014); in relation to the question of space in Gadda see Alfano (2009).

18 “It was like a railroad station” (Gadda 1996, 30).

19 “Stairway A was a bit quieter than its counterpart: all real respectable on that side” (Gadda 1996, 31).

an urban space facing the Mediterranean where different cultures, ethnic affiliations and geographical, religious, and cultural backgrounds coexist. In Fabio Montale's first-person narrative, the reader gradually comes to discover how Marseille has become, over the years, a port city refuge for dissidents and outcasts, a landing space for people fleeing (even from themselves), exiles or persecuted people from all corners of the world. Therefore, there is no ethnic core to the city; rather, it serves as a multi-ethnic space where difference is the norm. This is even more true when considering the representation of urban space where – even if some historic buildings or neighborhoods survive – the dominant criterion is that of change, with a constant tendency to transform the urban landscape into striated spaces, progressively subjected to control and squaring.

In Izzo's Marseille, there are thus places characterized by a variegated nature or by multiple connotations; for example, those marked by exclusion and marginalization in which the arrogance of those who – in the grip of a verbal violence declined according to different degrees of intensity – stand up as supporters of a form of post-colonial supremacy as happens in the case of some representatives of the police force. Alternatively, there are also places that promote encounter, inclusion, and exchange or that are delineated as spaces of redevelopment, capable of assigning to certain city scenarios a new multiple identity, socially, culturally, and linguistically.

In general, the metropolitan space of Marseille is contrasted in Montale's perceptual network with the Mediterranean, which is presented as a smooth (which is not the same as homogeneous) and nomadic space. It (the Mediterranean space) is seen through the window that allows him (Montale) to perceive the interior as a complementary moment of the exterior, that is, of the Mediterranean watery surface. In this way, the transition from smooth to striated space and vice versa is realized in the archetype of smooth space, namely the sea, which – as Deleuze and Guattari have argued – was the space over which man's control and power was first exercised with the intention of transforming it into a model of regulation. However, and Izzo confirms this, the Mediterranean aquatic space as a smooth space par excellence has a de-territorializing capacity that is superior to striations (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, 669–670).

Thus, the Mediterranean topography is brought to underscore the uprooting of people from their homes and their landing to another space; in this case to Marseille where the social and cultural networks that define individuals are broken and disrupted and where complex, multiple, often unresolved identities are generated in neighborhoods populated by immigrants, similar to the building described in Lakhous' novel.

In this sense, the Mediterranean and the morphology of its shores allow – as a large-scale heterotopia – a proliferation of stories that Izzo brings together under

the common denominator of Marseille. It is not single crime, in this case, that gives rise to noir or polar, but it is building speculation, mafia trafficking and economic interests that generate, in Izzo's trilogy, a multiple epistemic space that is deposited in the intricate topographical networks of the metropolis and the thresholds that characterize it. The Mediterranean described or evoked by Izzo is also a heterotopic space that for Fabio Montale always refers back to a time out of phase with the present, in an attempt at deterritorialization or escape, in the terms identified by Michel Foucault.

As elsewhere in the Mediterranean coastal morphology (i.e., the narrative depiction of thresholds) and the topography of Marseille's neighborhoods actively influence the construction of the plot and reflect the increasing transience of the existence of those who live there. In this case, it is not a generic sea (like the one Salvo Montalbano turns his gaze to), but a watery space that presents precise scenarios and angles, marked by spatial indications and habits that refer to the ways of the everyday.

The perspectives from which Izzo looks at that aquatic space are multiple; for example, one can decipher the way the Mediterranean is perceived by standing on land, following Montale's gaze at Marseille and also at how the latter is defined in relation to the complex network of identities that populate it – as a metropolitan space in close contact with the heterotopic sea surface. One can also see how it offers some alternative points of view – between smooth and striated spaces – with respect to hegemonic discourses of a postcolonial kind. It is no coincidence that in the end it is the Mediterranean Sea that becomes the marine space of annihilation, of death par excellence for the protagonist, Montale, who in *Solea* writes:

Je m'étais dit que la solution à toutes les contradictions de l'existence était là, dans cette mer. Ma Méditerranée. Et je m'étais vu me fondre en elle. Me dissoudre, et résoudre, enfin, tout ce que je n'avais jamais résolu dans ma vie, et que je ne résoudrai jamais (Izzo 2015, 544).²⁰

Concerning Marseille, its mixed and multiple nature, to which Izzo refers on several occasions, is evoked in its being described as "rose et bleue, dans l'air immobile" (Izzo 2015, 578),²¹ to the point of almost making it a real character. In fact, in *Total Khéops*, Izzo writes that the city is

une utopie. L'unique utopie du monde. Un lieu où n'importe qui, de n'importe quelle couleur, pouvait descendre d'un bateau, ou d'un train, sa valise à la main, sans un sou en poche, et se

20 "I told myself that the solution to all the contradictions of existence was there, in that sea. My Mediterranean. And I'd seen myself melting into it, at last resolving all the things I'd never managed to resolve in life, and never would." (Izzo 2007, 39).

21 "pink and blue in the still air" (Izzo 2007, 72).

fondre dans le flot des autres hommes. Une ville où, à peine le pied posé sur le sol, cet homme pouvait dire : « C'est ici. Je suis chez moi. »
Marseille appartient à ceux qui y vivent (Izzo 2015, 209).²²

In fact, as Foucault writes, utopia is present in places that do not exist; in this sense, Marseille is a hypothetical space that exists in Izzo's imagination but does not correspond to the actual urban profile. As Foucault writes, utopian spaces are “born in the heads of men or, to tell the truth, in the interstices of their words, in the thickness of their stories or even in the place without place of their dreams, in the emptiness of their hearts; in short, it is the sweetness of utopias” (Foucault 2020, 11).²³ Moreover, Foucault continues – approaching in my opinion the striations described by Deleuze and Guattari – “one lives, dies, and loves in a squared, cropped, variegated space, with bright zones and dark zones, unevennesses, steps, hollows and humpinesses, with some regions hard and others brittle, penetrable, porous” (Foucault 2020, 12).²⁴ In relation to this, he refers both to the zones of passage and those of temporary stops opposed by heterotopias as “situuated utopias,” real places out of all places. This is exactly the case of Fabio Montale’s Mediterranean, which – unlike the holographic one of Inspector Montalbano – is present at different levels, beginning with its concrete depiction and precise individuation. It is described from different points of view, for example from the thresholds that delimit it and depict a metropolitan landscape subject to economic and political power and control that from the mainland turns to also include the sea surface on which it faces and is reflected and a place where the south for those who represent power and authority becomes synonymous with danger, as in Lakhous’ novel. Thus, those who migrate from the south to the north, “les migrants de sud vers le nord” (Izzo 2007, 583), become elements to be excluded, punished, controlled, and if possible, eliminated.

As already pointed out about *Scontro di civiltà*, also in the third of the novels in Izzo’s trilogy – the one in which spatial trajectories gain more prominence than

22 “a utopia. utopia. The only utopia in the world. A place where anyone, of any color, could get off a boat or train with his suitcase in his hand and not a cent in his pocket, and melt into the crowd. A city where, as soon as he’d set foot on its soil, this man could say, ‘This is my home.’ Marseille belongs to the people who live in it” (Izzo 2006, 218).

23 The translations from Foucault’s 2020 are mine. Here is the Italian version: “[...] sono nati, come si suol dire, nella testa degli uomini o, a dire il vero, negli interstizi delle loro parole, nello spessore dei loro racconti o anche nel luogo senza luogo dei loro sogni, nel vuoto dei loro cuori; insomma è la dolcezza delle utopie”.

24 Here is the Italian version: “Si vive, si muore, si ama in uno spazio quadrettato, ritagliato, variegato, con zone luminose e yone buie, dislivelli, scalini, avallamenti e gibbosità, con alcune regioni dure e altre friabili, penetrabili, porose”.

in the first two – the south becomes synonymous with danger and threat. Commissioner Pessaire, who was born in Algiers and arrived in Marseille at the age of six by sea, is the spokesperson for a socio-political message that is intrinsic to a post-colonial reading of the Mediterranean, and where that space appears subject to continuous streaks, with elements such as obstacle, hindrance, and separation. Indeed, Izzo writes,

Pour l'Europe du Nord, le Sud est forcément chaotique, radicalement différent. Inquiétant donc (Izzo 2015, 584).²⁵

He goes on to point out how, in the future, “les États du nord réagiront en érigeant un *limes* moderne [...] comme un rappel de la frontière entre l'Empire romain et les barbares” (Izzo 2015, 584).²⁶ This is the dimension of Guattari's and Deleuze's striated spaces where the smooth is continuously absorbed by the political-economic logic that proceeds unstoppably, without wavering, even in terms of gentrification. This is evident from what Commissioner Pessaire adds as she takes up Izzo's demands:

Ce nouveau monde est clos. Fini, ordonné, stable. Et nous n'y avons plus notre place. Une nouvelle pensée domine. Judeo-christiano-helléno-démocratique. Avec un nouveau mythe. Les nouveaux barbares. Nous. Et nous sommes innombrables, indisciplinés. Nomades bien sûr. Et puis arbitraires, fanatiques, violents. Et aussi, évidemment, misérables. La raison et le droit sont de l'autre côté de la frontière. La richesse aussi. (Izzo 2015, 584).²⁷

The “we” alludes, in this case, to the Algerian origin of the woman for whom, as she declares, it is as if from Marseilles she could see the port of Algiers; and where the element of communication between the two extremes is given by the Mediterranean, a marine space in itself atypical in its being almost closed, heterotopic par excellence.

Mention has been made of the striated space and of his unabated proceeding unabatedly at the expense of smooth one; for the latter, even in its continuous tendency toward deterritorialization, is destined to succumb under the weight of the

25 “To those in Northern Europe, the South is by its very nature chaotic, radically different, and therefore disturbing” (Izzo 2007, 78).

26 “the countries of the North will end up building a new frontier, what the Romans used to call a *limes*, to protect them from the barbarians.” (Izzo 2007, 78).

27 “This new world is a closed world. Finite, ordered, stable. There's no place in it for the likes of us. A new philosophy holds sway. Judeo-Christian, Hellenistic, democratic. With its myth of the new barbarians. Us. And we're uncountable, undisciplined, nomads of course. We're also uncontrollable, fanatical, violent. And poor, of course. Reason and law are on the other side of the frontier. Wealth too” (Izzo 2007, 78).

new and ambitious projects of the Euro-Mediterranean. And so, the littoral – smooth in its haphazard and chaotic development – becomes a space that

les paysagistes conseils d'Euroméditerranée voulaient détruire. Dans cet article de la revue *Marseille*, ils parlaient « d'une froide répulsion résultant de cet univers de machine, de béton et de charpente rivetée sous le soleil ». Les cons !

Le port était magnifique de cet endroit-là. On se le rentrait dans les yeux en roulant. Les quais. Les cargos. Les grues. Les ferries. La mer. Le château d'If et les îles du Frioul au loin. Tout était bon à prendre (Izzo 2015, 604).²⁸

The intentions are, on the contrary, to reset those landscapes “synonymous with chaos for technocrats,” that is, what is called “a landscape disuse.”

Thus, traversing that area by walking along the shoreline becomes for Montale a way of appropriating it (as it is for Lakhous' protagonist) by going along it “until” he reached “the outer harbor of La Joliette. Facing the Sainte-Marie lighthouse” (p. 75), or when he takes a ferry making the crossing together with the inhabitants of the area, or again when he is seen moving with a small boat gliding over its surface. It is a path that, in his detachment from everything, leads him to reenact a kind of rudimentary sea baptism to which his father had subjected him:

Au large des îles de Riou, j'avais coupé le moteur et laissé flotter le bateau. A cet endroit, approximatif, où mon père, me tenant sous les aisselles, m'avait trempé pour la première fois dans la mer. J'avais huit ans. [...] « N'aie pas peur, disait-il. N'aie pas peur. » Je n'avais pas eu d'autre baptême. Et quand la vie me faisait mal, c'est toujours vers ce lieu que je revenais. Comme pour tenter, là, entre mer et ciel, de me réconcilier avec le reste du monde (Izzo 2015, 568).²⁹

It almost seems as if the adopted sons of Marseilles, the escapees attempt to find their own common feeling and a kind of belonging as a function of that sea, the Mediterranean, with its wide expanse, “l'infini blue du monde” (Izzo 2015, 584)³⁰

28 “the consultant landscape architects of Euroméditerranée wanted to destroy. In that article in the magazine *Marseille* – it is Montale who narrates in the first person – they called them ‘a cold, repellent universe of machines, concrete and rivets under the sun.’ The idiots!

From here, the harbor looked magnificent. You got a real eyeful of it as you drove. The piers. The freighters. The cranes. The ferries. The sea. The Château d'If and the islands of the Frioul in the distance. All ready for the taking” (Izzo 2007, 98).

29 “Off the Riou Islands, I'd cut the motor and let the boat drift. It was here, more or less, that my father had help me under the armpits and dipped me in the sea for the first time. I was eight [...] ‘Don't be afraid,’ he said. ‘Don't be afraid.’ It was the only baptism I'd ever had. And whenever life became too painful, this was where I came, here, between the sea and the sky. As if it was only here that I might be able to make peace with the world” (Izzo 2007, 77).

30 The “infinite blueness of the world” (Izzo 2007, 78).

III

In conclusion, therefore, it can be stated how, in Lakhous' Rome, there are heterotopic spaces – the elevator – that reproduce on a small scale the nature of the Mediterranean as a counterspace along with the smooth and striated spaces of urban geography that gather subjects, identities and ethnicities on par with distinct and simultaneous objects and times that seem to allow for flashes of a trans-cultural communication.

We face, in the case of the elevator, a heterotopia founded on separation and crisis, where there can be no communication and where hindrance (in this case the crime) is produced. Beginning with the observation that examinations around urban space are by their very nature intricate, parceled out and destined to refract into multiple othernesses, Izzo's depiction of Marseille and its Mediterranean is characterized by greater complexity. First and foremost, Marseille is proposed as a kind of utopian space – in Izzo's narrative constructions – contrasted with the marine heterotopia in which Montale as a child is immersed by his father in a kind of secular baptism and in which he finds himself in moments of crisis to the point of deliberately choosing to die there. Above all, it is the eternal struggle of a city where those who land from the South move like nomads eventually succumbing in the face of the constant striations imposed by the state, politics, and the will to control that is exercised over both urban and marine space.

The attempt has been to deconstruct the map of urban spaces and places of passage marked by their being destined for temporary stops, evoked in *Scontro di civiltà* and Montale's trilogy. In the latter text, one must consider, on the one hand, the scenarios in which the narrative texture is distributed – and thus ultimately the external and internal spaces in their specificities – and, on the other, the related epistemological mechanisms. Thus, one must consider the fluid nature of the urban Roman space or the urban and marine spaces of Marseille in their being capable of reflecting the split identities of those who move there, alongside its osmotic nature capable of accommodating – in a non-peaceful form – subjects and suggestions from a South understood from a European, Mediterranean perspective, a perspective that ultimately implicitly also addresses the global South.

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Part IV: **Conceptional Spaces**

Albert Göschl (University of Graz)

A Mediterranean Utopia. The Renaissance Fiction of Plusiapolis as an Ideal of Mediterranean Connectivity

Abstract: The discourse on the Mediterranean (as it has been promoted by authors such as Fernand Braudel) reveals a strong utopian impact. This special kind of Mediterranean utopian thinking refers to transregional, multiconfessional and multilingual chronotopoi, which create new forms of contact zones. These new spaces also manifest in the genre of literary utopia, a fact that has been proven by the existence of one of Italy's first early modern utopias, Filarete's *libro architettonico*, written shortly after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Filarete's manuscript is usually understood by art historians to be a testimony of theoretical architecture, but from a literary point of view, it actually represents a complex metadiegetic novel depicting an imagined society which is characterized by a rich range of 'boundless' Mediterranean elements. On behalf of his Milanese ruler, the narrator finds therein an ideal utopian city during whose fictitious construction he discovers traces of an antique counter-town. This opposite world, Plusiapolis, is characterized by the description of urban buildings apparently influenced by the imagery of an oriental and eastern Mediterranean architecture.

This paper presents the *libro architettonico* as one of the first early modern Mediterranean utopias, and illustrates the influences of the Eastern Mediterranean on the literary utopia as well as the (im)possible influences of Filarete and his book on the reconstruction of Constantinople after the Ottoman conquest.

1 The Concept of Mediterranean Utopia

The Mediterranean region can be seen as a dense communicative network whose cultural and linguistic elements are genuinely closely interconnected.¹ However, the concept of Mediterranean has a hybrid character. On the one hand, it represents a concrete historical region, as described by Fernand Braudel, with more

¹ For the concept of Mediterranean connectivity as well as its necessary counterpart of fragmentation see Horden and Purcell (2000; 2019): "The unity and distinctiveness of the Mediterranean should be differently conceived. The unity is not that of ecological or cultural types so much as of connectivity between structurally similar (similarly mutable) microecologies" (Horden and Purcell 2019, 12).

or less fuzzy boundaries (cf. Portugali 2004, 18; Horden and Purcell 2000, 45). At certain times and places, it seems to crystalize into a strongly condensed form, such as in Medieval Andalusia or Sicily under the reign of Frederick II, both pluricultural and plurireligious melting pots, which symbolically stand as *parts pro toto* for the entire Mediterranean area. On the other hand, however, this concept of *méditerranée* also implies a strongly utopian moment. This concerns the sometimes overly idealized image of a constructed multi-ethnic society which generates transregional and multi-confessional spaces.

Hence, the *Dictionnaire de la méditerranée* contains an explicit entry on the concept of “Mediterranean Utopia”. In using this term, Christian Bromberger, the author of the lexicon entry, is primarily referring to the harmonious coexistence of Orient and Occident in the geographical area of the Mediterranean (cf. Bromberger 2016, 1503–1506). Obviously, the concept of utopia in Bromberger’s definition refers not to a place that does *not* exist, as the term was intentionally coined by Thomas More,² but rather emphasizes a particularly desirable social condition in its ideal design at its best. Utopianism is based first and foremost on a longing for a better situation, a utopian desire, as Ruth Levitas (1990) calls it. Thus, the Mediterranean region combines both the actual geographical region as well as the utopian longing for a multiethnic society; a longing which also implies its non-existence in the actual state.

But utopia is not only the longing for something. Utopia in its narrow sense is also a very well-specified literary genre. When we understand the implicitly utopian character of the Mediterranean, it is unsurprising to also find many Mediterranean utopias in the strict sense of a literary genre; texts that depict the ideal of a Mediterranean society in the genre of utopia. Besides the fact that the concept of Mediterranean is based on a broad understanding of utopianism, we also find Mediterranean utopias in a stricter sense, such as in the example of Filarete’s manuscript on architecture. The Mediterranean also manifests itself in fictional utopian places, as will be shown in the following lines. In order to analyze this form of *méditerranée* as a utopian desire, one of the first utopias of the early modern period, (Antonio Averlino) Filarete’s *libro architettonico*, should serve as a basis.³

2 The term *utopia* goes back to the Greek *ou-topos*, the non-existent place. In the argumentation of Thomas More utopia is – according to the English pronunciation of <u> – also interpreted as a *eu-topos*, a non-existent happy place (cf. More [1516/51], xi): “Wherfore not *Utopie*, but rather rightly my name is *Eutopie*: a place of *felicitie*”.

3 While utopias had, of course, also emerged in the centuries before (such as, for example, the as yet little researched utopianism of the Middle Ages, cf. Oexle 1977), the term is a neologism of More alone.

2 Filarete's Construction of Utopia

In literary studies utopia is understood to be a literary mediated social concept that is situated in a non-existent, fictional place and presents a radically different counter-model to the author's contemporary reality.⁴ Unlike the ideal city of Sforzinda, the equally fictitious town of Plusiapolis is far less well-known. Plusiapolis is an ancient port whose existence was narrated by Filarete's literary meta-utopia between 1460 and 1464.⁵ It is an urban and at the same time global Mediterranean metropolis whose transregional nature is expressed through the literalization of building structures.⁶ Filarete's untitled manuscript, which in research is called either *trattato di architettura* or *libro architettonico*, is of central importance for the history of art, as it contains the first classical design of an ideal city in the Renaissance.⁷

However, in reducing its importance to art history, it has been long overlooked that this text is also of great interest for literary studies, including *Mediterranean* literary studies. The art historical and architectural discourse on the text usually devalues its narrative elements in favor of the description of architectural components. In the late nineteenth century translation into German by Wolfgang von Oettingen (1896) for example, narrative passages were even partially shortened and deleted as uninteresting with the purpose of emphasizing the treatise-like structure of the text. But beyond the architectural treatise, the text also represents a literary social draft which contains the most essential components of literary utopias and thus already anticipates a large part of Thomas More's utopian writing. Filarete refers in his manuscript to a non-existent, desirable world which is not only architecturally outlined, as the title suggests; he also depicts the utopian society itself. The description of the new society outlines, as in all classical utopias, the education system, clothing, penal system, daily routine, and similar sociological elements. In addition to the pure description of architectural sketches and ideal

⁴ Utopia and utopian thought in general always arise from concrete historical conditions. Their analysis contributes to the understanding of utopia. Important introductions to Utopia as a genre are, among many others, Sargent (1994), Levitas (1990), Hölscher (1996), and Kuon (1986).

⁵ Pivotal research on Filarete is presented, above all, in the works of Berthold Hub (2011; 2012; 2014) and Hubertus Günther (1988; 2009; 2014), Pfisterer (2002; 2009); Finoli (1985), Grassi (1985).

⁶ The most important new editions of the text from the twentieth century were presented by Spencer (1965) and Finoli and Grassi (1972).

⁷ For an introduction to the ideal city discourse during the Renaissance cf. Buck (1991), and a concise study on Filarete as architect by Tigler (1963).

social structures, the text consists of a convoluted narrative framework which transcends the *écriture* of a treatise, integrating novelistic traits.⁸

The starting point of the text is a conversation about the unnecessary nature of architecture, which Filarete coincidentally witnesses. For this reason, he writes his book in the Italian vernacular to emphasize how necessary this art form is to society. In using the *volgare*, he distinguishes himself from his recent predecessor Leon Battista Alberti, who had written a Latin treatise *De re aedificatoria* on architecture shortly before (1443–1452). Subsequently, Filarete's text consists primarily of a dialogue between the narrator-architect and his Milanese ruler, Francesco Sforza (including his son). Even though the latest edition of the manuscript from 1972 is entitled *trattato di architettura*, it is not, strictly speaking, a treatise from a literary studies point of view given that the voice is far too personal, the narrative framework inappropriate, and the utopian social drafts equally unfitting.

In any case, the narrator reflects on the ideal city and convinces his ruler to construct it. At the outset he searches for the best possible landscape he can find in the fictitious *Valle d'Inda*. There he begins, after an accurate astrological analysis of the best moment (cf. Bertolini 2010, 142), with the construction of his ideal city Sforzinda, unmistakably named after the Milanese ruling dynasty, the Sforza. He depicts in detail the buildings, their dimensions and functionalities as they are arranged in the literary created space. In front of the reader's eyes, an ideal city is brought into being, arranged according to classical principles, congeneric to the one we perceive in Urbino's cityscapes, which have also become iconic.

The crucial moment for interpreting the *libro architettonico* as an outline of Mediterranean utopianism occurs at the end of the first book in chapter XIV.⁹ After the architect has convinced the prince to construct a new harbor for Sforzinda, the workers discover a mysterious box, during the excavations. They immediately recognize an inscription on it, written not in Latin or Italian, but in Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic.

E nel cavare fu trovato uno sasso quadro, il quale era come dire una cassa grande [...], tutto pulito e quadro, che non pareva se none un pezzo intero; il quale vedutolo mi piacque, e fatolo scavare intorno e voltatolo sotto sopra, *gli era scritto lettere antichissime ebree e arabiche*

⁸ The narrative elements here correspond to the fictionalization strategies of later utopias. In addition to the narrative perspective, these concern the attitude of reception, the metaphorical function of the voyage, the toponomy of geographical places, and the symbolic imagery (cf. Rivoletti 2008).

⁹ Besides De Alberti and the art historian influences, other literary influences can be traced back to travel narratives such as Marco Polo's *Milione* (cf. Grassi 1985, 36–38) or, as with all literary utopias, to Plato's myths of Atlantis (cf. Onians 1971, 107).

e greche; e veduto queste mi piacciono e molto ci maravigliamo, e subito lo facemo condurre fuori del fondamento. [...],¹⁰ [emphasis mine] (TdA, 385).¹¹

Since none of the workers involved in the excavations is capable of speaking any of the three languages, the narrator commissions a translation.

[F]eci trascrivere quelle lettere nella propria forma, le quali innanzi che altrimenti fusse toccate mandamo al Signore. E quale, maravigliatosi, subito le fece interpretare, e inteso la significazione d'esse, subito ne scrisse indietro che per infino che lui non venisse non si dovesse aprire, e che s'attendesse a murare, che infra otto o dieci dì vi sarebbe sanza manco. (TdA, 385).¹²

As the lord arrives, the box is finally opened, which inaugurates the pivotal moment of the book, dividing it ultimately into two parts on a narrative level. As the casket is opened, two butterflies escape, and a golden book appears next to two vases filled with ashes.

Veduto, com'io ho detto, lui ancora questo sasso quadrato, molto si maravigliò e volle vedere dove e in che luogo fu trovato; e fattolo scoprire e guardato dentro gli era una cassetta di piombo [...]. *Eragli ancora uno libro grande tutto d'oro, [...].* E nel resto del vacuo erano due vasi del medessimo metallo ch'era el libro [...]. E vedute queste cose, ognuno rimase stupefatto e anche molto allegri, veduto quell'oro [emphasis mine] (TdA, 386).¹³

This golden book is richly decorated and written in Greek “tutto era scritto a lettere greche” (curiously, despite its verbal description, the corresponding figure only illustrates a Latin title without Greek inscription)¹⁴. It is sent to the main

10 Trans. “During the excavation, a square stone was found that was almost like a large chest. It had a volume of three braccia and was all polished and square so that it seemed to be a solid piece. When I saw it, I liked it and had it dug out all around and brought out. On top of it there were writings in very old letters in Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek. I was pleased when I saw these. We were astonished by it but soon had it brought up out of the foundations.” (ToA, 177; ToA refers further on to Spencer's translation of 1965 entitled *Treatise on architecture*).

11 TdA refers hereafter to the edition of Finoli and Grassi *Trattato d'architettura*, 1972.

12 Trans. “I had these letters transcribed exactly, and before anything else was touched we had them sent to my lord. He was amazed at them and soon had them translated. When he understood their meaning, he quickly wrote back that it should not be opened until he arrived” (ToA, 177).

13 Trans. “He had it opened and looked inside. [In it] there was a small lead box [...]. There was also a large book all of gold. [...] In the remainder of the hollow, there were two vases [made] of the same metal as the book [...]. Everyone was amazed by these things and also very happy” (ToA, 178).

14 Pfisterer (2002) undertook a detailed analysis of the description of the Golden Book and the differences from the illustrated version of it. For a general analysis of Filarete's illustrations cf. Beltrami (2001), Samsa (2012), and Hubert (2003).

translator of Francesco Sforza, who – as a highly educated humanist scholar – will soon translate the contents of the book.

Scoperti i vasi, non altro che polvere v'era dentro, la quale stimamo per quell'ora essere polvere de' corpi morti e quasi furono tentati di gittarla via, senonché io dissi: “*Nolla gittate, Signore, vogliate prima fare interpretare queste lettere che sono scritte su questi vasi*, poi si può fare come vi piace” [emphasis mine] (TdA, 387–388)

The prince opens the vases and discerns them to be filled with ashes. Finding them worthless, he is about to discard them. Only the intervention of the architect protects the important discovery, as it will later transpire. The inscription on the vases should be translated first.

E così si partì, e con noi rimase il suo poeta valentissimo in greco e in latino; trascritto tutto il libro dell'oro al figliuolo del Signore e a me, tutto iscolpito nelle pagine, la quale significazione disse che era in questa forma (TdA, 392).¹⁵

Once translated, it becomes evident that the author of this book is a certain King Zogalia,¹⁶ the ancient king of Plusiapolis himself and his architect Onitoan Nolivera Notirenflo, who constructed the old town. Consequently, a considerable metadiegetic narration is about to begin.

Io, Rex Zogalia – il quale in nostro volgare dioma vuol dire sapiente e ricco – come amaestrato in più scienze, lascio questo tesoro in guardia a te Folonon e a te Orbiati, che mai nessuno debba potere toccare questo tesoro per infino che non verrà uno, il quale dee venire di piccolo principio e per sua virtù acquiserà una signoria non piccola, [...] (TdA, 393).¹⁷

Zogalia reports therein that there was once an ancient port city at this place whose existence he wishes to preserve for posterity by describing it in such detail. He depicts the structure of the city, its buildings, gardens, labyrinths, and social struc-

¹⁵ Trans. “He left, and his poet, [who was] well educated in Greek and in Latin, remained with us. He translated both to my lord's son and to me all the book of gold – everything that was engraved on its pages. The poet said its meaning was this” (ToA, 181).

¹⁶ Regarding the names of his protagonists, Filarete works with a system, similar to the French verlan, exchanging syllables so that Zo-ga-lia might refer to Ga-lia-zo; with the same logic, Zogalia's architect Onitoan Nolivera Notirenflo is an anagram of Antonio Averlino (Filarete) (cf. Finoli 1985, 63).

¹⁷ Trans. “I, King Zogalia, which means in our vulgar tongue wise, rich, trained in many sciences, leave this treasure in your guardianship, Folonon and Orbiati. No one will ever be able to touch this treasure until there comes a man who will rise from a small principate and through his own virtù” (ToA, 181).

ture. Filarete and his colleagues read these metadiegetic descriptions with great interest and decide, with the prince's consent, to reconstruct the old town right in this place. Thus, instead of building a *new* port town, it was decided that the *ancient* port be rebuilt according to the fictional architect's descriptions. Here, the program of the Renaissance is about to be realized on a fictional level in an astonishingly condensed form.

3 Mediterranean Influences of Plusiapolis

The fictional discovery of the Golden Book is a key moment in the history of the Renaissance. It combines the rediscovery of Vitruvius's books on architecture with Middle Eastern narratives (the discovery of a treasure) as well as alchemical-allegorical elements, which also emanate from the Eastern Mediterranean region (cf. Hub 2011, 29). Filarete presents through his *libro d'oro* a literary utopian ideal of a non-existent antiquity. The Renaissance ideal should not, however, be expected in the classical sense such as that represented by Alberti (cf. Onians 1971, 107). The fact that the Golden Book is written in Greek, and that all the inscriptions in the ancient port town are also written in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, or even with Egyptian hieroglyphs suggests that Plusiapolis lies somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁸ It is not Western Rome that is going to be rebuilt; it is the Eastern Byzantine part of the Empire that is integrated into this fictional utopia. Filarete's fantasies refer to a geographical context which extends from Constantinople to Egypt and beyond to a boundless Mediterranean space oriented towards the East.

But even before the appearance of the Golden Book, there are already indications of the Mediterranean character of the text, as can be observed in the allegorical symbol of the snake: when the construction work on Sforzinda commences, the workers witness the sudden appearance of a snake.

In questo cavando, uno de' cavatori vidde un certo buco ch'era li propinquio a lui, alzando la zappa in su quel diritto diè in modo che, levando uno gran pezzo di terra, scoperse una certa tana dove una grossa e bella serpe era inviluppata; [di che costui sbigottito, e la serpe, vedendosi scoperta e anche la sua abitazione guasta, presto alzò la testa e di quel luogo si partì molto severa e colla testa alta, che pareva ch'ella fusse levata due braccia da terra, e così inverso del centro del nostro circuito s'adirizzò] (TdA, 108).¹⁹

¹⁸ As Hub (2011, 21) notes, there are only a few proposals relating to classical Roman antiquity.

¹⁹ Trans. "During the excavation, one of the diggers saw a hole near him. With his shovel, he lifted a large piece of earth and discovered a den where a large and beautiful serpent was coiled up. He was terrified by it, but the serpent, seeing himself discovered and his house ruined, suddenly

The workers are terrified and attempt to kill it, but the snake dispatches one of its aggressors by coiling around his neck and constricting him to death.

Vedendo questa così andare, ognuno guardava, e uno fra gli altri corse per volerla amazzare, e con uno bastone le trasse per modo che, se l'avessi colta, senza dubbio l'arebbe morta, pure un poco di punta per ischiancio la toccò. Lei, sentitasi tocca, con grande velocità e impeto in contra di costui s'adirizzò, e senza essere potuto aiutare, se gli avolse al collo e tanto lo strinse che la detta serpe gli tolse il fiato. E fatto questo, in un momento se gli svolse dal collo e andò alla sua via. Molti volevano andare per amazzarla (TdA, 109).²⁰

One could expect that the aggression against the snake would escalate but astonishingly, the opposite is the case. As the lord observed this event, he ordered that no one should attack the animal. In the meantime, the snake moved to the laurel in the center of the *piazza* and entered it through a hole in the trunk. The lord finally claimed: “Certainly these are omens of great significance” (ToA, 47):

Veduto il Signore questo così fatto augurio, fece comandare che niuno la dovesse offendere, non facendo ella molesta, e non dessi impaccio a niuno per mezzo della nostra lineata città. E quando ella fu in el centro dove era disegnata la piazza, e sendo a caso e a fortuna quasi a mezzo, o vero presso a mezzo, della detta piazza una grossa pianta d'alloro, e la dirittura più al principio della piazza una grossa e antica quercia concava, non volle entrare in quella, maadirizzatasi all'alloro, su per esso andò; e trovatavi una concavità dentro vi si misse. E stando così attenti tutti a riguardare questo animale, il quale si misse in questa pianta dell'alloro, e uno sciamio d'ape sopra al detto alloro si posò. E stando così attenti e mezzi stupefatti ogni persona di questo caso, il Signore dice: ‘Per certo questi sono auguri che importano grandissima significazione’ (TdA, 109).²¹

The interpretation of the scene becomes explicit when Filarete subsequently discusses this event with a clairvoyant. The wise man informs Filarete that the

raised his head and very angrily left the place with his head so high that it seemed to be raised two braccia off the ground. He started toward the middle of our circuit” (ToA, 47).

20 Trans. “Everyone watched him go. One person ran after it to kill it. He struck it with a club in such a way that if he had hit it, he would certainly have killed it, but the point only struck a glancing blow. Feeling itself touched, the snake attacked him with such speed that we were not able to aid him. The serpent wrapped itself around his neck and squeezed so hard that it took his life” (ToA, 47).

21 Trans. “When my lord saw this omen, he ordered that no one should attack it. [...] It arrived in the center where the piazza was laid out. [Here there was] almost in the middle, or near the middle, of the piazza a large laurel, and in line with it, but nearer the beginning of the piazza, a large and hollow old oak. It did not wish to enter this but went straight to the laurel. It went up it and found a hole where it entered. [...] My lord said: Certainly these are omens of great significance” (ToA, 47).

snake is not a symbol of sin, but of the new town. In this crucial scene, two symbolic systems are competing with each other. While the simple workers interpret the snake as a threat in the sense of the Christian symbol of sin and the expulsion from paradise, the snake is now positively revalued.

Even if it is just an assumption, it appears to be plausible that Filarete had the ancient symbol of the ouroboros in mind, the depiction of a snake eating its own tail and a symbol which hints at an old but well known (in humanist circles) Egyptian alchemic discourse (cf. Assmann 2017), in which Filarete seems to be interested. The ouroboros would fit perfectly into the construction of a self-sufficient utopia where the past and the present, the *we* and the *other*, symbolized by the two towns of Sforzinda and Plusiapolis, create a self-sufficient circle. The interpretation of this scene as being based on ancient alchemical symbols is strengthened by Filarete's special interest in a mystical Egyptian past (cf. Hub 2011, 19). The text is replete with references to Egyptian obelisks, pyramids, labyrinths, and an enthusiastic fascination with hieroglyphics. Obviously, it is only a vague stereotypical image of Egypt, which has little in common with the true geographical region.²²

ed eravi ancora nel centro uno obilisco, cioè una guglia, la quale era scolpita tutta di lettere egiziane come già anticamente s'usavano. [...] E così in ciascheduno di questi due teatri volle si mettesse nel mezzo uno obilisco con lettere di quelle che avevo detto che erano in figura d'animali e d'altre cose, quasi come quelle egiziane, e volle ch'io scrivessi il nome suo e ancora il tempo che correva, cioè el millesimo (TdA, 119).²³

Another example of Filarete's special kind of Mediterranean utopianism is the central tower of Sforzinda, whose depiction strongly reminds us of the lighthouse of Alexandria.²⁴ In both cases, the towers can be imagined as a parallelepiped on which stands an octagonal tower, leading into a round tower on which a small statue has been placed. The similarities between the two buildings are evident. Nevertheless, Filarete's predominant interest lies not in Egypt, but in a more general Byzantine world. Constantinople, for example, serves as an explicit model.²⁵

22 Additionally, it seems plausible that Filarete's interest in Egyptian hieroglyphs is based on the rediscovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1460, the year Filarete began to write his *libro architettonico*. The book was brought to Florence where Marsilio Ficino worked contemporaneously on its translation into Latin and caused a first peak of interest in Egyptian hieroglyphs amongst Italian humanists (cf. Keiner 2003, 67–68).

23 Trans. "He also wanted an obelisk erected in the middle of these two theaters with the letters that I have mentioned in the form of animals and other things, almost like the Egyptian ones. He wanted me to write his name and the date, that is the year" (TdA, 155).

24 I want to thank Nicolai Kölmel who made me aware of this important fact.

25 See, for example, the cathedral of Plusiapolis which is akin to Ottoman mosques.

Moreover, all the main buildings of Plusiapolis are akin to elements of Eastern Mediterranean, Byzantine and oriental architecture.

4 Filarete's Mediterranean Network

One of the reasons for this interest in the Byzantine world may be Filarete's stay in Milan. Since the 1430s, a strong philobyzantine interest has prevailed among humanists, with whom Filarete also came into contact (cf. Rovetta 1983).²⁶ Among them, Francesco Filelfo is to be mentioned above all, who besides Latin also mastered Greek perfectly (cf. Meserve 2010, 47).

As a matter of fact, Filelfo himself enters the fictitious world of Filarete's uto-pia. It is none other than him (or to be more precise, his fictional counterpart) who translates the Golden Book on behalf of the prince. As in the aforementioned examples of Zogalia (Galazio Maria Sforza) or Onitoan Nolivera Notirenflo (Antonio Averlino Florentino), it is easy to decipher the character of Scofrance Notilento, the translator of the Golden Book, as Filelfo da Tolentino. The humanist Filelfo lived in Constantinople in the 1420s as a *bailò*, a Venetian ambassador (cf. Meserve 2010, 51). There he married a Greek woman, whose father taught him ancient Greek (cf. Meserve 2010, 48). During his stay, Filelfo also came into contact with the Ottoman Empire, negotiating Venetian trade interests with the Sultan. Filelfo then became an essential connoisseur of the Eastern Mediterranean. This self-stylization came to pass by means of numerous public *epistolae* which were addressed to rulers all around the world (cf. Meserve 2010, 47).

A key moment is the final takeover of Constantinople by the Ottomans and Filelfo's conviction that a crusade against the Empire should be organized (cf. Meserve 2010, 47). Filelfo's family is consequently arrested by the Ottomans and only a praise poem of Filelfo's to Mehmed II leads to their liberation. It appears obvious that Filarete may have been significantly influenced in the literary construction of his two ideal cities by the first-hand descriptions of his best friend, Francesco Filelfo.

The friendship between Filelfo and Filarete began in 1456. In 1465, however, one year after finishing his manuscript, all traces of Filarete are suddenly lost. The last vestige which is preserved is a letter of recommendation from Filelfo to

²⁶ Besides Milan, Mantova also maintained very close relations with the Ottoman Empire (cf. Gattward Cevizli 2014). For the special role Filelfo had for Filarete's book, cf. McEwen (2016).

the Greek Georgios Amiroutzes, teacher of Mehmed II, in which Filarete is depicted as Filelfo's best friend and outstanding architect,²⁷ here in the Greek original:

Φραγκίσκος ὁ Φιλέλφος Γεωργίψ Ἀμοιρουκίψ, φιλοσόφω, χαίρειν

‘Ο ἀποδιδούς σοι τὴν παροῦσαν ἐπιστολήν, Ἀντώνιος Αὐερλῖνος, ἀνήρ ἐστι καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός, κάμοι ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα φίλοις τυγχάνων. Διὸ κατὰ τὴν πάλαι παροιμίαν, συνίστημι σοι τὸν ἄνδρα, ὃς καὶ φίλον ὅντα ἐμόν τε ἐσόμενον, κοινὸν ἄρα φίλον ἡμῖν τοῖς φιλτάτοις. Ἐστι δὲ πραγμάτων ἔμπειρος ἄλλων τε πάνυ πολλῶν καὶ καλῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀρχιτέκτων ἄριστος. Ἐρχεται μὲν οὖν αὐτόσε θέας ἔνεκα μόνον. Ποιήσεις μοι τοίνυν πρᾶγμα λίαν ποθεινὸν δεξάμενος τὸν ἄνδρα ἀσπασίως καὶ δείξας αὐτῷ ἄπασαν τὴν ἀγάπην σου πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

Ἐρρώσο. Μεδιολάνοθεν, τῇ πρὸ Αύγουστου Καλενδῶν τρίτῃ, ἔτει ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ γεννήσεως ἀρρενοκόρητος (30.07.1465; Filelfo 2015, 1134, PhE 25.49).²⁸

Filarete “is a gentleman and one of my dearest friends. [...] He is experienced in many useful fields and most importantly he is a great architect”, as translated in the critical edition of Filarete’s letters by Jeroen De Keyser. Although impossible to prove, there seems to be evidence that Filarete went to Constantinople after 1465 to participate in the reconstruction of the city (cf. Hayes 2001, 170; Kafescioğlu 2009, 74).

Mehmed II actively brought intellectuals from all over the world to work on the reconstruction of the new capital and the construction of the new empire. The Italian influences on the new empire are manifold, such as the portrait of Mehmed II. by Gentile Bellini in 1480 (cf. Kafescioğlu 2008, 253). According to Marcello Restler (1981, 361–367), there are Florentine influences on the dimensions of the Medresses and the Fatih Mosque in Istanbul, whose construction began after 1464 (cf. Hayes 2001, 168). Mehmed also constructed the first star-shaped fortress (Yedikule Hisarı), as depicted by Alberti and Filarete. Benedetto Dei, a Florentine spy noted in his *Cronica* that in 1466 Florentine builders assisted the Ottomans in constructing the “chastello de la Grecia” (cf. Hayes 2001, 180). The star-shaped construction of the Yedikule, built in 1458, already points to an Italian influence. Florentines were also involved in the construction of Kilitbahir (cf. Gat-

27 See also Tigler (1963, 5) and Monfasani (2019, 20–21).

28 Trans. “Francesco Filelfo greets the philosopher Georgius Amoerucius.

The man who brings you this letter, Antonio Averlino, is a gentleman and one of my dearest friends. Thus, according to the old proverb, I entrust to you this man, as my friend, to become your friend, a mutual friend, then, for the two of us, who are dear friends. He is experienced in many useful fields and most importantly he is a great architect. He is coming there only to see the sights. You will do me a great pleasure if you welcome him with kindness and if you show him all the love that you have for me.

Goodbye. Milan. ‘30 July 1465’ (Filelfo 2015, 1135, PhE 25.49).

ward Cevizli 2014, 183). From these facts it could be deduced that even Filarete was involved in the construction (cf. Hayes 2001, 168).

More evidence of a possible contact between Filarete and the Ottoman Empire lies in the fact that parts of the Corvinus library (Mathias Corvinus, King of Hungary, requested a translation of Filarete's manuscript into Latin) were discovered in 1862 in Constantinople (cf. Hayes 2001, 170). During Filarete's lifetime, Corvinus had the Italian text translated into Latin in order to include it in his library. In the Corvinus library of Istanbul, however, there was also a Vitruvian manuscript which had most probably been in the possession of Filarete (cf. Hayes 2001, 169).

Of course, these are only speculations; perhaps it is only a romantic idea that embeds the disappearance of Filarete in such an attractive narrative. Regardless of whether Filarete actually moved to the court of Mehmed II after he had quarreled with his Milanese rulers, it is evident that the Ottoman Empire and Italian Renaissance architecture influenced each other's urban structures.

5 Conclusion

Filarete's Plusiapolis symbolizes the ideal past of a pan-Mediterranean urban system inscribed in an Arcadian landscape at the seaside, somewhere in the Mediterranean. Filarete explicitly depicts architectonic buildings in the opening chapter of his book as human individuals: "Io ti mostrerò l'edificio essere proprio uno uomo vivo, e vedrai che così bisogna a lui mangiare per vivere, come fa proprio l'uomo" (Finoli and Grassi 1972, 29).²⁹ The buildings were created according to human characteristics and are as individually different as people are; just as no man is like another, no building is like another. Taking this point of view seriously, Filarete depicts Plusiapolis as a city populated by individuals of different origins. Most of them are of Greek, generally of Byzantine, Egyptian, or Roman origin, traces of which can be proven in individual cases as distant as Persia and India. The actual absence of people in the cities is substituted for the individual descriptions of people who open up a highly connected Mediterranean communication space. At the same time, it shows the potential of this past utopian town to become a future city since the narrator is presenting us with a plan to rebuild it.

The common language of Plusiapolis is Greek. The fictional treatise is written in Greek; all the inscriptions in the main buildings are Greek. The architectonic allusions are inspired by the Egyptian and Byzantine world; not by the real world

29 Trans. "I will [then] show you [that] the building is truly a living man. You will see that it must eat in order to live, exactly as it is with a man" (ToA, 12–13).

but by the imagined world Filarete had in mind, without studying it, but rather by being informed by acquaintances such as the humanist Francesco Filelfo, whose biography is crucial to understanding Filarete's text. It is much more likely that *Inda*, even as an allusion to India, simply symbolizes a form of otherness. It is a global, antique Mediterranean world vision which had to be reborn in Filarete's vision; a rebirth not of classical Roman antiquity, but of an apparently homogeneous but also diverse, ideal Mediterranean town.

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Sophia Schnack (University of Vienna) / Daniel Winkler (Heidelberg University)

The *pensée de midi* Revisited: Mediterranean Connectivity Between Paul Arène, Albert Camus, and Louis Brauquier

Abstract: The following article discusses the “pensée de midi” and formations of Mediterranean relationality in canonical and non-canonical literary texts. The “pensée de midi” is seen as a corrective that dissolves binary oppositions and brings different (literary) spaces and topoi into dialogical relation. Texts from the 1880s to the 1950s will be examined that implement the “pensée de midi” in the field of tension between regionality and transnationality, using literary strategies that, despite all the Mediterranean topoi, undermine an essentialization of a unified Mediterranean by means of techniques of projection and alienation. If Paul Arène’s novel *Paris ingénue* (1882) serves as an impulse text that changes the view of Paris through the imaginary of Provence, Jean Grenier and Albert Camus later considered the French South in a transnational context. For them, Lourmarin became a point of reference for a transnational “pensée de midi”. In Jean Giono’s work in *Manosque* instead, another form of Mediterranean-meridional mythology emerges that functions on a level of abstraction, namely the transferability of imaginary landscapes and mentalities. The intent of this paper is to contextualize the *pensée de midi* by putting it in perspective as a symbol of connectivity and as a representation of an antihegemonic vision of the South.

1 From Albert Camus Back to the Félibrige

Albert Camus and other intellectuals established the *pensée de midi* as a humanistic-sensual counter-device of modernity against the backdrop of European totalitarianism and imperialism, as well as in opposition to the increasing commercialization of almost all areas of life. This article aims to contextualize the *pensée de midi* and to put it into perspective as a symbol of connectivity, oscillating between Meridionality and Mediterraneanity, which historically date back much further. Despite having slightly differing connotations, the *pensée de midi* is in this context understood as portraying an anti-hegemonic view of the South, and not a reference to a geographically fixed space. This article looks at Paul Arène (1843–1896), Albert Camus (1913–1960) and Louis Brauquier (1900–1976) as models in examining how this figure of thought can be observed throughout (southern) France’s literary his-

tory of modernity. As divergent as their individual works are, all three authors are tightly connected, in an intellectual and biographical sense, to the Mediterranean region; specifically, the historically French departments of Basses-Alpes, Bouches-du-Rhône and Vaucluse, as well as Algiers and Constantine in Algeria.

Based on the work of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2019, 208), Mediterranean connectivity is understood as a multi-layered interaction of highly distinctive “Mediterranean microregions”. In addition to the evident “movements of peoples and goods and information”, the three authors examined in this article also imagine, in different ways, “shifting terrestrial or maritime networks” as well as sensual-fluid “lines of sight and lines of sound” that often transcend the Mediterranean. In this sense, we assume that for all three authors the Midi represents a space of reflection, open in the direction of the North and the South. Within this space, the three authors constantly explore the tensions between regionality, nationality and Mediterraneanity. Regarding the “border space ‘Mediterranean’”, their texts also reflect the “gaze-bound nature of border demarcations” (Burtscher-Bechter and Mertz-Baumgartner 2006, 12 and 14), i. e., the interdependence of North and South or city, country and sea.

Arène’s stories from the 1880s and the 1890s, Camus’s essays and Brauquier’s poems from the 1920s and the 1930s stand for three different forms of Meridional-Mediterranean connectivity, which correlate with divergent forms of exoticism and orientalism: Paul Arène, against the background of his socialisation as a Félibrige from Haute-Provence and a career in the Parisian literary milieu, takes a ‘provincializing’ look at the capital. Paris becomes a place of sensual strolling characterized by a decelerated-associative, i. e., transregional, perception. Albert Camus, on the other hand, theorizes the *pensée de midi* as a figure of thought for characterizing a meaningful human life. In the sense of a territorially delimited South, his origins in French Algeria, his Parisian career and his residence in Lourmarin in the department of Vaucluse, all condense into an imaginary space of deceleration, simplicity and physicality. Louis Brauquier extends this legacy with his lyrical work in the form of a trans-Mediterranean exoticism. The *pensée de midi* appears in the texts of the nomadic lyricist without boundaries. The Midi, the Mediterranean and the Pacific become analogous places of melancholic projections of wanderlust and homesickness.

2 The Midi, the Sea and the Hinterland

When looking at the Mediterranean region as a “sea of literature”, French colonialism becomes evident as a historical framework for reflection. For a long time, the Midi was considered an archaic and underdeveloped region, often perceived

in quasi-colonialist terms by Paris. This clearly changed with the French occupation of Algeria (1830) and its annexation to France (1848). The Midi became a liminal space between Central France and the new Algerian departments, and it subsequently experienced a socio-economic and cultural upswing (Borutta 2014, 201–205). It was increasingly perceived as a “Mediterranean space-time continuum”, which is reflected, among others, in the Saint-Simonists’ vision of “an administrative and infrastructural interconnection of the Mediterranean coasts” and a “southern extension of France” (Borutta 2014, 206). The literature of the late nineteenth century depicts this socio-economic and conceptual transformation of the South of France as a symbol of connectivity: the Midi becomes the starting point of numerous shipping voyages by Orientalist authors, as well as the *topos* of an inner-French Orient. Marseille in particular is evoked as the *Porte de l’Orient*, where one can already sense the allure of the Other without having to confront the socio-economic and linguistic-cultural differences present in the new departments (Winkler 2007, 95–96).

Against this backdrop, many Mediterranean discourses of a topographically expanded southern France at the threshold of the twentieth century appear to be permeated with imperial implications, even if they are intended to be anti-nationalist. The desire to think of the Midi and the Mediterranean as fluid zones manifested itself in the early twentieth century in the Marseillais journal project *Cahiers du Sud* (1925–1965), which, from a contemporary perspective, laid the foundation of a cosmopolitan *pensée de midi*. After its foundation in 1914 by Jean Ballard and others, the *Cahiers du Sud* helped establish a circle of cosmopolitan authors such as Gabriel Audisio and Louis Brauquier throughout the 1920s. The journal gained an international reputation for its anti-nationalist Mediterranean thinking, which dissociated itself from *latinité* ideology, i.e., the perception of the Midi as an archaic hinterland, which can also be traced back to the Félibrige.¹ The *Cahiers du Sud*’s location and title were intended as a way to distance the journal from the Paris center and establish it as a transregional and transnational opening. Issues such as “L’Islam et l’Occident” (1935) and “Le Génie d’Oc et

¹ Camus referred to this tendency as a “nationalisme du soleil” and a “régionalisme méditerranéen” (qtd. in Fabre 2000b, 9) at the opening of the Maison de la Culture in Algiers in 1937. In the sense of a “séparation entre deux mondes, deux pays, deux imaginaires” (Fabre 2000b, 6), Provence is cut off from its medieval and early modern Jewish-Arabic heritage, as well as from the influences of the Age of Enlightenment. In the form of folk festivals and literary and lexicographical projects, Mistral attempted to revive specific regional and linguistic traditions. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the South of France was constructed, in the sense of a “renaissance du Midi” (Séréna-Allier 2000, 33), as a cultural area that could be clearly delimited territorially, linguistically and in terms of its population.

l'Homme Méditerranéen" (1942) make this intention particularly clear (Témime 2002, 123–143).

In this ideological area of tension, the current article sees the *pensée de midi* as an oscillating figure of thought that helps to question hegemonic perspectives again and again; in this way it can be traced back to (southern) French literature in the nineteenth century. The journal *La pensée de midi* (2000–2010), founded under Thierry Fabre in Marseille and Arles as a successor to the *Cahiers du Sud*, hints at such a perspective in its first issue on "Les territoires de l'appartenance Provence – Méditerranée". It is true that the concern formulated here is to give back to the traditionally marginalized South "son statut de sujet de la pensée et d'acteur de sa propre histoire" (Fabre 2000a, 3). At the same time, however, the Midi is also conceived as an imaginary space intended to inspire our sensibility and illuminate our gaze, especially in the sense of a "point de vue sur le monde" (Fabre 2000a, 2). The *pensée de midi* is thus formulated as a meaningful rethinking of humanist concerns, which, following Camus, should make us aware of the physical and moral limitations of human life and action. Accordingly, we understand the *pensée de midi* as a reflective space that repeatedly places diverse forms of Mediterranean relationality in a new dialogical relationship. This raises the question of which different literary strategies are used by modernist authors to overcome particularistic thinking and the essentialization of unilateral Meridionality.

3 The Félibrige Paul Arène and his Midi on the Move

Born in Sisteron in 1843, Paul Arène's work evinces two conflicting trends of the late nineteenth century: the renaissance of Provençal under the auspices of the Félibrige, and the first wave of a Provençal-exoticist literary fashion in Paris driven by artists from the Midi. Arène, who had trained as a teacher, moved to Paris in his early twenties and spent most of his life there until he moved to Antibes, where he died in 1895. In the Parisian bohemian environment of the Rive Gauche, he worked as a theatre critic for Léon Gambetta's *République Française* and as a ghostwriter for established authors such as Charles Monselet and Alphonse Daudet. He maintained contact with Frédéric Mistral from 1863 onward, founded the cultural association Cigale in Paris (1878) and became a member of the Félibrige de Paris (1879). Arène's origins soon served as the basis for his own literary work, which centered on numerous stories that, unlike his early Provençal poetry (especially up to 1871), were written in French (Petry 1911, 5–18).

His stories are of particular interest since they reflect an ambivalent relationship with his origins and the Félibrige. Arène's views largely obscure developments around social modernization and mechanization; alongside tradition and nature, he works through themes of poverty and marginality with an often distinctly flippant tone for a national audience. Already in his first collection of novellas, *Jean-des-Figues* (1870), transregional connectivity becomes a theme; indeed, he has the title character move back to Provence after two years of Parisian bohemia. Numerous collections of stories, such as *Contes de Paris et de Provence* (1887), also set the poles of Provence and Paris in relation to each other and repeatedly re-explore North–South relations in the field of tension between idealization and irony (Fournier 1994).²

A *pensée de midi avant la lettre* can be discerned in Arène's work in the form of a South that is often spatially and temporally delimited, even if the Provençal hinterland is the core of its frame of reference. A *pensée de midi* can also be seen in his work in the sense of a balanced geographical or inner center. The introduction to the story collection *Le Midi bouge* (1895), dedicated to his Félibrige friend, the journalist and deputy from Arriège Albert Tournier, illustrates this: the title refers to a marching song he himself wrote during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, which culminated in the siege of Paris. The warlike refrain “Le Midi bouge / Tout est rouge!”, which paraphrases the mobilization of the peasant South to the occupied region of north-western France, becomes the title of a book made up of rather jocular tales (Petry 1911, 10–11). The refrain, meant to be patriotic, is used as a popular song by the “septentrionaux malicieux” to ridicule the South, “à l'encontre de ce Midi que nous aimons tous les deux”. This also leads to a self-stigmatization of French Southerners (Arène 1895, VI). In postcolonial terms, Arène's re-appropriation of the title is an anti-hegemonic ‘writing back’ intended to re-establish the dignity of the French South in centralist France. The book's title, devised by Arène's satirical tone, serves two further purposes: on the one hand, the author calls attention to the popular title's advertising function for his publishing house (“Après tout, ça fait toujours un peu de réclame et Flammarion sera content!”, VI); on the other, he points out that the title suggests that the South of France, long imagined as static, stands up for its own highest interests (“Attention! Aujourd'hui le Midi ne bougera pas”, VII).

2 There is no current research available on the Arène texts discussed here. Concerning Arène in general, in addition to older works (e.g., Duché, René. *La langue et le style de Paul Arène*. Paris: Dierville, 1949), we refer to Grenier, Roger. *Paul Arène. Sa vie, son œuvre*. Raphèle-les-Arles: CPM, 1993; Coll., *Paul Arène 1843–1896. Célébration du 150me anniversaire de sa naissance*. Digne-les-Bains: SSLAHP, 1995, and the edition of the *Annales de Haute-Provence* 327–328 (1994) dedicated to him.

At the intersection of idealization and irony, a *pensée de midi avant la lettre* is presented by using stories that usually describe country life through food and customs, métiers and vegetation. An imaginary Midi is outlined in the sense of a holistic life, as opposed to the North, which Arène characterizes as a space of acceleration and associated with the “générations modernes” (VII). He connects this with a mentality that often praises new trends unreflectively, overdramatizes inconveniences and takes itself too seriously. For him, Southern thinking is thus manifested above all in an almost Epicurean attitude to life that distances itself from current events and focuses on people, their habits and their environment. In contrast to the “je ne sais quels brouillards venus du Nord”, the Midi stands for a sensual mentality of serenity that does not overestimate the individual eventualities of life. *Le Midi bouge (pas)* would prove in this sense “avec quel beau calme et quelle sereine philosophie, quel détachement supérieur et avisé des passagères contingences, le vrai méridional sait éviter de prendre au tragique certains accidents de la vie” (VII).

In a completely different way, Arène designs a space of connectivity with his collection of short stories *Paris ingénue* (1882), which assumes the gaze of a *flâneur* and directs it at the city. The short portraits and atmospheric images speak of death and marginal milieus from the ‘old’ Paris of the Rive Gauche before ‘Haussmannisation’. Instead of the modern neighborhoods of the bourgeoisie and the bohemian scene, he focuses on the small alleys, old canals and métiers as well as the suburban Paris “loin des quartiers riches” (Arène 1882, 202). The capital appears in the form of a ‘naïve’ proximity to nature, which is ironically interrupted: the *flâneur* as the alter ego of Arène’s neo-Parisian filters the hustle and bustle of the big city and looks down on it from the green margins of the city. Already in the first story “La campagne à Paris”, he notes that in the city there are “plus d’arbres qu’à la campagne” (1). In this line, Arène creates often rural impressions that are diametrically opposed to Paris’ status as the “capitale du XIX^e siècle” (Benjamin 1939).

On closer inspection, it becomes clear that the often very short texts serve two semantic functions. The naïve strolling of the narrator generates a provincializing *dispositif*. The green vegetation and the “idéal rustique” (2) only come to the fore from the perspective of peasants who have become Parisians by choice, because “trois quarts au moins de ceux que nous appelons Parisiens sont des paysans mal déracinés” (1). Correspondingly, the ‘village’ of Paris is often characterized by figures, plants and impressions that reveal a broadly understood South. Particularly striking is the figure of an Auvergnat who appears again and again either as the epitome of provinciality or as the connectivity of the metropolis (in “14 juillet”, among others). Peasant figures from the Midi such as “mon ami Alpinien” – whose daughters, described as “fleurs d’Orient”, further expand the Midi in an Oriental-

izing manner (59–60) – illustrate the fluid South as well as many impressions of nature and milieu. Cicadas and chestnut trees, maroon and coal merchants, fields, hills and pastures are described by the strolling narrator and appear as the epitome of the rural-rustic and sunny-southern, from the Rive Gauche to the popular outskirts of the city and into the surrounding countryside (279).

In *Paris ingénue*, the strolling gaze controls the perception of space and time at least as much as the selection of marginal places, people and milieus. This is illustrated by the sketch “Paysagiste”, which depicts a landscape painter whom the narrator meets in an “aride coin du Midi”. There, he visits a small valley, an “oasis microscopique dans un Sahara de cailloux”, and eventually begins painting the valley’s only tree (237). Although this landscape reminds him of Normandy, later in Paris he adheres to a “nostalgie du Midi” (237). In an abandoned quarry without grass cover, which seems to him “merveilleusement provençal”, he paints and dreams of white limestone, blue skies and burning sunbeams (237). Here, the reverie of the *flâneur* and his object eludes the hegemonic zeitgeist and a clearly graspable regional location. Arène thus casts an alienating gaze on the metropolis. The political and cultural center of the country is gutted while traditional oppositions, such as those between center and periphery, are dissolved.

If strolling *per se* symbolizes a perception marked by association and deceleration, city and country, North and South connect through sensory impressions of Meridional-Mediterranean nature, cuisine and culture. In the very first text of *Paris ingénue*, the narrator discovers an idyll of nature in a tree nursery on Rue Vavin. A “bouquet de maronniers qu’entoure un taillis de lilas” (5) harbors some twenty beehives and a meadow, which is dotted with daisies and other plants typical of southern France, such as thyme and lavender, as well as a small stream in the sense of the “précepte virgilien” (6). In addition to descriptions of nature, there are striking comparisons in the stories referring to a barren and charming Midi; these dynamize the capital through connectivity. In the chapter “Les choses qui s’en vont”, the cry of a man in the halls of Paris who has gambled away his money in Monaco is associated with the storm-like roar of a “cigale solitaire cramponnée aux branches d’un tamaris” of the “côtes désertes du Languedoc” (170).

In the section “Bouts de croquis”, the short story “Mistral parisien” depicts a veritable ‘galéjade’ of Marseille, i.e., a fib story. The anthropomorphized mistral wind flows out of the open suitcase of one of the narrator’s cousins, who has just arrived from the Midi, and it proceeds to take over the station concourse and then undertake a tour of the sights of Paris, during which it transforms the Seine into a blue sea with waves and white foam “comme on les voit en Méditerranée, quand le ciel est clair et que le vent souffle” (227). The tale of a grape harvest in the rather cool environs of Paris also references the South. It is said that such harvests cannot be compared to the “fêtes païennes du Midi”, because

there, unlike in the North, the smell of crushed grapes alone would entice the youth to dance due to their high sugar and alcohol content (287).

No less frequent are borrowings from the broader Mediterranean, which ‘Mediterraneanizes’ Paris: there are hedgehog eaters here as in Spain (278); the Seine has more “riants jardins” than the Arno in Florence – indeed, Paris is the real “ville des fleurs” (205); the extinct profession of ‘pifferari’ musician is placed in the context of Italian Paris on the slopes of the “montagne Sainte-Geneviève” (168). Such *flâneur* impressions of the Mediterranean are followed by numerous references to water. More and more titles refer to bridges and boats, fishing and floating ice. The banks and the water of the Seine are repeatedly charged with maritime significance: in “Le passeur”, there is an account of swallows and flies which “faisaient danser la Seine comme une mer” (159) with their fluttering wings. In “A bord d’un bateau de charbon”, the river resembles an “oasis” of silence where only the sound of boats, sparrows and fishermen can be heard. Finally, the associations “pêche”, “quais” and “baignade” convey an entirely Mediterranean impression: “Paris, sous le soleil qui cible la Seine de paillettes d’or, apparaît comme une Venise” (76).

Paris ingénue contains many narratives that, in the style of a portrait, show clear borrowings from the Mediterranean in detail. A striking exception is “Le démon de la nature morte”, which references a transcontinental *pensée de midi*. The painter M. Senez, who is a friend of the narrator and specializes in still lives, lives in a rustic *maisonnette* in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, where a Southern atmosphere unfolds *en passant*. It is from Antibes that a consignment of oranges, lemons, watermelons and pomegranates is delivered (33). They form the basis of a *tableau* that oscillates between Southern French and North African associations: a “plat hispano-arabe” is revealed next to porous clay jugs from Kabylia on an oriental carpet. The result is an atmospheric image that Arène, referring to literary *topoi* of the time, ironizes as hot and mysterious “comme une atmosphère de harem”. Not only are all sexual fantasies alien to the painter, but at the same time “toutes les poésies du Midi ensoleillé” are evoked with associations of pine trees and cicadas (33). The episode thus symbolizes Paul Arène’s understanding of the Midi as an interreligious and intercultural space.

Two years later, in 1884, Arène published his next book, *Vingt jours en Tunisie*, the poetization of his only intercontinental journey to visit his brother Jules, vice-consul in Sousse. Here, too, Tunisia is observed through the lens of associative strolling, only this time it occurs from the other side of the Mediterranean: “la Tunisie se révèle d’abord sous un aspect bonhomme, agricole et provincial [...]. L’humanité, partout, reste identique à elle-même ; et je serai tout étonné demain de trouver, coiffés de turbans, ces paysans d’Afrique qui, à travers les phrases, m’apparaissent avec la figure tannée et résignée de nos paysans français” (Arène 1983,

98). As we can observe in this text too, Arène's *pensée de midi avant la lettre* reflects a sensual, decelerated attitude to Mediterranean life, where Christianity and paganism form an "organic unity" (Petry 1911, 81). Thus, Arène repeatedly poetized the Mediterranean connectivity, i.e., the divided topography, vegetation, cuisine and mentality, integrating the influence of the Arabs and Moors in the fatalistic and communal mentality of the South (Petry 1911, 63, 81–83).

4 Albert Camus: The *Pensée de Midi* as a Philosophical-Aesthetic Space

Arène dynamizes the opposition between North and South, between the paradigmatic metropolis of modernity and the archaic South, as an ironic negotiating of the relationship between the center and southern periphery. About fifty years later, the Algerian-French Albert Camus, born in 1913, began to develop a more conceptual *pensée de midi*, which emphasized a political and aesthetic dimension of connectivity: already in his poem "Méditerranée" (1933) exist rudiments of what would develop in the course of his life into a comprehensive Mediterranean *esprit* that pervaded his work up to his unfinished final novel, *Le premier homme* (published posthumously in 1994).³ In the early 1930s, Camus joined a Mediterranean fad that had emerged around Gabriel Audisio's *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* (1935). The emphatic lyrical search for peace and (physical) unity around ideals of simplicity, characterized by sun and sea and giving color to even the loneliest and poorest towns (Témime 2002, 118), evoked passion in the young Camus.⁴

However, the Parisian philosopher and author Jean Grenier, who had taught at the University of Algiers between 1930 and 1938, became his real mentor. Grenier's prose volume *Les Iles* (1933), the 1959 edition of which included a euphoric foreword by Camus, represented a literary awakening for him at the young age of twenty.⁵ With his 1939 collection of essays *Noces* ("Noces à Tipasa", "Le vent à Djémila", "L'été à Alger" and "Le desert"), which Camus himself saw as a response to Grenier's *Les Iles*, he laid the literary foundations of his Mediterranean ideology

³ Camus's *pensée de midi* is theorised and explained in detail in the conclusion of his philosophical-political essay *L'Homme révolté* (1951).

⁴ In the period between the two World Wars, the formulation of Mediterranean ideals also represents an attempt to establish a common European identity (cf. e.g., Rufat 2017).

⁵ Camus begins his preface as follows: "J'avais vingt ans lorsqu'à Alger je lus ce livre pour la première fois. L'ébranlement que j'en reçus, l'influence qu'il exerça sur moi, et sur beaucoup d'amis, je ne peux mieux les comparer qu'au choc provoqué sur toute une génération par *Les Nourritures terrestres*" (Camus 1959, 9).

and aesthetics. In the works of both authors, the Provençal Lourmarin became the symbol of a transnational and transcontinental *esprit méditerranéen*.

Lourmarin, which lies in the Lubéron mountains and looks towards Marseille and Algiers, became a tangible metaphor for a non-contemplative, lustful and intense life unburdened by excess material possessions, especially in Grenier's *essais* "Terrasses de Lourmarin" and "Sagesse de Lourmarin", published in 1936 in *Cahiers du Sud*. For the two intellectuals, the commune in the Provençal hinterland became a nostalgic solar projection of a *pensée de midi* germinating in Algeria. Here, present and past, northern and southern shores, simplicity and sensual perception flowed together into a Mediterranean model of life and literature that transcended the shore. The exuberantly life-affirming sensuality of the thoroughly lyrical essays in Camus's *Noces*, which his later texts never praised as a leitmotif (Kampits 2000, 52), is also connected to his tuberculosis, which led the author to seek admission into a sanatorium in southern France as early as 1930 (Grenier 1987, 20).

At the latest in 1936, however, he visited Grenier in Lourmarin (Sommer 2011, 57), which became his "port d'attache et d'évasion" (Todd 1996, 1019). Here, Camus found the light of his native Algeria (Sommer 2011, 57), and in 1958, he bought a house there with the money from his Nobel Prize. Thus, the author of the "printemps à Tipasa" found himself in the "autumn of Lourmarin" (Todd 1996, 1024), catching glimpses of the Algerian Mount Chenoua in the Lubéron (Sommer 2011, 56). "[E]n envoyant la main, je touche l'Algérie" is how Suzanne Ginoux delivers Camus's words (Todd 1996, 1016). In the third essay of the *Noces*, "L'été à Alger", the Provençal hills become the antithesis of the intellectual hustle and bustle of Paris, i. e., the symbol of a life spent in silence where man can escape from his humanity and gently free himself from himself.⁶ Still in "L'éénigme", one of the essays of *L'été* (1954), he states: "tout se tait devant ce fracas et le Lubéron, là-bas, n'est qu'un énorme bloc de silence que j'écoute sans répit" (Camus 1959, 141).

Likewise, in the sense of a transnational Mediterranean connectivity, Rome and *latinité* are not portrayed as the center of the Mediterranean (historical-geographical) continuum. Instead, Greece, with its opening to the Orient, becomes for Camus the exemplary embodiment of a Mediterranean "bassin international" (Grenier 1987, 37). Against the backdrop of the Algerian War and the two World Wars, national thinking becomes a sign of decay while internationality becomes a means of restoring real meaning to the Occident (Camus 1983, 55). The notion

⁶ "Ailleurs, les terrasses d'Italie, les cloîtres d'Europe ou le dessin des collines provençales, autant de places où l'homme peut fuir son humanité et se délivrer avec douceur de lui-même" (Camus 1959, 35).

of transgressing social, political and national borders on the path to a universally conceived humanity engenders in Camus an anti-totalitarian and anti-colonialist outlook (Témime 2002, 1000). In the notion of united anti-fascist nations, Greece becomes, following the tradition of classical antiquity, the ideal of measure and balance, symbolized by the Greek goddess Nemesis (e.g., "L'exil d'Hélène", 1948), to whom Camus dedicated a short poetic text written in Lourmarin in 1959 (Todd 1996, 1025).

The lessons of light that Camus collected in connection with his early stays in southern France and readings of Grenier had a lasting influence on his view of his Algerian homeland and childhood. Already in his first publication, *L'envers et le droit* (1937), the interrelation of the themes of poverty and light are addressed, and the same is portrayed in the *Noces*. In the *Carnets* from May 1935, Camus also speaks of a "nostalgie d'une pauvreté perdue": "à des gens riches le ciel, donné par surcroît, paraît un don naturel. Pour les gens pauvres, son caractère de grâce infinie lui est restitué" (Camus 1983, 17). The sunshine thus becomes the place of the poor, the shade that of the wealthy (Grenier 1987, 9), and the two sides are mutually dependent. This tense Mediterranean political arc between these connected poles will be repeatedly taken up, particularly in *Le premier homme*. In the part of the novel written in Lourmarin, Camus recalls the poor conditions of his childhood and portrays this stage of life, more than any other, as being marked by light. On the ship to Algiers, the protagonist Jacques (Camus's alter ego), rocked by the ocean waves and illuminated by the sun, falls into a slumber in which he is entirely determined by the "pauvreté chaleureuse" that has never left him (Camus 1994, 53).⁷

Here it becomes clear that only by looking from a distance can Camus consciously locate the significance of light in the years of his childhood: "la patrie se connaît au moment de la perdre", as he stated explicitly in "L'été à Alger" (Camus 1959, 48). Likewise, his family's financial circumstances become, from the position of the advanced intellectual, the ideal of Mediterranean simplicity. The present is here illuminated by the past, as is childhood through the eyes of the forty-six-year-old author (Ellison 2009, 111). The two times and sides of the Mediterranean are brought into a dialogue that is associated with the constant *balancement* of the Mediterranean.

With its roots in Belcourt, a poor district of Algiers, Camus's *pensée de midi* as a Mediterranean and moderate concept thus initially refers to a social-geographi-

⁷ "Il respirait, sur le grand dos de la mer, il respirait par vagues, sous le grand dos de la mer, il respirait par vagues, sous le grand balancement du soleil, il pouvait enfin dormir et revenir à l'enfance dont il n'avait jamais guéri, à ce secret de lumière, de pauvreté chaleureuse qui l'avait aidé à tout vaincre" (Camus 1994, 53).

cal imprint. Not least through the class and race differences he personally endured as well as his experiences with illness, Camus was struck by a (literary) thirst for freedom and community, balance and justice, which he took to the extreme. Drawing on these early influences, Camus developed a political, ethical and literary-aesthetic programme of *dépouillement*. In the process, the deprivations of the social milieu in which he grew up were idealized by means of spatial and temporal distance and became the basic prerequisite of a solar manner of thinking. Furthermore, he linked the need of the *gens pauvres* to be content with the immediate to a special sensitivity towards experiences of nature, which is particularly evident in the “*lyrisme exceptionnel*” (Rufat 2011, 197) of the *Noces*.

The tension between (external) poverty and (internal) wealth that unites seemingly opposed poles is also reflected in other forms of polarities that Camus resolved through the concept of a Mediterranean-solar connectivity marked by simplicity: the *Noces* celebrate not only the marriage of light and the sea (“l’unité s’exprime ici en termes de soleil et de mer”, Camus 1959, 47) but also the physical contact between man, culture and nature, in which man’s incongruity with the world seems to dissolve for a moment. In the first of the lyrical-sensual essays, “*Noces à Tipasa*”, the ruins of a Roman temple, which had not been fenced in with barbed wire in the 1930s but remained freely accessible, merge with the Mediterranean vegetation, the sea directly below and the open sky. The narrator describes himself as a “race née du soleil et de la mer, vivante et savoureuse, qui puise sa grandeur dans sa simplicité” (Camus 1959, 21). The Algerian scents, sounds and temperatures are (sensually) erotically charged in the sense of a “*goût de la chair*” (Camus 1959, 47). Entirely in the tradition of Gide’s apologia of the corporeal in *Nourritures terrestres* (1897), they put the reader into a state of synesthetic excitement.

This aesthetic of sensory intensity is supported at the level of lexis and syntax by a style of deliberate simplicity and materiality (Monte 2003), which gives the appearance of a (seemingly) direct documentation of evidential occurrences. The pleasurable life among aromatic plants, the silver shield of the sea (Camus 1959, 11) with its embracing waves, the blue sky, the hot stones that can be touched with one’s hands and kissed with one’s lips, however, do not correspond to unmediated impressions. Rather, they are elements of a comprehensive worldview and poetics. Camus’s Mediterranean aesthetic is thus reflected in an “*écriture unificatrice*” that describes natural phenomena partly in terms of a sexual union: “on assiste à un véritable acte d’amour”, writes Pacchiani (2013, 17–18), underlining the author’s lascivious language as a hymn to a physical-sensual drunkenness. The stylistic conspicuousness can thus be attributed to an “*écriture méditerranéenne*” without essentializing it; as Philippe Jousset (2016) puts it, “il n’y aurait d’écriture

méditerranéenne qu'à la façon dont il existe des illusions optiques. Et il existe bien des illusions optiques".

In the second essay, "Le vent à Djemila", the metaphorically charged Algerian spring and its fullness of life around Tipaza is abandoned in favor of the ruins of Djemila and a reflection on transience. Finally, in "L'été à Alger", the Algerian capital, like other seaside cities, is granted the privilege of an opening to the sea (Camus 1959, 33). In the Algerian population, Camus observes a glorification of the body as well as a "richesse sensuelle" (Camus 1959, 45 and 34): "comment ne pas s'identifier à ce dialogue de la pierre et de la chair à la mesure du soleil et des saisons?" (Camus 1959, 37). The "peuple enfant", as Camus further describes the Algerian people whom he strongly idealizes, are "sans leçons", characterized by a simple happiness ("bonheurs faciles") and a lavishly passionate zest for life ("c'est une précipitation à vivre qui touche au gaspillage", Camus 1959, 41–42).

In "Le desert", the fourth part of the *Noces*, Camus allows Italian painting to become the ideal of his Mediterranean conception of art. This concluding essay, dedicated to Grenier, reads like an echo of Camus's stay in Tuscany, which, in its lessons about passion,⁸ becomes another point of reference for Mediterranean ideals and idealizations. Based on paintings and frescoes from the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, painters alone are given the ability to satiate those hungry for art. They alone work in an eternal present, and they alone have the privilege of making themselves novelists of the body ("ils ont le privilège de se faire les romanciers du corps", Camus 1959, 54). The corporeal is thus explicitly linked to an ahistorical attitude. Natural phenomena are given human attributes; for example, when the landscape resembles the "premier sourire du ciel" or a "cri de pierre" (Camus 1959, 67).

In short, the light of the Mediterranean world, in all its fluid, physical states, is for Camus the metaphorical materiality of a "lost happiness" of poverty and home (Sommer 2011, 47), whereby his "écriture fluide et lumineuse" (Pacchiani 2013, 15) allows the *carnal* to triumph and becomes part of an artistic revolt in which humanity and nature, an enduring presence and the tension between (over-) abundance and austerity, converge. In a broader sense, the material *dépouillement* programmatically portrayed by Camus is ultimately linked to literary creation. It becomes the necessary basis of an ardent existential as well as a textual liveliness and directness. Birgit Wagner (2000, 20) also speaks of a linguistic "warmth that arises from concreteness", which expresses itself on a semantic as well as syntactic

⁸ In Camus's works, passion results from the rejection of any hierarchy of values and of any given fulfilment of meaning (Kampits 2000, 53).

level, and which reflects Camus's conception of the *pensée de midi* as a physically lived philosophy rather than a complex, abstract *raisonnement*.⁹

5 Outlook: Louis Brauquier's Voyages Between Marseille and the World Sea

In Albert Camus's work, the Mediterranean as a connecting space is first and foremost an intellectual literary metaphor of Mediterranean connectivity, whose nostalgic solar projection site becomes the Provençal Lourmarin. In Louis Brauquier's work, on the other hand, it appears as a concrete working reality spread across continents. It is transferred into his poetry – mostly in French, though sometimes also in Provençal – and there is a permanent correspondence between the author's working life and creation (Audisio 1966). The poet, painter and photographer Brauquier was born in Marseille in 1900. His work repeatedly references the geographical Midi while, in contrast to Camus and Arène, encompassing a much broader maritime perspective. He worked for almost forty years at the Messageries Maritimes in Marseille, which sailed to Africa, Asia and India, and he was stationed in various ports between the Mediterranean and the Pacific for most of his life. From 1926 onwards, he travelled the oceans and described the ambience of the world's port cities in his poetry.

Brauquier's poetry fuses his experiences in Alexandria, Djibouti and Nouméa, Sydney, Colombo, Diego-Suarez and Saigon with the exotic trends of the time. In the process, Marseille runs through his entire oeuvre as a nostalgically charged anchor point to which he returns again and again: "tout commence à Marseille, tout continue pour Marseille, et finalement tout reviendra à Marseille" writes Gabriel Audisio (1966)¹⁰ about his fellow poet. Indeed, Brauquier developed an exalted and mystified image of his hometown (Audisio 1966), for example, in the poems "Fondation de Marseille" or "Litanies pour Notre-Dame de la Garde", among others. In addition, Brauquier repeatedly dreamt of places around the Étang de Berre, the area to the west of Marseille characterized by industry and working-class culture, where his family on his father's side came from and where he would retire in 1960 (Anderson 1993, 3–10).

⁹ The "rhétorique du moins" also corresponds to this idea, in particular the rare use of antitheses and oxymora, which reflect a rational, logical and complex perception of reality, or, in contrast, the frequent, not thought-through or ordered, enumerations or semantically reducing synecdoches (cf. Monte 2003).

¹⁰ Audisio's study does not contain page numbers in the e-book version.

At the same time, Marseille is ‘nomadized’ by Brauquier’s pen (Audisio 1966): in addition to constant homesickness, Marseille is associated with a permanent wanderlust. Meanwhile, the longed-for port also becomes the starting point for long journeys by ship. Brauquier was not a sailor at sea, however, but a clerk at a shipping company on land (Frébourg 2018, 9–24).¹¹ Thus, the texts, which often start in harbor pubs, oscillate between impressions of land and sea, long-distance and homesickness, loneliness and exile, moods of arrival and departure. “Toutes les puissances du globe”, for example, explicitly speaks of a noisy bar in an unspecified port city, “où débarquent, brûlent et passent/ Les races multiples” (Brauquier 2018, 45). On the other hand, the poem “Pour nous qui n’avons pas vu”, which, like the poems above, can also be found in *Et l’Au-delà de Suez* (1922), is emblematic of the need for distance. A group of islands in the Antilles, the Iles Sous-le-Vent, becomes here an almost communicative crystallization point of exoticism expressed in sensual charms. The lyrical I, who wants to travel on the ship, associates the Antilles with ocean waves, exotic spices and rum, i.e., articles imported to France.

In many texts, port cities and their resonant names become a special sensual attraction. Inspired by his time in Australia, Brauquier transforms the Malay Archipelago into a fiery culinary symbol of “Des noms de villes brûlants/Comme du carry sur la langue” (77). In general, similar to Camus’s essays, many of Brauquier’s poems foreground a sensory-erotic perception of nature in an exoticized environment elsewhere in Mediterranean rurality: “Je voudrais être une pierre”, “Le vent”, “La pluie”, “A la mer”, “Un sein” or “Naissance du soleil” speak exemplarily of the longing for a sensual union between the skin and the four elements. Repeatedly, erotic word fields metaphorically transmit Mediterranean sensory impressions: the lyrical I recalls a “baiser de l’eau fraîche/sur mon corps nu comme l’été” (515) or makes female breasts swell like a peach “quand le soleil chauffe ses pores” (404). Brauquier’s metaphorical fields, drawn from pungent Mediterranean

11 This ambivalence between exoticism and existential security has made Brauquier a literary figure. Long after the success of his play (1929) and film *Marius* (1931), Marcel Pagnol admitted that his wanderlust-addicted title character in a harbour bar had been inspired by Brauquier and his first volume of poetry *Et l’Au-delà de Suez* (1922). With regard to the editorial team of *Fortunio*, which included Pagnol, Ballard and Brauquier, Pagnol gives the following information in a 1959 interview: “Louis Brauquier qui nous rebattait les oreilles, à Marseille, avec sa mer, ses îles, ses bateaux... On se moquait de lui : il ne partait jamais! Tous les jours il allait gratter son papier dans un bureau... Et puis un jour, il est parti... Tu sais que je l’ai revu ? Il est rentré définitivement. Parce que, là-bas en Australie, quand il est arrivé, tu sais ce qu’il a fait ? Eh bien, il est entré dans un bureau et il s’est remis à gratter toute la journée ! Et pendant vingt ans... Alors, vous voyez, mon *Marius*, je n’ai eu qu’à le regarder, qu’à l’écouter et à écouter d’autres autour de moi” (Pagnol qtd. in Maumet 1997, 25).

nean and distant scents and tastes, or other, especially maritime, sensory impressions, often appear highly repetitive and globally transferable from one area to another. In the poems that incorporate port cities or shipping as their theme, it is striking that Brauquier sticks to the language of his maritime everyday life, while in poems compromising themes outside his professional milieu, material and technical terms relating to shipping are repeatedly made to appear poetic.

The imaginary space Brauquier opens up looks, as in Camus's works, at social and geographical margins away from urban and bourgeois centers. Above all, however, his poetry, for which he finally received the Grand Prix littéraire de Provence and the Grand Prix de poésie of the Académie française after his definitive return to France, can be understood as a cosmopolitan culmination of the *pensée de midi* that is completely removed from the continent (Frébourg 2018, 39). In this sense, Brauquier's life and poetry also reflect or mirror the spirit of the *Cahiers du Sud*, for which he also mediated shipping advertisements. In the sense of Jean Ballard's editorial of 1926, this is a territorially delimited extension of the Midi. The "vague sens géographique" of the journal would incorporate all the tendencies of the "vastes contrées qui entourent et prolongent Marseille", and its title would be the "enseigne d'une bonne demeure", "où l'hospitalité la plus large peut être offerte à quiconque la demandait dignement" (Ballard 1926, 53). In summary, the hospitality referenced here can be read in Brauquier as a lived *pensée de midi* which stands as the symbol of a trans-Mediterranean exoticism and shows the transferability of maritime landscapes and mentalities.

Brauquier's poetry thus confirms and condenses the ideal of a Mediterranean connectivity into a world-oceanic one, in which elements of both Arène's fiction and Camus's essays are synthesized: in Arène's work, the outskirts of Paris become imaginary transitional spaces between North and South, province and metropolis. Strolling through Paris gives rise to a dynamic dialogue with deceleration, vegetation and a mentality traditionally associated with Provence or provincialization. In contrast, Camus's *Essais* open up an ethical-aesthetic space of a sensual-moderate *pensée de midi*, which, in addition to Italian, Greek and Spanish symbolic references, is based in particular on Algerian-Provençal references. Brauquier's poetry can be read here as an outlook that goes beyond the Mediterranean *esprit* of Arène and Camus: Provence's countryside, Marseille's borders and international ports become connecting thresholds. They combine Mediterranean spaces and references with cosmopolitan vagabondage. Both are transferred from Brauquier's maritime everyday life into a sensual-nostalgic metaphor and aesthetics.

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Stéphane Baquey (Aix-Marseille University)

The Possibility of the Mediterranean and the Contribution of Poetic Cross-Cultural Philologies During the Twentieth Century. Al-Andalus in the Poetry of Federico García Lorca, Louis Aragon, and Mahmūd Darwiš

To return with Lorca only yesterday, to walk along the sea, under the stars, to see the forests becoming green forever, green with love, the shadow of our childhood like a flower, crying adios! While marching single file up to the crossroads, reciting songs we made, white muslim shaking, trailing along the byways, the glitter that drops down from Lorca's wings, words that we write through Lorca. (Rothenberg 1990, 47–49)

Abstract: Since the nineteenth century, poetry has been both a privileged object for different philologies (rediscovering pre-islamic or troubadour poetry for example) and one of the literary genres where this knowledge has been recycled in new poetical achievements crossing the cultural boundaries persistent in the philologies themselves (since Goethe, Hugo, and others). Until the twentieth century scholarship and composition of poetry were thus entwined in the context of a set of cultural and political agendas where the question of the national and various forms of the transnational were to be taken into account. We can read within this framework the poetry of Federico García Lorca, Louis Aragon, here principally taken into consideration as the author of *Le Fou d'Elsa* (1963), and Mahmūd Darwiš, mostly between his departure from Beirut, in 1982, and his “return” to Palestine, in 1995. Their poetries share a reference to al-Andalus / Andalusia which, as a moving, multi-layered and contrapuntal local reference, is one of the most important locations from which to start to build a Mediterranean transregional perspective in literary studies. Indeed, the territoriality of Andalusia as a “translation zone” (E. Apter), at the crossroads of Romance philology and the so-called Oriental philology, was and still is a place of projection for various cultural and political dilemmas which can be anchored to different places within the Mediterranean. However, Lorca, Aragon and Darwiš were not confined by collective agendas. On the contrary, they performed in their poems a deterritorialization of philology, entwining what is considered as their “own” and as the “other’s” cultural history, thus integrating Romance and Oriental philologies in a poetic discourse which goes beyond philology in its imagination of the place.

1 Introduction

As modernity *came* to the Mediterranean at around 1800 (Ben-Yehoyada 2014; Burke III 2016), the area has been gradually mapped as a cultural space by philologies. Philology is here used as a countable noun referring to different epistemological practices, to different national academic institutions and to the divides existing in the discipline between fields of research resulting from different languages and literatures (Espagne 1990). Philology as a renewed science of language and literature is not a homogeneous scientific paradigm. It nevertheless conveys a new way to transmit a culture now built on an epistemic objectification. What was vehiculated by a traditional logic of imitation is reshaped and becomes a historical repertoire in the new context of the growth of liberal nationalism but also of colonial imperialism. Thus, philology as a historic and humanist knowledge is not separable from political agendas linked with both identity and difference, national pedagogy and imperialist hegemony. As a specialist of cultural history, Anne-Marie Thiesse has shown how literary history, which is a variation of philology in a French positivist context, has played a central role in the nation-building processes in Europe, and that in turn, the European model has become a global model influencing nation-building processes elsewhere in the world (Thiesse 2019). World literature cannot be considered only as a uniformization of a wholesale connected literature in a world-system through global *translatio*. World literature is also the result of a worldwide generalization of the building of national languages and literatures, which are located in newly fragmented nation-state territories. Philologies have thus contributed to the study and institutionalization of languages and literatures in every emerging national entity which had formerly belonged to dynastic or imperial powers; this has been carried out through processes of cultural revivals, declarations of independence and nation-state building.

These cultural and political processes have a particular relevance in the modern Mediterranean. In actuality, the Mediterranean is a transregional area of ancient and perennial linguistic and cultural contacts which includes a large spectrum of typical modern locations. There exist in this area prestigious cultural locations, such as France, which have provided a model for the building of other national modern repertoires. Also in this area are peripheral European locations which have been able to, more or less, take on the central prestigious modern teleology of cultural evolution, from Spain and Italy, which are unavoidably included in a European cultural territoriality through Romance philology, and further, to the more problematic Balkan peninsula. And eventually, this area also includes locations outside Europe which have often been subjected to colonial

domination and have been encompassed in a much more indistinct field of research, i.e., Oriental philology or Orientalism.

There is a strong paradox within philology. It could be considered a discipline which reinforces national cultural identifications, mainly focusing on a quest for origins that are, most of the time, located in a medieval linguistic and literary etymon. Or it could be considered as a discipline which cannot be encapsulated into a national agenda, one which expands its gathering of material from an ever-growing area of relevance that enters into contact with other neighboring areas, eventually becoming worldly. The trajectory of the Romanian Erich Auerbach appears to represent a centrally important point in the matter; Auerbach gave in *Mimesis* (1946) an extensive rereading of European culture while being an exiled in Istanbul during the Second World War, and also wrote the landmark essay “Philologie der Weltliteratur” (1952). There exist numerous further participants in this debate regarding philology, including Edward W. Said (1983 and elsewhere), Emily Apter (2006) and Aamir R. Mufti (2016). The vagaries of philology towards world literature, as they are illustrated in this debate, are seen as exploring a “translation zone”, to borrow Emily Apter’s expression. This zone can be experimentally situated with a sphere of relevance across the Mediterranean, between a Romance philology which has become a European philology, and an otherness which was covered in both sense of the word (reported and hidden) by Orientalism. Aamir R. Mufti, himself originating from the Indian subcontinent, has shown how Orientalisms, which are to be considered as plural, have contributed to map world literature. He argues that “*world literature has functioned from the very beginning as a border regime*, a system for the regulation of movement, rather than as a set of literary relations beyond or without borders” (2016, 9). According to him, the complementarity of philologies and world literature since Goethe, being renewed by Auerbach, has been hardly able to escape from two predicaments: the uniformization of languages and literatures by translation in English as a global vehicular, and a marginalizing and misleading assignment of the vernaculars to build local linguistic and literary institutions following the Western European model. Mufti thus engages the scholar and the critic in a task which may be better carried out at the level of a relatively smaller transregional border zone like the Mediterranean than at the level of world literature, which implies a recourse to distant reading and to digital humanities:

To engage in the “philology” – that is, historically engaged and linguistically attuned criticism – of world literature is to produce critical-historical knowledge of this process, of the concepts and practices, intellectual or scholarly as well as literary, of this worldwide social and cultural assemblage and their modes of embeddedness in the world. (Mufti 2016, 241)

In order to contribute to such a “critical-historical knowledge of the process” between philologies and world literature, I would argue that the modern Mediterranean is a relevant field of inquiry, especially if one begins with the way philologies have mapped this field and at the same time have complexified the reality of the borders within it. In actuality, Romance philologies, in a fluctuant dialog with Orientalisms in the Mediterranean, could not help but to consider in medieval times intimacies between Romance and Semitic languages and literatures, and thus overcoming, albeit potentially with some misprision, the divide between philologies as it is described by Mufti. A would-be cross-cultural philology has thus been anticipated in the different locations of the Mediterranean, where a modern philological rereading of the medieval was produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; this was undertaken mainly in France, Spain and Italy, but also in the Near East, in the frame of the Arab revival, the *Nahda*. Regarding Romance philologies, a national medieval etymon could not be found in the purity of a single vernacular or in its sole derivation from Latin; the Arabic legacy had to be remembered. Further, these national would-be cross-cultural philologies of the medieval have played a ground-breaking role in the context of contemporary American Mediterranean literary studies, as they have been initiated by María Rosa Menocal (Menocal 1987; Mallette 2010; Akbari and Mallette 2013). Menocal was herself indebted to the pro-Arabist tendency of Spanish philology (Marín, 2009), members of which travelled from Spain to the United States Academy when some of the eminent members of the Spanish philological school, such as Américo Castro, left in exile during the Spanish Civil War.

However the aim here is not to enter further into the philological debates about the medieval. The main points to be considered are that, firstly, there is a shared remembered medieval Mediterranean discussed by philologies, in the frame of political and cultural agendas instituted in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, and that, secondly, these discussions played a role in the formation of the modern Mediterranean at the time of nation-building processes and colonial imperialism. We can focus on al-Andalus as the most common of the common places for studying this modern use of the medieval Mediterranean in terms of a shared and contrapuntal memory. Modern references to al-Andalus were actually constructed from different contextual spatio-temporal locations in the Mediterranean such as, as will be seen, Spain in the 1920s–1930s, at the time that an attempt was made for a liberal national modernization, or France in the aftermath of the Second World War, between the time of *Résistance* and that of decolonization, as well as Palestine in the 1980s–1990s, at the time of the predicament of the pan-Arabist project. Thus, a possibility of the Mediterranean is embedded in space-times such as al-Andalus, onto which are projected different versions of a shared memory from various ensuing cultural and political locations. Altogether, philolo-

gies as a condition for the construction of references to such space-times have played an important role in linking modern contexts to a remembered past.

The novel is considered to have been, along with the print media, the prevalent literary genre in which modernization was expressed in nation-states all around the world. However, I will argue that poetry, too, has played a significant role in this cultural evolution. The specificity of the poetic discursive mode is that it relies both on a process of exemplification, through which it is inscribed in a historical series of literal or oral traditions, and, that it reevaluates this memory through an enunciation in the immediacy of a new context. Poetry in the modern Mediterranean has thus been itself a sort of philology, having a deep conscience, (which could be called in the words of Harold Bloom an “anxiety of influence”), of its role in the perpetuation and renewal of a language and of its poetic repertoire. At the same time, poetry was also deeply inscribed, as a performed enunciation, in its contemporary contexts. Certain poets have thus played a part in modernization processes, parallel to those of intellectuals and political activists; particularly when it has been the case that poetry has been valued as a common good in cultural transformations. In the various contexts mentioned earlier in Spain, France and in the Arab World, Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), Louis Aragon (1897–1982) and Mahmūd Darwiš (1941–2008) were poets among philologists, but also among intellectuals and politicians. They contributed, through their authorship as poets, to establishing a link between philological scholarship, intellectual critique and political activism, being themselves amateur philologists, intellectuals of sorts and, regarding the latter two, for a time even political figures. They thus played a role in actualizing a possibility of the Mediterranean as a consistent cultural space from their contrapuntal locations which were connected a minima by a shared reference to al-Andalus. As poets, they reassembled a public through a literary language which reinvented al-Andalus as a part of their culture, while various philologies contributed to the negotiating of the legacy of al-Andalus inside and beyond cultural borders. They built in their poetry a contextual reference to Al-Andalus, and in so doing, performed what I propose to be a poetic cross-cultural philology. This may have profited greatly from a philological knowledge, but a knowledge which was reenacted in their work. However, I would add here that they also went “beyond philology”, in the words of Sharon Kinoshita (Akbari 2013, 25–42). This means that not only did their practice abandon the quest for an etymon, but also the transfers of a cross-cultural philology. Al-Andalus gave way through Lorca to Andalucía, not as a regional transcultural location but as a wandering place which liberated the naked strength of the song, a place which surges through what Lorca himself called the *duende*.

2 Beginning With al-Andalus Through Lorca

Lorca's poetry, besides his theatre, has been studied in its evolution and its diversity and considered to be a perfect combination of tradition and modernity, popular culture and high literacy, regionalism and avant-gardism. Marie Laffranque underlines the synthetical capacity of this poetry when she relates the first years that Lorca spent in Madrid, beginning in 1918, where he mainly lived until 1928, at the *Residencia de Estudiantes*:

Le jeune Grenadin peut ainsi offrir des solutions originales aux problèmes esthétiques de l'heure. Des tendances qui partagent ses contemporains, et qu'il trouve en lui-même, il réalise une synthèse forcément inachevée sur le plan théorique, mais parfois accomplie dans la perfection de l'œuvre d'art. (Laffranque 1967, 109–110)

Poema del Cante Jondo, Romancero gitano, Poeta en Nueva York, Diván del Tamarit: each of these collections, presents a new exploration and accomplishment. According to Andrés Soria Olmedo (2004), quoting Jorge Guillén, Lorca was himself a “fábula de fuentes” in the way he reread tradition as well as how he shared his contemporary literary life. He was, with reference to polysystem theory, a cultural entrepreneur whose works have illustrated and renewed a dynamic relational network between the heterogeneous models and strata which formed the Spanish poetic repertoire of his time. His practice thus contributed to a task which was promoted by prominent figures such as José Ortega y Gasset along with a whole generation of intellectuals (Aubert 2010). The main difficulty for these intellectuals was found in the fact that they possessed a liberal ideal, according to which power had to be given to the people recognized as a nation, while at the same time possessing an elitist conception of culture which cut themselves off from the same people. In their view, the gaps were to be filled by education. The national ideals were to be told to the people by intellectuals, educators and artists, who would thus shape the people in this way. Lorca as a poet shared this endeavor explicitly as he accompanied his poetry with lectures or recitals. When he pronounced his inaugural lecture on the *cante jondo* in 1922, he presented his exploration of Andalusian popular culture as “una obra patriótica y digna” (Lorca 2008, 207).

One intention of Lorca's poetry was to tell of the place at a growing scale, ranging from Granada and Andalusia to Spain, while at the same time, summarizing the entire national space at the local level of the Andalusian city. He had a direct experience of these places as an inhabitant of Granada or as an excursionist around Spain. The reference to this geographic space was also mediated in his poetry by representations which were cultural ideological frames; this was done mainly when he associated the Andalusian region to the Gipsies, the flamenco

and the corrida (Pérez 2018). However, the reference to a territory was particularly shaped in his poetry by a poetic repertoire which was established by philology, be it done in a correct fashion by scholars, or by artists in the course of their artistic invention. The lecture *Importancia histórica y artística del primitivo canto andaluz llamado “cante jondo”* (1922) and the delayed publication of *Poema del Cante Jondo* (1931) could not have happened without the masterful example of the composer Manuel de Falla, himself following in the fashion of Russian and French composers as well as being indebted to local Andalusian folklorists. The predilection for the romance, as was illustrated in *Romancero gitano* (1928), was an inheritance of an uninterrupted tradition in Spanish poetry, from the fifteenth century to the generation of the *Edad de Plata*, which included Juan Ramón Jiménez and Antonio Machado. This was furthered by the research of the prominent Spanish Romance philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who Lorca himself accompanied in Granada in 1920 as he was collecting popular romances and who published in 1928 *Flor nueva de romances viejos* (he began its preface by questioning the hypothesis according to which “*España es el país del Romancero*”). The lecture given in 1926 *La imagen poética de Don Luis de Góngora* was important for the generation of 1927 and its reflection on the faculties at the origin of poetic invention between a conscious mastery and a liberation of the unconscious, which was close to surrealism; this lecture was associated with incontestable philological research such as that of Dámaso Alonso who completed in 1927 a critical edition of Luis de Góngora’s *Soledades* and sustained the following year a doctoral thesis about the poet. Further, the composition of the collection *Diván del Tamarit* in the first half of the 1930s coincided with the publication in 1930 of a work by Emilio García Gómez, (himself the main figure of the school of Spanish Arabists in the twentieth century), the *Poemas arábigoandaluces*, as well as his nomination in the same year as professor of Arabic at the University of Granada. In 1934, García Gómez was to give a preface for the edition of *Diván del Tamarit* at the University of Granada, but the book was not able to be printed at that time. He nevertheless published later a “Nota al *Diván del Tamarit*”. Thus, each Lorquian poetic exploration corresponded to philological investigations, performing scholarship in live poetry.

For Lorca, al-Andalus is but one of the strata of the place. When al-Andalus would have once covered historically a large part of the Iberian Peninsula, the city of Granada as an epitome can be seen to maintain its survival. Lorca was not the first to experience the city as a ruined palimpsest. His reverie reiterated the Romantic or even Modernist literary orientalism and its musical resonances in compositions by Claude Debussy or Manuel de Falla. We can see this in his first published book in 1918, *Impresiones y paisajes*. In the Albaicín, “surgen con ecos fantásticos las casas blancas sobre el monte... Enfrente, las torres doradas de la Alhambra enseñan recortadas sobre el cielo un sueño oriental.” (Lorca

2008, 144) Nevertheless, this oriental dream does not specifically refer to al-Andalus. It vaguely intertwines, as did Romantic orientalism, the Persian and the Arabic. Lorca himself signed one of his first articles in 1917, about a Spanish translation of *Rubaiyat* by the Persian poet Omar al-Khayyam, under the name of “Abu-Abd-Alah” (Lorca 2008, 69), taken after the name of the last Arab king of the emirate of Granada. In the lecture about the *cante jondo*, he took on the idea of the *costumbrista* Estébanez Calderón, according to whom the name of the *caña*, considered as the primitive stem of the *cante jondo*, was derived from the Arabic *ginā* or *uğniyya*, which he spells “*gannia*” (Lorca 2008, 208). According to this dubious philology, an Arabic etymon was thus supposed to be at the origin of the song which was claimed to give the most authentic expression of the place fusing all its cultural strata. The knowledge Lorca had of Oriental poetry is thus very approximate and should not be judged by the criteria of philological truth. Lorca possessed a knowledge of Omar al-Khayyam, but it was seen through a European reception, particularly through the mediation of his reading in Castilian of the Nicaraguan Modernist poet Rubén Darío, as documented by Pepa Merlo (Lorca 2018, 87). In his lecture about the *cante jondo*, Lorca quotes Arab, and mainly Persian, poets like Hafiz and Omar al-Khayyam, arguing an affinity between their poetry and the *cante jondo* (Lorca 2008, 222–226). However, the source he mentions is *Poesías asiáticas, puestas en versos castellanos* by Gaspar María de Nava, Conde de Noroña, published in Paris in 1833, in the heyday of Romantic orientalism. Gaspar María de Nava, who based his version on English and Latin translations, was not himself a learned orientalist. Al-Andalus is thus for Lorca, as a cultural stratum he includes in his representation of the place, a dreamed origin and a very imprecise reference, whose relevance cannot be appreciated in terms of philological accuracy, but instead in the frame of a contemporary poetic polysystem, where all the items transferred into it are reevaluated.

One might think that the situation would have changed after Lorca encountered a real learned Arabist in the form of Emilio García Gómez, while he was himself composing the *gacelas* and the *casidas* which would be included in *Diván del Tamarit*. However, regarding this point, it is worth quoting the note that García Gómez wrote about the collection:

No creo que haya que decir que las denominaciones de García Lorca –*diván*, *gacelas*, *casidas*– no se ajustan a las definiciones anteriores. En este sentido son arbitrarias. Pero tampoco creo que haya que decir –y mucho menos tratándose de Lorca– que estas poesías nada tienen de común con esas llamadas orientales, máscaras literarias de un carnaval romántico, falsas, vacuas, pintarrajeadas.

Los poemas del *Diván del Tamarit* no son falsificaciones ni remedos, sino auténticamente lorquianos. (Lorca 2018, 132)

This presents a paradox pertaining to this poetic cross-cultural philology. The reference to al-Andalus is a condition of the discursive strategy of *Diván del Tamarit*; Lorca engages in a cultural debate about the identity of the place. At the same time, regardless of any thematical kinship between the poetries, it is by and large a form of mimicked reference, which mainly allows Lorca to invent a poetry of his own, whose intimacy is beyond imitation and stereotypes. This reference leads to a blurring of the boundaries between cultures as they are mapped by philologies. We can read the beginning of “Gacela II de la terrible presencia” in this way: “Yo quiero que el agua se quede sin cauce. / Yo quiero que el viento se quede si valles.” (Lorca 2018, 142) The self in the poem wishes that the landscape be covered by the elements, water and wind. He calls for an intensity of the song which erases the limits of the self and the world. The name Lorca gave to this intensity is the *duende*, whose main expression in the Andalusian place is the Gipsy *cante jondo*, even though it was supposed to have an Arabic origin. There is thus in this poetic cross-cultural philology a tension between a dreamed etymon situated beyond cultural borders, and an erasure of any origin in the flood of the song, going beyond philology. The reference to al-Andalus tends to give way to a kind of wandering poetics.

3 Louis Aragon and the Uncertain Future of al-Andalus

Louis Aragon was born nearly in the same year as Lorca but had a longer life. It was in his late age that al-Andalus became the reference upon which he built an entire masterful poem *Le Fou d'Elsa*, which was published in 1963. The narrative dimension of the poem mainly relates the fall of the last emirate of al-Andalus around King Boabdil as a central character. Aragon had had to acquire a certain historical knowledge in order to accomplish this. The second central character, called the Medjnoûn, is a relay through which a literary corpus is reassembled that goes far beyond the time of the Andalusian Arab twilight. Through this character, a popular poet and composer of zajals, large parts of the culture of the Muslim worlds are perused, and further, even of the culture which in Spain followed the fall of al-Andalus up until the time the author was living in. Aragon had thus also had to base his composition on an extensive cultural and literary documentation. A list was kept of the books he had consulted to write his poem (Aragon 2007, 1536–1540). Of course, this list does not offer a guarantee that Aragon had fully read all the books it includes, nor does it rule out that he had not read other books. Like Lorca's, his philology was not a scholar's philology. Among the

books on this list are found primarily works by French orientalists with different specialities like Louis Massignon, Évariste Levi-Provençal, Marcel Cohen, Régis Blachère and Roger Arnaldez, but also of Spanish Arabists like Emilio García Gómez, or Romance philologists like Ramón Menéndez Pidal, and even of historians, among whom were those who were considering al-Andalus as a parenthesis in the continuity of Spanish history: Claudio Sanchez-Albornoz on the republican side and Ignacio Olagüe on the fascist side. There are also on this list translations of Arabic texts by learned orientalists, as well as works which contributed to the Romantic myth of al-Andalus, including Chateaubriand and Washington Irving. A learned orientalist and Arab scholar, Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, has identified many factual approximations in the poem of the literary orientalist Aragon (Aragon 2008, 1518). Nonetheless, Bencheikh altogether praised Aragon's work. The fiction of the poem keeps its grounding in a rich erudition, one which Aragon precisely intended to exhibit – not with a pedantic pretense, but to immerse his French lector in a culture usually ignored. The poem itself included at its end a long “Lexique et notes” where the author takes on the task of being a critical editor of his own text. As a *mise en abyme* of the philological apparatus the poem is built on, the oral songs of the Medjnoûn are transcribed, collected and commented on by a fictional young erudite boy, Zaïd, who accompanies the Medjnoûn.

This further example, after Lorca, of a poetic cross-cultural philology takes on another dimension if we include in it further aspects of Louis Aragon's life; he was not only a poet, but a communist intellectual, a member of the Central Comity of the French Communist Party and was very officially awarded with the Lenin Prize for Peace in 1958. Aragon's cultural agency can then be considered in a partisan frame, and its reevaluations then in accordance with historical circumstances, even if it cannot be totally reduced to that. Indeed, in the poem, topics are often conveyed in a way that the author could not have otherwise communicated them in as a partisan intellectual. In the frame of the communist internationalist doctrine for literature and arts, defined by Andrei Zhdanov from 1934 onwards as a socialist realism, a complementary stress on national cultures had appeared in order to appeal to the people. The communist writer, socialist in the content, had to be nationalist in the form (Thiesse 2019, 316). When Aragon composed his resistance poetry during the Second World War, and when he promoted a national poetry during the post-war period, he grounded the task of inscribing poetry in a national tradition within a scientific study of French literature, and primarily on the French Romance philology school, including medievalists such as Gaston Paris, Joseph Bédier and Alfred Jeanroy (Baquey 2018b). It is worth quoting a speech he gave at a congress of the French Communist Party in 1954:

Un art de parti est aujourd’hui la condition nécessaire du développement de ce grand art national. Cet art de parti, étant l’art du Parti communiste, ne peut être un art de hasard, un art empirique ; il se distingue par le caractère scientifique de ses bases et de son développement, comme, si je puis dire, le communisme se distingue du socialisme utopique. [...] La réévaluation critique de notre patrimoine national est l’une des tâches déterminantes de l’art de parti. (Aragon 1990, 193–194)

However, after the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in the circumstances of the Franco-Algerian decolonisation war, perspectives surrounding the scientific building of a repertoire changed, and Aragon paid much more attention to Orientalist philology and to its persistent and constantly renewed debates with Romance philology about al-Andalus and the possible Arabic origins of the troubadour’s poetry (Baquey 2014 and 2018a). In the speech he gave in Moscow at his reception of the Lenin Prize in 1958, just after he had explicitly mentioned the Algerian war, he refused to claim the Occidental cultural heritage as his sole heritage and said:

[...] il nous faut réclamer notre héritage, pour que survive la culture, je réclame tout notre héritage humain où la discrimination entre l’Occident et l’Orient ne peut être que le fait d’une guerre préparée, et la négation de l’avenir au nom d’un passé mutilé. (Aragon 1990, 716)

The premise of the poetic cross-cultural philology of *Le Fou d’Elsa* is present in this defence of culture which moves from a communist national internationalism to a communist worldly internationalism, where the borders between philologies tend to be transcended and where another representation of al-Andalus takes shape, one presenting it as a multiculturalist refined and tolerant society (Pérez 2018, 187). Here, the building of the reference to al-Andalus as a Mediterranean commonplace does not refer to a problematic Spanish national identity as was the case in the context of Lorca’s poetry, but instead it finds one of its referents as a polysemic allegory in the French colonial Mediterranean empire, mainly in Algeria.

One might now ask how in the semiology of *Le Fou d’Elsa* there can be a conciliation of a historical reference to the past of al-Andalus mainly built on scholarly and literary orientalisms, and a polysemic allegorism referring to the twentieth century. The poetic forms of the Andalusian poetry such as the *zajal* or the *muwaššah*, which gave rise to so many discussions between Romance and Orientalist philologies, are not much more exemplified in Aragon’s poem than the *qaṣida* or *ḡazal* are in Lorca’s *Diván del Tamarit* (Aragon 2007, 937). However, the link between al-Andalus and the twentieth century is developed in another way: as a historical evolution where the engine of progress is not the class struggle but the transformation of the relationships between men and women in couples. The representation of the society of al-Andalus thus does not escape from the historical perspective of

a heterodox Marxism. This society is represented as a monarchist and theocentric one which oppresses the rationalist philosophes and the Medjnoûn, the popular poet who sings to the woman of the future. Thus, Arabic poetry is not simply included in a cross-cultural and so to speak worldly literary repertoire, where Andalusian poets take their place in a cortège of poets forming through the ages a single file which tragically ends up with the assassination of Lorca (Aragon 2007, 847–850). There is no Arabic etymon but a journey through time where the fictional Medjnoûn is but a relay in a long chain of poets including his Persian contemporary, Djami. At the end of the poem, the Medjnoûn, having found refuge after the fall of Granada in a cave of the Gypsies in the Sacromonte neighborhood, sees the future of the song which is the future of love between couples of human beings, or to put it in another way, a future of the nuclear human experience of community and alterity. But the Medjnoûn, giving way to the author himself for whom he was a spokesman in the poem, despairs about this future. His song joins the despaired song of the Gypsies, the *duende* as Lorca understood it. The journey through time runs aground as it is allegorized by the crossing of the sea by Christopher Columbus, who seems likely to fail to discover a new human world.

4 Maḥmūd Darwiš: Anywhere in the World Through the Poem

Maḥmūd Darwiš, who was born in 1941, is a much later modern poet than Lorca or Aragon. The Arab cultural revival, the *Nahda*, began in the nineteenth century and a pan-Arab national project emerged at the dawn of the twentieth century. Yet modernity in Arabic poetry only arose after the Second World War, firstly in Iraq, then in Beirut around the magazine *Ši'r* at the end of the 1950s (Creswell 2019). The poetry which preceded this, from the end of the nineteenth century, was firstly a neoclassic form of poetry, and then a romantic one. Both maintained the versification of the medieval classical Arabic poetry with an inflexion towards an expression of Arab nationalism and a more personal sensibility. This poetry was in itself a philological repository of Arabic language, as the more ancient Arabic poetry had been for the medieval Arab grammarians. However, Darwiš for his part grew up in Israel and received an education in Hebrew. Before he left Israel in 1970, he had little knowledge of contemporary Arab poetry apart from Sayyāb, Bayātī and Nizār Qabbānī (Wāzen 2006, 106). He eventually came to know of the Arab modernity firstly when he flew to Cairo in 1971, and then primarily as he stayed in Beirut from 1972 to 1982. He has since then fully partaken in the debates about Arab poetic modernity as a magazine editor and poet. Nevertheless, he was

also a Palestinian intellectual, which meant to situate oneself at the core of the pan-Arabist nationalism of the time. Like Aragon, he also took on political responsibilities when he entered the Executive Comity of the PLO in 1987. Even so, this did not last, since he left in 1993 because of a disagreement on the conditions of the peace process with Israel. Afterwards, he purportedly asked himself what was his place as a poet in the Executive Comity and finally claimed nothing more but a poet's authority.

In the context of this contrapuntal study of the poetic reference to Al-Andalus, it is important to mention that, unlike Lorca and Aragon, Darwiš could read the Arabic Andalusian poetry of the medieval epoch. When he quotes Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Zaydūn or Ibn ‘Arabī, it is not through an approximate knowledge and translations. These poets belong to his poetic heritage. Further, he also often said that one of his favorite poets from his youth was Lorca, to whom he dedicated a poem in one of his first collections published in Israel. His first reading of Lorca was in Hebrew, which was a language through which world poetry first came to him. If Lorca's poetry summed up the strata of Spanish poetry of his time as a national polysystem, and if Aragon imagined in *Le Fou d'Elsa* a funeral cortege accompanying the death of Lorca, thus reassembling in an elegiac way a Mediterranean cross-cultural poetic repertoire including poetry in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic and new Romance languages, we could say that, from the beginning, Darwiš had to situate his poetry in the perspective of world literature. His language neither belonged to the main languages into which world literature was translated, nor was much of the literature of his language translated into the languages of world literature. After he had to leave Beirut due to the circumstances of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, he soon found a main refuge in Paris, until returning to live between Palestine and Jordan in 1995. This Parisian stay was a time in which he affirmed himself as a world poet through the extent of the cultural references in his poetry, situating Arab history within a universal history. However, his poetic philology also included a strong attachment, wherever he was in exile, to the imperative of perpetuating the song of the poem in Arabic. The Arabic language was, through the medium of poetry, a place for him to inhabit, while dealing with the uncertainty of a return to a Palestinian homeland. This philology, literally a love for one's language, was exemplified by the way he maintained in his poetry the feet of the ancient Arabic prosody freed from the structure of the traditional meters (*qaṣīda al-taṭfīla*), while the main trend of Arabic modern poetry was opting for prose poetry (*qaṣīda al-natr*). On the one hand, Darwiš told of his remoteness from ancient Arabic poetry, that is to say from a hereditary etymon consisting of the first prestigious models of the Arabic *qaṣīda*, the *mu'allaqat*. On the other hand, he claimed Arabic as a language where he expressed not only his detachment from a pan-Arabist nationally rebuilt past, but a quest for a new

way to inhabit the world— which did not mean renouncing the needed recognition for his people of the right to a land.

The reference to al-Andalus is a common topic in Arabic poetry since the *Nahda* and, like Lorca and Aragon, Darwiš inherited a construction of the medieval reference in his own modern culture. William Granara considered this construction of the reference as an Andalusian *chronotope* in modern Arabic novel throughout the twentieth century (Granara 2005). Yet as Granara himself indicates in a footnote, this reference was also present in poetry at the same. Reuven Snir in his studies has even expressed that “most literary expressions of al-Andalus appear in poetry” (Snir 2000, 265). Poetry presents itself as the genre in which a poetic philological remembrance is directly exemplified in Arabic. The neoclassical poet Ahmad Šawqī, when he was in exile in Spain in 1916, composed among other Andalusian poems a *nūniyya*, or a poem that rhymes with *nūn*, which was modelled on a famous poem by Ibn Zaydūn. This kind of imitation is known as a *mu’āraḍa*. The traditional lament over the lost Andalusian paradise was in that context an elegy about an Egyptian national homeland at that time under British domination. Darwiš in a late poem of his, “In Cordoba” (*Atar al-Farāša* [The Trace of the Butterfly] 2008, Darwiš 2009, 718), referred to another poet, Nizār Qabbānī, who, as he was visiting Cordoba in 1955, spontaneously looked there for the key to his own childhood’s home in Damascus, as if he were deceived by a resemblance between the two places (“Mudakkirāt Andalusīyya” [Andalusian Memoirs]). Al-Andalus as a reference in Arabic poetry has thus been used in the contexts of colonial European domination, of newly independent Arab states, but, in addition to this, also specifically in Palestinian poetry. The reference appeared in Darwiš’s poetry in 1984, particularly in “Qaṣīdat Bayrūt” ([Ode to Beirut] Darwiš 2005a, 505), after the Palestinian resistance movement had been expelled from Beirut. There was no more al-Andalus to escape to, as the last survivor of the Umayyad dynasty had done, when he had fled from Damascus to Cordoba and founded a new emirate. There was no choice but to leave Beirut as a “last tent”. The tent is here a metonymy for a pan-Arab community inheriting its origins from a Bedouin past, whose form of genuine expression was poetry. The Palestinians had to take to sea without any assurance to re-enter into history and to regain a land to live on. Emily Apter has commented, following after Edward W. Said, on the way Darwiš’s poetry, in its representation of a human destiny, had to renounce any kind of quest for a paradise (2006, 79). Its humanism goes beyond the remains of theology which subsisted in Auerbach’s philology when he recapitulated European literature around Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. It goes even beyond Aragon’s poetic cross-cultural philology which tries to rebuild a law of progress through a journey in time since al-Andalus. Darwiš, as suggested by Iain Chambers (2008, 50), goes beyond the modern national mapping of cultures to which the philologies have contributed, as has also been argued by

Aamir R. Mufti. After the “Ode to Beirut”, another long poem by Darwiš published in 1990, entitled “Ma’sāt al-Narjis Malhāt al-Fida” [The Affliction of the Narcissus, the Merriment of the Silver] (Darwiš 2005b), exhausts itself while reassembling a cross-cultural memory for an Arab community as a historical epic, before eventually returning to the ordinariness of everyday life in a natural world which could be found anywhere.

Reference to al-Andalus culminated in Darwiš’s poetry with the poetic suite he published in 1992 under the title “Aḥad ‘Aśar Kawkabān ‘alā Ājir al-mašhad al-Andalusī” [Eleven Planets over the Last Andalusian Scene] (Darwiš 2005b, 269–292). We find in it the motif of the fall of al-Andalus as it had been orchestrated in Aragon’s *Le Fou d’Elsa*. Yet the character of the last king, Abū ‘Abdallah-Boabdil, as a figure either for identification or as a denounced traitor of a collective cause, is in this case not superseded by a fictional Arabic poet, the Medjnoûn, as a mask for the lyrical I, but instead by Lorca himself as the main relay through whom the song is perpetuated. Lorca is a very present poet in Arabic and especially Palestinian poetry (Snir 2000, 277), the tragedy of his assassination lyrically overlapping the narrative of the collective loss of Al-Andalus, which allegorizes the loss of Palestine. In Darwiš’s poetry, the figure of Lorca acquired a specific long-lasting importance. Darwiš felt that he shared Lorca’s reverie, who had himself shared the visions of the Oriental poetry in *Diván del Tamarit* (Darwiš 2005b, 275–276). Moreover, Lorca is the Andalusian who relayed the transcultural song of the Gypsies, whose strength he defined as exemplary of the *duende*. Through the intensity of this song, the cultural density of what was here referred to as a poetic cross-cultural philology is even erased in a disregard for any inheritance. There is thus a shift from the condition of the Arab inheritors of the nomad Bedouins, in quest of a lost origin so as to build a modern nation, to the imagined wandering condition of the Gypsies, who as they settled in Andalusia acknowledged the lack of a homeland, and inhabited the danse, the song or even the cord of a guitar which resonates across the sea. In summary, al-Andalus was a common place through which modern poets located in the Mediterranean have shaped cross-cultural philologies, going beyond the national philologies contemporary to the different revivals and nation-state building processes. It has made a literary Mediterranean possible. Yet through Lorca something new emerges which is beyond philology, something that is worldly or even earthly in the sense that it leads poets to inhabit among the barest elements of the Earth: the sea, the stars, the forests and a “shadow of our childhood like a flower”.

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Charles Sabatos (Yeditepe University) / C. Ceyhun Arslan
(Koç University)

Đurišin's Interliterary Mediterranean as a Model for World Literature

Abstract: During the 1980s, the Slovak literary theorist Dionýz Đurišin drew on the structuralist and Marxist frameworks prevalent in the socialist Bloc to develop his concept of interliterary communities. In 1992, he published *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (What is World Literature?), which provided the foundation for applying this theory to such contexts of world literature as Central Europe and the Mediterranean. His final project was the trilingual (Italian, French, and Slovak) *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteraria* (The Mediterranean: An Interliterary Network 2000), coedited with Armando Gnisci, which brought together Slovak, Czech, Russian, and Italian scholars working on Greek, Turkish, Maghrebi, and other Mediterranean literatures. This chapter uses Đurišin's interliterary theory of the Mediterranean to examine the pioneering Arabic prose text *Al-Sāq 'alā al-sāq* (Leg over Leg, 1855) by the Ottoman-Lebanese writer Ahmad Fāris al-Shidhīq, which takes its autobiographical narrator around the Mediterranean and beyond, challenging its linguistic and political hierarchies. It suggests that the interliterary Mediterranean is the ideal milieu for comparatists to study world literature.

1 Introduction: Đurišin's Theory of World Literature

One of the earliest sustained engagements with the theory of Mediterranean literature emerged in a rather unlikely time and place: the landlocked Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, where even traveling to most Mediterranean countries (with the exception of Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast) was difficult for ordinary citizens up until the end of the Communist regime in 1989. The work of Dionýz Đurišin (1929–1997), a researcher in world literature at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, drew on structuralist and Marxist frameworks to develop his concept of interliterary communities, which play an “intermediary function” between the national and world context. Rather than setting up strict boundaries, Đurišin studied “the network of literary relations, which, from single unities (national literatures), proceeds through intermediate stages (groups of national literatures called ‘interliterary communities’) to the final stage, namely, world literature,” which is “the ultimate target category for literary scholarship” (2012, 151). In 1992, Đurišin pub-

lished *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (What is World Literature?) which provided the foundation for applying this theory to a broader context.¹ His collaboration with the Italian comparatist Armando Gnisci resulted in the collected trilingual volume *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteraria* (The Mediterranean: An Interliterary Network), published in Italian, French, and Slovak in 2000), which brought together scholars working on the “interliterary centrisms” of Mediterranean literature and its connections to the Slavic world.

Although it was published in two world languages, the lack of an English version has limited the reception of this collection in the Anglophone field of world literature, and Ďurišin’s premature death has also limited its later impact in Mediterranean studies.² In *Teória literárnej komparatistiky* (Theory of Literary Comparistics 1975, published in English in 1984), Ďurišin presents several examples of interliterary communities, from “ethnically related national wholes... in a single state unit” (like Slovaks and Czechs), “ethnically kindred nations which do not share co-existence” (including Germanic, Romance and Slavic literatures), and “nations without the ethnical bond” but historically with a common state (such as Slovak’s relationship to Hungarian literature). He suggests that “the geographical or the regional factor also possesses certain possibilities of creating interliterary communities,” offering the examples of the Danube region or the (then-socialist) nations of Eastern Europe (Ďurišin 1984, 287). In *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (published only in Slovak, with a summary in French), Ďurišin is already adjusting to post-socialist political realities (he refers to the “former” Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, although Czechoslovakia was still united up until the following year), but his focus remains primarily on Slavic literatures. The book includes only a passing reference to Mediterranean literature in Chapter 6, “What are Interliterary Communities and the Interliterary Process?” In his reformulation of the categories of interliterary communities, he proposes “Northern European, Central European, East European, Mediterranean and other literatures” as geographic criteria broader than national or linguistic bonds (Ďurišin 1992, 156).

Ďurišin’s theory has received its greatest attention in Slovakia and elsewhere in Central Europe, although it has also been discussed by the Spanish comparatist

¹ Slovak scholars are fond of pointing out that this book appeared over a decade before David Damrosch’s book of the same title, which does not mention Ďurišin, although there are several references to the earlier theorist in his latest work (see Damrosch 2020, 259, 262).

² Ďurišin’s Slovak colleague Marián Gálik has offered more practical reasons why his works had only limited success abroad: “One crucial factor was that it was impossible to buy these books in the world outside the former Czechoslovakia. A second reason was Ďurišin’s shyness with anyone who tried to speak with him in western languages that he could not speak. A third reason was his uncompromising attitude to the view of others who had different opinions” (Gálik 2009, 11).

Claudio Guillén (1993, 98). According to Ladislav Franek, who compares Đurišin's work with Guillén's, its "primary task was to search for such systems, concepts or points of departure, which would have the ability to bring the examined phenomena to the level of mutual relations and connections, both from the viewpoint of the internal development of literature, as well as in the sense of overstepping the narrow framework, in the direction to revealing the nature and regularity of world literature" (2014, 253). The Romanian comparatist Marcel Cornis-Pope suggests that "while Edward Said's term 'Orientalism' describes well the perspective of Western writers on the Eastern Mediterranean, it does not reflect accurately the more complex attitude of East-Central European writers towards the East," concluding that "[in] the spirit of Dionýz Đurišin and Armando Gnisci's redefinition of the Mediterranean area as 'Una rete interletteraria' [...] we can argue that the mobility of writers across cultural and literary boundaries enhances their interconnectedness, hybridizing their literary and cultural production" (2014, 139, 143). The Slovenian scholar Marko Juvan has compared Đurišin to such better-known scholars as Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti, commenting that unlike their inter-national emphasis, Đurišin focuses on "complementarity within the interliterary communities of Central Europe, Slavic nations, the Mediterranean, or the former Yugoslavia. Instead of lamenting lagging behind the center, he stresses the irregular and accelerated development of minor literatures. In place of influence, he proposes a dialogic notion of creative reception of metropolitan patterns" (Juvan 2018, 101). Juvan's emphasis on the minor is relevant for writers, as well as theorists, from nations outside the geographical limits of the Mediterranean region.

While Đurišin's theory of interliterary communities examines the interaction of languages at the level of national groups, it does not place much emphasis on the interaction of different language affiliations within the work of an individual author. This issue has been discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who have proposed that Franz Kafka's "irreducible feeling of distance" from his native Czech territory led to his creation of a "minor literature" within the "major language" of German.³ The English translation includes a foreword by the Algerian comparatist Réda Bensmaïa, who states that Kafka's work "will henceforth serve as a *rallying point* or *model* for certain texts and 'bi-lingual' writing practices that, until now, had to pass through a long purgatory before even being read, much less recognized" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, xiv, emphasis in the original).

³ They describe three main attributes of minor literature: "language" with "a high coefficient of deterritorialization," a "cramped space" that forces everything "to connect immediately to politics," and "a collective enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17–18).

Bensmaïa implicitly places “minor literature” in a Mediterranean framework: his reference to “bi-lingual” alludes to the Moroccan novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi’s *Amour bilingue* (1984, translated as *Love in Two Languages*).⁴ Although minor literature has often been conflated with ethnic minorities, Deleuze and Guattari characterize it as a specific function of writing, to “really become a collective machine of expression and really be able to treat and develop its contents.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 18–19). The validity of this theory for Kafka’s work has been the subject of debate, but it has served as a framework for the “minor” Mediterranean in the work of modernist writers from the margins of Europe, whose writings undermine political and cultural hegemonies that shape the Mediterranean as they flesh out the cultural hybridity that characterizes it (Sabatos 2016, 52–53).

Đurišin and Gnisci’s volume, while including contributions relating to Turkey and the Maghreb, mostly leaves unexplored what is arguably the heart of Mediterranean culture, and certainly its religious traditions: the Levant. Although his scholarship has received almost no attention in Middle Eastern studies, Đurišin emphasizes the need for further study of what he called “Asian Mediterraneanness” (Đurišin and Gnisci 2000, 381). The example that will be discussed further below is that of *Leg over Leg* (1855) by the Ottoman-Lebanese writer Ahmed Fāris al-Shidyāq (1805/1806–1877). This uncategorizable text, first translated into English less than ten years ago, takes its autobiographical narrator around the Mediterranean and beyond, challenging linguistic and political hierarchies while pushing the boundaries of the Arabic novel. Rebecca C. Johnson observes that “[w]hat al-Shidyāq ultimately gives us in *Leg over Leg* is a theory of world literature,” and as she notes, his work “imagines and constructs the world anew, through an omnivorous textuality, absorbing texts and literary forms through juxtaposition, quotation, imitation, and parody. Far from holding up Sterne or Lamartine as culturally distinct and inviolable paradigms, he incorporates them into Arabic literary categories, aligning *Tristram Shandy* with the *maqāmāt*” (2013, 1, xxx). As Gnisci observes, the “Mediterranean transcontinentalism—unique in the world—offers, inasmuch as it is an interliterary center, the ‘strongest’ yet intimations of the process that goes from national literature and ends in ‘world literature’” (2005, 263). Reassessing *Leg over Leg* within the interliterary Mediterranean framework, discussed further below, will move beyond the context of Ottoman imperialism, Western colonialism, and Arab nationalism, and draw on Johnson’s vision of

⁴ Bensmaïa’s foreword also includes a reference to the Islamic world: “[If] Kafka’s watchword was really ‘thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image,’ it was certainly not in the manner of the ‘Turks’ or ‘Muslims’ that Hegel describes in his *Aesthetics*,” here alluding to the French philosopher Sara Kofman’s *Mélancholie de l’art* (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, xvii).

world literature, which in turn resonates with Ďurišin's attention to processes of literary transculturations.

2 Centers and Peripheries in Ďurišin's and Gnisci's Interliterary Network

Much of Dionýz Ďurišin's career was spent at the Institute of World Literature (*Ústav svetovej literatúry*) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.⁵ Like the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow, the Institute sponsored academic research with an implicit agenda of fostering connections within the Soviet Bloc and its affiliated states. Róbert Gáfrík points out that although “Ďurišin was not enthusiastic about advancing the ideology of Marxism-Leninism [...] his work is permeated by concepts of dialectical and historical materialism” (2010, 22). Ďurišin was influenced by Slovak scholars in translation studies such as Anton Popovič (himself influenced by the Czech Jiří Levý), who were also considerably ahead of their time in theorizing a previously underexplored field of literary analysis, and whose work helped to shape the better-known “polysystems theory” developed by the Israeli scholars Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury. Ďurišin does not define world literature as the sum of all literary works in the world (“a complex or a compendium of literatures of the world”) or a limited number of classical masterpieces (“a selective concept of world literature”). He calls for “a developmental concept of world literature” based on “facts that are the bearers of mutual relationships and affinities, those that are genetically and typologically mutually conditioned and systematized” (Ďurišin 2012, 157). With the fall of the “Iron Curtain,” the Institute had greater opportunities to develop links with Western European scholars, and Ďurišin began parallel projects on the literatures of Central Europe and the Mediterranean.⁶

Ďurišin's collaboration with Armando Gnisci, a professor of comparative literature at La Sapienza University of Rome, led to the trilingual volume *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteraria/ La Méditerranée. Un Réseau interlittéraire / Stredozemné medziliterárna sieť*. The beginning of the volume (following Ján Koška's

⁵ Established in 1964, it was known as the Institute of Literary Studies between 1973–1990, when it was redivided into separate institutes of Slovak and world literature.

⁶ Slovak has two related terms for “Mediterranean” using the prefix “stredo-” or central: “stredozemný” and “stredomorný,” both of which show a more explicit parallel to “Central European,” or “stredoeurópsky,” than in English or Romance languages. While Czech also uses “středozemní,” the Czech contributors to Ďurišin's and Gnisci's collection mostly use the adjective “mediteránní.”

short piece on world literature and translation) features Ďurišin's essay "Medzikontinentálne súvislosti stredomorského kulturného a literárnoumeleckého procesu" ("Intercontinental Connections of the Mediterranean Literary and Cultural Process") and Gnisci's "La letteratura comparata come disciplina di decolonizzazione" ("Comparative Literature as a Discipline of Decolonization"). Except for Gnisci and his colleagues Franca Sinopoli and Costanza Ferrini, all of the contributors were Slovak (Ján Koška, Pavol Koprda, Daniel Škoviera, and Xénia Celnarová), Czech (Ivan Dorovský, Miloš Zelenka, and Ivo Pospíšil) or Russian (Sofia A. Ilinskaja, Svetlana V. Prozogina, and Elena Riauzova).⁷ These are followed by Gnisci's second essay, "La rete interletteraria mediterranea" ("The Mediterranean as Inter-literary Network"), and Ďurišin's "Ústretovosť slovenského a talianskeho výskumu medziliterárnosti?" ("Convergence of Slovak and Italian Research on Interliterarity?").⁸ Most of the articles offer broad historical backgrounds rather than detailed close readings, and with the exception of Ilinskaya's article on twentieth-century Greek poetry, there is little on modern literature. The Italian and French sections also include Ferrini's extensive annotated bibliography "Mediterranean: A Self-Representation in Construction."⁹

After introducing interliterary centrism within the Czech and Slovak comparative tradition, Ďurišin proposes: "The particularities of the literatures of the Mediterranean region cannot be understood without studies of the Mediterranean milieu. Otherwise, we might forget the important connections between Spanish literature and culture with Arab literature. [...] Here we must think of the Israeli component, the influences in Syria and Lebanon, etc." After alluding to Greek culture and (South) Slavic literature, he adds "the Mediterranean viewpoints of French literature" and concludes with Italy, which he sees as having "the central status in the European part of the Mediterranean Sea"¹⁰ (Ďurišin and Gnisci 2000, 379). Touching on Central European and Nordic literatures, he returns to the "intercontinental character" of the Mediterranean, mentioning Syrian, Lebanese, Cypriot and Turkish influences, which make this interliterary network an

7 While the chapters by Koška, Ďurišin, Gnisci, Koprda, Dorovský and Sinopoli present general overviews of "Mediterranean interliterary centrism," the others are devoted to the histories of specific national literatures: Ilinskaja on Greece, Škoviera on Slovakia, Zelenka on the Czech lands, Pospíšil on Russia, Celnarová on "Asia Minor" (mainly Turkey), Prozogina on the Maghreb, and Riauzova on Portugal.

8 In the French section, the order of Ďurišin's essays is reversed, perhaps due to an editing error.

9 This includes both fictional and non-fictional works ranging from the predictable reference points (i.e. Fernand Braudel and Predrag Matvejević) and some of the best-known figures of the region (i.e. Orhan Pamuk and Amin Maalouf) to writers whose works circulated less widely outside their national traditions (i.e. the Maltese Oliver Friggeri and the Syrian Hanna Mina).

10 All English translations from the volume (except Gnisci's chapter) are by the present authors.

ideal case study for his vision of world literature. Đurišin also points out “the potential coexistence of Israeli literature with Polish, Czech, and Austrian cultures, in other words with Central European tendencies”¹¹ (Đurišin and Gnisci 2000, 385). Perhaps his most original insight is that “we do not understand Mediterraneanness as an isolated phenomenon only including the Mediterranean coast, but study it in its broadest intra-European connections”, and cites the missionaries Cyril and Methodius, who brought Christianity to the Slavs: “The presence of Greek Mediterranean culture in Central Europe on the territory of Great Moravia, that is current-day Slovakia, was also the arrival of Greek, or more precisely Byzantine tendencies in the zone of Western Europe” (Đurišin and Gnisci 2000, 386).

Gnisci's essay “The Mediterranean as Interliterary Network,” which was later published in English in a Canadian volume, begins by alluding to Herodotus and Braudel, as well as Tahar Ben Jelloun's “magic lake”: “[D]ifferent ways of thinking historiographically of the Mediterranean have succeeded one another [...] In attempting to think of the Mediterranean literally, my mind is overwhelmed with images and sketches, and shadows of images” (2005, 261). Gnisci claims that two of Đurišin's concepts were particularly formative for his own work in the field: the Mediterranean's unique “transcontinentality” and its “interliterary centrism,” which offers a “geographically specific test” for the Slovak theorist's “long and magisterial research” on world literature (2005, 263). This is exemplified through Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq's particular use of Arabic that undermines the political and cultural boundaries imposed by both Western imperialism and Ottoman imperialism. His *Leg over Leg* demonstrates Gnisci's claim that “[e]verything slides in the Mediterranean. The South under the North, the West over the East, the center towards the periphery” (Gnisci 2005, 264). As Jeffrey Sacks notes, al-Shidyāq's work is “both about and of language” (2015, 92) and he concurs with Mattityahu Peled's observation that “peculiarities of language appear to be the essence of [Leg over Leg]” (1985, 31). Al-Shidyāq offers a vision of world literature, as Johnson suggests, in which one cannot draw a clear-cut boundary between a hegemonic center and a marginalized periphery. All languages that are used in the region have the potential to make visible its multilingual and transcontinental character and to become the basis of a minor Mediterranean text, but Arabic writing in the late Ottoman period serves as a particularly rich example. Đurišin and Gnisci's

¹¹ In his acceptance speech for the Jerusalem Prize in 1984, published in *The Art of the Novel* (1988), Milan Kundera similarly extends the interliterary borders of Central Europe to the Mediterranean: “[The] great Jewish figures have always shown an exceptional feeling for a supranational Europe—a Europe conceived not as territory but as culture [...] Israel, their little homeland finally regained, strikes me as the true heart of Europe—a peculiar heart located outside the body” (Kundera 1988, 157).

Mediterranean framework reveals the processes, such as translation and hybridization, that can be found in al-Shidyāq's *Leg over Leg*.

3 Al-Shidyāq's *Leg over Leg* from the Minor to the Interliterary Mediterranean

Arabic has constituted a key component of the Mediterranean interliterary community for centuries, and during this time, different political projects have wanted to lay their claim to this language for their particular cultural vision. For example, Arabic language and literature played a key role in the constitution of Ottoman imperialism, and Arabic itself possessed a cultural prestige due to its sacred function as the language of Islam and its rich classical heritage. Furthermore, a considerable percentage of Ottoman vocabulary came from Arabic, and Arab poets and their works constituted a key component of the Ottoman cultural canon that many members of the imperial intelligentsia upheld (Arslan 2019). The study of Arabic among nineteenth-century Western scholars was concurrent with the rise of Western imperialism, and the nineteenth century also witnessed the Arab cultural "awakening," in which the Arabic language played a fundamental role (Suleiman 2003, 161).

The scarcity of works that reassess Arabic or Ottoman texts within a Mediterranean framework stems partly from the prevalent assumption that the Arab or Ottoman world is not a maritime culture. Numerous thinkers such as Hegel have associated Islamic civilizations with aridity (symbolizing oppression) and Europe with the Mediterranean (symbolizing freedom and open-mindedness), but the Ottoman Empire had a much more robust political and military presence in the Mediterranean than what historians previously assumed (Wick 2016 and Brummett 1993). The Ottomans controlled all the eastern and much of the southern Mediterranean, as well as a part of its northern coast, for centuries, and the Mediterranean was not simply perceived as a potential object of conquest for the Islamic world; for instance, the sea also played a key role in the constitution of Ottoman cultural identity (Haliloglu 2017).

Gnisci notes that Čurišin's work provides an image of the Mediterranean as a net with "numerous, simultaneous, but also successive or at least co-present centres", which contests any political vision that wants to turn the Mediterranean into a basin with "a single radiating centre" (2005, 263). As the Slovak Turkologist Xénia Celnarová explains: "Thanks to the fact that Ottoman Turkish became, after Arabic and Persian, the third universal means of communication in the Islamic world, its literary production found recipients not only within the Ottoman state but also be-

yond its borders, specifically in the Arabic lands of the Mediterranean regions" (Đurišin and Gnisci 2000, 323). Like Arabic literature or Ottoman literature in general, the work of Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq is usually not considered within a Mediterranean framework, with the exception of a few scholars (Starkey 2008). Critics have paid more attention to the difficulty of categorizing al-Shidyāq's text *Al-Sāq 'alā al-sāq fi mā huwa al-Fāriyāq* (*Leg over Leg or the Turtle in the Tree concerning the Fāriyāq. What Manner of Creature Might He Be* 1855) which carries characteristics of autobiography, travelogue, satire, and novel (Rastegar 2007, 103). It describes the life and travels of the character al-Fāriyāq (whose name is a combination of "Fāris" and "Shidyāq"), whose story displays significant parallels with al-Shidyāq's life.¹² Although al-Shidyāq was raised as a Maronite Christian (later converting to Islam), his work is not an example of a minor Mediterranean literature simply because it was composed by a member of a minority community, but instead because of his narrator's frequent comparison of languages, which undermines the authority of the "imperial center" of the Ottoman Empire. His experience was truly "transcontinental," since he lived around all three sides of the Mediterranean both within and beyond the Ottoman realms: Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Malta, Egypt, France, Tunis, and Istanbul.

Al-Shidyāq's use of Arabic renders *Leg over Leg* to be what Megan C. MacDonald has called a *navette* or shuttle that ultimately gives rise to a particular vision of the transcontinental Mediterranean. MacDonald has analyzed Salah Guemriche's bilingual French-Arabic dictionary, *Dictionnaire des mots français d'origine arabe* (Dictionary of French Words of Arabic Origin, 2007), which includes Arabic expressions that have become incorporated into the French language over centuries. She argues that this dictionary, including the preface that Assia Djebar wrote for it, reveals "a particularly trans-Mediterranean geographic space," as it functions as a shuttle which brings together "textures and tissues of sometimes disparate texts and languages" (MacDonald 2013, 58, 59). MacDonald thus demonstrates that this dictionary "defamiliarize[s] sites and linguistic archives thought to be familiar, in order to make them new spaces" (2013, 60).

Indeed, al-Fāriyāq often boasts of his mastery of Arabic; for example, he creates lists of Arabic words that end with the letter *dāl* and claims that all these words are related to "hardness, strength, and force" (2013, 1, 11). At the same time, there are moments in *Leg over Leg* that expose his sense of insecurity in regard to language. He complains about the difficulty of learning new grammar rules in Arabic (2013, 1, 171) and notes that "[t]he pen has refused to obey [his] com-

12 In the discussion below, "al-Shidyāq" will be used to refer to the author and "al-Fāriyāq" for his narrator, although there is naturally some overlap between the two.

mand" (2013, 2, 295). Furthermore, wherever he goes throughout his travels, al-Fāriyāq always carries with him *Al-Qāmūs al-muhibb* (Comprehensive Dictionary) by al-Fīrūzābādī (1329–1414/1415). When he provides a long list of words, he asks readers to consult the earlier dictionary to find the actual definition of these expressions, leaving the impression that once he loses al-Fīrūzābādī's *al-Qāmūs*, he can easily lose the sense of authority and mastery that he conveys when he writes about Arabic.

Guattari and Deleuze claim that "each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth" (1986, 19). Al-Fāriyāq also complains about how people make language mistakes as they cannot pronounce Arabic correctly because they "misuse" their mouth, tongue, and teeth. He himself confronts communities, such as what he calls "people of the ship" ("اَشْهَابُ الْسَّافِنَةِ") who deterritorialize Arabic language through their wrong pronunciations: "God destroy these louts! They live in our country for years and still can't pronounce our language properly. They pronounce *s* with a vowel before it as *z*, and the palatal letters and others are a lost cause for them, despite which we don't laugh at them" (2013, 2, 62–63). Later, al-Fāriyāq notes that while people in Damascus speak eloquent Arabic, people in Aleppo, who live close "to the lands of the Turks," use many Turkish words in their Arabic: "[T]hey say *anjaq bi-yikfī* ('it's barely enough'), articulating the *j* in *anjaq* as though it were the Turkish *jīm, yitqallanu* meaning 'he uses it,' *khōsh khuy*, and so on, and all this on top of their strange-sounding dialect and the foreign-tinged accent with which they pronounce Arabic words" (2014, 3, 287).¹³ Kamran Rastegar argues that al-Shidyāq puts a strong emphasis on his mastery of Arabic language to compensate for a sense of subjugation and displacement that he feels due to various factors such as the rise of Western imperialism and the unjust treatment that he and his brother received from the church clergy (2007, 107). Al-Fāriyāq may want to reinforce the impression that he is an authority on the Arabic language, but his text suggests that he has no strict control over it, as he confronts the deterritorialization of Arabic within the translingual character of the Mediterranean.

According to al-Fāriyāq, he never understood why Turks have established a political hegemony and even claim to be superior to Arabs. Instead, he suggests that Arabs are clearly superior because their language is superior, as it is also the language of Prophet Muhammad, the caliphs, and the Qur'an. He even claims that *all* scholars of Islam are Arabs, and writes: "I think, though, that most Turks are un-

13 The Arabic source text neither italicizes the terms *anjaq* or *khōsh khuy* nor puts a quotation mark around them to emphasize that they are foreign expressions. Therefore, these expressions also become incorporated into al-Fāriyāq's Arabic, giving the impression that they no longer stand as corrupt, foreign borrowings (2014, 3, 286).

aware of these facts and believe that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to say *söyle böyle* ('thus and so') and *bakalum kapalum* ('let's see-bee'), followed by a string of meaningless phrases interspersed with Turkish words (2013, 2, 49). While al-Shidyāq took a strong pride in his mastery of the Arabic language, he confronted the global political and cultural hegemony of Western Europe. As Abdelfattah Kilito (2017) points out, al-Fāriyāq, like Shidyāq himself, had to learn another language, English, which came at the expense of starting to forget Arabic and even experience a sense of estrangement from it.

Just as Turkish was required for finding employment in the Ottoman bureaucracy, French was necessary in the colonial system. For example, al-Fāriyāq recites a panegyric poem for the governor of Tunis, as classical Arab poets often composed works with the hope that they would be rewarded with money, gifts, and even job opportunities. The governor appreciates al-Fāriyāq's poem; however, he does not hire him because of his lack of knowledge of French (Kilito 2017, 71). Once again, al-Fāriyāq sees that the superior virtues of Arabic do not necessarily help him in economic advancement in a Mediterranean that has become incorporated into global capitalist networks. However much he may emphasize the glory of Arabs and Arabic, he ultimately has to come to terms with the fact that the achievements he boasts of took place a long ago, "in the age of caliphs." He has "no choice but to envision the future of the Arabs in Europe's present" (Kilito 2017, 85).

Although intellectuals of Arab cultural nationalism such as Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī (1847–1906) believed that "language and nation are two sides of the same coin" (Su-leiman 2003, 99), *Leg over Leg* demonstrates that the Arabic language cannot remain under the control of a single ethnic or national community, affirming Đurišin's claim that "the interliterary, hence supranational, perspective for the literary process becomes the basis for a generalization that is oriented toward the definition of the ultimate literary community—world literature" (Đurišin and Gnisci 2000, 382). Arabic was the language in which many books in Paris, such as al-Shidyāq's *Leg over Leg*, and newspapers in Istanbul, such as his *al-Jawā'ib*, were published. The dissemination of published works from different parts of the Mediterranean further undermines the perception of Arabic as the sole property of a particular national or ethnic community. Al-Shidyāq witnessed the transition from scribal technologies to the wider use of the printing press (Rastegar 2007, 109). He criticizes Orientalist professors in France who publish works in Arabic, and chastises them for claiming that their mistakes are mere typographical errors. At the same time, he places the final responsibility for his text on his own publisher: "Do you not observe that M. Perrault, of Rue de Castellane, 15, Paris, *even though he knows nothing about the Arabic language*, has followed with the utmost care our instructions in terms of corrections and changes and gone to great lengths to compose the letters correctly and produce an excellent piece of printing, so

much so that he has come up, praise God, with the best thing ever printed in our language in Europe?" (2014, 4, 483; emphasis ours). New printing technologies give a Parisian publisher the opportunity to "come up with" the best Arabic work in Europe (*Leg over Leg* itself) which further contributes to the deterritorialization of the Arabic language.

4 Conclusion

Đurišin's concept of interliterary communities can help theorists of Mediterranean literature in engaging with the "connectivity and fragmentation" identified by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell as defining features of ancient and medieval Mediterranean history (2000, 5). For example, Edwige Tamalet Talbayev has recently adopted a transcontinental approach for literary works from the Maghreb in order to move beyond the typical readings of these works as a representation of a clash between the French metropole and the Maghreb periphery, and instead demonstrates the deep imbrication of the Maghreb with diverse parts of the Mediterranean (2017). Doing away with the metropole/periphery dynamics as the sole model for studying Mediterranean literature does not mean romanticizing the Mediterranean as a cosmopolitan coexistence of different cultures. One can point out the connective networks that characterize the Mediterranean without overlooking the "darker hues" that also shape it (Talbayev 2017, 192). Furthermore, mapping out literary networks of the Mediterranean is fundamental and yet not sufficient for understanding the Mediterranean interliterary community. As Marko Juvan has also observed, Đurišin pays attention to creative adaptations and formations of minor literatures. Therefore, his theory of the interliterary Mediterranean can also resonate with more recent works by critics, such as Yasser El-hariry (2017), who also pays attention to issues of language and aesthetics rather than solely to representations of political and historical events in works of Mediterranean literature. Critics of Mediterranean literature can examine the particular uses of a language in a single text for fleshing out both the fragmentation and connectivity between the minor and the interliterary Mediterranean.

Finally, Đurišin sees no fundamental difference between Mediterranean literature and world literature in terms of their character, and claims that both feature similar dynamics, with world literature being the "final interliterary association" (2012, 158). Gnisci notes that for Đurišin, "the Mediterranean area is both historically and culturally, from the artistic literary point of view, a central and concrete representation, a kind of living model of 'world literature'" (2005, 261). As Đurišin himself puts it, the Mediterranean "allows us to see world literature in action" (2012, 152). Due to its uniquely tricontinental character that gives rise to intense

cultural cross-fertilizations, the interliterary Mediterranean is the ideal milieu for comparatists to study world literature.

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Serena Todesco (Zagreb)

A Female Mediterranean South? Italian Women Writers Gendering Spaces of Meridione: Nadia Terranova's *Farewell ghosts* (2018)

Abstract: The present contribution interrogates a Mediterranean literary imagery by observing the ways in which women writers utilize the Italian South (*Meridione*), as they re-invent its cultural stereotypes and identities in order to forge narrative instances that challenge a patriarchal perspective. By assuming the anti-canonical nature of feminine writing as a key element in the continuous redefinition of a literary (trans)national practice, this essay investigates some of the narrative strategies that contemporary Southern Italian women writers have adopted to challenge and transform patriarchal stereotypes attached to the South, as they carve out their own experience of Meridione outside of patriarchal and heteronormative patterns.

The essay analyses in depth which historical and cultural premises lead to a reconceptualization of the Italian South according to a non-normative configuration of Southern, as well as Mediterranean spaces. As it takes into account the perspective of non-canonical narratives such as those offered by contemporary female narrators, the contribution suggests the possibility of a symbolic subversion of a Southern Italian cultural subalternity; this is observed as being the result of the emergence of women writers who manipulate and rewrite creatively their own spatial experiences of the South, thus allowing for a retrieval of marginalised subjectivities, such as those featured in novels by Elena Ferrante in her *Neapolitan Quartet* (2011–2014). Along with a series of theoretical propositions, the essay provides a close reading of *Farewell, Ghosts* (2018), a novel by Sicilian writer Nadia Terranova (1979-), in which the aim is to look at the textual configuration of designed spaces, while considering how the very conceptualization of space tied with gender implies a complexed destabilization of identities and social relations (Massey 1994).

Introduction

In the third volume of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels (2012–2015), the protagonist Elena Greco suddenly realises the global scope of the violence and abuses

that she has been witnessing since childhood in the Neapolitan *rione*. Throughout the four novels, we read how Elena herself and her friend Lila experience different traumatic situations connected with a dominant patriarchal society that objectifies and marginalises women: “[T]he neighbourhood was connected to the city, the city to Italy, Italy to Europe, Europe to the whole planet. And this is how I see it today: it's not the neighbourhood that's sick, it's not Naples, it's the entire earth” (Ferrante 2014, 28).

It is not by chance that this attempt to undo the North-South binary logic comes from a gendered gaze such as Elena's, whose life experiences in Naples and eventually at the Normale University in Pisa, demonstrate that gender-based violence and injustice may occur in a low-class area of a big Southern Italian city, just as much as among the prestigious intellectual circles of Florence and Milan (or, one may add, in cosmopolitan realities such as New York or New Delhi). What is generally conceived as a clear-cut dichotomy between a backwards South (*Meridione*, or *Mezzogiorno*) and a more advanced, “civilised” North, is in fact being deconstructed by Ferrante. Reconfigured as a place that is “both metaphorical and particular”, (de Rogatis 2019, 287) the city of Naples juxtaposes a gendered articulation of the South within a coalescence of archaic and modern, which is envisioned as a “synchronous vertical landscape”, covering national and trans-national realities (Milkova 2021, 3).

This excerpt from *My Brilliant Friend* partly echoes the words of Olga, Ferrante's protagonist from *The Days of Abandonment* (2002). Olga is a Neapolitan woman who lives in Turin, where she has to cope with the painful end of her marriage, since her husband left her to be with a much younger girlfriend. As it tells of Olga's gradual emancipation and desire for agency, the story focuses on her struggle to come to terms with the collapse of self in relation to violent heteronormative structures. The eventual renegotiation of a new identity, both as a woman and as a mother, will require a temporary embracement of her Neapolitan “ghosts”, where Olga, just like Elena, has witnessed to what extent women can become self-destructive. As she reminisces of another woman who many years before, in her native Naples, committed suicide after being left by her husband, Olga thinks that “accents of the south cried in my head, cities that were far apart became a single voice, the blue surface of the sea and the white of the Alps” (Ferrante 2005, 47). The “accents of South” mark here the reverberations of a social and cultural paradigm that oppresses women transversally, no matter whether they come from a Southern or a Northern social environment, or whether they share a more “advanced” or “backwards” cultural heritage. Just like the violence of the *rione* for Elena, the historical oppression on women knows no circumscribed latitude.

Not only do these examples indirectly (but not too much) do away with the North-South dichotomy by suggesting its artificially ideological relativism, but

they also plastically change the symbolic hierarchy sustaining women's subalternity in the South, by giving shape to a narrative of female friendship and transformation, one in which a Southern, peripheral, marginalised space indeed becomes the centre of the world.

Since her debut novel *Troubling Love* (1992), Ferrante's narratives adopt Naples as a "stratified social and spatial geography"; (Milkova 2021, 3) this situates her within a genealogy of twentieth-century Italian writers (e.g. Southern Italian authors such as Leonardo Sciascia, Elio Vittorini, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, or Anna Maria Ortese, but also Northern writers like Cesare Pavese, or Carlo Levi), who have problematized the space of the "South", with its social, historical and cultural categories, in order to encompass both national and extra-national social realities and their struggles (Dainotto 2018, 22–23; Cazzato 2008, 102–115).

The two examples quoted from Ferrante suggest that it is within a gender-specific perspective that Southern spaces experiment an even deeper symbolic subversion, thus offering the possibility of re-interpreting the socio-cultural problematics that have historically characterised them. With an epistemological turn already featured in canonical novels (a line already established by Manzoni and continued by Verga), Ferrante's marginal female protagonists are endowed with a new centrality, as they are retrieved from their originally subaltern, historically silenced dimension, and enter an evolutionary journey (each protagonist, as we know, will evolve in a fairly different way). Lila's and Lenù's diversity is not just one of class; they embody what De Lauretis famously defined the "eccentric" subject, i.e. a non-unitary individual occupying multiple and fractured positions far from the centre of dominant discourses on identity/belonging, nationality, and/or heterosexual normativity. (De Lauretis 1999, 46) Ferrante's choice of privileging a female gaze over the cities, the streets or the houses of Naples, indeed interrogates and possibly subverts well-known gender-based distinctions, which at least since the Italian unification of 1861 have been connected to a North-South dichotomy, where the first one stands for a "male" rationality and modern progress, and the latter marks a "female", *ergo* feeble and irrational, existential paradigm.¹

It is precisely the subversion of the negative sexualisation of the South and its cultural and social imagery that I intend to explore in this contribution. I am interested in mapping some of the narrative strategies that Southern Italian women writers have adopted to challenge and transform patriarchal stereotypes

1 The gender-based distinction is quite telling if paralleled with the painful process of annexation of the South to the Kingdom of Savoia. Around thirty years after the 1861 Unification, Positivist thinker Alfredo Niciforo would stress how, in his view, Northern people were endowed with a collective conscience and the ability to pursue social organization and discipline, whereas Neapolitans were labelled as a weak, dissolute and "female" people (Niciforo 1898, 293).

attached to the South, as they carve out their own experience of *Meridione* outside of patriarchal and heteronormative patterns. For the purpose of this essay, I will limit myself to a close reading of a novel by Sicilian writer Nadia Terranova (1979–), in which I will attempt to look at the textual configuration of designed spaces, while being aware that the very conceptualization of space tied with gender implies a complex destabilization of identities and social relations (Massey 1994, 5).

My textual analysis is aimed at proposing a wider cultural perspective, aimed at considering the way in which Southern Italian women writers continuously redefine two interconnected forms of *meridionalità* (“Southernness”), by distancing themselves from a literary canon developed after the Italian Unification of 1861. According to a dominant and “naturalized” perspective, Southern spaces have been enclosed within a double-sided Otherness, which affects the individuals who inhabit them: one side is the generic mark of negative difference attributed to the South as a subaltern, different Italy, excluded from progress and modernization (Dickie 1999, 2–3), whereas the other side corresponds to the forms of objectification, control and marginalization that specifically affect women. In the light of this, I believe that the process of negative “Othering” affecting the South also ensues from a series of automatisms between women as a historically marginalised and subaltern social group, and the narratives portraying a timeless, ahistorical South that has been perceived as part of a conquering project aimed at forming the Italian nation.

By looking at narrative reinventions of the South as a “feminine *psychical-corporeal-spatial* landscape” (Milkova 2021, 4, author’s italics), the objective is here to investigate the different strategies put in place to connect the often stereotypical representations of a backwards and patriarchal *Meridione* with the presence of female subjectivities who oppose forms of resistance and reinvention to that reality. This approach may reveal that, through both literary imagination and autobiographical experience of a Southern space – one that is, at once, geo-cultural and symbolic –, female gazes may delineate singular Southern identities by telling stories that creatively dismiss a patriarchal perspective. The latter fairly coincides with the Risorgimental patriotic rhetoric that contributed to forge the identity of modern Italy upon the exclusion of alienated groups, thus resulting in a racialized and sexualised Southern Question (Re 2010, 3–4; see also Re 2001).

While assuming the impossibility of defining the Italian South in terms of a univocal cultural epistemology, one cannot deny the unbalanced social position of women in the formation of a literary discourse on Italian national identity. Within the context of Southern Italian literature (but bearing effects on the entirety of Italian context), part of this misbalance derives from the prestigious role assigned to a male line of authors, mostly made by canonical Sicilian writers, as

I have argued elsewhere (Todesco 2017, 121–174). In this respect, it is also – yet not only – from a frequently quoted Sicilian genealogy (from Verga and Capuana to De Roberto and Pirandello, from Tomasi di Lampedusa to Sciascia, Consolo and Camilleri), that a paradigmatic image of the South has been forged (Merola 2008; Madrignani 2007). According to a widespread *vulgata*, not only has *Meridione* become a place of stereotypical social and class subalternity, but it has also been adopted as an authentic laboratory of ideas for the formation of an Italian modern identity, one from which the voices of women have often been excluded (Di Gesù 2013, 48–49).

However, numerous examples of Southern-themed narratives confirm that Italian women writers have continuously “gendered” the South.² Apart from the global influence of Ferrante’s novels, many other narratives have shed a gendered light over the cultural and social debates around the existence of a “Southern question” and its effects on the female condition in contemporary Italy. As they have chosen to thematise the South and its contradictions, numerous novels have redefined Southern women as subjects of history actively responding to the elicitations of feminist historiography and sociology (Scott 1996; Soldani 1999; Ginatempo 1994). A richly transformative tension attached to the South is visible in many contemporary female-authored texts, such as Elsa Morante’s *House of Liars* (1949),³ *Il mare non bagna Napoli* by Anna Maria Ortese (1953),⁴ *Althénopis* by Fabrizia Ramondino (1981).⁵ More examples may be provided by the historical novels by Sicilian authors Maria Attanasio (*Il falsario di Caltagirone*, 2007) and Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (*La briganta*, 1990),⁶ Goliarda Sapienza’s posthumous masterpiece *The art of joy* (*L’arte della gioia*, 2008),⁷ or the more recent example of Nadia Terranova’s novel *Farewell, Ghosts* (*Addio fantasmi*, 2018),⁸ to name but a few.

2 Since the end of nineteenth century up until today, especially Sicilian women writers have produced a number of original narratives in which the socially inferior positioning of women becomes the centre of a more general cultural meditation on the female Southern Subaltern subject. See Todesco (2017).

3 *House of Liars*. Trans. Adrienne Foulke. Ed. Andrew Chiappe. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1951.

4 *Neapolitan Chronicles*, Trans. Ann Goldstein and Jenny McPhee. New York: New Vessel Press, 2018. This title was chosen for the American audience, while the British edition came out with the title *Evening Descends Upon the Hills: Stories from Naples*, London: Pushkin Press 2018.

5 *Althénopis*. Trans. Michael Sullivan. Manchester: Carcanet, 1988.

6 *The Woman Outlaw* Trans. Angela M. Jeannet. New York: Legas, 2004.

7 *The art of joy* Trans. Ann Milano Appel. New York: Penguin, 2013.

8 *Addio fantasmi*. Turin: Einaudi, 2018; *Farewell, Ghosts*, Trans. Ann Goldstein. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2020.

A great quantity of Southern-themed literary works by women stands for a deeply cultural transformation, in which authors are remapping a different *Meridione*, within the larger context of a globalised and increasingly gendered Mediterranean scenario (Cariello 2011). The very choice of narrating the South by assigning a central position to a gendered gaze operates a form of symbolic decolonization which, by restoring a perspective on female bodies, memories and spaces, provides an alternative epistemology of the South itself. I also reckon that the transformative effect of a gender-based critical analysis on the cultural perception of the South may be observed both in terms of a historicization of creative practices, as well as a conscious-raising redefinition of ontological patterns. Thus, for example, if literary and cultural criticism takes into account how Southern Italian women writers narrate themes such as exile and *nóstos*, or the relationship between mothers and daughters, by situating them in a Southern space, such intersections may integrate, and possibly counter with, previously partial (male) interpretations of those same realities.

As Simone de Beauvoir famously put it, “The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself [...] The *Other* is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One” [author’s emphasis] (De Beauvoir 1989, xxii–xxiv).⁹ With its charge of cultural, socio-economical and ethical implications, the historical “Othering” of the South (just like the construction of the East as “Other” observed by Edward Said) represents a macro-environment in which dichotomies are elaborated, performed and challenged by different social groups. This convergence allows one to look at the South from a postcolonial, as well as from a feminist perspective. A major exemplification is the construction of an epistemological discourse on the South being Italy’s “Other” at the aftermath of the Italian Unification in 1861, when the regions of *Meridione* were objectified by the Kingdom of Savoia, for whom the newly conquered areas were dark, uncivilised and feminine spaces to rehabilitate (Dickie 1999). Within such a scenario, the adoption of different nar-

⁹ Assumed by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) and developed by second-wave feminism, the notion of Otherness benefits from a vast bibliography, which cannot be summarised here, due to its numerous appropriations by a variety of disciplines and by distinct thinkers who have re-read classical Hegelian and Kantian philosophy, from Hannah Arendt to Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, or Gayatri Spivak. The latter further elaborated the concept of “Othering” while re-reading different philosophical and theoretical traditions, such as the Rani of Sirnur (see Spivak 2004, 221–260). In the context of this work, it is useful to connect the concept of Otherness with an investigation of counter-hegemonic cultural practices, as demonstrated by the notion’s key role in Postcolonial theories, as well as in Poststructuralist studies. Within the framework of these complexed intersections, the value and productivity of Otherness from a gender perspective is, intuitively, extremely relevant for a comprehensive analysis. For detailed discussions of the Othering of the Italian South, see Derobertis (2012, 157–173) and Lombardi-Diop (2012, 175–190).

rative genres (such as the *memoir* and the historical novel) that thematise the otherness of the South from a female narrative point of view – women being a marginalised group *par excellence* – helps conveying a condition of “double Southernness” (*doppia meridionalità*).

In the second section I will examine textual excerpts by Nadia Terranova, while in the third and final section I will argue for the necessity to insert a literary female Southern gaze in the larger context of a global and local perspective of Mediterranean Studies. My focus will be the centrality of spaces in relation to Ida, protagonist of *Addio, fantasmi* (2018),¹⁰ and their capacity to re-delineate *Meridione* according to gendered bodily and existential perspectives. As I hope to demonstrate, the Southern spatial and experiential dimensions narrated in Terranova’s novel ultimately retrieve the fractures of an uneven, irreducible history by providing a different image of the South. The objective is here to advocate for an intersection produced by a literary “female Mediterranean South”, one that is able to challenge the North/South divarication, by inscribing identities within a constitutive and imaginative dimension.

The House Ghosts and the Watery Cityscape: Nadia Terranova’s Ida

The crossing: one reason the return was worthwhile.
(Terranova 2020, 17–18)

Born in Messina in 1978 and resident in Rome already for well over a decade, Nadia Terranova¹¹ entertains with her native Sicily a productive relationship, whether it is expressed through the choice of spaces that inhabit her narratives,¹²

10 For the purpose of this essay, I will refer to the Italian edition in the body of the text, and to the English edition in the footnotes.

11 This section is partly a re-elaboration of a previous analysis (Todesco 2020, 340–362). However, in the context of this essay, I am examining Terranova’s novel as part of a larger and multiform epitomization of Southern spaces specifically connected with a gendered dimension.

12 More generally, the attention of Terranova to the narrative potential of spaces is testified by more recent writings, such as the short story collection *Come una storia d’amore* (2020), where each story symbolises a form of existential “re-appropriation” and reinvention of a different Roman neighbourhood, or *Caravaggio e la ragazza* (2021), in which the few years spent by the great painter in Messina become the pretext for a historical, as well as a sensorial journey into the city.

or it is the result of a historical and cultural acknowledgement towards coeval or antecedent authors.¹³

In the context of this contribution, it is relevant to point out that the epitomization of spaces in Terranova's narratives provide a ground for a renegotiation of the writer's Southern and Sicilian identity, as well as a contingent framework where the embodied subjectivity of her protagonists come to terms with the wounds of the past, especially one related to childhood and adolescence. This is particularly true for both novels *Gli anni al contrario* (2015; "The Backward Years"), as well as for *Addio fantasmi* (2018; *Farewell, Ghosts*, 2020), where the characters are shown as being differently involved in a series of spatial dislocations that take them away from and/or back to the Southern space of Messina, each movement signifying a crucial step of their individual *Bildung*.

At the same time, in the case of *Farewell, Ghosts* – in which the return of the protagonist to her native Messina reshapes an original itinerary of awareness and, possibly, existential closure after a long buried, yet interrupted, mourning – the configuration of topographic and domestic spaces also allows for a female individual agency to be achieved through the physical and existential rediscovery of other gendered "bodies" – those incarnated by the city and the house, which participate in the characterisation of a liminal, unorthodox South.

A first-person narrative, *Farewell, Ghosts* hints at the connection between the internal voice of Ida, and the writer's own family autobiography, as already partly done in her previous novel *The Backward Years*, thus re-proposing a multiple tension with fixed identity categorizations, as well as transfiguring the writer's own family autobiography (Todesco 2020, 347). However, *Farewell, Ghosts* reshapes the spatiality of a geographically determined South – here the city of Messina – around a female body who faces the traumatic events that had originally caused her self-exile from that very space.

From the title itself, *Farewell, Ghosts* is a novel that thematises forms of separation and detachment. The protagonist, Ida Laquidara, is a writer of radio dramas in her thirties who has left Messina over a decade earlier, and now lives with her husband Pietro in Rome. When Ida's mother urges her to return in order to help her supervise the structural renovation of their old apartment and to sort out her personal items, the sudden homecoming makes Ida's fragile

¹³ Over the past few years, Terranova has been supporting and promoting – both in written and oral form, and often through her social networks – the works of other Sicilian authors, including canonical writers like Leonardo Sciascia and Gesualdo Bufalino, along with lesser known Sicilian female narrators who have hardly entered the canon, such as Goliarda Sapienza and Laura Di Falco, or contemporary novelists who have actively thematised Sicilian space and history from a gendered perspective, e.g. Maria Attanasio and Stefania Auci.

inner equilibrium collapse. The unexpected close contact with her childhood home, filled with objects and memories, as well as with the city streets, awakens a pain that the protagonist has so far attempted to bury, one connected with the mysterious disappearance of her depressed father Sebastiano that occurred twenty-three years earlier.

The novel is divided into three main sections, “The Name”, “The Body” and “The Voice”, preceded by a brief untitled introductory chapter. Each section is further composed by brief chapters, that intersect Ida’s present time with flashbacks from her childhood and adolescence. Some shorter chapters consist of chronological sequences called “Nocturnes”, and are specifically dedicated to the dreams that Ida experiences while staying at her family house in Messina. The narration follows the protagonist’s inner voice and, except for a few dialogues, is entirely focused on her thoughts, desires, memories, and fears. This also allows the rhythm of the narrative to adhere to Ida’s gestures, resulting in a continuous, almost fleshly juxtaposition between her own experience within the surrounding space and the same spaces being described. The reiterated apposition of spaces to the female body is confirmed, for instance, by a passage where Ida meditates on what bidding farewell to Messina has done to her face:

Quando ero andata via dalla Sicilia, per primo mi era cambiato il naso, si era chiuso sempre di più, con ostilità e disprezzo per quel poco ossigeno impregnato di cemento e smog della capitale; poi era cambiata la pelle, per via dell’acqua calcarea che scendeva dai rubinetti e dello scarico delle auto; da ultima mi era cambiata la schiena, incurvandosi in modo innaturale mentre saliva e scendeva dagli autobus e dai tram. Così da messinese ero diventata romana, e da ragazza ero diventata adulta e moglie (Terranova 2018, 17–18).¹⁴

The theme of *nóstos* – which Terranova retrieves by drawing a connection with Vittorini’s *Conversation in Sicily* (1941) – allows the narrative to thematise the precariousness of domestic spaces in giving a shape to one’s individual sense of belonging. A manifest uncertainty of selfhood, along with the violence of the original emigration from home, are equally and powerfully visualised in the novel’s opening lines:

14 “When I left Sicily, my nose was the first thing that changed. It had grown more and more congested, hostile and scornful toward the scant oxygen of the capital, saturated with cement and smog; then my skin had changed, because of the chalky water that came out of the faucets and the exhaust from the cars; finally my back had changed, curving unnaturally as I got on and off buses and trams. Thus I had been Messinese and become Roman, had been a girl and become an adult and a wife” (Terranova 2020, 20).

Una mattina di metà settembre mia madre mi telefonò per avvisarmi che entro qualche giorno sarebbero iniziati i lavori sul tetto di casa nostra. Disse proprio così: nostra. Ma io avevo già da tempo in un'altra città un'altra casa a cui badare, una casa presa in affitto da me e da un'altra persona (Terranova 2018, 5).¹⁵

Spaces, just like people, reveal themselves as literally infested with the ghosts of absence and grief, and are able to affect the apparent linearity of a person's existence, thus intertwining a resemantization of spaces with a reconfiguration of time. As Sicilian-American writer and essayist Edvige Giunta poetically suggests while describing one of her many Sicilian returns, "the geography of return is spatial and temporal, horizontal and vertical, an excavation site to be uncovered every time" (Giunta 2004, 768). In Terranova's quoted excerpt, the reiterated term "house" stands as a token that intensely differentiates Ida's past and present, as, in a few lines, the novel charts its course around spatial, as well as time precariousness. The refusal of sharing with her mother the possession of the house in Messina is hinted by the repetition of the adjective "another", which suggests Ida's desperate attempt to claim that she has already replaced the original house with a new one, in a choice that ought to be considered final. Nevertheless, the imposed return to that original, yet now repudiated, space challenges the supposed stability of the newer house, by adding a somewhat ironic detail: Ida's and Pietro's house in Rome (which here remains unnamed as "another city") is actually rented, a fact that hints at another form of instability and dispossession.

Ida's return also emblematises a form of trauma, since it means to sneak among the fragments of that first, original, violent fracture she herself decided to create between her own life and the life of her childhood home: "[N]on esisteva più una casa che avrei chiamato nostra, quell'etichetta si era staccato quando ero andata via e negli anni successivi ne avevo ripulito la memoria con accurate violenze" (Terranova 2018, 5).¹⁶ The house of her childhood is no longer there, while the one that her mother urges her to go back to has a falling roof: "aveva cominciato a crollare fin dalla mia nascita, non aveva fatto che sgretolarsi e piovere in

¹⁵ "One morning in the middle of September my mother called to tell me that in a few days' work would begin on the roof of our house. She said it just like that: 'our.' But for some time I'd had another house to take care of, in another city, a house rented by me and another person" (Terranova 2020, 7).

¹⁶ "The house I would have called ours no longer existed, that label had been removed when I left, and in the following years I had wiped it from my memory with thorough violence" (Terranova 2020, 7).

forma di polvere e calcinacci per tutta la vita che avevo vissuto lì dentro" (Terranova 2018, 5).¹⁷

The act of "going South" is commonly perceived as charged with a certain level of rituality for every Italian Southerner who has emigrated and temporarily goes back home, and Ida is no exception. The liminal space of her homecoming is inaugurated by a description of the night before the journey to Messina, and a clear-cut dichotomy is textually established between the (apparently) safe space of Rome and the unstable and estranged dimension of the Messina house, treated with reticence and painful dismissal, as seen above. Such dichotomy is, however, fraught by a series of oscillations. Already while packing, Ida's mind arranges what is going to be her movement towards the South: "[A]vrei guardato fuori dal finestrino per il lungo tratto di mare della ferrovia calabrese, fino a Villa San Giovanni, di lì avrei preso il traghetto per Messina [...]" (Terranova 2018, 6).¹⁸

Right before she goes to the station to catch a train to Sicily, the watery space of Messina invades the false safety of Rome in the form of a dream, thus contradicting the illusory solidity of Ida's marriage:

Quella notte sognai di annegare. Scaldava il letto il piede di mio marito appoggiato sulla mia caviglia e, a un certo punto, dal tepore sotto il lenzuolo iniziavo a entrare in acqua. Camminavo come se avessi saputo dove andare e l'acqua mi rinfrescava le caviglie, i polpacci, le ginocchia e poi le cosce, i fianchi, la pancia, il seno e le spalle, e ancora il mento e la bocca finché, appena provavo a parlare, sparivo inghiottita da un'onda. [...] Chiamai sottovoce Pietro, mio marito, non perché avessi bisogno di lui ma perché desideravo non escluderlo dal fatto che stavo morendo (Terranova 2018, 6).¹⁹

As an adult, Ida has sought refuge, as well as a new self-identity in her marriage with Pietro, whose name – derived from *pietra*, "stone", evokes the capacity to consolidate her painful uncertainties: "Allora assieme alla città avevo trovato una

17 "[I]t had begun to fall down when I was born, and had been crumbling, raining down in the form of dust and flaking plaster, for all the life I had lived there" (Terranova 2020, 7).

18 "I would look out the window for the long stretch of sea beside the Calabrian railroad all the way to Villa San Giovanni; from there I would take the ferry to Messina [...]" (Terranova 2020, 8).

19 "That night I dreamed I was drowning. My husband's foot, propped against my ankle, warmed the bed, and at some point I began to move from the warmth under the sheet into the water. I was walking as if I knew where to go, and the water-cooled ankles, calves, knees, and then thighs, hips, belly, breast, and shoulders, and then chin and mouth, until I tried to speak and immediately disappeared, swallowed up by a wave. [...] In a whisper, I called to Pietro, my husband, not because I needed him but because I didn't want to keep from him the fact that I was dying" (Terranova 2020, 8–9).

nuova me stessa, e lui era lì, sempre lì, con una disponibilità che mi commuoveva” (Terranova 2018, 8).²⁰

However, their relationship has been constructed upon subtractions and silences, as well as marked by the anonymity of the spaces they both inhabit:

[A] un certo punto i nostri corpi avevano smesso di funzionare insieme, di incastrarsi nel sonno e nella veglia che lo precede, eravamo diventati respingenti l'uno per l'altra. [...] Il corpo aveva smesso di essere il luogo della comunicazione. [...] [S]tare insieme ogni giorno, prendere insieme ogni decisione, conoscere a memoria l'odore, il sesso, il carattere dell'altro: ecco cos'era il matrimonio. Il resto era un mare *tempestoso e sconosciuto che non valeva la pena attraversare*. [...] Nelle mie finte storie vere mettevo parte del mio dolore e dell'acqua che esondava dal passato, e speravo che la scrittura sarebbe bastata a salvarmi [...]” (Terranova 2018, 8–11, my emphasis).²¹

The mere thought of the Strait of Messina, the waters of which Ida is about to cross, has been able to destabilise her, anticipating a journey that will become a real katabasis into a family “Hades”. Through the images of drowning and perilous sea-crossing, the various different forms in which Ida’s identity is collapsing get signified by a potent spatial element in the novel, i. e. water, which will recur in the characterization of the house in Messina as a living *locus* of change and renegotiation of grief. In exceeding the weak protection of the anonymous, rented apartment in Rome, the seawater to be crossed – along with its oneiric, deadly counterpart – also signifies the protagonist’s dynamic transit between Sicily and the Italian peninsula, as they anticipate Ida’s coming to terms with her native city and home. Water, in other words, will trigger an action that Ida has been putting off for far too long. Not surprisingly, the irresistible action of water will recur at the first sights of her own old bedroom: during her first night in Messina, Ida will dream of it as “satura di speranza inutilizzata” (Terranova 2018, 20);²² the room is a suspended place, and also in reality it presents itself as “ferma nel tempo; pavimento e mura erano occupati dal magma degli oggetti fuoriusciti dallo stanzino sul terrazzo [...] Una camera morta, invasa dai flutti dei ricordi”

20 “So, along with the city, I found a new self, and he was there, always there, and that availability was moving” (Terranova 2020, 10).

21 “At a certain point our bodies had stopped functioning together, stopped fitting together in sleep and the waking that precedes it; we had become shields for one another [...] The body stopped being the place of communication [...] Being together every day, making every decision together, knowing by heart the smell, the sex, the character of the other: that was marriage. The rest was a stormy, unknown sea, and there was no point in crossing it [...] In my fake true stories I put part of my pain and the water that overflowed from the past, and I hope that writing would be enough to save me [...]” (Terranova 2020, 10–13).

22 “[S]aturated with unused hope” (Terranova 2020, 24).

(Terranova 2018, 17).²³ Furthermore, water recurs in the novel as the objective correlative of the unmanageable disappearance of Ida's father, who was clinically depressed and has perhaps drowned himself.

The spatial crossing is also a temporal one, since Ida is returning to her childhood, by moving away from the present of her adulthood. The crossing of the sea is, as in a quasi-mythical tale, supervised by the mother's body, who welcomes Ida at the docks and is similar to a younger version of her own daughter: “[I]l suo corpo sottile si mise in mezzo tra me e l'isola facendomi da ingresso alla città. Notai che crescendo – invecchiando – aveva preso a somigliarmi, neanche fosse lei la figlia; mi sorrise con un'ingenuità che un tempo era stata mia [...]” (Terranova 2018, 15).²⁴

Since the disappearance of the father, Ida and her mother share a lot of silences and hardly understand each other, nor do they wish to make any attempt at the gripping sense of guilt and resentment that they feel towards one another: “[S]e c'era un'arte in cui io e mia madre eravamo diventate brave durante la mia adolescenza, quell'arte era il silenzio” (Terranova 2018, 31).²⁵

Their arguments are episodic fights that resemble those of two “esseri eterni che si permettevano il lusso di sprecare il tempo [...] Io urlavo e mia madre piangeva e ciascuna metteva in campo l'arma più apocalittica, la rabbia più disgustosa, una bestemmia” (Terranova 2018, 136–137).²⁶ One of their first exchanges after Ida's arrival from Rome echoes the austere essentiality of a Greek tragedy, while the protagonist's inner monologues accentuate the utterly aphonic dimension of their incommunicability:

“Hai bruciato il caffè, disse mia madre entrando in cucina [...]”

Pensai: mio padre è sparito ventitre anni fa.

“Ti avevo preparato la caffettiera da accendere.”

Pensai: è sparito nel nulla e dopo i primi tempi non ne abbiamo più parlato.

“Avevo messo il biglietto nel beccuccio come faceva la nonna con me.”

Pensai: perché non ne abbiamo più parlato?

23 “The room where I had slept, played, studied had remained fixed over time; floor and walls were occupied by the magma of objects exiled from the shed on the terrace [...] A dead room, invaded by waves of memories” (Terranova 2020, 19).

24 “[H]er slender body was placed between me and the island, forming an entrance to the city. I noticed that in growing up – ageing – she had begun to resemble me, as though she were the daughter. She smiled at me with a candor that once had been mine [...]” (Terranova 2020, 17).

25 “[I]f there was an art in which my mother and I had become expert during my adolescence, that art was silence” (Terranova 2020, 37).

26 “[W]e fought like eternal beings who could afford the luxury of wasting time [...] I shouted and my mother wept and each of us fielded our most destructive weapon, the most repugnant rage, a curse” (Terranova 2020, 151).

“Sei sveglia da tanto?”

Pensai: perché non ne hai più parlato? (Terranova 2018, 27).²⁷

In *Farewell, Ghosts* spaces and objects take over the characters' agency, or rather lack thereof. Ida's solitary journey is thus accompanied by the major presence of her house, which together with the city, unblocks the state of lethargy caused by the trauma of being the daughter of a missing man. As she herself meditates, “La morte è un punto fermo, mentre la scomparsa è la mancanza di un punto, di qualsiasi segno di interpuzione alla fine delle parole” (Terranova 2018, 25).²⁸ The house is indeed a co-protagonist of this topographic novel;²⁹ it is a fulcrum where everything has remained exactly the same as Ida remembers, as if this fix-edness were necessary to welcome the return of her father Sebastiano. Similar to his mysteriously disappeared body, the body of the house has remained “unburied” and summons Ida to itself, as soon as the latter arrives (Terranova 2020, 19), by displaying all its clear signs of decay:

In mezzo a strade dedicate ai miti del mare, via Colapesce e via Fata Morgana, ci aspettava la casa. Non era che una brutta sopraelevazione aggiunta in ritardo su un palazzetto d'epoca, una corona di plastica su una regina vera; ne raccontavano la decadenza i resti di fregi nei balconi sottostanti, un leone dai capelli ondulati e sgretolati, simboli nobiliari stinti e scoloriti, persiane cadenti in legno verde (Terranova 2018, 16).³⁰

The house is a living entity, “un appartamento sproporzionato, ricovero escrescente di mobili accatastati in tempi diversi” (Terranova 2018, 32);³¹ inside of it, since Sebastiano has disappeared, mother and daughter are two silenced, stranded

27 “You burned the coffee,’ my mother said, entering the kitchen [...] – I thought: My father disappeared twenty-three years ago. – ‘I got the coffee ready so you just had to turn it on.’ – I thought: He disappeared into nothing and after the first days we never talked about it. – ‘I put a note in the spout the way your grandmother did with me.’ – I thought: Why didn’t we talk about it anymore? – ‘Have you been up long?’ – I thought: Why didn’t you talk about it anymore?” (Terranova 2020, 32).

28 “Death is a full stop, while disappearance is the absence of a stop, of any punctuation mark at the end of the words” (Terranova 2020, 30).

29 I owe this definition to my brilliant friend and *sodale* Prof. Stiliana Milkova, to whom goes my gratitude for sharing many illuminating considerations on Terranova's novel.

30 “Amid streets dedicated to sea myths, Via Colapesce and Via Fata Morgana, the house awaited us. It was only an ugly extra story added on later to a nineteenth-century building, a plastic crown on a real queen; its decline was recounted in the vestiges of ornaments on the surviving balconies, a lion with undulating, flaking mane, faded and discoloured symbols of nobility, dilapidated green-painted wood shutters” (Terranova 2020, 18).

31 “[A]n apartment out of scale, an excrescence sheltering furniture accumulated at different times” (Terranova 2020, 38).

solitudes, surrounded by a sea of family debris: “Le case dei miei compagni di classe erano così leggere che quando ci entravo mi sembrava si staccassero da terra; [...] mentre io e mia madre, dentro la nostra, camminavamo a fatica, incatenate agli oggetti che non buttavamo. [...] Noi non conservavamo per ricordare, ma per sperare; tutti gli oggetti ricoprivano un ruolo e avviavano un ricatto, e ora sono intorno a me a guardarmi” (Terranova 2018, 19).³² The blackmailing, exorbitant presence of objects signifies the heaviness of unfinished memories, but it also means that the space of the house inevitably affects the supposed temporal linearity that Ida has wished to give to her own life. Time is, in fact, also stranded, because the grief for Sebastiano’s disappearance has not found a proper closure, his missing body has not been properly mourned.

Just like the protagonist, also the body of the house is heavy with unelaborated sorrows that invoke a form of closure. The bags containing all the things that Ida’s mother has persistently accumulated contain “cose indistinte, accomunate da una presunzione di utilità [...] Aveva continuato a conservare oggetti per plasmare un avvenire, il mio” (Terranova 2018, 110),³³ yet conversely the accumulation has increased Ida’s sense of precariousness and the feeling that her father’s coffin remained everywhere. For example, in a chapter called “Le cose che non facciamo” (“The things we don’t do”), the protagonist’s drawers are overflowing with all the diverse children’s clothes and objects that were kept to be used once she would become a mother. This eventually never happened, because Ida grew up seeing her own unhappy mother (who was first forced to live with a depressed companion, and eventually was abandoned by him), and didn’t wish to live through the same risky experience: “Alla mia gabbia avevo almeno avuto il coraggio di togliere una sbarra: mio marito non sarebbe stato padre, non dei miei figli. Eppure, neanche questo aveva salvato il nostro matrimonio dal trasformarsi in una creatura zoppa [...] mia madre doveva aver annaspato dentro la gabbia” (Terranova 2018, 86).³⁴ These objects have been kept without a rational logic, along with Ida’s school

32 “My classmates’ houses were so light that when I entered I imagined they would lift off from the ground; [...] while my mother and I struggled to walk in ours, chained to the objects we didn’t throw away. [...] We saved them not to remember but to hope; all the objects performed a role and launched a threat, and now they’re around me, looking at me” (Terranova 2020, 23).

33 “My mother had accumulated an undifferentiated jumble of things [...] She had continued to save objects that would mould a future, mine” (Terranova 2020, 122).

34 “I at least had had the courage to remove one bar from *the cage*: my husband wouldn’t be a father, not of my children. And yet not even that had saved our marriage from turning into a lame creature [...] my mother must have floundered in the cage” (Terranova 2020, 97–98).

papers and newspaper clippings. They had all become “buffi e subito antichi, poi tristi e infine inservibili, a breve sarebbero stati grotteschi” (Terranova 2018, 87).³⁵

Only their cumbersome manifestation can once more force Ida to deal with the necessity of finding her own personal way of mourning: “Nascita, morte, sparizione, tutto nello stesso cassette, il ciuccio e il lutto, l’infanzia e la vecchiaia, la scuola e i miei meriti, e poi il giorno senza tempo che aveva spezzato la nostra vita, poche righe sulla scomparsa di Sebastiano Laquidara, stimato professore di liceo [...]” (Terranova 2018, 87).³⁶

Nevertheless, the same space of the house becomes the first main site where Ida can liberate and literally “drain out” her grief, and ultimately regain possession of the only object which she is not going to let go and has kept all these years, buried in the house: a red iron box containing the traces of her father’s voice and name. In a chapter entitled “Leaking” (but originally called *Sfiatare*, a term that contains the word *fiato* – breath – and directly conveys the idea of the air being drained out of a pipe), there is a clear and decisive enfranchisement shared by both Ida and the house, irremediably damaged by the accumulation of humidity through the floors and on the roof terrace. Here, water is opposed to air, by being a suffocating element that prevents the house from breathing. One first “liberation” of air against water occurs when Ida confronts her mother, who has accused her of being selfish, also for not wishing to become a mother. To these accusations, Ida answers “d’un fiato, spavalda come il personaggio di una tragedia greca” (Terranova 2018, 117),³⁷ saying that she could not possibly give an existence to another life – least of all, to give her father’s name to an imaginary baby boy – because “finché il corpo di mio padre non avrà pace non ne avrò io” (Terranova 2018, 117).³⁸ Already by verbalising her pain, Ida marks the territory of her future actions, both inside the house and through the city, which will provide her the ideal ground for a series of rituals to mourn her father, thus healing her own wounded self.

A second and decisive action consists in draining the water out of the apartments’ radiators, which are the same as when Ida’s father had lived in the

³⁵ “[F]unny and immediately old, then sad and finally useless; soon they would be grotesque” (Terranova 2020, 98).

³⁶ “Birth, death, disappearance, all in the same drawer, the pacifier and mourning, childhood and old age, school and my merits, and then the day without time that had split our life, a few lines on the disappearance of Sebastiano Laquidara, esteemed high school teacher [...]” (Terranova 2020, 98).

³⁷ “I said all in one breath, bold as a character in a Greek tragedy” (Terranova 2020, 130).

³⁸ “[A]s long as the body of my father has no peace, I won’t either” (Terranova 2020, 130).

house (Terranova 2018, 125; Terranova 2020, 139). By taking her father's place, Ida removes the water, acting like a doctor on a fatigued pair of lungs:³⁹

Girai la manopola sul lato sinistro e dopo un breve silenzio ci fu un'esplosione, come quando si stappa una bibita gasata. L'aria compressa delle tubature fece schizzare in alto l'acqua, che dal termosifone colò sulle mie caviglie e sulle dita dei piedi; dovetti richiudere e correre via. Incrociandola in corridoio urlai a mia madre con tutta la voce che avevo: ma cosa hai fatto in questi anni, di cosa ti sei curata, non hai pensato a niente. [...] Uno per uno liberai tutti i termosifoni della casa. [...] Mi parve che le pareti riprendessero il loro respiro regolare e la casa diventasse un corpo dai bronchi liberati e guariti, e me ne tornai a letto (Terranova 2018, 125–126).⁴⁰

Along with the house liberated from some of the “ghosts” caused by Sebastiano's persistent presence/absence, Ida's Sicilian re-appropriation of spaces majorly concerns a personal remapping of the city of her childhood, a process that starts from a persistent use of toponyms, as if the very act of uttering each place name would rebuild it on Ida's reconfigured gendered subjectivity as a woman whose body and mind are divided between the past and the present. The precariousness and indefiniteness of spaces is primarily a corporeal one, as testified by Ida's troublesome dreams, or “Nocturnes”, where her body exceeds its own contours, transfiguring into her own father's features: “Mia madre ride sdraiata, voltata su un fianco verso di me, scarmigliata e felice come in foto [...] Mi ha appena abbracciata, mi guarda con gratitudine, non ha il sorriso che si rivolge a una figlia, mia madre non sta ridendo a me, non ha abbracciato me, il mio corpo non sono io: nel sogno io sono il corpo di mio padre” (Terranova 2018, 95).⁴¹

39 Quite significantly, once the radiators have been emptied from their watery burden, a smoother and less oppressive communication starts between Ida and her husband Pietro (who has remained in Rome and is worrying about her well-being). She is now able to tell him about the bad dreams that have haunted her since her arrival in Messina, and the distance between them becomes less threatening, as his voice reminds her now of “acqua termale curativa” (Terranova 2018, 145), i.e. a curative thermal water that soothes her sleep.

40 “I turned the knob on the left side and after a brief silence there was an explosion, as when you open a carbonated drink. The compressed air in the pipes made the water shoot up, and it dripped from the radiator onto my ankles and toes; I had to reclose it and run. Meeting my mother in the hall, I shouted at her with all the voice I had: What have you been doing all these years, what have you taken care of, you haven't bothered with anything. [...] One by one I liberated all the radiators in the house. [...] It seemed to me that the walls resumed their normal breathing and the house became a body with freed, healed lungs. I went back to bed” (Terranova 2020, 139–140).

41 “My mother is laughing, lying down, turned on one side toward me, dishevelled and happy as in the photo [...] She has just hugged me, she looks at me gratefully, she doesn't have the smile proper for a daughter, my mother isn't laughing at me, she hasn't hugged me, my body isn't me: in the dream I'm the body of my father” (Terranova 2020, 106).

Parallel to the lack of spatial borders in which Ida's body can escape the tragedy of her family, her own sense of belonging cannot be definite, because the places of childhood have been blocked by a major traumatic event, and by the eventual decision to leave the island:

Io, se volevo vivere, quel mare dovevo attraversarlo e non fermarmi: il mio posto non era Scilla né Cariddi, e forse non esisteva in nessuna carta geografica [...] Dovevo fuggire, [...] guardare la Sicilia con la distanza del telescopio e la sicurezza dei rifugiati, per poi dimenticarmi e confondermi con i turisti di piazza Navona, [...] Io ero fatta, in ogni atomo, dell'aria della casa di Messina, e per questo motivo avrei dovuto lasciarla (Terranova 2018, 140).⁴²

Farewell, Ghosts is one of the few contemporary Italian novels – perhaps the only one – in which the city of Messina reacquires a symbolic centrality in reflecting, as well as affecting, the psychic landscape of the characters. Just like Ida has isolated herself from any grief or the least possibility of change, Messina is blocked inside a circular time, which mirrors the circularity of the narration, marked by continuous references to the three main elements: the name, the body and the voice. While these three elements appear more clearly connected with Ida's personal katabasis, they may also guide the reader through the parallel tale of a city and its feminised body. Just like the house, the city of Messina appears at first suffocated with oppressive and worn out remnants of the past; however, towards the end, its persistent presence – made explicit by the toponyms, the presence of the sea breeze, the small and secluded urban corners, along with the “white light of the Strait” – will spatially mirror Ida's inner itinerary:

Adesso, sulla strada del mare, dovevo scegliere la mia direzione. A sinistra: la litoranea e il museo, ovvero l'acqua e il luogo dove mia madre aveva lavorato per anni. A destra: il duomo e l'imbocco dell'autostrada, ovvero un centro storico ritoccato come un parco giochi e la possibilità di una fuga. [...] Potevo salire verso i quartieri panoramici scegliendo una di quelle strade chiamate torrenti perché in origine la città era attraversata dai fiumi, poi insabbiati per farne arterie che dalla costa si inerpicavano sui colli. Torrente Trapani, Torrente Giostra, Torrente Boccetta...A occhi chiusi sentivo l'odore di acqua dolce bucare l'asfalto, Messina era una città dalle fondamenta fangose (Terranova 2018, 58).⁴³

42 “If I wanted to live, I had to cross that sea and not stop: my place wasn't Scylla or Charybdis and maybe it didn't exist on any map [...] I had to flee, [...] look at Sicily with the distance of a telescope and the assurance of a refugee, and then forget myself and mingle with the tourists of Piazza Navona [...] Every atom of me was made of the air of the house in Messina, and for that reason I would have to leave it” (Terranova 2020, 154–155).

43 “Now, on the street along the sea, I had to choose my direction. To the left: the shore and the museum; that is, the water and the place where my mother had worked for years. To the right: the cathedral and the entrance to the highway; that is, a historic center touched up like an amusement park, and the possibility of flight. [...] I could go up toward the panoramic neighborhoods, choosing

Plunging in Messina means, for Ida, to plunge into a Foucaultian heterotopia, i.e. a counter-site, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” (Foucault 1997, 24). Messina has nothing of the supposedly idyllic Sicilian places that crowd the collective imagination. Its “luce petulante” (Terranova 2018, 69),⁴⁴ and its streets filled with oxygen and salt (Terranova 2018, 117) have followed Ida everywhere since she was a little girl, and every corner keeps reminding her that her father’s name and body are nowhere to be found. Another potent reference to Vittorini’s *Conversation in Sicily* echoes in the novel through the infesting presence of Messina’s rains that chase Ida’s memories of herself as a young fatherless daughter, going back and forth from school: “Quando pioveva, mi pioveva dentro le scarpe. Il nome di mio padre, scomposto in effluvi acquatici, coincideva con il fastidio di calze bagnate, inzuppava i piedi col fango, il filo di Scozia si arrendeva all’apocalisse” (Terranova 2018, 48).⁴⁵ In a poetic movement that resembles the fluidity of the dominant element of water, the novel refutes any automatic dichotomy (e.g. water/sun, or humidity/warmth): along with water, also the sunlight spatially operates to adjust Ida’s fluid descent into her traumatic memory. While Ida is talking to Nikos – a young Greek man who is taking care of her house renovations –, she notices that, in spite of its beauty, the light over the Strait of Messina is far from benevolent, but rather seems to accompany her suspended state of mind: “Chi non sa niente della Sicilia pensa che la luce porti buonumore e va diffondendo l’equivoco dell’allegria, ma i siciliani la luce la scansano e la subiscono come l’insonnia e la malattia, a meno che non sia una scelta, e nessuno può scegliere la luce tutti i giorni per tutto l’anno. Renderebbe ciechi, invalidi. Anche la luce può essere un nemico” (Terranova 2018, 42).⁴⁶

one of the streets called *torrente*, because the city had originally been traversed by rivers, which were then silted up to make roads that wound from the coast up into the hills. Torrente Trapani, Torrente Giostra, Torrente Boccetta... With my eyes closed I smelled the odor of fresh water poking a hole up through the asphalt, Messina was a city with a muddy foundation” (Terranova 2020, 66–67).

⁴⁴ Translated as “impertinent light” (Terranova 2020, 69).

⁴⁵ “When it rained, it rained in my shoes. My father’s name, decomposing into watery exhalations, coincided with the annoyance of wet socks and soaked my feet with mud, fine cotton surrendered to the apocalypse” (Terranova 2020, 54).

⁴⁶ “People who know nothing about Sicily think that the light brings good humour and spread that misconception about cheerfulness, but Sicilians avoid the light and endure it, like insomnia and illness, unless it’s a choice, and no one can choose light every day of the year. It would blind us, disable us. Even light can be an enemy” (Terranova 2020, 48).

Filled with things that, in Ida's perception, need to be recuperated from and/or buried into both individual and collective histories, Messina is also a tired, peripheral and precarious body where spaces appear worn out and full of useless, yet phantasmal details that the inhabitants fail to notice:

Dev'essere stato dopo il terremoto del 1908 che abbiamo smesso di buttare le cose, incapaci per memoria storica di eliminare il vecchio per fare posto al nuovo; dopo il trauma tutto doveva convivere, accatastarsi, non si poteva demolire niente, solo costruire a dismisura per lo spavento, baracche e palazzine, strade e lampioni: da un giorno all'altro la città c'era e poi non c'era più, e se il disastro era accaduto poteva accadere di nuovo, infinite volte. Allora meglio addestrarsi a tenere insieme, subito tirare su un edificio per fare ombra a quello prima, poi ancora un terzo per togliere la vista a entrambi, e così via fino all'aggrovigliarsi inestricabile dell'implosione architettonica (Terranova 2018, 57–58).⁴⁷

Places such as the *passeggiataammare* (the seaside promenade, written in italics in the text, like many other dialectal terms), or the streets that lead to the house of Ida's once-best friend Sara, are all part of a larger urban microcosm where the protagonist has practiced her survival after Sebastiano's disappearance; and yet, the memories of those spaces formerly inhabited by both father and daughter are scattered through the narrative, creating a dynamic interaction between the past and the present. The *passeggiataammare* embodies the place where Ida has learned to skate (Terranova 2018, 59–60), and not far from there, by the *Fonte dell'Acquario* (a fountain close to the city's aquarium), the now adult Ida seeks refuge and finds the right words to make peace with her father's missing body:

Il passato era una regione lontana, le cose sono immobili solo nella mia memoria, lo stesso ricordo si ripete mille volte come un nuovo debutto a teatro, mio padre si sveglia alle sei e sedici, spegne la sveglia con un colpo secco e quella sveglia per magia non va più Avanti [...] Mi girai su un fianco. Afferrai dalla tasca l'unico oggetto che avevo portato via da casa: una penna verde e profumata con cui facevo i compiti e scrivevo a Sara appassionate lettere di amicizia. [...] [I]mplorai la pace di un cadavere e scrisse le parole che i veri orfani possono permettersi di irridere mentre i sopravvissuti a una sparizione agognano come la quiete: "Qui

⁴⁷ "It must have been after the earthquake of 1908 that we stopped throwing things out, historical memory making us incapable of eliminating the old to make room for the new; after the trauma everything had to live together, pile up, we could demolish nothing, only construct to excess out of fear; shacks and apartment buildings, streets and streetlights: overnight the city was there and then it wasn't, and if the disaster had happened it could happen again, infinite times. So it was better to train yourself to hold things together, put up a building right away to cast a shadow on the one before, then a third to take the view away from both, and so on until the architectural implosion became an inextricable tangle" (Terranova 2020, 66).

giace Sebastiano Laquidara, lo piange la figlia Ida.” Quando finii di scrivere il necrologio di mio padre, la furia del suo nome si placò (Terranova 2018, 62–63).⁴⁸

The quest for closure comes, once again, from the wish to perform another ritual of water, i.e. swimming, which coincides with a ritual of bodily desire. Swimming is a nostalgic gesture that brings Ida back to a time that cannot return: “E io fui presa da una gran voglia di reagire, rinascere, prendere a pugni la vita, immergermi nel presente fosse anche per risolvere almeno una delle mie storie interrotte. [...] Una nuotata. Lunga, liberatoria, purificatrice” (Terranova 2018, 154).⁴⁹ The desire for swimming is, however, postponed by two crucial events that bring the story to its conclusion. These coincide with Ida’s dialogues with her friend Sara, and with her new acquaintance, the young Nikos (the son of the foreman who is busy renovating Ida’s apartment). Both events are connected with a renegotiation of spaces, and reveal themselves necessary for Ida to finally find the courage to open the iron metal box containing the only valuable object connected with her father’s memory, i.e. a cassette with his recorded voice.

The deafened pain felt by Ida gets first destabilised by Sara’s own story: the latter refuses to go swimming with her friend and, as soon as Ida tells her how much she has been missing her company and constant support, finds the courage to tell her: “Ti volevo bene e te ne voglio ancora, ma nella nostra amicizia c’eri solo tu. Esiste anche il dolore degli altri, Ida” (Terranova 2018, 160).⁵⁰ Sara also had gone through dramatic events – an abortion, a bout with cancer – and she hadn’t been able to rely on her friend’s support. At the time of her abortion, an already traumatised Ida had visited her at the hospital, and was already endeavouring to detach the body from every risk of emotional connection: “Se succede al corpo non è successo davvero: dovevo aver usato il mio mantra anche quel pomeriggio”

48 “The past was a distant region, things are motionless only in my memory, the same memory repeats countless times like a theatrical début, my father wakes at six-sixteen, flicks off the alarm, and magically that clock doesn’t go forward; [...] I turned on my side. I took out of my pocket the only object I had brought from the house: a green pen with which I did my homework and wrote Sara passionate letters of friendship. [...] I begged for the peace of a corpse and wrote the words that real orphans can afford to mock and survivors of a disappearance yearn for like tranquillity: ‘Here lies Sebastiano Laquidara, his daughter Ida weeps for him.’ When I finished writing my father’s obituary, the fury of his name subsided” (Terranova 2020, 71).

49 “And I was seized by a great desire to react, to be born again, to pummel life, immerse myself in the present if only to resolve at least one of my disrupted stories. [...] A swim. Long, liberating, purifying” (Terranova 2020, 170).

50 “I loved you and I still do, but in our friendship there was only you. Other people’s suffering exists, too, Ida” (Terranova 2020, 177).

(Terranova 2018, 161).⁵¹ Something very similar has occurred when Ida had reacted to Sebastiano's disappearance, many years earlier: that is the reason why, through the entire novel, his body has to be spatially re-configured by his daughter and her itineraries through Messina.

The two friends have an intense dialogue as Sara drives Ida closer to the city center and away from the seawater. The brief car scene provides a liminal "third space", subtracted from the polarity in which Ida has been trapped for years:

Un fatto non è un fatto ma uno sguardo è uno sguardo: il suo su di me era stato privilegiato. Che mi piacesse o meno, era stata la nostra vicinanza a produrre il suo distacco. [...] Il dolore di Sara aveva riempito l'abitacolo. Eppure non mi aveva sorpreso, una parte di me sapeva: finché non aveva avuto un dolore tutto suo era stata in grado di tollerare il mio, poi quel qualcosa si era preso lo spazio, buttandomi fuori a calci (Terranova 2018, 160–161, 164).⁵²

Now shown with a new angle on the events that have involved not just herself, but an entire family and circle of friends, Ida is learning to say goodbye not just to Sara, but to her own teenage self, while realising that relational dynamics represent a vital part of every grieving process.

Another, conclusive lesson is provided by Nikos, with whom Ida has an intense dialogue in the context of a symbolic place for all Messinese people, i. e. the "House of the *Puparo*" ("Puppeteer"), in the peripheral and decayed neighbourhood of Maregrossi. By showing Ida the life work of the Puparo Cammarata, an anarchic bricklayer who occupied that space to make his own original works of art, the young man manifestly conveys his own desire to achieve an agency of his own, against his own father's expectations:

Pensai a quanto Cammarata, muratore dalla vita avventurosa, [...] potesse eccitare l'animo di un ragazzo che, appena maggiorenne, ereditava la professione paterna e la confrontava con quella del Puparo [...] E se di giorno lavorava sul tetto della mia casa, adesso era pronto a celebrare quell'esecuzione di arte viva, anarchica, che costituiva un'altra casa, diroccata e disabitata (Terranova 2018, 170–171).⁵³

51 "If it happens to the body it didn't really happen: I must have used my mantra that afternoon" (Terranova 2020, 178).

52 "A fact isn't a fact but a gaze is a gaze: hers on me had been privileged. Whether I liked it or not, it was our closeness that produced her detachment. [...] Sara's suffering had filled the car. And yet it hadn't surprised me. Part of me knew: as long as she didn't have suffering of her own she had been able to tolerate mine, then something had occupied the space, kicking me out" (Terranova 2020, 177–181).

53 "I thought of how much Cammarata, a bricklayer with an adventurous life [...] might excite the mind of a boy who, growing up, had inherited his father's trade and compared it with the Puparo's [...] And if by day he worked on the roof of my house, now he was ready to celebrate that achieve-

Quite significantly, Nikos chooses this peripheral, forgotten city area to tell Ida that he is also secretly grieving the loss of the woman he loved, who died in a tragic motorcycle accident: “I guerrieri del Puparo ci fissavano con il loro miscuglio di magia e seduzione. Ecco cosa voleva mostrarmi Nikos: non un luogo fisico, ma quel luogo terribile che era la sua vita” (Terranova 2018, 174).⁵⁴ By allowing other people’s tragedies to enter her own, Ida can undo the ghostly presences in her life. While she is letting objects call upon her obsessively, she is also finding the space to exercise her own art of survival: “Dormire non si può, ed è meglio che mi alzi inseguendo una risposta alle voci che mi assillano. ‘Sussumere’ sarebbe il verbo giusto: prendere su di me le vite degli altri, non sono capace di farlo coi vivi, forse ci riesco con i morti, ma la vera emergenza è pensare ai sopravvissuti” (Terranova 2018, 178).⁵⁵

Unlike Ida, who will keep on guarding and subsuming the memory of the dead, Nikos will eventually die in an accident symmetrical to the one where his beloved lost her life: this event will grant both Ida and her mother a transversal catharsis, as they will take part at Nikos’ funeral, indirectly juxtaposed to the missed ceremony they never had after Sebastiano disappeared. A reconstituted dialogue between mother and daughter will thus be one where Ida allows her mother to throw away the useless and cumbersome content of all their wardrobes and drawers in the house: “Metti le mani fra le mie cose, ti do il permesso. Vuoi sapere chi è tua figlia? Ecco l’occasione. Scegli, elimina, *scartafruscia, scafulia*. Lo vedi, mi viene pure il dialetto ora che me ne vado. [...] La traversata è mia, è la cosa più mia che ho, voglio farla da sola” (Terranova 2018, 194).⁵⁶ By re-appropriating the crossing of waters and spaces from her childhood – both a metaphorical and a literal crossing – Ida can now open the iron box of her father’s memories, and listen to the cassette where his voice happily sang to her when she was a baby. The katabasis is now complete, as his voice invades Ida’s space, giving her

ment of living, anarchic art which constituted another house, ruined and uninhabited” (Terranova 2020, 189).

54 “The Puparo’s warriors stared at us, with their mixture of magic and seduction. That was what Nikos wanted to show me: not a physical place but the terrible place that was his life” (Terranova 2020, 192).

55 “Impossible to sleep, and it’s better to get up and look for an answer to the voices that assail me. ‘Subsume’ would be the right verb: take upon myself the lives of others. I’m not capable of doing it with the living, maybe I can succeed with the dead, but what’s truly urgent is to think of the survivors” (Terranova 2020, 198).

56 “Go through my stuff, I give you permission. You want to know who your daughter is? Here’s your opportunity. Choose, throw away, *scartafruscia, scafulia*. You see, now that I’m leaving, dialect comes to me. [...] The crossing is mine, it’s the thing I have that’s most mine – I want to do it alone” (Terranova 2020, 215).

back the right to return to a more aware adulthood, getting rid of the objects but retaining a conscious, bodily memory of the events. As she decides to throw the red iron box into the sea, she finds the most suitable, final resting place for her father's voice in the sea that has accompanied her so far: "Delle vite degli altri non so molto, ma se aprissi uno spiraglio la mia solitudine diventerebbe affollata. [...] Molte sono [le case] che possiamo abitare, una quella che si accende quando sentiamo quella parola, casa. Casa, ripeto fra me, e mi giro verso il continente e Roma che mi aspetta; casa, mi ripeto, ora con lo sguardo all'isola e a Messina che mi dice addio. La mia casa non è nessuna delle due, sta in mezzo a due mari e a due terre. La mia casa è qui, adesso. [...] Rido, e rido. Rido e finisce un'epoca nel rumore di un tuffo, nel mare che si apre e ingoia senza restituire" (Terranova 2018, 195–196).⁵⁷

Gendering a Mediterranean *Meridione*

Arguing on the necessity of retrieving the significance of spatial referents in relation to gender, Doreen Massey suggests

[the] same gendering operates through the series of dualisms which are linked to time and space. It is time which is aligned with history, progress, civilization, politics and transcendence and coded masculine. And it is the opposites of these things which have, in the tradition of western thought, been coded feminine. The exercise of rescuing space from its position, in this formulation, of stasis, passivity and depoliticization, therefore, connects directly with a wider philosophical debate in which gendering and the construction of gender relations are central (Massey 1994, 6–7).

As the textual analysis on Terranova's novel has hopefully demonstrated, a gendered narration of the *Meridione* spaces also entails the possibility of elucidating a lesser known literary genealogy of women writers in which Southern backwardness and subalternity are being challenged. When it comes to the concept of "South" in the Italian cultural context, the porosity of Mediterranean Studies helps identifying some suitable starting points for an investigation that attempts

57 "I don't know much about the lives of others, but if I opened my solitude just a crack it would become crowded. [...] Many are the houses that we can inhabit, but only one lights up when we hear the word *house*. *House*, I repeat to myself, and I turn toward the continent and Rome, which awaits me; *house*, I repeat, now with my gaze on the island and Messina, which is saying farewell. My house is neither of the two, it's in the middle of two seas and two lands. My house is here, now. [...] I laugh and laugh. I laugh, and an epoch ends in the sound of a dive, in the sea that opens and swallows up without giving back" (Terranova 2020, 217–218).

to break a series of disciplinary frontiers. As argued by Iain Chambers, to rethink a critique of Italian culture inside and throughout a Mediterranean scope means to consider a constant tension between local and global representational dimensions, as well as between institutional paradigms and unorthodox research:

To break a persistent mould and consider present-day Italy in its relationship to its historical, cultural, and geopolitical location in the Mediterranean is immediately to run up against a profound native resistance to interdisciplinary and intercultural studies. Yet frontiers, both national and disciplinary, are invariably spurious historical confines [...] To pay attention to these languages, and adopt a more fluid and flexible map, permits the possibility of simultaneously opening up a critical dialogue with both the European and the Mediterranean formation of modern Italy (Chambers 2010, 1).

At the turn of twenty-first century, the Italian *Meridione* is the focus of numerous studies that often cross paths with Postcolonial Theory and Mediterranean Studies, touching different fields, such as sociology, cultural history, anthropology and literary criticism. Already over at least the past four decades, some scholars have adopted a Postcolonial perspective, by reading the Italian South through Said's "Orientalism" (Said 1978; Chambers 2006), by arguing for a South as irredeemably corrupted and inferior (Moe 2002, 156–179), or by advocating for a Southern subalternity to be examined in the context of a critique of a Global South. (Cazzato 2008) Furthermore, contemporary Italian literature that thematises and originates from the South has offered a diversity of angles that have helped constantly redefine the scope of cultural disciplines that look simultaneously at the macro-conceptualizations of Southern identity and geo-cultural observations on space (Rosenkarten 1994; Brunetti and Derobertis 2011). Though in many cases they appear strongly indebted to a certain canonical tradition inaugurated by Verga and his *Verismo*, contemporary literary works from Sicily, Campania, Calabria or Sardinia still defy categorizations, and on several occasions transfigure the South not just to claim the status of an existing "otherness", but rather to challenge any rigid division between local and trans-national dimensions, thus contaminating any fixed representations of *Southernness*, or *Italianness* (Brunetti and Derobertis 2011). This is further confirmed by a current of literary criticism originated in the South of Italy (e.g. at the Universities of Naples, Bari or Palermo), where many scholars show an interest in a contaminated gaze on literature, in the name of a "multi-territorial perspective" (Cazzato 2011, 14). In such a context, what is likely to revitalise the place of the Italian South from the perspective of a Mediterranean critique is a continuous dialogue between disciplines that look both at the Mediterranean *and* at the South as non-fixed spatial, historical and culturally complexed cartographies, where narrating a story of Southern "otherness" may help creating

those “counter-cultures of modernity” that find their strength through instability and heterogeneity (Chambers 2006, 10).

As argued by Franco Cassano, the founding father of Southern Thought (Cassano 1996), particularly since the second half of twentieth century, the Mediterranean “is the place where Europe looks onto the South of the world; the counterpart to modernity” (Cassano 2012, 132), yet it also coincides with a specific socio-cultural entity threateningly running counter to the ideal of modernity and neoliberal development pursued by contemporary Western thought. For Cassano, the image of the Mediterranean emerging from the latest decades of socio-economic expansion precisely epitomises “backwardness and resistance to modernization” (Cassano 2012, 132), as well as

the danger that Italy, and specifically its Southern side, faces because it is rooted in it through its history and geography. In this boorish, but deep-seated stereotype, ‘Mediterranean’ takes on different and sometimes contradictory meanings that (...) are often casually grouped together under the same, single negative sign (Cassano 2012, 132).

Any critical discourse around the geopolitical unity of the Italian South has undoubtedly to face that negative connotation that was inaugurated by the historical events following Italian unification in 1861, and which is today widely discussed from a perspective that borrows some theoretical tools of Postcolonial theory as it identifies the *Meridione* as the internal “Other” of Italy (Dickie 1996, 19–33; Gribaudi 1996, 72–87; Verdicchio 1997; Conelli 2017). Indeed, the events accompanying the formation of modern Italy saw the ironic paradox of a nation that radically split into two entities, each one involved in oppositional tension with the other, as demonstrated by the proliferation of cultural and literary discourses produced both inside and outside Italy after the 1860s (Moe 2002, 13–26). Furthermore, since at least the 1980s, a significant Italian and international development of a critical discourse around cultural configurations of the South confirms the centrality of a debate that underscores the Mediterraneanness of *Meridione* (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2016, 54–55), so that any investigation of the relationship between Italian socio-historical developments and cultural configurations has to deal with a critical context that is *both* European and Mediterranean, self-directed as well as hetero-directed (Giuliani 2017, 15–28). It is a scenario in which memories, spatial representations, ideologies, legacies and power structures derive from a continuous contamination of ideas (Chambers 2010), but are also constantly fraught by forms of repression and exclusion of an intersectional nature, encompassing class, race and gender (Giuliani 2010, 79–160; Ellena 2010, 125–45; Giuliani 2013, 253–344).

One may state that the ambivalence of the South has much to do with an incongruous Italian position in the larger European context; and yet, as Giuliani convincingly argues, there is something quite specific about Italy's "racialized and racializing constructions of the Self and Other", because they "derive from an idea of national, cultural, historical and biological heritage that manufactures *italianità* ("Italianness"), as both white and Mediterranean, as essentially heterosexual and virile" (Giuliani 2018, 16). If one attempts to look at the history of these areas over the past one-hundred-and-fifty years – since the birth of the Italian nation in 1861 – the *Meridione* confirms its in-between-ness as both a geo-cultural dimension and as symbolic device. The Italian South, in its manifold articulations, should thus be considered within the larger scale of Mediterranean borders that constantly deconstruct, reorganise and re-articulate themselves, according to different, often extremely violent power dynamics. It is a Mediterranean where texts are part of a heterogeneous process by which memories are spatialized and become discourse (Giuliani 2016, 95).

Along with Italian and international Postcolonial and Subaltern Studies, the role of feminist and gender theories that come from non-Western countries has been crucial, particularly in reference to the meditation on the concept of margin as a space of strategic resistance and radical empowering practices. In this respect, the works of Gayatri C. Spivak, bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa have provided a seminal ground for a discussion that intersects criticism of gender and race power structures, by also interrogating Western, white feminisms, including those nourished by influential academic postures (Spivak 1990, 1–16 and 140–145; hooks 1990, 50–57; Anzaldúa 1987, 16–18). Numerous Italian analyses informed by feminist and gender studies have indeed shown an interest in reconfiguring women from the South by looking at mechanisms of Western symbolic and material oppression (Cariello 2011; Ellena 2010). In several cases, such interdisciplinary investigations have looked at *Meridione* within a Mediterranean and/or global perspective, while not always necessarily distinguishing the Italian South in its socio-anthropological specificity. At present, the overall cultural impact of Southern Italian female narrations on the possibility of blurring the North/South dichotomy is rarely being investigated outside of the larger context of the Global South, except in the context of literary analysis (Todesco 2017; de Rogatis 2019; Milkova 2021).

Considering the dramatic events that we have all been witnessing over the past few years, with hundreds of people crossing the sea and/or often losing their lives in the attempt, Mediterranean women's voices, narratives and cultural politics have often been examined by academic scholarship in order to investigate the creative manifestations connected with female migration, exile and/or displacement, as well as the presence of borders and walls, both material and symbolic ones, observed through a gendered perspective (Piccirillo 2018, 85–93; Zacc-

ria 2016, 239–249; Cariello 2012). Although much work is still to be done, the necessity to continuously and simultaneously examine the South from a gendered transnational, as well as a *glocal* perspective remains crucial (Robertson 1992, 175–180), with a larger postcolonial perspective that operates a circular movement, by persistently going beyond its own ambit (Satpathy 2009, xxi).

In the light of these dense junctures, the interconnection between female literary perspectives and Southern Italian cultural and historical identities appears more than ever open to further investigations. The same Cassano, in his most recent edition of *Southern Thought* (2005) draws from feminist thinker and essayist Ida Dominijanni a productive parallelism between the new centrality and ontological autonomy attributed by him to the South, and feminist thought, particularly the suggestions of Italian *pensiero della differenza*:

Just as female experience is not an inferior and imperfect form of its male counterpart, but rather a different perception of the world that critiques the false neutrality of male dominance, so the South does not simply constitute an imperfect and incomplete stage of development, but rather a different way of seeing that aims at protecting its own autonomy vis-à-vis the developed world while deconstructing its symbolic arrogance.

It goes without saying that this movement does not represent a defense of tradition, just as thinking about difference, which claims the autonomy of the female point of view, does not coincide at all with the idealization of the traditional role of women. In both cases we are not faced with a defense of traditional versus modern society, but with a critique of the false neutrality and universality of dominant cultural models (Cassano 2012, xxxvii–xxxviii; Dominijanni 1996, 24–25).

As millions of readers have confirmed in the case of Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet, sometimes fictional worlds set in the Italian South have gained so much visibility that the gendered margins of the South have indeed *become* the centre, both on a national and on a global scale. This positioning remains ambivalent, and benefits from such ambivalence, as bell hooks lucidly envisages:

We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole (hooks 1984, ix).

Like with Ferrante's protagonists Lila and Lenù, each reader has been encouraged to live reality through the eyes of “two subaltern girls and their linguistic and symbolic polyphony” (de Rogatis 2019, 277). Similarly, the voice and body of Ida, along with their corporeal crossings of urban, natural and domestic environments that surround and challenge them, epitomize two examples of female re-semantiza-

tions in which *Meridione* provides a dimension where women's subjectivity can claim for a change, which in the novels is shown as both existential, as well as socio-historical. By staging women's experiences and memories, these narratives stand as literary examples where there may be more room – more *spaces* – for a less monolithic Italian South that creatively re-utilizes a gendered "Otherness".

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Iain Chambers (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)

Learning from the Sea: Migration and Maritime Archives

The sea is an anarchic passage; it evades any borders, it cancels out any trace of appropriation, it contests the *arché* of order and subverts the *nómos* on land. For this reason, the sea also preserves the memory of another clandestinity, that of oppositions, resistances, struggles. Not the clandestinity of a stigma, but rather that of a decision. (Di Cesare 2020, 125)

Abstract: The following article explores the complex relationship between the Mediterranean and modernity, challenging established notions of geography, history, and power. Since the Mediterranean cannot easily be confined to predestined cultural sites, it seems necessary to propose a reassessment of its history and the narratives that surround it. It can be argued that the sea is not a passive backdrop, but an active participant in shaping the political and intellectual coordination of the world. Migration across the Mediterranean, both historically and in the present, highlights the violence and racism inherent in Occidental modernity. The article emphasizes the importance of understanding the sea as a site of critical inquiry and challenges the hegemony of Western knowledge formation. The essay also explores the intersection between Black critical thought and the reshaping of Occidental archives, offering alternative perspectives on history, power, and culture. Ultimately, it can be argued that understanding the Mediterranean and modernity requires a radical transdisciplinary approach that embraces alterity and confronts the violent legacies of colonialism and racism. The sea, with its fluidity and complexity, becomes a laboratory for reimagining and reconfiguring our understanding of the world.

Perhaps this affirmation by the Italian philosopher Donatella Di Cesare is too neat. We know that even the waters of the oceans, seas and their depths are being appropriated and increasingly resourced. Nevertheless, it serves to mark a certain limit in our reasoning and political calculus. At sea something always exceeds and flees the semantics secured on land, in the territories, buildings, monuments and laws. Thinking of the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel (1995) famously proposed considerations of the deep rhythms of time, more recently Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000) have encouraged us to confront the corruptive compli-

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cations of multiple ecologies. The Mediterranean does not settle easily into predestined critical or cultural locations. In immediate terms, contemporary European politics and legislation, concentrated in the figure of the ‘illegal’ migrant, inadvertently expose deeper archives; these invite us to reevaluate this body of water and associated histories. Sea water is striated. It follows neither a single history nor a unique map. It is worked up and worked over not only by social, but also by physical, animal and chemical, processes. To insist on these overlapping configurations is to register what exceeds and enriches the picture. Unregistered histories invest, cross and construct unsuspected maritime archives.

Further, to consider who gets to map, frame and configure the world, that is to understand geography as power, is also to ask who has the right to narrate. For the spatial organisation of knowledge is also a temporal device that logs, writes up and chronicles the political, cultural and philosophical administration of time. Commencing from the epistemological challenge of the sea, and abandoning national narratives and the prison houses of identity secured in the presumed stability of land-based institutions, we also discover that the objectivity of our intellectual anchors often fail to hold. As Merje Kuus has written: “Although nationalism and the nation-state are omnipresent categories of practice in our world, they are not necessarily the appropriate categories of analyzing that world” (Kuus 2017, 263). So, rather than simply adding the ocean and the marine world to existing understandings of political geography – from area studies and international relations to the renewed insistence of borders and the ubiquity of capitalist extraction through national and trans-national agencies – it might be instructive to look landwards from the sea precisely in order to bring fresh questions to the logic and languages of those categories and practices.

The sea is not merely a dialectical negation of the ground beneath our feet. It is something more than that; it breaks away from simply being an aquatic emptiness contrasted to the fullness of the land. Although claimed, administered and resourced by all the powers and technologies of modernity – from trade and tourism to energy supplies and pharmacological research (Steinberg 2001, 9) – we can choose to insist that the sea promotes an irreducible alterity. Beyond the heterotopic challenge of the slave, pirate and whaling ship, all charting modernity otherwise from the vessels of the maritime world (Gilroy 1993; Linebaugh and Rediker 2002; Casarino 2002), the challenge of the sea insists on its indifference to the powers ravaging its reaches and resources. It poses questions that cannot be readily captured in the representative logic that guides our rationalism. To echo Gilles Deleuze on the cinema, a theory of the sea is not ‘about’ the sea, but about the concepts that the sea gives rise to (Deleuze 1989, 280). At this point a maritime ontology, in this particular case tied to the Mediterranean, proposes the laboratory of another modernity.

Going off-shore for a moment allows us to renegotiate our premises while being at sea (a term which also implies being lost). When we no longer think of the Mediterranean and, in particular the centrality of the in-between status of its marine ambient – the Mediterranean – as the *object* of our geographical, historical, sociological and anthropological gaze, then a certain knowledge formation comes unstuck and begins to drift. Of course, the Mediterranean is itself an invention, object of a regime of knowledge produced by historical and political forces that since 1800 have bound it into the particular political economy that today dominates the globe (Chambers 2008). Yet from its African and Asian shorelines the Mediterranean has rarely been constructed and conceived in the fashion we are presently accustomed to. Let us simply consider that the most widely spoken language in the Mediterranean basin, in all its dialects and variations, is Arabic. Perhaps an ‘Arabic Mediterranean’, in the manner we Europeans are accustomed to consider it, does not exist. In fact, the term *al-Muttawassit* only begins to circulate in Arabic at the beginning of the twentieth century (Matar 2019). Europe has imposed a unity on what elsewhere carried multiple names. This distinction and fracture draws attention to a more open archive: one whose languages are not merely of European provenance. It suggests other perspectives and lexicons that do not automatically mirror or mimic a subaltern and repressed version of what we on the northern shore have elaborated. Rather than propose a sharply separate and unregistered alternative, we need to consider the underside and unconscious dimensions of a Mediterranean which, when laid out flat as the map, betrays all the limits of its modern European inscription.

Other histories and cultures have traversed its waters. They have proposed temporalities that are irreducible to the crushing linearity imposed by Occidental ‘progress’. I have in mind the fourteenth-century journeys of Ibn Battuta from West Africa and the Atlantic coast to central Asia and China, or the temporal spirals of historical sociology elaborated by his slightly later contemporary Ibn Khaldūn. In the present order of knowledge these examples, if considered at all, are ‘minor’ proposals, exotic curiosities set in the margins of the modern academic machine and its self-assured epistemic order. What I am proposing here, following Walter Benjamin’s noted theses on the philosophy of history, is to shift the historiographical axis 180°. Adopting a view located not in a temporal lag, but from a contemporary below, interrupts the chronological axis. Rather than being secured in a linear narrative, we find ourselves in a constellation where the past does not simply pass but rather accumulates in the present as a set of interrogations and potential interruptions (Benjamin 2015).

Carlo Rovelli suggests that science is about a continual process of proposing possible views of the world through informed rebellion (Rovelli 2016). For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari philosophy is fundamentally about the invention of

concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). Applying such perspectives, while avoiding the purported ‘cutting edge’ of neoliberalism always looking to capitalise on novelty, involves embarking on a radical trans-disciplinary approach to our habitual coordinates. This is to consider the structure of time not in terms of a flow in which events occur, but rather of understanding and experiencing time as it emerges from events. The latter can accelerate, slow and deviate the steady pulse of chronology. This intersects with the Gramscian invitation to consider time and space always in political, never in neutral, terms (Chambers 2015). It means, and now moving into our argument, to propose understandings of the Mediterranean that are always subject to contestation and reconfiguration; that is, to historical processes and shifting geographies of power.

Beneath the surface, beyond the purview of the intellectual panopticon that believes all can be rendered transparent to its will, we can consider the Mediterranean from what is sustained and suspended in its waters. This suggests the strategical move of beginning to think *with* the sea; no longer as a mute object or dumb accessory, but as an active participant in the political coordination of the world; no longer merely a physical space to be crossed and controlled, but a historical participant that permitted modern sea-borne empires and the Occidental fashioning of the planet (Steinberg 2001). What today rises to the surface and floats on its waters – dead mammals (both human and non), together with other disappearing life forms – brusquely and brutally return the unregistered archives of a migrating modernity and its ecological breakdown to the present. The human migrant, denied passage over its waters by an Occidental legal apparatus that unilaterally appropriates the right to universal law while frequently denying the immediate ‘law of the sea’ to save and rescue, provides a central key with which to reopen and rerun the accredited narrative of Western modernity. The lives involved are apparently voiceless, reduced to objects in the brutal inflation of political discourse where the spectre of alien ‘invasions’ and the denial of climate catastrophe are deeply entwined in the maintenance of the status quo and white hegemony. Yet these bodies do speak. Whether alive or dead their presence interrogates the smug assurance of an official modernity that assures us all is under control, that further progress will find a solution for the wretched of the planet, for the wretched planet (Fanon 2004; Gray and Sheikh 2018). Pulled into an ‘ecological’ vision – one not simply restricted to ‘nature’ and its accompanying sciences – we enter darker spaces than their accommodation of counter-histories.

Restricting ourselves to the human dimension, the ecology of life and survival clearly precedes, exceeds and sustains the category, and other histories emerge from the depths of modernity. Human migration is transferred from a peripheral question, confined to the social and economic margins, to joining the mainstream of the violent and enforced mobility of goods and capital in the making of the pre-

sent-day world. Migration now becomes the history of modernity. The global and mobile exploitation of human labour together with the world-wide raiding of material resources that fuels capital accumulation and material development, not only persists, but insists. What was distanced, even hidden, far away in the colonial spaces of the plantations and the mines, the slave trade and subsequently in the politically refused slums of the industrial and post-industrial world, explicitly returns to triangulate our modernity with the constitutive coordinates of capitalism and colonialism and their moral endorsement in racialized distinctions. If this means to paint the picture with very broad brush strokes and register that the colonisation of the planet means that all Europeans are ultimately white settlers, it nevertheless allows us to begin to assemble the flotsam of the present into a certain critical coherence. This cuts into the apparently seamless sovereignty of the West on the world to retrieve other histories, and consider other horizons. Here the modern market economy and its dependence on subordinate labour, most dramatically rendered explicit in modern slavery and indentured labour – from eighteenth-century plantations in the Americas, to tomato pickers in southern Italy today – intersects the deeper tempos of ecological decomposition and re-composition that draw together time scales that are both human and beyond.

Much of the thinking expressed here matured in the company of a FLOATS (Floating Laboratory and Action at Sea) seminar near Samos in 2019, sailing between Greece and Turkey, Europe and Asia, on the Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation vessel *Aegean Explorer*.¹ Thinking on water, travelling by sea, further encourages the interruption of the claims of a single political and intellectual sovereignty over the world. On a horizontal plane, the historical, political and cultural construction of the Mediterranean is largely restricted to the spacetime paradigm of European provenance that pretends universality. Present day political and legal barriers against migrants crossing the sea, amounting to an undeclared war on the water (Chambers 2019), are the most potent signs of the limits of this purported universalism and its associated humanism. Meanwhile, dropping down the vertical axis brings into play the complex stratification of human and non-human life in the aquatic domain. This poses fundamental questions about the existing disciplinary divisions of knowledge and promotes an overspill between the social and natural sciences in an altogether more extensive ecological frame. The ready identification of 'objects' of scientific study and the positivism of their methods breaks up; the abstract endorsement of a-priori procedures and a single time frame is intercepted by the rigour of following a multiplication of material scales and processes. Against the progressive logic of fine-tuning and improving the ex-

1 <https://floatsea.org> (access 1 August 2023).

isting knowledge apparatus to incorporate these critical proposals there now emerges a deeper set of epistemological questions: these challenge the present political economy of knowledge. Like the sea these questions can never be fully absorbed nor tamed, for they request a profound undoing and redoing – not a cancellation – of an intellectual arrangement that is also a historical and political settlement (Hallaq 2018). So, if geography cannot be spliced apart from history then geopolitics and area studies, but also the sociology, historiography and anthropology, of the Mediterranean – all disciplines forged in the making of modern Europe and the West – can no longer pretend to hold their previous status as disinterested and neutral forms of knowledge. Their limits lie not in the failure to extend and further refine their appropriation, but rather in continuing to insist on extending sovereignty over the world thereby continuing the violence of the colonisation of the planet. Cancelling respect for alterity and refusing to engage with difference, is to exercise an exclusive knowledge over others and promote a divine reach untrammelled by the complexities and restrictions of the planetary habitat. At the end of the day, like all colonialisms (Memmi 2016), it amounts to intellectual fascism.

Is Occidental knowledge intrinsically part and parcel of the historical processes that led to establishing the West as the universal measure of mankind? Is it possible to separate modern social and human sciences from the precise geo-historical matrix that formed, financed and institutionally established their legitimacy and authorised their knowledge? Just as they can be a history of the discipline and practices that have produced ‘history’, so, too, there can exist an anthropology of anthropology, a sociology of sociology. All of which is to reference a political geography of knowledge formations. Such self-reflection hardly begins to scratch the surface of the modern power-knowledge apparatus, its languages, premises and protocols. A deeper historical cut cannot avoid the intricate binding of our knowledge formation to the violent fashioning and colonisation of the world. The modern university and the division of intellectual activities into fields of competence precisely gain in certitude as they lose sight of the often brutal historical processes that sustain them. Rendering the world manageable by dissecting it in disciplinary competences is precisely to define, catalogue and control. Research and academic practices consistently expose the colonial constitution of Occident modernity in their assumptions and languages. If the physical extension and metaphysical justification for the appropriation of the planet continue to coordinate and frame the languages of knowing and understanding then any appeal to scientific ‘neutrality’ and purported objectivity can only be met with historical and epistemological scepticism.

Returning to the shorelines of this essay, in the intricate meshing of the Mediterranean and modernity today we persistently encounter Occidental violence

and racism. It is intrinsic to the structure and exercise of power. Taught to consider such factors at a distance, confined to the past and extra-European spaces, what is occurring right now in the Mediterranean – from migration, mounting deaths at sea, dictatorships, uprisings and revolt on its African and Asian shores – returns that colonial past to the present. Further, it also reminds us that both modern colonialism and racial hierarchies initially emerged here. A century ago mass migration across the Mediterranean involved only Europeans as they journeyed to colonise Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Palestine. The structural engagement and political appropriation of North Africa and the Middle East has in the modern era always been accompanied by race as ‘its ordering principle’ (Robinson 2000, xxx). For: “It was there—not Africa—that the ‘Negro’ was first manufactured” (Robinson 2000, xiii). Alongside the contemporary situation in which black people everywhere in the ‘civilised world’ find themselves, one has only to register the continuing stereotypical subordination of the modern ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ to capture the sense of these observations. Although studiously avoided, ironed away in the ceaseless maps of political affairs and area studies, lost in the inevitable ‘progress’ of European histories and the bland benevolence of their cultural lexicons, the epistemological binding together of capitalism, colonialism and racism coordinating the making of Occidental modernity is recursive. European colonial violence, both from back there in Africa and the Americas, and last night on the waters of the Mediterranean, has produced a continuum of racial terror whose structure of power is persistently ghosted by those seeking social recognition and historical justice.

Right now in the Mediterranean, Libyan patrol boats and concentration camps, financed by the European Union, are trying to block historical movement. To insist that modernity is itself a migratory apparatus that continually traverses waters and seas – highlighted in European maritime empires, in the slave trade from Africa to the Americas, in mass migrations from the rural poverty of nineteenth-century Europe, and today in movements from the south of the planet – is to challenge stable referents of understanding. In the border regions where the modern state and its democracy seeks to regulate, control and deter migratory flows we most acutely register the limits of our grip on the world. In these marginal spaces, in the borderlands, the levelling mechanisms operated by Western reason as the tools and syntax of global management find themselves in deeper waters. The hegemony of the modern European subject, rendering the world objective through cancelling the specificities of the lives that disturb his and her order of knowledge, is set adrift. Precisely such a manner of thinking, making the world fully knowable and transparent to a particular will to power, today explains the “disregard for the lives lost on the streets of the United States and the Mediterranean Sea” (da Silva 2017). The presence of the contemporary migrant – her life and

death – not only challenges the juridical definitions of rights and citizenship, and fragments the national collocations of belonging and cultural identity; it also opens up the complex constitution of what historically, culturally and juridically makes the West the West. A hole opens in time, the past is rendered proximate to contemporary concerns through the repressed archives of the present. Receiving and assembling a historical inheritance in this manner leads to building an alternative sense of the present. It leads to slicing up the body of modernity to produce another critical montage. This allows us to engage with the intertwining of the represented and the repressed in an emerging critical constellation. Here we cannot avoid registering the global injustice sustained by laws that guarantee, in its abstract and universal indifference, the general equivalence of capital.

One of the most challenging forms this radical realignment takes today comes from Black critical thinking. Aimé Césaire’s and Frantz Fanon’s critique of European humanism, their insistence on a humanism “à la mesure du monde”, is now increasingly amplified in the ongoing disturbance and rearranging of Occidental archives. When in 1928, anticipating Frantz Fanon’s “Look! A Negro!” in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952), the African American writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston wrote “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background”, she caught the essential: objectified, caught and captured in the dehumanising position of being black in white society (Hurston 1928). Such a critical vein acquires increasing force in the retrieval of the centrality of the Black Atlantic experience and its fundamental contribution to the economy, culture and political institutions of the West. More recently this has been carried over into fresh critical considerations that respond to the need “to conceptualise the politics of contemporary blackness” beyond “the reductive orthodoxies of institutional methodologies and sociological empiricism” (Brar and Shama 2019 89). Beyond the historical passage from the 1980s to the 2000s, from Black British Cultural Studies to North American Black Critical Thought, this mobile assemblage – from Stuart Hall and *Policing the Crisis* (1978) to Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* (2016), to name just two key texts – points to the ongoing trans-Atlantic meshing of the diverse temporalities of being ‘black’ in the decaying imperial centres of the First World. It is also where the critical insistence of the black diaspora crosses the lives and deaths of today’s migrants in their mutual constitution of modernity through their shared negation by that very same modernity. It is where maritime archives oversee the collapse of simple chronologies and secure unsung connections, composing the contemporary constellation of the Black Atlantic and the

Black Mediterranean.² This intellectual assemblage is destined for further configurations in and from the south of the planet announced, for example, in the work of the Cameroon philosopher Achille Mbembe and his insistence on the becoming black of the world (Mbembe 2017). Rather than a linear heritage, this is a constellation whose stars and planets provide different illuminations in diverse tempos and spaces: W.E.B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin and James Brown do not disappear, the bass of Jamaican reggae and dub is constantly present, and the repeating poetics of the Caribbean continues to echo. It is sedimented in what Paul Gilroy called the “slave sublime” of the blues in music, literature and the visual arts. Such critical remapping have been accompanied and nurtured by the accelerating refusal to accept the “afterlife of slavery” (Hartman 2006) in the state authorised racism of the policing and surveillance of our broken democracies.

This suggests an epistemological shift: induced both from within a dismantled Occidental heritage and through an intrusion from the externalised and marginalised ‘outside’ (which given the planetary constitution of modernity is never outside). Among the results there has been the increasing intersection between archival work and postcolonial art; that is, between research in the disquieting and violent archives of Western modernity and art against the grain proposing the modernities of previously unauthorised subjects, histories and lives. As James Baldwin pointed out many decades ago, people who live beneath and below the power bloc, in the subaltern worlds of the marginalised, the negated and the forgotten of the multiple souths of the planet, know far more of the hegemonic world than that world knows about them (or of itself). In the asymmetrical relations of power that structure the histories of the present lies not only the registration of the powers of brutal appropriations but also the potential of a critical cut and epistemological interruption. In *Peripeteia* (2012), John Akomfrah’s reworking of Albert Dürer’s study of a black male and female figure at the beginning of the sixteenth century, matter once considered out of place now pushes an established arrangement of knowing the world out of joint. Not only do we comprehend that the world is wider and far more than us, but we begin to hear and learn from what exceeds and refutes our authorisation. This means to cease the existing map and perforate it with other trajectories. It is where, and listening to non-white experience, fugitivity, lines of flight and exercises in opacity open up new understandings of critical and epistemological power.

2 For an excellent overview of the discussion on the Black Mediterranean, see chapter 4 “The Black Mediterranean” in Proglio (2020).

I think that a radical practice is not directly accessible if one is not one of those naked humans, as Glissant spoke of the “naked migrant,” a figure of radicalism, an echo of the Maroon who must rebuild everything in the space of escape. At that precise moment, there is a form of contradictory power in destitution, a form of optimism in obligatory survival. It’s the fundamental optimism of the slave who has left the plantation, who walks without knowing where to go, carried by an enormous desire to live that will allow him to pass beyond death (Marboeuf 2019).

The return of this archive within the repetition of the history of the Occidental art canon seeds aesthetics with an ethics bound to the measure of the world. This is what constitutes the potency and poetry of what I consider postcolonial art. Further, and to augment a critical disavowal and to take ‘Art’ and ‘aesthetics’ in hand, we need to recognise them as recent inventions of European modernity. They betray a precise historical formation and cultural configuration. What we identify as art is a limited exercise in the languages of our epistemic order, and not a judgement of universal validity. Remaining within the Mediterranean, the very idea of ‘Islamic art’ (invariably considered ‘ornamental’ with respect to the great tradition of Occidental provenance) underscores the mis-match historically arising between diverse cultural formations that are irreducible to a single measure. What falls outside the frame of Occidental concepts and conceit nevertheless persists and insists. What we call art, can appear in another assemblage of sense and sensibility that draws us beyond the categorisations of what we consider modernity. In other words, and digging deeper, the secularisation of Christianity as another name for modernity and its presumptive redemption of the world, fails to receive or respond to the cultural force of Islam through refusing its alterity as a component *within* the modernity it thinks it owns. This exploration of the “epistemological assumptions of the secular”, its inscription in the capitalist infrastructure of the modern nation state as political hegemony, together with the largely unexamined dependence, and not distinct separation, of the sacred and the secular, has been consistently exposed by Talal Asad (2003), and more recently extended by Irfan Ahmad (2017). To consider these wider coordinates means to rethink ‘art’ and undo the aesthetics that binds it to one particular order.

Art history has developed its paradigms through the analysis of Western art that might be better termed Christianate, underscoring the modern transposition of premises informed by European Christianity as culture which permeate secular Western societies and which often serve as a measure for the assimilation of those designated as other. Generously globalizing these paradigms, it has recognized the art of other cultures to the extent that it suits this filter. When applied outside Europe, the term ‘art’ represents a form of epistemic violence through the renegotiation of objects from the intrinsic logic of their cultural-social life into an extrinsic realm of analysis and modern commodification in private collections and museums. It denigrates the cultures in which works were produced as intellectually mute

and lesser than the narratively produced, imaginary collective designated as 'our (Christian-)ate own' (Shaw 2019, 11).

Here cultural differences, and their inevitable ranking via figurations of race, critically intersect definitions of art and aesthetics. This is what David Lloyd most effectively captures in his book *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics*. He insists that aesthetics is not merely about art, but "rather has functioned as a regulative discourse of the human on which the modern conception of the political and racial order of modernity rests"; it arises out of the necessity "to substitute for the immediacy of political demands and practices an aesthetic formation of the disinterested and 'liberal' subject" (Lloyd 2018). In this far longer and deeper wave we encounter our proximity to a past we presumed has passed, consigned to a closed chapter in the history of modernity. On the contrary, time flows back and forth, and returns us to the precedents that established a particular order and its contemporary distribution of wealth, political power and cultural authority in the ongoing colonial constitution of the present. As the artist Cameron Rowland, once again centring slavery and the sea, succinctly puts it: "Abolition preserved the property established by slavery. This property is maintained in the market and the state" (Rowland 2020).³

These are some of the lessons I have learnt from the sea.

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³ See also, Guy Mannes-Abbott, 'Cameron Rowland, '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73'', *Third Text*: <http://www.thirdtext.org/mannes-abbott-rowland>.

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Notes on Contributors

Stéphane Baquey is Assistant Professor of twentieth- and twenty-first-century French and Franco-phone literatures at Aix-Marseille University and member of the CIELAM. His research focuses on four domains, with a disciplinary extension to comparative literature: French modern and contemporary poetry with an exploration of its potentials as a literary genre and its extensions as a post-generic practice; an exploration of the ways to write a literary history of the modern and contemporary Mediterranean, with a particular attention to literary spaces (al-Andalus, Maghreb); modern and contemporary poetry in the Arab worlds in French and Arabic; and the expression of place and space via a multidisciplinary approach associating poetics with aesthetics, anthropology and geography, and with a concern for the experience of liminality in the Anthropocene. Between 2010 and 2014, he organized the seminar “Literary History and Cultures of the Mediterranean Space”. The seminar brought together scholars and writers whose origins or trajectories encompassed nearly all the Mediterranean area and always maintained a methodological openness.

Cristina Benussi, Full Professor of Italian Literature, was Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Trieste (Italy). She has produced several studies on the cultures and literatures of the Trieste and Julian areas, including Svevo, Saba, Bazlen, Marín, Stuparich, Slataper, and Quarantotti Gambini. She is the author of a number of monographs and essays on leading Italian and European writers of Modernity. More recently, she has been investigating influences of boundaries influences in literature (*Confini. L'altra Italia*, 2019; “I triestini il sabato non vanno a conferenze”. Pasolini e la poesia triestina: Giotti, Saba e Marín”, 2022). She has dealt with minorities, especially regarding Jewish culture, as well as aspects of gender (*Cambiare il mondo. Viaggio nel pensiero femminile*, 2014). She acted as visiting professor at numerous universities in Europe and the United States. Currently, she is the director of the Literature section of the “Circolo della Cultura e delle Arti di Trieste”, of which she is also vice president. She regularly collaborates with the daily newspaper *Il Piccolo* and several radio and television stations and is on the scientific committees of the most important journals in the field.

C. Ceyhun Arslan is an Associate Professor at Koç University in Istanbul, where he teaches Ottoman and world literatures. His main research interests include Arabic and Turkish literatures, Mediterranean studies, and literary theory. His monograph *The Ottoman Canon and the Construction of Arabic and Turkish Literatures* is forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press. He has recently been awarded with a Georg Forster Fellowship for Experienced Researchers from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. During his fellowship, he will continue to work on his second book project in progress, tentatively entitled *A Literary History of the Mediterranean from its East and South*, which examines literary works from/on various vantage points of the Mediterranean.

Iain Chambers has consistently developed interdisciplinary and intercultural studies on contemporary popular metropolitan cultures and music. More recently, he has transmuted this line of research into a series of postcolonial analyses on the formation of the modern Mediterranean. He has taught cultural, postcolonial, and Mediterranean studies at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, and is now an independent writer and researcher. He is the author of many articles and books. Amongst his more recent publications are: *Mediterranean Crossings. The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (2008), *Postcolonial Interruptions, Unauthorised Modernities* (2017), *Mediterraneo Blues. Musiche, malin-*

conia postcoloniale, pensieri marittimi (2020), and, with Marta Cariello, *La questione mediterranea* (2019), and the recent essay “At History’s Edge: The Mediterranean Question” (2022).

Marianna Deganutti studied in Italy, the UK and Slovenia. She holds a PhD in Modern Languages from the University of Oxford. From 2016 to 2018 she was a Research Associate at the University of Bath, where she worked for the Horizon 2020-funded project “Unsettling remembering and social cohesion in transnational Europe” (UNREST). She is the author of several articles on borderland studies, literary multilingualism, trauma, and exile in leading international academic journals. Her new monograph on literary multilingualism in borderlands will be published by Routledge in 2023. She is co-editor (with Michela Baldo) of the Special Issue “Code-switching as a Narrative Tool” (*Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 2024) and (with Sandra Vlasta) of the Special Issue “Trauma and Multilingualism in Literature” (*The Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, 2024). She has recently completed a postdoctoral position at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Germany).

Verena Ebermeier is a postdoctoral Research Associate at the Department of German Studies, with the focus on medieval literature, at the University of Regensburg. She is a researcher in the DFG project “Historische Narratologie und Raumchronistik: Herkunfts- und Gründungserzählungen in der bayerischen Landesgeschichtsschreibung des 15. Jahrhunderts”. Her research particularly focuses on Area Studies, historical narratology, medieval philosophy, and medieval reception of the ancient world of conceptions. Her publications include several articles on the subjects of island travel and the relation of space, time, and cognition (“Literarische Erkenntnisreisen im Spannungsfeld von *curiositas* und *conversio voluntatis*.” *Curiositas*. Eds. Andreas Speer and Robert Maximilian Schneider. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. 483–504; *Die Insel als Kosmos und Anthropos. Dimensionen literarischer Rauminszenierung am Beispiel der Heiligenlegende ‘Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis’ und des ‘Trojanerkriegs’ Konrads von Würzburg*. Berlin et al.: LIT, 2019), as well as on specifics of literary concepts of the Mediterranean island world.

Angela Fabris is Associate Professor of Romance Literature at the University of Klagenfurt and a visiting professor at University Ca’ Foscari Venice. Her research touches on different themes, figures, and times in Italian, Spanish, French, and European literature, also from a comparative perspective, from Boccaccio to the Baroque novel of the Siglo de Oro, up to the genre of the “Spectators” and eighteenth-century journalistic production (*I giornali veneziani di Gasparo Gozzi. Tra dialogo e consenso sulla scia dello Spectator*; Biblioteca di “Lettere italiane”, Florence: Olschki, 2022). She is one of the leaders of the project *The Invention of the Lottery Fantasy – A Cultural, Transnational, and Transmedial History of European Lotteries*, funded by the Research Council of Norway (<https://www.ntnu.edu/lottery>). She has written several essays and has edited 3 volumes on various film genres, such as science fiction, horror, and eroticism. Since 2020, she is editor of the series *Alpe Adria e dintorni, itinerari mediterranei* (AAIM) with De Gruyter publishers and has researched Mediterranean literature and film, to which she devoted a series of essays, particularly concerning the treatment of space.

Albert Göschl teaches Italian and French Literature at the Department of Romance Languages, University of Graz. He studied Romance studies and philosophy at the Universities of Graz and Siena (Italy). Research stays brought him to Rome (2015) and at the University of Aix-Marseille (2020/21). His current research project “Utopographies – The Poiesis of Space in Early Modern Utopias” deals with the literary construction of social counter-spaces in the paradigmatic genre of utopia, particularly literary strategies of spatiality. His book on the development of Italian essayism “Die Logik des essayistischen Gedankens” (Winter, 2016) was honored by the Böhlau Jubilee Prize of the Austrian

Academy of Sciences. He is part of the editorial board of the *lettere aperte*, a journal for Italian Cultural Studies. Since 2022, he has been Deputy Managing Director of the *Austrian Center of Language Competences*.

Adrian Grima is Associate Professor of Maltese literature and literary representations of the Mediterranean at the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta and a visiting lecturer at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) in Paris. He has published academic works in Maltese, English, and Italian and delivered papers at academic events around the world. In 2014, he co-edited (with Simone Galea) and co-authored a volume on *The Teacher, Literature and the Mediterranean* (Sense, Rotterdam). A keynote speech he gave at St Anne's College, University of Oxford, was published as a book chapter entitled "The Mediterranean Novel Defying Borders", in *Minding Borders. Resilient Divisions in Literature, the Body and the Academy* (Legenda, 2017). As coordinator of the Mediterranean cultural organization *Inizjamed*, set up in 1998, he acted as artistic director of the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival between 2007 and 2018. His more recent research has focused on the fiction of Juann Mamo and Concetta Brincat, contemporary Maltese literature, and rhetoric.

Jonas Hock is a Research Associate at the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Regensburg. After a BA and a MA (double degree) in French and German philology at the University of Leipzig and the Université Lyon II, he obtained a PhD in Modern French literature at Regensburg. His recent research focuses on the relation between Italian baroque literature and political rhetoric, on Franco-German agents of the Enlightenment, and on literary Mediterranean studies (South Italian anthropology and island studies). He is a co-organizer of the CITAS-funded research network MS ISLA (Mediterranean Studies on Island Areas) at the University of Regensburg. Recently, he has published a special issue of the journal *Zibaldone* (No. 74, Fall 2022) on the Adriatic as a contact-zone (co-edited with Laura Linzmeier).

Sara Izzo is Supplement Professor in the Department of Romance Studies at the University of Bonn. Her research focuses on Mediterranean studies, literary journalism, and homoerotic poetry. She recently wrote her habilitation thesis on literary cartographies of the Mediterranean from a comparative perspective (*Literarische Kartographien des Mittelmeers im Kontext nationaler und imperialer Identitätsbildungsprozesse in Frankreich und Italien*). She published her PhD thesis on the political and journalistic writings of Jean Genet in 2016 and edited a volume on postcolonial war reporting (*(Post-)koloniale frankophone Kriegsreportagen. Genrehybridisierungen, Medienkonkurrenzen*) in 2020. Currently, she is preparing a research project on the concept of connectivity in the Mediterranean at the Centre Ernst Robert Curtius in Bonn.

Marília Jöhnk is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Comparative Literature at Goethe University, Frankfurt. Her research currently focuses on gender and literary multilingualism in eighteenth-century women writers from a comparative perspective (Spain, Portugal, and France). Another focus of her work is on twentieth-century Latin American literature (see *Poetik des des Kolibris*), translation theory (cf. "Übersetzungstheorie aus Brasilien: Haroldo de Campos im Dialog mit Christian Morgenstern"), and Queer Studies.

Charikleia Magdalini Kefalidou received her PhD in Comparative Literature from Sorbonne University Paris where she studied as a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation scholar. Her thesis explored the representations of trauma, exile, and identity in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary works

produced by displaced Armenian authors in France and the United States. Her research focuses on the representations of trauma, exile, and marginality in francophone, anglophone and hellenophone literature and graphic novels. Kefalidou has held positions as a Temporary Teaching and Research Assistant (ATER) at the University of Strasbourg and at the University of Tours and as a Temporary Lecturer at the University of Caen in Normandy and the University Paris-Est-Créteil-Val-de-Marne. She has contributed chapters to four books and has published articles in several international and French journals. She is currently writing a book about twentieth- and twenty-first century Armenian-American and French-Armenian literature.

Sharon Kinoshita is Professor of Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz. A specialist in medieval French and Comparative Literature, she is the author of *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (2006) and co-author of books on Chrétien de Troyes (2011) and Marie de France (2012). Her interest in Mediterranean Studies dates back more than two decades; with Brian Catlos (University of Colorado), she is co-founder and co-director of the Mediterranean Seminar (mediterraneanseminar.org), a group dedicated to promoting collaborative research in the Humanities, Arts, and Humanistic Social Sciences. She had co-edited (with Peregrine Horden) *A Companion to Mediterranean History* (2014) and (with Brian Catlos) *Can We Talk Mediterranean? Conversations on an Emerging Field in Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (2017). She has translated the Franco-Italian version of Marco Polo's *Description of the World* into English (2016) and has written widely on various aspects of Marco Polo and the Global Middle Ages.

Daniel G. König is Professor for the History of Religions at the University of Konstanz. After a training in European history and Islamic studies, he wrote his PhD thesis on motivations to convert to Christianity in the Western Roman Empire of Late Antiquity and its Romano-Germanic successors (*Bekehrungsmotive*. Husum: Mathiesen, 2008). In his second book, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), he re-evaluated the Arabic-Islamic documentation of medieval Christian Europe. Since the publication of *Latin and Arabic: Entangled Histories* (Heidelberg: HeiUP, 2019, open access: <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.448>), an edited volume on the historical sociolinguistics of Latin and Arabic, he has been working on various facets of Christian-Muslim interaction and communication in the wider Mediterranean, including processes of translation, mutual depictions of the other, the role of the Islamicate sphere for the cultural history of Europe, etc. As editor of and contributor to volume 2 of C.H. Beck's (2023) and Harvard University Press' (2024) *History of the World*, published in German under the title *Geteilte Welten. Geschichte der Welt 600–1350*, he has also engaged with pre-modern global history.

Karla Mallette is Professor of Italian in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and Professor of Mediterranean Studies in the Department of Middle East Studies at the University of Michigan. She is the author of *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250: A Literary History* (2005), *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean* (2010), and co-editor (with Suzanne Akbari) of *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (2013). Her most recent book, *Lives of the Great Languages: Arabic and Latin in the Medieval Mediterranean* (2021), won the Modern Language Association Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for best book in Comparative Literary Studies of 2022. She has written numerous articles on medieval literature and Mediterranean Studies. She is currently Chair of the Department of Middle East Studies at the University of Michigan.

Roberta Morosini was Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures at Wake Forest University (USA) and the 2019–2020 Charles Speroni Endowed Chair at the Department of Italian at UCLA

(USA). Since 2022, she is Full Professor of Italian Literature at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. She is area editor of the Medieval Mediterranean for Oxford Bibliographies, and also the author of several publications involving the artistic representation of the sea. In the attempt to contribute to a poetics of Mediterranean literature, she has published extensively on the literary sea with a geo-critical approach of maps, people, and spaces from Dante to Renaissance island books. Part of her pan-Mediterranean research concerns the study of Christian-Muslim relations, as in her forthcoming monographs on *Dante, Moses and the Book of Islam. Depicting the Quran and Filippino Lippi’s Adoration of the Golden Calf* (L’Erma di Brescneider, 2023), and *Boccaccio and the Invention of Islam. Writing Otherness and Crossing Faiths in the Mediterranean* (De Gruyter, 2023). Her recent books include *I cieli naviganti. Domenico Rea, Boccaccio e Napoli* (Mediando, 2023); *Rotte di poesia, rotte di civiltà. Il Mediterraneo degli dei nella Genealogia di Boccaccio e Piero di Cosimo* (Castelvecchi, 2021); *Il mare salato. Il Mediterraneo di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio* (Viella, 2019).

Charles Sabatos is Professor at Yeditepe University in Istanbul, where he teaches Slavic, American, and comparative literature. His primary research interests are in transnational contexts of Central and Eastern European literary history, particularly modernist and contemporary fiction. His monograph *Frontier Orientalism and The Turkish Image in Central European Literature* was published by Lexington Books in January 2020. He is also co-editor of the collected volume in progress, *Home and the World in Slovak Writing: A Small Nation’s Literature in Context*.

Sophia Schnack is a postdoctoral assistant of French and Italian literature and media at the University of Vienna. She specializes in contemporary francophone literature and textual corporality. In this field of research, she has published articles about Colette, Marguerite Duras, Nina Bouraoui, an Albert Camus. Her thesis “Texte corporel, corps textuel. Nina Bouraoui en dialogue avec Marguerite Duras, Annie Ernaux et *La Nausée*” was published in 2023 by L’Harmattan. The thesis was honored with the award Gender Gain and Agency in 2021. Currently, her research concerns the narrative work of the Provençal author Marie Mauron (1896–1986) and the influence of the Piedmontese writers Sibilla Aleramo, Lalla Romano, or Cesare Pavese on her novels. Her current work in media studies focuses on Ermanno Olmi, Jean Cocteau, Eric Rohmer, and Agnès Varda.

Steffen Schneider is Full Professor of Italian and French literature and cultural studies at the University of Graz. His research areas include Renaissance literatures, drama, myth reception, Mediterranean studies, and contemporary literature. Recent publications in the field of Mediterranean Studies include: “Ibridismo siciliano e memoria in *Retablo* di Vincenzo Consolo.” In: *Forme ibride e intrecci intermediali. Da Giotto e Dante alla narrativa e alla docufiction contemporanea / Hybridisierung der Formen und intermediale Verflechtungen. Von Giotto und Dante bis zur Gegenwartsnarrativik und Doku-Fiktion*. Eds. Julia Brühne, Christiane von Heydendorff, Giulia Fanfani, and Christian Rivoletti. Frankfurt am Main: Lang. 129–141; “La memoria risorgimentale ne *I vecchi e i giovani* di Luigi Pirandello.” In: *Pirandello in un mondo globalizzato. Narrazione – Memoria – Identità*. Eds. Domenica Elisa Cicala and Fausto De Michele. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2020. 5–23. “Les sémantisations de la mer dans le roman *Partir* (2006) de Tahar ben Jelloun.” In: *Observations. Beobachtungen zu Literatur und Moral in der Romania und den Amerikas*. Eds. Albert Göschl and Yvonne Völkl. Wien: LIT, 2019. 321–330.

Elisabeth Stadlinger studied Italian and Russian Language at the Universities of Vienna and Bologna. In 2017, she received her doctoral degree at the Institute of Slavonic Languages (University of Vienna) with a thesis on the Russian reception of the Venetian theatre author Carlo Gozzi as part of the so-called “Italian Text” in Russian culture, including the first edition of Michail Kuzmin’s late

nineteenth-century opera libretto *Korol' Millo*. She has published an expanded and revised version of her thesis as a monograph entitled *Carlo Gozzi in Russland. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte aus zwei Jahrhunderten* in 2022, she has also worked on the topic of Russian poets' and translators' biography, and has recently focused on women writers in eighteenth-century Italy. At the moment, she is working at the Austrian National Library where she manages processes to open through digital preservation and publication the Library's holdings to the humanities.

Serena Todesco is a translator and scholar of contemporary Italian literature. Her research interests include issues of identity and (self) subjectification related to the notion of gendered and/or cultural otherness in the Italian South. She has dedicated a number of academic articles to the themes of female writing in the Mediterranean and in the Italian South, as well as to the topics of the female body, trauma, and motherhood in the novels of Italian contemporary women writers (Elena Ferrante, Anna Maria Ortese, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Nadia Terranova, Maria Attanasio, Giuliana Saladino, Maria Ochipinti, Viola Di Grado, Slavenka Drakulić). She is the author of *Tracce a margine. Scritture a firma femminile nella narrazione storica siciliana contemporanea* (Pungitopo, 2017) dedicated to historical fiction, gender, and memory in contemporary Sicilian female writing, and *Campo a due. Dialogo con Maria Rosa Cutrufelli* (Giulio Perrone, 2021), a conversation on women's writing, Southern and Mediterranean feminism, and gender culture in Italy. She regularly participates in international conferences and has held seminars on Italian Southern women writers at several universities.

Daniel Winkler is Professor at the Seminar for Romance Studies at the University of Heidelberg, where he teaches Italian and French Literature, Cinema and Culture. He was Assistant Professor at the University of Vienna, Lecturer at the University of Innsbruck and Research Fellow at the École Normale Supérieure and the Institut Historique Allemand in Paris. He completed extended research stays in Marseille, Turin, and Naples and wrote his PhD thesis on Marseille as a cinematic city and his postdoctoral project on Italian tragedy in the Age of Enlightenment. His postdoctoral thesis was awarded the Elise-Richter-Prize of the DRV and the University of Innsbruck's Otto-Seibert-Prize. He has co-edited and co-published 20 books and special issues and more than 60 articles. His publications include papers in peer-reviewed international journals such as *CINÉMAS, Journal of Film and Video*, *Annali di Ca' Foscari* and *Studies in French Cinema*. He is the author of *Körper, Revolution, Nation. Vittorio Alfieri und das republikanische Tragödienprojekt der Sattelzeit* (Fink, 2016) and co-editor of the volumes *Serialität und Moderne. Feuilleton, Stummfilm, Avantgarde* (Bielefeld, 2018) and *The Cinemas of Italian Migration: European and Transatlantic Narratives* (Cambridge Scholars, 2013).

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