*P*rime*r*jaln*a* knji*ž*e*v*nost

Primerjalna književnost

Tematski sklop / *Thematic section*

Sodobno pripovedništvo o sredozemskem turizmu
Contemporary Narratives of Mediterranean Tourism
Uredila / *Edited by*: Aina Vidal-Pérez
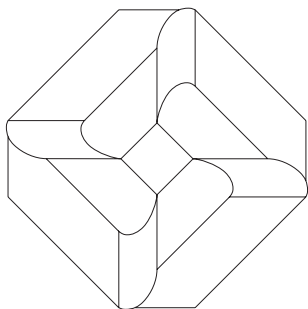
Sodobno pripovedništvo o sredozemskem turizmu (predgovor)

Aina Vidal-Pérez

»Sodobno pripovedništvo o sredozemskem turizmu« je skupni naslov niza razprav, posvečenih sodobnim literarnim reprezentacijam sredozemskega turizma in njegovim ideologijam modernizacije. Medtem ko precejšen del sodobne književnosti na temo Sredozemlja še zmerom eksotizira morje, uzrto skozi nostalgično lečo preteklosti, je v zadnjih desetletjih vendarle opazen vzpon pripovedništva, ki mu množični turizem velja za nezanemarljivo transformativno silo. Tukajšnji tematski sklop razprav se osredotoča na književne pripovedi, ki s pomočjo tematizacije sredozemskega turizma problematizirajo regionalna družbena protislovja. Popotništvo in turizem tako postaneta literarni temi, ki sodobnemu pripovedništvu omogočata dostop do imaginarne razsežnosti Sredozemlja, ki sega od t. i. sredozemske identitete ali mediteranskosti do sredozemskega orientalizma ali mediteranizma in celo do alternativnih imaginarijev mediteranske modernosti.

Sredozemsko morje, od obalah katerega lahko najdemo marsikatero izmed politično in gospodarsko najbolj nestabilnih regij sveta, je že od nekdaj povezano s toposi prostega časa, hedonizma in čutnega ugodja. Zaradi privlačnosti sredozemskega podnebja, starodavnih mest, arheoloških najdišč, v zadnjem času pa tudi kulturnih festivalov igrata popotništvo in turizem ključno vlogo pri prehodu mnogih sredozemskih držav v sodobna kapitalistična gospodarstva. Tradicija nam je zapustila množico različnih podob Sredozemskega morja kot zgodovinskega, imaginarnega, kulturnega in geopolitičnega prostora. Najbolj razširjene med njimi so bržkone povezane s sodobnimi, iz imperializma izhajajočimi geografskimi, zgodovinskimi, političnimi in kulturnimi klasifikacijami, vključno s tradicijo *grand tour*, francoskimi odpravami v Egipt, t. i. *École d'Alger* in britansko antropologijo 20. stoletja. Prevladujoča kolonialna in postimperialna gledišča so narekovala ne le konceptualizacijo regije kot raziskovalnega predmeta, temveč tudi konfiguracijo daljnosežnega sredozemskega imaginarija, ki se je ohranil v turističnem diskurzu. Ta konstitutivna razmerja med turizmom, kolonializmom in imperialnimi formacijami postajajo danes predmet literarnih raziskav.

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Pisanje o Sredozemlju je polno izzivov. Kot je Predrag Matvejević pokazal v svojem *Mediteranskem brevirju* (*Mediteranski brevijar*, 1987), Sredozemlje nima in ne more imeti ene same mere. V primerjalni literarni vedi sta Dionýz Ďurišin in Armando Gnisci pristopila k Sredozemlju kot k medliterarnemu omrežju in nekakšni idealni študiji primera za njuno vizijo svetovne književnosti. A zamisel o Sredozemlju kot produktivnem primerjalnem okviru je starejša, saj jo zasledimo že v prelomnem delu Fernanda Braudela. V tem tematskemu sklopu, ki izhaja iz Braudelovega pojmovanja Sredozemlja kot poroznega, a konstitutivnega dela svetovnega-sistema, je turizem obravnavan kot relevanten dejavnik v sredozemski zgodovini in kulturi. Pripovedništvo, ki tematizira turizem, vpeljuje epizodne, konjunkturne in *longue-durée* perspektive, ki osvetljujejo in problematizirajo sam vznik literarnega Sredozemlja, kakršnega poznamo. Raziskovanje turizma v pripovedništvu nam omogoča, da v literarnem Sredozemlju prepoznamo hevristično sredstvo, ki vsakokrat reflektira sodobnost.

Medtem ko o turizmu že zdavnaj govorimo kot o pomembni kulturni sili poznega kapitalizma, je pripovedna literatura, ki tematizira sredozemski turizem, kljub njenemu potencialu za raziskovanje sodobne kulturne zgodovine Sredozemskega morja le redko deležna primerjalne obravnave. Članki v tem tematskem sklopu zato primerjalno pristopajo h kompleksnemu razmerju med pripovedništvom, reprezentacijami turizma in Sredozemskim morjem. Katere pripovedne figure najdemo ob morskih obalah? Kakšne žanre in pripovedne oblike porajajo priljubljene predstave o popotništvu in turizmu? Katere pripovedne strategije dajejo prostor kritičnemu diskurzu o turizmu? Kaj lahko rečemo o literarnih prispevkih k t. i. sredozemski dediščini? Kako je Sredozemlje kanonizirano v evropski literaturi? Kako sredozemski turistični prostori, vključno z otoki in arhipelagi, strukturirajo literarne forme? Tovrstna vprašanja si neizbežno zastavljajo prispevki k tematskemu sklopu, namenjenemu proučevanju sodobnih pripovedi o sredozemskem turizmu.

Celovit pregled vseh obal, ki jih je izoblikovalo to morje, je seveda le stežka predstavljiv. A določena težnja po pluralizaciji kljub temu zaznamuje prispevke k tematskemu sklopu. Majorka, Ibiza, Kairo, Libanon, Sicilija, Grčija, Istanbul, Marbella in Korzika prevladujejo med lokacijami, ki jih tematizirajo izbrane literarne pripovedi, te pa so tudi same nastale v različnih jezikih, med katerimi prevladujejo katalonščina, moderna grščina, angleščina, italijanščina, francoščina in nemščina. A vse prej kakor dokončen pregled pripovedništva o sredozemskem turizmu je namen člankov dialog; njihove teme tako segajo od kronik

do pustolovščin, od realistične pripovedi do distopije, od potopisov do avtobiografij, od epov do satir in od literarnega šunda do literarne plaže.

Na čelu sklopa članek Eduarda Moye obravnava sodobno književno poseganje v mitologijo Balearov, ki sta si jih potopisje in turistična industrija vselej zamišljala kot zaslon za projiciranje fantazem o idili in eksotiki. Kot pokaže Moyà, sicer mnoga sodobna pripovedna besedila prispevajo k poblagovljenju Ibize in Majorke kot lokacij množičnega turizma, a vsaj del novejšega leposlovja v angleškem jeziku preseneča s kritičnimi odkloni od literarne plaže. V tem balearskem prostoru prispevek Mercè Picornell na primeru petih majorških pripovednih besedil proučuje povezavo med otoškostjo, turizmom in distopijo. Na ozadju otoške tradicije, ki že stoletja zaznamuje zahodno utopično imaginacijo, članek pokaže, da hipertekstualna in temporalna artikulacija distopije kot pripovednega žanra omogoča produktivno kritiko prekomernega turizma. Nikos Filippaios v svojem prispevku proučuje štiri številke publikacije *Mikros Iros* (Mali junak), grške vohunsko-fantastične revije za otroke in najstnike, ki jo je pisal Stelios Anemoduras, ilustriral pa Viron Aptosoglu. Umeščena v Istanbul in Kairo v času druge svetovne vojne, revija *Mikros Iros* po Filippaiosu ponuja značilno eksotizacijo izbranih regij, krajev in znamenitosti vzhodnega Sredozemlja. Sklop nadaljuje Filip Ryba, ki analizira sodobno literarno (re)konstrukcijo libanonskih pojmovanj Sredozemlja v opoziciji do turističnih podob te sredozemske obale. Članek se posveča kompleksni libanonski estetiki morja, ki sega od sublimnega k izviru življenja in k viru grožnje. Nazaj k otoškim prostorom in potopisnim pripovedim nas nato popelje članek Àlexa Morena, ki raziskuje Sebaldov pristop k večstoletni zgodovini škodljivega vplivanja popotništva in turizma na korziško okolje. Po Morenu W. G. Sebald v namerno statični pripovedni drži, ki nasprotuje prevladujoči imaginaciji turizma, upoveduje Korziko kot ambivalentno metonimijo evropske dekadence. Na koncu sklopa pa v svojem članku analiziram pripovedne strategije predstavljanja večjih preobrazb obal južne Evrope. Osredotočam se na plažo kot sporno okolje in kot umetni prostor turističnega letovišča, ki ga obravnavam kot pripovedni obči kraj, ki razkriva medsebojno vplivanje različnih predstav o evropski zgodovini, reprezentacij obalnega okolja in pripovednih strategij.

Urejanje tematskega sklopa je potekalo v okviru podoktorske štipendije Margalida Comas (PD-012-2023), ki jo podeljujeta Vlada Balearskih otokov in ESF+ (2021–2027), projekta ERC »Ocean Crime Narratives: A Polyhedral Assessment of Hegemonic Discourse on Environmental Crime and Harm at Sea (1982–present)« (GA 101043711), ki ga financira Evropski raziskovalni svet, in projekta »Narratives At the Margins

Contemporary Narratives of Mediterranean Tourism (An Introduction)

Aina Vidal-Pérez

"Contemporary Narratives of Mediterranean Tourism" brings together a cluster of essays that share a common goal in their respective examinations of contemporary literary representations of Mediterranean tourism and its ideologies of modernization. While a significant portion of contemporary Mediterranean literature continues to exoticize the sea, recreating it through the nostalgic lens of the past, recent decades have seen a surge in narratives that depict mass tourism as a major transformative force. This cluster of essays focuses on literary narratives that thematize Mediterranean tourism as a way of portraying the region's contradictions. As literary tropes, travel and tourism feed into narratives that enable a deeper exploration of the Mediterranean's imaginary dimensions, ranging from the so-called Mediterranean identity or Mediterraneanness, to Mediterranean orientalism or Mediterraneanism, to alternative imaginaries of Mediterranean modernity.

Home to some of the world's most politically troubled and economically unequal regions, the Mediterranean Sea has long been represented through the tropes of leisure, hedonism, and sensory pleasure. Through the appeal of the Mediterranean climate, ancient cities, archaeological sites, and, more recently, cultural festivals and events, travel and tourism have undoubtedly played a pivotal role in enabling many Mediterranean countries to transition into modern capitalist economies. The Mediterranean Sea has traditionally sustained multiple images as a historical, imaginary, cultural, and geopolitical space. Among these images, those that are most widely circulated likely have to do with modern yet empire-rooted geographical, historical, political, and cultural classifications, including the Grand Tour, French expeditions to Egypt, l'École d'Alger, and twentieth-century British anthropology. Colonial and postimperial perspectives have prevailed in the study of the region, not only in its conceptualization as an object of research but also in the configuration of the far-reaching Mediterranean imaginary that is at the root of the tourism discourse. These constitutive relationships between tourism, colonialism, and

imperial formations are now slowly beginning to be scrutinized in literary studies.

Challenges of writing about the Mediterranean are multiple. As Predrag Matvejević has shown in his *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape* (*Mediteranski brevijar*, 1987), there is and can be no single measure of the Mediterranean. In comparative literary studies, Dionýz Ďurišin and Armando Gnisci have approached the Mediterranean as an interliterary network, an ideal case study for their vision of world literature. But the idea of the Mediterranean as a productive comparative framework goes back to Fernand Braudel's groundbreaking work. Building on Braudel's perception of the Mediterranean as a porous yet constitutive part of the world-system, this cluster of essays examines tourism as an impactful force in the region's history and culture. Tourism narratives reveal episodic, conjunctural, and *longue-durée* perspectives, enabling an exploration of a literary Mediterranean that challenges its very invention. Exploring tourism in narrative allows us to ponder the literary Mediterranean as a heuristic device that never ceases to reflect on the present condition.

Whereas tourism has long been recognized as a major cultural force of late capitalism, narrative literature thematizing Mediterranean tourism has scarcely been addressed in a comparative manner, despite its obvious potential for the exploration of a contemporary cultural history of the sea. The essays that follow aim to develop a comparative approach to the complex relationship between narrative form, representations of tourism, and the Mediterranean Sea. Which narrative tropes are present along seashores? Which genres and narrative modes are fueled by perceptions of travel and tourism? Which narrative strategies give voice to the critical discourse on tourism? Which are the literary uses of the so-called Mediterranean heritage? How is the Mediterranean canonized in European literature? How do Mediterranean tourist spaces, including islands and archipelagos, structure literary forms? These are some of the questions the essays pose in order to advance the study of contemporary narratives of Mediterranean tourism.

Admittedly, one should begin by acknowledging the impossibility of providing a comprehensive account of all the shores washed by the waters of this sea. However, the will to pluralize is tangible in the contributions that shape this cluster. Mallorca, Ibiza, Cairo, Lebanon, Sicily, Greece, Istanbul, Marbella, and Corsica are some of the places covered by the selected narratives, which were written in Catalan, Greek, English, Italian, French, and German. Far from trying to provide a definitive account of narratives on Mediterranean tourism, the

aim of the essays is to invite dialogue; accordingly, the topics of the essays range from chronicles to adventure, from realist modes to dystopia, from travel writing to autobiography, from epic to satire, and from pulp magazine to amenity literature.

The cluster opens with Eduard Moyà's examination of the ways in which contemporary literary works challenge the myths constructed around the Balearic Islands, which travel writing and the tourism industry have historically imagined as a blank canvas upon which we are free to project our fantasies of the idyllic and the exotic. Moyà argues that, while many of the contemporary narratives have facilitated the commodification of Ibiza and Mallorca as sites of mass tourism, recent contemporary fiction in English has led to critical shifts in amenity literature. Within the Balearic insular space, Mercè Picornell examines in her contribution the connection between insularity, tourism, and dystopia through five Mallorcan narrative works. Without losing sight of the insular utopian tradition in Western imagination, Picornell argues that the hypertextual and temporal articulation of the dystopia as a narrative genre fosters critiques of tourism's oversaturation. In his contribution, Nikos Filippaios studies four issues of *Mikros Iros*, a Greek spy-fiction pulp magazine for children and teenagers written by Stelios Anemodouras and illustrated by Vyron Aptosoglou. Dealing with Istanbul and Cairo during World War II, Filippaios shows how this popular literature provides a standardized, exoticizing representation of certain regions, spaces, and monuments in the Eastern Mediterranean. The volume continues with Filip Ryba's analysis of the ways in which contemporary literary narratives capture and (re)construct Lebanese imaginaries about the Mediterranean in contrast to the tourist perceptions of this Mediterranean shore. The article examines the complex Lebanese aesthetics of the sea, ranging from the sublime, to the life-giving, to the perilous. In his article, Àlex Moreno takes us back to insular spaces and travel narratives by delving into W. G. Sebald's approach to the harmful effects of travel and tourism on Corsica's environment over the centuries. In a deliberately static narrative position that contradicts the hegemonic imagination of tourism, Sebald depicts Corsica as an ambivalent metonymy of Europe's decadence, according to Moreno. Finally, my essay examines the narrative strategies of representing major transformations of the coasts of Southern Europe. Focusing on the beach as a contested environment, I read the artificial space of the tourist resort as a narrative trope through which we can investigate the interplay between perceptions of European history, representations of the coastal environment, and narrative strategies.

Isola rasa: Reimagining Mallorca and Ibiza as a Blank Canvas for Tourism in Travel Fiction

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This article looks at how travel writing, travel fiction, and the capitalist stage of tourism have together reimagined Mallorca and Ibiza as isolae rasae, *or blank geographies. The notion of* isola rasa *grasps the commodification of these islands as idyllic, timeless spaces, devoid of any complex history and local community, and serving as backdrops for fantasies of Northern European tourists. This transformation, evident in literature, positions such Mediterranean islands as Mallorca and Ibiza as escape zones for travelers seeking a sensual remedy to the alienation they experience in their own societies. The article discusses the ways in which contemporary literary works both reuse and complicate these tropes. By examining works such as Luke Rhinehart's novel* Naked Before the World *and Matt Haig's novel* The Life Impossible, *the article argues that these works, by narrating the homogenized tourist experience that prioritizes visitors' fantasies over local dynamics, provide a critical platform that enables a productive discussion of the environmental, social, and cultural costs of mass tourism.*

Keywords: travelogues / travel fiction / tourism / imagology / Balearic Islands / *isola rasa* / exoticism

Introduction

Aristotle introduces the category of *tabula rasa* in *On the Soul* to draw a parallel between the mind and an unwritten tablet, suggesting that the mind is initially blank and takes shape only through experience and thought: "Haven't we already disposed of the difficulty about interaction involving a common element, when we said that mind is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable, though actually it is nothing until it has thought? What it thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing tablet on which as yet nothing stands written:

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this is exactly what happens with mind" (429b29–430a1). This metaphor can be applied to the way in which nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers from Europe viewed Mediterranean islands like Mallorca and Ibiza as so many *isolae rasae*—blank slates at the service of the travelers' imagination. These islands became geographic spaces onto which visitors could project their desires and fantasies, shaped by the alienation they felt in their industrialized homelands. Just as Aristotle's mind acquires form through external input, so these islands were perceived as empty and available for the travelers' imaginative and sensual experiences, without regard for their respective histories or ongoing struggles.

This dynamic invites a second category, that of Mary Louise Pratt's colonial gaze (see Pratt), as the travelers' own loss of spiritual or emotional fulfilment—due in part to the dehumanizing effects of industrialization (see Porter; Pemble)—leads them to seek out places they could imagine as pristine and untouched. In their minds, the islands are malleable utopias of compensation, ready to be filled with meaning that suits their personal fantasies, just as Aristotle's writing tablet awaits the impressions of thought. Both categories emphasize the role of perception in shaping reality, highlighting the way in which these islands were stripped of their true identities and transformed into playgrounds for the travelers' imagination.

This article draws upon theoretical frameworks of cultural geography, travel literature studies, and imagology to explore the commodification of Mallorca and Ibiza in contemporary fiction. It begins with a discussion of the notion of *isola rasa*, examining its implicit emergence in the imagery of Romantic poetry, where the Mediterranean is idealized as a space of escapism and sensuality whose inhabitants appear to be voiceless. This enables the article to examine the ways in which twentieth-century travel literature perpetuates rigid images of Mallorca and Ibiza, depicting them as geographies devoted to leisure and pleasure, and their inhabitants as mere incidental characters with limited agency. Finally, the article shows how contemporary novels such as Luke Rhinehart's novel *Naked Before the World* (2008) and Matt Haig's novel *The Life Impossible* (2024) follow the tropes established in previous travel literature in order to attempt a critique. These novels are discussed in the context of amenity literature, understood as "products for the consumption of tourists and migrants belonging to the authors' culture, readers who are ready to travel to or already living in the island and seek additional information that will make their experience more enjoyable, while also craving the pleasure and entertainment of reading fiction" (Bastida Rodríguez and Bosch Roig 10).

The Romantic birth of the Mediterranean island in English literature and its consolidation as a "paradise"

Islands have not only been read as "places out of time" (Edmond and Smith 8) but, precisely because of their isolation, they have also emerged as the ideal field of experimentation for the traveler (see Moser 410). Indeed, it is easy to describe the island as a realm free of imposed rules where individuals can confront themselves, society, and its norms, and which often results in the evasion of these things (see Cohen and Taylor). Islands, and in this case Mallorca and Ibiza, found their place in the cartography of modernity through travel and travel literature (see McMahon), where they were seen as both (geographical) peripheries and centers (of the travelers' wishes).

If the tourist industry has conventionally designed and promoted travel destinations around the appeal of the exotic (see Ward; Dinnie), Mallorca and Ibiza appear at the apex of the exotic discourse in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Blázquez Salom and Murray Mas; Moyà). In the nineteenth century, however, only a few travelers knew about their existence (see Fiol Guiscafré). The islands' marginal appeal originated with the Romantic travelers and developed through their compilations in the early decades of the twentieth century. These sources, travel accounts, and guidebooks provided markers that would label the experience of the Balearic Islands as "an escape from civilization and progress towards the investigation of a world of pleasure" (Turner and Ash 87). This trope has been used to describe Mallorca and Ibiza ever since, whether in fiction, music (see Vicens Vidal), or film (see Brotons Capó et al.), often following the formula of the cult of the Sun (see Littlewood). This formula, I propose here, may have had its literary birth in stanza 63 of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*:

> 'Tis a sad thing, I cannot choose but say,
> And all the fault of that indecent sun,
> Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay,
> But will keep baking, broiling, burning on,
> That howsoever people fast and pray,
> The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone:
> What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
> Is much more common where the climate's sultry. (Byron 61)

Indeed, Byron seems to suggest through his hero that the southern latitude and exposure to a sun that is sultrier than that of the North are the sources of a more relaxed sexual morality in a place where the flesh is

"frail" and where the soul is "undone." This "gallantry" or "adultery" is the result of a metonymic process on the part of the poet (and the readers). In this process, one term is identified with another not because they are similar, but because of conceptual proximity. Thus, the "suffocating sun" is related to a "warm morality" and, by extension, prone to breaking the rules of repression. Sun, by contiguity, is gallantry and adultery. These practices, according to the poetic voice of Don Juan, are more common in the South. This is just one example of the articulation of a ero-zone—a site of liberated morality, sensual warmth, and natural vitality—within the literary construction of the Mediterranean as a sensual space.

The shaping of a romantic destination liberated from the strict puritanical morals of the era follows these premises: firstly, feelings and sensations are celebrated over practical reason; secondly, the allure of the exotic and peripheral triumphs over the monotony of industrial uniformity; and finally, the exploration of personal individuality and the aspiration to attain it beyond the constraints of a dehumanized society take central stage.

The monotony of urban oppression against which the exotic destination is contrasted is captured by William Blake in his 1794 poem "London," where the lack of freedom and signs of pain on the faces of the citizens of the modern metropolis are evoked. In Blake's poem, the modern city embodies the harsh forces of progress, trapping its inhabitants in a cycle of misery and dehumanization. Blake's phrase "the mind-forged manacles" speaks powerfully to the invisible and self-imposed chains created by a society built on economic constraints. The "chartered street" and "chartered Thames" (Blake 76) suggest that even natural and public spaces are commodified in London. The preindustrial appears here as an alternative destination for sensual travelers (see Torgovnick). Their mental manacles will be released in more southerly latitudes far from modern urban constrictions.

John Keats is instrumental in marking this differentiation by proposing idyllic visions of the South. His "Ode to a Nightingale" reflects a yearning for escapism that resonates deeply with the industrialized, polluted reality of nineteenth-century England. The poem juxtaposes the dreariness of a mechanized world with the idealized warmth and sensuality of the Mediterranean, portraying the latter as a space of vitality, natural beauty, and culture. The contrast between the speaker's industrialized surroundings and an imagined Mediterranean allows Keats to explore the themes of exile, longing, and the power of poetic imagination.

The speaker's despair is evident from the opening lines on: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk" (Keats 349). The imagery of toxicity and lethargy evokes the unhealthiness of urban, industrialized England, a place where life feels oppressive and disconnected from nature. This malaise drives the speaker to envy the nightingale, a "light-winged Dryad of the trees," whose song embodies an unspoiled, pastoral existence. The nightingale's melody becomes a symbol of freedom and harmony with nature, contrasting sharply with the alienation of industrial life. Keats' yearning for escape is crystallized in the lines: "O for a beaker full of the warm South, / Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene" (349). The "warm South" invokes the Mediterranean, a land of sun, wine, and carefree mirth. The mention of "Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth" further enhances this vision of Southern Europe as a place of cultural exuberance, a sharp departure from the rigid industrial world. The imagery of wine—symbolizing sensuality and liberation—acts as a vehicle for transcendence, offering the speaker a means to "leave the world unseen" and merge with the natural splendor embodied by the nightingale.

In this imagined Mediterranean escape, the poetic voice dreams of dissolving the burdens of memory and the decay of the present: "Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget" (Keats 350). This verse underscores the seductive allure of an idealized South where life is simpler, freer, and more attuned to the rhythms of nature. This vision of the Mediterranean provides an antidote to the industrialized North, offering not only physical relief but also spiritual and artistic renewal.

Keats' portrayal of the Mediterranean South transcends mere escapism; it embodies an idealized world of beauty and sensory fulfillment, contrasting with the alienation of England's industrial landscape. The vivid imagery of wine, music, and pastoral harmony reflects a longing for a more connected and authentic existence, highlighting the enduring human desire to seek refuge in places of natural and cultural vitality.

The exoticism of the former lines and the longing for new horizons in the South is also expressed in the poem "Happy is England"; there the poetic voice, while praising the simple loveliness of English women, burns to see "Beauties of deeper glance, and hear their singing, / And float with them about the summer waters" (Keats 73). The waters in particular work as a soothing compensation for the strains of the senses of the civilized worker in a modern world. In the sonnet *"On the Sea,"* the poet urges the weary reader to seek refuge by the sea, leaving behind the clamor of modern life and its tiresome duties, in order to listen to the enchanting songs of the sea nymphs: "Oh ye! who have your

eye-balls vex'd and tir'd, / Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea; / Oh ye! whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude, / Or fed too much with cloying melody¾ / Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth, and brood / Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quir'd!" (Keats 80).

In the same spirit, Keats' poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" evokes images of a classical Mediterranean that have been captured in an urn and suggest an infinite pleasure, a wild joy, a mad search for the beauty of the old classical days: "What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (Keats 352). Musical instruments and the celebration of lovers and musicians have been represented forever in the clay pot. The poet cannot hear the music of the instruments but is able to feel it through his imagination: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" (353). This makes the imagined songs much more sensual and sweeter than those that are heard. Mallorca and Ibiza were cast by this spell. Practically unknown by the tourist industry until the early twentieth century (see Alcover; Amengual; Cirer Costa), they will become a "more sensual and sweeter" song—an empty beaker to be filled with the desires of the traveler.

For Archduke Ludwig Salvator of Austria, Mallorca was nothing short of a romantic paradise, a place where nature and simplicity combined to create an idyllic refuge from the world. In his seminal work, *Die Balearen geschildert in Wort und Bild* (The Balearic Islands Described in Words and Pictures, 1869–1891), he sings the island's lush landscapes, rich cultural tapestry, and gentle pace of life, celebrating its unspoiled beauty and authenticity. The Archduke's detailed yet biased exoticizing observations (see Vives Riera) reflect his profound admiration of and personal connection to Mallorca, which he describes as possessing "a charm and solitude untouched by the hands of time" (Salvator 18). The island of Ibiza is also permeated by a spell of magic in the eyes of the Archduke; the island is reflected in "the clear mirror of a deep blue sea that makes objects located at an imprecise distance seem at times far away, at times close by. … An inexpressible charm draws the traveler to the sea with the eagerness to throw himself into the waves to perceive … the unexplorable fascination" (18; my trans.). His work stands out as both a personal love letter and a tribute to Mallorca's and Ibiza's unique allure as a timeless sanctuary.

George Sand is another renowned Romantic traveler to Mallorca. Despite her occasional harsh portrayals of the island's local community, she depicts the landscape with a sense of sublime beauty. In her 1842 book *Winter in Majorca* (*Un hiver à Majorque*), she writes: "[E]verything around me is paradise … mountain shapes of wonderful boldness,

and the sky that seems to be painted by Raphael" (Sand 82). Needless to say, visitors to the island were quick to reproduce this idyllic scenario.

In brief, the literary imagination surrounding islands such as Mallorca and Ibiza reflects a longstanding tension between their geographical marginality and their symbolic centrality as spaces of escape, sensuality, and self-discovery. Romantic travelers from Lord Byron to Archduke Ludwig Salvator constructed these geographies as idyllic refuges, contrasting them with the constraints of industrialized and dehumanized societies. Developed into a ero-zone, the recurring motif of *isola rasa* in the Mediterranean reinforced the islands' allure within the travel and tourism discourses of the twentieth century. Through literature, guidebooks, and cultural narratives, spaces such as Mallorca and Ibiza were transformed into so many canvases for travelers' desires, embodying both the exotic and the familiar following the Romantic pursuit of beauty beyond the modern urban confines.

Commodifying the dream on the empty island: Twentieth- and twenty-first-century travel literature

Following the argument I developed elsewhere (see Moyà), I want to suggest that in the early twentieth century, British travelers encountered the Balearic Islands as they began to embrace tourism, which at the time was increasingly supported by the construction of the first hotels and a growing awareness of the economic potential of the travel industry. These visitors, however, saw themselves as descendants of an authentic and artistic tradition of travelers, not tourists. Their travel accounts, influenced by previous Romantic narratives, emphasized the preservation of what they saw as the fading quasi-authentic Balearics, represented by the picturesque Orientalist imagery that characterized the islands as quaint, exotic, and untouched by modernity. Their writings often adhered to existing stereotypes, focusing on elements like the Mediterranean sun, vibrant colors, and olive trees, which reinforced the exotic appeal of the islands. Any landscape or cultural feature that deviated from this quaint ideal was rejected, as evidenced in their portrayals of Minorca as less picturesque and too British, or of Barcelona as overly industrialized (see Boyd; Flitch).

These travel accounts not only depicted the islands through an ideological lens but also imposed restrictive idealized images on the locals, portraying Majorcans as charming peasants: "In the *plaza* ancient men follow the sun in its daily revolution round the square, warming

their bones against the sunbaked walls, … dazed and torpid, like flies at the end of autumn" (Flitch 84). Alternatively, Ibizans were represented as wild and passionate people: "In Ibiza passions are hot, and women—since they are greatly in minority—at a premium. … The Ibizans are hot blooded, revolvers are plentiful, and the police find it wiser not to investigate *crimes passionels*" (Goldring 71–72). This idealized perspective effectively infantilized the locals, casting them as either static or savage and primitive figures, in contrast to the supposedly modern British visitors. These portrayals unknowingly laid a foundation for future representations that would perpetuate this rigid, idyllic image of the islands in subsequent narratives of tourism.

Interwar travelers criticized the rise of tourism for fostering consumerist behavior, superficial engagement with local culture, and a desire for stereotypical "tourist markers" (MacCannell 110). However, most failed to offer a meaningful alternative, as their accounts often lacked genuine dialogue with locals and depicted the islands through exotic, rigidly idealized images. What is more, travel literature in the 1930s in the Balearics was characterized by both a skepticism toward traditional values and a lighthearted, almost hedonistic attitude toward the war that loomed on the horizon. Francis Caron's *Majorca: The Diary of a Painter* (1939) encapsulates a broader generational disillusionment, portraying the Balearics as a rite-of-passage setting for expatriates, who find the islands to be a permissive, pleasure-driven space. One of Caron's characters, Jeanne, gives her perspective on the island and the reasons for her to visit: "Majorca, where there are no troubles and everything is simple and beautiful, where people who come for a month stay for years, where time passes quickly in the sleepy, damp, warm atmosphere, where nearly everybody does nothing, and where there are painters and poets" (Caron 29). Caron's narrative contrasts a sunny, lethargic daytime landscape with a vibrant, bohemian, and permissive nightlife, depicting the Balearic Islands as sites of escapist indulgence rather than traditional exploration.

Caron's accounts rely on caricatures and stereotypical Sunny South imagery, such as turquoise seas and radiant sun, which serve more as colorful props than meaningful elements of place. This approach distances them from earlier travel writers such as Mary Stuart Boyd and J. E. Crawford Flitch, who saw the Balearics as a place of quiet fulfillment or of a vanishing authentic life. By contrast, interwar travelers portray the islands as zones of sensory pleasure where their own actions become the focal point, rather than any engagement with local life. This shift toward fictionalized narratives reflects a longer tradition of

foreign romanticization, now intensified into a setting for transgressive indulgence in an imagined Spanish passion.

In the contemporary genres of travel fiction, the escapism and pleasure of the previous century gain full strength. Mallorca often becomes a place of exotic retreat—a compensating space that counterbalances the overstimulation of modern life in the authors' home countries. Anna Nicholas' travel memoirs, for example, represent Mallorca as an ideal escape where one can rediscover simplicity and tradition in a rural setting far removed from the relentless pace of urban life. Initially skeptical, Nicholas finds herself drawn to the island's charm and beauty, ultimately deciding to purchase a farmhouse and split her time between her high-stress London PR career and the tranquil Mallorcan countryside. In works such as *Cat on a Hot Tiled Roof* (2008) and *Donkeys on My Doorstep* (2010), Nicholas chronicles her integration into Mallorcan rural life, describing her involvement in farming, almond harvesting, and other local traditions. Through her narrative arc, she portrays Mallorca as a space where expatriates can leave behind the grey lifestyle of industrialized society and embrace an idealized existence surrounded by a "myriad of brightly coloured Mediterranean flowers" (Nicholas 320). In her eyes, Mallorca becomes a timeless sanctuary where she can truly live "lightyears away from my flat in central London … and the constant judder of coaches and lorries as they thunder by" (13). Similarly, best-selling author Peter Kerr's memoir series, beginning with *Snowball Oranges* (2000), depicts Mallorca as a pastoral retreat for expatriates seeking relief from modern pressures. Kerr's humorous accounts—spanning from *Mañana, Mañana* (2001) to *From Paella to Porridge* (2006)—center, once more, on the joys of the ongoing Mallorcan adventure of adapting to a simpler life on the island. This streak of expatriate amenity literature suggests a recurring narrative: Mallorca as an exotic alternative to the authors' native environments, where the island's natural beauty and slow pace of life serve as a corrective to a too-modern world: "Fate had provided us with an opportunity to farm in the most entrancing settings on a beautiful Mediterranean island, it was an opportunity that we were not determined to miss" (Kerr 14). Through lighthearted anecdotes and vivid depictions of island life, authors like Nicholas and Kerr reinforce Mallorca's allure as an idyllic retreat—a place where one can reconnect with nature, community, and oneself, sheltered from the demands of modernity.

Ibiza, as depicted in various literary works, also emerges as a canvas for personal reinvention, erotic liberation, and the pursuit of empowerment, particularly through the lens of outsiders who project their fantasies onto the island. These narratives often prioritize themes of self-discovery

and indulgence, reducing Ibiza to a mythical backdrop rather than a lived space with its own cultural and historical depth. In *Hits Different* (2024) by Tasha Ghouri and Lizzie Huxley-Jones, the protagonist, Cassie, embodies this transformative journey. The authors, publicizing their novel, describe the protagonist's experience in Ibiza as an opportunity to pursue her passion for dance and leave behind her mundane existence, describing the island as a "hot summer" haven where her dreams feel "closer than ever." This framing aligns with the trope of Ibiza as a space for personal rebirth, where its physical and social environment catalyzes self-discovery.

Eroticism and romance frequently define literary representations of Ibiza, positioning it as a site of sensual exploration. Kitty French's *Knight & Day* (2013) exemplifies this theme, leveraging the island's relaxed Mediterranean atmosphere as a backdrop for romantic and erotic escapades surrounded by "[d]azzling turquoise water fringed by sugar-white sands"; the protagonists navigate a narrative of "sun-soaked bliss" (French 1) where the island becomes synonymous with passion and freedom: "Ibiza. Sunshine. Sand. Sea. Sexy girls in cowboy boots" (165). This portrayal perpetuates again the romanticized Mediterranean ideal, casting Ibiza as an exoticized space where Northern European protagonists experience uninhibited desires. The focus on adult clubs, secrecy, and indulgence underscores the island as a site for erotic performance, yet it neglects the local cultural dynamics, treating the island more as a stage than as an authentic setting.

Ibiza, a capital of hedonism as described by Stephen Armstrong in *The White Island* (2005), thus becomes a mythical landscape of perpetual indulgence and possibility. Armstrong's chronicle of Ibiza as a fantasy island, perpetually bathed in a golden summer signifying "the Balearic vortex of charm" (Armstrong 2), elevates the island to a space of limitless self-empowerment. This pseudo-historical study of Ibiza often overshadows its historical and cultural reality, positioning it as a vessel for external desires rather than a place with its own agency.

These representations suggest an ongoing pervasive trend: rather than engaging with the islands' polyhedric identity, these texts position them as fantasy islands where foreign characters can freely engage in activities they would not pursue in their home countries. Such narratives project a couleur-de-rose version of the islands that fulfill the protagonists' desires, ultimately positioning both Mallorca and Ibiza as escapist constructs. This literary framing sides with a colonial gaze that reduces so-called exotic locations to playgrounds for the emotional and erotic exploration of outsiders.

Beyond the surface: Unveiling tourism's blind spots in island narratives

Luke Rhinehart's novel *Naked Before the World* (2008) and Matt Haig's novel *The Life Impossible* (2024) mark a turning point in the tradition of tourist fiction. While they inherit many tropes from earlier works—glorified landscapes, transformative journeys, and the sensual quests of the visitors—they stand out as the first novels to deliver a pointed critique of tourism itself. Both novels challenge the commodification of idyllic destinations, exposing the environmental, cultural, and existential costs of a global industry that turns paradise (imagined or not) into a product. In doing so, they reframe tourist fiction as a vehicle for resistance rather than escapism.

Naked Before the World offers a satirical critique of the bohemian expatriate culture and tourism in Mallorca by exposing the commodification of paradise and the hollow ideals that underlie the pseudo-artistic expatriate community of the 1960s. Set in Maya, a fictionalized version of Deià—a town in Mallorca's northern coast described by a *Lonely Planet* guide as "the holy grail when it comes to idyllic views," a village boasting "a rich literary history" (Govan)—the novel draws on familiar tropes in travel literature, only to subvert them and reveal the underlying self-indulgent consumerist dynamics of the expatriate community. In the novel, the very people who disparage mass tourism are themselves deeply entangled in a performative, exploitative relationship with the island and its local culture, reducing it to a mere backdrop for their own quests for self-reinvention, sensuality, and artistic expression.

The protagonist, a young art student named Katya, is rather predictably drawn to the island in search of an escape from the "phony layers" (Rhinehart 9) of her former middle-class American life. Ultimately, according to the narrator, "[s]he knew she wanted to experiment with her sexuality" (48), and the Mallorcan scenario was propitious to it. The Mediterranean landscape is described in hyper-romanticized terms, heightening the sense of Mallorca as an exotic blank canvas: "The Mediterranean had been only a tiny wash of blue beyond the lowest layer of olives, … the mid-afternoon view made her gasp: the world had become blue—sea and sky expanded in front of her in the bright summer sunlight as if part of some triumphant Technicolor film" (3). In the words of another character: "This island is a paradise. And Maya is the Garden of Eden" (68). Despite this intoxicating scenery, some characters soon realize that the allure of Maya is not untouched by commercialism and the pressures of idealization. Where some saw a

paradise, others saw otherwise: "We seem to be back to the Garden of Eden. 'Garden of Eden!' Dr. Toom sputtered. 'I see sagging tits!'" (302). The idyllic setting, seductive or not, has already been reimagined and repurposed by foreigners, effectively transforming it into a geography tailored to serve expatriate fantasies.

Throughout, the novel critiques the dissonance between the ideals of the expatriate artists and the reality of their actions. Katya joins a community that outwardly claims to resist "the invasion of the … barbarians" (Rhinehart 21), a reference to the tourists, yet this community paradoxically mirrors the exploitative behaviors they claim to reject. Despite their apparent disdain for tourism, the expatriates in Maya are, in fact, engaging in their own brand of tourism, one that commodifies the island and its people as props in a self-centered quest for personal fulfillment. Katya's arrival is marked by her desire to shed her American identity and "stand at last naked before the world" (9), a sentiment that idealizes the Mediterranean as a transformative space capable of granting spiritual and sensual rebirth. Yet her journey reveals that such a transformation is superficial, as her quest for authenticity is constrained by the same forces that drive conventional tourism.

Rhinehart uses the interactions between characters to underscore the lack of genuine engagement with the island's local culture, often reducing the expatriates' romantic ideals to mere objectification and hedonism. Katya herself is commodified within this social setting, as illustrated by the director of the Arts Institute's dismissive comment: "'Any brains?' Dr. Toom exhaled slowly and with dignity. 'I doubt it,' he said. 'Not with those tits.'" (Rhinehart 59). This reduction of her worth exemplifies how even the supposed intellectuals and artists fall into patterns of exploitation. Similarly, Diane's crude forecast for Katya's summer—"You are a beautiful wench doomed this summer to get her ass fucked off by every stiff prick in the village" (180)—further highlights the sexualized gaze imposed upon women in this expatriate enclave.

The expatriate community, with its hedonistic pursuits and thinly veiled contempt for traditional Mallorcan life, becomes a mirror image of the mass tourism it despises. The novel's portrayal of Katya's experience ultimately undermines the romanticized narrative of the Mediterranean as a paradise. By the novel's climax, Katya's search for personal liberation has devolved into a nightmarish ordeal, culminating in a Dionysian scene where she is nearly raped by the very expatriate artists who claimed to seek freedom and authenticity. The irony becomes clear: the utopia that promised creative renewal and sensual awakening instead exposes the protagonist to exploitation, and it is

only Franz, a character aligned with the local community, who ultimately rescues her.

In *Naked Before the World*, Rhinehart critiques the expatriate community's self-perception as a community of noble and authentic seekers, revealing instead their complicity in the ongoing commodification of paradise. The novel's closing sentiment, expressed in Franz's ironic welcome— "Welcome, wench, to Maya" (Rhinehart 309)—serves as a disillusioned farewell to the myth of the island as an untouched haven for personal discovery. Rhinehart's exaggerated portrayal thus underscores a broader commentary on tourism itself, suggesting that tourism is hardly ever an innocent activity, as it is inevitably tainted by the projections and desires of outsiders who consume paradise without fully understanding or respecting its reality.

In *The Life Impossible*, Matt Haig reimagines Ibiza not as an archetypal haven for youthful revelry but as a complex site of mourning, reflection, and potential rebirth. For the protagonist, a 72-year-old retired mathematics teacher named Grace Winters, the island serves as an unanticipated salve for an unbearable loss: the death of her son in a traffic accident. While tradition casts Ibiza as a place where individuals seek compensation for intangible losses—whether alienation or disillusionment in their home countries—Haig's narrative deepens this trope by deploying devices of magic realism and science-fiction and framing Ibiza as a repository of primeval happiness that engages in the preservation of the island menaced by the threats of capitalist tourism.

From the outset, Grace is portrayed as a figure steeped in despair and unable to see value in life after her son's death. Her internal monologue reveals a pervasive nihilism: "I look at what is happening to the world, and I see that our whole species is on a path to destruction. … And I just get fed up with being a human" (Haig 2). Ibiza, in this context, represents a rupture from her mundane reality. Initially, however, the island's vibrant and hedonistic image feels incompatible with her grief: "Ibiza, I imagined, was the loud younger mischievous one who went off the rails. … [A] place of parties for young people with reasons to celebrate … [t]he opposite of me" (20). This juxtaposition underscores the protagonist's initial rejection of the island's mythos, as she views herself as "old and stiff" with "no reason to celebrate" (20). Her decision to travel to the island reflects not a desire for escape but an unavowed recognition of the island's mythical potential of restoring what has been lost. Once on Ibiza, the protagonist begins to unravel her preconceptions.

Haig begins to explore Grace's complex relationship with Ibiza through her encounters with local perspectives. The taxi driver's critique

of the island's invasion by hippies, ravers, and celebrities reflects a nuanced understanding of Ibiza as a site of both exploitation and enchantment (Haig 31). This duality resonates with Grace, who simultaneously critiques and surrenders to the island's myth: "I had never been to a place where pleasure was more expected than this Spanish island" (74). Her eventual embrace of Ibiza's ethos of pleasure suggests a tentative reconciliation with life, albeit through a lens still shaded by her grief. Ibiza fulfills its traditional role as a space of compensation, but not without complication. Rather than offering a simplistic return to happiness, the island challenges the protagonist to confront her loss while acknowledging the potential for fleeting moments of joy: "Happiness in June was as common as equations in algebra" (72). This ambivalence underscores the novel's broader commentary on the human condition—where even in the face of profound grief, spaces like Ibiza offer a glimmer of the vitality and connection that grief threatens to extinguish.

It is precisely this vitality that will inspire Grace to dismantle the commodified results of Ibiza's myth in the second part of the narrative. Once she has fallen for the island, it is time for her to defend it and save it from the hungry capitalist market of tourist development. This is when she starts her journey with Alberto Ribas, a free-spirited elderly biologist who takes her to a magic world that advocates nature, ecology, and local life. The narrative echoes the news by revealing that Ibiza has become a battleground on which forces of capitalist exploitation confront advocates of environmental preservation. This tension is exemplified through the conflicting ideologies represented by Art Butler, an international developer, and the collaborative efforts of Grace and the local biologist, who advocate sustainable living and ecological respect. While the image of Ibiza as a tourist product has driven its global popularity, it also raises critical questions about the consequences of such commodification for the island's identity and environment.

Butler epitomizes the capitalist view of Ibiza, seeing it as a resource to be commodified: "Take paradise, package it, and make people rich" (Haig 318). The development of tourist infrastructure—discos, beach clubs, agrotourism, wellness retreats—is portrayed as an endless cycle of cloning what is unique to Ibiza, stripping it of its essence: "What works here becomes cloned everywhere, taking the heart out of it" (218). For Butler, Ibiza is less a living ecosystem than a malleable product, ready to be shaped for financial gain. This perspective, however, alienates the real Ibiza, as pointed out by a local politician: "The Ibiza you are talking about has only been a perception" (232). The capitalist

focus overlooks pressing local issues such as homelessness near the marina and unregulated parking at Platja d'en Bossa (232), reflecting the disconnect between glossy tourist imagery and lived realities. In stark contrast, Grace and Alberto channel the ethos of preservation and local respect.

Grace's journey captures this transformation from consumer to protector of Ibiza. Initially captivated by the island's aesthetic wonders— "Everything ached with beauty" (Haig 139)—her perspective deepens as she begins to see Ibiza as more than just a destination. Inspired by Alberto's guidance, she embraces an environmentalist stance, declaring that "Ibiza is not for sale" and advocating for the protection of Posidonia seagrass (238). The recognition that "there are no islands"—"If you go far enough down, everything is connected" (226)—underscores the broader environmental message: Ibiza's fate is intrinsically linked to global ecological health.

The struggle over Ibiza's identity reflects deeper social issues. The contrast between those who benefit from tourism and those left behind mirrors broader inequalities: "The difference between a gift and a curse was sometimes a question of perspective" (Haig 226). Alberto recalls a time when life on the island required adaptation to its natural rhythms, fostering a sense of unity with the land that is increasingly eroded by modernization. This loss of connection is poignantly reflected in his lament: "You had to respect the shape of the land. The hills. The pines and the soil" (292). At the heart of the narrative lies a call to action: to resist the homogenization and exploitation of Ibiza by recognizing and preserving its unique identity. In Grace's words: "You will find yourself protecting life, protecting nature, protecting this beautiful island" (193).

The tension between exploitation and preservation in Ibiza serves as a microcosm of broader environmental and cultural conflicts in the modern world. Prioritizing profit over preservation, Art Butler's vision represents the global capitalist approach to tourism. In contrast, Grace Winters and Alberto Ribas champion a more sustainable and respectful relationship with the island, arguing that its true value lies not in its marketability but in its natural and cultural integrity. As the narrative poignantly illustrates, protecting Ibiza entails not only saving a physical place, but also preserving the soul of a community and an ecosystem in its relation to the world.

Luke Rhinehart's *Naked Before the World* and Matt Haig's *The Life Impossible* infuse amenity and leisure literature with a fresh critical perspective. By intertwining social and environmental commentary, they transform the act of travel and turn mere escapism into an opportunity

for local awareness and ecological engagement. They challenge readers to reconsider the ethics of tourism and embrace a more responsible connection to the destinations they explore, redefining leisure as an act of mindful stewardship.

Conclusion

The enduring allure of Mallorca and Ibiza as idyllic tourist destinations reflects a profound tension between their symbolic representations and the realities of their cultural, environmental, and social landscapes. From the early Romantic imaginings of Mediterranean islands as paradisiacal escapes to contemporary narratives that critique the commodification of these spaces, the notion of *isola rasa* encapsulates a persistent dynamic: the reduction of these islands to empty canvases upon which external fantasies are projected. In this article, I have traced the evolution of this phenomenon, illustrating how literary, cultural, and economic forces have coalesced to construct, perpetuate, and challenge the myth of the Balearics as an escape zone devoid of intrinsic identity.

The Mediterranean coast has been romanticized as an exotic sanctuary offering an escape from industrialized life, with early depictions by poets such as Byron and Keats emphasizing sensuality and vitality. This vision persisted in twentieth-century travel literature and its portrayals of the Mediterranean as a space of simple, unspoiled retreat. Catering to Northern European fantasies, these narratives have facilitated the islands' commodification for mass tourism. The resulting environmental harm, cultural homogenization, and loss of local agency have in turn become objects of critique in contemporary fiction. In this respect, the novels by Rhinehart and Haig exemplify a critical shift in amenity literature, exposing the dissonance between the utopian promises of tourism and the realities of ecological and social exploitation.

By juxtaposing idyllic imagery with satirical and critical commentary, these contemporary works reveal the fragility of the constructed identities of the Balearics. They challenge readers to reconsider the ethics of tourism. Rhinehart's *Naked Before the World* deconstructs the expatriate romanticism of Mallorca and exposes the superficiality and exploitation underlying the artistic and hedonistic enclaves. Similarly, Haig's *The Life Impossible* reimagines Ibiza not merely as a playground for indulgence but as a battleground, reflecting broader tensions between commodification and preservation in global tourism.

Ultimately, the commodification of Mallorca and Ibiza is part of a larger pattern in which local particularities are erased in order to satisfy global desires, a phenomenon deeply embedded in the tourism and travel literature industries. Yet, as contemporary critiques demonstrate, there is an opportunity to reimagine these islands not as blank canvases but as vibrant, interconnected spaces deserving of respect and preservation. These narratives can help us foster a more ethical and nuanced approach to tourism, both in literature and practice, and thus challenge the legacy of *isola rasa* and dignify the complexity of these Mediterranean landscapes.

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Isola rasa: Majorka in Ibiza kot prazno platno turizma v potopisnem leposlovju

Članek pokaže, kako potopisi, potopisno leposlovje in kapitalistični stadij turizma predstavljajo Majorko in Ibizo kot *isolae rasae* oziroma prazni geografiji. *Isola rasa* pojmovno zajema poblagovljenje teh otokov kot nekakšnih večnih idiličnih krajev brez zgodovine ali lokalne skupnosti, krajev, ki ponujata zaslon za fantazme severnoevropskega turista. Zaradi te transformacije, ki jo lahko spremljamo v literaturi, sredozemski otoki, med katerimi sta Majorka in Ibiza, postajajo eskapistične cone, namenjene popotnikom, ki iščejo čutno zdravilo za odtujenost, ki jo občutijo v svojih lastnih družbah. Članek zastavlja vprašanje, kako sodobno pripovedništvo reproducira in obenem problematizira te obče kraje. Ob branju romanov, kot sta *Naked Before the World* Luka Rhineharta in *The Life Impossible* Matta Haiga, se izkaže, da tovrstna literatura homogenizirano turistovo izkušnjo, ki daje obiskovalčevim fantazmam prednost pred lokalnimi problemi, upoveduje na način, ki ponuja kritično obzorje, v katerem lahko načnemo razpravo o okoljski, družbeni in kulturni ceni množičnega turizma.

Tourism and Imperfect Island Futures: Simulacra and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Mallorcan Dystopia

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The article discusses the triangulation of the notions of insularity, tourism, and dystopia on the basis of five works of Mallorcan literary fiction. It takes as its point of departure the wager that the genre of dystopia, given the hypertextual and time-based character of the dystopian narrative structure, is a form conducive to raising awareness about the over-saturation of mass tourism. In the article, five novelistic works of anticipatory fiction written by Mallorcan authors will be read from the perspective of the dystopian genre. In these speculative works, the aesthetic logic of the simulacrum becomes particularly important as a tool for the construction of tourist leisure scenarios. When those settings recreate emblems of pristine nature or cultural authenticity in order to promote a holiday destination, they undermine the potential for a pre-tourist nostalgia that might otherwise serve as a foundation upon which one could build an alternative future, one that does not entail mass tourism as an inevitable outcome.

Keywords: Spanish literature / Mallorca / tourism / dystopia / insularity / the Mediterranean / simulacrum

Tourist utopias and the transformation of insular space and time

Utopia and island are two notions that have been interconnected ever since Thomas More built his imaginary world in 1516.[1] This identification is perhaps facilitated by the sense of wholeness attributed to islands—as territorially confined ecosystems—which Fredric Jameson also observes in utopian forms: "this combination of closure and system … which is ultimately the source of that otherness, or radical, even alien difference" (Jameson 11). In the Western imagination, the island is by definition in a different place, and this otherness makes it an attractive space for tales unbound by time, whether they take the form of a utopia, a dystopia, or a place of leisure, far removed from the routine of everyday work (see McMahon; Su et al.). This perception of the island as something that is at once complete and timeless is particularly relevant in Mediterranean settings, insofar as these have been imagined against the backdrop of a mythical past and repackaged as a place of rest and relaxation for the contemporary visitor. In this regard, Aina Vidal-Pérez writes:

> The myth of the Mediterranean inspires the tourist's holiday dreams; dreams that, on the one hand, are tinged with the desire to get to know—albeit briefly—this cultural space of great heritage value, and on the other hand, hope to see the fulfilment of expectations that have been generated by institutional campaigns, brochures, posters, adverts, travel guides, travel agency catalogues, etc. This gives rise to an image of the Mediterranean Sea as a myth and symbol of leisure in industrialized Europe; its value increasing in proportion to the appeal of the sea as a mosaic of cultures, as well as the promise of enjoying the three Ss: *sun*, *sea*, and *sand*; a paradise-like image of the Mediterranean that has gradually taken hold throughout history. (Vidal-Pérez 79)[2]

Following Pau Obrador Pons, Mike Crang, and Penny Travlou, we can add two more s-words to those listed by Vidal-Pérez, namely *sex* and *spirits*, which have become important in building a tourism image for

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[2] From here on, quotations in Spanish or Catalan are translated into English; all translations are by Susan Feuer.

the Balearic Islands (see Obrador et al.). A great deal has been written about the construction of this image, which is rooted in exoticizing accounts by cultured and wealthy Northern Europeans who frequented the island in the early twentieth century, an image that has been in constant use since the dawn of the tourism boom of the 1960s in Spain (see Martínez Tejero and Picornell).

The novels that I will discuss below transmit critical discourses surrounding the impact of tourism on the environment and on the construction of island culture. This construction is usually assessed through the paradigm of acculturation understood as a sudden, massive contact with external cultures that bring about the loss of the region's own cultural roots. The reassertion of traditional local roots in the face of tourist acculturation is the result of a romantic perception of the region and can be seen in protest pictures that use the folkloric image of the peasant as an emblem of a culture under threat that is empowered to resist what is presented as an invasion (see Picornell, "Back Side"). In such images, tradition is used not only to counter the effects of touristification but also to subvert the appropriation of images of local culture in products that target visitors (such as postcards and souvenirs).

Figures 1 and 2: Postcards with folk scenes (originals in color).

Figures 3 and 4: Illustrations against tourist explotation of folk culture by
Juanito Comicartor and Foners (originals in color).

Figures 5 and 6: "Resident Evil" by the design company Melicotó and
postcard by Malafolla.

Opposed to this acculturating perception, recent scholars have de-
fended the need to understand and study tourism as a cultural practice
that is actively engaged in the creation of a local identity (see Obrador

et al.; Vives Riera and Vicens Vidal). In what follows, I share this critical stance regarding the romantic essentialism that underlies certain critiques of touristification. Nevertheless, in order to assess the impact of tourism, we must understand that such impact not only changes the imaginary of the touristified destination but can also force a material transformation of that place to adapt it to the tourists' expectations or even to create a new market niche. Such transformation relies on culturally significant practices for residents and visitors while also being mediatized by whatever the business sector wishes to promote to brand a given destination. The changes spurred by this process are not merely symbolic, as they can also bring about material transformations. For example, the sun and sand holiday supply has historically generated images of Mallorca that imitate those of stereotypical tropics, yet which do not fit with many settings of the Mediterranean island: postcards present vast sandy beaches, landscapes with palm trees, weather that is always warm, and even images of camels carrying tourists along the coastline. Similarly, in the case of Magaluf, an area known for its nightlife and overindulgence, the desire to attract a more affluent target audience would explain the erection of hotels with large swimming pools with surfing waves in a Mediterranean environment that rarely provides the opportunity to surf, and large, green golf courses on an island where water is a limited resource.
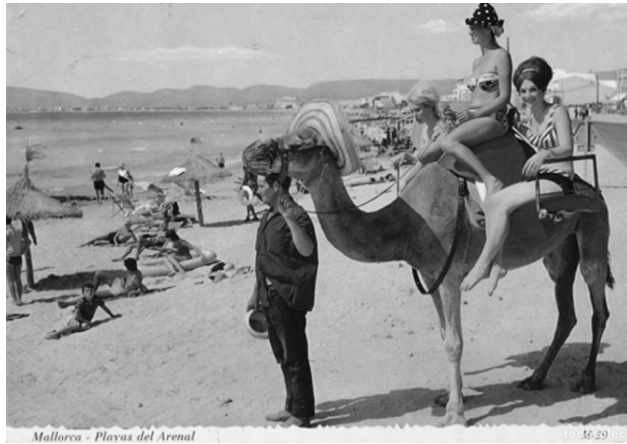
Figure 7: Postcard of the Arenal in Mallorca (original in color).

The touristic gaze that John Urry elaborated as a tool to analyze the touristic experience not only constructs what the tourist wishes to see but can also lead to the adaptation of the tourist space to match the

tourist's expectations (see Urry). In this sense, the notion of anticipation is vital to the shaping of touristic time, as it involves not only generating expectations prior to the visit but also the creation of a place of leisure, that is, a holiday time away from the everyday routine and, finally, an image of the memory of the stay, preserved in photos, postcards, and souvenirs. As such, the configuration of the place and time of tourism is complex for both visitors and residents. Due to this dual impact, this space-time configuration can hardly be viewed as a chronotopic unit. The perception of the region is determined by a palimpsest of mutually interfering hetero- and self-images: the emblematic nature and culture marketed as a tourist attraction and at the same time transformed to match the visitor's expectations. The time of the touristic experience is a hiatus for the traveler, determined by an imaginary machinery consisting of prior expectations and images to be remembered; on the other hand, the resident's identity can integrate the tourist image or recreate an illusory image of life before tourism. In this sense, nostalgia is an ambiguous and at once effective tool for a local reconsideration of the consequences of touristification.

Critical dystopia as a tourist reference

On this basis, I wager in this article the hypothesis that dystopia is a useful genre for a critical analysis of the effects of touristification, and that this is the case due to two key aspects of its configuration: its hypertextual nature and its expression of time. Regarding its hypertextuality, dystopia always entails a secondary story because its very construction requires the existence of a previous point of reference. According to Fredric Jameson, the utopian discourse is characterized by its radical and explicit intertextuality: "[F]ew other literary forms have so brazenly affirmed themselves as argument and counterargument" (Jameson 6). Based on this idea, Elizabeth McMahon analyzes dystopia and utopia as connected forms in the portrayal of insularity as both paradise and prison. This connection would favor a complex reading of utopian and dystopian depictions that forces us to contemplate both the projection (be it optimistic or pessimistic) and its counter-discourse:

> In this process, the reader not only compares utopian and dystopian projections but must also consider the negative elements within the supposedly positive alternative and vice versa. The simple binary is thus doubled as a chiasmus, with the reader directed to consider and dismiss not two but four alternative visions in a complex grid of separate and shared qualities. This double cancellation

acts as a double negative to disallow reification. In its place, the reader must constantly shift between possibilities, none of which are acceptable but which cannot be wholly discarded, and which direct the reader to assess the merits of each possibility against their own historical circumstance. (McMahon 7)

McMahon's revision reinforces my proposal regarding the capacity of dystopian characteristics to juxtapose different opposing versions. Moreover, in those dystopias that have used tourism as a reference, the model to be re-examined refers to the construction of an earlier image that serves as an attraction for visitors and which was built on the foundation of mythicized icons. The touristic dystopia therefore operates by creating a double feedback loop where a simulation that constructs the touristic image is critically simulated. It resembles the finger pointing at the mask that Roland Barthes invokes to characterize the metalinguistic orientation of literature as a meta-imaginary process that forces us to see the processes involved in the construction of images of reality, that is, the simulations that are often normalized in our social life (Barthes 123).

In his illustration of the operation of simulation, Jean Baudrillard used the image of Borges' map, a chart so realistic that it completely covers the reality that it supposedly represents (Baudrillard 1). In a dystopia, this map would not seamlessly fit the world that it aims to represent but would rather signify its very disruption. The second feature of the dystopian concept that reinforces its effectiveness in criticizing touristification is the gap in time that it establishes between real-life reference and its fictionalization. The dystopian story is displaced, often in time or in the unusual, or in both. Such displacement generates a particular structure of time in which the points of reference that constitute the past of the dystopian story and which could almost be contemporaneous with the reader establish causal links with an undesirable future. Adam Stock regards these "future histories" as essential to the political dimension of dystopia as a genre, as they serve as anchors in the conflict-ridden present of the reader (Stock 417).

So far, scholars have identified three connections between tourism and dystopia. The first refers to dark tourism, which, according to Hazel Tucker and Eric Shelton, could be segmented into two subtypes: last chance tourism and disaster tourism. These are not dystopias in the generic sense of the term, but rather spaces that are touristified through a sort of staging that somewhat resembles what occurs in dystopian stories or images. The second connection, which is rather limited yet no less interesting, can be seen in prospective reflections such as the one that appears in the book *Science Fiction, Disruption and Tourism* (see

Yeoman et al.), where science fiction and the dystopian story are used as tools for the projection of future scenarios from which one can gauge the challenges of tourism exploitation. Thirdly, and returning to the literary sphere, Mariano Martín identifies three types of tourism-themed dystopias: those in which the natives adapt their way of life to attract tourists; those that relocate the plot to a galactic setting; and those that depict oppressive forms of organization.

If we consider the case of *England, England* (1998) by Julian Barnes, we can arguably add a fourth category, where the dystopia operates as a parody of tourist attraction models that are based on stereotypical notions of cultural authenticity. According to Martín, in dystopian tourism-themed fiction "there seems to be a promotion of nationalism-inspired tourismophobia within the framework of an implicit opposition between localism and universalism" (Martín 287). Martín's starting point is the idea that "tourism has always been a powerful vehicle for universalization, which favors more open societies and can therefore be detrimental to the maintenance of traditional homogeneous societies" (287). From this point of view, he correlates such "traditional homogenous societies" with those that would defend nationalist positions in the tourist areas of Spain, such as Barcelona and the Balearic Islands. For Martín, the reiteration of the touristic dystopia in Catalan literature, which includes the Mallorcan novels that I will examine below, might be explained by the disruption that tourism has caused in "communities that were previously closed and whose individualistic mindset was very much alive as a result of the use of a regional language" (229). Martín does not consider the history of the areas studied, which were opened up to mass tourism in the 1960s, during the Franco dictatorship, a regime that had actively attempted to remove these languages from public use. Nor does Martín consider that the critical discourses against the touristification of these regions initially emerged from environmentalist advocacy groups and have only recently become linked to other aspects of social life (see Valdivielso and Moranta). The undoubtedly broad dystopian casuistry in Catalan literature usually responds to the influence of new trends in European literature. In fact, as Pablo Pesado has shown for Galician literature, only on rare occasions and only very recently has dystopian fiction of this nature made reference to nationalism or placed its focus on identity.

Tourism dystopias in the Balearic Islands

Dystopia has been one of the themes used most frequently by environmentalist organizations in their effort to denounce the effects of overtourism. Maps teeming with roads and images of a completely built-up island are frequently used to warn of the consequences of continuing the current unlimited growth (see Picornell, "Back Side").

Figures 8 and 9: Images from the 2004 campaign "Qui estima Mallorca no la destrueix" ("If you love Mallorca, you won't destroy it") and the 2018 campaign "Autopista mai" ("Motorway never").

The image of overdevelopment is highly present in the five dystopian novels set in Mallorca that I will examine below, namely Llorenç Villalonga's *Andrea Víctrix* (1974), Pere Rosselló's *L'infern de l'illa* (2002), Antoni Roca and Maria I. Deyà's *Territori amortitzat 114* (2001), Jaume Pons Alorda's *Ciutat de Mal* (2020), and Pere Antoni Pons' *Contra el món* (2023). The first and last of these novels warrant a more detailed analysis, given the complexity of their plots. Although these novels are very different from one another, four of them share several relevant features. The first feature to be highlighted here is linked to the intertextual structure of the dystopia. In the novels by Villalonga, Rosselló, and Pons Alorda, this intertextuality pervades conversations, quotations, and innuendos. In Pons' novel, the pictorial reference generates a similar space for reflection on the world and its portrayal. Secondly, these four novels thematize different lines of criticism that are linked to the complex temporality shared by the dystopian theme and tourism. This takes the form of a recurring imagery of the excessive—stimuli, people, shops, urban development—which finds its opposite in the images of emptiness and waste at the spatial or

historical margins of tourism. As a counterpoint, I will also ask which aspects are preserved as signs of recognition of Mallorcan identity in order to draw conclusions concerning the ways in which tourism-based dystopias engage in dialogue with a pre-tourist past that might be recovered or nostalgically idealized.

Andrea Víctrix

Andrea Víctrix has been viewed by some as the culmination of Llorenç Villalonga's oeuvre. A depiction of a world in decline, the novel was seen by the author himself as his third take on Mallorca, a narrative standing alongside his two most successful novels, namely *Mort de dama* (Death of a Lady), his 1931 debut portraying the social change that took place at the turn of the century, and *Bearn* (1956 in Spanish, 1961 in Catalan), an exploration of the decline of the estate-owning aristocracy of the nineteenth century. *Andrea Víctrix* portrays the future narrated through a register that resembles neither the Catalan *costumbrismo* of *Mort de dama* nor the psychological realism of *Bearn*. Villalonga's dystopian attempt oscillates between irony and absurdity brought about by the hyperbolic use of contemporary literary references, specifically those of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the profusion of useless electrical appliances that do not fit inside homes or which are ultimately thrown off balconies, and the tropes of the thesis novel, with long discussions of history and morality.

The narrator of the novel, which Alfons Gregori believes to be a sort of "alter ego" of Villalonga himself, is frozen in old age, only to be revived in the year 2050. When he wakes up, he discovers an island that has been transformed into a single city. Palma, the capital of Mallorca, is now Turclub, which is short for the official name, Club Turista de la Mediterrània (Tourist Club of the Mediterranean). The year is now 632 of the so-called Fordian era, located in the United States of Europe under an authoritarian regime controlled by Monsieur-Dame. In Turclub, everyone apparently lives a luxurious life guaranteed by the massive purchase of so-called atom-domestics and the consumption of the regime's official drink, Hola-Hola. The waiters are regarded as the highest class, and anyone who questions the regime is locked up in a psychiatric clinic where they are taught to accept the constant pursuit of pleasure as a way of life. The narrator rejects this sense of pleasure, yet due to his old-fashioned mentality he cannot help but be attracted to Andrea Víctrix, a youngster who, like the current inhabitants, is androgynous.

The protagonist gradually ventures into this new world to discover its falseness and to connect with a network of people who oppose this model that will only hasten the decline into which the very system of constant progress is heading. Golden signs with the motto "Progress can't be stopped" adorn the city. In one text of the underground resistance, "The Veil of Isis," a former Hola-Hola worker realizes that this beverage is actually nothing at all. The mystery of its formula, which, like the name, ironically evokes Coca-Cola, masks emptiness. As the narrator writes, the story "lifted the tip of the veil and revealed to the frightened reader a blank wall" (Villalonga 108). This exact wording of the manuscript is seemingly transposed at the end of the book that we hold in our hands, where the narrator also gives in to the resistance by questioning the very reality of the authority he opposes. "I'm thinking," he laughingly remarks in the last line of the novel, "that Monsieur-Dame is perhaps also an ornament" (290).

Indeed, the notion of the ornament is essential to the make-up of this new world of pleasure: it is entirely superficial, with no content to speak of. The Universitat Clàssica is staffed by professors who specialize in decorative history; sexuality is omnipresent—the government holds free mass orgies to which attendance is advisable—yet the protagonist's desire for Andrea and the others who offer themselves to him is inaccessible to the morality of a person displaced from the twentieth century who expects an assigned gender; the trees and flowers are all plastic, and the birds, which are scheduled to sing, become cacophonous when the batteries run out; similarly, restaurants are lavishly staffed with elegant and attentive waiters serving tasteless tinned food. This absence of food in a world that has abandoned agriculture is what actually triggers the decline of this new industrial and touristic empire.

Tourism appears repeatedly in the protagonist's descriptions. As Pilar Arnau has shown, Villalonga has already touched on the subject in his earlier novel, *Mort de dama*, where he draws a contrast between the old aristocracy of the historic quarter and the modern customs of the tourists (Arnau 79). In another novel published in the 1960s, *Les fures* (The Ferrets, 1967), tourism is a source of quick money for the peasant farmers who abandon the countryside, as well as for a young boy who works as a gigolo for wealthy, middle-aged tourists. This demise of moral values is revisited in a more ironic tone in *Andrea Víctrix* (see Ventayol Bosch). *Andrea Víctrix* denounces not only tourism, but also the notion of limitless progress and the loss of modern cultural references in the consumer society. In Villalonga's Mediterranean setting, however, tourism is the main culprit. Three aspects of this industrial

tourism are critiqued. The first one concerns the lack of calm and makes explicit reference to one of the works that laid the foundations for the tourist image of the island, namely Santiago Rusiñol's "L'illa de la calma" ("The Island of Calm"), an essay from 1912 which presents the island as an ideal place for rest and relaxation. In Turclub, this calm is both a draw for visitors and completely impossible due to the very activities offered to them. The streets are eternally flooded with light and brimming with noise and smells. Loudspeakers fill the streets with advertising to such extremes that there is some concern as to whether this excess might affect the influx of tourists. We are told that the city of Cannes has hotels that advertise "No radio or TV: all top quality" (Villalonga 59), but by attempting to trumpet this slogan louder than the neighboring hotels which copy it, the managers defeat its very purpose. Some of the advertising slogans that are repeated are copied from those that appeared in the Balearic press as early as 1963. One intrusive author makes this explicit in a footnote. This minimal gesture is enormously relevant and contributes to the awareness of the simulation to which the narrative's intertextuality points as well; it breaches the limits of the story by a footnote that necessarily comes from an intrusive author, distanced from a narrator who, as we have seen, could be viewed by the informed reader as an alter ego of Villalonga. It is in this manner, through the novel, that the author underscores the novel's fictional nature.

The second effect of touristification denounced by *Andrea Víctrix* relates to the urban development of the region. The metamorphosis of the entire island of Mallorca into a sprawling city is a central concern of critical geography studies as they address the issue of land use and zoning on the island (see Picornell, "Insular Identity"). In Turclub, skyscrapers block the view of the sky, and cars flood the roads and avenues, where drivers are rewarded for running over pedestrians. The island's emblematic buildings have been converted into hotels, and Palma's cathedral has been replaced by a functional building. The city obtains an opulent and highly developed appearance, "with modern streets, and once in a while, some freshly built ancient monument" (Villalonga 15–16). Classical architecture is presented as an architectural pastiche, reconstructed as a purely aesthetic artefact entirely stripped of any cultural reference. Hence, we see newly built Roman palaces in streets where most of the citizens are dressed in togas. The authorities have made this dress code compulsory for everyone except for troublemakers, who can wear jeans. The reason for this exception, Andrea explains to our astonished narrator, is the fact that the troublemakers "have

become part of the folklore. … They seem to be of interest to certain tourists" (64).

As to the third effect, cultural localism appears to have been transformed to adapt to the tastes of the tourists. In Turclub's world of pleasure and overindulgence, the peasant women dressed in traditional Mallorcan attire who were once portrayed on folkloric postcards now appear to be overly prudish, and are therefore placed alongside bull-fighters, odalisques, and Spanish Civil Guard officers. Moreover, in the new fast-track tourism, supersonic tourists can no longer really know what place they are visiting. For this reason, the tour guides inform them that when they get home, they can watch a ten-minute television show and read a 560-word summary with "the history, monuments, folklore, and cuisine of the countries they have seen" (Villalonga 167), so that they can describe them to their friends. Hence, the times of tourism have also been transformed.

Villalonga's ironic nightmare invokes tourism to create a story of disillusionment with an opulent world with muddy feet. Here, the classical and local cultural references do not disappear, but rather become a commodified pastiche. Moreover, the target audience of this place is made up not only of tourists but also locals who live their lives strictly for leisure. The Mediterranean spirit becomes a source of attraction that is built on clichés as a purely aesthetic element resembling an artificially projected classicism, as seen in the architecture, the togas, and the very name of the touristic city. At the end of the novel, the only salvation imaginable for those who want to resist is to head off to new islands in Indonesia, colonized to restart a story of progress with no point of reference. In Villalonga's narrative, those islands, too, will continue along the road to decline.

L'infern de l'illa, *Territori amortitzat 114*, and *Ciutat de Mal*

Published a year apart, Pere Rosselló's *L'infern de l'illa* (The Hell of the Island) and Antoni Roca and Maria I. Deyà's *Territori amortitzat 114* (Amortized Territory 114) exemplify two different approaches to excessive touristification. While Rosselló's book uses irony to weave a critique of both the current model and those who are presently promoting it, including politicians, hotel owners, and residents who have lost their identity, there is no hint of humor in the novel by Roca and Deyà. Instead, their family story uses references from pre-tourism Mallorca to reconstruct an island that has been completely devastated.

L'infern de l'illa is a humorous short novel that explicitly takes the form of a meta-literary pastiche. In fact, it is difficult to understand most of the book's references without considerable knowledge of Catalan literature. This local bias is interesting in a work that is presented as a nod to the reader. It generates a space for recognition as part of a literary and cultural community that acknowledges its own impending extinction in the novel itself. In it, modernist writer Santiago Rusiñol, who, as we have seen, appears in *Andrea Víctrix* as the founder of the image of Mallorca as an island of calm, returns to the now-deceased island. Upon arrival, he cannot find his way out of an ever-expanding airport which is so large that the workers building it have not even been informed that the construction work is complete. Threatening to engulf the entire surface of the island, the airport is described as a sort of parodic Dantesque hell through which Llorenç Villalonga, the writer-turned-character, accompanies Rusiñol. The airport, full of walkways and paths, in fact takes the form of an enormous ensaïmada, the island's most emblematic pastry.[3] When viewed from the mountains of accumulated construction debris, its expansion resembles a cancer devouring the entire island. Despite Rusiñol's initial dismay, the ensaïmada-shaped airport is not a particularly dangerous place. According to the writer-guide, who quotes another writer, Salvador Espriu, it is a labyrinth, "inconsequential, harmless for tourists, … a sort of a theme park, a virtual reality. Do not forget that at the end of the day, our island is a place for enjoyment, a paradise" (Rosselló 36). The most terrifying hall of this labyrinth leads to an immense city of hotels, apartments, golf courses, and discotheques that are completely empty, under the threat of a storm that is preventing tourists from visiting. It is the hell of the hotel owners who have destroyed the island and who are condemned to live in their world, uninhabited by visitors.

The ironic and metaliterary nature of this novel is reinforced by countless references to its own fiction. Rusiñol himself notes that this ever-expanding airport could never be a nightmare, since he is dead and as such does not have dreams. Yet it could never be real either. Neither dream nor reality, the airport may well be fiction. It is explicitly presented as "a symbol, a hyperbole, a caricature, … a literary figure" (Rosselló 27). Rusiñol's complaints about the difficulty of moving through this airport with no way out are supported by Villalonga, who reminds him that an author cannot make fiction on his own and that they, the characters, must contribute to its development. In fact, this

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[3] This is a spiral-shaped pastry that comes in different sizes and has been marketed as a souvenir in bakeries and in the airport itself, placed in octagonal boxes.

very author of the *nouvelle* is critiqued in the footnotes by an alleged editor who, for example, questions the author's placement of words in the mouths of characters who could never have uttered them. Similarly, at the end of the book, when Rusiñol complains that the novel we are reading is too short, another writer, Gabriel Alomar, reminds him: "You forget, Tiago, that the island is small, that the land and the water and the energy resources are limited, and that this hell, this ensaïmada, airport, or labyrinth—whatever you want to call it—is only a toy" (111). Moreover, he adds, with the little time currently available for reading, it is necessary to facilitate the task for readers. The readers are in turn left with doubt as to what is specifically meant by this present tense, which is simultaneously included in the dystopian present and in the present moment of reading. The novel ends by evoking a lost paradise that humankind has destroyed: "There remains only the country of our memory and of our sweetest dreams, populated by those who can only see its beauty because we know how to look at it. Here we can remain forever" (112). This ironic pastiche is at once a eulogy in which all that remains of the island is merely a remembrance. The authentic island is only accessible through memory and fiction.

In 2001, a year before the publication of *L'infern a l'illa*, Antoni Roca and Maria I. Deyà published *Territori amoritzat 114*, a book that follows the clichés of the genre much more closely than Rosselló's short novel. Like *Andrea Víctrix*, a different geopolitical world is presented here, one in which the specificity of each individual region has been replaced by global confederations. In this new milieu, Mallorca is an island lacking in resources, marginalized on the fringes of international financial networks. The island is therefore portrayed as a counter-image to the tourist destination. In the face of today's growing demographics, we are confronted with an almost uninhabited place, with a small airport that can only be reached via horse-drawn carriage. A quasi-historical report explains the reasons for this situation. Although it was a prosperous place in the early twentieth century, almost entirely geared to mass tourism, which generated wealth in the hotel and construction sectors, the island's water and energy supplies and waste management presented significant problems. As a result of its monoculture of tourism, the island was listed on the world stock exchange under the name "Mallorquische, Societat Territorial Anònima" until the rise of the sea level caused by climate change made it an unattractive place for tourists. Despite the fruitless attempts of a Mallorcan nobleman to purchase the land, by 2030 the island had become a depreciated, unsalvageable place that could not generate wealth.

In this case, the virtual banishing of the island's landscape is taken up by a new traveler, a scholar of Mallorcan origin on a quest for the jewels of the ancient crown of Mallorca. On this journey, she meets different characters who refuse to leave the island and who guide her through places that can be recognized by any local resident. Those places are described among the ruins—abandoned villages, debris in constant combustion—and the recovery of a simpler, more natural life. The island's few remaining inhabitants subsist by farming or by trading in waste. Nature has gradually reclaimed places and the children play traditional games in the street, as there are no television sets. The characters who guide our protagonist are archivists and historians, custodians of the past. In this way, the dystopia exposes and denounces the effects of the region's over-commercialization and presents the image of an impoverished landscape destroyed by the rise in sea levels. This scenario nevertheless generates a twofold place for optimism. On the one hand, nature is creatively regenerating abandoned spaces, not only by recovering the land but also by taking in new species. On the other hand, there is new hope in the discovery of the protagonist's ancestry, as she is the heiress of medieval jewels that embody wealth and symbolic importance which would enable her to buy the island. Personal history is therefore rooted in the collective history, to generate a possible future. Oddly enough, this critical and hopeful story does not include images associated with simulation or any recurring intertextual references. Mention is again made of the changes of historic place names—the city of Palma had at some point come to be called Palmabadia (Palma Bay)—yet the timeline of the basic story is linear: from the lost heritage and inheritance, the story moves on to the recent past, when such loss occurred, to the present time of the novel, when the consequences of that loss are explained, and finally, to the anticipation of a possible future that might allow that damage to be undone.

Unlike *Andrea Víctrix* and *L'infern a l'illa*, *Territori amortitzat 114* does not rely on literary references to underpin simulacra. Those references, however, abound again in Jaume Pons Alorda's novel *Ciutat de Mal* (City of Evil). Here, intertextuality is constructed both through quotations, which can be more or less overt or even stated in the epilogue, and through alter egos of certain characters, who bear some level of resemblance to certain writers. However, in this case, there is no external, time-traveling narrator, but instead an outcast writer with an inferiority complex who seeks out points of reference in a depraved world controlled by an authoritarian figure known as "el Constructor"

("the Builder"). The immense city that the island has become is a place built anew over the rubble of the obliterated space. The image of simulation reappears in a dystopian world.

The novel begins as follows: "I have always thought, too, that the sea is like a person. It penetrates and is penetrated. However, this sea is not what it seems, but instead a gruesome illusion, an artificial pond made by the Builder and his assassins. After the fiasco of the City's last update, they had to demolish entire neighborhoods to rebuild nature, but a false one" (Pons Alorda 11). In the heart of the city, our protagonist, a writer who always stammers when speaking directly, travels inside a worm-metro to find a typical dystopian city with outlandish and somewhat violent characters and strange shops. Surrounding the city is a ring of "destruction, wasteland plots, changing streets, this parched road and the snow that cakes everything with brownish scum" (35–36). Like Villalonga's Turclub, the setting is characterized by false opulence and sexuality that is far more explicit here. The Mallorcan cultural references that enable us to recognize the place in question are perhaps the most stereotypical and are evoked without the slightest hint of nostalgia. The pig slaughter appears as the finale of cultural celebration, and ensaïmadas of all types appear recurrently as a sweet that is often combined with orgies and scenes of sex and violence. Only in one chapter is there a hotel; there, we see the protagonist, who is carrying some ensaïmadas and finds him- or herself in an orgy that culminates with a ritualistic balconing ceremony.[4] The theme of tourism is therefore not explicit, as everything ultimately relates to tourism: the lifestyle of overindulgence, the overbuilt land, and the simulated scenarios over a ravaged landscape.

Contra el món

Finally, Pere Antoni Pons' *Contra el món* (Against the World) provides a contrast to the novels discussed above, given its realist tone. The realism of *Contra el món* is the effect of the contemporary nature of the plot (here, dystopia is generated by the unusual) and of the desire to portray the destruction of the island and its identity through different types of Mallorcan people—builders, ecologists, and artists—who

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[4] The term "balconing" refers to the dangerous practice of young tourists who attempt to jump from balcony to balcony in the hotels or who jump into the pool from the balcony of a hotel room—an activity that often ends in death.

represent different attitudes regarding tourism and local life. Here, the dystopian element is generated by a specific event: one day, the Serra de Tramuntana mountains rose up. Everything has disappeared as though it were swallowed up by the atmosphere, leaving a huge, empty plain in its place. The novel narrates the reactions of different characters. Their thoughts about the causes of the unusual phenomenon and disappearance lead to a debate about the recent history of the island. Whereas Matias, who has worked in the hotel sector, believes that tourism enabled progress on the poor island, Miquel, a militant environmentalist, feels that tourism has caused nothing but a squalor that is as "frenetic and opulent" (Pons 48). For this character, the event represents a sort of revenge by nature in retaliation for the wrong that has been inflicted on the island's natural environment. Yet the pursuit of the causes is hardly a priority in the face of the need to rebuild and the possibility of generating profits with an enterprise of this magnitude.

The decision to use the Serra de Tramuntana mountains was no coincidence, as it is a protected natural area and a World Heritage Site. The novel itself describes it as "the most emblematic landscape" and, mimicking a typical guidebook, as "the most ecologically and culturally rich area of the island" (Pons 59). As a result of the natural event, everything suddenly looks both different and similar. A hard-to-describe void fills the space once occupied by nature, as well as by towns with names "that had always sounded hospitably unchangeable, yet now only exist on the outdated fiction of maps" (62). The lost heritage exists only through its images in memory. Government action in response to the disaster is organized almost immediately to maintain the economy and prevent a decline in tourism. Indeed, two tourism companies endeavor to take advantage of the situation. The first and most immediate attempt is made by international dark tourism companies. However, it is ultimately unsuccessful because the emptiness left behind by the catastrophe does not make it a sufficiently photogenic location. The company that succeeds in the reconstruction is a corporation with German and Spanish capital that quickly plans a multi-million-euro project to occupy the space. Under the name "Mallorca Nova," a re-creation of the local area is presented as a "revitalizing tribute to the lost Mallorca" (131); yet it can only ever serve as a pastiche designed to attract new visitors and residents. This reconstruction takes a stereotypical local image as its reference. Far from healing the trauma, the project makes it impossible to overcome it. One character explains: "It can lead to an exaltation of tasteless-ness, which, rather than reconnecting the past with the present in an

attempt to mitigate the impact of the trauma, actually has the opposite effect, embedding the trauma of the present in the body of the future as a copy of bad taste, ostentation, and greed" (131). And when this same character is invited to visit the redeveloped areas, he is left retching beneath a tree, overwhelmed by the images of this reconstruction of the historic site, which has now been transformed into an apparently bucolic setting that justifies the construction of large housing developments in the area.

The second counterpoint to this idea is presented with an original correlation. Sebastià, one of the main characters, is a painter renowned for his abstract paintings. Following the disaster in the Tramuntana mountains, he begins to paint a series of very large paintings that offer a hyperrealist reproduction of the natural landscape, free of any human presence. As representations of the lost place, the images give rise to multiple interpretations, including those that view the gesture as "a nostalgic lament for an irretrievable past" (Pons 263) or as a satirical portrayal in which "the painter rises above the drama of the mountains' disappearance and cordially laughs at those who hoped to remain entrenched in the Mallorca of the past" (253). The painter himself has no idea what inspired him to create these paintings, which, for personal reasons, he ultimately sells to one of the developers of Mallorca Nova. Not even art can generate alternatives to destruction, as it also ends up entangled in the machinery of power. As such, the story's disappointing ending presents a setting in which everything will remain the same. The debris that has been floating in the atmosphere begins to fall on the island from the sky. Despite the hopes of the group of ecologists, no meteorite actually hits the island. "Mallorca has remained intact," the painter observes, adding: "It's totally destroyed" (409). This sentence, which closes the novel, leaves us with a simultaneously bleak and alarming thought: unless there is a radical change in the mentality of the local people and those who govern the island, nothing, not even a dramatic warning from nature, can lead them off the road to disaster. Undoubtedly, the most disturbing aspect of the novel is that it is presented as if it were the most ordinary of situations. It portrays different viewpoints of the problem, held by politicians, investors, intellectuals, and ecologists, all of whom could easily be those of today.

Conclusion

My aim in this article was to examine the relationship between dystopia, insularity, and tourism through the lens of five contemporary novels from Mallorca. In most of these novels I was able to detect a critical view of a model of progress that relies on an unlimited growth of the island's tourism industry. To convey this view, the novels generate a distinctive poetic of simulation where the paradigm of successful growth, embodied by accessible leisure, large facilities, and promotional images of the island, is unmasked as a sham. The image of tourism is presented as a construction that reveals its falseness and leads to disaster through a dystopian situation. However, any reconstruction based on nostalgia can only ever result in a satirical or revolting pastiche. The only novel that dares to present a glimmer of hope, Roca and Deyà's *Territori amortitzat 114*, does so as a future possibility and by undertaking personal action on an almost deserted region. If the dystopian register does generate a place from which one could rethink the island, it is by exposing the simulated nature of the touristic facade. This opens up cracks in the surface of the tourism growth bubble, affording a glimpse of what lies beyond the facade that is the field of vision of the tourist gaze.

In the 2019 documentary film *Tot inclòs* (All Inclusive), a nature preservationist points out that the environmentalist struggle in the Balearic Islands has gone from being topographical, that is, focused on specific places in need of protection, to being more general, with an attitude summarized by the slogan "Let's save the island." The slogans that have inspired their actions over the last decade, including "SOS Residents," "Life in the Center," and "Today for Tomorrow," connect the need to protect the land with a sense of social and personal well-being. What is still missing is a specific vision of that possible future. If such a vision has not yet been formulated, one can only speculate that it is because it would be extremely complex fiction, and even somewhat discouraging in its sheer slowness. This would be a fiction of persistent change, resistant to the ups and downs of politics, faced with global capitalism and the urgency of immediate action that many people face in their fight for a better future—in other words, short-notice evictions, bulldozers that irreversibly destroy cultural heritage, or asphalt that solidifies far too quickly, giving rise to new roads and housing developments.

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Turizem in nepopolne otoške prihodnosti: simulakri in nostalgija v sodobni majorški distopiji

Članek obravnava prepletenost pojmov insularnosti, turizma in distopije na ozadju petih majorških pripovednih besedil. Izhaja iz hipoteze, da je žanr distopije po zaslugi specifične hipertekstualnosti in temporalnosti distopične pripovedne strukture forma, ki lahko prispeva k ozaveščanju o nevzdržnosti množičnega turizma. Članek analizira peterico romanesknih del spekulativne fikcije, ki so nastala na Majorki, z gledišča distopičnega žanra. Estetska logika simulakra se v teh romanih izkaže za pomembno orodje za ustvarjanje scenarijev turističnega brezdelja. Ko tovrstna prizorišča poustvarjajo embleme prvobitne narave ali pristne kulture, namenjene promociji počitniških destinacij, prezrejo potencial pred-turistične nostalgije, ki bi sicer lahko ponudila izhodišče za zamišljanje alternativne prihodnosti, v kateri množični turizem sedanjega časa ne bi bil neizbežen nasledek.

From the Mansion of the Pasha to the Crypt of the Sphinx: The Representation of the Eastern Mediterranean in the *Mikros Iros* Magazine

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The article examines issues 17–20 of Mikros Iros *(*Little Hero*), a widely read Greek pulp magazine for children and adolescents written by Stelios Anemodouras and illustrated by Vyron Aptosoglou. Published weekly between 1951 and 1968, the magazine has appeared in a total of 798 issues. Its protagonist, the teenager Giorgos Thalassis, joins the Greek resistance during the German Occupation of Greece (1941–1944). The narrative intertwines real historical events with elements of popular literary imagination. In issues 17–20, Giorgos confronts the Nazi agent Seitan Alaman, first in Cairo and subsequently in Istanbul. These episodes construct a representation of regions, spaces, and prominent monuments of the Eastern Mediterranean, shaped predominantly by discourses of Orientalism, ethnocentrism, antifascism, and popular fiction. To interpret these representations, the article employs a theoretical framework that draws on Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism, Marc Augé's concept of touristic non-places, and Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism.*

Keywords: modern Greek literature / Anemodouras, Stelios: *Mikros Iros* / pulp magazines / imagology / Eastern Mediterranean / Orientalism / non-places / banal nationalism
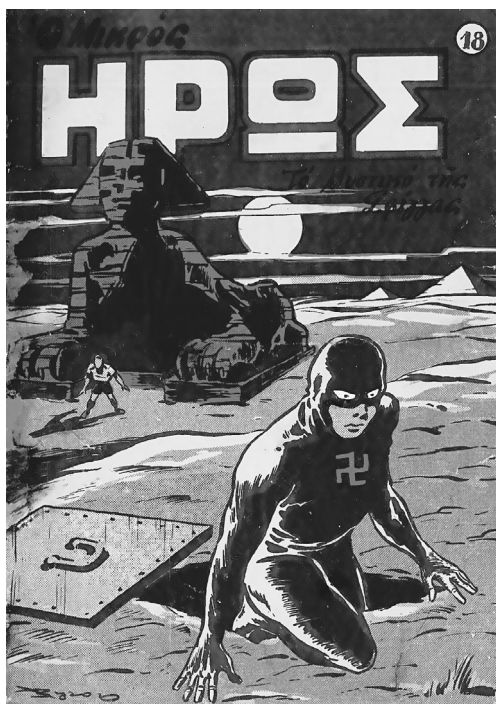
Figure 1: Cover of issue 18 of *Mikros Iros* titled "The Secret of the Sphinx."[1]

In this article, I examine issues 17–20 of *Mikros Iros* (Little Hero), a highly successful and influential Greek pulp magazine of spy fiction targeted at children and adolescents during the 1950s and 1960s. A significant part of the narrative in these issues unfolds in Istanbul and Cairo during World War II. These two cities, as major urban, cultural, and historical centers of the Eastern Mediterranean, serve as the backdrop for a classic conflict between archetypal characters: the protagonists aligned with the Allies, and the antagonists belonging to the Axis powers. Within these issues, a complex narrative emerges that intertwines features of literary styles and genres with broader cultural and ideological elements in patterns of both antagonism and synthesis.

In this article, I will refer to these literary and cultural motifs as discourses to grasp the integration of narrative structures into a broader socio-historical fabric that interests me in *Mikros Iros*. Following Michel Foucault's classic conceptualization of *discourse*, reading the magazine in terms of discourse will enable me to pose the question of fundamental socio-psychological mechanisms of persuasion and discipline.

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[1] I am grateful to the publisher Leokratis Anemodouras for sending me the image.

Three primary discourses seem to be at play here. First, there is the Orientalist-touristic discourse through which historically and culturally significant urban spaces and archaeological sites of Asia Minor and Egypt—particularly Istanbul and Cairo—are portrayed in exoticized terms. These representations reflect what Edward Said describes as "the broadly imperialist view of the world," characteristic of Orientalism (Said 15), and they also align with the commodified, ahistorical lens of mass tourism. This discourse is further shaped by the stylistic conventions of popular culture, especially popular fiction. However, alongside this Orientalist-touristic perspective and the tradition of popular fiction, a third discourse emerges, rooted in ethnocentric historical memory. This discourse is informed by complex and often nostalgic associations with the Eastern Mediterranean that were prevalent when issues 17–20 of *Mikros Iros* were published (see Vlachos 20). As we will see, the construction of fictional characters is deeply entangled with these discourses, forming a dynamic interplay between narrative, ideology, and cultural memory.

A first encounter with the little hero

Before I proceed with my analysis, let me provide an overview of this iconic Greek pulp magazine. *Mikros Iros* was an exceptionally popular and culturally influential periodical aimed at children and adolescents, published weekly from 1951 to 1968. Over its 17-year run, it produced 798 issues. The magazine was both written and published by Stelios Anemodouras (1917–2000), while the illustrations were primarily created by Vyron Aptosoglou (1923–1990), who signed his work under the pen name Byron. Anemodouras also used the pseudonym Thanos Astritis, in order to distinguish his popular fiction writing from his professional identity as a journalist and publisher in Athenian newspapers. Nevertheless, *Mikros Iros* and similar children's magazines ultimately became the focal point of Anemodouras' writing and publishing career, spanning from the early 1950s to the late 1990s.

The magazine's format remained consistent throughout its publication history. Each issue measured 17.5 × 12.5 cm and comprised 32 pages. The cover featured colorful illustrations, while the interior pages combined prose with black-and-white drawings that interrupted and complemented the text. The pricing of *Mikros Iros* was deliberately kept low, making it affordable to a broad base of young readers across Greece. Like other pulp magazines for youth during that period, it was

distributed from Athens to mainly urban regions via the nationally established network of the (mainly Athens-based) press.

The protagonist of *Mikros Iros* is a Greek teenager named Giorgos Thalassis. Following the murder of his parents by the Nazis, Giorgos forms a guerrilla group that actively resists the Axis powers during the German occupation of Greece (1941–1944). The hundreds of adventures depicted across the magazine's 798 issues are rooted in real historical events. Indeed, Greece witnessed a strong resistance movement against the Axis, largely supported by the British and other Allied forces. In 1982, these efforts were formally recognized by the Greek state as part of the National Resistance.

Nevertheless, alongside its historical underpinnings, *Mikros Iros* is heavily shaped by conventions of popular literary genres—particularly spy fiction, thrillers, and sentimental novels. As such, the magazine weaves together historical reality and literary imagination, often allowing the latter to overshadow or reframe the former.

Perhaps the most striking example of this mythologization of history through popular fiction is the way in which the National Resistance is portrayed in the magazine. A defining aspect of the Resistance period—and of the Occupation more broadly—was the violent and polarized conflict between left-wing and right-wing factions. This political division ultimately culminated in the Greek Civil War (1944–1949). Yet, this central historical tension is conspicuously absent from *Mikros Iros*.

Although Anemodouras held leftist antiauthoritarian and antifascist ideas throughout his life, he consciously self-censored his work, particularly in *Mikros Iros*. This decision was likely motivated by a desire to avoid conflict with the dominant anticommunist and ethnocentric governments that mainly governed Greece in the aftermath of the civil war, up until the 1960s. The result is a narrative that, while antifascist, strategically omits the politically sensitive cleavages that defined Greece's wartime and postwar experience.

Due to the central role of popular fiction in *Mikros Iros*, its narratives are marked by a pronounced Manichaean dualism. On one side, Giorgos Thalassis, his team, the Greek resistance, and their British allies are portrayed as embodiments of freedom, justice, democracy, and Christian virtue. On the other side, the German Nazis, the Italian fascists, and their collaborators are consistently depicted as evil, violent, tyrannical, and corrupted by an insatiable desire for political and economic domination.

Giorgos' two main companions are Spithas ("Spark Boy") and Katerina. Spithas is a physically large, somewhat dim-witted, but courageous and powerful boy, often serving as comic relief to serious and even

violent adventures. Katerina is the teenage daughter of the Greek resistance leader; she joins dangerous missions despite her youth and the perceived vulnerability associated with her gender—a representation shaped by the dominant postwar gender norms of Greek and broader Western society. She and Giorgos share a platonic romantic bond, which adds a sentimental dimension to the narrative.

The character of Giorgos is constructed as a near-superhuman figure. Despite his young age, he possesses extraordinary strength, mastery of "Japanese wrestling," advanced weapons skills, proficiency in operating various vehicles, and fluency in multiple languages. Initially, his missions take him across the Balkans and the Mediterranean, but as the series progresses, he ventures into increasingly distant and exotic places, combating Adolf Hitler and his followers. His effectiveness and elusiveness earn him the notorious nickname "Ghost Child." Throughout these global adventures, Giorgos, Spithas, and Katerina acquire new allies and face fresh enemies—both types of characters typically appearing for a limited number of issues, emphasizing the serialized nature of the narrative.

Mikros Iros achieved widespread popularity among Greek pre- and early teens, profoundly shaping their worldview during their formative years. In parallel, the magazine played a significant role in constructing both personal and collective memories of the past—at existential, local, and national levels (see Filippaios, "Childhood"). Its remarkable success sparked a proliferation of similar pulp magazines for young readers, many of which were produced by Anemodouras himself and his collaborators at his publishing house (see Papadakis et al. 46–179). However, none of these subsequent publications attained the cultural impact or longevity of *Mikros Iros*.[2] This wave of "little-heroic" publishing gradually declined in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as younger generations gravitated toward different aesthetic sensibilities and values shaped by an increasingly globalized, technology-driven popular culture marked by a rising dominance of American color comics and the emergence of television (see Filippaios, "Greek").

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[2] More precisely, the shift of Greek publishers, writers, and illustrators toward a younger readership began in the latter half of the 1940s. However, Anemodouras significantly advanced this trend, developing it into a dominant force in the following decade. For a concise and comprehensive overview of Greek popular literature, particularly that aimed at children and adolescents, see Filippaios, "Greek."

The theoretical framework

The Orientalist, touristic, and historical representations of the Eastern Mediterranean—particularly of Cairo and Istanbul—as well as the fictional characters operating within these settings will be analyzed in this article through a theoretical framework composed of three distinct but complementary cultural approaches: Edward Said's critique of Orientalism; Marc Augé's concept of non-places within modern tourism; and Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism.

Said's influential analysis of Orientalism, first articulated in his seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*, has had a profound impact across the humanities and social sciences. Said conceptualizes Orientalism as a long-standing Western discourse that predates the Age of Discovery and extends well into the twentieth century. It is made up of three basic elements: a vast corpus of texts—including literary works, political treatises, scientific writings, and personal memoirs—that collectively constructed the East as an exotic, primitive, deceptive, and underdeveloped realm; a systematic and seemingly rational, yet fundamentally ideological, Western hegemony over the peoples of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the so-called Middle East; and a coordinated effort by the major European colonial powers to assert both hard and soft diplomatic control over these regions.

In this article, my focus lies primarily on the first dimension of Orientalism and its textual articulation, particularly within popular literature. According to Said,

> the very power and scope of Orientalism produced not only a fair amount of exact positive knowledge about the Orient but also a kind of second-order knowledge-lurking in such places as the "Oriental" tale, the mythology of the mysterious East, notions of Asian inscrutability—with a life of its own, what V. G. Kiernan has aptly called "Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient." (Said 52)

While Said demonstrates how the Orientalist perspective shaped the ideological hegemony of the West, anthropologist Marc Augé addresses the role of tourism in reinforcing the dominant ideologies of Western modernity. In his influential book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Augé introduces the concept of the non-place. According to his analysis, non-places are transient spaces in which individuals spend time without meaningful engagement or cultural anchoring—examples include hotel rooms, airports, and shopping malls. In these environments, the dense network of

meanings associated with national, ethnic, tribal, regional, cultural, or class-based identities is unraveled and supplanted by a set of signifiers—images, sounds, spectacles, and forms of entertainment—that serve the consumerist imperatives of contemporary mass tourism. As Augé observes with both depth and irony:

> We can contrast the realities of *transit* (transit camps or passengers in transit) with those of residence or dwelling; the *interchange* (where nobody crosses anyone else's path) with the *crossroads* (where people meet); the *passenger* (defined by his *destination*) with the *traveller* (who strolls along his *route* …), the *housing estate* ("group of new dwellings," Larousse says), where people do not live together and which is never situated in the centre of anything (big estates characterize the so-called peripheral zones or outskirts), with the *monument* where people share and commemorate; *communication* (with its codes, images and strategies) with *language* (which is spoken). (Augé 107–108)

This vivid contrast between anthropological places and non-places invites us to extend the concept of the non-place to include archaeological, historical, and cultural sites—ranging from ancient and medieval structures to traditional neighborhoods. In the context of mass tourism, these sites—originally spaces of memory and communal significance—are increasingly traversed by visitors who receive only a superficial, often commodified historical account, typically conveyed by a tour guide, in printed material, a digital application, or a website. Consequently, the anthropological richness of these places is eroded, replaced by a distracted and ephemeral tourist gaze—which, upon closer inspection, is deeply informed by the surviving ideologies of colonial inequality.

The final concept of my theoretical framework in this article is that of banal nationalism, introduced by sociologist and social psychologist Michael Billig in his 1995 book of the same name. Like Said, Billig draws on the foundational concept of hegemony, as formulated by Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, hegemony refers to the organized efforts of the dominant class to present and propagate its economic and political interests in such a way that they are perceived as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable—essentially as ideology. Billig extends this understanding of hegemony by suggesting that national hegemony is not only advanced through overtly violent forms of nationalism—such as chauvinism and fascism—but also through more subtle, everyday expressions of nationalism, which often go unnoticed:

> The ideological habits, by which "our" nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and, thereby, unnoticed. The national flag hanging outside a public

building in the United States attracts no special attention. It belongs to no special, sociological genus. Having no name, it cannot be identified as a problem. Nor, by implication, is the daily reproduction of the United States a problem. (Billig 6)

In what follows, I will demonstrate how the interconnections between Orientalism, non-places, and banal nationalism are woven into the narrative fabric of *Mikros Iros*, particularly in issues 17–20. These themes manifest through dialectical relations of alliance and antagonism, producing unexpected literary and cultural discourses. The analysis of these discourses and their interactions will follow in subsequent sections of the article.

Spaces, places, and little heroes under the shadow of representation: Facing the enemy for the first time

On the first page of issue 17, Giorgos Thalassis finds himself in Cairo, where he is summoned for a meeting with the chief of the British Middle East Command, responsible for overseeing the British military operations in Egypt during World War II. The meeting is prompted by the arrival of a new Nazi secret agent in Cairo, who has already carried out a series of illegal activities, including crimes against the Allied forces. When Giorgos inquires further, the commander provides the following account:

> For some time now, a strange child has appeared in Cairo. He wears a tight black uniform and a hood that covers the upper part of his face. On his chest is embroidered a red swastika, Hitler's symbol. He is an agent of Hitler and acts against us with such diabolical skill that we have not yet been able to capture him! He infiltrates our headquarters and camps, steals documents, and causes explosions, only to vanish without us being able to apprehend him. He is faster than the wind, more flexible than a snake, and more aggressive than a hungry tiger! The Arabs have named him Seitan Alaman, which means "the Devil-German!" And they are not wrong! (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 3)[3]

In this excerpt, three distinct discourses intersect: the stylistic conventions of popular literature, particularly influenced by postwar US traditions; an antifascist yet ethnocentric perspective; and an Orientalist discourse. Specifically, Seitan Alaman's uniform evokes the costumes of superheroes from postwar US science fiction and action comics. In

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[3] All translations of excerpts from *Mikros Iros* are mine.

fact, Stelios Anemodouras likely drew inspiration from Captain Nazi, the primary antagonist of Captain Marvel, a character from the well-known *Detective Comics* series. Additionally, Alaman possesses nearly superheroic abilities, a trait commonly found in US comics and other kinds of popular literature.

However, the popular culture discourse is inextricably linked to an antifascist and even ethnocentric viewpoint in *Mikros Iros*. Alaman's villainy is almost entirely defined by his identity as a Nazi agent, thus reinforcing the narrative of good versus evil, where good represents the Allies while evil is embodied by Nazi forces.

Moreover, Alaman's name and the setting of his actions are key elements of the Orientalist discourse. The phonetic rendering of Satan as "Seitan" undoubtedly invokes Turkish and Arabic linguistic traditions, while the surname Alaman (derived from *Allemagne*, the French word for Germany) directly connects the antagonist to the German enemy. This name construction aligns with the stereotypical, derogatory depictions often found in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American Orientalist literature. Said illustrates this kind of representation through an example from a 1908 article by Lord Cromer, a high-ranking British diplomat in Egypt; in Said's reading of Cromer, "Orientals or Arabs are … shown to be gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative,' much given to 'fulsome flattery,' intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; … Orientals are inveterate liars, they are 'lethargic and suspicious,' and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Said 38–39).

Through the fictional character of Alaman, the stereotype of the Muslim imposter—a characteristic that, according to Said, was first attributed to Muhammad by various poets and authors, possibly beginning with Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Said 69)—merges with the figure of the Nazi criminal, as it was depicted in US antifascist propaganda from the 1940s onward. This figure of the Nazi villain was propagated across various media, including literature, comics, print, cinema, television, and radio. As Jordan Maxwell Foster notes in his recent study of representations of Nazis in US comics, "over the past 80 years … one monolithic figure has embodied the identity of absolute evil and provided an example of true villainy in literature, television, and film: the Nazi" (Foster 2).

As we will see in the following sections, Giorgos confronts Alaman in places and spaces that are central to the Orientalist, tourist, ethnocentric, and popular representations found in *Mikros Iros*. These settings—comprising urban landscapes, the mansion of a fictional Pasha,

and important archaeological monuments—serve as key loci in the narrative, contributing to the multifaceted discourse woven throughout the story.

The urban spaces of Cairo and Istanbul

Following the initial introduction of the "diabolical" Seitan Alaman, the narrative of *Mikros Iros* becomes dominated by action and violence as Giorgos Thalassis pursues the Nazi agent. After several suspense-filled scenes, Giorgos chases Alaman across the seemingly endless expanse of Cairo's rooftops: "Seitan Alaman is in the center of the city, where the buildings are constructed close to one another. As far as the eye can see, terraces and roofs of houses stretch out. The Ghost Child will have a hard time reaching him on these roofs" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 10). A similar representation of an important Eastern Mediterranean city is given in issue 20, where two Turkish policemen hunt Alaman through the sewers of Istanbul: "Meanwhile, in the vast network of the sewers that run beneath Istanbul, the Turkish policemen are hunting Alaman. It is a strange hunt, like chasing a ghost. Hitler's agent slips into the darkness like a ghostly shadow, leaving them behind and disappearing from the light of their electric lanterns. But the Turks, of course, know the ropes much better than Seitan Alaman" (91).

The depiction of urban landscapes in Cairo and Istanbul in these two scenes, one from the first of our selected issues and the other from the last, falls squarely within the Orientalist discourse. Cairo and Istanbul are portrayed as labyrinthine, mysterious, and complex urban spaces where exoticism, mystery, and underdevelopment converge. This portrayal evokes a dual response from the reader: while it fosters a sense of detestation and fear, particularly for younger readers, it simultaneously generates a strong sense of fascination and allure. At the same time, this representation acquires an aura of a non-place because all the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical weight of Cairo and Istanbul is lost due to a stereotypical Orientalist representation. In this sense, the narrative and stylistic elements of popular literature—particularly the genres of thriller and spy fiction—serve to amplify the stereotypical portrayal and estrangement of these spaces.

In parallel, the ethnocentric discourse of banal nationalism once again plays a significant role in the narrative. The following excerpt from the rooftop chase in Cairo provides a clear example of how the Orientalist, popular, and ethnocentric discourses intertwine:

Thus begins a crazy chase from rooftop to rooftop and from roof to roof, a dangerous chase that every now and then brings the two opponents face to face with death. As Seitan Alaman jumps over a tiled roof, he loses his balance. He falls and rolls onto the sloping roof, moving rapidly toward the void, a thirty-meter void! Below, the asphalt awaits to receive his crushed dead body! But he is lucky: as he rolls, in front of the astonished and horrified eyes of Giorgos, his body encounters a chimney and stops.

"You won't catch me, you dishonorable Greek!" the German snarls.

And the chase continues. (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 10)

This passage exemplifies the blending of multiple discourses. The historical present tense of the verbs, the short, punchy sentences, and the overuse of exclamation marks all reflect the typical style of popular action narratives. At the same time, the portrayal of space remains distinctly Orientalist, with the setting of Cairo's roofs rendered as both exotic and alien to the Western eye. Moreover, the underlying ethnocentric discourse becomes apparent through Alaman's insult, "dishonorable Greek," which evokes the deep antagonism between Greece and Germany during World War II, particularly during the German occupation. This ideological division between the civilized and democratic nations (represented by Giorgos and the Greek resistance) and the barbaric and tyrannical Nazis is a common motif in wartime popular culture, already from the early stages of the war.

However, it is crucial to consider the historical context for both the readers and the author of these stories. The underage readers of *Mikros Iros* in 1953 would have likely grown up in urban environments scarred by the recent trauma of the German occupation and the subsequent civil war. These young readers, potentially witnessing the effects of urban devastation and violence firsthand, would be particularly receptive to the narrative's dramatic action and violence. Similarly, Stelios Anemodouras, the author, experienced these historical events as a young man, when he actively participated in the Greek Resistance against the Axis powers (see Anemodouras, "An sinékhiza" 16–18). Thus, the Orientalist and popular perspectives in *Mikros Iros* should be seen as intertwined with the immediate personal experiences of both the readers and the author. In this way, collective memory of recent historical events merges with the literary imagination, contributing to the creation of a narrative that resonates deeply with its audience, while simultaneously reinforcing dominant cultural ideologies.

The Pasha's mansion

The next significant setting in the narrative, where the dialectical inter-play of the aforementioned discourses unfolds, is the mansion of Pasha Ahmed Azi. Initially, Ahmed Azi appears to be an ally of the British army in Egypt. However, it is soon revealed that he is a secret agent of the Axis powers, using his mansion as a hideout for Seitan Alaman. Giorgos Thalassis uncovers Azi's true allegiance and learns that Alaman is hiding there, so he decides to visit the mansion. The scene unfolds as follows:

> The door opens, and the guard, holding a naked sword in his hand, motions for them [Giorgos and Spithas] to enter.
> They cross a beautiful garden and enter a mansion, where the walls sparkle with works of art and decorations that cost a fortune each. The floors are covered with carpets, where feet sink up to the ankles.
> Somewhere, inside the vast house, lazy music is playing, and light-scented smoke circulates in the air.
> Giorgos enters a circular hall decorated with statues.
> In the middle of it, there is a marble pond where exotic golden fishes swim. Near the pond, on a pile of cushions, sits a dark-haired man in a European suit, but with a sari on his head. He is relatively young, and his features are rather handsome, although they are etched with relentless cruelty.
> Next to him sits a khanum with a veil over her face and a half-naked body. (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 24)

The mansion is presented in a typically Orientalist way, a space of luxurious but kitschy and obsolete decoration and architecture, in which lavishness, self-indulgence, and lethargic sensuality reign supreme. In fact, the mansion could be described as a non-place, created in a stereotypical Orientalist and colonial logic.

As Giorgos begins a tense conversation with Azi, he quickly manages to corner him, forcing the Pasha to reveal his true identity as a Nazi collaborator and to admit that Alaman is hiding in the mansion. At that climactic moment, something utterly unexpected takes place:

> With a sudden movement, khanum Leila lifts her veil, revealing a beautiful young face.
> She speaks. But from her mouth comes not a thin woman's voice, but a thick man's voice!
> "You have before you Seitan Alaman or Leila! And I am very pleased that you came alone to fall into my hands, Ghost Child! I never expected such luck! Why did you take on that surprised expression? Don't you know that I can disguise myself as I want?" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 25)

By disguising himself as a khanum, Alaman reaches the height of his deceitfulness and immorality. In doing so, he fully embodies the fusion of two ideologically charged stereotypes: the Orientalist figure of the Muslim imposter and the archetypally evil Nazi of US popular culture. The common thread between these two figures is a pathological proclivity for deception—so profound that it destabilizes even the perceived natural order of gender identity. This moment of gendered disguise is not merely a narrative twist; it symbolically violates a core component of Western ideological hegemony: the rigid binary division between male and female, which underpins dominant moral and cultural structures.

This particular scene in the mansion is further saturated with the discourse of banal nationalism, particularly as expressed through the Turkish guards who confront Giorgos. These guards are described in overtly stereotypical terms as "gigantic guards with huge swords in their hands" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 25), reinforcing a reductionist and exoticized view of the so-called other. Thus, the most salient marker of banal nationalism in this scene emerges through language.

As Michael Billig notes, concepts such as those of nation and language "should not be used uncritically to analyse nationalism, because they do not stand outside the topic which is to be analysed. Instead, the history of nationalism continues to run through the meanings which such concepts routinely bear" (Billig 16). In this vein, the guards' speech carries significant ideological weight. They refer to Giorgos using pejorative terms such as "unfaithful" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 26) and "giaour" (28; *giaour* is a Turkish term for non-Muslims, often used to refer derogatorily to Greeks, especially during the times of the Ottoman Empire). These expressions evoke deeply rooted historical antagonisms, particularly the collective memory of the Ottoman occupation of Greece (mid-fifteenth century to 1821). Within the hegemonic Greek national narrative, this period is framed as one of religious and cultural oppression, during which Orthodox Christians struggled to preserve their faith against Muslim rule. As such, Orthodox Christianity emerges as a cornerstone of Modern Greek national identity and its hegemonic ideological framework.

This ideological underpinning will prove crucial in understanding how archaeological monuments in *Mikros Iros* are represented—not merely as historical artifacts, but as symbols embedded in a broader narrative of national struggle and identity formation.

The archeological monuments of the Sphinx, the Bosphorus, and Hagia Sophia

The two climactic moments in the ongoing duel between Giorgos Thalassis and Seitan Alaman are set at the Sphinx in Egypt and at the Bosphorus and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, respectively.

Following his escape from the mansion of Ahmed Azi, Giorgos tracks down Alaman, and their intense confrontation resumes. Eventually, the Nazi agent manages once again to elude capture. Alaman escapes into the Egyptian desert on a motorcycle during the night, with Giorgos pursuing him from a distance. He soon arrives at "the pyramids of the Pharaohs and the Sphinx, the gigantic statue which thousands of years of sun and rains didn't manage to destroy" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 40). Upon reaching the Sphinx, however, Alaman abruptly vanishes from Giorgos' sight. After a brief search, Giorgos discovers a hidden trapdoor leading to a subterranean chamber beneath the monument. Inside, he uncovers Alaman's secret base, containing an "enormous radio device" capable of "transmitting messages to all parts of the world" (42). As anticipated, the ensuing confrontation between the two adversaries is fierce and violent, but the resolution is deferred to the following issue (number 19).

The Sphinx in the narration is presented as enigmatic and mysterious, with secrets hidden from the public eye. Only Giorgos, the superheroic protagonist, possesses the perceptiveness and courage necessary to uncover its hidden crypt and to reveal Alaman's secret hideout. The Sphinx, of course, holds a long-standing place in the Western imagination as a symbol of both alluring and sinister mystery. This symbolic function is well documented across various literary and cultural references. One of the most notable is found in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, first performed around 429 BCE, where the mythological Sphinx poses a deadly riddle to the citizens of Thebes. Oedipus solves the riddle, prompting the Sphinx to destroy itself and thus liberating the city. In lines 390–396 of the play, Oedipus criticizes the blind prophet Tiresias, accusing him of failing to vanquish the Sphinx despite his supposed metaphysical powers:

> Come now, if you're a prophet, where's the proof?
> What happened when the rhapsode bitch was here?
> You should have spoken up and saved the town!
> Her riddle wasn't meant for passersby
> to solve. It needed your prophetic art.
> And yet you didn't know the answer. Birds
> could tell you nothing. Gods were silent too. (Sophocles 26)

In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus refers to the Sphinx with the profane phrase "the rhapsode bitch" (ή ῥαψῳδὸς κύων in the original Greek), highlighting her power to surpass even the prophetic abilities of Tiresias and to inflict suffering upon the people of Thebes. Even the gods remained silent before her, underscoring her portrayal as a creature of profound malevolence and inscrutable mystery. This portrayal of the Sphinx as a symbol of a dark enigma has been deeply embedded in Western cultural memory, developing further across both high art and popular culture.[4] As such, the Sphinx can be understood as an integral figure within the Orientalist imaginary—a projection of the East as mysterious, threatening, and seductive. At the same time, the Sphinx also functions as a major site of Western tourism, where its enigma is commodified and consumed by visitors seeking awe and wonder. Thus, in the case of *Mikros Iros*, the depiction of the Sphinx embodies a convergence of Orientalist and tourist discourses, situating the monument within a narrative universe that draws on fascination and fear alike.

In the finale of issue 20, another duel between the two enemies takes place—first in the Bosphorus and then in Hagia Sophia—as Alaman moves from Cairo to Istanbul, with Giorgos following his trail. The rhetoric here echoes that of the Sphinx episode, combining the discourse of Orientalism, the concept of the non-place, and popular fiction. However, in the representations of these two monuments of Istanbul, the discourse of ethnocentrism becomes especially prominent. This is due to the fact that both sites carry deep symbolic significance within the context of national Greek hegemony of the historical past. This dimension is clearly visible in the following excerpt, which appears at the very beginning of issue 20: "A deep silence spreads over

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[4] References to the Sphinx as both a mythological creature and an artistic symbol of mystery are so numerous and complex within Western culture that they could easily form the basis of a specialized academic study. Therefore, only two representative examples will be briefly discussed here. First, the Sphinx features prominently in several paintings by Symbolist artists, such as *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1864) by Gustave Moreau, *The Kiss of the Sphinx* (1895) by Franz von Stuck, and *The Caress of the Sphinx* (1896) by Fernand Khnopff. In each of these works, the Sphinx is depicted as a figure of enigma and allure, fully in line with the Symbolist movement's fascination with the mysterious and the metaphysical. On the other hand, the motif of the Sphinx also maintains a strong presence in popular fiction. A brief excerpt from Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "The Ring of Thoth" (1890) serves as an illustrative example: "They would run upon the enigmatical attendant with the sphinx-like face and the parchment skin" (Conan Doyle 49). Here, the comparison to the Sphinx reinforces the attendant's unreadable and eerie presence, once again invoking the centuries-old Western association between the Sphinx and impenetrable mystery.

the vast City, which seems to dream of past glories and lost grandeurs of the age of emperors" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 75).

In this passage, Stelios Anemodouras alludes directly to the Byzantine Empire, an era that is constructed within dominant Greek national ideology as a central phase in the historical continuity of Greek identity. Paschalis Kitromilides characterizes this view of national history as "a teleology for the Greek state," in which "Byzantium could be canonized … as the *telos* to which Greek state and Greek destinies were expected to strive to approximate" (Kitromilides 31). In this passage, Kitromilides refers mainly to the period in which the so-called Great Idea (*Megali idea*) dominated both the official ideology of the Greek nation and a great part of the mentalities of Greek people, namely from mid-nineteenth century to 1922. The Great Idea was the ideology of the imperialistic spread of the Greek state to the borders of late Byzantine Empire; this hegemonic irredentist and, in fact, nationalistic ideal was abandoned in a tragic way, with the defeat of the Greek army in the Greco-Turkish war (1919–1922) and the huge wave of refugees, comprised by Greek-speaking and/or Orthodox populations, from Asia Minor to Greece. Though the Great Idea met its bitter end in 1922, its influence on the popular imaginary was still vivid when *Mikros Iros* was published, surviving in the form of banal nationalism—an unspoken, taken-for-granted sense of national pride and identity. Of course, this introverted return to the Great Idea was supported by the hegemonic ideology of the post-civil war conservative governments of that time.

The following excerpt from the duel between Giorgos and Alaman in the Bosphorus powerfully evokes the ethnocentric antagonism between Greeks and Turks, encapsulated within the conventions of popular literature. Alaman expresses a triumphant hatred, believing that Giorgos ("Agent Hellas") has perished in the waters of the Bosphorus:

> The minutes pass, without Agent Hellas making his appearance.
>
> The face of Hitler's agent is distorted under his hood by an expression of wild triumph.
>
> "The Ghost Child is dead!" he murmurs with joy. "The Ghost Child is no more! I saw him with my own eyes disappear into the waters of the Bosphorus along with the pieces of the motorboat! And he never came up again! Therefore, he is dead. I am finally free from this cursed enemy!"
>
> He remains there for a few more minutes to make sure that Giorgos has really drowned, and then he turns the motorboat toward the land and quickly moves away. (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 94)

Beneath Alaman's "wild triumph" lies a deep national trauma: the crushing of the Great Idea during the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922. Crucial to this symbolic dimension is the hybrid identity of Alaman, who functions as a nexus between Nazi villainy and the enduring figure of the hostile Turk. His character allows the narrative to conflate two historically distinct yet ideologically charged enemies of the Greek nation. At the same time, the conventions of popular serialized literature inform the reader's expectations: most young readers would instinctively know that Giorgos is not truly dead, but alive and already preparing his next move.

Therefore, while the representation of the Sphinx leans heavily into an Orientalist and also touristic framework, the representations of the Bosphorus and Hagia Sophia are shaped primarily by a deeply rooted nationalist ideology. The tourist gaze recedes here, giving way to collective memory, trauma, and the symbolic geography of Greek national identity.

Conclusion: Stelios Anemodouras as a "brilliant inventor"

It is truly remarkable that within the span of just four issues of a pulp magazine for children and teenagers, all published in the early 1950s, a complex labyrinth of spatial and geographical representations is constructed. These representations interweave Orientalist, touristic, and ethnocentric perspectives, all articulated through the narrative conventions of popular literature. By examining them, we gain valuable insight into the ideological battleground of post-civil war Greece and the ways in which cultural production was mobilized in the service of hegemony, but also as a resistance to it. The creator of *Mikros Iros*, Stelios Anemodouras, can be regarded as the orchestrator of these formations. Umberto Eco characterizes the writers of popular novels as brilliant and ingenious inventors who combine in their writings a great variety of ideological and cultural elements of their time and also from other eras (see Eco). Anemodouras fits this description aptly.

First and foremost, Anemodouras was trying to balance different and even contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, he had to align with the narrow framework of the official hegemonic ideology of the state after the civil war. This hegemonic ideology combined an introspective ethnocentrism characterized by anticommunism and social conservatism with a powerful influence of Western—or North American, to be more exact—style of urbanization, based on economic growth and consumerism. After all, Greece was the only Balkan country

that became part of the Western postwar bloc. On the other hand, Anemodouras channeled some of his sociopolitical ideas to the narration of *Mikros Iros*, especially a mindset—quite popular in Greece during the 1950s and especially the 1960s—that combined patriotism, antiauthoritarianism, and a strong desire for a democratic regime based on the power of the people.

Hence, Anemodouras had to navigate strict anticommunist censorship and the general persecution of anyone who openly expressed ideas opposing the dominant national ideology. At the same time, he needed to meet the expectations of his readers, following the conventions of popular literature of his time. It is within this framework that we can understand the central role of discourses revolving around Orientalism, non-places, banal nationalism, and popular culture in the *Mikros Iros* series. This immensely popular and influential children's magazine offered a panoramic and simultaneously intimate view of the struggle for the formation and the diffusion of hegemonic ideology. This ideology had to influence and overcome the mentalities circulating in Greek society during the 1950s and 1960s, from Marxism and socialism to feminism and decolonization. In this article, I tried to show how a part of this dynamic and multifarious ideological landscape was incorporated into the body of *Mikros Iros*, in accordance with the popular literature of the time, without underestimating the sociopolitical positions of the author himself.

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Od paševe palače do sfingine kripte: reprezentacije vzhodnega Sredozemlja v reviji *Mikros Iros*

Članek obravnava številke 17–20 grške publikacije *Mikros Iros* (Mali junak), priljubljene šund revije za otroke in mladostnike, ki jo je pisal Stelios Anemoduras, ilustriral pa Viron Aptosoglu. Revija, ki je izhajala tedensko med letoma 1951 in 1968, obsega 798 številk. Njen protagonist, najstnik Giorgos Talasis, se med nemško okupacijo Grčije (1941–1944) pridruži grškemu odporniškemu gibanju. Pripoved resnične zgodovinske dogodke prepleta s priljubljenimi literarnimi prvinami. V številkah 17–20 se Giorgos v Kairu in nato še v Carigradu spoprime z nacističnim agentom Seitanom Alamanom. Te epizode reprezentirajo regije, kraje in znamenitosti vzhodnega Sredozemlja na način, ki reproducira diskurze orientalizma, etnocentrizma, antifašizma in množične literature. Članek te reprezentacije interpretira s pomočjo teoretskega aparata, ki se opira na Saidovo analizo orientalizma, Augéjev koncept turističnih nekrajev in Billigovo teorijo banalnega nacionalizma.

Imagining the Mediterranean Again and Again: Touristic Imaginaries of the Mediterranean Sea, and How It Appears from a Lebanese Literary Perspective

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In this article, I analyze the contemporary literary narratives that capture and (re)construct Lebanese imaginaries of the Mediterranean and compare these imaginaries to the ways in which tourists imagine and describe the Mediterranean and its coasts. My aim is to explore the Lebanese multifaceted local perceptions of the Mediterranean, which is viewed not only as sublime and life-giving but also as perilous and polluted. To this end, I analyze four texts: Lost in Beirut: A True Story *(2021) by Ashe and Magdalena Stevens,* Between Beirut and the Moon *(2020) by A. Naji Bakhti,* Spring Rain *(2020) by Andy Warner, and* "The Sea Closes at 7:00" *(2022) by Sabah Ayoub. By juxtaposing these narratives with those constructed from a tourist perspective–or targeted toward tourists–I seek to illustrate how the generalized imaginary of the Mediterranean as a tourist haven fails to align with the Lebanese perspective, and how it is adapted to suit the unique reality of Lebanon. This reality often diverges significantly from the Mediterranean experience as rendered by the tourist industry of the Global North.*

Keywords: travel fiction / imagology / Lebanon / the Mediterranean / touristic imaginaries / Lebanese identity

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When landing at Beirut airport, I stare at the Mediterranean coast of Lebanon every time. From the plane window I see the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea dotted with points and lines marked by the outlines of container ships, tankers, cutters, and boats. I stubbornly stare at the blue sea, looking for a sign that something is wrong with it. I just know it is. I have read dozens of articles about its pollution, and Lebanese friends have warned me many times against swimming in the sea in inappropriate places. But the sea looks completely ordinary, and its shades of blue and turquoise seem almost inviting. I have the overwhelming impression that what appears to me on a sensory level and what happens to me on an affective level does not fit at all with what I know on a rational level.

I must also add at the outset that I come from Poland—a Central and Eastern European country from the perspective of which the Mediterranean Sea has always seemed like a holiday paradise. As a child, my parents and I often went to the Mediterranean coast to swim in the sea, sunbathe, and snorkel. In my head, there is a whole archipelago of memories and associations related to the Mediterranean Sea. Almost all of them are positive—sunny, holiday-like, and soothing. The only one that disturbs them is the memory of a documentary about dolphins that I watched many times as a child, since I recorded it on a VHS tape. I remember that when the film mentioned the contemporary threats that dolphins face, the narrator mentioned pollution, adding that the most polluted sea in the world is the Mediterranean Sea. I never factchecked this assertion, but it has stuck in my memory ever since. Every time I see the crystal waters of the Mediterranean Sea shining in the sun, I can no longer believe my eyes.

When I started conducting fieldwork in Beirut for my PhD degree, I still held that documentary fragment in my memory. However, I still felt a certain cognitive discomfort whenever what appeared to me did not fit aesthetically with what had shaped my consciousness and my imaginaries at an early age. I thought that what remained most conflicted in my mind in this context were precisely the imaginaries. So, I decided that it would be worth examining these imaginaries a little more closely. Starting from an autoethnographic perspective, which focused on my own imaginaries and sensations, I decided to look at different ideas about the Mediterranean Sea. I wanted to confront them with how this sea is perceived and thematized in the Lebanese context, which, according to my initial intuition, deviates from the most common patterns of perception and imaginaries of the Mediterranean Sea. Given that the Mediterranean coast is one of the

most important tourist areas in the world, I would like to devote special attention to tourist ideas. I also think that these are the notions that are most in conflict with how one might see the Mediterranean from a Lebanese perspective.

To this end, I would like to take a closer look at four contemporary (semi-)autobiographical literary texts: Ashe and Magdalena Stevens' novel *Lost in Beirut: A True Story* (2021), A. Naji Bakhti's novel *Between Beirut and the Moon* (2020), Andy Warner's comic book *Spring Rain* (2020), and Sabah Ayoub's essay "The Sea Closes at 7:00" (2022). The subjectivity of these texts is reflected in my article, written from a personal, embodied perspective and supplemented with an autoethnographic context. I believe that although literary texts after the death of the author, announced influentially by Roland Barthes, can be interpreted in a fairly free way without causing scandal, it is impossible to separate any kind of interpretation from the creator of the text (regardless of whether that creator is an embodied representative of any species or even a virtual, technological entity of the artificial intelligence type). Accordingly, I treat each text as a sky which is, in Barthes' words, "at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks" (Barthes 14). Moreover, the text of this article is also a sky in which the constellation is created by the analyzed texts, academic perspectives on the issue I discuss, contemporary neoliberal infrastructures of so-called knowledge production, and, above all, my embodied, affective perspective on what I write about. The structure of this article will therefore also be constellational, showing various possible, existing, and potential connections and relationships, and as an author, I will use texts as pretexts for thinking and thematizing rather than objects of detailed analysis. The texts discussed as wholes will therefore be rather marginal in the perspective of this article. What will interest me in particular are the lexias—"units of reading" (Barthes 13)—that is, certain arbitrarily selected fragments of the text which will become not only a pretext for reflection for me but also something with which I will think.

Mediterranean Sea(s)

The axis of this text is what I have been calling "the Mediterranean Sea" so far. In many texts, the term "Mediterranean Sea" appears basically without additional commentary that would explain what the author means. Most often, the term seems to refer to some area or territory marked on maps, which in turn are supposed to represent some material

space or its elements. It is difficult, however, to clearly indicate what actually falls within the semantic field of the Mediterranean Sea perceived in this way and what is a representation of what. Is it about—to put it somewhat colloquially—a hole in the ground in which water has gathered? Or maybe about the water itself, which nevertheless constantly mixes with water from elsewhere? Or maybe it is about combining both these elements into something that could be described—somewhat perversely in this context—as a landscape, at least in the new materialistic understanding? Finally, how does the area marked on the map relate to all these elements? These are just a few considerations that pop into my head when the term "Mediterranean Sea" is left alone and without explanation.

In this article, when writing about the Mediterranean Sea, I mean first and foremost the set of imaginaries associated with this term. I should emphasize at the outset that this is not in any sense a homogeneous or uniform set, nor is it finite. Above all, it is not without reason that people elaborate on so-called Mediterranean cultures; almost eighty years ago, Fernand Braudel argued that the Mediterranean Sea is what provided a certain unity or cultural integrity to the peoples inhabiting the entire Mediterranean coast. For thousands of years, the Mediterranean area was crossed by numerous trade and transport routes, which allowed the movement of not only goods and more-than-human entities, but also ideas. It is therefore not surprising that the imaginary of the Mediterranean Sea as a kind of connector or medium has been deeply embedded in the imagination of societies of the Global North (see Gabaccia and Hoerder; Isabella and Zanou).

Moreover, the Mediterranean Sea in the context of mobility can be understood even more broadly, considering the mobility of the very imaginaries of this sea and their influence on the perception of other seas and oceans. According to Philip E. Steinberg, the power of the idea nested in the Mediterranean Sea comes not only from the notions of unities and divisions, but also "from the idea's existence as an 'immutable mobile,' … an idea that travels" (Steinberg 26). Indeed, the imaginaries associated with the Mediterranean Sea still constitute a kind of template for entities or landscapes that appear similar to observers connected with the Global North.

This is possible primarily because the Mediterranean Sea and its adjacent areas are often understood as a whole, or—as Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca bluntly state—"the cultural 'containers' imagined and celebrated in Orientalist colonial rhetoric and Romantic literature" (Giaccaria and Minca 353). When the Mediterranean Sea is perceived

as a kind of cognitive container, it can be easily compared to the concept of the world understood in the way Timothy Morton develops it in his seminal work on hyperobjects. In Morton's theory, the world provides an assumed background for perceived or experienced events in the perceiver's reality: "The world is more or less a container in which objectified things float or stand" (Morton 99). The Mediterranean, like the world, is supposed to be a transparent background for things and events; a background that does not require much explanation. But eventually, this transparent background begins to take shape and demands to be noticed—this is what Morton believes happened to the world in the face of climate change—which will no longer allow us to ignore things that previously seemed determined and devoid of more in-depth meaning, such as the weather. In a similar gesture, I would like to take a closer (and more suspicious) look at what is called the Mediterranean.

Returning to Steinberg's point, the Mediterranean Sea—even when perceived as a whole—is imagined simultaneously through connections, contacts, and relationships, as well as through antagonisms, frictions, and divisions. After all, ever since the seventh century, the Mediterranean Sea has separated Christian Europe from the so-called other, who both historically and currently (through the image of the terrorist and other Islamophobic contexts) constitutes a crucial element in the constant processes of emerging identities in the societies of the Global North (Steinberg 25). The issue of the otherness constitutive of these societies (particularly the European ones) separated by the waters of the Mediterranean Sea seems to be of key importance here because, as Giaccaria and Minca write, "what characterizes and differentiates the genesis of Mediterraneanist narratives—as compared to the constitution of a generic Orient as an-Other, subaltern space produced by European modernity—is the presumed 'objective' existence of a geographical object called the Mediterranean" (Giaccaria and Minca 348).

Thus, the image of the Mediterranean Sea in its ambivalence or even contradiction is also significant in the context of what Edward Said has theorized as Orientalism because the sea itself is both imaginary and real in its role of separating Europe from the Middle East and North Africa region, inhabited mostly by Muslims. This kind of materialization of an imagined division is closely tied to categories that are responsible for imperial violence in the twenty-first century, including, for example, Samuel Huntington's category of the clash of civilizations.

It is not without reason that I mention such figures as Said and Huntington. It is difficult to imagine contemporary reflection on what influences the perception of the Mediterranean Sea without considering

colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial contexts. All of these contexts can coexist, as Steinberg argues, because "the flexibility of the Mediterranean image—in which the fluidity of the sea both erases and magnifies difference—and the intensity of the 'paradoxical interplay' that results allow individuals to use the image to support very different political diagnoses" (Steinberg 31). On the one hand, this establishes a certain community, but on the other hand, it separates those who are our own from those who are others. What is more, the Mediterranean Sea may combine very different associations resulting from the colonial context: the Mediterranean Sea is perceived differently by a white, middle-class resident of Oslo who vacations on Italian or Spanish beaches twice a year than by a person on the move from Eritrea who sees the Mediterranean Sea primarily as a deadly obstacle on the road to a better life.

It is images similar to the latter that have inspired the Italian scholar Gabriele Proglio to critically discuss the notion of the Black Mediterranean—originally proposed by Alessandra di Maio—a term that attacks the dominance of the imaginary of the "white Italian–European sea" (Proglio 406). For Proglio, the Mediterranean "may be viewed as not only a sea but also an excess space, a site of accumulation of discourses largely revolving around Italy–Europe, among others" (408). The dominance of this Italian–European imaginary is based on both the influence of narratives generated by the Global North, and geography itself (understood as a field conceived within a white and Western conception of science). The Black Mediterranean resists the traditional understanding of geography, since it often refers to areas thousands of kilometers away from the shores of the Mediterranean, such as Massawa or Somaliland. The Black Mediterranean does not really have a simple referent in space; instead, it is a kind of look at the memory of those who managed to reach Europe by crossing the waters of the Mediterranean. According to Proglio, the Black Mediterranean is

> a postcolonial and diasporic sea: it is postcolonial for trying to distance the black bodies from the instruments of biopolitics; it is diasporic because it is about imagined communities that, albeit fragmented in space, were never completely separated and are thus in constant dialogue with each other. Again, it is diasporic in terms of memory because of the movement of voices and memories over, across and beyond the borders of the Old Continent. (413)

The description by the Italian researcher clearly shows the distance that often separates the ideas that create what is called the Mediterranean Sea from the landscape or space that would seem to constitute it.

However, the perception of the Mediterranean Sea should not be limited to the imaginary layer, where the dimension of landscape is ignored. Specific landscapes and the assemblages that create them remain in close relation to imaginary elements—even if they are assumed and not directly experienced, such as the school of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean Sea that I just thought of. Although I do not empirically and materially experience this school now, it can still appear in my imaginary layer, subsequently influencing my decisions and choices. It is important to remember that, for example, in the context of administrative policy, the Mediterranean Sea refers to a certain area—regardless of its level of imaginability. Specific (bio)political decisions can therefore have a significant impact on the more-than-human beings that create landscapes that have been incorporated into the area subsequently designated as the Mediterranean Sea. In other words, the fact that imaginaries seem less real than things experienced empirically or sensually does not mean that they are devoid of a performative dimension that can have a direct impact on what is empirically and sensually accessible.

In what follows, I will refer both to the imaginary dimension of the Mediterranean Sea and to landscapes directly intertwined with this dimension. I think that Iain Chambers is right when he says that the Mediterranean "is a 'reality' that is imaginatively constructed: the political and poetic articulation of a shifting, desired object and perpetually repressed realization" (Chambers 11). However, at the same time, the reality that Chambers speaks of has a direct bearing on more-than-human assemblages and landscapes, which means that any limitation of the term "Mediterranean" to a set of imaginaries—even if potentially true—should consider the performative potential of that set. Although the Mediterranean Sea is "more than an imagined surface," and "the Mediterranean region is more than a trope for understanding (or performing) postcolonial dynamics of connection amidst division" (Steinberg 33), it is worth remembering that both the sea and the region are terms still used in politics, economics, legislation, and elsewhere.

Touristic imaginaries

The imaginaries I would like to focus on now are tourist imaginaries. The expectations resulting from them influence specific political and economic decisions. For example, the view of life jackets washed ashore from people on the move who lost their lives trying to cross the

Mediterranean Sea is not something that most tourists want to see (unless they seek dark tourism, which is a specific case). Obviously, local governments are aware of this, which in turn can influence their decisions and actions at various levels of government. So, what are touristic imaginaries of the Mediterranean Sea, if they probably do not include life jackets?

The very definition of a tourist contains a key element in this context, defining the main reason for becoming a tourist, namely pleasure as the driving force of tourism. In turn, following the logic of capitalism, tourism must both promise a pleasure to the potential consumer of a service or a product and generate or strengthen the need for pleasure itself and indicate its potential source. In the case of tourism, this source must be related to mobility, since tourists "travel from their usual living environment to the center-out-there" (Erem 685). Accordingly, various companies and institutions are tasked with presenting a trip to a place as a pleasant experience.

This task is most often carried out by tourism marketing, which is interested in tourists' imaginaries of the possibilities of fulfilling the need for pleasure through tourism in specific contexts and spaces. Tourism marketing is therefore less interested in researching and defining ideas about selected holiday destinations, as its primary concern has to do with generating these imaginaries, or possibly modifying them. However, the tasks of tourism marketing defined in this way require certain procedures performed on representations of potential holiday destinations. As Hazel Andrews writes: "[M]arketing enacts a form of violence … as it reduces people and places to bite-size representations for the easy digestion of potential tourists. Notions of the nature of destination places and peoples are informed by the images found in various forms of tourism-related discourses—travel brochures, TV programmes, guidebooks" (Andrews 32).

It is hence impossible to establish a simple trajectory for any touristic imaginary, as these imaginaries seem to circulate and constantly transform, depending less on individual preferences and more on class and social imaginaries. The famous anthropologist Noel B. Salazar writes about this, stating that touristic imaginaries "emerge not from the realm of the concrete, everyday experience but in the circulation of more collectively held imaginaries" (Salazar 871).

Tourist imaginaries of the Mediterranean Sea are essential for several reasons. Firstly, the Mediterranean coast is one of the most important tourist areas in the world (see Tresserras). Secondly, as was the case with more general imaginaries of the Mediterranean Sea, tourist

imaginaries of the Mediterranean coast also provide a model for other coastal regions of the world that wish to develop tourism. Thirdly, it was with Mediterranean tourism that the democratization of tourism itself was associated, which in the twentieth century became the domain of the middle and working classes (Gordon 224). For decades, Mediterranean tourism has rested on three s-words: sea, sun, and sand (Vidal-Pérez 79; Erem 689). The Mediterranean coast is still associated primarily with these three elements, despite the many factors that have made them much more problematic over the years. Chief among these factors are the climate crisis and migration (also largely a consequence of the climate crisis). Applying Achilles Mbembe's concept of the deathscape, Laura Lo Presti draws attention to a significant change in public discourse concerning the Mediterranean: "When the Mediterranean is mentioned in public discourse, it is, in fact, less often characterized as a contact zone generating conditions for vitality, cultural encounters, hybridizations, liquidity, or motion, as oceanic philosophy would have it, but rather feels like a motionless deathscape" (Lo Presti 54).

Indeed, recent years have brought about a notable increase in narratives concerning migration across the Mediterranean Sea. These narratives, however, have had little impact on tourists' ideas about the coast of this sea, which still revolve around relaxation and pleasure rather than any ethical decision regarding a highly problematic situation. The life jackets washed ashore can, on the other hand, significantly hinder or even prevent this oversight because—like the device of estrangement in Victor Shklovsky's theory of prose (Shklovsky 6–12)—they cause cognitive disruption of habits and established cognitive habits. It is therefore in the interest of the tourism industry to limit tourists' contact with objects that operate on the principle of estrangement as they question the polished, aesthetic, and established tourist image of the Mediterranean Sea. The basis of this image is described by Bertram M. Gordon, who writes: "The 'blue water' and the sun appear as continuous references throughout the past two centuries, if not before" (Gordon 225). The sight of life jackets washed ashore can transform the blue water shimmering in the sun into a large coffin, as these jackets bear witness to those who wore them.

Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am interested in the relationship between these generally outlined tourist ideas about the Mediterranean and how the sea appears in the context of Lebanon. I have the impression that confronting these two elements—tourist ideas and Lebanese contexts of the Mediterranean—can reveal a mechanism similar to Shklovsky's estrangement. In order to look at how this sea can be seen from a Lebanese perspective, I will look at literary texts in which the Mediterranean Sea appears from time to time but is mentioned and thematized on the margins rather than at the center of the narrative.

The idea for this way of approaching the problem came to me while reading Ashe and Magdalena Stevens' bestselling novel *Lost in Beirut: A True Story* (2021). The main character of this novel is an American traveling to Lebanon to organize a concert by one of the top musicians. The protagonist's numerous love affairs are accompanied by the outbreak of the July War of 2006, which ultimately forces the main character to flee the Middle East. But what is much more interesting from my perspective is the background for this rather clichéd love story. This background is rooted in the imaginaries of the Middle East, and mainly Lebanon, seen from the perspective of a wealthy white American. This is how he describes his trip to Jounieh: "The beach to my left is so close that I can see the sparkling blue waters of the Mediterranean. For one of the oldest settled lands in our human history, the waters are still stunningly clear. … Yet humans have occupied these beaches here for thousands of years, and they still hold magic, looking untouched by benighted men" (A. Stevens and M. Stevens 39).

When I read this description, I had already visited Lebanon several times and was quite familiar with the Lebanese imaginaries related to the sea. I knew that these imaginaries consist of the grand, turgid, and sometimes poetic stories about the close relationship of the Lebanese with the sea. These imaginaries also incorporate beliefs and urban legends about the pollution of the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Lebanon. I was reflecting on how strongly the general imaginaries of the Mediterranean must have impacted the perception of this sea by people outside the local communities. I thought that it would be worth collecting what I know about the imaginaries of this sea from a local, Lebanese perspective.

As I mentioned, the inhabitants of the Lebanese Republic remain closely connected to the sea on various levels. Firstly, there is a strong influence of geography itself, as the territory of contemporary Lebanon

stretches along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea for a length of about 210 kilometers (Geara-Matta et al. 1). Beirut, Tarabulus, Saida, Sur, Jounieh, and other major cities in Lebanon are located along the Mediterranean coast, and they are connected by the country's main highways. Secondly, the heritage with which a large part of the Lebanese identify is closely connected to the sea, as it concerns the Phoenicians, a people perceived as one of the most outstanding sailors of ancient times (Najem and Amore 241). Reference to the Phoenicians has played many important roles in the history of Lebanon, both during and before the time of independence. Initially, it was mainly Christians who referred to the Phoenician heritage, constantly fearing repression from successive authorities and the Muslim majority; they sought elements that would allow them to embed their identity in local landscapes, which could also affect their sense of security. Over time, however, the Phoenician heritage was also accepted by the non-Christian community inhabiting Lebanon: "Phoenicianism as the national, non-Arab, identity of Lebanon continued to be articulated by a select group of Christians in Beirut and in the Mountain. But at the same time, Phoenicianism for many non-Christians evolved to denote the history of the land no less than the history of its people" (Kaufman 245). References to the Phoenician identity were also intended to provide additional arguments for the integrity and autonomy of Lebanon during the conflicts with Syria (El-Husseini 199–200). Moreover, Phoenicianism was and remains a competing narrative to pan-Arab ambitions because it values the Phoenician heritage more than that associated with Arab conquests (Najem and Amore 241). The relationship between the Phoenician culture in the region of present-day Ash-Sham and the Mediterranean Sea was important primarily because it provided the Phoenicians with economic benefits but also with a constant flow of inventions from various cultures throughout the region.

In scholarly sources, the Phoenicians are also considered to be the people thanks to whom "for the first time in human history it was possible to speak about a 'Mediterranean civilization'" (Kaufman 3). In his Western-centric and anthropocentric narrative, Asher Kaufman draws attention to the dominance of the Phoenicians in most areas of the Mediterranean—mainly the Eastern and Central Mediterranean¾ and to the colonies established by the Phoenicians. But he does not directly note that hegemony, the creation of a unified category of people, the establishment of settlements in areas inhabited by foreign peoples, or the exploitative use of the achievements of these peoples could be considered as the foundations of the later colonial system. However, I leave

these considerations aside and return to the issue of the relationship between the Phoenicians and the sea.

One of the most important promoters of this relationship is the francophone Lebanese nationalist Michel Chiha, who emphasized the role of the Mediterranean Sea in the creation of Lebanese identity (Kaufman 16). This role was to direct the process of constructing the Lebanese nation toward the West, toward the Mediterranean Basin, and not toward the Arab East. At the same time, this orientation toward the West, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, was described using racist and colonial language, as an orientation toward what is civilized, linking it with the heritage of the white man. This can be seen, for example, in the terms in which Pierre *Raphaël, a* Lebanese Jesuit, thought in 1924 about which colors should be on the Lebanese flag: "The blue, it is the sea that the Phoenicians introduced, through their vessels, to human history, and which they traversed along the maritime routes that civilized the world" (qtd. in Kaufman 21). The intertwining of the issues of Lebaneseness, the Mediterranean Sea, and Phoenician culture therefore has a strong political connotation—far from being a mere poetic reference or a picturesque metaphor, it expresses the political ambitions and directions of Lebanon's development. In the view of the tourist, this political connotation is sometimes revealed in the perception of the Mediterranean Sea as the cradle of civilization as such, not one of many civilizations—the above passage from *Lost in Beirut* is revealing in that sense. Such a perception of civilization fits perfectly with colonial visions in which the colonialists civilize savage peoples—Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden," which is often interpreted as a manifesto of the so-called civilizing mission, comes to mind in this context.

The Mediterranean Sea has yet another political dimension in Lebanon, one that primarily concerns the country's recent neoliberal policies. This is clearly visible in Sabah Ayoub's essay "The Sea Closes at 7:00" (2022). The author of the text describes her experience of visiting the "new corniche"—a coastal concrete promenade in Beirut, from where she is asked to leave by a security guard. Ayoub writes:

> We tried to explain to him that the sea and the space is ours as well as his, and that the company that he worked for had no right to kick us out of it. … Call it what you want, sir, but it is ours! The man nodded in agreement with everything we said but he insisted on accompanying us to the gate. … It had really happened. The man closed the sea at 7:00. I never went back to this place.

Through this experience, Ayoub describes the problem of appropriation of public space in Lebanon by state-owned companies—such as well-known Solidere, responsible for the construction of the new corniche—as well as by private businessmen and large corporations. As a result, the Lebanese coast is appropriated, and access to it is limited, often against the law. Numerous resorts are built there as so many elite enclaves of luxury. Andrew Arsan addresses this problematic, noting that "[t]hose who wish to spend a day sunbathing or swimming must all too often pay a steep entrance fee to gain access to a rooftop pool or beach club—often, as investigative journalists and activists have found, built illegally on seafront land that belongs to the state" (Arsan 249). The fight for access to the sea in Lebanon thus becomes part of a larger battle for the right to public space, which is regularly appropriated. This appropriation is possible through a perception of landscape that Jala Makhzoumi describes as "a privileged, totalizing perception of the Lebanese countryside generally by neoliberal politics whereby land and scenic landscapes are conceived as a resource to be used for economic profit, 'colonized' for the enjoyment of a privileged few" (Makhzoumi 229). Such a perspective on landscape seems to enter a well-functioning symbiosis with the concepts described earlier that appear in connection with Phoenicianism.

However, this is not the only perspective on landscape that can be observed in Lebanon. According to Makhzoumi, there is also a second perspective that constantly clashes with the neoliberal one, in which there are "perceptions of the Lebanese public where mountains and sea are integral to Lebanese national identity" (Makhzoumi 229). However, when it comes to national identity, it should be noted that both ways of perceiving landscape derive from the same nationalist core, of which the sea is an element that can be positioned in various ways symbolically and semantically. In Makhzoumi's text, it is clear that the author herself perceives landscape in accordance with the second perspective when she formulates assertions such as: "Land and people in Lebanon are products of mountain and sea" (230). In another place, she states that "the view from the motorway of verdant banana plantations against the Mediterranean Sea is evocative of traditional coastal landscapes in Lebanon before they were fragmented by piecemeal unregulated development" (233). Such statements as "traditional coastal landscape in Lebanon," and above all the word "traditional," show that for the author, the seascape appears as an integral element of local culture—an element from which this culture essentially emerges. The Mediterranean Sea then appears as a part of identity, which, however, takes on a slightly

different dimension when it is recognized as a direct product of the local landscape, and not of some ancient cultures. Ayoub's text, too, echoes nostalgia for this traditional Lebanese landscape that blends harmoniously with the sea. When the author visits the new corniche, she notices that "[i]ts heavy presence seemed incompatible with the sea" and that "there was a strange, unsettling feeling of not belonging, of only being invited" (Ayoub). Such reflections show that neoliberal policies targeting the Lebanese landscape lead to the severing of relationships and separation, thus disrupting the existing processes of identification.

In the passage from *Lost in Beirut* quoted above, the narrator looking at the sea says that "the waters are still stunningly clear" and that the beaches seem to be "untouched by benighted men" (A. Stevens and M. Stevens 39). When I first read this, I was so surprised that I drew a row of exclamation and question marks in the margins. I have often come across stories about how polluted the Mediterranean Sea is off the coast of Lebanon. I remember that when walking with Lebanese friends along the corniche, I often saw children bathing in the sea, happily jumping into the water from the coastal rocks. I always asked my companions whether it was safe to swim on the Beirut coast. The usual response was that it is dangerous, that the water is polluted, and that only kids from the poorer parts of the city swim there. In turn, when I suggested to my friends that we go to the beach on a day off, they usually suggested a trip to one of the private seaside resorts, not one of the few public beaches outside the capital. After spending time in Beirut, I became convinced that using the coast in Lebanon has a class character, which is often camouflaged by narratives about hygiene and pollution.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the waters off the coast of Lebanon are heavily polluted. One study from 2010 estimated 49 major sources of pollution of Lebanon's marine environment: "Most are related to uncontrolled human activities such as sewage outfalls, refineries and factories. Currently, 53 outfalls (very close to coast) are identified along the Lebanese coast" (Geara-Matta et al. 6). However, there is another factor contributing to the pollution of the sea in this area, namely the destruction associated with the numerous armed conflicts in the region. Perhaps the most famous example is the Israeli attack on the power plant in Lebanon, when Lebanon's Jiyeh power plant was attacked and about 15,000 tons of heavy fuel oil spilled into the Mediterranean Sea (see UNEP). The military conflict hindered any immediate response to the oil spill; as a result, the spill had a long-term impact on the ecosystems of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and fuel oil reached the coasts of Syria and Cyprus (Pan et al. 7483). It is no wonder that the Mediterranean Sea

seems to be a potentially dangerous place for Lebanese people because of its pollution. When I was in Lebanon, I would regularly receive advice about where it is safe to swim and how much time one can spend in the water. These concerns of Lebanese people are also shared by researchers who note, for example, that municipal sewage is not properly treated, and its condition is not monitored. Instead, it is discharged "into the river system or directly into the Mediterranean Sea, … raising a serious geo-environmental problem that might affect the coastal shoreline of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, threatening the coastal marine ecosystems" (Geara-Matta et al. 10).

When discussing this topic, it is also necessary to consider the very low level of legitimacy of the government in Lebanon, which was consolidated after the *thawra* revolution in 2019–2020 and the explosion in the Beirut port in August 2020. The uncertainty about the safety of bathing on the coast of Lebanon should thus not be surprising. An interesting description of this uncertainty and the attitude toward it can be found in A. Naji Bakhti's autobiographical novel *Between Beirut and the Moon* (2020). In this novel, the narrator describes his youth spent in Beirut and the outbreak of the July War in 2006. In one of the chapters, he and one of his friends decide to become summer camp monitors, which is basically limited to taking care of children playing on the beach. The narrator reflects on his experience:

> The oil from the Israeli warships, coupled with the waste from nearby factories and sewage plants, had severely damaged aquatic life along Lebanese shores. We had been instructed not to allow the children to swim for more than one hour a day in the sea. Alana and I ignored this. The sea was littered with empty bags of Fantasia chips and glass Pepsi bottles, and we reasoned that a bit of oil could not have done too much more harm. (Bakhti 187)

This description clearly illustrates the imaginary of the Mediterranean Sea, which differs greatly from tourist imaginaries of the Mediterranean. The sea is a potential source of hurt here, and its fluidity is the focus of an unknown danger, a threat invisible to the naked eye. The perspective of the author of the novel, on the other hand, emphasizes the storied Lebanese resilience, which is often described as almost a superpower that allows the inhabitants of Lebanon to survive in an environment so destroyed and uncertain that it seems almost impossible to live in. Many Lebanese authors write about this life in what Anna L. Tsing conceptualizes as capitalist ruins. One of the elements of this life is the relationship with the sea, which seems to be a source of identity and an indispensable element of local landscape, while also presenting a potential danger that

is difficult to identify. Moreover, the sea is a frontier dividing not only geographical entities such as lands and islands but also life perspectives and possibilities. In the words of the narrator of *Between Beirut and the Moon*: "Behind me was Cyprus, and behind Cyprus was Sicily and behind that was Valencia, and in between all of them and Beirut was the salty water of the Mediterranean, and me" (Bakhti 188).

In this approach, the Mediterranean Sea also seems to be a kind of reservoir in which meanings and senses are swarming, often clashing with each other. At the same time, this reservoir accumulates memories and stories, which is clearly visible in Andy Warner's autobiographical comic book *Spring Rain* (2020). In this book, the American author and cartoonist tries to reflect his student years spent at the American University of Beirut, which coincided with the turbulent years of the assassination of Rafik Harriri, the outbreak of the Cedar Revolution, and the beginning of the July War. The comic book's protagonist experiences life in Beirut in its various dimensions, including parties, protests, buzzing social life, and attacks. Although life in Beirut is dynamic and changing, and everyday life seems completely unpredictable, the sea seems to be an unchanging and, in some sense, universal element here, reminding the protagonist of his childhood (Warner 96). Finally, due to the outbreak of war, the protagonist is forced to leave Lebanon, but years later he returns, with the Mediterranean Sea bringing back memories as a body of water that seems to be unchanging in the dynamic environment of Beirut. The drawing of a man walking along the coast is accompanied by the description: "Down by the Corniche, the salt sprat still cooled my face in the afternoon sun" (191). Despite the many changes that have taken place in Lebanon since the July War, the sea is what anchors the author in a dynamic, changing environment, even if in reality the sea has changed beyond recognition due to the destruction caused by the armed conflict.

Conclusion

Does looking at the Mediterranean Sea from the Lebanese perspective really reveal something new? Do the four texts that constitute my starting point allow me to look at the Mediterranean from a novel perspective, one that could also respond to the challenges of postcolonial movements? I think that this perspective enables us to notice frictions that we would have otherwise ignored. In Lebanon, the ideas and meanings centered around the Mediterranean concern political, social, class,

economic, cultural, and other dimensions of life in Lebanon. In many regions, this friction seems to be much more difficult to reach because it is covered by a thick layer of tourist narratives that are supposed to construct ideas and desires that ensure the stability of local economies. In Lebanon, due to the high political dynamics, armed conflicts, and weak legitimization of power, the meanings and ideas about the Mediterranean are more distinct and dynamic. Alongside tourist ideas, those related to the birth of civilization (in the singular) and those related to migration and the Black Mediterranean, there is also the perspective that speaks of a difficult but constitutive relationship with the sea.

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Vedno nove podobe Sredozemlja: turistični imaginariji Sredozemskega morja in pogled nanj z libanonskega literarnega gledišča

Ključne besede: potopisno leposlovje / imagologija / Libanon / Sredozemlje / turistični imaginariji / libanonska identiteta

Članek obravnava sodobne literarne pripovedi, ki tematizirajo in (re)konstruirajo libanonske imaginarije Sredozemlja, in jih primerja s tem, kako si Sredozemlje in njegove obale zamišljajo turisti. V središču pozornosti so raznolika libanonska pojmovanja Sredozemlja, ki se kaže kot sublimno in oživljajoče, a hkrati tudi kot nevarno in onesnaženo. Članek analizira štiri tekste: *Lost in Beirut: A True Story* (Izgubljeno v Bejrutu: resnična zgodba, 2021) Asheja in Magdalene Stevens, *Between Beirut and the Moon* (Med Bejrutom in luno, 2020) A. Nadžija Bahtija, *Spring Rain* (Pomladni dež, 2020) Andyja Warnerja in »The Sea Closes at 7:00« (»Morje se zapre ob 7.00«, 2022) Sabe Ajub. Primerjava teh pripovedi s pripovedmi, ki prevzemajo turistično gledišče – ali ki so namenjene turistom – pokaže, kako se posplošeni imaginarij Sredozemlja kot turistične oaze, ki bistveno odstopa od libanonske perspektive, poskuša prilagajati specifični libanonski resničnosti. Ta resničnost se pogosto močno razlikuje od izkušnje Sredozemlja, kakršno proizvaja turistična industrija globalnega Severa.

What Corsica Represents: W. G. Sebald's Poetics in "The Alps in the Sea"

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The article analyzes the destruction of Corsica's flora and fauna in "The Alps in the Sea" ("Die Alpen im Meer"), a work of prose by W. G. Sebald published in 2001 and included in the posthumous volume Campo Santo *in 2003. The article reflects upon Sebald's approach to travel and tourism, as well as upon the devastation of the island of Corsica over the centuries, as a metonymy of Europe's decadence. The literary techniques applied in "The Alps in the Sea," such as the retelling of Gustave Flaubert's "Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaller" ("La légende de Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier") and the apparent convergence of the story's elements in several key paragraphs, are understood in the article as fundamental characteristics of Sebald's poetics. In turn, Sebald's poetics is approached with a hypothesis that rethinks–along with several studies of the author's oeuvre and with Jacques Rancière's interpretation of Sebald's 1995 novel* The Rings of Saturn (Die Ringe des Saturn)*–the technique of obliquity, a device defended by Sebald himself and deployed by many influential interpreters of his oeuvre.*

Keywords: German literature / imagology / Corsica / Sebald, W. G.: *Campo Santo* / tourism / aesthetics of destruction

Between the publication of *The Rings of Saturn* (*Die Ringe des Saturn*) in 1995 and the publication of *Austerlitz* in 2001, W. G. Sebald worked on an unfinished project provisionally titled *Notes from Corsica: On Its Natural History & Anthropology* (Kunze 110).[1] Often referred to as *The Corsica Project*, four extracts of the text were published posthumously in

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2003 in the volume *Campo Santo*, together with a dozen speeches and essays. Two sections, "Prose" and "Essays," comprise the book, with the first including these four extracts. Yet, in the preface, the book's editor, Sven Meyer, acknowledges the difficulty of separating some texts from others, citing one of Sebald's most well-known assertions: "My medium is prose, not the novel." The editor likewise points out that in the last texts in the second section, "the essayist can no longer be distinguished from the writer" (Meyer ix).

Campo Santo was, like *Unrecounted* (*Unerzählt*) or *Across the Land and the Water* (*Über das Land und das Wasser*), one of the posthumous books published after Sebald's unexpected death in 2001. In 2008, on the occasion of an exhibition on Sebald at the German Literature Archive, Ulrich von Büllow published the catalogue *Wandernde Schatten* (Wandering Shadows), which contained the complete *Corsica* manuscript portfolio. As Graeme Gilloch notes, there are two versions of *The Corsica Project*, apart from other materials in the archive, such as newspaper cuttings, images, and cards (Gilloch 145). This is important here not just to show another case of our era's apparently indomitable need to rummage through the raw materials of our most celebrated authors in search of anything publishable, but also because in an article about "The Alps in the Sea," one of the prose pieces from *Campo Santo*, the history of the text's publication demands an explanation on the place where are we reading the text from, because several studies mix the stories published in *Campo Santo* with the posthumous manuscript, understanding both as a whole and thus interpreting each as an incomplete work. And it is indeed incomplete, even though some of *Campo Santo*'s prose pieces were published before Sebald's death, regardless of whether they may have been conceived as a part of a larger project. Sebald read "The Alps in the Sea" upon receiving the Düsseldorf Heinrich Heine Prize in December 2000 (Schütte 328) and then published the text in the journal *Literaturen* in 2001. How are we to deal with the similarities between this text and the manuscript, or with their differences and contradictions? Coleridge's ancient mariner, for example, appears in the story of "The Alps in the Sea" within the *Corsica* manuscript, but is absent from Sebald's published text. So, studying the mariner's presence in one of the versions might lead to engaging analyses while blurring the limits of what should be considered a draft and what should not. For this article, however, it does not seem relevant to wonder if, in a more advanced phase of the work, Coleridge's sailor would have been the only passenger on a yacht on which there were no signs of life at all; "The Alps in the Sea" was

presented—and, above all, shows itself—as a finished piece, so it may be read as one.

Traveling to a Mediterranean island, reflecting on Europe

All the narrative action in "The Alps in the Sea" is presented through the narrator's thoughts, memories, and sights from his hotel room in Piana during his journey to Corsica. The first pages deal with the evolution and decadence of the flora and fauna of the island, as well as with some childhood and later recollections coming to the narrator's mind as he sits by the window and finds a copy of Flaubert's "Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaller" ("La légende de Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier"), which he summarizes, fascinated and disturbed, by describing how "an insatiable passion for hunting and a vocation for sainthood do battle in the same heart" (Sebald, *Campo* 42). The final scene, in which the main character watches the sunset and an apparently empty yacht crossing a somewhat apocalyptic landscape through his binoculars, is also told from the same room. It is from this deliberately static narrative position that the Corsican journey rejects the touristic idea of traveling: instead of taking a tour through the village or relaxing in what could be described as idyllic coastal scenery, the narrator does not leave his hotel room and spends the day meditating on the forms that destruction can adopt. In the last chapter of his book *Ghostwriting: W. G. Sebald's Poetics of History*, one of the most thorough interpretations of *Campo Santo* and *The Corsica Project*, Richard T. Gray also understands the first part of "The Alps in the Sea" as a counterpart to the hegemonic imagination of what tourism is: the trip to the island opens a space for "experiencing ecological decimation in its most immediate and exaggerated forms"; in that sense, Sebald "pursues a brand of ecotourism motivated more by the desire to experience decline than the pristine recuperation of nature" (Gray 373). Immediately afterwards, Gray writes that Sebald "once again takes Corsica as a microcosm for a 'dialectic of Enlightenment' that exposes how purported advances in human civilization are concomitant with the despoliation of the human world." The idea of the "microcosm" sparks a latent question that traverses Gray's text, but also Sebald's and almost any work of prose that involves an island or isolated place. Gray addresses it explicitly earlier in his text through a reference to the beginning of "The Alps in the Sea." Asking "Why Corsica?" he writes:

> As an island nation whose political history is closely yoked to that of continental Europe and the Mediterranean region more specifically, Corsica represents a microcosm of this larger geopolitical, natural-historical, and anthropological domain. It circumscribes that part of the world that Sebald refers to as the "cradle of our civilization" ("Wiege unserer Zivilisation" …). The possessive adjective "our" ("unserer) is significant, since it indicates how Corsica stands as a metonymy, as *pars pro toto*, for the larger abstraction of "Western civilization." … Corsica offers a narrowly circumscribed experimental object from whose study one can extrapolate conclusions about European civilization more generally. (366)

Corsica might then be the perfect place to extrapolate conclusions on Europe's progression. Throughout the first pages of "The Alps in the Sea," as mentioned, the narrator meditates on the evolution and decadence of Corsica's flora and fauna, describing the impressive European forests of the nineteenth century and explaining how some Corsican trees could be millennial and tower more than fifty meters. The narrator laments that perhaps, if humans had not intervened in the trees' growth, they would have kept growing and growing until they reached the sky. Through the diaries and notes from personalities like Ferdinand Gregorovius or Edward Lear, the narrator focuses on "the destruction of the Corsican forests *par des exploitations mal conduites* (by mismanaged exploitation)" (Sebald, *Campo* 36). The conviction of nineteenth-century writers that these forests would eventually vanish reappears in almost every paragraph; the opening sentence splits the past from the present in fairytalesque style: "Once upon a time Corsica was entirely covered by forest" (35). The narrator then places the origin of the degradation of nature in the "cradle of our civilization" that Gray alludes to—one of the elements that confers Corsica the possibility of representing something larger than itself.

The understanding of Corsica as a metonymy can be ambivalent, though, as the island may well represent the evolution and decadence of European civilization but may also function as a blank canvas, as a representative place so long as its specificities are erased.[2] How does this metonymy work in "The Alps in the Sea"? The approach to Corsica in the text gives reason to believe that the island was not chosen as a way of appropriating an apparently peripheral place. Sebald writes:

> Most of the high forests that once grew all the way to the Dalmatian, Iberian, and North African coasts had already been cut down by the beginning of the present era. Only in the interior of Corsica did a few forests of trees towering

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[2] For touristic representations of islands as blank canvases, see Moyà.

far taller than those of today remain, and they were still being described with awe by nineteenth-century travelers, although now they have almost entirely disappeared. (Sebald, *Campo* 35–36)[3]

Although the island has almost no vestiges of those magnificent forests, Corsica remains one of the few European territories where these land-scapes can be imagined. Its regional particularities, and the deterioration of its environment, may prove representative of the similar environmental destruction across the rest of Europe. Yet, a metonymy must always leave some things behind, and Corsica could become a symbol of something that it is not. For instance, if we talk about the "cradle of our civilization," an apt metonymy should include not only the natural characteristics of Corsica and Europe but also historical, political, and economic issues that have affected both. However, considering how Sebald deals with the topics of destruction and eradication not only in "The Alps in the Sea" but in other works as well, it seems that his main interest is not Corsica at all. Sebald's narratives appear to be based on a contradictory principle, as every place that appears in his works has its own specificities and is rele-vant to what is being told, but it is simultaneously quite difficult to affirm that these places are essential, or that a different topography would not have allowed for the same questions and problems to arise in the writing.

Although his arguments go in another direction, Gray alludes to an interview with Sebald that will be useful at this point:

> In what would be his very last interview, conducted by Uwe Pralle in Decem-ber 2001, Sebald insisted on the continuity of a European politics of mastery from its inception with Napoleon to its perverse culmination in the crimes of Nazi Germany. The "traces of this catastrophe," he claims, "are discernible everywhere in Europe, regardless of whether they are in evidence in the north of Scotland or on Corsica or Corfu." (Gray 367)

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[3] In an interview with Joseph Cuomo from March 2001, Sebald, asked about the conflict between nature and civilization in his work, gives an answer that is astound-ingly reminiscent of the fragment from "The Alps in the Sea" yet does not evoke *The Corsica Project*. Indeed, Sebald mentions neither *The Corsica Project* nor "The Alps in the Sea," despite having read "The Alps in the Sea" at the Heinrich Heine Prize reception ceremony just a few months earlier. This was his answer: "Organic nature is going to vanish. We see it vanishing by the yard. It's not very difficult—I mean, you can hear the grass creak. Once you have an eye for it, if you go to the Mediterranean you can see that there used to be forests all along the Dalmatian coast. The whole of the Iberian Peninsula was wooded; you could walk from the Atlas Mountains to Cairo in the shade at the time of Scipio. It's been going on for a long time, it's not just now. There are pockets, Corsica, for instance, where you can see what these forests looked like. The trees were much taller. They were like the American trees, straight up, some sixty yards. But there are only pockets of it left" (Sebald, "Conversation" 102).

Rooted in Sebald's poetics, in dialogue with Walter Benjamin's, is the assertion that the catastrophic path Europe has taken over the last centuries can be corroborated in any place, and proof emerges from people's stories, lost objects, city ruins, or in writing from other eras. This is palpable in all of Sebald's books, and among examples like Iver Grove's isolated and untouched room in *Austerlitz*, or the small Welsh village where Jacques Austerlitz grows up, or the Manchester docks in *The Emigrants* (*Die Ausgewanderten*), the lamentation in *The Rings of Saturn*, where the narrator recalls his walk through the county of Suffolk, might be the most paradigmatic. There, a trip that begins "in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work" and succeeds in doing so to an extent, "for I have seldom felt so carefree as I did then, walking for hours in the day through the thinly populated countryside," ends up making the narrator preoccupied "not only with the unaccustomed sense of freedom but also with the paralyzing horror that had come over me at various times when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident even in that remote place" (Sebald, *Rings* 3). The question of the ethics of metonymy becomes somehow outdated as a result of Sebald's approach to any place he chooses to discuss history, memory, or the decline of nature. The intriguing debate in his work is not about the places where his texts take place and whether they are fairly represented. Rather, why we constantly find reflections drawing from concrete spaces that seem to stand for broader issues in Sebald's works—Europe's destiny, the unstoppable catastrophe toward which we are headed, the impossibility of dominating the writing of history—may be a better question with which to comprehend his poetics.

The history of Europe as a long account of calamities

This characteristic is mostly developed through a literary technique and, as we will see, through an alternative epistemological understanding of the temporality of narration. In his harsh critique of Carole Angier's biography of Sebald, Ryan Ruby conceptualizes this technique, this narrative position, as "metaphysics of coincidence," defined as "the way an apparently associative series of random details and incidents makes it difficult to tell how one sentence follows from the next, only for the whole to reveal itself, in the end, as having operated according to a complex, latticelike order from the beginning" (Ruby 134). The first

part of "The Alps in the Sea," which concludes with a description of a butcher's shop to which we will come back later on, presents this structure and fits into the explanation that Sebald himself proposed on different occasions, becoming a common reference in discussions of his style. This style, usually characterized as oblique, would be a response to humans' self-defensive compulsion toward apathy in the face of injustice. As Sebald wrote in *Notes from Corsica*, "the eye learns to look away from those things that cause it pain, and perhaps it even learns to love a world that is constantly becoming more graphite-gray" (qtd. in Gray 394). The gaze, the insight, is fundamental to all of Sebald's works, and his proposal of a levity writing complements the obliquity through the same metaphor: in a 1996 interview, when he spoke of his ambition as a writer, he claimed that it was "to write about the difficult things in such a way that they lose their gravity," as he believed "that things can only be communicated by means of levity and that everything that is as heavy as lead also places a burden on the readers, so that it makes them blind" (qtd. in Gray 410). The method that Sebald proposes tries to avoid this looking away, this blindness. His process of writing about history, violence, and injustice comes together in a famous interview with Michael Silverblatt, in which the ideas of obliquity, levity, and metaphysics of coincidence—writing about an absent presence through this "apparently associative series of random details and incidents"—are displayed in a conversation about the approach to concentration camps in *Austerlitz*. Sebald explains:

> To write about concentration camps in my view is practically impossible. So you need to find ways of convincing the reader that this is something on your mind but that you do not necessarily roll out, you know, on every other page. The reader needs to be prompted that the narrator has a conscience, that he is and has been perhaps for a long time engaged with these questions. And this is why the main scenes of horror are never directly addressed. I think it is sufficient to remind people, because we've all seen images, but these images militate against our capacity for discursive thinking, for reflecting upon these things. And also paralyze, as it were, our moral capacity. So the only way in which one can approach these things, in my view, is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation. (Sebald, "Poem" 80)

These concepts are key to discussing Sebald's poetics, as they generally lead to conclusions that should be reconsidered. These explanations provide insights regarding the way Sebald's texts work, and it is obvious that the Holocaust is fundamental to the author's books, but one of the most misleading interpretations of these ideas is that there is an existing

center to be fathomed in the texts, with all the elements approaching it serving as mere excuses, or as contingent elements that exist in the text with the sole purpose of reaching what is being chased. The fact that the Holocaust is probably the most recurrent topic in Sebald's books does not imply that all the other issues addressed in them are subordinated to it, as if these works' only goal were to find a way of representing the Shoah, or as if Sebald's oeuvre still followed Aristotelian poetic principles presenting fictional events through what Jacques Rancière has called the "verisimilar consequences of a chain of causes and effects" (Rancière 1). According to Rancière, classical fiction is based on the core idea that chance and coincidence do not exist, meaning that works are built to reach a final conclusion whose explanation can be traced by this cause-effect principle. However, to Rancière, modern fiction abolishes "the division in which the fictional rationality of plots is opposed to the empirical succession of facts" (5), thus creating a kind of book that, in Rancière's reading of *The Rings of Saturn*, rejects a "causal chain endowed with a necessity superior to the unfolding of ordinary life events"; the loss of this "super-rationality" (105) permits a new temporality for fiction, liberated from the chain of causes and effects.

To which kind of temporality does Rancière refer, and how might we describe this dialogue not only with *The Rings of Saturn* but also with "The Alps in the Sea"? Rancière understands *The Rings of Saturn* as a book in which digression is the rule, so that "at each spot, easily locatable along the coastline of a small English county, it is possible to find the point of departure for an infinite digression," a point that also "ties [a] place and its history to a multitude of different but comparable places and times, of serious or fantastical tales, of historical documents, of collected objects bearing witness or of myths lost forever in the night of time" (Rancière 116). This brings about a temporality of coexistence in which in every moment different objects, places, and stories from different periods are in dialogue with each other, without any being inferior or secondary to the rest.

One of the scenes in *The Rings of Saturn* that represents this as well as the misguided interpretations mentioned above is the one in which the massive slaughter of herrings throughout the last few centuries is juxtaposed against a photograph of human corpses in the camp of Bergen-Belsen. The fact that we see two photographs of corpses piled up on the ground, one of herrings and one of people; that the narrator draws information on the history of herrings from a documentary filmed in the year 1936; that the process of killing the fish is described as "the most extreme of the sufferings undergone by a species always threatened by

disaster" (Sebald, *Rings* 57); and that the story that follows the herrings is that of Major George Wyndham Le Strange, a man who served in an anti-tank regiment that liberated the camp of Bergen-Belsen in April 1945—all these facts reinforce the connection between the herrings and the Holocaust. While the former is usually read as a comparison that foreshadows the real tragedy, an oblique way of referring to the Nazi genocide, Rancière defends a kind of fiction in which events are not taken as hierarchical. What is more, scenes like this are also intertwined with elements of equal importance throughout *The Rings of Saturn*, with the most recurrent probably involving the silk industry, which appears in the herring chapter to explain how fishing nets are made, although the silk is also present, among endless examples, in the recounting of Thomas Browne's biography, in Joseph Conrad's mother's return to exile, in the Chinese empress Cixi's desire for limitless power, and in the Third Reich. These examples help to understand why Rancière asserts that Sebald's fiction "unfolds not as a linking of times but as a relation between places," as "each place is several things at once and fiction is built as a relation between several forms of reality" (Rancière 117).

Sebald did consider the possibility of representing the horror of the Holocaust, in his own words (using yet another metaphor for sight), "like the head of Medusa: you carry it with you in a sack, but if you looked at it you'd be petrified" (qtd. in Gray 395). However, rather than understanding Sebald's entire poetics as a catalogue of strategies with which to approach the mass murders of World War II, we may glean an ethical position inscribed in his project, which may be partially defined as an understanding of our history "as a long account of calamities" (Sebald, *Rings* 295). Yet, following Rancière, the aim of such an understanding of history may not be to melancholically sit in front of these calamities like Albrecht Dürer's Angel, but to believe in "another use of knowledge, one that produces not only a new sort of fiction but another sort of common sense which links without subordinating or destroying" (Rancière 125).

Connecting human guilt to the decimation of Corsica's wildlife

Back in the first part of "The Alps in the Sea," after reviewing the decadence of Corsica's flora and fauna, the narrator considers "our dark past" and recalls two personal experiences, the first being from his childhood, which "filled [him] with uneasy premonitions" (Sebald, *Campo* 41):

I remember, for instance, how on my way to school I once passed the yard of Wohlfahrt the butcher on a frosty autumn morning, just as a dozen deer were being unloaded from a cart and tipped out on the paving stones. I could not move from the spot for a long time, so spellbound was I by the sight of the dead animals. Even then the fuss made by the hunters about sprigs of fir, and the palms arranged in the butcher's empty white-tiled shopwindow on Sundays, seemed to me somehow dubious. Bakers obviously needed no such decorations.

Later, in England, I saw rows of little green plastic trees hardly an inch high surrounding cuts of meat and offal displayed in the shop windows of "family butchers." The obvious fact that these evergreen plastic ornaments must be mass-produced somewhere for the sole purpose of alleviating our sense of guilt about the bloodshed seemed to me, in its very absurdity, to show how strongly we desire absolution and how cheap we have always bought it. (41–42)

These two paragraphs close the narration of the progressive destruction of Corsica's wildlife in "The Alps in the Sea." Paraphrasing Ruby, the whole reveals itself, and random details appear to merge in a singular moment. On the one hand, in the first pages, we find constant references to the shortening of the island's trees: from having almost sixty-meter tall, millennial trees, we transit to the chopped down trees that measure more or less thirty meters, and finally arrive at the "slender conifers which cannot be imagined lasting a single human lifetime" (Sebald, *Campo* 38) after the great fire of the 1960s. From being chopped down to enduring a fire, the tree population is no longer native, as "no trees grow here except those planted by the forestry department." This scene is especially interesting because the figure of the tourist appears in the nineteenth-century notes of Melchior van de Velde that Sebald reproduces in his text, and the kind of tourism he describes is once again opposed to the one the narrator practices. "Of the forests I have seen, Bavella is the loveliest. … Only, if the tourist wishes to see it in its glory, he must take haste! The axe is abroad and Bavella is disappearing!" (38). Tourists are never presented as people who want to, or even ought to, worry about the fate of the forest. Merely in pursuit of beautiful landscapes, they only risk arriving too late to enjoy them.

On the other hand, something similar unfolds with Corsica's animals. Van de Velde affirms that "the ground under these meager pines is largely bare: I myself saw not the slightest trace of the wealth of game mentioned by earlier travelers" (Sebald, *Campo* 38). Hunting is described as a "ritual of destruction which long ago became pointless" (39); the book describes animals that have become extinct, with hunters compared to Yugoslav soldiers of the Civil War, or to guerrillas that do not want to be

photographed in the fields, as if deep down they were aware of the consequences of their killing. It is the hunters' inability to see the contradiction between their own photographs posing with dead boars and their lamentation of the drop in the hare and partridge population year on year, or the disappointment of a hunter's wife, ever excluded from the hunt, who watches her husband come home almost empty-handed, what is seen as "the closing episode of a story that looks far back into our dark past" (41) and what precedes the previous, longer fragment.

The sensation that the palms arranged in the butcher's empty, white-tiled shop window arouse in the narrator becomes clear in the next paragraph: the little green plastic trees come off as an attempt to alleviate guilt, a demonstration of our desire for absolution. Even though this paragraph is cast as the narrator's recollection of his childhood in England, the fact that the text combines themes that have been previously developed around Corsica's wildlife establishes a kind of narrative convergence: the last phase of humankind's subjugation of flora and fauna is nothing other than their commodification. The trees planted after the fire are no longer of natural origin, but are mass-produced plastic; and if artificiality marks the end of the trajectory of the trees that, centuries ago, astonished their onlookers, then the end for the animals is death itself, transforming them into consumable goods, usually also mass-produced, as it were, and presented as yet another man-made product.

The objective here is to remark upon the fact that establishing a moment in which previous elements resonate does not make them mere bridges toward ideas of guilt and absolution. The progressive destruction of Corsica's flora and fauna should not be overlooked; "The Alps in the Sea" adjusts to Rancière's way of understanding new fiction because there is no such thing as a final goal. One could interpret the butcher's shop scene as a narrative convergence, yet the text does not end there, and, further to this, everything we have read up until this scene is presented as recollection. "All this was going through my head again one afternoon as I sat at the window of my hotel room in Piana. I had found an old volume of the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade in the drawer of the bedside table, and I began to read Flaubert's version of the Legend of Saint Julian" (Sebald, *Campo* 42). This almost works as a long digression, a parenthesis that, following the classic structure of fiction, would lead to the center of the story. Yet this does not happen either: Sebald's retelling of Flaubert's tale cannot be declared the heart of the text, nor a point to which the reader arrives thanks to a logic of cause and effect. Similarly to what Rancière argues regarding *The Rings of Saturn*, digression is the rule in "The Alps in the Sea," and the goal, if there is any, appears to

be to develop the answer that Sebald famously gave in "An Attempt at Restitution" to the question *A quoi bon la littérature?*: "Perhaps only to help us to remember, and teach us to understand that some strange connections cannot be explained by causal logic" (204).

Ways of approaching the Mediterranean devastation

The existence of these strange connections, however, does not imply that any link one suggests is valid. In his text about *The Rings of Saturn*, Rancière states that "the point is not that everything is equivalent and that all orders are good" (Rancière 121). Sebald does not work with chaotic interconnections but with subtle associations or affinities that he often reinforces. The narrator's retelling of "The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaller" is exemplary: in his three-page summary of Flaubert's story, Sebald introduces an element in the saint's life that differs from Flaubert. Flaubert's Julian hunts, like the described Corsicans, and his history is, like the island's, a tale of progressive destruction. Julian's hunting story begins in his childhood, with the killing of a little mouse: he sees it for the first time at mass, and the next Sunday he was troubled by the thought that he might see it again: "It did come back; and then every Sunday he watched for it, was troubled, seized with hatred for it, and determined to get rid of the mouse," and when he killed it, he "stood lost in amazement at this tiny body which did not stir again" (Flaubert 82). Soon after, he starts killing pigeons without questioning why he is doing it, and just a few pages later, having grown up, we behold a brutal and exponential massacre. He kills bears, bulls, wild boars, "an endless company of beasts … [that] grew more numerous at every step, … thinking of nothing, with no memory of anything at all" (89–90), and if, as a child, he went to see the pigeon he hit with a stone to feel it die in his hands, in this slaughter he cannot even stop to skin a black beaver that he has never seen before nor to pick up a grouse whose two feet he has chopped off with a sword (88–89). Julian's need to kill progresses like the island's destruction at the hand of industrialization, catastrophe, and human devastation. But despite these elements, Sebald alters Flaubert's tale to establish a stronger link. The narrator's reading seems to faithfully summarize Flaubert's writing,[4] but at

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[4] Flaubert writes: "Night was close at hand; and behind the woods, in the interspaces of the boughs, the sky was red as a sheet of blood. Julian leant back against a tree, and gazed with staring eyes at the enormous massacre; he could not think how it had been done" (Flaubert 91). Sebald writes: "In the end, night comes, the sunset is

the end of the aforementioned massacre an idea of guilt and absolution that is absent from the original source appears in Sebald's text. On his reading of "The Alps in the Sea" as a critique of how we have become inured to death and destruction, unmoved by catastrophe, Gilloch summarizes Sebald's view:

> Julian is the hunter who one day, after causing the most terrible carnage, is moved to renounce hunting altogether, only to find himself the quarry pursued relentlessly by the avenging ghosts of the animals he has killed. In his desperation, he is driven to the ends of the earth searching for absolution for his sanguineous atrocities, and finds it eventually in the infectious embrace of a leper whose pitiful bed he is forced to share. (Gilloch 137)

Sebald's Julian does feel guilty, and after the killing, he "falls victim to a paralysis of the soul, and begins his long wanderings through a world which is no longer in a state of grace. … He refuses to hunt anymore, but sometimes his terrible passion comes over him again in his dreams" (Sebald, *Campo* 43–44). Conversely, Flaubert's Julian stops hunting not because of his emotions, but because the last stag he shoots on the night of the massacre threatens Julian with the prophecy that he will murder his own parents. Julian leaves his home after nearly murdering them by accident on a couple of occasions, but eventually kills them after succumbing to the temptation to hunt again: many years after the massacre and the stag's prophecy, Julian lives with his wife, and he decides to go hunting. He fails at it, with the forest animals enclosing him as though plotting their vengeance, so Julian returns home. Yet "his thirst to kill swept over him again, and for want of beasts he would gladly have slain men" (Flaubert 107). Like a modern Oedipus, he murders his parents in his own house, who have visited him: Julian finds them asleep in his bed and, confusing them for his cheating wife and her lover, slays them. In Flaubert's story, Julian's guilt emerges from this point: it is the killing of his parents that will make a beggar of him until he finds the leper who brings him redemption.

Sebald omits this part of the tale, and his Julian feels guilty for the massacre of the first animals, a guilt that Corsican huntsmen have not experienced yet but that is described in the butcher's shop scene with the reference to the "guilt about the bloodshed." Similarly, Julian does not reencounter the animals physically as he does in Flaubert's short

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red among the branches of the forest like a cloth soaked with blood, and Julian leans against a tree with his eyes wide open, looking at the vast extent of the slaughter and wondering how he can have done it" (Sebald, *Campo* 43).

story: in "The Alps in the Sea," "wherever he goes, wherever he turns, the ghosts of the animals he has killed are with him" (Sebald, *Campo* 44). These animals and their spectral existences are figments of the imagination sparked by Julian's guilt. Rather than a modern Oedipus, Sebald's Julian is like Aeschylus' Orestes, and the animals are like the Erinyes that chase him for having murdered his mother.

After the narrator finishes reading Flaubert's story, the transition between this scene and the next resembles the one between that on the butcher's shop and the finding of Flaubert's volume in a drawer. Once the narrator abandons the book, he looks out the window to see what could be described as an apocalyptic landscape: "The monstrous rock formations of Les Calanques … were in flames, glowing from within. Sometimes I thought I saw the outlines of plants and animals burning in that flickering light, or the shapes of a whole race of people stacked into a great pyre" (Sebald, *Campo* 45). Connections with the other parts of the text, mainly through the reference to the burning of plants and animals—another form of destruction—emerge here, but always through dialogue, not as the be-all and end-all of the story. As Rancière puts it, we have a link that does not subordinate or destroy.

We may conclude by stating that this last fragment, among others, can also be related to Sebald's other works, as one could link the underlying ideas in the Les Calanques paragraph to the problems that arise when Sebald writes about the Holocaust, with the image of a "whole race" of people stacked into a great pyre. Some of the reasoning in "The Alps in the Sea" can be linked to several fundamental ideas in *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn*, and *Austerlitz*. Comparing "The Alps in the Sea" to the latter works should broaden an interpretation which, however, could paradoxically become a coercive reading of this short story, if associations were to be detected through what we can define as obliquity overuse. Sebald's characteristic way of creating associations must not be reduced to a sum of metaphorical substitutions of the Holocaust, lest we betray the fact that "all is determined by the most complex interdependencies" (Sebald, *Vertigo* 157), an idea expressed in *Vertigo* (*Schwindel*) that is basic to Sebald's poetics.

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Kaj predstavlja Korzika: poetika W. G. Sebalda v zgodbi »Die Alpen im Meer« (»Alpe v morju«)

Članek obravnava tematiko uničevanja korziške flore in favne v zgodbi »Die Alpen im Meer« (»Alpe v morju«), proznem besedilu W. G. Sebalda iz leta 2001, ki je bilo dve leti pozneje vključeno v avtorjevo posthumno izdano knjigo *Campo Santo*. Članek se osredotoča na Sebaldov odnos do popotništva in turizma – pa tudi na onesnaževanje Korzike skozi stoletja – kot na metonimijo evropske dekadence. Literarni postopki v »Alpah v morju«, med katerimi so parafraziranje Flaubertove povesti »Legenda o svetem Julijanu strežniku« (»La légende de Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier«) in nakazano konvergiranje različnih elementov zgodbe v ključnih odlomkih, so v članku obravnavani kot temeljne poteze Sebaldove poetike. K tej pa članek pristopa s pomočjo hipoteze, ki – skupaj z izbranimi razpravami o Sebaldu in z Rancièrovo interpretacijo njegovega romana *Saturnovi prstani* (*Die Ringe des Saturn*) iz leta 1995 – problematizira tehniko odklonskosti kot postopek, ki ga je zagovarjal Sebald sam, analizirali pa so ga mnogi vplivni interpreti njegovega opusa.

Melodrama and Farce in the Tourist Resort: A Southern European Perspective

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In this article, I examine the narrative strategies of representing major transformations along Europe's Mediterranean shores. My focus is on the beach as a contested environment in which the natural and the social, as well as the private and the communal, confront each other. I argue that contemporary Catalan, Spanish, French, Italian, and Greek novels use tourism and the hyper-urbanization of the beach as gateways to explore questions of identity, historical meaning, and the Mediterranean's place in Europe and the world. By analyzing the tourist resort as a specific narrative site, I investigate the interplay between historical perceptions, environmental imaginings, and narrative form. Through close readings of Metin Arditi's L'enfant qui mesurait le monde *and Massimo Maugeri's* Trinacria Park*, I highlight the challenges of capturing the complexity of the social construction of Southern European shores in a single narrative. While Arditi tackles the Greek crisis through melodrama and nostalgia for ruins, Maugeri traces a Sicilian island's historical development from tragedy to farce and, eventually, disaster. Ultimately, my article seeks to contribute to a better understanding of narrative perceptions of modernization in the Euro-Mediterranean region.*

Keywords: imagology / European Mediterranean / beach / resort / nostalgia / melodrama / tragedy / farce

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Setting the scene

The shoreline is an ambiguous space.[1] Its geography attests to the historical intertwining of humanity and nature, as well as to the lengthy historical duration of the capitalist project behind its transformations. The shoreline is also a point of confluence between land and sea, traditionally conceived as the domains of society and nature, respectively. John Fiske describes the coast as an "anomalous category between land and sea that is neither one nor the other but has characteristics of both" (Fiske 43), one where the physical structures and perceptions of land and sea overlap with the social structures of nature and society. The coast, the shoreline, and the beach mediate between these binaries as extremely dynamic and transitional ecological domains. As early as 1951, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist and the author of the seminal book *The Sea Around Us*, conceived the sea as the most "fleeting and transitory feature of the earth" (94).

The beach, a space socially constructed as a place of leisure, paradoxically illustrates the privileged access to the edge of nature understood as "the radical other" (Taussig 264). As Hannah Freed-Thall writes, "the cultural history of the leisure beach encompasses medicine and hygiene, steam engines, urban planning, and labor movements" (Freed-Thall 133). Since the eighteenth century, the beach has ceased to be portrayed as a place of disaster and shipwreck, gradually becoming a common symbol of paradise; it has also entered medical narratives that recommend the breeze, sand, waves, and horizon as remedies for the physical and emotional afflictions of the industrializing city. In brief, the beach became an object of fantasies of tourism.

As beach tourism gained popularity throughout the twentieth century, the tourism industry made Mediterranean beaches accessible to visitors. In the pre-World War I era of international tourism, the Italian and French Rivieras were home to winter resorts for Northern Europe's wealthy upper class (Bramwell 4). The Mediterranean and its

islands were conceived as exotic paradises, as destinations coveted for their natural beauty, climate, and idyllic atmosphere, as well as their supposedly pre-modern essence. One might mention the acclaimed novels of British travelers to the Balearic Islands (see Moyà), or the depictions of Cyprus in Lawrence Durrell's 1957 autobiographic work *Bitter Lemons*. The French Riviera also hosted writers, artists, and thinkers such as Stefan Zweig, Scott Fitzgerald, Aldous Huxley, and Walter Benjamin, who would visit the South of France in search of peace and exuberant nature (see Scaraffia).

Travel and tourism have played key roles in the history of capitalist expansion, facilitating the insertion of certain spaces into the dynamics of capital (see Murray Mas), including the Euro-Mediterranean countries upon which I will focus below. Since the mid-twentieth century, Mediterranean beaches have been transformed into socially constructed leisure landscapes. After World War II, the southern coastal regions of Europe experienced accelerated and uneven development driven by the so-called economic miracles of the 1950s and 1960s in countries such as Spain, Italy, France, and Greece (Hadjimichalis 3). Tourism became international and massive, involving diverse social groups as a result of the rising incomes that came with post-war prosperity, longer paid holidays, innovations in transport technology, and the large-scale reproduction of standardized holiday packages. This phenomenon— initially captured in works such as Italo Calvino's 1957 novel *A Plunge into Real Estate (La speculazione edilizia)*—socio-culturally constructed holidays as sun-and-sand experiences, perpetuating stereotypes about the Mediterranean (see Minca) and consolidating the region as a leisure periphery, a socio-cultural manifestation of peripheral capitalism.

With ups and downs punctuated by episodes such as the crisis of the 1970s and the entry of post-dictatorial states such as Greece and Spain into the European Economic Community in the 1980s, international financial capitalism benefited from Southern Europe's tourism sector almost until the outbreak of the Great Recession in 2007. As my colleague Violeta Ros and I have shown elsewhere, the Southern European states of Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain were branded as lazy, backward, corrupt, and irresponsible (and agglomerated through the acronym PIGS) during the Great Recession (see Vidal-Pérez and Ros). These asymmetrical imaginaries were echoed in Southern European narratives of the crisis that critically pointed to the long-established tradition of Mediterranean Orientalism (see Herzfeld).

How can we capture in a single narrative the complexity of the social construction of Europe's Mediterranean shores? In my research, the

coast—and its pacified version, the beach—serves as a narrative environment conducive to exploring history in its *longue durée*. Tourism and the hyper-urbanization of the beach are central motifs in the texts I will study below, reflecting the Mediterranean's dramatic transformation and serving as gateways to the historical meanings of places and their roles in the European project. As Freed-Thall notes, the beach is a site of contradiction (Freed-Thall 132). I argue that this stems from its contradictory dual nature: aquatic and terrestrial, natural and social, but also public and private. A simulation of the commons, always conditioned by the possibility of entering a regime of privilege, the beach is, in this sense, a contested space. In what follows, I will explore the beach as a narrative environment in the sense that Marta Puxan-Oliva proposes, that is, as "the formal narrative expression of space" and as the interaction of socio-historical contextualization, environmental imaginings, and narrative form (Puxan-Oliva 80). I will do so by focusing on a recurrent narrative environment that is emblematic of coastal contestation: the tourist complex.

Where the sea meets the land: Resorts and fantasy

In J. G. Ballard's novel *Cocaine Nights* (1996), one particular sentence serves as a pivotal entry point for my reflection: "Something new and strange happens when the sea meets the land" (131). The novel portrays Marbella's coast in Spain, transformed by residential tourism and corrupt real-estate developments. Set in Estrella de Mar, an exclusive resort for wealthy British retirees, the story is catalyzed by five deaths. Beneath its harmonious façade, the resort thrives on crime, drugs, and illicit sex, suggesting that criminal violence acts as a social corrective. The novel engages with a critique of the impact of global capitalism on the recent construction of a supra-national, free-market Europe. As Ballard unfolds his signature blend of the uncanny with the parodic, the novel comes off as neither speculative nor noir. Rather, it revolves around what happens when land meets sea: it explores the unsettling social and narrative structures of contemporary Europe, organized around leisure and business and centered on sun, sea, and sand.

Numerous novels produced around the global economic crisis use tourism as a literary motif, often featuring Mediterranean resorts as unsettling narrative spaces that are emblematic of such developments. In *El Dorado* (2008), Valencian author Robert Juan-Cantavella

portrays a journalist investigating Marina d'Or, a real Valencian resort, because "something strange is happening on this shore of the Mediterranean" (23).[2] The protagonist's drug-induced haze blurs reality and hallucination, rendering uncertain whether the resort's kitsch architecture—described as "motley metal porticoes with Arabic shapes and bulbs … crowned by the sailboat" (26–27)—is real or imagined. In Philippe Claudel's 2018 novel *Dog Island* (*L'Archipel du Chien),* an allegorical story set on a fictional French archipelago, nature takes revenge against its impoverished inhabitants. Forgotten by the continent and dehumanized, they so badly covet the construction of a construction project that they hide the arrival of deceased migrants' bodies on their shores. Pere Antoni Pons' 2023 novel *Contra el món* (Against the World) envisions a dystopian Mallorca where the Tramuntana mountains suddenly vanish and are replaced by New Mallorca, a real-estate complex that grotesquely recreates the former one (see also Picornell, "Tourism"). Petros Markaris' 2020 novel *O fónos eínai chríma* (Murder Is Money), set in post-crisis Greece, follows a murder investigation involving a Saudi investor's luxury seaside project. Livio Romano's 2016 novel *Per troppa luce* (Too Much Light) satirizes Neripoli, a theme park built atop former olive groves, blending grotesque comedy with dramatic undertones.

As Waleed Hazbun notes, the post-war Fordist stage of capitalism drove the homogenization of consumer tastes, popularizing standardized products such as mass beach tourism and resorts (Hazbun 8). From the 1960s onwards, tourism capital has promoted settings that fit the Mediterranean holiday imaginary, exploiting both the *couleur locale* and historical sites, while building hotels and theme parks to accommodate a growing wave of middle- and working-class tourists from Northern Europe. These narrative resorts embody the postmodern aesthetic of fragmentation and spatio-temporal compression (Hom 156). In the above novels, the tension between authenticity and Mediterranean identity is commodified within tourist spaces. The tourist complex simultaneously acts as a mass control device and as a tool of homogenization, while turning resort locations into continental and global cartographies. For these Mediterranean countries, the complex serves as both an escape from economic exceptionalism and a guarantor of normalcy. However, these narratives also anticipate the untenability of the paradoxical promise, as the South is both encouraged to become like the North and denied this possibility (see Cassano).

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

The Mediterranean resort can be viewed as competing in the order of the spectacular. Michael Taussig's description of the beach as "the ultimate fantasy space," produced under a regime of modernism in which reality is subtly displaced with "strange flights of imagination" (Taussig 250), seems to hold for the resort as well. As Orvar Löfgren writes in his social history of tourism, "vacations remain one of the few manageable utopias of our lives" (Löfgren 7). Fantasy, imagination, utopia: something of the order of the fantastic seems to necessarily be activated in the assimilation of the spatial transformation produced by mass tourism in its resorts, theme parks, and other spectacular manifestations. I would like to explore this imaginative exercise of narrative in the production of contemporary and spectacular Euro-Mediterranean tourist sites through two case studies: Metin Arditi's 2016 novel *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde* (The Child Who Measured the World) and Massimo Maugeri's 2013 novel *Trinacria Park*. Both novels revolve around the planning of a tourist mega-project (the Périclès Palace and Trinacria Park, respectively) in an idyllic place (a Greek island and a Sicilian island) that has been impoverished by decades of unequal and dependent development. Both are confined to the limited space of an island, yet they reflect images of a larger system that frames their peripheral condition. Significantly, both novels feature a central trope embedded within the resort setting: the recurring presence of classical remnants (an amphitheater and a manuscript, respectively). These remnants serve a dual purpose: discursively, they engage with the respective positioning of Greece and Sicily within Europe and the wider world; narratively, this motif serves as the basis for the construction of a fiction that is made manifest through different modulations, from melodrama and nostalgia to tragedy and farce.

Périclès Palace: Nostalgia for ruins

L'enfant qui mesurait le monde, the novel by the francophone Swiss writer of Turkish origin Metin Arditi, was published by Éditions Grasset in 2016.[3] The novel is set on Kalamaki, a fictional Greek island devastated by the Great Recession. The narrative revolves around the personal stories of two characters. The first is that of Eliot (Ilias in Greek), a retired Greek-American architect who moves to Kalamaki

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[3] Arditi's novel was awarded the Prix Méditerranée 2017 by the Centre Méditerranéen de Littérature, which prizes works that address Mediterranean issues. The novel was adapted into a film in 2024.

after his daughter, also an architect, dies there. Attracted by its ancient amphitheater, Eliot's daughter had moved to the island, where she had begun to design a project to restore it using the golden ratio. However, her accidental death in the amphitheater halts the project. Eliot settles on the island to feel closer to her, dedicating himself to her unfinished work. Years later, amid the crisis, he remains committed to her vision: restoring the monument to create a philosophical school facing the sea. The second main character of the novel is Yannis, an eleven-year-old autistic boy who only finds solace in counting the fishing boats arriving on the island and the number of fish caught, which are becoming increasingly scarce. Yannis is the son of Maraki, a middle-aged, divorced, artisanal fisherwoman who works off of her small boat, conveniently named Pantocrator. The island, conceived as a privileged reservoir of the classical past and of the vanishing genuine world, is in danger of being marred by Investco, a company that plans to build a tourism real-estate project called Périclès Palace, a gigantic complex located in the Saint-Irénée cove, one of the most beautiful in Greece, with 340 rooms, 22 bungalows, a marina for 35 boats, six tennis courts, three swimming pools, a heliport, and a potential gambling license. In addition, a road is set to cross the entire island, with plans to build an incineration plant as well. The project would decidedly boost the impoverished island's economy.

In *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde*, several topics that are central to my approach may be explored at the same time: the representation of the contemporary Mediterranean as a paradisiacal and exploited place; the contrast between splendor (symbolized by the amphitheater) and ruin (symbolized by the spoils of the financial crisis); and the problematization of accelerated modernization. In what follows, I will explore how, while the novel initially appears to pose a political problem by considering how capitalism always seems to reproduce itself despite its crises, a close reading of the novel's narrative development based on melodramatic tropes and the nostalgic mode reveals a controversial resolution.

As is characteristic of island narratives, characters can be categorized into fairly archetypal schemes: the lonely foreigner, the sympathetic priest, the corrupt politician, the honest journalist, the disabled child, the divorced mother. Their evolution is key to understanding the melodramatic basis of such fiction, as the characters develop along a sentimental plot that idealizes family, romance, and community ties. Initially virtuous characters become even more righteous. Eliot, a solitary man who has lost loved ones, dedicates himself

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to his late daughter's projects and eventually opens his heart to love again; Yannis, a boy with autism, finds solace in Eliot's daily visits, during which he learns to write and listens to Greek myths; Théofani, a journalist, reignites her youth activism in response to the controversial project. The narrative concludes on a conciliatory note: the municipal council approves the Périclès Palace, but with modifications. The buildings will blend with the landscape, the marina will be located not in the cove but along the village, and only one swimming pool will be built. The Ministry protects the ancient amphitheater, while a modern theater is planned for the locals. These changes aim for social and natural integration. Corruption is exposed: Investco, along with a local politician, are revealed as corrupt. The conflict and Yannis' situation bring Eliot and Maraki closer, sparking a romantic relationship. All these features configure a narrative tone that builds on empathetic compassion and moralizing identification to the point that it appears to remind us of the primacy of human connection over material hardship.

Another element that underpins the nostalgic mode is the novel's monumental conception of the past. The conflict raised by the construction of the Périclès Palace restores a distant historical sense located in an idealized, classical past. Instead of using narrative devices to delve into the socio-historical motifs that explain the present crisis (where the problem of the novel seems to be located), the narrative recurrently brings together Hellenic tropes (be they mythological, philosophical, artistic, or literary) as so many markers of Greek grandeur, while essentializing, in passing, a sense of Greekness.[4] The aesthetic form that this idealization takes is that of the contrast between splendor and ruin, which I have elsewhere studied in the Spanish context, where the ruins comprise the real-estate developments interrupted by the crisis (see Vidal-Pérez). Against the backdrop of the calm waters of the Aegean lies the ruined amphitheater, a paradoxical symbol of classical Greek splendor. This architectonic monument, whose construction was based on an ancient measure of proportionality—"the key to

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[4] This contrasts with the trend in Greek literature (and other Southern European literatures including Catalan, Spanish, and Italian) to revisit the recent past following the Great Recession. Dimitris Tziovas notes that this trend reflects disillusionment and outrage with the failed modernization and democratization of the previous decades. Key authors such as Petros Markaris write crime fiction based on the crisis, with constant critiques of the Colonels' junta, abandoned revolutionary projects, and the urban modernization of Athens (see Tziovas).

ancient art and its magic" (Arditi 43)[5]—is a setting in decadence whose pulsating grandeur still blooms in its marble fissures. The conception of the natural environment as a potentially lost paradise only deepens this duality: "Saint-Irénée followed a curve about five hundred meters long. Its beach of small, very white pebbles was surrounded by a forest of umbrella pines that sloped gently upwards, presenting the bay like a jewel" (212).[6]

The urban development project of Périclès Palace, on the other hand, is an example of a different kind of splendor: the illusory character of capitalist phantasmagoria and its capacity to conquer and appropriate, following Jason W. Moore, new frontiers in coastal spaces (Moore 63). Occupying seven hectares of one of the most beautiful coves in Greece, the project is poised to "restore hope to one of the most beautiful islands in the Aegean Sea" (Arditi 109).[7] With its construction, "there would be money for the road, a prestigious hotel, a marina; Kalamaki would become a little Mykonos" (126).[8] Paradoxically, the project is named after an important Athenian politician and orator from the fifth century BCE who promoted the arts and literature and made Athens the cultural center of Ancient Greece. Most of the great temples of the Acropolis that can be visited today were built under his rule. The complex's symbolic name brings to light a central episode in Greek history in a rather poorly performed demonstration of the continuity of magnificence.

The ruins of the amphitheater also symbolize Europe's debt to Greece, in contrast to Greece's debt to Europe, as represented by the Périclès Palace: "There was a time when we gave the world temples, stadiums, and amphitheaters. Today, we are disfiguring a marvelous site to build the Pericles Palace, a symbol of our repeated rendez-vous with ridicule and shame" (Arditi 93).[9] Following his daughter's

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[5] In the original: "la clé de l'art antique et de sa magie."

[6] In the original: "Saint-Irénée suivait une courbe longue d'environ cinq cents mètres. Sa plage, faite de cailloux petits et très blancs, était entourée d'une forêt de pins parasols qui montait en pente douce et présentait la baie comme on offre un bijou."

[7] In the original: "a le mérite de redonner espoir à l'une des plus belles îles de la mer Égée."

[8] In the original: "Il y aurait de l'argent pour la route, un hôtel prestigieux, une marina, Kalamaki deviendrait un petit Mykonos."

[9] In the original: "Il fut un temps où nous offrions au monde des temples, des stades et des amphithéâtres. Aujourd'hui, nous défigurons un site merveilleux pour y construire le Périclès Palace, symbole de nos rendez-vous répétés avec le ridicule et la honte."

research, Eliot presents his counter-project (whose title, "Un ouzo chez Sophocle," or "An ouzo at Sophocles," is a near caricature): a school of philosophy in the restored amphitheater. Such a (symbolic) restoration, which "could harmoniously occupy the Saint-Irénée cove" (184),[10] would receive foreign-exchange students: "It restores our honor" (250).[11] The reference to the classical Greece as the cradle of civilization emanates from ruins, from remains. As I understand it, this may involve a problematic double reading: on the one hand, we have the interpretation of these ruins as absence, that is, as "a past that can now only be grasped in its decay," as Andreas Huyssen claims (Huyssen 12); on the other hand, we have the problematic anxiety with which Greeks are reminded, in this case by the displaced Eliot, of the greatness of their own culture.

Noting that "both the ruin in its empathetic sense and the notion of the authentic are central topoi of modernity itself rather than simply concerns of the late twentieth century," Huyssen locates the so-called authentic ruins of modernity in the eighteenth century and suggests that "this earlier imaginary of ruins still haunts our discourse about the ruins of modernity in general" (Huyssen 9–10). Whereas this appreciation may be present in *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde*, the syncopated allusions to Homer, the myths, the golden ratio, and Sophocles respond rather to the tendency toward what Fredric Jameson calls, in the context of Greece, "a nostalgia for the classicism endemic in this nation-state" (Jameson, *Ancients* 134), a tendency so unjustified that it comes across as superficial. In the course of the narrative, such allusions emanate as cliché rather than tradition. Deprived of the historical context that generates conflict, this kind of monumental approach to the past as a source of emotional and aesthetic satisfaction modulates a rather nostalgic narrative mode (see Jameson, "Postmodernism" 66).[12] In parallel, Mercè Picornell suggests that the transformation of ruins into beautiful remnants of the past is a process driven by present interests that assign ruins value tied to a specific history and their original function (Picornell, *Sumar* 28). In this sense, the restoration narrative in *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde* reinforces a nostalgic and fetishized reconstruction of the past.

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[10] In the original: "pourrait harmonieusement occuper la crique de Saint-Irénée."

[11] In the original: "Il rétablit notre honneur."

[12] Interestingly, *O bombistís tou Parthenóna* (The Parthenon Bomber), Christos Chryssopoulos' novel from 1996 in which an individual blows up the Parthenon in Athens with the idea of freeing the Greeks from the perfection that the monument symbolically carries, was republished in 2010.

By the end of the novel, the Greek academy is not developed, and the conflict is surprisingly resolved through a not-so-problematic acceptance of progress. While it may be true that "reflective nostalgia … reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another" (Boym 49–50), *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde* does not raise many questions. The novel seems to require melodramatic schemes and common narrative tropes to work as fiction—bolstered by the nostalgic contrast between the splendor and ruin of both Greece and the Mediterranean. However, even the melodramatic basis upon which the fiction is built does not resolve its own conflict. The philhellenic point of view of the narration, therefore, seems more engaged with the nostalgia of monumental ruins than with the material ruin of the present, perhaps due to a lack of familiarity with modern Greek history, illustrating in effect Huyssen's general insight that "the real catastrophes of the twentieth century have mainly left rubble rather than ruins" (Huyssen 20).

Trinacria Park: A meridional farce

Trinacria Park, the novel by Catanese writer and journalist Massimo Maugeri, was published in 2013 by Edizioni E/O in the Sabot/Age collection curated by the crime fiction writer Massimo Carlotto.[13] The novel is set twenty kilometers off the coast of Catania, in an imagined Mediterranean enclave: Montelava, a small, triangular island much like Sicily. After being ruined by decades of misrule, irresponsible real-estate development, the seasonal tourism economy, and unscrupulous politics, Montelava has become the focus of a grandiose project of rebirth funded by the United States with the support of local politicians. Covering the entire surface of the island, Trinacria Park, as this theme park about Sicily and its history is called, is destined to become Europe's first tourist center, an island-bound Disneyland of sorts. The island will have spaces for film and television studios (again, the largest in Europe), gardens, aquatic parks, and golf courts. There will be hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, rooms equipped for every pastime, swimming pools, a conference hall, a hospital, themed areas with live representations of the great

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[13] Initially led by Sandro Ferri and Sandra Ozzola, this publishing house launched the Mediterranean noir genre in Italy, exporting this label to the anglophone field through Europa Editions, a publishing house based in New York and London.

events of Sicilian history (with the to-scale reproduction of all its panoramic and artistic beauties, including Mount Etna), and vast spaces for activities of all kinds. At the park's inauguration, a historical finding on the island is set to be announced: the discovery of an ancient manuscript containing a poem about the Gorgons. The island can therefore harbor everything imaginable, as reflected in the quote by Leonardo Sciascia that opens the novel: "Sicily is a fantastic dimension. How can one live there without imagination?" (Maugeri 1).[14]

But during the inauguration party, when the island is full of political, business, and cultural bigwigs, tragedy strikes: a deadly cholera epidemic breaks out and starts to kill off the island's visitors and inhabitants alike. The island is quarantined and relations with Sicily cease: amid total isolation, rumors of a terrorist plot by radical Islamists begin to circulate. Eventually, it turns out that the plot is actually being led by park shareholders seeking to acquire the complex and profit from the production of a vaccine. The situation is simultaneously exploited by a small command of Sicilian ultranationalists that manages to penetrate the Directorate General and prepares to carry out a massacre. Nature, too, participates in the general madness. A furious wind causes a hurricane that devastates the island, destroying everything in its path: "The sea swells. Waves rise. … The island shakes, it rebels. It takes revenge" (Maugeri 209).[15] The island seems to cast off all the artifice that has ensnared it.

In a rather obvious manner, this resort contains an inherent tension between the parodic and the allegorical in relation to the consumerist view of Sicilian history. In her study of Maugeri's novel, Daniela Carmosino defines historical theme parks as mega-complexes of buildings intended for the accommodation and entertainment of tourists and reproducing scenes from one or more historical periods with the goal of profit; for Carmosino, these complexes seek to seduce and delight masses of consumers with a dose of problematic authenticity. Trinacria Park is a sort of journey through the most popular episodes of Sicilian history: "the massacre of Portella della Ginestra, the disembarking of the Thousand, the arrival of the Americans in World War II, … *The Leopard* by Luchino Visconti" (Maugeri 57).[16] The critique of the current

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[14] In the original: "La Sicilia è una dimensione fantastica. Come si fa a viverci senza immaginazione?"

[15] In the original: "Il mare si gonfia. Le onde si sollevano. … L'isola si scuote, si ribella. Si vendica."

[16] In the original: "la strage di Portella della Ginestra, lo sbarco dei Mille, lo sbarco degli americani nella Seconda guerra mondiale, … *Il Gatopardo* di Luchino Visconti."

perception of history in the novel is made obvious: contrary to *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde*, history is starkly depicted as just another authentic product that is commodified, exhibited, and consumed. Strikingly, one area of the complex stands out: Little Sicily (named after New York's Italian neighborhood to emphasize the project's Americanized design), "where the identity of the island is showcased in a generous concentration of splendor" (117),[17] and where the visitor can approach the architectural wonders of Sicily. Historical spectacularization prevails, then, over historical narration.

I agree with Carmosino in her argument that, through the simulated recreation of mainstream historical time, the novel poses the crisis of the historical *logos* and critiques the apparent impossibility of producing and generating history—in this case, specifically Sicilian history (Carmosino 147). However, I would like to explore how the design of this Mediterranean resort sustains tension between parodic and tragic conceptions of Sicilian history in this novel. Key in this sense is the mythological reference to the Gorgons and the subject of the newly found manuscript. As in *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde*, the park's notoriety is legitimized by a historical finding: the providential discovery of certain fragments of a poem in ancient Greek that narrates the vicissitudes of the three Gorgons (Medusa, Euryale, and Stheno), the daughters of the sea god Phorcys and the sea monster Ceto, who "exercise a destructive function with the sole aim of fostering a new equilibrium" (Maugeri 51).[18] This is related to Sicilian symbology itself. The triskelion (commonly known as Trinacria), a depiction of a mythological being with three legs, on Sicily's flag is shrouded in mystery.[19] The Gorgon at the center of the triskelion is the head of Medusa, the snake-haired Gorgon and the only mortal of the three Gorgon sisters. It is not difficult to see how, by appropriating the name of a mythical element, Trinacria Park satirically and allegorically condenses a critique of the dominant (self-)perception of Sicily.[20]

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[17] In the original: "quella dove l'identità dell'isola viene messa in mostra in un generoso concentrato di splendore."

[18] In the original: "esercitano una funzione distruttrice soltanto con l'obiettivo di favorire nuovi equilibri."

[19] From the Greek τρία (*tría*, "three") and ἄκρα (*ákra*, "promontories"), trinacria means "three mountains." The three legs represent the three extreme points of Sicily: Cape Pelorus or Punta del Faro in Messina, Cape Passero in Syracuse, and Cape Lilybaeum or Cape Boeo in Marsala.

[20] For a comprehensive cultural analysis of Italian theme parks as so many hyperrealist simulations of the nation, see Hom.

In the novel, a Sorbonne professor of Greek paleography describes the ancient poem whose "structure and verses present similar features to the two Homeric works" (Maugeri 50).[21] This story of the Gorgons is supposed to be dramatized as a play for the visitors of the park. However, mid-narrative, the manuscript is revealed to be fake.[22] The epic of Sicily's founding thus becomes a true parody of Sicilian history. However, while parodying the uniqueness of an ultimately false manuscript on the Gorgons, this myth serves two narrative purposes.

First, although false, the fictional device allows the Gorgons to serve as a liaison throughout the novel: the three figurations structure the chapters and are incarnated in the characters of the three protagonists (Italo-American producer Monica Green, ambitious Sicilian television journalist Marina Marconi, and ultranationalist Sicilian actress Angela Metis). In addition, as bearers of the depths of the unconscious, the Gorgons anchor the modernity of the novel in primal archetypes and experiences like the struggle for power and ambition, forbidden and tragic love, familial and corporate hate, destructive acts of revenge, and the inevitability of death. The novel seems to suggest that these conditions constantly mar human history, repurposed here with devastating force.

Second, the mythological Trinacria pushes us to reconsider Sicily's existence as a tragic one. Montelava represents a small-scale copy of contemporary Sicilian history through the prism of subjugation, domination, and dependence, as "a land raped for centuries" and "accustomed to succumbing" (Maugeri 196–197).[23] In the words of a government figure: "Montelava has always been regarded as an island abandoned to itself, a victim of neglect, greed, the gain of the few at the expense of collective interest. An island pointed to as a negative example, as ballast, a dustbin" (126).[24] The recent history of tourist-sector development, with the new Mediterranean imaginary linked to *Italia balneare* ("seaside Italy") which is the product "of the 'economic

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[21] In the original: "struttura e versi presentano caratteristiche simili alle due opere omeriche."

[22] Maugeri reaffirms his admiration for Sciascia who, in his 1963 novel *The Council of Egypt* (*Il consiglio d'Egitto*), illustrates a similar ambivalence toward Sicily by exploring the story of an eighteenth-century forger who created fake Arabic codices to challenge conventional interpretations of Sicilian history.

[23] In the original: "una terra violentata da secoli" and "abituata a soccombere."

[24] In the original: "Montelava è sempre stata considerate come un'isola abbandonata a se stessa, vittima de ll'incuria, dell'avidità, del guadagno di pochi a discapito dell'interesse collettivo. Un'isola indicate come esempio negative, zavorra, pattumiera."

boom' and of the financial resources that postwar Italian governments poured into the Italian south" (Fogu 255), actually "had a devastating impact on both the economy and politics of the south" (Mackay 214), portrayed in the novel as a tragic story of failures. The repetition of an attempt at economic acceleration and recovery in search of "the relaunch of the entire Mezzogiorno" and "the largest tourism development project ever in the history of the nation" (Maugeri 128)[25] is destined to fail. This tourist-dependent accumulation and speculation cannot but take the form of a farce, as epitomized by Trinacria Park. Through the critique of fraught modernity and ultranationalism, the so-called Southern question is clearly present in the novel. The narration develops a palpable critical perspective on the identification of Sicily with agriculture, as historically subordinate and dependent on both Northern Italy and Europe, and suggests how the island could become the subject of its own history. Following Franco Cassano's *Southern Thought* (*Il pensiero meridiano*), this would be a subject of thought that seeks to recover the idea of the Mediterranean as a necessary space of resistance and solidarity in which alternative modernities can be projected.

The resolution of the plot simultaneously reveals the discovery of a conspiracy orchestrated by investors and the fulfillment of the Gorgon prophecy through a natural disaster. In the end, Maugeri chooses the mythological path of condemnation to restore the equilibrium of the island: first, a deadly epidemic decimates the population of Trinacria Park, as if to remind us of Sicily's fatal epidemics of the past; then, a destructive tempest comes from the sea, sweeping the island clean. In the end, we learn how Sicily bears its strength and majesty, but also its devastating chaos, as a true Gorgon. Very few Sicilians will survive Sicily: only those who know how to survive a tragedy and trust in their ghosts and the sea. The Mediterranean as a sea reemerges then not as a domesticated, pacified space, but as an enemy, an obstacle, and at once a place of salvation.

In brief, the characters are allegorically defeated by superior or otherwise inevitable forces, be they guised as the totality of the world-system or as the Gorgons. The complot and the prophecy serve as key figurations, providing a narrative structure that organizes and processes the conflicts of Sicilian history and its contradictions. Between hyper-realistic simulation and the operability of myths, between pastiche and

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[25] In the original: "il rilancio ti tutto il Mezzogiorno" and "il più grande progetto di sviluppo turistico mai realizzato nella storia del Paese."

allegory, the novel presents both unified and fragmented versions of history while offering a critical perspective on socio-political structures.

Conclusion

The beach is a contested environment in which the natural and the social, the public and the private, problematically converge. The tourism boom and accelerated modernization propelled by the economic growth of the mid-twentieth century drastically transformed the Mediterranean coast of Europe. Focusing on a corpus of Catalan, Spanish, French, Italian, and Greek novels, I have explored in this article how the contested environmental and social conditions of the Euro-Mediterranean beach interact with diverse narrative forms. As a narrative environment, the beach provides a lens through which we can examine the complex social construction of Mediterranean shores. Embodying fantasy, Mediterranean resorts are private and privileged spaces that capitalize on the discourse of free access to natural commons.

Analyzing Arditi's *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde* and Maugeri's *Trinacria Park*, I have highlighted the challenges of capturing in a coherent narrative the complexity of the social construction of Europe's southern coasts. The philhellenic dualism of the Périclès Palace project becomes a pastiche of simulacrum in Trinacria Park. *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde* tackles the Greek crisis through a monumental veneration of history, risking the identification of the Mediterranean with nostalgia, as a host of relics from a pre-modern past. *Trinacria Park* narrates how the repetition of history becomes a farce. While the sarcastic tone makes it difficult to distinguish the envisioning of a project for Sicily and the Mediterranean as a privileged place of resistance, behind the final destruction, a Mediterranean that enables nonhegemonic modes of perception, desire, and sociability seems to emerge. Through these two case studies, I have argued that the beach remains a space in which historical and cultural meanings are negotiated in contradiction but also a space in which the limits of the modern project become evident.

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Melodrama in farsa v letovišču: južnoevropski pogled

Ključne besede: imagologija / evropsko Sredozemlje / obala / letovišče / nostalgija / melodrama / tragedija / farsa

Članek obravnava pripovedne strategije upovedovanja zgodovinskih sprememb v evropskem sredozemskem obalnem pasu. Osredotoča se na obalo kot prizorišče trka med naravnim in družbenim, pa tudi med zasebnim in skupnim. Sodobne katalonske, španske, francoske, italijanske in grške romanopisce turizem in pospešena urbanizacija obalnega pasu spodbujata k tematizaciji identitete in zgodovinskega položaja Sredozemlja v Evropi in svetu. Članek analizira letovišče kot specifičen pripovedni topos in raziskuje razmerja med zgodovinskimi pojmovanji, okoljskim imaginarijem in pripovedno formo. Natančno branje romana Metina Arditija *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde* in romana Massima Maugerija *Trinacria Park* osvetli izzive pri upovedovanju kompleksnosti družbene konstrukcije južnoevropskih obal v posameznem pripovednem tekstu. Medtem ko se Arditi grške krize loteva s pomočjo melodrame in nostalgije do ruševin, Maugeri prikaže zgodovinski lok sicilijanskega otoka od tragedije do farse in navsezadnje katastrofe. Te analize članku

nazadnje omogočijo, da se dotakne strukture pripovednih reprezentacij modernizacije v evropskem delu Sredozemlja.
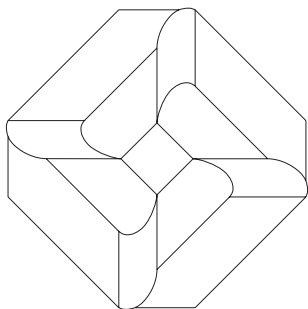
Razprave / *Articles*

Between Confession and Subversion: Ideology, Eroticism, and Laughter in *Levitan* by Vitomil Zupan

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This article analyzes Vitomil Zupan's novel Levitan *as a politically subversive and hybrid narrative that interrogates totalitarian ideology through grotesque aesthetics, erotic vitalism, and confessional narration. This analysis draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque function of laughter, emphasizing how Zupan utilizes subversive narrative strategies to deconstruct official political discourse. The grotesque and erotic vitalism function as subversive narrative strategies that confront the symbolic authority of Titoist socialism. The prison setting and ideological representation in* Levitan *is interpreted through the lenses of Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and surveillance, Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses, and Fredric Jameson's understanding of the political unconscious. Furthermore, Vladimir Biti's concept of the "ideology of originality" provides a theoretical framework for understanding the question of whether Jakob Levitan's narrative autonomy becomes complicit in the very ideological mechanisms it seeks to resist. Within this framework,* Levitan *emerges as a complex literary artifact that resists ideological representation of reality through a synthesis of confessional introspection, grotesque aesthetic, and narrative innovation.*

Keywords: Slovenian novel / Zupan, Vitomil: *Levitan* / literature and ideology / political prose / subversiveness / laughter / eroticism

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Introduction

Vitomil Zupan's novel *Levitan* (1982) articulates grotesque humor and erotic vitalism as subversive ideologemes that confront the symbolic structures of totalitarian ideology. Framed through a confessional first-person narrative, the novel not only critiques political repression but also exposes the paradoxes and limitations of ideological view of reality from within. Zupan's prose is shaped by modernist narrative principles, marked by a sustained emphasis on psychological interiority and the subjective dynamics of motivation. Written under postwar censorship and published several decades after its initial composition, Levitan, like Zupan's other major works *Klement* (1974) and *Menuet za kitaro* (1975)*,* continues to resonate with contemporary readers. These works remain critically relevant for their satirical engagement with themes of individual agency, state control, and narrative experimentation. In this context, *Levitan* stands as both a literary act of resistance and a deeply self-reflexive inquiry into the very ideological frameworks it seeks to subvert.

In the period of Yugoslav literature, especially within the genre of the novel, elements of the de-ideologization of reality persisted, including anti-colonial and anti-imperial tendencies from the early 1950s. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, these tendencies evolved into literary engagements with themes of totalitarianism, namely, the exposure of totalitarian consciousness within ideological state apparatus. Among these was the Yugoslav state apparatus itself, which increasingly began to embody such characteristics. Within this context, it became crucial to abandon the myth of "brotherhood and unity" forged during the National Liberation War (NOB), and to demythologize revolutionary forms of consciousness. The ideological relationship to the NOB was most explicitly articulated by Zupan in *Menuet za kitaro*, but his most subversive and direct critique of ideological dogma appears in *Levitan*.

Zupan's work emerged in this period as an aesthetic and political confrontation with the censored narratives of the Yugoslav state. His literature challenged the very foundations of collective memory and ideological loyalty. *Levitan* is a literary resistance against ideological conformity. Positioned within the genre of the political prose, it engages not only with the physical experience of incarceration, but with broader questions of state power, moral autonomy, and the repression of human desire and laughter.

Vitomil Zupan was a controversial and subversive writer during socialism, and both his life and work generated public consternation

during his time, largely because his literature was primarily perceived as anti-communist and decadent. His biography is among those intriguing and unusual life stories of talented individuals whose lives appear simultaneously turbulent and adventurous. This biographical quality lends Zupan's novels a particular sense of realism and testimonial authority, a point emphasized by Vladimir Biti, who cites an emblematic line from *Levitan*: "'It is very difficult to fairly describe events and states that one has not experienced oneself,' reflects the protagonist, thereby asserting 'the right to speak the truth about the world and life over those who function within the recycled circumstances of a second-hand shop existence'" (Biti 45). The next chapter will examine *Levitan* as a paradigmatic novel wherein the figure of the political prisoner becomes a symbolic ideologeme, both revealing two sides of existence, the official and the unofficial, in the Yugoslav society and resisting the ideological apparatus of the Yugoslav socialist state.

Jakob Levitan and the politics of imprisoned subjectivity

Jakob Levitan, the main character of the novel *Levitan*, is a political prisoner who fights for his freedom of thought and expression. Jakob Levitan's name is symbolically charged: it is a synthesis of two biblical narratives, framing him as both a religious archetype and a narrative subject engaged in a political struggle against secular "gods" of power. He is the chronicler of his own life, having experienced life and its pleasures, pleasures that are tabooed by politics, and thus becomes, as Vladimir Biti puts it, "from a sage to a chronicler" (Biti 45). Levitan narrates his life in the first person, from prison, in the form of an interrogation that led to his confession of a fabricated betrayal, intended to result in his conviction during trial: "He asked me how many years I got. When he heard the sentence, he shook his head sadly. Why? Politics, I answered" (Zupan 77).

His primary identity is that of a political prisoner; as such, he is an isolated individual, a social outcast detached from the community and its conventions, without a voice in society, labeled an anti-communist, but above all, a sexual deviant. This creates a conflict between the individual and the collective. Thus, the main characteristic of this literary figure is political. He is guilty because he engages in politics, and his sin, sexuality and hedonism, through ideology becomes a punishable crime the moment it deviates from the ruling ideology. The punishment is the loss of bodily freedom and ideological re-education.

In this context, Levitan's sexuality extends beyond the realm of personal transgression, emerging as a politically charged site of resistance. His erotic hedonism functions as a subversive force against the socialist regime's efforts to impose moral regulation and uphold a dogmatic vision of social hygiene. From this perspective, mechanisms of power exert control not merely over behavior, but over the vitality, desire, and sensory experiences of the body itself. Levitan's pursuit of pleasure outside the boundaries of ideological utility thus represents a radical act of political defiance.

Prison literature, along with narratives emerging from concentration camps, is a significant testimonial genre in the twentieth century, particularly under communist regimes. The voice of Jakob Levitan transforms into a chronicler's confession, and the confession includes a collection of randomly assembled poems or letters smuggled out of prison, notes from the period of apprenticeship, hence a series of surveys, sketches, and portraits.

Jakob Levitan as the chronicler denies the value of any official historical perspective; he wants "to cut through every 'historical perspective' and place things where they belong" (Biti 45). His life before prison, his immense life energy and instincts toward women, toward exploring life and all its phenomena, in prison turns into a thirst for knowledge, collecting information, and reading a vast number of books. His narrative subject, divided into the experiential and the knowing subject within the structure of the novel, through his consciousness, is split into past and present life before prison and life in prison.

This tension between lived experience and retrospective interpretation stresses the crisis of testimony within totalitarian regimes. The question, then, is how one can reclaim authorship when even memory is subject to political regulation. Zupan's concept of a "second-hand shop existence" mirrors the chronicler's crisis, as he is compelled to distill truth from deceptive ideological fabrications and rhetoric that manipulates reality and public opinion. In this manner, Levitan's fragmented narrative functions as an act of resistance.

In political prose, the view of reality and politics is of exceptional importance, as it reveals the traits of the main character, whose personal characteristics or political values often become their tragic flaw. Considering the genre nature of *Levitan*, and the fact that Zupan, in line with the literary fashion following the Second World War, autopoetically defined his work as "a novel that is not a novel," his typically parodic postmodern gesture reflects the nature of the prison story that resists full fictionalization of discourse, that is, the absurdity of life in

prison. The genre nature of the novel has been discussed by Željko Milanović and Slobodan Vladušić in their recent comparative study "Vitomil Zupan i Borislav Pekić: od zatvorskog iskustva do žanra":

> The realization of the limited narrative potential of a protagonist in prison, which inevitably leads the text toward an essayistic discourse, creates a work that cannot confidently name itself a novel—a work that, through its unstable genre, manages to merge the autobiographical with the understanding of human existence as one of constant imprisonment within a civilization that is deceitful, and in which the discovery of prison becomes a means of humanizing the individual. (70)

This genre instability mirrors the ideological instability faced by those caught within state apparatuses. Levitan's refusal to conform to a stable ideological identity is reflected in his rejection of a stable literary form. As Milanović and Vladušić observe, the text's transition towards an essayistic style of discourse indicates the shift in focus from plot to intellectual survival in prison literature. This hybrid literary form, a novel incorporating elements of memoir and diary, reflects a divided narrative subject that mirrors the disintegration of subjectivity under conditions of prison control and ideological surveillance.

With a firm internal composition held together by the consciousness of the main narrator, *Levitan* presents a confessional narrative structure that focuses on the narrator Jakob Levitan, a prisoner of political events. Through first-person narration, the novel represents the protagonist's inner world as he faces the challenges of prison life, while simultaneously reflecting on his own thought processes, the struggle for survival in prison, and confrontation with institutional limitations. He recounts what he experienced, saw, or heard from other characters, attempting to draw the reader into his world of truth about events. However, his knowledge of events is always limited, narrowed by his subjective perspective. Jakob Levitan places himself at the center of his own world, a world of originality and the truthfulness of the chronicle. Yet, as Vladimir Biti rightly asks: "Doesn't, in such circumstances, the chronicler's guarantee of originality and truth ultimately turn into imaginative manipulation?" (Biti 46). The novel's nature, positioned on the border between autobiography and autofiction, invites the interpretation of imaginative manipulation due to its first-person, subjective narration by Jakob Levitan, a character that is perceived as a political delinquent, rapist, and misogynist, yet embodying the author Vitomil Zupan's own life and defiance of the communist regime. This manipulation is not

a fictional flaw but a defining characteristic of novels autofiction, where Levitan's controversial behavior serves to explore themes of freedom, rebellion against hypocrisy, and the subjective reconstruction of personal history through a critically reinterpreted reality. Ultimately, this imaginative manipulation allows the author to confront political and societal norms by creating a complex, challenging protagonist who blurs the boundaries between lived experience and literary creation, pushing readers to question both the character's actions and the nature of truth in a repressive environment.

The novel reads as a subversive attack on power and the powerful, whom Jakob Levitan refers to as "gods." In Genesis in the Old Testament, Leviathan is one of the beasts fought by the supreme Jewish god Yahweh, making the symbolism quite clear and direct. The narrative subject of *Levitan* attempts to present himself as a being fighting against the gods, gods as symbols of totalitarian and absolutist power who determine the fate of all those beneath them.

This religious-mythical framing situates Levitan as a kind of philosophical Leviathan, a force of chaos in a rigid, divinely ordered system. These "gods" do not merely punish, they are politicians and rulers, they reshape reality itself, determining the biographies and truths that constitute historical memory. Zupan's choice to mythologize power intensifies the novel's critique: totalitarianism is not just a political structure, but a new theology of control; it represents the dogma of the regime as the new religion.

Gods of an ideology that affirms itself in the manner of a religion. The gods are those who will ultimately be remembered in history by shaping the biographies of ordinary people, even rewriting their autobiographies. According to Jakob Levitan's testimony, prisoners were forced to write their own and others' biographies in prison as dictated by their interrogators. Hence the narrator's turn toward essayistic discourse, as he is an educated character, an erudite, a writer who becomes a political prisoner. Based on certain elements of the interrogation process and the depiction of the prisoner's life and worldview of political rebellion (with revolutionaries declared as traitors), *Levitan* can be seen as the continuation of the literary tradition of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940). The narrator does not hide the influence and connection of Koestler's novel with his own writing, as he reads it in prison: "With special interest I read Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*" (Zupan 81).

Jakob Levitan is a political prisoner; his speech is subversive toward both politics and bourgeois conventions. He is controversial and

cynical, but through his erotomaniacal and hedonistic view of life, he deconstructs socialist ideology and, most importantly, reveals the true nature and essence of prison as a concept of dehumanization. In deconstructing socialist ideology, he becomes its critique.

Levitan represents prisons, political parties, and religions as state ideological apparatuses that pragmatically use "morality" and serve as mechanisms of repression over people, being hallmarks of totalitarian regimes. He sees them as well-organized systems of a ruling class of deceivers and liars, with no place for people who hold different values: "In every orderly state, the Pharisees represent a tightly connected society within a society, vigilantly watching everyone suspected of not being a Pharisee" (Zupan 57). These societal rules carry the symbolic role of the circular prison (panopticon), elaborated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* as a metaphor for surveillance and the presence of power structures in Western society; the concept of the panoptic prison is transposed onto society and creates a panoptic society out of it, as centralized power is realized through various discursive practices in the public and private spheres: "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself" (Foucault 202).

The panopticon is a type of institutional building and control system that was invented by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century. The concept of the building is designed to allow all the inmates of that facility to be watched by one guard, and the inmates are in constant insecurity and fear of being watched. As it would be physically impossible for one guard to observe all the prisoners' cells at once, this situation in which the prisoners cannot know when they are being observed means that they are motivated to act. Prisoners are forced to regulate their own behavior. Bentham's prison is now most commonly understood as a panopticon: "And, in order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere" (Foucault 214).

Among different power structures, Louis Althusser distinguishes between state apparatuses (SA) and ideological state apparatuses (ISA). State apparatuses are typically repressive and include the government, administration, police, courts, prisons, etc., and they function through

violence. Ideological state apparatuses refer to various realities perceived by observers as specialized institutions: religion, education, family, law, politics, culture, unions, media, etc. Althusser classifies these into the public (state apparatuses) and private (ideological state apparatuses) spheres. Ideological state apparatuses function through ideology. According to Althusser, ideology has no history and can have two faces: ideology is the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence, and ideology can have a material existence. Ideology exists within state apparatuses, possesses a material dimension, and is only possible if there is a subject whom ideology interpellates and to whom it is addressed.

The genre of the political novel, or rather the type, is referred to by Aleksandar Flaker as "the novel of expression." In the novel of expression, as in the political novel, the character "moves through time and space while simultaneously being a character who expresses thoughts primarily on ideological themes" (Flaker 161). By reducing the novel to its most important essayistic component, which serves to ideologize the depicted reality, the political in the novel is reduced exclusively to the ideological. Ideology is one of the main components of the political novel, as well as—according to Lennard J. Davis's *Resisting Novels*—of all novels, just as ideology is one of the components of politics: "Novels do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology" (Davis 24). Ideology, as represented by certain ideological characters in political novels, is an expression of their dramatic position within the text. Their actions and thoughts serve as indirect characterization, providing the reader with insight into the system of ideas and representations, as Althusser comments on the origins of ideology:

> It is well known that the expression "ideology" was invented by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their friends, who assigned to it as an object the (genetic) theory of ideas. When Marx took up the term fifty years later, he gave it a quite different meaning, even in his early works. Here, ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group. (Althusser 253)

Terry Eagleton, in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, asserts that "every important political battle is, among other things, a battle of ideas" (10). This conception of ideology aligns closely with Karl Marx's foundational view, wherein ideology functions as a system of dominant power structures on the level of a group and individual. Lennard J. Davis echoes this perspective, characterizing Marx's theory as one in which

ideology operates as "a reflection of the dominant powers (dominant power/dominant ideas)" (Davis 41). Together, these concepts of ideology highlight the political nature of ideological discourse and its role in legitimizing hegemonic authority.

Fredric Jameson introduces a nuanced view of the concept of ideology, exploring its operation not only in political discourse but also within the very structure of cultural and aesthetic production. Ideological themes discussed by literary works, according to Jameson, mark the moment when we "find that the semantic horizon within which we grasp a cultural object has widened to include the social order" (Jameson 61). The text transforms from a text in the narrower sense, from *zero meaning*, into "the form of the great collective and class discourses of which a text is little more than an individual parole or utterance" (61). According to Jameson, in this transition, the text becomes an *ideologeme*, that is, a unit of ideology, "the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes" (61). Finally, the text, from a mere symbolic act, through the ideologeme, can transition into the third semantic and interpretative horizon, that of the *ideology of form*, where the text is interpreted as "the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production" (62). Accordingly, a character who expresses thoughts on ideological themes could be reduced to an ideologeme. However, by the end of Zupan's novel, Levitan is no longer merely an autobiographical narrator;[1] he is an expanding, imprisoned, human ideologeme. He embodies the smallest unit of ideological contradiction, where erotic freedom, individual autonomy, and political resistance converge. His war is not just with the prison wardens, but with the gods themselves, the divinized machinery of ideology, memory, and state power. Readers should consider Levitan's personal struggle as emblematic of the broader fight to preserve truth and autonomy under oppressive systems, prisons as instruments of discipline and punishment, linking individual resistance to collective political realities through writing and confessing.

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[1] For more on this subject of autobiographical prose, see Sablić Tomić.

Eroticism and humor as ideologemes of the novel, humor and laughter as political critique and subversiveness

Activating the phenomena of eroticism and humor in his discourse, Levitan reveals the flaws of political systems. When the phenomena of eroticism and humor become part of the literary world, they represent politically subversive literary speech that resists the forces of evil and political power oppressing humans for their own interests: "Autocracy and humor do not go together, just as it is impossible to lock and unlock a door at the same time" (Zupan 46), just as "both authentic tragedy and authentic ambivalent laughter are killed by dogmatism in all its forms and manifestations" (Bakhtin 121).

According to Jakob Levitan, socialist society uses morality for its pragmatic political goals. Political discourse expels all elements of the people's and human spirit and freedom, just as all dogmas have done, especially since the Middle Ages, as Mikhail Bakhtin wrote in his study *Rabelais and His World*. Yugoslav socialism did this in a brutal manner, but not as brutally as Stalinism, according to Zupan's opinion. "Levitan's ideology of originality arises in circumstances that witness the return of the medieval-Renaissance conception of history to the historical scene" (Biti 52). It is precisely this return that is actually hidden in the activation of medieval laughter culture in Zupan's novel:

> Privilege of the status of a teacher he earned, with the condition that he successfully rid himself of the blindness of the experiencing subject, so that he can now, *au-dessus de la mêlée*, from a cognitive perspective "laugh heartily." At the sight of a petrified world in the most grotesque positions, a deep laughter of a person awakens, who has seen too much. In this clarity, there is no sad solemnity, no tense gravity, just funny facts, one after another. (Biti 44–45)

Alojzija Zupan Sosič develops the thesis that "eroticized vitalism," a concept that links eroticism with the force of life and resistance against repression, is the main theme of all Vitomil Zupan's novels, and that it is a "typical narrative perspective and source of novelistic dynamism: erotic stories, in which the narrator most often plays a role, summarize the narrative flow, and erotic suspense makes the storytelling more dynamic" (Zupan Sosič 157). Likewise, Milanović and Vladušić note that Zupan's Levitan, for whom "eroticism is omnipresent" in contemporary life, "equates government and the public (public opinion, the people themselves) with prison and the prison world" (Milanović and Vladušić 70). Considering this important genre component that dominates the artistic vision and "ideology of originality" of Zupan's

novel, it demands further attention as both a structural and ideological idea of resistance.

Zupan reveals the dimension of humor, or laughter, that Mikhail Bakhtin famously elaborated:

> True ambivalent and universal laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it. Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naivete and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness. Such is the function of laughter in the historical development of culture and literature. (Bakhtin 122–123)

Thus, Zupan's humor is humor against autocracy, that is, against dogmatism, ossification, and categorical worldviews. This form of subversive humor does not coexist with the rigidity of totalitarian ideology, nor with its sanctioned seriousness. Political totalitarian regimes do not even recognize open seriousness, nor strict scientific seriousness, because open seriousness, according to Bakhtin, is not afraid: "True open seriousness fears neither parody, nor irony, nor any other form of reduced laughter, for it is aware of being part of an uncompleted whole" (Bakhtin 122). In contrast, totalitarian seriousness seeks to neutralize all ambivalence, all plurality, all forms of ambiguity—precisely what laughter embraces.

Totalitarian seriousness is precisely the opposite of laughter, and can subordinate all other forms of seriousness, because it is dogmatic, one-sided, fanatical, unambiguous, categorical, but above all uses fear and intimidation, as religions do, as its strongest weapon for domination. Laughter is perhaps the greatest enemy of political oppressive regimes: "In a metaphysically hollowed-out world, the author recognizes the primacy of art, which by its soothing effect is similar to eroticism. Erotic vitalism transcends decadent, neo-Romantic, existentialist, and socialist realist sketches, or 'holds' them at a fragmentary level, while historical narratives are covered with intimate, 'side' stories" (Zupan Sosič 157).

Bakhtin's description of popular folk laughter as a form of expression that originates from the masses and resonates with their shared experiences is particularly noteworthy. Consequently, humor in politics has witnessed a surge in popularity, with comedians who have transitioned into politics or satire with a pronounced political theme gaining significant public appeal. This form of laughter is frequently regarded as authentic and relatable, stemming from shared cultural

codes. However, folk laughter can also become constrained within ideological or partisan frameworks, thereby losing its liberating potential. Consequently, even laughter, once a symbol of freedom and resistance, can be appropriated, structured, and used as a tool of persuasion or political manipulation. This calls for a critical inquiry: does this laughter still represent the "true laughter" put forth by Bakhtin, or has it, in contrast to his assertions, become susceptible to ideological codification and dogmatism?

Socialism was supposed to replace dogmatic paradigms, freeing people from the shackles of false morality: "You will break through petty-bourgeois morality, where sexuality is banished into toilet writings, dirty jokes, and brothels, drivers, and through clerical virtue, where sexuality is imprisoned within the boundaries of sin; finally, you will reach the so-called socialism, where they will take off the wall quite ordinary female nudes in watercolor, as supposed pornography. Those nudes later ended up on judges' desks, under review; later I learned that they were burned because I would no longer need them anyway" (Zupan 29). The means of humor in Zupan are the same as those Bakhtin registered in Rabelais. The most important techniques are exaggeration, distortion, deformity, and repetition.

The political novel, in its foundation, is a utopian genre aimed at creating a literary narrative as an alternative world to this political world in which humans live. In the real social system, a person cannot achieve their full existence because it is based on poor assumptions: "This is why we have the right that punishes (including terror), payment systems (including bribery), political incitements, and crises. Is there any society based on bright feelings? On fulfilling bright desires (democracy, normal relations among people, responsibility of those in power), on bright hopes (meaningful goals ahead of a person who does something), on joy and love?" (Zupan 63).

Just as carnival humor originates from the Middle Ages because it turns the entire Middle Ages "upside down," and thus reflects the entire underside of medieval culture embodied primarily in the carnival, so culture is divided according to the dichotomy Learned–People's and High–Low. Zupan overturns this vertical model by introducing subversion from the underground, low culture, into the narrative fabric of his novel, through humor and critical satire, to ridicule politics that divides society into high and low.

The society built by politics is not utopian, it is not built on the principles of democracy, much less love or joy. Going beyond the boundaries of ordinary life, that is, the real form of life itself, and not

the artificial theatrical form: Jesters, Madmen, Giants, and Fools are those who free us from the shackles of ideology and its seriousness. Precisely because of their jesting subversive behavior, Jakob Levitan becomes a victim of ideology and political consciousness. Politics thus becomes devoid of all humanistic values; hence politics, or the state apparatus formed as a consequence of politics, are portrayed as evil or negative factors in society. They are the novel's "absent presence," as Stuart Scheingold calls it regarding the political novel.

The genre of the South Slavic political novel itself is marginal and borderline, just as the literature in which it was born is. But its marginality is a consequence of its borderline and marginal character. This stance is confirmed by Scheingold as well:

> Political alienation novels are even further removed from the center of politics toward the periphery of politics. Indeed, politics and politicians are mostly invisible in these novels. Politics thereby becomes an absent presence—directing attention to its consumers and victims. Politics creates conditions and circumstances that must be dealt with but are opaque, incomprehensible, and irresistible—thereby suppressing any semblance of political agency among ordinary people. (Scheingold 18–19)

In *Levitan*, Zupan stages what Stuart Scheingold terms a "political alienation novel," wherein politics functions as an "absent presence," an omnipresent yet invisible godlike force that shapes the protagonist's reality without revealing a concrete face. Instead of encountering named political agents, the protagonist is subjected to anonymous interrogators and abstract institutional mechanisms that demand obedience without offering transparency or meaning. These imperceptible formations operate in a manner analogous to secular deities, representing an invisible power that is palpable yet eludes complete comprehension. This engenders an ambiance of existential disorientation and ideological absurdity. In this manner, the political realm depicted in Levitan's work does not manifest as immediate conflict but rather as a pervasive, elusive condition that gives rise to victims and subdues political agency. Through this portrayal, Zupan critiques totalitarianism not by exposing its officials, but by revealing how its unseen operations infiltrate consciousness, language, and the body—turning the narrative into a deeply personal account of ideological alienation and resistance.

The political novel within the South Slavic intercultural context has become "a form of narrative speech that represents the system of political relations as the boundary of the human existential circle. …

Therefore, history and politics are not only the external framework of events, creation, and institutionalization of values, but also the fateful measure of human existence" (Kovač 11). The development of political satire as a defining moment has reached the integration of politics and history into the creation of its inner artistic whole and made them the dominant features of the genre. The literary context limits and defines literary works, just as much as literary works participate in forming the content of that same context, strengthening or disintegrating it.

Ultimately, in Zupan's novel, eroticism and laughter are not aesthetic ornaments but literary modes that act like the core ideologemes through which the ideological representation of reality is dismantled, mocked, and replaced with human vitality. The literary modes of grotesque body and the subversive humor become revolutionary tools, undermining the seriousness of autocracy, the rigidity of ideology, and the very legitimacy of political power.

Conclusion

The literary vision, sharp auto-irony, and original, subversive narrative style permeating Vitomil Zupan's novel *Levitan* reflect a distinct Slovenian literary expression and a true literary innovation within the context of the Yugoslav literature. At the same time, the novel retrospectively illuminates historical and cultural aspects of politics and ideology, disclosing a dimension of the complex context in which the work was created.

Furthermore, *Levitan* embodies a profound critique of totalitarian political systems, utilizing humor and eroticism not only as literary devices but as ideological tools of resistance. Zupan's work exposes the oppressive nature of political power that suppresses individuality and freedom, while simultaneously engaging the reader in a carnivalesque subversion that deconstructs dogmatic paradigms. The novel's fusing of political satire and phycological existential inquiry positions it as a critical voice against authoritarianism, reflecting broader societal tensions and the search for authentic human existence beyond ideological confines. This places *Levitan* firmly within the tradition of politically engaged literature in the South Slavic intercultural context, offering both a subjective historical testimony and a timeless commentary on the human condition under oppressive regimes.

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Med izpovedjo in subverzijo: ideologija, erotika in smeh v *Levitanu* Vitomila Zupana

Ključne besede: Vitomil Zupan / *Levitan* / Bahtin / Biti / ideologija / smeh / erotika / politična proza

Razprava analizira roman Vitomila Zupana *Levitan* kot politično subverzivno in hibridno pripoved, ki preizprašuje totalitarno ideologijo skozi groteskno estetiko, erotični vitalizem in izpovedno pripoved. Analiza se opira na teorijo Mihaila Bahtina o karnevalski funkciji smeha in pokaže, kako Zupan uporablja subverzivne narativne strategije za dekonstrukcijo uradnega političnega diskurza. Groteskni in erotični vitalizem delujeta kot subverzivni narativni strategiji, ki se soočata s simbolno avtoriteto titoističnega socializma. Zaporniško okolje in ideološka reprezentacija v *Levitanu* sta interpretirana skozi prizmo Foucaultove teorije discipline in nadzora, Althusserjevega koncepta

ideoloških aparatov države in Jamesonovega razumevanja političnega neza-
vednega. Poleg tega koncept »ideologije izvirnosti« Vladimirja Bitija ponuja
teoretični okvir za razumevanje vprašanja, ali Levitanova narativna avtonomija
postane soudeležena v samih ideoloških mehanizmih, ki se jim skuša upreti.
V tem okviru se *Levitan* kaže kot kompleksen literarni artefakt, ki se upira
ideološki reprezentaciji realnosti s sintezo izpovedne introspekcije, groteskne
estetike in narativne inovativnosti.

Reconstructing the Slavic World in Polish Slavic Fantasy: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Discourses

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*This article analyzes selected works from the currently trending genre of popular literature known as "Slavic fantasy." It examines how individual authors draw on Slavic mythology, demonology, legends, and folklore. The study focuses on the use of these elements, particularly in works rooted in Polish literature and historical realities. The settings of the analyzed works are often located in lands inhabited by Western Slavic tribes, which significantly influenced the formation of Polish nationality. The phenomenon of Slavic fantasy has been systematized through classifications, notably by Adam Mazurkiewicz, who proposes a division based on the adopted creative strategy: adaptation or reconstruction. The analysis considers representative novels across several subgenres: historical/parahistorical fantasy—*Wisznia ze słowiańskiej głuszy *(Cherry from the Slavic Wilderness) by Aleksandra Katarzyna Maludy and* Piast Mściciel *(Piast the Avenger) by Krzysztof Jagiełło; contemporary (folk) fantasy—the series* Kwiat paproci *(The Fern Flower) by Katarzyna Berenika Miszczuk; and alternative world construction–the trilogy* Wilcza Dolina *(Wolf Valley) by Marta Krajewska. The article also addresses whether it is possible to discuss contemporary issues, such as women's rights and ethics, through a narrative world inspired by the Middle Ages. It contributes to the growing trend of research on the phenomenon of Slavic fantasy and the fascination with Slavic culture.*

Keywords: contemporary Polish literature / fantasy fiction / Slavic culture / Slavic mythology / feminism

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Introduction

Back in 2009, in a collective volume on the origins of the fantasy genre, Elżbieta Żukowska wrote: "Typical Slavic fantasy is still scarce, but the distinctiveness of the style strongly distinguishes it from Polish fantasy" (Żukowska 207). It only took a decade for the situation to radically change. Today, dozens of debut Slavic fantasy books are published every year, being the subject of both literary and cultural studies and pop culture discourse. This phenomenon is part of a worldwide trend, also noticeable among Slavic peoples. Through literature, audio-visual arts, music, fashion, etc., the sources of national identity are sought in folklore, history, mythology, and pre-Christianization rituals. In this way, creators of the fantasy genre retell[1] the history of their countries from a "centrifugal perspective." Maria Janion wrote: "The new narrative of the humanities can tell the history of our culture differently" (Janion 20). She also pointed out the dangers of doing so: any fascination with an ethnic myth, if it crosses a certain boundary, becomes fodder for nationalists (22). Those accused of sympathizing with these movements have long distanced themselves in Poland from creating narratives in the pagan/Slavic spirit. Today, however, there is a process in domestic literature of shedding such dependencies, breaking away from them, or perhaps proving that not only nationalists can be interested in the pagan roots of Polish identity. In the discussion of the phenomenon, the question is still being asked what Slavic fiction is supposed to be in the face of all this: a source of historical information, a propaganda tube, or entertainment?

So far, an attempt has been made to systematize the phenomenon of Slavic books[2] and organize the positions within this trend by means

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[1] "Retelling" is a much broader term today, referring not only to history, legends, and mythology, but also to fairy tales and various cultural transmissions. To retell is the act of repeating a well-known work in such a way that it becomes a separate, independent work, drawing on anything that has become well-rooted in cultural transmission.

[2] The term "Slavic book" was coined by Wiktoria Korzeniewska, the promoter of literature inspired by Slavic beliefs and the creator of a blog who is also active on social media. Over the past few years, however, the term has gained considerable popularity and is now used not only by other participants in cultural life but even by scholars. It is intended to refer as broadly as possible to books connected with Slavic mythology, yet its semantic scope does not fully overlap with that of the term "Slavic fantastic literature" or "Slavic fantasy," as it also encompasses genres that are thematically linked to the cultural heritage of the Slavs and have been gaining popularity, such as Slavic crime fiction, folk noir, bestiaries, herbal guides, books of spells and rituals, popular science works, and finally children's literature, including educational works.

of several classifications. Adam Mazurkiewicz writes about the division according to the strategy adopted: adaptation or reconstruction (Mazurkiewicz 136–140). Novels based on the strategy of adaptation adapt popular and well-known plot patterns and characters of the depicted world to (pre)Slavic reality. They make use of monomyths, such as Campbell's hero's journey, or refer to universal patterns and topoi from Tolkien, from bildungsroman, etc. Their "Slavicness" is therefore a kind of costume, a staffage. Consequently, a swap for any other stylization would not significantly affect the plot of the novel itself.

On the other hand, the opposite is done by writers opting for the strategy of reconstruction. They shift the burden of attention from the plot to showing the realities of the depicted pagan world. The works come close to the assumptions of the historical novel, but supernatural characters and phenomena are an additional element.

Within this strategy, authors opt for several variants. One of them, the closest to the historical novel, is realized in works whose action takes place in lands inhabited by Western Slavic tribes, which significantly influenced the formation of Polish nationality. While maintaining attention to the description of the everyday life of the characters, elements of the supernatural world are subtly introduced into this parahistoric fantasy genre. This model of tale is based on scientific foundations, and their creation precedes the authors' acquisition of extensive knowledge of the slice of history in which the action takes place. Often, they also refer to the oldest Polish legends or the so-called tribal myths about Popiel, Wanda, the Wawel dragon, etc. The second variant of the plot strategy, only indirectly related to the reconstruction procedure, consists in situating the plot in a completely fictional, self-referential universe, which, after all, shows considerable similarities to the land of the ancient Slavs. It seems that such a strategy, which is opted for by a whole range of debuting authors of Slavic books, allows for greater flexibility inherent in the fantasy genre, for bolder plot concepts and the possible filling of "white spots" with original ideas. And these "white spots," related to the knowledge of Slavic tribes living in Central Europe, are plentiful (Rudolf 199–200). Knowledge of their culture, tribal structure, religion, rituals, and way of seeing the world, is scarce and drawn from sources written by people who Christianized the Slavs. Hence the idea, often realized in fantasy, of constructing a fictional universe, in which we find figures drawn from the Slavic *immaginarium communis*. What binds the thematically and compositionally distant plots together in such a strong way that we can still speak of one genre, is the "Slavicness" mentioned above, sometimes understood

very broadly, but most often present through references to mythology (cosmogony and theogony), demonology, or Slavic folklore. Anna Justyna Dragan writes: "The multifarious manifestation of Slavicness in the text is thus the generator of the origin of the name 'Slavic fantasy.' The planes it encompasses include the realities of an ancient era, the dualistic worldview and magical thinking of the Slavic ancestors, the characters of legendary and mythical heroes, perennials, and mythical narratives" (Dragan 56).

We will now try to take a closer look at how this "Slavicness" is realized in representative novels belonging to each genre variety. Due to the limitation of space in the article, we will omit the analysis of works that merely adapt plots and characters foreign to Slavic realities, and focus on historical/parahistorical fantasy, contemporary (folk) fantasy, and constructing an alternative world.

Variant one: A legendary past

The retelling procedure has a long tradition in Polish literature. Probably the most famous nineteenth-century novel about the beginnings of our statehood, Kraszewski's *Stara Baśń* (*An Ancient Tale*), significantly influenced the formation of pop-cultural perceptions about Slavism that have survived to this day. At the same time, it retold legends familiar to us from medieval chronicles. Contemporary writers, who choose to situate the plot of their novels in the times before the reign of Mieszko I,[3] primarily try to break the "idyllic" image of the Slav as a pacifist and harmless shepherd, which was initiated, among others, by Herder who wrote about "lovers of the countryside, who tilled the soil with relish, hated wars, and wanted to live in comfort" (Dragan 24–25). Noteworthy are two examples showing in an alternative way the same moment from the history of our country—the rise of the Piast dynasty. Aleksandra Katarzyna Maludy, for the time of the plot of *Wisznia ze słowiańskiej głuszy* (*Cherry from the Slavic Wilderness*), chooses the turbulent period of the formation of European states, when in the territories of Central Europe Eastern cultures and religions clashed, while tribes and clans merged into states or were conquered by stronger neighbors. The historical background for the adventures of the main character, Wisznia, is the reign of the legendary King Krak and the story of his

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[3] Mieszko I ruled Poland from 960 to 992, and the Piast dynasty ruled from 960 to 1370.

daughter Wanda. As in the case of other parahistorical Slavic fantasy, realism is mixed here with fantasy, and facts with Maluda's authorial ideas. At the same time, *Wisznia ze słowiańskiej głuszy* is difficult to definitively assign to fantasy due to the ambiguity of the "miraculous" and supernatural phenomena appearing on the pages of the novel. The author seeks to make legendary, mythical events plausible, to give them a mark of authenticity, and in this way to trace the origin of the oldest "Polish" legends. Thus, she explains the victory over the Wawel dragon by killing a cruel Avar leader bearing the nickname Dragon.[4] Not co-incidentally, she makes one of the heroines of her story Wanda, whose motif has been used many times in the debate related to women's rule. This is because Maludy is clearly trying to insert her novel into the feminist discourse and the consideration of the role of women in history. Also, the story of Wisznia herself, the "Slavic Amazon," is to become a pretext for taking up reflections on the justice and equality between the sexes. The book features more characters derived from national chronicles: Piast Kołodziej, Rzepicha, Prince Popiel, Lech, Czech, and Rus. Each time, the author tries to make legendary versions of events plausible, placing them in historical context.

The second of the aforementioned novels is Krzysztof Jagiełło's *Piast Mściciel* (*Piast the Avenger*). Although set in the same historical moment as *Wisznia*, it presents a completely different—masculinist—perspective. The protagonists of the novel are not women but men—Piast Kołodziej and his friend Ścibor. This has various plot consequences. In *Wisznia*, the author devotes a lot of space to describing the daily life, beliefs, and customs of the Slavs. We learn how housewives cooked and baked, how they prepared beer, what the settlements, cottages, and chambers looked like at the time. This does not mean, however, that Maludy makes the domain of women only the private sphere of life. On the contrary, her heroines actively participate in armed skirmishes and are an important voice in the political affairs of the settlement. Eventually, they take over the rule of the Szelig stronghold, driving out the men in revenge for their mistreatment. With all this, however, the book devotes a lot of space to "women's issues," such as pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care. What strikes one above all in *Piast Mściciel*, is the almost complete absence of this "private," domestic sphere of life. The story of the main character Ścibor is a flashback to the events of

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[4] This is not Maluda's own conception, but the position of some scholars of the history of that period, which she claims to have taken from the work of Jacek Banaszkiewicz. The dragon would have been Ejderha, the leader of the Avars, whose traces of existence from the sixth century AD were found in the vicinity of Krakow (Zieliński 150).

decades ago that led to the overthrow of Prince Popiel and the rise to power of Piast. The storyline is dominated by extensive, detailed images of battles, armed skirmishes, tribal rallies, and warrior training.

Both novels are assigned to the genre of Slavic fantasy, although supernatural themes are treated in them residually. They do not constitute an important element of the plot but are rather inscribed in the construction of the psyche of the main characters. In order to draw a successful and credible portrait of the Slavs in that time, it is impossible to ignore the deep belief in the supernatural world inherent in our ancestors. In both books, Slavic gods and demons do not appear as independent characters, but the main characters invoke their faith in them in moments of trepidation or elation, and sometimes interpret various natural phenomena as signs from them. It is up to the reader to make the final decision whether to believe in the veracity of these omens or treat them as coincidences. A sign of the care that the goddess Mokosh, according to Yaga, exerted over Wisznia was supposed to be the girl's miraculous rescue from wild animals when, as an infant, she spent the night in the forest under a sacred oak tree (Maludy, *Wisznia* 36). Ścibor, on the other hand, interprets the sparks flying from the bonfire as a sign from Perun at the time of the uttering the oath of warriors (Jagiełło 25). In both novels, the heroes also believe in the power of amulets to protect them from evil, and fear creatures that have Slavic origins—rusalkas, vampires, Leshy, Baba Yaga. Members of the settlement also take part in lavish celebrations of festivals associated with the agrarian calendar of the old Slavs.

The two narratives, though presenting such extreme perspectives in places, cohere when attempting to portray the brutality of the times in which the action takes place. Both Maludy and Jagiełło draw detailed and convincing descriptions of the cruelty of the perpetrators, depicting the hardships of the characters' lives and the severity of the customs of the time. Both stories begin with the burning of the heroes' native settlement. In Maludy's novel, Wisznia ends up in Avar captivity, where she faces humiliation, rape, and a grueling journey of many months through the wilderness towards Krakow. In Jagiełło's novel, Ścibor and Piast become witnesses to the dishonor and killing of their mothers and sisters; however, they escape from the settlement, thanks to which they do not get enslaved. The fate of the slaves is depicted similarly in both novels. The drastic scenes are primarily intended to emphasize the brutality of the era in which the action is set. The authors simultaneously deal with two lingering myths: the myth of the "gentle Slav" and the myth of the opposition between the Haves and the Outsiders.

While in the beginning Wisznia is kidnapped and raped by the Avars, an invading, "alien" people who came from the depths of Asia in the middle of the sixth century, later her torturers become other Slavs. Eventually, the women come to the conclusion that their enemies are men, and their derivation is of secondary importance. In *Piast Mściciel*, the betrayal of other Slavs is mentioned in the beginning. In the face of constant fratricidal fighting, it is the hero who is the first to attempt to unite the Polanian tribe. At the same time, both of the leading characters—Wisznia and Piast—behave in a morally ambivalent manner. The women of the Szelig stronghold have no reluctance to abandon unwanted newborns in the forest, while Piast sells prisoners at the slave market to purchase war equipment. Maludy stresses, however, that we must not judge the motivations and deeds of people living at that time through the prism of today's moral standards. On the other hand, the romantic theme present in both books is meant to prove that regardless of the brutality of the times in which the characters live, certain behaviors remain universal to humans, such as the need for happiness, love, living in peace, security, etc. These needs drive Wisznia and Piast, giving them strength in their struggle, despite their loss of dignity. This also represents, in a sense, a response to the question about the meaning of the creation of "parahistorical" fantasy: on the one hand, its authors want to bring us closer to the realities of that era, and on the other hand, they want to make certain human experiences universal, belonging to all times. In one of the interviews, Maludy said: "We rarely realize that we are children of history, that our way of thinking, the conditions we live in, our customs—all of these are the result of events that took place in the past" (Maludy, "Jesteśmy"). In turn, in the epilogue of *Piast Mściciel*, the author puts a metatextual statement in the mouth of one of the monks, which can be read as a kind of manifesto or an attempt to define his motivations for writing: "It seems that the Slavs can boast stories as worthy of song as those of Odysseus, Aeneas, Beowulf, or Cuchulainn. You know the fate of the wars of the people of Israel and can gawk for hours about the victories of Roman Caesar. Meanwhile, the tribes inhabiting these lands before the conquest of the Franks would probably have just as many heroic deeds to immortalize" (Jagiełło 334–335).

Jagiełło is strictly interested in the history of heroic war deeds of Slavic tribes. It is no accident that he refers to the most famous epics of our cultural circle. He wants to write his novel into the long tradition of narrative affirming the heroism of the "fathers of the nation." However, Piast differs from the "brave men" derived from epic poems in that he,

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as a hero, is not subject to the process of idealization. This is even more interesting—and contrasts with previous convention—because the figure of the legendary protoplast of the Piast dynasty has long remained in literature as a symbol of the righteous and virtuous king Pole.

Variant two: Modern Slavic culture

Authors of Slavic fantasy are inspired by native beliefs in a variety of ways. While authors of parahistorical narratives use studies of ancient Slavs, in novels set in modern times, Slavic rituals resemble the actually organized and pompously celebrated festivals of today's native believers. Katarzyna Berenika Miszczuk, while writing her series *Kwiat paproci* (*The Fern Flower*), in which Poland officially remains a pagan country, conducted extensive queries and participated in native believer gatherings and rituals to later describe them in the books (Miszczuk 415).

The first novel from Miszczuk's series, *Szeptucha* (*The Whisperer*), tells the story of the young doctor Gosława Brzózka who moves out of Warsaw and into the countryside, to Bieliny, to do her mandatory one-year internship with a whisperer (*szeptucha*). After all, herbalists are held in the same high esteem there as medics. The rural space in which the author places the action of the novel is also not without significance. The province is a place where the Slavic gods are much stronger than in the cities, and ancient traditions are still alive. In the cities, not only demons and monsters but also religious holidays and rituals are objects of derision, and society is secularizing: "I grew up in Warsaw. There, no one cared about either gods or superstitions. Everyone treated religion as a charm or folklore and an opportunity to have a day off from work in case of holidays" (Miszczuk 99). The titular whisperer, Jarogniewa, is a modern variation of Baba Yaga, a character so firmly established in Slavic folklore that she is one of the most important sources of inspiration for the creators of the genre in question. In one way or another, the witch, the whisperer, the witch doctor, and Baba Yaga appear in most of the works discussed here. In the case of Miszczuk's prose, Baba Yaga is a character that is as important as she is caricatured. She is supposed to be a grotesque, exaggerated version of the notion of a village witch, which is why she pretends to be limp and shortsighted, hunchbacks unnaturally when walking, ties a kerchief on her head and puts a golden veneer in her mouth, but she does this only for show, in front of customers: "It is not enough to be a good whisperer. In these parts, you

still have to look proper" (46). Her character may be, in its own way, an ironic commentary on the contemporary fascination with Slavic folklore, which as a trend tends to be superficial, shallow, and not very insightful. However, it is important that Jarogniewa, although she pretends to be a grandmother from a cottage on a chicken leg, does not pretend about the skills she possesses. She passes on her knowledge of herbs, spells and fighting monsters to her chosen apprentice, Gosława. Gosława, despite her initial reluctance, eventually accepts her destiny as the new whisperer in Bieliny. Miszczuk alludes to a longstanding folk tradition, according to which a village quack keeps the arcana of her healing art a secret and only in old age chooses a successor for herself.

Slavic mythology and folklore are very important parts of the plot in Miszczuk's work. Here, in contrast to the world created in *Wisznia* and *Piast Mściciel*, the gods are not only undoubtedly as real as humans, but also ready to constantly and actively interfere in the affairs of this world. The main character, before she arrives in Bieliny and becomes embroiled in divine intrigues, seems to doubt their existence, or at least to question any possibility of communication with them. The gradual metamorphosis of the main character thus becomes a path from negation to acceptance, from ignorance to knowledge, that is, to being a witch, a whisperer. Emphasizing her uniqueness is to be served by the fact that she is born as a "chosen one," a "seer." Gradually, Gosława discovers more closely guarded family secrets about her father's divine origin (in this case, the author used a model known more from Greek mythology), about having two souls and being a shearer (this inspiration comes from Slavic folklore), and about being destined to restore the balance by killing a god and giving birth to him again (this myth reflects the universal account of a goddess giving birth to a sun god every year, known from many religions).

What is striking in the *Kwiat paproci* series above all, is the total lack of trust, even dislike for the deities that are worshipped. Paradoxically, some demons and supernatural beings, such as the drowning Dareczek or the mermaid Slava, show the heroine more sympathy than the gods. And the aforementioned demons are plentiful in Miszczuk's novels: from the ghoul Ote, Goslawa's main antagonist, to vampires, impoverished creatures, scorchers, and even Leszy, who roams the woods. Some pose a real threat, which the whisperer Jarogniewa and her young apprentice must face, while Leszy, for example, is called diminutively "Mr. Leszek" what situates him rather within the humorous threads of the saga.

The place of power of most demons is the forest (similarly in *Okrutnik* by Aleksandra Rozmus and *Zmorojewo* by Jakub Żulczyk).

The forest as *locus horridus* has a long tradition in Slavic folklore. As Katarzyna Grabias-Banaszewska writes: "Since the earliest times, the forest at the same time as being a host for man has filled him with dread. Folk beliefs populated the terrain of primeval forests, woods, and thickets on almost all continents. In beliefs from the Polish territory, the forest was inhabited by demonic beings of various types" (Grabias-Banaszewska 43).

The space of the village and the forest is a link between the modern and the ancient. The further away from civilization, the more demons and various supernatural beings in the novel. Instead, in the heart of the Bielany forest, not far from Łysa Góra (famous witch mountain), there is an entrance to Nawia, the Slavic underworld, guarded by the god of the underworld, Weles. Today, we know very little about this place. Our perceptions of the Slavic underworld overlap the Christian vision with the Greek Hades (Gołuński 28–29). Perhaps that is why the author of *Kwiat paproci* avoids an in-depth description of this land, telling the heroine to stop at its gates, protected by Weles.

The novel *Szeptucha* is an example of literature aimed at young people. Although the world of Slavic mythology is the dominant feature of the work, it is difficult to classify it as ambitious literature. It is worth remembering that the book was primarily intended to remain a "Slavic romance" and was advertised as such on the publishing market. In this case, rather than a desire to familiarize readers with the customs and rituals of the ancient Slavs, it may be more about a desire to entertain them. Anna Justyna Dragan calls this "a primordial turn to pleasure" of reading (Dragan 6), which makes Slavic fantasy a typically postmodern genre. Nevertheless, *Szeptucha* and the entire *Kwiat paproci* saga meet the expectations of today's audiences and are an important example of Slavic fantasy—not least because the novel launched the immense popularity of Slavic fantasy aimed at women, and its success contributed to the growth of general interest in Slavic themes.

Variant three: Slavic fantasy *universum*

The last of the varieties discussed in this article probably most fully deserves the title of fantasy because in it all the determinants of the genre resound, additionally equipped with a "Slavic" stencil. An interesting example is Marta Krajewska's trilogy *Wilcza Dolina* (*Wolf Valley*), nominated for the Janusz A. Zajdel Award by the Polish science fiction and fantasy fandom.

The world of Wolf Valley, which is the main place of action, is clearly inspired by the land of the ancient Slavs. All the cultural ideas about how our ancestors lived, which have been growing for decades, are concentrated here as if in a lens. An additional, typically fantastic element are characters of unclear ontological status from the traditional bestiary of the Slavs. On the other hand, far less is said about the gods. Characters mention them during oaths or curses, call upon them during holiday celebrations and ask for their protection during illness, but do not interact with them directly. Some of the residents of Wolf Valley question their existence: "Gods. You have so many of them. How do you know they all want the same thing for you? After all, you don't even see them. Maybe they do not exist" (Krajewska 246). However, they do not face any punishment for this.

On the other hand, those who question the existence of demons perish, as shown by the story of Winny, a young boy who taunted Leshy, after which he was found dead in the forest near the settlement. Demons in Krajewska's novels are not dreamlike specters meant to illustrate universal fears or sins but pose real threat. They can impersonate people, like the innkeeper's son Irke who, as a drowning man, tries to seduce the main character, or Lendav, the kite-flyer, brought in response to prayer during a storm. They can also appear in the protagonists' dreams, leading them to their doom, like *strzygoń* Ollen, haunting his mother Stalka during nightmares. Wolf's Valley is an alternative world born out of the ancient Slavs' ideas of what our world would be like if supernatural beings existed. Sometimes the author makes some creative shifts, enriching the source message with her own imagination, but she always tries to faithfully reflect the cultural ideas about a particular demon or Slavic festival that have been ingrained in us. The interferences Krajewska makes in the historical message she has at her disposal and to which she refers have a specific purpose on plot grounds each time. The most important authorial idea is the introduction of the figure of the guardian/caretaker into the village community. The main character, Venda, is the adopted daughter of the guardian, and after his death she takes over his function. The guardian, as the reader learns in the course of the plot, has the task of guarding the inhabitants from demons, casting charms, fighting diseases, and upholding ancient customs related to the worship of deities. Thus, in this profession we can find connotations with both the figure of the whisperer (herbs, healing, curing) and the priestess (performing rituals). The protective nature of the guardian's function is emphasized by the words of the solemn oath: "Let everything evil strike me" (Krajewska 230).

The opposition to the guardian is the witch Atra. The first abhors magic, does not like to use it, and her job is to help victims of spells. The second—a young disciple of the old hag from under the rock—will learn the arcana of the magical arts. Krajewska shows two extreme types of femininity. Venda is modest, altruistic, and has close relations with all members of the community. She delivers babies, performs funeral ceremonies, heals and comforts the sick. She uses her knowledge for the benefit of others. Atra, on the other hand, was created from the beginning as a *femme fatale*. She is entangled in a love affair with demons residing in the Cemetery of the Outcasts, she is cold, alienated, distanced from the other villagers, and at the same time endowed with exceptional beauty. In both cases, the women become bearers of the qualities with which the witch/herbalist has been endowed by folk religiosity: above-average knowledge and skills, contact with supernatural beings (in Venda's case, these are supposed to be gods, in Atra's case—demons, her lovers), a sacred, mysterious relationship with both life (delivering babies) and death (helping in miscarriage). Atra, like every *femme fatale* and witch in popular culture, "plays with fire": she fraternizes with demons and engages in a dangerous love affair with the "other side"; she is fascinated by otherness, evil, darkness. Her figure is a peculiar conglomerate of Slavic traits and European ideas about witches, dating from—after all, several hundred years later—the time of the stakes. On the other hand, the old witch from under the rock, who is Atra's teacher, refers to the figure of Baba Yaga in the form in which tales and legends have taken over and transformed her from folklore messages.

The influence of fairy tales is also highlighted in the spatial constructions. The daily life of the residents of the Wolf Valley is described with great meticulousness and attention to detail. The interiors of the residents' cottages, inns, and the village's main square transport the reader to an early medieval Slavic settlement. Field work or farming activities are described just as faithfully. But there are also spaces in the novel with a distinctly fairytale provenance, such as the neglected hut of the witch from under the rock, the castle of the goddess of winter (Marzanna, a character derived from Slavic mythology, but here reminiscent of Andersen's Snow Queen), or the ruins of the Wolf's Castle, near which a treasure is supposed to be hidden. This turns our attention again to the phenomenon of retelling. In this case, the strategy chosen by the author serves to loosely interweave inspirations derived from world literature and native ones. As a result, the depicted world becomes a conglomerate of themes, motifs, intertexts, and references mixing together but forming a coherent whole within the system.

Krajewska assumes the position of a "storyteller," entertaining the listener with tales that he or she has heard somewhere before, but now gain a completely new face.

Conclusion

After analyzing representative novels situated within the genre of Slavic fantasy several conclusions arise related to the attempt to answer the question of the reason for their growing popularity. Moreover, what determines such a high attractiveness of retelling strategies in the eyes of readers? Anna Justyna Dragan concludes that behind this is the age-old need to search for the sacred, spirituality, and mysticism, which resonates particularly strongly in modern man: having rejected Christianity, he turns to that in which he wishes to find himself (the teachings of his ancestors). This is undoubtedly one of the religious motivations of native believers, while looking for it in literature raises some doubts. Slavic fantasy as offered to the reader will not satisfy his spiritual needs, as its main (sometimes only) function remains entertainment. However, it seems important to note a general trend related to the fashion for "Slavicism." This is because it testifies to the worldview transformation that is slowly taking place among Polish consumers of culture—from the initial rejection of their own identity to the affirmation of localness as a differentiating criterion, positively valorized in the culture of niches.

However, literature, though rich, is only a part of the process of turning towards tradition, roots, and heritage, which can be observed in culture today. The "fashion for folklore," noticeable on many levels, makes Slavic fantasy perfectly accepted on its native soil, fitting in with the tastes of readers. This is because it represents an original, postmodern combination of two opposite poles—the old and the new, fresh, experimental. Playing with tradition, recalling old stories heard in childhood but placing them in a contemporary context (for example, feminist or postcolonial) revives old legends, builds national identity, and draws the reader into playing with plot, form, and convention. Satisfied that he or she has found an intertextual clue, the reader of the work wants to return to the pleasure of reading. What's more, modern fantasy authors are in constant contact with their fans, allowing them, in a way, to "influence" the plot, cocreate it, modify it. For example, the name of the main character of Miszczuk's *Kwiat paproci* saga, Mieszko, was suggested to the author by one of her readers.

Krajewska, on the other hand, organizes virtual meetings with fans, where she discusses with them the latest, as yet unpublished volume of *Wilcza Dolina* trilogy. The exchange of ideas is lively, inspiring, and mutually rewarding. In this way, readers become cocreators of Slavic fantasy, what undoubtedly builds the popularity of the genre. It is also that the readership stems precisely from the purely entertainment function, not educational. Even in parahistorical novels, the ludic aspect prevails over informational aspect. This leads to the conclusion that, so far, Slavic fantasy has not managed to leave the domain of entertainment literature and become what it sometimes aspires to be—a source of thorough knowledge about our ancestors, and not just postmodern "fun." Nevertheless, reaching for it may trigger in the reader the desire to further explore the subject of ancient Slavs by seeking reliable studies—and for this reason alone it should not be ignored.

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Rekonstrukcija slovanskega sveta v poljski slovanski fantaziji: zgodovinski konteksti in sodobni diskurzi

Ključne besede: sodobna poljska književnost / fantazijska literatura / slovanska kultura / slovanska mitologija / feminizem

Razprava analizira izbrana dela iz trenutno priljubljenega žanra popularne literature, znanega kot »slovanska fantazija«. Preučuje, kako posamezni avtorji črpajo iz slovanske mitologije, demonologije, legend in ljudskega izročila. Študija se osredotoča na uporabo teh elementov, zlasti v delih, ki temeljijo na poljski literaturi in zgodovinskih realnostih. Prizorišča analiziranih del so pogosto postavljena v dežele, kjer so živela zahodna slovanska plemena, kar je pomembno vplivalo na oblikovanje poljske narodnosti. Fenomen slovanske fantazije je bil sistematiziran s klasifikacijami, predvsem s strani Adama Mazurkiewicza, ki predlaga delitev na podlagi ustvarjalne strategije: adaptacija ali rekonstrukcija. Analiza obravnava reprezentativne romane v več podžanrih: zgodovinska/parazgodovinska fantazija – *Wisznia ze słowiańskiej głuszy* (*Češnja iz slovanske divjine*) Aleksandre Katarzyne Maludy in *Piast Mściciel* (*Piast maščevalec*) Krzysztofa Jagiełła; sodobna (ljudska) fantazija – serija *Kwiat paproci* (*Cvet praproti*) Katarzyne Berenike Miszczuk; in gradnja alternativnega sveta – trilogija *Wilcza Dolina* (*Volčja dolina*) Marte Krajewske. Članek obravnava tudi, ali je mogoče razpravljati o sodobnih vprašanjih, kot so pravice žensk in etika, skozi pripovedni svet, ki ga je navdihnil srednji vek. Tako prispeva k naraščajočemu trendu raziskovanja fenomena slovanske fantazije in fascinacije s slovansko kulturo.

Apostrophizing Byron: The Rhetoric of Troping and the Making of Chinese Modernity through Lyric Translation

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Given Herder's insight that one way to effectively establish national identity is to look into poets who are capable of telling ancient stories and bringing them back to present readers, this article focuses on the unlikely technique of apostrophe in lyric translation as the means by which English Romantic poet Byron was assimilated into the Chinese socio-historical context. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's tripartite theory of portraiture, which tends to lock the text into a "drama of human relations" with a "socioanagogic mode of analysis," the article argues that translation reconciles two uses of apostrophe in lyric traditions: a poetic convention that is "a relic of archaic beliefs" and an optative signifier of "the power of poetry to make something happen." The analysis shows that by wittingly adopting archaism, namely, by seeking a dynamic equivalence between the refrain word xi *in* sao *poetry that originated in the* Chuci *tradition and the poetic device of apostrophe in Western Romantic poetry, Hu Shi (1891–1962) interpolated the exclamation tradition of Chinese poetics into Byron's poem "The Isles of Greece," thus rhetorically eluding the risk of making every apostrophe "an invocation of invocation." It was in this way that Chinese modernity was made, and a more problematized version of the poem was passed along to the intended Chinese readership through the target language text.*

Keywords: English poetry / Byron / translation into Chinese / literary influences / apostrophe / mimetic reconfiguration / allusion

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But as evil cannot exist without good,
so unexpectedness must arise from expectedness.

Edgar Allan Poe

Itha a shaʿab yumān arād al-hiyāh …
If, one day, the people will to live …

Abou el Kacem Chebbi

Introduction

Lyric and revolution are never antonyms. The opening lines of the poem "The Will to Live" (1933), written ninety-two years ago by the Tunisian poet Abou el Kacem Chebbi, was reincarnated in the closing part of Tunisia's national anthem in the 1930s, and again in the 2010–2011 demonstration slogans. Since the 1930s, it has been circulated on the tips of millions of tongues, written on protest banners, and even proclaimed "the folklore of global protest music" (Omri 138) and adopted by the International Solidarity Movement. As Mohamed-Salah Omri argues, "at its beginning, as at its height, the [Tunisian] revolution was expressed in poetry" (138). Yet from the beginning, revolution has never been a legitimate child of poetry. The nexus between the two is not necessarily in the literal meaning of poetry, but in the moral and emotional impact of lyricism itself. Especially when a poetic text undergoes the constant flux of socio-political change, the personality of the text coalesces into that of an agent, exerting both emotional and moral impact upon the reader.

To illustrate my point, I want to zero in on one key figure in China's revolutionary moment, the quintessential Romantic poet George Gordon Byron (1788–1824). Although it would seem unusual to regard an English Romantic poet as a genuine force in the context of revolutionary China, Byron remains unique in expressing his poetic momentum and public presence through the times and spaces of English-Chinese translation. As a matter of fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in his transformations in twentieth-century China and their still unfolding aftermath, Byron has become an accurate index of the spirit of resistance in one of the most chaotic times in Chinese modern history: the New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong*, 新文化運動), also known as the May Fourth Movement (*wusi yundong*, 五四運動), mindful of the involvement of many May Fourthians (i.e., new intellectuals pursuing the "May

Fourth spirit" [*wusi jingshen*, 五四精神]) in the political demonstrations around May 1919.[1]

My concern here, however, is not Byron's revolutionary impact on modern Chinese literary history, as with other Western men of letters to be introduced through translation to China. Given Herder's insight in his seminal treatise "Results of a Comparison of Different Peoples' Poetry in Ancient and Modern Times" (1797) that one way to effectively establish national identity is to look into poets who are capable of telling ancient stories and bringing them back to present readers, this article focuses on the unlikely technique of apostrophe as the means by which English Romantic poet Byron was assimilated into the Chinese socio-historical context through transculturation. The article draws on Kenneth Burke's tripartite theory of portraiture, which tends to lock the text into a "drama of human relations" with a "socio-anagogic mode of analysis" (Rueckert 107), and demonstrates the role of apostrophe in the zone of translation. Though apostrophe as a lyric device has long been reduced to an insignificant master trope, namely a mere figure of speech, by literary critics, it bears special meaning with its newly acquired role as a rhetorical mediator between the personality of the text and the personality of the poetic agent.[2] My perspective is

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[1] The New Culture Movement, which promoted a new mindset and laid the cultural groundwork for the subsequent May Fourth Movement, is a progressive, nationwide sociopolitical movement that boosted new learning and scientific understandings of the individual and the world in a fledgling modern China during the early twentieth century. There are innumerable signs demonstrating the mutual support between the two movements. Following the failure of the 1911 revolutionary attempt to establish a republican government in the hope of salvaging late imperial China from its subordinate international position, a liberating, democratizing movement broke out as a protest against the announcement of the terms of the Versailles Treaty that concluded World War I, and continued through the 1920s. The May Fourth intellectuals blamed traditional Chinese culture (such as classical Chinese writing system and the Confucianist social system) for the dramatic fall of China into subjugation. In order to catch up to Japan and the Western Powers in military development and industrialization, the new intellectuals readily embraced Western concepts like democracy and science and launched the vernacular language movement to popularize *baihua* (the vernacular) as a replacement for *wenyan* (the classical language) in writing. The momentousness of the events equals if not surpasses the more commonly known revolutions of the century. Their participants were eyewitnesses of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and the end of imperial China, laying crucial foundations for modern notions of human rights and equality by challenging traditional Confucian values (Maissen and Mittler 83–85).

[2] On the final stage of developing his dramatistic poetics, Burke promoted a "universal methodology for exploring the personality of a given text" (Rueckert 106), a concept that is discussed in "The Language of Poetry, 'Dramatistically' Considered"

not unlike that of Jonathan Culler, who moves from the poem's per-
formance to its effect on us, thus incorporating a linguistic reading of
apostrophe into the celebration of the lyric par excellence's ability to
predict the mystification of semantic meaning by means of a fictional,
apostrophic/atemporal time.[3] I submit that cultural-historical condi-
tions further complicate this linguistic presentation in lyric translation
and render apostrophe a symbolic and performative move. This move
disrupts the narrative temporality that often stabilizes a poetic text in
relation to its poetic agency within the source language text.

(1955). Working with a universal definition of a text as an "organically interrelated
structure of terms with a beginning, middle, and end," Burke proposes that "to the
traditional three 'offices' of the poet and orator (all discourse, really)—to teach, to
please, and to move or persuade—we need to add a fourth if we are to do justice to the
range and complexity of poetry" (106). This fourth office, Burke says, is "to portray,"
and portraiture is "a three-headed proposition" used to discuss "(1) the unique person-
ality of a given text as an organically interrelated structure of terms with a beginning,
middle, and end; (2) the personality of the text as a revelation of the personality of
the agent who enacted it; and (3) the agent, scene, and act relationship as a revelation
of the personality of the sociopolitical scene (the social hierarchy and the hierarchic
psychoses that are always part of it)" (106). All of these (the symbolic action, the
agent, and the hierarchic scene), according to Burke, are made possible by language
and infused with it. As William H. Rueckert points out: "Burke's tripartite theory of
portraiture makes it possible for him to begin an empirical analysis of a text in terms
of what it literally is: a verbal or linguistic action, the end result of which is a certain
structure of organically related *terms* in a set order. … In moving from the personality
of the text to the personality of the agent whose symbolic action it is, the pentad and
ratios are brought into analysis in order to establish and study the unique ingredients
of personality (psychic and physical) that are necessarily reflected in the words, the
terms of the text. Words contain other words, Burke says, and words bring a lot of
foreign substances into a poem with them, all of which indicate both the choices the
agent made when creating the poem as well as the historical accidentals always present
in any language" (106–107). Yet Burke does not rest here. As he considers a poem as
"the verbal symbolic action of an agent in a scene," he is taken deeper into the inward-
ness of a poem by acknowledging the resources of language as "a formidable arsenal
of analytic tools" for the critic to make use of (107). A classic example of how Burke
proceeds can be found in his Keats essay and in the *Faust I* analysis that is the second
part of this essay. As he does in his "Ethan Brand" essay, Burke usually begins with the
verbal, symbolic action, moves to a consideration of the personality of the agent whose
symbolic action it is, and finally, moves to a consideration, "by use of the pentad," of
the nature of the sociopolitical scene that is embodied in the text and then to the inter-
active relationship that necessarily exists between the agent and the scene (107). Text
in translation sophisticates the process and expands the latitudes that Burke's move of
portraiture could cover.

   [3] In contrast with Paul de Man, who mystifies (and celebrates this mystification
of) the meaning-making process.

This article thus argues that the translation of Byron in twentieth-century China, with the case of Hu Shi (胡適, 1891–1962) in particular,[4] serves as an alternative to the black-or-white dichotomy that Jonathan Culler imposes on apostrophe as either descriptive (i.e., an emotional signifier embedded in and naturalized by the conventional subject of sublime poetry) or ritual (i.e., a master trope for the conditions of communication). In other words, the paper argues that translation reconciles two uses of apostrophe in lyric traditions: a poetic convention that is "a relic of archaic beliefs" and an optative signifier of "the power of poetry to make something happen" (Culler 140). By seeking a dynamic equivalence between the refrain word *xi* (兮) in early Chinese poetry and the poetic device of apostrophe in European Romantic poetry, Hu Shi's translation of Byron legitimizes a different discourse of apostrophe, in which the apostrophic vocative ability to make things happen, to build poetic relations, or to reflect the "conjunction of mouth and happening" (140) always hinges on its function to embody "poetic tradition" and "the spirit of poesy" (143). By wittingly adopting archaism and interpolating the exclamation tradition characteristic of Chinese poetics into an English text, Hu Shi rhetorically eludes the risk of making every apostrophe "an invocation of invocation" (144). Culler's distortion of Quintilian's notion of apostrophe, which features valediction, is useful for understanding China's revolutionary moment, since it was not until Chinese and Western poetic traditions met in translation that apostrophe took on its new role of mediating foreign poetry in China. In this way, what Du Bois calls "double consciousness"[5] is achieved in the affective process of translating

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[4] Hu Shi was an instrumental figure in the New Culture Movement. He compares the Chinese New Culture Movement with the European Renaissance, and elucidates as follows: "(1) both set out to replace classical literature with a new literature in the living language of the people—the vernacular; (2) both were movements of deliberate protest against established cultural ideas and institutions, and of conscious emancipation of the individual from the bondage of tradition; (3) both were 'humanist' movements" (Maissen and Mittler 85).

[5] In his effort to examine and explain the depressing effect of white supremacy on black subjectivity and collectivity, Du Bois addresses a problem that resembles the one Freud confronted years later in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). Basically, both struggled to understand "how one might develop or find a practice for converting one relation to loss into another" (Flatley 117). For Du Bois, as for Freud, a difficult, ambivalent loss (or the rejection by one that is being addressed) is preserved through a process of internalization, producing what Du Bois calls "double consciousness." I believe that a similar effect is generated in the translation process to be discussed in this paper.

Byron, which transfers the personality of the source language text into that of its agent, by means of which a more problematized version of that personality is passed along to the intended Chinese readership through the target language text.

First off, and not altogether incidentally, Byron in translation opens up a space for debate on the ultimate function of apostrophe in lyric poetic traditions. To borrow Quintilian's succinct definition in the classical context of forensic oratory, the "figure which the Greeks call *apostrophe*" initially refers to a "'diversion' of speech (*sermonem a persona iudicis aversum*)" that "redirects the speech [from the 'proper' listener] to someone other than the original hearer" or to the "intended hearer" (Kneale 143). As Jacques Derrida has shown, voice (plus voicing) "has always been privileged in Western culture as a guarantee of truth, consciousness and being" (141). This tradition of privileging voice over writing in the Western poetic tradition and in the Western literary tradition in general further facilitates our historical understanding of the disputed presence of apostrophe in the Romantic poetic tradition, as the pragmatic function of the term gradually came to be a mixture of commentary and articulation of feelings such as grief and indignation by means of an address to certain addressees. As a counterargument to Jonathan Culler's view, apostrophe is "far from being [a useless and embarrassing figure] avoided by critics," but rather has a "distinguished tradition of [address and] commentary" (141). This "utility" of the figure has been regularly and systematically acknowledged by classical writers ranging from Cicero and Quintilian to rhetoricians of the Renaissance and eighteenth century (143). Hu Shi, by borrowing *xi* from early Chinese poetry—typical of the exclamation tradition in Chinese poetics—in his translation of Byron, suggests to a Chinese audience that Greece in Byron's "The Isles of Greece" is identified with modern China not only in terms of a similar sociopolitical crisis, imminent reform, and revolutions, but also in that both civilizations have lost touch with their art and traditions. Considering this possibility of merging Chinese and European poetic traditions in the specific site of China allows us to tease out precise values from an entangled cultural and historical mass. In other words, in the specific context of revolutionary China, an alternative apostrophic discourse that takes advantage of both the exclamation tradition in Chinese poetics and the much disputed tradition of apostrophe in English Romantic poetry is given full play. Since it is not until the two traditions converge in translation that the term apostrophe adopts its new mediating role between foreign poetry and Chinese revolution during the late imperial

and early Republican period, Culler's distortion of Quintilian's notion of apostrophe, which features valediction, paves the way for this process of apostrophic transculturation.[6]

Chuci (楚辭, *Verses of Chu*, *Songs of Chu*, or *Elegies of Chu*; hereafter *Songs of Chu* as the optimal choice)[7] is a type of poetry that flourished in the Chu (楚) region, which was situated along the Yangtze River in southern China and was known for its shamanistic practices during the Warring States period (approximately 403–221 BCE). The majority of the poems were collected in the anthology *Chuci zhangju* (楚辭章句, *Commentary Edition of Chuci*), in which the most significant poem is

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[6] The concept of "transculturation" was coined in 1940 by the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, who intended to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures and explain the stages and results of cultural contact among people brought together by European colonial expansion into the Caribbean. Transculturation encompasses more than acculturation and deculturation. It merges these concepts and additionally implicates a consequent creation of new cultural phenomena (neoculturation), which can often be the result of colonial conquest and subjugation as postcolonial races struggle to regain their own sense of identity. As a contribution to the study of Cuba and to the general field of Social Sciences, and more essentially, an epistemological stand advancing the understanding of Latin America through Latin American theoretical tools, it remained rather dormant until Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama re-elaborated the notion in 1982 and applied it to Latin American literature. Rama's particular elaboration of the concept attempts to explain the way in which some Latin American authors incorporate diverse elements in their work of indigenous cultures—words and grammatical structures, for example—while, at the same time, adopting and adapting the literary techniques from the European and US literary avant-gardes. Both Neil Larsen and Antonio Cornejo Polar called into question these earlier articulations of the concept, criticizing that they entail a form of hegemonic aesthetic for Latin America's peripheral Modernity. Instead of what Ortiz and Rama see as an illusion of harmonic synthesis, Cornejo Polar emphasizes the contradictory and conflictive nature of Latin American literature and culture, suggesting "heterogeneity" as the proper alternative to a conceptualization that is otherwise reminiscent of the problematic notion of assimilation. The Chinese Byron at play in translation is not unlike Latin America's peripheral Modernity here. The heterogeneous representations of Chinese modernity, which is determined by the national crisis entailed by the invasion of the Western imperialist powers, is fully evinced by the transculturation of apostrophe in the translation of Byron.

[7] One of the earliest anthologies of Chinese poetry. Authorship aside, dating the works in the *Chuci* has long been a bone of contention. Renowned for his longing for ideals and patriotic spirit, Qu Yuan, a high minister and patriotic poet in the ancient State of Chu during China's Warring States period, is credited with composing a large part of the poetry collection. The works in the *Chuci* feature a unique romantic idiosyncrasy characterized by rich mythological allegories and symbolism of folk songs, unwonted surreal touches and imaginative twists, and particularly the use of the auxiliary word *xi* at the end of lines.

"Lisao" (離騷, "On Encountering Trouble"), the crowning achievement of the genre and presumably composed by Qu Yuan (屈原, c. 340–278 BCE). *Sao* (騷), the second character of its title, is often used to refer to the entire *Chuci* repertoire and any work written in the *Chuci* style, the so-called *sao* poetry (*saoti*, 騷體), a rhyme-prose style of the state of Chu during the Warring States period of imperial China. As a product of the Chu culture in the south, *Chuci* poems differ drastically from those in *Shijing* (詩經, *The Book of Poetry*)[8] in both content and form. In content, the influence of shamanism dominates many of the early poems in this genre, the "Jiuge" (九歌, "Nine Songs") being a remarkable example of such portrayals of religious rituals and performances. In the long narrative poem "On Encountering Trouble," Qu Yuan developed this occult lineage with an "unprecedented autobiographical framework and voice" (Cai 36), which has evidently exerted tremendous impact on Chinese intellectuals' engagement with apostrophe in their translations of Byron, especially Hu Shi's. In form, *Chuci* poems are marked by longer lines than those in *Shijing*, with stanzas often containing either six or eight lines alternating between six and seven characters. Another prominent formal feature of the genre, namely the use of the refrain word *xi*, which constitutes the most conspicuous idiosyncrasy of Hu Shi's translation of "The Isles of Greece" (i.e., 吾慷慨以悲歌兮, 耽憂國之魂磊), also occurs in the *Shijing* and other earlier texts but did not become a constant until it was applied to *Chuci*. The function of *xi* is thought to be mostly musical and to indicate "a drawn-out sound similar to the *a* in modern Chinese" (37), which also resembles the interjections in Western lyric poetry.

Rhythmic repetition is the way of early communication in Chinese and Western oral traditions alike. By strategically placing "rhyme, alliteration, assonance, reduplication, refrain, and the like" to articulate important meaning and retain "carefully articulated thought" in "mnemonic patterns," people in the oral age believed that "rhythm aids recall, even physiologically," and that "serious thought is intertwined with memory systems" (Sun 34). This time-honored rhythmic tradition, including refrain and incremental repetition for the purpose of rhetorical exclamation, came to be reinforced in the notion of poetry

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[8] Believed to have been compiled in the early Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) and traditionally attributed to Confucius, *Shijing* is the earliest known anthology of Chinese poetry, with poems and songs dating from the eleventh to seventh centuries BCE. Acclaimed to be the fountainhead of the Chinese literary tradition, it has been canonized as one of China's Five Classics and is a foundational text in classical Chinese literature, recording social realities and cultural values of the age.

in the Chinese literary tradition in that the character for poetry *shi* (詩) had gradually evolved to become interchangeable with *zhi* (志), which means "to remember," "to record," and most importantly, "to cherish in the mind." In effect, in addition to poetry, "practically all the important metaphysical compositions of ancient times [in China], including the *Laozi*, the *Xunzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Huainanzi*, and the *Yijing* (the *Book of Changes*), employ rhyming language in whole or in part" (35). As the modern Chinese scholar Wen Yiduo (聞一多, 1899–1946) and the modern philologist Wang Li (王力, 1900–1986) have both verified, not only did the rhyming language dominate poetry and other rhyming compositions long before unrhymed prose works in the Chinese literary tradition, but it literally permeated "the writings of high antiquity in China" (35). In Chinese versology, the mode of rhythmic repetition has always been "intimately intertwined with both ease in memorizing and the articulation of important meaning" (35). It is this very fact that renders rhythm and pronunciation in Chinese poetry important for the translation of Byron's poetry in the eventful historical context of modern China.

The primary role of the exclamation tradition in Chinese poetics, in light of the tradition of apostrophe in Romantic poetry as its Western counterpart, was to establish a rhythm for poetry that was suitable for the Chinese language. During this process, "the interaction and mutual influence between words and music drove poetic imagination as it redefined and clarified rhythm and tone" (Gu 53), lending Chinese poetry a performative and ritualistic nature. Formative Chinese poetry (similarly to the ancient Semitic, Greek, and Latin poetry) based its rhythm on an imitation of music "that featured verbal repetition and duplication" (54). To create poetic flow, the main poetic form of *Shijing*, the first collection of Chinese poetry, was four characters per line with alliteration in order to accommodate the singing of contemporary music that contained lyrics. As Chinese pronunciation grew longer and more complex, poets had to create increasingly varied beats to deliver poetry, which gave rise to empty words (words void of meaning) like the refrain word *xi*, a primitive poetic delivery that poets and critics usually called *yi chang san tan* (一唱三歎, "singing in one note or line and sighing in three").[9] However, "this complete unison of music and

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[9] A typical example is the *Shijing* poem "Wang feng: Cai ge" (王風 采葛, "Folk Song: To Gather Dolichos"), in which the formalistic function of exclamation words is ostensive: "Bi cai ge *xi*, yi ri bu jian, ru san yue *xi*. / Bi cai xiao *xi*, yi ri bu jian, ru san qiu *xi*. / Bi cai ai *xi*, yi ri bu jian, ru san sui *xi*." ["There he is gathering the dolichos! A day without seeing him, is like three months! / There he is gathering the

poetry did not last as long as the Latin tradition of the Middle Ages" (55), as the *Shijing* style evolved into the *Chuci* style and the use of the empty, duplicated exclamation word *xi* (originally derived from musical imitation) became part and parcel of a poetic composition that emphasized its verbal rhythm. *Xi* in *Chuci* thus not only regulated the rhythm of the poetry but also created a sort of verbal parallelism, which stemmed from its stable position, often at the end of a half line and the end of the line.[10] Unlike European poetry that was composed with multi-syllable words, most Chinese words up to the medieval times were single syllable,[11] which meant that exclamation and empty words in later *Chuci* poetry formed rhythmic contrasts in the same way that Germanic languages employ multisyllabic words in modern poetry (56). The fact that the exclamation word and other "empty" words in Chinese classical poetry tended to play a phonetic role yet had no or very little semantic function (59) coincides with Culler's view that apostrophe acts either as a trope for "poetic pretension" (i.e., a sign of the poet as not merely a poet but the embodiment of poetic convention) or for "apostrophic fiction" (i.e., a poetic sign that initiates communication between the addressor and the addressee, evokes poetic act or presence, or completes self identities by addressing thus interiorizing the external), both of which are marks more of dramatization than of semantic meaning (Culler 143, 145).

As L. M. Findlay reminds us in the article "Culler and Byron on Apostrophe and Lyric Time," Culler isolates apostrophe as a particular rhetorical device in an attempt "to expose the complicity of poets and critics in the creation and perpetuation of the myth of lyric timelessness" (Findlay 336). Findlay maintains that Culler's theoretical and practical ruses, though claimed to have a profound lineage in classical rhetoric, are seriously biased in favor of the more recent philosophy on writing and difference such as Derridian *écriture*, which characterizes any sign system that generates meanings by means of a paradigm of differentiated signs. It is in this light that Culler deems "'the poetic pres-

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oxtail-southern-wood! A day without seeing him, is like three seasons! / There he is gathering the mugwort! A day without seeing him, is like three years!"]

[10] A typical example is Liu Bang's (劉邦, 256–195 BCE) "Da feng ge" (大風歌) in *Chuci* style: "Da feng qi *xi* yun fei yang. / Wei jia hai nei *xi* gui gu xiang. / An de meng shi *xi* shou si fang!" ["Rise a great wind, oh! It drives the clouds away. / Return to my birthplace, oh! The world is under my sway. / Where can I find brave soldiers, oh! To defend the distant borders today!"]

[11] China's "medieval" period encompasses "roughly the first millennium CE, following the Qin-Han foundation of the empire, and leading up to the transitional period of the Song" (Wang and Morrow Williams 1).

encing of the lyric subject' (to use Murray Krieger's apt designation) …
an act of inscription occasioned by that subject's absence"; or rather,
apostrophe for Culler is an "invocation of invocation" and "nothing
need happen in an apostrophic poem" owing to the fact that apostro-
phes are mere master tropes for "the temporality of *écriture*" (336).
Findlay argues that Culler's definition of apostrophe is most prob-
lematic in terms of his misreading of Quintilian in commenting that
"apostrophe is different [from other tropes] in that it makes its point by
troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of
communication" (337). To put it another way, the apostrophic "O,"
whether expressed or implicit, is "devoid of semantic reference" (337).
Findlay objects that though Quintilian, speaking of oratory, defines
apostrophe as the "diversion of our words to address some person other
than the judge," he never denies apostrophe's ability to make semantic
meaning: Quintilian even insists that apostrophe can be "more pointed
and forceful than customary locution (*acrior … atque vehementior*)"
because "it raises questions about the speaker's sense of his audience"
by establishing a new decorum of address to prepare its highly-likely-
to-be-startled audience with the rhetorical device *prosopopoeia*, namely,
an "imaginary person speaking on behalf of the accused" (337–338).
Findlay argues that successful apostrophe, addressed to the judge as one
would expect, tends to destroy the whole force of a text with its unnat-
ural diversion in locution, but it also renders apostrophe part of the
larger structure of exordium, as "what is heard apostrophically by one
or more select addressees is also overheard by the remainder of the exor-
dium's original audience" (338). Therefore, by restoring Quintilian's
notion of apostrophe from Culler's distortion, we may arrive at the
conclusion that apostrophe is by no means a mere master trope of
communicative situations "devoid of semantic reference"; rather, "the
turning away from the judge is not a rejection of him but a specially
deferential act of rhetorical inclusion made possible only by virtue of
judicial privilege in the hearing and interpretation of testimony" (338).
Through careful consideration of the ways in which Byron arbitrates
between apostrophe and temporality, Findlay's critique designates a
direction for alternative interpretations of poetic apostrophe that bypass
the shopworn tendency of criticism to pigeonhole apostrophe as a type
of escapism. That said, he offers no resilient "mediation" (353) that
compromises apostrophe's vocative power to signify a declension from
diction to valediction, from speech to event, and its symbolic represen-
tation of poetic tradition. With that in mind, the subtle relationship
between poetry and revolution in late Qing and early Republican China

complicated the matter, for this subtlety blurs the distinction between the descriptive and the ritual and gives birth to a new apostrophic discourse in peripheral spaces (such as lyric translation) that straddles both sides of the fence, which is the inevitable consequence of the merging of the exclamation tradition in *sao* poetry and the tradition of apostrophe in the Western lyric.

Apostrophizing Byron and the making of Chinese modernity through lyric translation

In modern Chinese literary history, the late Qing writers have been the only generation "to put more emphasis, at least for a time, on the introduction and translation of foreign works than on their own creative writing" (Yu 80), for the introduction of foreign works was conceived of as a "weapon" in social reform. Since the second decade of the twenty-first century in particular, it almost became an imperative for "the cultural content and themes of translated works" to "align with China's social reality and cultural values, becoming the main consideration in translation choices" (Li 155). In addition, to "match one's deeds with one's words has since ancient times been held a virtue by Chinese men of moral integrity" (Yu 79), thus the transference of the socio-political values of selected foreign texts and the personalities of certain foreign poets became essential to highly successful literary exercises during the final years of the Qing dynasty and early Republican China alike, such as the circulation of Byron's "imitation of revolutionary Greek ballad" (McGann 44), "The Isles of Greece" (1819), which played a seminal role in promoting the Byronic spirit in early modern China. The poem, which is essentially an "admonishment" and "fulfillment" of Byron's "highest poetic ideals," is "sung by a Romaic poet in the late 1780s to an audience of his fellows who live quiescently under Turkish rule" (45). The purpose of the poem is to call them "from their lives of pleasure and political degeneracy to take up a more strenuous and principled course of action" and thus "to raise the Greek national consciousness" (45).

The leader of the previously mentioned translation trend in early modern China, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873–1929), quoted "The Isles of Greece" in the second half of his first novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* (新中國未來記, *The Story of New China*) from 1902, presenting the original English text and providing a verse translation of the poem. One of the founding members of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's (孫

中山, 1866–1925) revolutionary organization in Japan, Ma Junwu (馬君武, 1881–1940), equally moved by "The Isles of Greece" and unsatisfied with Liang's partial and almost "tandem" translation (Gibbs Hill 32), rendered the poem into Chinese in its entirety three years later, utilizing the advantage of his mastery of English. This time, it was published in the literary magazine *Xin wenxue* (新文學, *New Literature*), an indicator of China's cultural modernism at the time but no longer extant today. The first systematic introduction of Byron's poetry was the collection *Bailun shixuan* (拜倫詩選, *Selected Poems of Byron*) edited by Su Manshu (蘇曼殊, 1884–1918), which was published in 1909. As the first important Byron translator in China, Su is the only translator of those mentioned in this paper who read Byron extensively and is comparable himself to Byron in multifarious ways. That said, the essential reason why Su was fascinated by Byron's work lies in a parallel between the Turkish conquest of Greece and the corrupt rule of the Manchus, against which Su arduously fought in his youth. As Su himself remarks, Byron's poem "The Isles of Greece" would incite his nationalistic indignation in a way "as if [turning] to a pre-existent pattern of his own suffering which afforded him both self-expression and catharsis" (Yu 88). "The Isles of Greece" became so popular after Liang's initial translation attempt that five complete renditions came out over the next two decades, "while Byron's other works were barely translated" (83). As a matter of fact, most Chinese readers learned about *Don Juan* and Byron through this "thrilling, immortal lyric" (83). It is not out of the question that it was Liang's version of "The Isles of Greece" that set off the "Byron craze" or "'The Isles of Greece' craze" and set the tone for the Chinese image of Byron. Yet, it seems more notable that a conscious adoption of (Quintilian's) apostrophe had already surfaced in Liang's translation of the poem. By interpolating comments on the original poem from two protagonists of the story, Liang manages to contextualize his translation of Byron in light of the Chinese people's pursuit of freedom and independence. Interestingly, Ma Junwu, regardless of his contempt for Liang's translation, inherits this awareness and makes it even more tellingly expressive in the title of his own translation, "Ai Xila ge" (哀希臘歌, "The song, Alas for Greece"). As Chu Chi Yu points out, later translators have followed suit by using either "Ai Xila" (哀希臘) or "Xila ge" (希臘歌), which gives impressive prominence to the political meaning created by a single closing interjection "alas," namely *xi* (兮), which shows up in every other line of the translated text (83–84).

Hu Shi, whose English was better than that of the aforementioned translators and who was obviously more familiar with English literature, translated the poem in 1914 when he was a student at Cornell University in the United States. Though relying largely on Liang Qichao's translation and mistaking the poem for a long play rather than part of *Don Juan*, Hu's translation shows in its preface a fairly measured appraisal of Byron and his position in English literature. Chu Chi Yu holds that Hu's translation differs from other translators, who "borrowed Byron's poem to voice their own views," and that Hu did the translation "merely as a literary exercise" (Yu 90). Yu argues further that the poetic form Hu used, *saoti*, has its own failings because while the archaic rhyme scheme allowed Hu more freedom in line length and the number of lines per stanza, the liberty he took also put him at risk for misreading the poem's original meaning. However, a closer analysis of Hu's translation reveals that to the contrary, it is the very form of *sao* poetry, and the merging of its exclamation tradition and the tradition of apostrophe associated with the Western lyric form adopted by Byron that generated new meanings and elevated Hu's rendition to a higher realm of the poetic world (*shijing*, 詩境).

As noted earlier, Culler misinterprets Quintilian's notion of apostrophe as "different [from other tropes] in that it makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication" (Findlay 337). The apostrophic "O," whether expressed or implicit, is "devoid of semantic reference" (337). Nonetheless, Quintilian, though essentially speaking of oratory, defines apostrophe as "more pointed and forceful than customary locution" because "it raises questions about the speaker's sense of his audience" (337) by establishing a new decorum of address. Successful apostrophe is by no means a mere master trope of communicative situations "devoid of semantic reference"; rather, the gesture of *turning away* is not a rejection but an "act of rhetorical inclusion" (338). In Byron's poem "The Isles of Greece," there is no overt apostrophe except for occasional dithyrambs to the isles of Greece. Yet in Hu Shi's translation, the adoption of the refrain word *xi*, which is characteristic of *saoti* and can be deemed the counterpart of an exclamatory *ah*, *alas* or *O* in Western poetry, gives the original poem a fresh new depth that is by no means an unintentional misreading of the poem. Take the following stanza as an example:

The Scian and the Teian Muse,
    The hero's harp, the lover's lute
Have found the fame your shores refuse.
    Their place of birth alone is mute
To sounds which echo further west
Than your sires' "Islands of the Blest." (Byron 179)

悠悠兮, 我何所思	I recall things a long long time ago
荷馬兮阿難	Homer and Anacreon
慷慨兮歌英雄	Singing about fervent and gallant heroes
纏綿兮敘幽歡	Relating moving stories about love
享盛名於萬代兮	They enjoy fame through ten thousand years
獨岑寂於斯土	But their place alone is silent
歌聲起乎仙島之西兮	Their songs started from the west of the Immortal Islands
何此邦之無語	Why is their place alone mute? (Hu 390; Yu 91)

As an English poem, "The Isles of Greece" is written in folk-song style and, in the original context of *Don Juan*, was sung by a wandering singer figure to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. As shown in the excerpt above, the words are simple and the meter is regular, with each stanza containing six lines in iambic tetrameter (with an *ababcc* rhyming pattern), which constitutes a complete thought unit in itself. More crucially, there are "few variations of form throughout the poem" (Yu 93). As Chu Chi Yu mentions in his discussion on the first translations of Byron, form "presents the greatest challenge to all translators, especially those dealing with two languages like English and Chinese which are generically unrelated and rhythmically remote" (92). In spite of the fact that the pre-May Fourth China was one of the most open and receptive periods in modern Chinese history, the literary world was dominated by "highly developed genre concepts" and no ready-made classical Chinese poetic form was available which suited the translation of Byron's verse, considering the few variations of form in the original poem and the frequent form variations of its Chinese counterparts, ranging "from the earliest *Book of Songs*, five-character line *gu shi* (ancient poems) and *fu* (rhyme prose) of the Han dynasty, through the seven-character regulated verse of the Tang dynasty, to Song lyrics and the lyrical songs of Yuan drama" (93). At the beginning of the twentieth century, these forms were the only ones the translators were familiar with, and which readers would accept as poetry. To adhere to these strict prosodic formulae, the early translators all used one of the basic forms of verse translation proposed by James S. Holmes, the "analogical form" in imitation of archaism, the effect of which is "to

bring the original poem within the native tradition, to 'naturalize' it …
in a period that is inturned and exclusive, believing that its own norms
provide a valid touchstone by which to test the literature of other places
and other times" (Holmes 97). Given these norms, which were ex-
clusive to a period that tended "to have such highly developed genre
concepts that any type of form other than the analogical would be quite
unacceptable to the prevailing literary tastes," (97) "communicative"
rather than "semantic" translation, to borrow Peter Newmark's terms,
was almost inevitable (Yu 93). Although towards the end of the Qing
dynasty the scholar poet Huang Zunxian (黃遵憲, 1848–1905) had
initiated a poetic form that tested his political ideas in the form of the
five-character ancient poem, using colloquial language, Byron transla-
tors like Hu Shi were more interested in emulating traditional art forms
to generate an "authentic" Chinese poetry that communicates feelings
authentically. With that in mind, the new genre that Huang strenu-
ously promoted was, in the early Byron translators' views, not necessar-
ily communicative, owing to his aim to break away from the traditional
poetry and to explore "what the ancient people did not have."[12] This is
because Huang's bold formulation was so experimental that there was
no conjunction of speech (mouth) and events (happening). It naturally
follows that when translating "The Isles of Greece," Hu Shi's choice of
saoti is a meticulous consideration of the text's and the form's "compat-
ibility with new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role that it
may assume within the target literature," in which there happened to be
"turning points, crises, or vacuums" (Even-Zohar 47). It is safe to say
that the creative employment of the refrain word *xi* in the above quoted
stanza, which illustrates Greece's animated response to the lyric songs
coming from Byron, a poet of England, tactfully maneuvers between
Quintilian's notion of apostrophe and Culler's interpretation. When
Byron's invocation to Greece is implied in the rhetorical mark *xi* exclu-
sive to the Chinese poetic context, the two apostrophic discourses of
"poetic pretension" and "apostrophic fiction" (Culler 143, 145) merge
and engender a new textual personality that seeks its poetic agency in
Hu Shi, the translator who personifies the intimacy between foreign
poetry and the revolutionary nation-state at the climax of its socio-po-
litical transformation. Moreover, the cultural-historically conditioned
linguistic presentation of the apostrophic in Hu's translation also at-
emporally juxtaposes the present modernizing, revolutionary China in

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[12] Though Huang's experimental stylistic reform based on his famous slogan "My
hand writes my mouth" somewhat echoes Byron's poetic claim "to forsake the pen for
the sword" at times of domestic trouble and foreign invasion.

turmoil with Byron's absent poetic Greece. This juxtaposition mediates poetic power by internalizing the tension underpinning the synchronic contingency of the social movements in Greece and in China into a dialectical, reversible alternation between two apostrophic commands. This mutuality combines the evocative power of apostrophic expressions in Byron's poem and Hu Shi's translation into one central issue with one dramatic stroke. On parsing Hu Shi's annotation of the above quoted stanza, Chu Chi Yu laments that the first line and "ten thousand years" in Hu's translation are simply redundant. Then he offers a further critique that though the last two lines succeed in retaining most of the original's words, to replace the word "echo" with "start" (起) is a detrimental loss due to its indication that "Greece is unresponsive to the song coming from the west (England/Byron)" (Yu 91). While Yu finds the whole meaning of the stanza to be incorrect in Hu Shi's rendition, it is arguable that these alterations are intentional adaptations to the apostrophe of the *saoti* that Hu adopts.

More significantly, in light of Quintilian's definition of apostrophe, the formal equivalence between apostrophe in English Romantic poetry and *xi* in Hu Shi's *saoti* translation of "The Isles of Greece" shatters what Hu calls the "narrow-mindedness" of Byron (Lee 128) and ruptures the formal restraints and thematic limitations of the original poem. This is also a crucial place where the alternative discourse of apostrophe amalgamates poetic tradition and contingent events and generates new meanings. To further clarify my point, it is necessary to recount the historical context of *sao* poetry. For example, to explore Hu Shi's "unfaithful" translation of Byron's lyric stanza above, one has to be fully aware of the *wu*'s (巫, the Chinese word for "shaman") ability to communicate with supernatural beings, as well as several important features of "Nine Songs," the source of which is Qu Yuan's widely influential political poem "On Encountering Trouble." The central motif of the poem is a love quest, which is conducted in a peculiarly shamanistic style: "The protagonist [the goddess] rides on supernatural creatures, crosses between heaven and earth, and commands the natural world to be at her service" (Cai 39). The quest, however, "fails because her lord breaks his promise," which "produces a profound melancholy that informs the entire verse" (39). This failure also causes "a temporary estrangement from her lover-deity" (39). Yet, despite all the disappointment, she remains loyal to him in the end. Qu Yuan appropriated this motif in "On Encountering Trouble," making it into the central metaphor of his relationship with his monarch and state. As we shall see, Hu Shi also drew inspiration from this dialogical relationship

in his translation of Byron's poem "The Isles of Greece," but what is different is that whereas in "On Encountering Trouble," Qu Yuan uses apostrophe performatively to address an intended self with the refrain word *xi*, in Hu Shi's translation of "The Isles of Greece," apostrophe, or rather, the interjection *xi*, *turns away* from the original audience of Byron's poem and is used instead to address the poem's intended Chinese readership. In the original first line ("The Scian and the Teian Muse"), which directly evokes the spirits of the poets supposed to have been born on Scios (a medieval name for Chios) and Teos, a subjectivity from nowhere intervenes (*wo* [我] or "I" as in 悠悠兮, 我何所思, "I recall things a long long time ago"). Though "The Isles of Greece" is one of the best-known instances of a poem-within-a-poem in the English language tradition, for which reason the addressees are sometimes ambiguous due to complex perspectives and heteroglossia, this intromission would be misleading if we only envision this "I" as a court poet entertaining partying Greeks without giving consideration to the recurrent motif of *xi* from the *sao* poetry form being adopted. Furthermore, despite the fact that Hu Shi correctly understood the muses in the first line to refer to Homer and Anacreon and made Byron's symbolism explicit in the second line of the translation, it is conspicuous that he rendered Anacreon, the great Greek lyric poet notable for his drinking songs and hymns, as 阿難, the Chinese transliteration of "Ānanda," one of the principle disciples and a devout attendant of the Buddha. For one thing, Ānanda literally means "happiness" or "bliss," which is the closest to Anacreon's role within the nation in a geopolitical sense. Additionally, to keep Homer while replacing Anacreon with a religious icon in Asia is sinicization. This helps to explain why Hu Shi, who was well-versed in English, would "misread" "your shores refuse" as "ten thousand years," and "misinterpret" the word "echo" as "started." All these alterations are in preparation of a "double consciousness" (Flatley 117) aroused by the interpolated apostrophe—the refrain word *xi*—that communicates a meaning-making diversion in the locution of the court poet. On the one hand, Hu interjects *xi* into the poem to address China as a modernizing nation-state through the uncanny intervention of 我 ("I"). This mediation renders apostrophe part of the larger structure of Byron's discourse of sarcasm in "The Isles of Greece," which otherwise conveys a melancholy sentiment that overshadows his disappointing relationship with the state that the poet had been fighting for, as well as his own nation. This shared failure to communicate with an intended audience is mirrored in the interplay of apostrophe and a rhetorical, constructed geopolitical proximity through translation. After all, China

as a civilization has certainly existed for "thousands of years," and the Greek Muses' songs did "start" from the west of China, if the audience to whom the court poet in Hu Shi's translation chants is the Chinese audience. As Lefevere notes, "the poetics consists of both an inventory component (genre, certain symbols, characters, prototypical situations) and a 'functional' component, an idea of how literature has to, or may be allowed to function in society" (Lefevere 4). Given its apostrophic function, the refrain word *xi* in Hu Shi's translation of "The Isles of Greece" is by no means a mere master trope of communicative situations "devoid of semantic reference" (Findlay 337); rather, the *turning away from* the Greek audience is not a rejection but "a specially deferential act of rhetorical inclusion" (338) made possible only by virtue of a double consciousness of melancholy embedded in the *Chuci* version of the poem. If "the style is the man" (Guo 889), the poetics Hu Shi employs in his chosen text has successfully transplanted his own personality and socio-political concern as a translator into Byron's poetic agency. This use of apostrophe from the Chinese poetic tradition testifies to a third space, that of translation, that exists between the apostrophic dichotomy raised by Culler.

Conclusion

As T. S. Eliot remarks in the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," tradition does not belong to the past despite its considerable affiliation with the past. It has wider significance: "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers" because poetry "is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Eliot 17, 21). This sacrificial depersonalization of individual poets beyond the limits of space and time is also the continuation (and renewal) of tradition in its "much wider significance" (14). In his essay "Cognitive Mapping," Fredric Jameson also suggests that "one requires a cognitive map of social space for a sense of agency in the world more generally" (Flatley 77). The function of this map, Jameson says, is "to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (77). In other words, "in its negotiation of the gap between local subjective experience and a

vision of an overall environment, the cognitive map is an apt figure for one of the functions of ideology, which is, in Althusser's now classic formulation, 'the representation of the subject's imaginary relationship to his or her real conditions of existence'" (77). Hu Shi's translation of Byron, which depersonalizes the poet through the liminal but mutual space of apostrophe, not only suggests the potentiality of translation as an arena for an individual identity struggle but also identifies classical lyricism as a crucial access point through which the social moorings of poetry are viable and representable in a global context. Thus, Culler's theory on apostrophe is too provincial when it comes to a more universal cultural context. As a formal feature of the lyric, the apostrophic does germinate new meanings, for "the circulation of world literature is in fact part of the communication and interaction between different cultures" (Guo 887).

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Apostrofiranje Byrona: retorika tropov in ustvarjanje kitajske modernosti skozi prevajanje lirike

Ključne besede: angleška poezija / Byron / prevodi v kitajščino / literarni vplivi / apostrofa / mimetična rekonfiguracija / aluzija

Glede na Herderjevo stališče, da je eden od načinov za učinkovito vzpostavitev nacionalne identitete preučevanje pesnikov, ki so sposobni pripovedovati starodavne zgodbe in jih obuditi pred sedanjimi bralci, se razprava osredotoča na nenavadno tehniko apostrofiranja pri prevajanju lirike kot sredstva, s katerim se je angleški romantični pesnik Byron asimiliral v kitajski družbeno-zgodovinski kontekst. Članek se opira na tripartitno teorijo portretiranja Kennetha Burka, ki s »socioanagogičnim načinom analize« teži k umestitvi besedila v

»dramo človeških odnosov«, in pokaže, da prevajanje usklajuje dve uporabi apostrofe v lirskih tradicijah: pesniško konvencijo, ki je »ostanek arhaičnih prepričanj«, in optativni označevalec »moči poezije, da nekaj doseže«. Analiza dokazuje, da je Hu Shi (1891–1962) z zavestnim prevzemom arhaizma, namreč z iskanjem dinamične ekvivalence med refrensko besedo *xi* v *sao* poeziji, ki izvira iz tradicije *Chuci*, in apostrofo v zahodni romantični poeziji, interpoliral vzklikalsko tradicijo kitajske poetike v Byronovo pesem »The Isles of Greece« (»Grški otoki«) in se s tem retorično izognil tveganju, da bi vsaka apostrofa postala »klic klica«. Tako se je ustvarila kitajska modernost, bolj problematizirana različica pesmi pa je bila prek besedila v ciljnem jeziku posredovana predvidenemu kitajskemu bralcu.

Kaj smo hoteli od Shakespearja? *Kar hočete* ali *Dvanajsta noč* na slovenskih odrih

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Razprava analizira recepcijo Shakespearjeve komedije Kar hočete *na slovenskih odrih in ugotavlja, katere interpretativne smeri so se izoblikovale kot ključne. Z zgodovinskim pregledom pomembnejših slovenskih uprizoritev in s poudarkom na režijskih pristopih, recepciji občinstva in kritike ter tematski usmerjenosti posameznih postavitev pride do naslednjih ugotovitev. Komedija* Kar hočete *se je na slovenskih odrih izkazala kot izjemno prilagodljivo delo, ki omogoča različne interpretacije. Že med obema vojnama je Branko Gavella z ambiciozno režijo ter vplivi Stanislavskega in Dančenka postavil temelje za poglobljeno uprizarjanje. Po drugi svetovni vojni so bile postavitve sprva osredotočene na uspeh pri publiki in preskušanje gledaliških ansamblov, v šestdesetih letih pa se je Branko Gombač odločil za resnejši pristop, ki se je v celoti izoblikoval v njegovi tržaški uprizoritvi. Leta 1986 je Mile Korun z inovativnimi režijskimi prijemi, simboliko in dopolnjevanjem Shakespearjevega besedila predstavil sodobnejšo interpretacijo s poudarkom na spolni identiteti. V novem tisočletju sta sledila Unkovski in Kica, ki sta z improvizacijo in kolektivnim ustvarjanjem nadgradila Korunovo smer; kritiki so kot uspešnejši ocenili Kicevi postavitvi. Komedijo* Kar hočete *torej zaznamujeta odprtost in interpretativna svoboda, kar režiserjem na Slovenskem omogoča različne pristope pri uprizarjanju, a hkrati predstavlja past, saj se uprizoritve lahko omejijo na površinsko komiko in s tem izgubijo globljo tematiko besedila.*

Ključne besede: angleška dramatika / Shakespeare, William: *Kar hočete* / zgodovina slovenskega gledališča / Gavella, Branko / Gombač, Branko / Korun, Mile / Kica, Janusz

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Uvod

William Shakespeare je svojo komedijo *Kar hočete* napisal na vrhuncu svoje kariere.[1] To je bilo leta 1600, v istem času kot *Hamleta* in tik pred svojimi najbolj znanimi tragedijami, med katere spadajo *Othello*, *Kralj Lear* in *Macbeth*. Nastanek drame je natančno datiran, saj obstajajo pričevanja o njeni prvi izvedbi. Komedija *Kar hočete* je bila napisana po naročilu in prvič odigrana na dvoru kraljice Elizabete I. na predvečer 6. januarja (praznik svetih treh kraljev) leta 1601. Kraljica je takrat gostila italijanskega plemiča Virginia Orsina in ohranjeno je poročilo, da sta se kraljica in gost dobro zabavala ter da je smel Orsino ves čas obdržati pokrivalo na glavi, čeprav je bil v družbi kraljice. Koliko je Shakespeare namigoval tudi na morebitno ljubezensko zvezo med njima, je lahko le ugibanje, a dejstvo je, da je imel Virginio Orsino posebno mesto pri kraljici. Tudi v drami je ilirski vojvoda Orsino zaljubljen v grofico Olivijo, a mu ta čustev ne vrača.

A vrnimo se na začetek, k samemu naslovu. Ta je pravzaprav prva intriga celotnega besedila. Za prvo uprizoritev ga je namreč spremenil že avtor sam v *Dvanajsta noč*. *Dvanajsta noč* po datumu krstne izvedbe, ki je bila na dvanajsto noč po božiču. Danes raziskovalci zagovarjajo domnevo, da je to storil iz strahu, da bi se originalni naslov *Kar hočete* lahko zdel uglednima gostoma žaljiv. Še bolj nenavadno pa je dejstvo, da tako *Kar hočete* kot tudi *Dvanajsta noč* pravzaprav nimata trdne zveze z vsebino te igre.

Je veliki dramatik skušal zbosti svoje občinstvo in mu dati tisto, »kar hoče«? Je gledal na svojo komedijo kot na manjvredno besedilo, ki naj le zabava? Naj bi bila odraz splošnega okusa dobe? Gre morda za ljubezen kot temeljno gonilo igre, ki je tisto, kar vsi hočemo? Je morda ta komedija brezčasna in nagovarja arhetipska vprašanja človeške eksistence in medčloveških odnosov?

Na ta vprašanja seveda ni lahkega odgovora. Raziskovalci so si edini, da gre za najbolj kompleksno Shakespearjevo komedijo, ki prepleta več dramskih dejanj in konfliktov ter jih uspe povezati v koherentno celoto. Giblje se med tragično vzvišenostjo dramskih oseb višjih slojev ter burkaško komičnostjo nižjega plemstva in meščanstva, ob tem pa uvede še Norca kot rezonerja in tistega, ki obvlada umetnost duhovite konverzacije. Skratka, igra je res v veliki meri kompleksna.

Obenem je v tej komediji polno zanimivega in napetega dogajanja: pustolovščina z brodolomom in čudežno rešitvijo dvojčkov (Viola in Sebastijan), številne zamenjave in preobleke (Viola se preobleče v moškega, zamenjujejo dvojčka), goreče ljubezni in ljubezenski trikotniki (Olivija ljubi Cesaria, Orsino ljubi Olivijo, Viola ljubi Orsina …) ter nenazadnje srečen konec s kar tremi porokami.

Komedija je bila zelo uspešna že ob svoji krstni uprizoritvi in takšna usoda jo večinoma spremlja tudi ob uprizoritvah na Slovenskem. Krstno so jo uprizorili leta 1923 (Narodno gledališče v Ljubljani, rež. Osip Šest), kmalu potem, ko jo je v slovenščino prevedel Oton Župančič. Do danes je bila uprizorjena šestnajstkrat, od tega petkrat v SNG Maribor, štirikrat v SNG Drama Ljubljana, dvakrat v SSG Trst, dvakrat v SLG Celje, dvakrat v Mestnem gledališču ljubljanskem, enkrat pa v Prešernovem gledališču v Kranju.

Da bi lahko prikazali spreminjajočo se podobo komedije *Kar hočete* na Slovenskem, si bomo najprej na kratko ogledali samo igro in možne interpretacije, potem pa se bomo sprehodili med njenimi slovenskimi uprizoritvami.

Svet Shakespearjeve komedije *Kar hočete*

Še preden se lahko posvetimo posameznim uprizoritvam, si moramo vsaj na hitro ogledati vsebino te komedije in njeno zgradbo. Shakespeare jo gradi na treh različnih dogajalnih ravneh oz. preko treh intrig. Najprej gre za zgodbo dvojčkov Viole in Sebastijana, ki doživita brodolom na morju. Oba naplavi na obalo daljne dežele Ilirije, ki nekoliko spominja na Dalmacijo, saj jo zaznamujejo morje ter živahni in temperamentni prebivalci. Vsak od njiju se reši s svojim kapitanom, Sebastijan z Antoniom in Viola s Pomorskim kapitanom. Viola se preobleče v mladeniča in dobi službo pri ilirskem vojvodi Orsinu. Zamenjave med dvojčkoma so razlog številnih komičnih zapletov, ki se na koncu srečno končajo.

Naslednji dogajalni niz predstavlja ljubezenski trikotnik oz. več njih med visoko družbo. Osnovni komični zaplet v tem nizu je dejstvo, da so vsi zaljubljeni, a nihče drugemu ljubezni ne vrača. Vojvoda Orsino je noro zaljubljen v grofico Olivijo, ki pa je ravno izgubila brata in žaluje ter mu čustev noče vračati. Obenem je to ne ovira pri tem, da se ne bi na prvi pogled zaljubila v Orsinovega sla Cesaria, ki je pravzaprav preoblečena Viola. Viola se zaljubi v Orsina, ki pa seveda ne ve, da je pred njim ženska, saj se mu predstavi kot moški sopranist, v originalu

evnuh oz. kastrat, ki igra številne inštrumente in poje z visokim glasom. Te ljubezni se odigrajo med dvema hišama, med vojvodovo palačo in grofičino hišo.

Tretji dogajalni niz se plete v sami grofičini hiši in je najbolj komičen od vseh. V tem zapletu nastopajo grofičin stric Vitez Tobija Rig, njegov podpornik in naivnež Vitez Andrej Bledica, hišna Marija ter povzpetniški Olivijin dvornik Malvolio. Slednji je meščan, puritanec, na račun katerega se pošali ostala trojica. Ker je povzpetniški stremuh in skrajno nečimern, mu napišejo domnevno Olivijino pismo, v katerem mu grofica prizna ljubezen. Malvolio ne podvomi o pristnosti pisanja in se v smešni opravi pojavi pred Olivijo ter jo začne osvajati. Obtožijo ga, da se mu je zmešalo in ga vržejo v ječo, iz katere ga osvobodijo šele na koncu.

Vse tri raznorodne dogajalne nize Shakespeare spretno preplete, saj se znajdejo v istem dogajalnem prostoru. Tako se protagonisti križajo, zamenjave identitet pa poskrbijo za številne komične prizore. Ko se znajdejo vsi na kupu, se komedija srečno razplete s kar tremi porokami. Olivija, ki se je ogrela za Cesaria/Violo, dobi njenega dvojčka Sebastijana. Viola se razkrije kot ženska in osvoji svojega ljubega Orsina. Orsino se, čeprav sprva malo jezen, sprijazni z Violo. Tobija Rig se poroči s hišno Marijo, ki je radoživa in iskrivega duha, iz ječe pa izpustijo tudi osmešenega Malvolia.

Dogajanje in dejanja oseb spretno komentira Norec, ki včasih odstira zaplete in zamenjave med osebami, razgalja njihove slabosti, mestoma pa razmišlja o življenju, ljubezni in še o čem. Dober primer te vloge je njegova filozofska pesem »Pa dokler sem bil še bore fantič«, s katero se igra zaključi:

Pa dokler sem bil še bore fantič –
hej ho, kaj mi dež in vihar! –
ves svet je govoril: to vam je tič!
Saj dež dežuje sleherni dan.

Pa ko sem dorasel in bil sem možak –
hej ho, kaj mi dež in vihar! –
pred tatovi zapiral je vrata vsak,
saj dež dežuje sleherni dan.

Pa ko sem oženil se, zbogom mir –
hej ho, skozi dež in vihar! –
od jutra v noč samo prepir,
saj dež dežuje sleherni dan.

Pa ko sem šel postelje z doma iskat –
hej ho, skozi dež in vihar! –
sem bil ubogi vinski brat,
saj dežuje sleherni dan.

Ta svet je star in je močan –
hej ho, kaj mi dež in vihar! –
a kaj nam to! Komad je končan –
mi vam radi bi ugajali sleherni dan. (Shakespeare 139)

Kar hočete je torej komedija, ki združuje različne ravni. Po eni strani številne komične prvine in zaplete, ki segajo od visokih leg ob ljubezenskem trikotniku Orsino–Olivija–Cesario/Viola do bolj nizkih ob intrigi nižjega plemstva in služabnikov (Tobija Rig, Andrej Bledica, Marija in Malvolio). Po drugi strani pa se prav skozi replike Norca kaže globlji razmislek o človeški naravi, družbenem ustroju, eksistenci in življenju. Podobno ugotavlja Simon C. Estók, ki raziskuje povezave med Shakespearjevimi dramami, mizoginijo in naravnimi katastrofami. V komediji *Kar hočete* bi lahko videli tudi razmislek avtorja o svojem ustvarjanju, ki je bilo razpeto med lastno poetiko, spoznanji o življenju in željo po ugajanju publiki. Tudi slednja je bila raznolika, saj je ustvarjal tako za dvor kot za meščane. V elizabetinski Angliji je obstajalo namreč več vrst gledališč. Najprej gledališča bogatih plemičev. Takšno gledališče je imela tudi kraljica Elizabeta I. Nato so odprli t. i. ljudska gledališča, ki so bila namenjena srednjim in nižjim slojem in so stala izven mestnih obzidij. Takšno je bilo tudi slavno gledališče Globe, katerega solastnik je bil Shakespeare. Poleg teh so obstajala še t. i. privatna gledališča, kakršno je bilo npr. gledališče Blackfriars, ki so jih obiskovali premožnejši ljudje, bila so pokrita s streho, omogočala so uporabo odrske tehnike in razsvetljave ter so imela v parterju sedeže (Shakespeare 16–17). Vse to je pomenilo, da se je Shakespeare bržkone ukvarjal s pričakovanji občinstva ter jih skušal uskladiti s svojo poetiko in pogledi na življenje in svet.

Ena izmed ključnih značilnosti Shakespearjeve komedije *Kar hočete* je tako njena izrazita prostorska hibridnost – sposobnost, da enako učinkovito deluje v različnih gledaliških kontekstih. Kot poudarja Sarah Dustagheer, so igralci družine King's Men redno prehajali med javnim gledališčem Globe in zaprtim gledališčem Blackfriars, pri čemer so morali vsakokrat prilagoditi tempo igre, glasbene vložke in način nagovora občinstva (Dustagheer 24–25). Takšna dvojnost je vplivala tudi na oblikovanje *Dvanajste noči*, ki že po strukturi združuje odprto farsičnost z intimnimi prizori razkrivanja identitet.

V ospredje s tem stopa tudi recepcijska raznolikost, ki jo igra omogoča. Ena prvih izvedb v Middle Temple Hall leta 1602 je bila namenjena občinstvu Inns of Court, torej pravniški in izobraženi eliti, ki je cenila duhovite besedne igre in subtilno satiro (Watson 4). Istočasno pa so elementi komične preobrazbe, fizične norčavosti in glasbenih vložkov nagovarjali širše občinstvo javnih gledališč (gl. Eubanks Winkler). V igri se tako srečujejo konvencije različnih odrskih tipov – učenega, dvornega in ljudskega –, kar potrjuje, da Shakespeare ni pisal za enoten okus, temveč za večplastno občinstvo z raznolikimi pričakovanji.

Kot ugotavlja Simon Smith, se *Dvanajsta noč* »brez težav prilagaja tako zaprtim kot javnim gledališčem«, saj njena glasba in dramaturgija dopuščata različne izvedbene pristope (Smith 52). Prav ta odprtost – prostorska, slogovna in recepcijska – omogoča, da igra ponuja »za vsakogar nekaj«: za intelektualce duhovite sofizme, za dvorne gledalce prefinjeno igro identitet in za ljudske obiskovalce komične ekscese. *Dvanajsta noč* tako uteleša Shakespearjevo izjemno zavest o večglasju njegovega časa, v katerem je gledališče postalo prostor srečevanja različnih svetov in okusov.

Kar hočete ali *Dvanajsta noč* na slovenskih odrih

Uprizarjanje Shakespearja na Slovenskem se je intenzivneje začelo v dvajsetih letih 20. stoletja, ko je Oton Župančič prevedel ves njegov opus. Komedija *Kar hočete* je imela enako usodo in je do danes največkrat uprizorjena Shakespearjeva komedija. Njeno uprizarjanje se deli na štiri obdobja. Prvo je obdobje med obema vojnama in v času druge svetovne vojne. Tega zaznamujeta režiserja Osip Šest, ki je režiral kar tri postavitve od petih, in Branko Gavella, čigar postavitev v ljubljanski Drami je bila prelomna. Drugo obdobje obsega prvo povojno petletko. Takrat so med letoma 1947 in 1950 nastale tri uprizoritve, ki so prek Shakespearja gradile nove gledališke ansamble in preverjale okus publike. Tretje obdobje (1963–1986) zaznamuje režiser Branko Gombač, ki je režiral tri postavitve od petih v različnih slovenskih gledališčih. Pridružujeta se mu Janez Vrhunc (Mestno gledališče ljubljansko, premiera 9. 10. 1963) in Mile Korun, ki zaključuje to obdobje leta 1986 v Slovenskem ljudskem gledališču v Celju. Zadnje obdobje obsega tri uprizoritve, ki sta jih režirala Slobodan Unkovski in Janusz Kica (2001, 2011 in 2023).

Obdobje med obema vojnama

Prvo slovensko uprizoritev je v Narodnem gledališču v Ljubljani režiral Osip Šest. Premiera je bila 4. 5. 1923 pod naslovom *Na večer svetih treh kraljev ali Kar hočete*. Osip Šest se je v tem obdobju intenzivno ukvarjal s Shakespearjem, kar je seveda pomenilo, da je dramatika dobro poznal, po drugi strani pa je bil tempo uprizarjanja neprimerljiv z današnjim. Šest je namreč samo v sezoni 1922/23 uprizoril kar štiri avtorjeve tekste: *Hamleta*, *Othella*, *Beneškega trgovca* in *Kar hočete*. Kljub temu Adolf Robida pohvalno ocenjuje njegove dosežke: »Oder sam je deljen v dva dela: prednji del je za tri stopnice nižji kot zadnji. To omogoča plastiko aranžmaja in poveča iluzijo prizorov« (Robida 93). Nadalje omenja osredotočenost na besedo, torej na dramsko besedilo, kar se mu zdi v skladu z elizabetinsko tradicijo. Celoto označi takole: »Šestovi režijski domisleki so v celoti in v detajlu, enako tudi v inscenaciji in v shvačanju iger kot takih v renesanci porojeni, v rokoko kodrčkih vzgojeni in moderni preprostosti oblečeni gurmani« (94). V celoti torej dobra uprizoritev, ki je pomenila dosežek takratnega gledališča.

Šest je komedijo *Kar hočete* v tem obdobju postavil še dvakrat. Prvič štiri leta kasneje, leta 1927, v Narodnem gledališču Maribor. Režiser je težil k skoncentriranemu dogajanju. Dejanja je združil v dva dela, tako da je imela predstava en odmor in je trajala približno dve uri. Kot članek v *Mariborskem vestniku* povzema Dušan Moravec: »Mariborčani so znali posebej ceniti spretno in živo režiserjevo zamisel, ki je omogočila igranje z enim samim presledkom in konec predstave v dveh urah« (Moravec 266). Podobno je pozneje poročalo ljubljansko *Jutro*, in sicer, da je bila uprizoritev »dobro obiskana in tudi igralsko zadovoljiva, na odru je bila ubranost in v avditoriju dobro razpoloženje« (267). Tretja Šestova uprizoritev se je zgodila povsem na koncu tega obdobja, 4. 10. 1944 v Narodnem gledališču v Ljubljani, in je sledila obema že opisanima.

Najpomembnejša uprizoritev tega obdobja pa je prav gotovo tista, ki je doživela premiero 27. 3. 1932 v Narodnem gledališču v Ljubljani in jo je režiral zagrebški režiser Branko Gavella. Gavella je bil gledališki reformator, ki je v Ljubljano prinesel nov pristop k režiji. Po mnenju Vasje Predana se je Gavella zapisal v gledališki spomin kot »najbolj akademsko pedanten in studiozen, pri slavni ruski realistični šoli Stanislavskega in Dančenka navdihnjen umetnik« (Predan, *Slovenska* 48).

Leta 1932 je bil Gavella v Ljubljani že dobro znan, saj je pred tem režiral Balzacovega *Mercadeta* (1930) in predvsem Krleževe *Gospodo Glembajeve* (26. 2. 1931), ki so doživeli 31 ponovitev in so bili ena

najbolj razvpitih uprizoritev medvojnega obdobja. Njegova posta-
vitev komedije *Kar hočete* je izstopala s temeljnimi potezami njegove
poetike. Skupaj s scenografom Ljubom Babićem si je zamislil prilagod-
ljivo sceno, ki ni več temeljila na poslikanih kulisah, ampak je začela
urejati odrski prostor: »Predstavljal sem si, da mora stati sredi odra
nekaj, kar bo centraliziralo vso inscenacijo. Tako je tej predstavi sledila
predstava cilindra. Ker se nama je z Ljubom Babićem zdela po daljšem
premisleku vendar preokorna, sva cilinder razbila na polovico« (Gavella
2). Druga pomembna novost je bil pristop k igri. Tu Gavella poudari,
da je bilo »izhodišče notranje režije te komedije […] zahteva, da mora
igralec govoriti najbolj smešne stvari najbolj resno« (2). Gavellova
postavitev je bila vsekakor prelomna. Kot to opisuje Dušan Moravec:
»Gavellov obisk v našem gledališču je pomenil v tem obdobju za razvoj
Shakespearja pri Slovencih prvo globoko zarezo, ki je dala tudi zdrave
pobude za naprej« (Moravec 257).

Zadnjo od teh uprizoritev je v Mariboru režiral Jože Kovič (premi-
era 1. 10. 1938). Kot Moravec povzema Vladimirja Kralja, je šlo za
ponavljanje Šestovih rešitev iz leta 1927 (Moravec 269).

Prvo obdobje je torej pomenilo seznanjanje s Shakespearjevo kome-
dijo, ki je bila pri publiki nedvomno uspešna. Uprizoritve so gradile na
vprašanju, kako avtorjevo besedilo skrajšati in združiti dejanja, da bo
uprizoritev delovala znotraj pričakovane dolžine in sprememb prizo-
rišč. Bolj ambiciozen pristop je pokazal le Branko Gavella, ki je razmiš-
ljal o tem, kako postaviti intrigo v prostor, da bo ta čim bolj dinamična
in da bo komičnost kar najbolj učinkovita. Kot pravi sam: »Izhodišče za
vso zamisel je bila scena, ko čita Malvolio pismo. V realistični sceneriji
bi se morali prisluškovalci skrivati za kakim grmom […]. Pri meni se
tako rekoč 'grm' premika za Malvolijem« (Gavella 2).

Prva povojna petletka (1947–1950)

Prva leta po drugi svetovni vojni je zaznamovalo ponovno odprtje gle-
dališč in izgradnja razvejane gledališke mreže. Ponovno se odpre mari-
borsko gledališče, kjer 25. 10. 1947 uprizorijo tudi *Kar hočete* v režiji
Eda Verdonika. Njegova osnovna namera je bila bržkone uspeh pri
publiki. Kritike poročajo o tem, da je dodal dve pantomimi na začetku
in na koncu predstave, ki sta povzemali poanto celote. Celoto je peljal
v smer burke in groteske, predvsem pa je poudaril Malvolijevo zgodbo
in njegovo grotesko komičnost. Čeprav je bila uprizoritev uspešna pri
publiki, je bila po oceni Dušana Moravca manj poglobljena. Režiser jo

je približal *commedii dell'arte*, s čimer »je uprizoritev prav gotovo res izgubila na svoji grazioznosti, pa čeprav je ni bilo v celoti odkloniti, posebej še glede na pogoje prvih povojnih sezon mariborskega gledališča« (Moravec 297–298).

Sledili sta dve uprizoritvi, ki sta prav tako zaznamovali ponovno odpiranje gledališč. Najprej tržaškega, v katerem je komedijo režiral Milan Košič (premiera 5. 11. 1948). Šlo je za prvo tamkajšnjo vlogo Štefke Drolc, ki se je pridružila tržaškemu ansamblu. Postavljena je bila kot potujoča predstava, saj je gledališče delovalo v neurejenih razmerah in se je skušalo z gostovanji približati širšemu krogu publike. Moravec zapiše: »Za eksperimente mu ni šlo, ostal je trdno oslonjen na avtorja in ujel srečno ravnovesje med bolj razgibanimi in intimnimi scenami« (Moravec 294).

Podoben iniciacijski namen je imela postavitev Mihaele Šarič v Prešernovem gledališču v Kranju 18. 11. 1950. Režiserka si jo je zamislila kot preskusni kamen za ansambel, saj je Shakespeare zahteval višjo raven odrskega govora in igre, poleg tega pa tudi v smislu vzgoje publike (Moravec 304).

Prva povojna leta so bila tako skladno s splošno ravnjo gledališke produkcije usmerjena k popularnosti in gradnji gledališkega repertoarja. Shakespeare se je zdel odlična izbira, saj je zagotavljal kvaliteto, obenem pa je komedija kot zvrst pomenila tudi lažji dostop do občinstva. Uprizoritve so bile neambiciozne in so predvsem stavile na uspeh pri publiki.

Med resnim in komičnim (1963–1986)

Tretje obdobje zaznamuje režiser Branko Gombač. Komedijo *Kar hočete* je namreč režiral kar trikrat, in sicer 28. 6. 1963 v SLG Celje, 15. 6. 1968 v SNG Maribor in 5. 5. 1981 v SSG Trst. Vse tri uprizoritve druži iskanje mere med *commedio dell'arte*, torej bolj situacijsko komiko intrige okrog Malvolia, in bolj poglobljeno interpretacijo, celjsko in mariborsko pa tudi dejstvo, da sta bili zasnovani kot uprizoritvi na prostem.

Ob uprizoritvi v Celju kritike poročajo o dejstvu, da je bila uprizoritev izvedena na prostem in da je bila uspešna pri publiki. Ob tem poudarjajo, da je Gombač igro preveč približal *commedii dell'arte*, torej grobi situacijski komiki, ki ji je manjkala globina. Moravec povzema kritike, ki so pisali »o dinamični in iskrivi predstavi, pa tudi o 'monotonosti spektakularnosti', o preslabotnem tempu, o tem, da je omet

zunanjega blišča popolnoma prekril osrednje komedijsko jedro, spet o tem, da je bilo več *commedie dell'arte* kakor renesanse, skratka, da je žlahtna tradicija Shakespearja v Celju 'rahlo degenerirala'« (Moravec 303–304).

Ob prebiranju kritik Gombačeve naslednje postavitve, ki je bila v SNG Maribor, se ne moremo znebiti občutka, da je režiser z njo skušal odgovoriti na očitke iz leta 1963. Lojze Smasek je v *Večeru* zapisal: »Zrežiral jo je Branko Gombač – solidno. […] S precejšnjo pozornostjo in naklonjenostjo, posvečenima uprizarjanju plastičnih značajev, in z nekoliko manjšo prizadevnostjo glede situacijsko komičnih domislic in možnosti.« Med igralci je izpostavil Arnolda Tovornika, ki je bil tako prepričljiv, da »je po odru lomastil in zbijal svoje grobe šale vitez Tobija in ne Arnold Tovornik«, ter Volodjo Peera kot Norca, ki »ni nikoli stal nad dogodki in ljudmi, temveč sredi njih« (Smasek). Podobno ugotavlja Josip Vidmar, ki si je ogledal gostovanje v ljubljanskih Križankah. Tudi on je mnenja, da sta bili scenografija (Sveta Jovanović) in kostumografija (Vlasta Hegedušič) manj opazni. Predvsem so predstavi »brio dali igralci, ki jih je režiser vodil vešče in premišljeno« (Vidmar 5). Vidmar je bil manj zadovoljen z vlogo Norca, ki jo je režiser zanemaril, in z nemotiviranim ljubezenskim parom Tobija Rig in Marija, katerih zveza je »nas in režiserja kratkomalo presenetila« (5). Pohvalil je Arnolda Tovornika, predvsem pa je bil navdušen nad Malvoliem Antona Petjeta: »Njegov nesrečni dvornik je bil komičen v najpomembnejšem smislu te besede, nekako diabolično komičen, skoraj pošasten in že kar nekoliko tragičen« (5). Zaključil je pohvalno: »V celoti predstava, ki pomeni tehtno stvaritev mariborske Drame« (5).

Tretja uprizoritev Branka Gombača, tokrat v Slovenskem stalnem gledališču v Trstu, je pomenila največji uspeh. Kritiki so jo razglašali za najboljšo tržaško in celo slovensko uprizoritev sezone. Tako že Jernej Novak ugotavlja, da gre za podobno klasično postavitev kot pred 13 leti: »Na eni strani visoki svet […], ki ga v tej uprizoritvi barva predvsem poudarjena skrb za odrski govor […]. Na drugi strani pa stoje barvite figure preprostejših, za komedijo praviloma dragocenejših posebnežev.« Posebej pohvali Poldeta Bibiča kot Tobijo Riga, čigar kreacija je bila »polnokrvna, živahna, primerno robata, a nikoli pregroba«. V dialogu z Vidmarjem opazi, da Gombač tokrat ni zanemaril vloge Norca, posebej pa izpostavi tudi Malvolia v izvedbi Antona Petjeta, ki mu je dal »zanimive poteze zdaj povsem razvidnega prevaranta, zdaj nevarnega potuhnjenca« (Novak, »Igrivost«). Dimitrij Rupel je menil, da »so se igralci […] in režiser, ki je prišel na obisk iz Maribora, razvneli do takšne mere, da lahko govorimo o eni najuspešnejših predstav (tržaške,

morda celo slovenske) sezone« (Rupel). Podobno Andrej Inkret pohvali predvsem burkaške dele, a se mu zdi, da je Norec Livija Bogatca »zaradi premalo precizne režije ostal ob strani […]. Drugi 'plemiški' oz. ljubezenski predeli Shakespearjeve komedije so ostajali bolj ali manj v senci odličnih burkačev« (Inkret 9). Tudi Ace Mermolja izpostavi komično plat uprizoritve, ob tem pa pohvali tudi scenografijo (Niko Matul) in kostume (Alenka Bartl), o katerih zapiše: »Scena kot tudi kostumi so zelo efektni« (Mermolja 5). Posebej opozori na Poldeta Bibiča v vlogi Tobije Riga: »S svojim nastopom je bil Bibič že kar bistvena os vsega dogajanja« (5). Podobno laskavo so se o uprizoritvi razpisali Zdenka Lovec v *Primorskih novicah*, Dušan Željeznov v *Večeru* in Vasja Predan v *Naših razgledih*.

Le nekaj mesecev za Brankom Gombačem je leta 1963 *Kar hočete* prvič postavil na oder Mestnega gledališča ljubljanskega režiser Janez Vrhunc (9. 10. 1963). Uprizoritev ni bila uspešna. Moravec se strinja s kritiko Boruta Trekmana v *Naših razgledih*, in sicer, »da je dal režiser svoji *Dvanajsti noči* brez potrebe romantičen predznak in tako ni imela predstava prave zveze ne z elizabetinskim ne s sodobnim teatrom« (Moravec 292). Neposrečena pa je bila tudi vloga Norca, čigar replike so odzvanjale v obupu in melanholiji.

Veliko bolj ambiciozno se je uprizarjanja komedije lotil Mile Korun (SLG Celje, premiera 19. 9. 1986), ki je v delu iskal sodobnejše poudarke. Poigraval se je z vprašanjem ljubezni in različnih seksualnih identitet, ki so z gejevskimi in lezbičnimi gibanji postale v osemdesetih letih aktualne. Tone Peršak tako zapiše: »Transvestitizem je velika moda v *show businessu*, ravno tako kot poudarjanje erotizma in spolne izzivalnosti. Isto velja tudi za poudarjanje homoseksualnosti ali vsaj videza homoseksualnosti« (Peršak 3). Posebej izpostavi Milado Kalezič kot Violo, tip žensk, ki »z obleko prevzemajo tudi 'moške' (vedenjske) značilnosti in način gibanja« (3). Posebej pohvali Janeza Bermeža kot Malvolia, ki ni več le komičen, ampak je liku dodal »dobro odmerjeno dozo transvestitizma in fašistoidnosti povzpetneža« (3), ter Zvoneta Agreža kot Norca. Podobno pozitivno so uprizoritev ocenili Jernej Novak, ki odkriva norčavost in komičnost na eni strani ter meditacijo o ljubezni na drugi, Andrijan Lah in Helena Grandovec. Slednja posebej pohvali kolektivno igro ansambla in ugotavlja, da je »nastalo nekaj, kar je gledališka govorica v najboljšem pomenu besede.« Omeni fantastično pisane kostume (Marija Vidau), askestsko sceno (Mile Korun), obvezni dežnik in dojenčka, ki si ga kot nekakšen simbol podajajo iz rok v roke. Na koncu zapiše: »Iz obilice vsega tega pa lahko izluščimo posebnega Shakespearja, zares inventivnega Koruna, ki je znal dati ostalim

ustvarjalcem uprizoritve vse možnosti, da se izrazijo. Lahko rečemo, da so jih zares izkoristili« (Grandovec).

Tretje obdobje torej mine v iskanju klasičnega ravnovesja med komičnostjo intrige okrog Malvolia in resnejših tonov visokega plemstva. Nadalje okrog iskanja mesta, ki gre vlogi rezonerja Norca, ki je zdaj povsem odmaknjen in melanholičen, drugič preveč lahkoten in satiričen. Branko Gombač tu preskuša različne možnosti in najde pravo mero leta 1981. Najpomembnejša in tudi najpogumnejša je prav gotovo Korunova uprizoritev, ki stavi na celosten gledališki dogodek. Igro aktualizira s prevpraševanjem spolnih identitet, vpelje dojenčka in dežnik kot prosto lebdeča simbola, ki ustvarjata nove pomene, in s tem odpre nove možnosti uprizarjanja te Shakespearjeve komedije.

Novo tisočletje

Po letu 2000 je bila komedija *Kar hočete* uprizorjena trikrat. Najprej povsem na začetku tisočletja v Mestnem gledališču ljubljanskem, kjer jo je režiral Slobodan Unkovski (premiera 29. 9. 2001). To je bila otvoritvena predstava jubilejne 50. sezone gledališča, tako da je dobila veliko pozornosti. Unkovski je pred premiero v intervjuju s Slavkom Pezdirjem na kratko orisal svoj pristop. Za to uprizoritev je Milan Jesih pripravil nov prevod igre, režiser pa se je odločil, da se bo odmaknil od tradicije in uprizoril to komedijo kot preplet komičnosti in romantičnosti. Glavni temi je videl v hrepenenju, ki na splošno zaznamuje slovensko gledališče in dramsko pisanje vse od Cankarja naprej, in iskanju identitete (gl. Unkovski).

Uprizoritev je nedvomno uspela, čeprav so ji kritiki očitali nekaj nedodelanosti na začetku in koncu. Vilma Štritof Čretnik omeni odlične igralske stvaritve Ive Kranjc (Viola) in Judite Zidar (Olivija), še bolj pa komičnega kvarteta – Boris Ostan (Malvolio), Uroš Smolej (Medlika), Gašper Tič (Rigej) in Gregor Čušin (Norec). Poudari, da »je režiser temeljito izrabil obilico vizualnih odrskih rešitev, se igral z dinamično mizansceno in oblikoval pravo dramaturgijo poskokov različnih igralcev v različnih situacijah«, vendar zaključi z ugotovitvijo: »Na začetku malo prepočasnega teka, nato pa dinamična predstava z vsemi naštetimi kvalitetami, ki je ambiciozno odprla zlato sezono tega gledališča« (Štritof Čretnik).

Blaž Lukan je še bolj direkten, saj celoto označi kot »nedodelano«. To argumentira takole: »V uprizoritvi Unkovskega se namreč (pogosto neizbirčno) menjavajo slogi in načini, prijemi in učinki.« Pri tem

našteva različne pristope od baroka do sodobnega burlesknega gaga, ki mu je Shakespearjeva igra le neke vrste libreto. Režiserju očita, da sta »spolna binarnost in ambivalentnost [...] uprizorjeni zgolj kot (plavtovska) ljudska burka« (Lukan). Unkovski se torej ni poglobil v svojo interpretacijo, ampak ostaja na površini, v situacijski komiki in burki. Celota se Lukanu sicer zdi zelo živahna, a še ne do konca izdelana. Pohvali Aljošo Ternovša (Sebastijan) in Ivo Kranjc (Viola), ki premoreta nastavke drame, predvsem pa ponovno komične like v interpretaciji Borisa Ostana, Uroša Smoleja, Gašperja Tiča in Gregorja Čušina. Nad igralci so navdušeni tudi Bogomila Kravos (*Primorski dnevnik*), Ignacija J. Fridl (*Večer*) in Andrej Jaklič (*Slovenske novice*), pri čemer Fridl opazi, da »sta uvod in zaključek najslabša dela mestnogledališke uprizoritve« (Fridl). Jaklič pa ugotavlja, da je komedija *Kar hočete* »postala cinična freska cenenosti malomeščanstva in dekadence lumpenproletariata« (Jaklič).

Zadnji dve uprizoritvi je režiral Janusz Kica v SNG Maribor (premiera 15. 1. 2011) in SNG Drama Ljubljana (premiera 16. 12. 2023). Ob prvi so si kritiki skoraj enotni v splošni sodbi, da gre za odlično uprizoritev. Posebej izpostavljajo dobro scenografijo, ki razplasti odrsko ploskev v različne višine in z uporabo pogrezal gradi zanimive učinke.

Peter Rak svojo kritiko naslovi »Predstava brez šibkega člena«, kar argumentira s tem, da je v *Kar hočete* Kica znova

> manifestiral svoje mojstrstvo. Sem sodijo klasično modernistična, pa vendarle tehtno premišljena strategija izmenjave iluzije in deziluzije, torej stalno prestopanje med umetnostjo in realnostjo, demontaža zapletov in razpletov, ki ne funkcionirajo več kot linearna zgodba, temveč kot jasno razviden proces proizvodnje fikcije, ki služi predvsem za predstavitev karakterjev, na koncu pa se vsi fragmenti spretno sestavijo v koherentno celoto. (Rak 15)

Kica se je torej bolj svobodno lotil uprizoritve, pri čemer mu je šlo v prvi vrsti za predstavitev svoje interpretacije s kar najbolj učinkovitimi sredstvi. Rak ugotavlja, da uprizoritev zaznamuje »spretno odmerjena uporaba komike in ironije, ki nikoli ne preide v prazno burkaštvo, ter [...] subtilna aktualizacija Shakespearjevega teksta« (15). Vzeli so ponovno Župančičev prevod, ki pa ga je posodobila in dopisala kar ustvarjalna ekipa.

Petra Vidali dodaja: »Kljub precej neuravnoteženi igralski prezenci [...] smo lahko jasno razbrali vsak stavek, vsak poudarek in doumeli genialnost mikro nivoja, ki gradi makro stvaritev« (Vidali, »Shakespeare« 14). Razlog vidi v tem, da je »režija natančna in duhovita, dramaturgija tekoča, kostumi kot uliti« (14). Poudarja uspešno

uporabo vrtljivih vrat in različnih pogrezal: »In luknje, iz katerih lezejo in vanje poniknejo […], so uporabljene enako preudarno, duhovito in dosledno« (14). Nika Leskovšek poudari odlično prehajanje med tragedijo in komedijo. Posebej izpostavi Branka Jordana v vlogi Orsina, ki najčisteje »odigra prelitje tragičnega s komičnim obrazom« (Leskovšek 11), sicer pa pohvali tudi druge igralske stvaritve. Nekoliko bolj kritična je Vesna Jurca Tadel, ki razmišlja o tem, da je komedija *Kar hočete* sicer bleščeča v podrobnostih, manj uspešna pa v koherentnosti celote. In to že na ravni Shakespearjevega teksta. Izpostavlja dve ravni, bolj tragične intrige višjega plemstva in burkaški zaplet okrog Malvolia ter rokohitrski razplet s tremi porokami. Podobno meni o Kicevi uprizoritvi:

> Čeprav Kica z enako blago ironijo, ki preveva celotno predstavo, dogajanje na odru tudi zaključi – igralci se pogrezajo v orkestrsko jamo, medtem ko se srečni (?) držijo za roke in zborovsko popevajo ljubezenski »ah« –, se zdi, da je mariborski *Kar hočete* dosti močnejši v podrobnostih kot v celoti in da je izpustil nekaj priložnosti za bolj radikalen osnovni koncept. (Jurca Tadel 21)

Kica se je h *Kar hočete* ponovno vrnil v ljubljanski Drami leta 2023. Tudi ta uprizoritev je bila uspešna. Branko Šturbej (Malvolio) in Polona Juh (Olivija) sta prejela nagradi žlahtni komedijant in komedijantka na 32. Dnevih komedije v Celju, Tina Vrbnjak (Viola) pa igralsko nagrado »Duša Počkaj«, ki jo podeljuje Združenje dramskih umetnikov Slovenije. Benjamin Zajc pohvali kolektivno igro vseh igralcev, za celoto pa ugotavlja, da uspe klasično besedilo približati sodobni publiki, pri čemer se ljubezenska zmešnjava »dvigne na višji nivo in začne naslavljati tudi družbene trke in zmote našega časa« (Zajc 6). Petra Vidali poudarja, da gre za »komedijo spolnih vlog« (Vidali, »Komedija« 12), ki niso več trdne in s tem komentirajo heteronormativnost. Posebej izpostavi Branka Šturbeja in Polono Juh, poleg njiju pa še Veroniko Drolc (Marija), »za katero se najprej zdi, da je sključena od ponižnosti, potem pa se izkaže, da je to drža zviteža« (12). V celoti torej uspešna postavitev, ki gradi na vprašanju ljubezenskega hrepenenja in fluidnosti spolnih vlog, kar je Kica izpostavil že v mariborski postavitvi, pred njim pa tudi Mile Korun.

Sklep

Na koncu lahko skušamo odgovoriti na izhodiščna vprašanja. Shakespearjeva komedija je nedvomno brezčasna, kar dokazujejo tudi različni uprizoritveni pristopi na slovenskih odrih. Večinoma je uspešna pri publiki, saj na zelo razgiban in lahkoten način raziskuje arhetipska vprašanja identitete, vprašanja ljubezni in tega, kaj smo zanjo pripravljeni storiti. Že na začetku, med obema vojnama, je bila prepoznana kot dokaz kvalitete gledališkega ansambla in podlaga za uspešno uprizoritev. V tem obdobju je bolj ambiciozna gledališka postavitev uspela Branku Gavelli, ki je razmišljal o funkcionalnosti scenografije in se pri vodenju igralcev zgledoval pri Stanislavskem in Dančenku. Tako je postavil temelje za zahtevnejše interpretacije te Shakespearjeve komedije.

Po drugi svetovni vojni se nadaljuje tradicija uprizoritev, ki so stavile na uspeh pri publiki in kvalitativno rast gledaliških ansamblov. Do bolj ambicioznih postavitev je tako prišlo šele v šestdesetih letih, ko prevladuje režiser Branko Gombač. Ta v svojih treh uprizoritvah išče ravnovesje med komičnostjo in resnejšo obravnavo Shakespearjevih tem, ki mu je uspela šele v tretje, v tržaškem gledališču.

Pomemben mejnik predstavlja uprizoritev v režiji Mileta Koruna (SLG Celje, 1986), ki je odprla sodobnejše teme spolne identitete, obenem pa je jemala Shakespearjev tekst kot razpoložljiv material, ki naj ga dopolni gledališka uprizoritev. Korun je s svojim značilnim dopisovanjem in dodajanjem simbolov (dežnik in dojenček) nadgradil besedilo v polnokrvni gledališki dogodek.

V novem tisočletju sta se komedije *Kar hočete* lotila Slobodan Unkovski in Janusz Kica. Oba nadaljujeta Korunovo pot s sodobnimi prijemi. Gradita na kolektivnem ustvarjanju in improvizacijah, pri čemer sta bili Kicevi postavitvi po mnenju kritikov uspešnejši.

Zaključimo lahko, da je ta Shakespearjeva komedija izredno prilagodljiva, sestavljena iz več pomenskih in slogovnih ravni. Prav zato gledališču ponuja skoraj neizčrpne možnosti interpretacije, kar je po eni strani prednost, po drugi strani pa past, saj se uprizoritve pogosto ujamejo v past simplifikacije in igranja na zunanje komične učinke.

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What Did We Want from Shakespeare? *What You Will* or *Twelfth Night* on Slovenian Stages

This article analyzes the Slovenian reception of Shakespeare's comedy *What You Will* and identifies various interpretative approaches. Through a historical overview of the most significant Slovenian productions, with a focus on directorial approaches, audience response, and critical reception, the following conclusions are drawn. *What You Will* has proved to be an extremely flexible work, allowing for a wide range of interpretations. As early as the interwar period, Branko Gavella, with his ambitious direction and the influences of Stanislavsky and Danchenko, laid the foundations for in-depth staging. After the Second World War, productions initially focused on audience appeal and testing theatre ensembles, but it was not until the 1960s that Branko Gombač introduced a more serious approach, which was fully realized in his Trieste production. In 1986, Mile Korun presented a more modern interpretation, emphasizing gender identity and employing innovative directorial devices, symbolism, and additions to Shakespeare's text. In the new millennium, Unkovski and Kica followed, building on Korun's direction with improvisation and collective creativity; critics considered Kica's staging more successful. *What You Will* is therefore characterized by interpretative openness, which encourages directors to adopt different approaches to its staging, but at the same time presents a trap, as productions can be reduced to superficial comic effects and thus lose their depth.

Recenzija / *Review*
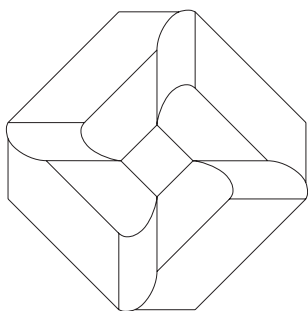
Devet življenj Srednje Evrope: po poteh mitov, podob, simbolov

Miloš Zelenka: *Central Europe in Symbolic and Literary Geography*. Berin: Peter Lang, 2024. 176 str.

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Več razlogov obstaja za nekolikšno presenečenje nad lanskoletnim izidom (pri založbi Peter Lang) monografske publikacije *Central Europe in Symbolic and Literary Geography* Miloša Zelenke, komparativista in literarnega teoretika, ki predava na Oddelku za slovanske jezike in književnosti Pedagoške fakultete na Južnočeški univerzi v Českih Budejovicah in Oddelku za srednjeevropske jezike in kulture na Fakulteti za srednjeevropske študije Univerze Konstantina filozofa v slovaški Nitri. Med pomembnejšimi med njimi je mogoče navesti preprost občutek, da se je navdušenje nad in potreba Srednjeevropejcev po ideji Srednje Evrope, ki je vzcvetela že v 80-ih, razvijala pa se je naslednja tri desetletja, v zadnjih petnajstih letih nekoliko izčrpalo. Namreč ideja pripadnosti Srednji Evropi, ki so jo v 90-ih z velikim navdušenjem poprijele države bivšega političnega »Vzhoda« in jo videle kot pomemben dokaz za pripadnost kulturi in družbi Zahodne Evrope že od vekomaj, je po že več kot dveh desetletjih članstva teh držav v Evropski uniji izgubila svojo relevantnost, saj je članstvo postalo že nesporno in nevprašljivo dejstvo.

Drugi razlog za njeno izčrpanost predstavljajo najnovejše družbenopolitične razmere, kjer se zaradi trenutnih političnih povezav določene države, ki so prej veljale za absolutno ključne elemente Srednje Evrope, zdaj obračajo stran od Evrope in njenih vrednot, kot so na primer liberalna demokratična ureditev, vladavina prava in socialna pravičnost. Prelepe sanje o skupni Evropi so se prelevile skoraj v nočno moro: namesto Evrope smo dobili Entropo (Dessy Gavrilova), saj se je izsanjana prihodnost raztreščila ob trdi resničnosti. In tretji razlog je umik ideje Srednje Evrope zaradi nezmožnosti ustrezne – politične, družbene, geografske, kulturne itd. – identifikacije in definicije. Malodane vsakdo, ki se je lotil razmisleka o Srednji Evropi, je to, neupoštevaje sosedov, počel s svojega vidika.

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Vendar se z druge strani zdi prav zato zdajšnji trenutek precej ustrezen za poglobljen razmislek o entiteti in vrednotah, ki smo jim bili Srednjeevropejci zavezani še ne tako dolgo tega, pa nam zdaj uhajajo med prsti. V tem smislu se zdi najnovejša knjiga M. Zelenke pomemben prispevek in opozorilo.

Dejstvo je, da se je M. Zelenka že vsaj od konca 90-ih let prejšnjega stoletja ukvarjal s tematiko Srednje Evrope in na to temo objavil kar nekaj monografskih publikacij, denimo učbenik in antologijo z naslovom *Střední Evropa v symbolické a literární geografii* (2008) ter, skupaj s sodelavci, *Stredoeurópsky areál ako kultúrny fenomén* (2015), od 2019 pa Inštitut za srednjeevropske jezike in kulture na Fakulteti za srednjeevropske študije Univerze Konstantina filozofa v Nitri izdaja tudi revijo *Stredoeurópske pohľady*, ki se prvenstveno ubada s to temo. V kasnejšem času je Zelenka s temo Srednje Evrope povezal tudi svoj osrednji raziskovalni interes, in sicer imagologijo, ki jo je obravnaval tudi v tukaj predstavljani publikaciji.

Ob zadnji obuditvi je imela ideja Srednje Evrope številne vidike, ki so tekmovali za eksegetsko prevlado: geografske, zgodovinske, politične, civilizacijske, kulturne, lingvistične, mitološke itd., pri čemer so se z ozirom na pojavljajoča se nasprotja nekateri izmed njih počasi obrusili in odpadli, drugi pa so stopili v ospredje. Vseeno pa se natančna definicija oziroma zamejitev Srednje Evrope še dandanes postavlja kot aksiološki problem: težava je namreč v tem, da je – kot pravi poljski rek – »gledišče odvisno od sedišča«, se pravi, da ima vsak srednjeevropski narod, vsak predstavnik ali predstavnica srednjeevropskega naroda pravzaprav lastno vizijo »prave« Srednje Evrope. Definicija tega koncepta v svoji biti tako ostaja tako razpršena, da je lahko celo kontradiktorna.

Zaradi številnih med seboj razlikujočih se pogledov je nedorečeno ostalo na primer vprašanje geografske zamejenosti: medtem ko so nekateri Srednjo Evropo videli le v skupini držav, ki je nekoč pripadala Avstro-Ogrski, danes pa tvorijo Višegradsko četvorko (Češka, Slovaška, Madžarska in Poljska), so drugi vanjo vključevali še druge narode (s kasnejšimi državami) pod okriljem cesarsko-kraljeve monarhije (ta supranaconalistični pogled predstavlja na primer minimalistični pristop k vprašanju Srednje Evrope, prim. Zelenka 49 in dalje), spet tretji so Srednjo Evropo omejevali s tremi morji (Jadranom, Baltikom in Črnim morjem), četrti je ne vidijo brez »balkanskih« dežel, peti vključujejo vanjo še nemškojezične dežele (Avstrijo in Nemčijo), šesti (denimo Ivan Dorovský) pa njene korenine iščejo v sredozemskem bazenu (Srednja Evropa kot entiteta med vzhodom in zahodom predstavlja maksimalistični pristop, prav tam).

Podobno razslojeno je tudi zgodovinsko razumevanje Srednje Evrope, saj je v neposredni povezavi z njenimi geografskimi koordinatami (identifikacija s Srednjo Evropo se zdi danes pri večini avtorjev in teoretikov povezana z zgodovino njihovega lastnega naroda oziroma nacije), medtem ko politični pogledi izhajajo iz vnazaj idealiziranega pogleda na družbeno tvorbo, kakršno je predstavljala avstroogrska monarhija. Pri tem se je treba zavedati, da prav slovanski narodi, danes precej goreči zagovorniki fenomena Srednje Evrope, v tej državi še zdaleč niso imeli enakopravnega položaja in da kot ena prednostnih političnih entitet vanj spada prav Avstrija. Idiosinkratičnost političnih pogledov na Srednjo Evropo je v tem, da ima ravno ta razsežnost močan mitološki priokus. Če so z ene strani slovanski narodi, ki so se po propadu komunistične diktature nadejali vključitve v »civilizirano« Evropo, menili, da prav oni tvorijo nesporno jedro srednjeevropske tvorbe (tako razmišlja večina slovanskih teoretikov), so se na drugi strani oglašali glasovi, ki so Srednjo Evropo videli kot nevprašljivo nemško (tako jo je denimo literariziral Joseph Roth v romanih *Radetzky marš* in *Hotel Savoy*, s pomočjo termina *Mitteleuropa* opisal Emil Brix, skozi lik F. von Gagerna v delu *Habsbruški mit v moderni avstrijski književnosti* pa predstavil tudi Claudio Magris. Srednja Evropa je bila zanj utelešenje ideje *felix Austria* kot dobre matere vseh svojih otrok-narodov, s čimer je zanikal vizuro avstrijske monarhije kot »ječe narodov«). Vendar niti mitologizacija Srednje Evrope – na primer z besedami Milana Kundere: »Srednja Evropa: laboratorij somraka« ali Györgya Konráda »Srednja Evropa ni dejansko nič drugega kot sen« – ne pomaga pri konkretnejšem definiranju tega specifičnega fenomena. Mitološka vizija Srednje Evrope odpravi tudi suhoparno »meteorološko« percepcijo Petra Handkeja, kar pa nas spet napoti nazaj na začetek, h geografiji.

In navsezadnje so z vsemi prejšnjimi povezani tudi jezikovni pogledi na Srednjo Evropo, ki se enako, kar je popolnoma jasno, med seboj močno razlikujejo: medtem ko je za nekatere to le slovanska tvorba, so drugi pripravljeni sprejeti še madžarščino, tretji pa se strinjajo, da – zaradi nekdanje politične prevlade – Srednje Evrope brez nemškega jezika pač ne more biti.

Z ozirom na vse omenjeno je pričujoča knjiga M. Zelenke, ki je, kot pravi sam, rezultat več prej objavljenih znanstvenih prispevkov (prim. Zelenka 138), osvežujoče spojna in zaokrožena, saj se problema Srednje Evrope loteva ne mimo, temveč na podlagi številnih doslejšnjih pogledov. Študija je zamišljena inkluzivistično, informativno in vseeno še analitično. Po avtorjevem mnenju je o Srednji Evropi na koncizen in hkrati najustreznejši način – ob tem, da je danes že pravzaprav

nemogoče zajeti ključna dela na to temo, kaj šele pregledati večino zapisov – mogoče, izognivši se mitologizaciji, govoriti le v okviru njene literarne in pa simbolne geografije. Obe področji po avtorjevem mnenju dovoljujeta namreč zadostno konkretno topično raznolikost, hkrati pa mitsko enovitost literature srednjeevropskega področja, da bi omogočili ustrezni oris Srednje Evrope, ne da bi pri tem tvegali spust v konkretne geografske, zgodovinske, socialne, politične in druge parametre, ki bi lahko to spojnost seveda takoj razbili. Tovrstni pristop omogoči avtorju ubiti dve muhi na en mah: uporaba komparativistične literarne metode mu omogoči osredotočenost na večkulturne agregate in sisteme ter obenem izmik »hegemonističnemu in univerzalističnemu značaju« (Zelenka 7) nacionalnih književnosti.

Zelenka si seveda ne dela nikakršnih iluzij glede dokončne definicije kulturnega prostora Srednje Evrope. Zaveda se, da gre za »mobilni in heterogeni prostor, poln tradicij in simbolov« (Zelenka 13), s katerimi je treba ravnati nadvse občutljivo, če naj vsak po svoje zaživi in postane del kompleksne »mreže« medbesedilnih povezav. Edina stalnica fenomena Srednje Evrope je neverjetna raznolikost njenih kultur (tako večjih, dominantnejših – poljska, češka, madžarska –, kot manjših, težje opaznih celo v medsebojnih razmerjih Srednje Evrope – na primer slovenska), zato se, vsaj na začetku, zazdi smiselni pristop k eksegezi tega polja na podlagi besedne zveze, ki bolj obvladuje družboslovni diskurz (Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu itd.), in sicer »mentalnega prostora«. V njem se namreč lahko srečajo zgodovina s sedanjostjo, mit z dejanskostjo in namišljenost z geografijo. Za razumevanje koncepta Srednje Evrope je bistvena prav njena umestitev v nerealni, namišljeni prostor, ki postane presečna množica faktičnih konstant, družbenih dejstev in predvsem individualnih projekcij, saj, kot opozori Zelenka, Srednja Evropa »pravzaprav nikoli ni obstajala kot zgodovinska geopolitična entiteta« (Zelenka 14).

Znanstveno raziskovalno podlago za svoja premišljevanja si Zelenka v tem primeru sposodi pri slovaškem raziskovalcu Dionýzu Ďurišinu in njegovem konceptu »medliterarnih skupnosti«, ki so sicer etnično definirane, vendar se skozi zgodovino temeljito spreminjajo. Etnija je v tem primeru predvsem jezikovno definirana – geografske določbe so na voljo, ali pa tudi ne, v bistvu pa niso niti tako pomembne. Kakor koli, po avtorjevem mnenju gre za intelektualni potencial, »koncentracijo duha« (Zelenka 16), ki se kaže predvsem v izjemni raznolikosti posameznih »sestavin«, kar pa vnazaj pomaga pri razgradnji tradicionalnega koncepta narodnih književnosti. Drugače rečeno, ko govorimo o nacionalnih književnostih, te razumemo kot neodvisne in samostojne.

V primeru srednjeevropskega diskurza pa nacionalnost književnost izgubi svoj primat in se v »loncu« Srednje Evrope zlije s številnimi drugimi (bolj ali manj) podobnimi književnostmi.

Zato Zelenka – po I. Dorovskem – za opis takšnega individualnega položaja uporabi zvezo »dvojna domovina« (Zelenka 17), ki temelji na konceptu dvo-literarnosti: literatura, pisana v enem jeziku, deluje hkrati tudi v večjezični, večkulturni skupnosti. Zelenka se zaveda, da takšna diferenciacija v Evropi nacij in regij lahko pripelje do kontradikcij, a vseeno se ne enega ne drugega ne da izključiti, zato se ponovno opre na Ďurišina in njegove »medliterarne centrizme« (Zelenka 23).

Kako zapleten je lahko razmislek o Srednji Evropi danes, kaže tudi odločitev M. Zelenke, da se v svojem pristopu k definiranju Srednje Evrope posluži več uveljavljenih teoretičnih konceptov, razvitih za namen ustreznejšega analiziranja književnosti. Eno takih orodij je »ingresivna« literarna zgodovina, kakršno sta v svojem delu predlagala Marcel Cornis-Pope in John Neubauer. Gre za pristop, ki vstopa med kulture, se ne zadržuje na ravni nacionalnih jezikov, temveč se spušča v špranje mednje in tako prepoznava avtorje s hibridnimi identitetami. Zelenka se nasloni še na slovenskega raziskovalca Marijana Dovića in njegovo opozorilo o potrebi ali celo nujnosti kontekstualnega diskurza (Zelenka 27). Po avtorjevem mnenju se najbolj z naravo srednjeevropskih literatur sklada sodobni, inkluzivistični pogled na literaturo. Za te literature prvenstveno velja, da je bilo v vmesnih prostorih ustvarjenega skoraj toliko kot na osrednjih, imanentnih nacionalnih fundamentih, ki v eksegezi književnosti vse prepogosto postanejo žrtev posploševanj in generalizacij (tu se Zelenka spomni tudi dela Alenke Koron in Marka Juvana). »Ingresivna« metoda Johna Neubauerja se tako odvrača od avtorjev in se posveča »različnim kotom in fragmentarnim pričevanjem« (Zelenka 30) z namenom, da bi iz posamičnih, parcialnih »posnetkov« sestavil mozaično agregatno sliko. Fasetni, fragmentarni način, ki bi ga lahko poimenovali tudi policentričnega, zato predstavlja kritiko etnocentričnih pristopov h književnosti (o čemer so med drugimi pisali tudi že Homi Bhabha, Armando Gnisci, D. Ďurišin, poseben projekt pa je o »kulturnih svetnikih« in njihovi nacionalni kanonizaciji na Slovenskem izvedel M. Dović).

Ne glede na dejstvo, da se je – ne samo po mnenju M. Zelenke – sodobna literarna teorija posebej izrazito ujela s srednjeevropskimi književnostmi, je monumentalno delo M. Cornis-Popa in J. Neubauerja pustilo še eno pomenljivo sled. Občo terminologijo Srednje Evrope sta razslojila še z uporabo ene specifične besedne zveze: *East-Central Europe* (po Zelenkovih besedah naj bi besedno zvezo razvila francoska šola

Annales in M. Foucault) oziroma Vzhodno-srednja Evropa, kar naj bi zajemalo prav po-avstroogrske, slovanske dežele, ki so si v 90-ih na vse pretege prizadevale za vključitev v evropsko »družino«. Vendar vprašanje, ali je mogoče oziroma ustrezno z ene strani nedoločeno govoriti o fragmentarni srednjeevropski identiteti, z druge pa jo geografsko trdno določati kot vzhodno-srednjeevropsko, ostaja.

Pri analiziranju fenomena Srednje Evrope pa se M. Zelenki za pomenljivega izkaže še en pristop (eno od področij primerjalne književnosti), in sicer komparativna imagologija, analitično orodje literarne vede s konca 19. stoletja. Že v svojem preteklem delu je bil Zelenka velik pristaš imagologije (k njeni teoriji je denimo prispeval leta 2018). Razkol med individualnim in nacionalnim, ki ga je Zelenka določil kot ključnega za razumevanje srednjeevropske kulture (in literature), je mogoče preseči in ga povezati le na podlagi poglobljenega razumevanja komunikacije med nasprotji. Podobe, o katerih govori Zelenka, tako lahko privzamejo like »stereotipov, mitov ali predsodkov; in klišejev« (Zelenka 40), se pravi, da ne zrcalijo resničnosti neposredno, temveč skozi perspektivo moči v diskurzu med različnimi etničnimi in socialnimi skupinami. V stereotipih v književnosti pa se razmerje med racionalnim in metaforiziranim pomenom preveša v korist ikonizacije. In ko smo na podlagi proučevanja »podob« za stopnjo oddaljeni od stvari same, torej na primer od nacionalnih avtoric in avtorjev, krajev in kultur, se s tem (lahko) izognemo neposrednejšemu konfliktu, saj se jasno izkaže njihov politični, nacionalni, etnični kontekst, torej njihove zunaj-literarne kvalitete. Kultura se – z besedami Paula de Mana – razpre kot »netradicionalni instrument moči, kot odprta manifestacija ideologije« (Zelenka 41). In najboljši način za razideologiziranje literarne vede in njenih ugotovitev je prikaz, denunciacija ideologije, saj se imagologija – po besedah Huga Dyserincka – vselej giba v medkulturnem prostoru.

V nadaljevanju razprave se Zelenka nekako logično posveti analizi stereotipov, nastalih v kontekstu najožje gledane Srednje Evrope oziroma Višegradske četvorke, torej tistega dela Vzhodno-srednje Evrope, ki se čuti še najbolj pripadnega tudi habsburškemu mitu (temu se v nadaljevanju še posebej posveti v poglavju o fenomenu srednjeevropskega centrizma). Analizi podvrže teoretike posamičnih držav: Slovaške, Poljske, Češke in Madžarske, pri čemer se posveti tako političnim odnosom vsake izmed njih, kot tudi družbenim stereotipom, ki iz slednjih izhajajo (denimo poljski odnosi do obeh velikih sosed: Rusije in Nemčije ali že tradicionalno problematična razmerja med Madžari in Slovaki). Ob navajanju različnih pogledov – tako za, kot

tudi proti – na Srednjo Evropo M. Zelenka po vzoru Lászlá Kontlerja izpelje zaključek o obstoju (vsaj) dveh Srednjih Evrop: manjše, ki predstavlja »ekonomsko in administrativno homogeno področje« (Zelenka 57) in ki ga poseljuje »homo habsburgiensis« (prav tam), ter večje oziroma celo maksimalistične, ki pa nima ne zgodovinskih ne striktno določenih geografskih meja, gotovo pa je le, da gre za območje, ki ga je mogoče umestiti med Vzhod in Zahod, civilizacijsko pa pripada in se sklada z vrednotami Zahoda. Zanimivo je, da se zdi – s stališča drugih Srednjeevropejcev – delitev na mini in maksi različico Srednje Evrope mogoča tudi zaradi tega, ker prva ne upošteva še drugih narodov, ki so bil prav tako del monarhije (na primer Slovenci in Hrvati), kulturno pa so prav tako spadali na Zahod.

Na podlagi vsega povedanega torej ni težko razumeti avtorjevega vzgiba, s katerim se v nadaljevanju prepusti razmišljanju o različnih obrazih fenomena (Vzhodno-)Srednje Evrope. Opiraje se na take luminarje kot M. Kundera, ali teoretike kot na primer Ivo Pospíšil, se M. Zelenka prepusti svobodnejšim asociacijam v iskanju trdnejših temeljev Srednje Evrope. In izkaže se, da je – skladno z avtorjevo izvorno domnevo – mogoče Srednjo Evropo še najustrezneje misliti kot kulturni fenomen, kot »kraljestvo duha« (Zelenka 79).

Kot eno ključnih postavk medliterarne komunikacije Zelenka izlušči teme, ki so vsem (ali vsaj večini) narodom Srednje Evrope skupni: eden takih najizrazitejših je Donava. Z njo so se ukvarjali tako rekoč vsi: od J. Rotha pa do C. Magrisa in P. Handkeja. Če naj bi bil Ren simbolni garant nemške narodne čistosti, predstavlja Srednji Evropi Donava povezovalno »srebrno nit« med kulturami in narodi. Drugi element, ki pa se zdi bolj povezan s slovanskim življem znotraj nekdanje monarhije, predstavlja sredozemsko morje. Po mnenju nekaterih gre za južno mejo (Vzhodno-)Srednje Evrope, kamor je s svojim pristaniščem (Trst) za dolga stoletja segla tudi habsburška monarhija, zaradi česar je Mediteran v predstavah sodobnikov nedvomno pripadel Zahodu.

Kot poslednja tema, ki se je loti M. Zelenka v svoji knjigi, se postavi pa vprašanje o kulturni vrednosti oziroma sploh prisotnosti srednjeevropske književnosti na svetovnem kulturnem odru, o literarnem ugledu Srednje Evrope. Tu Zelenka strne vse prej zapisano v logični sklep: da je ravno sodobnost (in njena teorija) izkazala zanimivost, še več, smiselnost koncepta Srednje Evrope, ki temelji na najnovejših določilih medčloveškega sobivanja: na »ideološki, politični, kulturni in filozofski heterogenosti, odprtosti in večobličnosti« (Zelenka 125), to pa kulturo – in z njo literaturo – Srednje Evrope dela za svetovno (in svetovljansko) *par excellence*. Pomen te ugotovitve je še toliko globlji,

kolikor izraziteje se deli današnje Evrope gibajo v nasprotni smeri. Za današnji čas so močno značilni antievropskost, uveljavljanje neliberal-nih, politično ekstremnih politik, nenazadnje tudi (ne samo) koketiranje z dejanskimi diktaturami, kar je postalo tipično celo za dve pomembni članici jedrne definicije Srednje Evrope: Madžarsko in Slovaško.
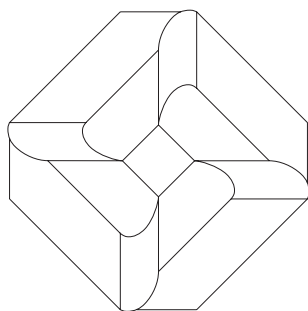
Priznati moram, da je zaradi takšnega koherentnega zaključka nekakšna bralčeva notranja bojazen potolažena: Zelenka namreč s svojo pertinentno knjigo brezprizivno dokaže, da Srednja Evropa – vsem našim dvomom navkljub – še zdaleč ni pripravljena za odmet. Pravzaprav je ravno nasprotno.

Pogovor / *Interview*

Svetovna literatura obstaja na različnih ravneh
Marko Juvan, dobitnik Priznanja Antona Ocvirka 2025

Letos je Slovensko društvo za primerjalno književnost podelilo peto Priznanje Antona Ocvirka za najboljšo monografijo zadnjih dveh let. Nominiranih je bilo pet monografij, in sicer *Zadnja sezona modernizma in maj '68: svet, Pariz, Ljubljana* Marka Juvana (LUD Literatura, 2023), *Vitomil Zupan ali kako biti jaz* Matevža Kosa (LUD Literatura, 2024), *Jugoslovanska avantgarda in metropolitanska dada* Kristine Pranjić (Sofia, 2024) ter *Vrhovi v globini II., Pindar* Vida Snoja (KUD Logos, 2024). Naloga komisije, ki so jo sestavljali predsednik Krištof Jacek Kozak, dobitnica nagrade leta 2023 Andrejka Žejn in Lucija Mandić, ni bila lahka: med več odličnimi deli pa je priznanje nazadnje podelila monografiji Marka Juvana *Zadnja sezona modernizma in maj '68: svet, Pariz, Ljubljana*.

Komisija je v utemeljitvi zapisala, da je »Juvanova knjiga specifična – na prvi pogled se zdi, kot da temelji na dveh ločenih argumentativnih stebrih: na eni strani na fenomenu literarnega sistema, na drugi pa na vzponu, razcvetu in razsnovi ene zadnjih faz modernizma, udejanjene v obliki študentskega gibanja oziroma revolucije na Slovenskem. Glede na to dvojnost šele Juvanov bližnji pregled razpre celoto 'epske slike', ki združuje in poglobljeno obdela oba vsebinska toka.

Vprašanje literature kot sistema je eno temeljnih vprašanj sodobne primerjalne književnosti. Gre za razmislek o razmerjih med centrom in ekscentrom, osrednjimi in obrobnimi kulturami ter njihovimi literaturami. Juvanov realistično zamišljeni sklep je 'organicističen': če velike literature primerjamo z osrednjimi arterijami, je treba (deleuzovsko mišljene) majhne enačiti s kapilarami. Oboje je enako nujno za pretakanje idej in delovanje svetovnega literarnega organizma.

← Fotografija Manca Juvan Hessabi

Ti argumenti v nadaljevanju monografije služijo kot izhodišče za premislek o zadnjem velikem impulzu svetovnega modernizma – bolj filozofsko-političnem kot literarnem –, in sicer študentskem gibanju leta 1968. Juvan se osredotoči na slovensko različico in izriše natančen portret 'periferne različice' svetovnega gibanja. Pokaže, da so tudi 'obrobni modernizmi', zlasti njihove neoavantgardne različice, pomembno vplivali na sočasni svet. Slovenska literarna kultura je bila v tem pogledu 'precej bolj odprta in kozmopolitska od provincialne samozagledanosti mnogih velikih literatur', čeprav vpliv njenih teoretikov (denimo Dušana Pirjevca) in literatov (z izjemo morda Tomaža Šalamuna) ni segel daleč onkraj meja. Z natančno prospekcijo slovenskega modernizma konec šestdesetih let Juvan izriše tako rekoč simulaker študentskega gibanja na Slovenskem, zaradi česar njegove knjige pri razmisleku o tem obdobju ne bo mogoče obiti.«

Podelitvi nagrade, ki je 29. junija potekala v Dvorani štirih letnih časov na ZRC SAZU, je sledil pogovor z nagrajencem Markom Juvanom, ki ga je vodila Lucija Mandić in ki ga v nadaljevanju objavljamo v nekoliko prirejeni različici.

Dragi Marko, iskrene čestitke za Ocvirkovo priznanje tudi z moje strani. To ni tvoja prva izkušnja s klepetom po prejemu priznanja – prvič si ga prejel leta 2018 za monografijo _Hibridni žanri: študije o križancih izkustva, mišljenja in literature_, tokrat pa je bila nagrajena tvoja, če se ne motim, že enajsta knjiga. _Zadnja sezona modernizma in maj '68: svet, Pariz, Ljubljana_ je v veliki meri nadaljevanje tvojega dosedanjega dela na področju svetovne književnosti in svetovnega literarnega sistema. S to temo si se nazadnje podrobneje ukvarjal v knjigah _Prešernovska struktura in svetovni literarni sistem_ (2012), ki je prav tako kot _Zadnja sezona modernizma in maj '68_ izšla pri LUD Literatura, ter v knjigi _Worlding a Peripheral Literature_ (2019), ki je izšla pri mednarodni založbi Palgrave Macmillan. Kako sam vidiš genezo svojega raziskovalnega dela na tem področju? Položaj slovenske literature v svetovnem literarnem sistemu je očitno tema, ki te še vedno zaposluje?

Pravzaprav moram razkriti razmeroma trivialen povod za svoje ukvarjanje s svetovno književnostjo. Pred sedemnajstimi leti je na Univerzi v Novi Gorici prišlo do kadrovskih sprememb, zaradi katerih je v programu ostal nepokrit predmet pregled svetovne književnosti, tako da sem ga na pobudo Ota Lutharja moral prevzeti. Sprva sem bil

nezadovoljen in frustriran, saj sem se imel za slovenističnega literarnega zgodovinarja z določenim teoretskim in komparativističnim zaledjem, zdaj pa sem se znašel v položaju, ko naj bi predaval pregled svetovne književnosti.

Iz te zadrege sem se rešil tako, da sem se lotil preučevanja same ideje svetovne literature. Ob raziskavi historiata tega pojma ter njegovih novejših interpretacij in reinterpretacij sem naletel na ime Franca Morettija in na njegov znameniti članek »Domneve o svetovni literaturi« iz leta 2000. Njegova teorija svetovne literature kot sistema me je pritegnila, morda zato, ker sem že prej slovensko literaturo obravnaval kot poseben družbeni podsistem – to sem počel znotraj drugačne paradigme, ki je bila, bi rekel, utemeljena v neopozitivizmu sistemske teorije nemškega porekla. Pri Morettiju je podlaga seveda precej drugačna: gre za različico marksizma, kakršno je na področju ekonomske zgodovine in teorije uveljavil Immanuel Wallerstein. S tem, ko sem se lotil svetovne literature kot spoznavnega problema, sem se moral tudi sam metodološko preusmeriti. Od svojih strukturalističnih, semiotičnih in neopozitivističnih izhodišč, kombiniranih s precej eklektično dediščino poststrukturalizma in dekonstrukcije, sem se pomaknil v smer materialističnega razmisleka o literaturi. Na teh podlagah je nastala že knjiga *Prešernovska struktura in svetovni literarni sistem*, pa tudi moja novejša dela.

Tudi v prvem delu knjige, kjer se posvečaš teorijam svetovne književnosti, zagovarjaš pozicijo Franca Morettija in Pascale Casanova, ki v navezavi na Wallersteinovo delitev svetovnega kapitalističnega sistema na jedrne, periferne in polperiferne države svetovni literarni prostor razumeta kot sistem centrov in periferij, ki jih naddoloča ekonomska, politična in jezikovno-kulturna neenakost. Kritiki jima očitajo, da takšen sistemski pristop literaturo periferij obsoja na zapoznel razvoj, pasivno posnemanje in s tem na implicitno inferiornost. Čeprav sta njuni plodni študiji izšli v devetdesetih letih, gre še vedno za sporno pozicijo, ki ji nasprotujejo predvsem postkolonialni teoretiki, zagovorniki pluralizacije in decentralizacije svetovnega literarnega kanona. Kako sam vidiš svoj položaj v teh debatah kot raziskovalec ene od perifernih literatur?

Najprej bi rekel, da očitki, ki letijo na žal že pokojno Pascale Casanova in Franca Morettija, ki je bil s »kulturo črtanja« na neki način prav tako

izločen z javne scene, predstavljajo zamenjavo teze oziroma argument slamnatega moža. Moretti namreč izrecno trdi, da delitev na centre in periferije nima nobenih vrednostnih konotacij. Priznava, da se estetski presežki in inovacije ustvarjajo tudi na periferijah, le da imajo te manj sredstev, da bi jih lahko globalno uveljavile. Podobno velja za Pascale Casanova in pravzaprav za vse teoretike tako imenovane »trojke« svetovne književnosti, kamor poleg nje in Morettija sodi še David Damrosch.

Vsi trije – Moretti sicer nekoliko manj, Damrosch in Casanova pa toliko bolj – so si prizadevali, da bi v svoj prikaz svetovne književnosti oziroma svetovnega literarnega prostora vključili tudi dosežke manjših in manj znanih literatur, ne le tistih, ki so že desetletja ali stoletja del hiperkanona. Casanova denimo obravnava Danila Kiša, Damrosch pa Milorada Pavića in druge. Poskušajo torej afirmirati vse tisto, kar je bilo dotlej zapostavljeno. Nazoren primer podobnih teženj je založba Bloomsbury, ki izdaja serijo *As World Literature*; doslej so izšli zvezki o bolgarski in romunski književnosti, v pripravi je tudi madžarski, ni pa znakov, da bi utegnila iziti še *Slovenian Literature as World Literature*.

Drži, da dinamika med centri in periferijami nikakor ni preprosta. Tudi Moretti in pred njim Wallerstein opozarjata, da te dihotomije ni mogoče natančno lokalizirati ali zamrzniti v času. Gre za razmerje, ki se neprestano spreminja in vključuje tudi hierarhijo množtva centrov. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen je predlagal koncept začasnih podcentrov, ki v določenem obdobju vplivajo na mednarodne tokove – kot denimo skandinavska literatura proti koncu 19. stoletja. Kljub temu je treba ločiti realnost literarne komunikacije, ki jo v veliki meri določa mednarodno literarno tržišče, od hotenj po enakopravnosti in pravičnosti. Tudi sam se zavedam svoje zaznamovanosti z dejstvom, da prihajam iz enega od perifernih okolij. Bolj ali manj očitno si prizadevam prikazati enakovrednost slovenskih dosežkov v tem prostoru in jih s svojim pisanjem v okviru sistemske metodologije predstaviti mednarodni javnosti.

Če se v prvem delu knjige ukvarjaš s sistemskimi teorijami, ki prepoznavajo hegemonijo Zahoda in tako imenovanega greenwiškega poldnevnika kot prostora literarne konsekracije, se v drugem delu posvetiš maju '68 – a priori protisistemskemu gibanju, katerega cilj je bilo ravno rušenje te hegemonije. Kako razumeš

razmerje med teoretskim aparatom, na katerega se opiraš, in pred-metom svoje analize?

Mislim, da tukaj ni protislovja. Predstavniki sistemskega pristopa (Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi in drugi) so razpravljali o zgodovini antisistemskih gibanj, ki sega od francoske revolucije prek pomladi narodov leta 1848, pariške komune in tako naprej vse do leta 1968. Ta gibanja so bila nedvomno usmerjena proti svetovnemu kapitalističnemu sistemu, ki je imel dve pojavni obliki. Ena je bila dominantna, zahodna ureditev liberalno-reprezentativne demokracije, ki se je ohranila do danes; druga, novejša, pa sovjetski blok oziroma tako imenovani »drugi svet«, ki je temeljil na državnem kapitalizmu. Antisistemska gibanja šestdesetih let in pozneje so si prizadevala omajati oba sistema.

Pri tem moram opozoriti na posebnost študentskega gibanja v Jugoslaviji, s tem pa tudi v Sloveniji. Čeprav je, tako kot vsa druž-bena gibanja, prevzelo mednarodne oblike protestiranja in upiranja (barikade, demonstracije, sedenje na ulicah, zasedbe fakultet, spopadi s policijo ipd.), so bile njegove intence drugačne. Razlika med kapitalističnimi in socialističnimi antisistemskimi gibanji se je pokazala, ko so, denimo, nemški študenti z Rudijem Dutschkejem na čelu leta 1968 obiskali Prago in niso našli skupnega jezika s tamkajšnjimi študenti: ti so si želeli marsikaj od tistega, kar so zahodni študenti že imeli – in obenem zavračali. Jugoslovanski prostor je bil v tem pogledu nekakšna vmesna periferija med sovjetskim državnim in zahodnim liberalnim kapitalizmom. Po letu 1967 je s Kavčičem prišlo do hibridnega spoja samoupravnega socializma in načel tržnega kapitalizma – do t. i. socialističnega tržnega gospodarstva. V tej specifični konjunkturi je postalo vidno razslojevanje slovenske in jugoslovanske družbe, ki ga je vladajoča ideologija skušala prikriti z idejo o enotnem delavskem razredu in njegovi komunistični avantgardi. V resnici pa je bil delavski razred razdeljen na birokracijo, tehnokracijo in sloj, ki se je, podobno kot na Zahodu, približeval srednjemu razredu in potroš-niškemu idealu.

Vse to je študentskemu gibanju v Sloveniji dalo posebno usmeri-tev. Izhajalo je iz teženj nove levice, ki je problematizirala oblast stare levice, tiste, ki je med drugo svetovno vojno in revolucijo prišla na oblast. Na eni strani se je zavzemalo za »pravo« socialistično revolucijo, ki bi izpolnila cilje, za katere so menili, da jih obstoječi samoupravni sistem še ni uresničil. Pojavljale so se trockistične ideje o permanentni revoluciji, o nadaljevanju procesa, ki naj bi presegel doseženo stanje in

udejanjil resničen socializem, ne zgolj deklarativnega. Na drugi strani pa so se vrstile zahteve po emancipaciji posameznika, svobodi izražanja in osvoboditvi od družbenih konvencij, pogosto po vzoru zahodne alternativne kulture.

V sistemske analize svetovne literature vpelješ koncept kapilarnega svetovljenja, pri čemer poudarjaš pomen neposrednih kulturnih izmenjav med periferijami in polperiferijami. Kljub temu knjigo podnasloviš »Svet, Pariz, Ljubljana«, in ne denimo »Svet, Beograd, Ljubljana« ali »Svet, Praga, Ljubljana«. Slovenski študentje so se, kljub povezovanju s kolegi znotraj Jugoslavije in na Vzhodu, raje neposredno ozirali na Zahod. Kako je potekal ta kulturni transfer? Zakaj so se raje kot, denimo, k »domačim« praxisovcem obračali k francoskim teoretikom?

Za tak podnaslov ne bi krivil predmeta svojega preučevanja. Spoznavni objekt sem moral pač na neki način zamejiti, in osredotočil sem se na razmerje med centrom in periferijo, ki je določalo še odnose med študentskim gibanjem, revolucijo in modernizmom. Eden od razlogov za *Pariz* v podnaslovu je zagotovo ta, da je Casanova Pariz povzdignila v greenwiški poldnevnik modernosti. Drugi razlog pa je, da je bilo toliko teoretskih in literarnih referenc v tem obdobju vezanih prav na francosko teorijo.

V knjigi je vendarle vsaj obrobno omenjena medliterarna skupnost tedanje Jugoslavije, če uporabim Ďurišinov izraz. Ta se je oblikovala že pred študentskim gibanjem in trajala še vse v osemdeseta leta, čeprav je dobivala drugačno, deloma zloveščo fizionomijo. Pri pregledovanju srbskega študentskega tiska sem naletel na številne prevode in razprave, povzete iz slovenske študentske periodike. Slovenski študentje so se udeleževali različnih literarnih in političnih prireditev, organiziranih v Srbiji, Bosni, Makedoniji in na Hrvaškem, jugoslovanske neoavantgarde pa so se medsebojno podpirale. Franci Zagoričnik je imel denimo razvejano mrežo stikov po vsej Jugoslaviji. Koncept kapilarnega svetovljenja kot alternative metropolitanski konsekraciji, ki ga v knjigi podrobneje obravnavam predvsem na primeru Tomaža Šalamuna, bi bilo mogoče uporabiti tudi za analizo jugoslovanskega prostora. Kolegica Kristina Pranjić, ki se je ukvarjala z jugoslovanskimi historičnimi avantgardami, se je tej tematiki že posvetila.

Ideja o kapilarnem svetovljenju opozarja, da svetovna literatura obstaja na različnih ravneh. Hegemono raven predstavlja svetovni literarni

sistem, določen z razmerji moči na mednarodnem literarnem trgu in z neenako distribucijo kulturnega kapitala. Vendar poleg tega na drugi ravni živijo socialna omrežja generacijske, spolno-identitetne, estetske in politične solidarnosti, v katerih se pisci, kritiki, prevajalci in bralci povezujejo prek revij, prevajanja, predstavitev in gostovanj. Primer za to je Tomaž Šalamun, ki je v ZDA preživel več kot leto dni. Prek manjših, butičnih revij in založb, cenjenih v posvečenih literarnih krogih, je vplival na mlajšo generacijo ameriških pesnikov. To je ena od ravni svetovne literature, ki bi jo bilo vredno še podrobneje raziskati. Poskusil sem v svojem nedavnem projektnem predlogu, a na razpisu propadel zaradi kapric enega od ocenjevalcev.

Natančneje si oglejva še modernizem ljubljanskih študentov. Katere so njegove značilnosti, katere inovacije so vpeljali v slovensko literaturo in predvsem, kako so s temi inovacijami prek literarnih besedil izzivali oblast?

Različnih inovacij je bilo precej. Če jih primerjamo s konsi Srečka Kosovela, ki jih je šele malo pred letom 1968 izdal Anton Ocvirk, ne delujejo prelomno. A glede na tisto, kar je bilo v slovenski književnosti objavljeno in znano, so vsekakor pomenile izzivalen premik. Prva vrsta inovacij je nastajala v okviru t. i. semantične literature, torej literarnih besedil, ki sledijo splošnim načelom besedilnosti, četudi z mnogimi odkloni. Drugi tip inovacij pa je raziskoval onkraj tradicionalnih delitev med umetnostmi. Ta smer je presegala meje jezika in vključevala konkretno in vizualno poezijo ter konceptualizem, kjer je namesto končnega artefakta v ospredje stopila ideja, produkcija in sam ustvarjalni proces. Šlo je za poznomodernistični način antisistemskega odziva na poblagovljenje modernizma, ko so umetnine postale tržno blago, investicije za zbiratelje in maskote galerij.

Najpogosteje uporabljana izraza, ki ju je ob tovrstnih eksperimentih lansiral Taras Kermauner, sta ludizem in reizem. Gre za poimenovanje smeri, ki sta se oddaljili od zaznamovanosti slovenske književnosti z romantizmom. Romantična nota je prevladovala skozi 19. stoletje, potem nekoliko opešala, a jo je moderna z novo romantiko in simbolizmom oživila; nov zagon ji je dal Kosovel, v petdesetih letih pa se je reinkarnirala v intimizmu. Reizem se od tega tipa romantične subjektivitete odmakne. Lahko ga povežemo s filozofsko mislijo Dušana Pirjevca v dialogu s Sartrom in predvsem Heideggerjem. Gre za kritiko subjekta

metafizike v imenu odprtosti do biti in bivanja kot takega, izraža pa se z beleženjem stvari in opisovanjem predmetnosti, kakršna je. Hkrati je reizem tudi kritika procesa reifikacije.

Druga smer, prepletena z reizmom, je ludizem, literarna igra z označevalnimi sistemi. Oba izma – tako reizem kot ludizem – sta izzvala starejšo generacijo, člane partije in tiste, ki so ji bili blizu, kot denimo Josip Vidmar. Reizem je provociral predvsem z izrazito nepesniškostjo, neestetskostjo: estetski objekt je lahko predstavljal tudi opis kondomov, kar je šlo marsikomu v nos. Ludizem pa je izzival z igrivim poseganjem v t. i. sakrosanktne slovenske vrednote, v katerih se dediščina meščanskega liberalizma 19. stoletja združi z uradno socialistično ideologijo, s tako imenovanim socialističnim humanizmom.

Ludizem sem povezal – ne vem, ali že v tej knjigi ali v kakšnem kasnejšem delu – s karnevalsko strukturo, značilno tudi za mnoga protestna gibanja, ne le za študentsko gibanje leta 1968, pač pa tudi za nedavne kolesarske proteste v Ljubljani. Na to je opozorila Kaitlyn Tucker Sorenson, ki je primerjala reakcije oblasti na karnevalskost v Franciji in Sloveniji leta 1968. De Gaulle je dopustil določene reforme, ne pa »razvrata«, »cirkusa«, *chienlit*. Pri nas je bil odziv oblasti na antisistemsko karnevalskost v modernistični literaturi in študentskem gibanju podoben, kar ponazarja znameniti slogan »Demokracija da, razkroj ne!«.

Maj '68 je imel svoje karizmatične študentske vodje: Rudija Dutschkeja v Nemčiji in Daniela Cohn-Bendita v Franciji. Sam pa se v knjigi podrobneje posvetiš vlogi karizmatičnega teoretika oziroma univerzitetnega profesorja. V zgodnejših poglavjih navajaš teoretičarko Kristin Ross, ki poudarja, da je bil Derrida med dogodki izjemno zadržan, Foucault je bil v času upora v Tuniziji, Bourdieu se mu ni aktivno pridružil, Althusser je bil hospitaliziran, Lacan pa je v svojem seminarju zavrnil težnje študentskega gibanja z znamenito diagnozo: »Kot revolucionarji si želite gospodarja in dobili ga boste«. Po drugi strani pa vemo, da je študentsko gibanje javno podprl Sartre. V knjigi izpostavljaš, da je vprašanje vpliva francoskih teoretikov na študentsko gibanje še vedno predmet polemik, kot karizmatično figuro ljubljanskega študentskega gibanja pa izpostaviš Dušana Pirjevca. Kakšna je bila njegova vloga v kontekstu študentskih protestov in kako se je razlikovala od vloge pariških intelektualcev?

Ja, njegova vloga je bila v marsičem podobna francoskemu modelu javnega intelektualca. Pirjevec je močno vplival na študente, ki so ga množično poslušali in brali. Podpiral jih je tudi s svojimi spisi, a ni bil angažiran v takšni meri kot Sartre, ki je stopil pred množico študentov in jih javno nagovoril za akcijo. Prav tako ga ne moremo neposredno primerjati s srbskimi oporečniškimi profesorji tistega časa, predvsem s praxisovci, ki so bili protagonisti študentskega gibanja, medtem ko so bili njihovi zagrebški kolegi nekoliko previdnejši.

Mislim, da je bil Pirjevec do študentskega gibanja zadržan, kolikor se je to samo razumelo kot revolucija. V tem obdobju je namreč razvijal svojo teorijo romana, v kateri je kritiziral akcijo, utemeljeno na ideji, češ da se v njej pravzaprav uresničuje metafizični nihilizem, volja do moči. Ta teoretski zastavek lahko razumemo kot Pirjevčev obračun s svojo lastno preteklostjo političnega komisarja v partizanskem gibanju in povojnem agitpropu. Zaradi distanciranja od revolucionarne ideje njegova filozofija študentov ni neposredno motivirala za akcijo, drugače od njihovih francoskih ali nemških kolegov, ki so poslušali eksistencialista Sartra in neomarksista Marcuseja.

Pomakniva se še z dolgega leta '68 na njegovo zrcalno dolgo leto '89, ki so ga zaznamovale drugačne revolucije: padec Berlinskega zidu, razpad Sovjetske zveze, globalizacija in tudi končni zaton modernizma. V knjigi zapišeš, da se teoretiki *Problemov* »naprednjaštvu avantgard niso odrekli, temveč so si ga prilastili, besedno umetnost vrgli s parnika modernosti in namesto nje ustoličili materialistično teorijo označevalca«. Če se tu ponovno vrneva k sistemskim teorijam svetovne književnosti: bi lahko rekli, da v osemdesetih in devetdesetih letih konsekracije v svetovnih centrih moči ni doživela slovenska neoavantgardna literatura, ampak s Slavojem Žižkom slovenska teorija? Za razliko od, denimo, Češkoslovaške, kjer je kot produkt praške pomladi svetovno slavo dosegel romanopisec Milan Kundera.

Da, do neke mere to drži, gotovo. A težko bi trdil, da gre za povsem različni usodi nekdanjih soborcev na straneh *Problemov*, saj sta v *Katalogu* skupaj z OHO-jevci objavljala tako Rastko Močnik kot Slavoj Žižek. To je verjetno rezultat njunih kariernih poti: študija na francoskih univerzah ter povezav z *École freudienne* v Parizu in gostovanjem Millerja in ostalih v Ljubljani, najbrž leta 1982, če se prav spominjam. Naši lacanovci so bili nad obiskom francoskega centra v slovenski periferiji

vzhičeni, medtem ko sam z nekaterimi navzočimi študenti nisem kaj dosti odnesel od njihovih debat. Žižek se je globalno uveljavil, potem ko ga je sprejelo ameriško akademsko okolje in je začel objavljati v angleščini pri vidnih svetovnih založbah. Kar zadeva mojo formulacijo »vreči slovensko literarno avantgardo s parnika zgodovine«, gre za parafrazo zgodovinskih avantgardnih gesel. Do razkola med literarno in teoretsko platjo *Problemov* je prišlo v sedemdesetih letih po razpadu skupine OHO, ki je bila za teoretike *Problemov* pravzaprav edina relevantna med vsemi avantgardnimi iskanji tega obdobja.

Moram pa poudariti, da je tudi skupina OHO ostala mednarodno prepoznavna. Njihova dela so del zbirke Muzeja moderne umetnosti v New Yorku. OHO je navdihnil poznejše slovenske skupine, ki so globalno zaslovele, zlasti retrogardizem *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. Tudi Šalamuna sem že omenil v kontekstu kapilarnega svetovljenja. Lahko rečem, da smo na Slovenskem v tem obdobju vendarle proizvedli nekaj »izvoznih artiklov«.

Imam vtis, da je slovenska književnost, če jo primerjamo s teorijo, povečala svojo mednarodno odmevnost prav tako v osemdesetih letih, a iz drugih razlogov. Postala je zanimiva v obdobju razpada povojne bipolarne ureditve, zlasti v okviru diskurza o Srednji Evropi, ki ga najdemo pri Kunderi in številnih hrvaških ter srbskih intelektualcih. Pri nas je na ta vagon najprej skočil Drago Jančar, ki je zbujal pozornost zaradi svoje esejistike in mojstrske ubeseditve literarnih tem v kontekstu tranzicijskih in protikomunističnih reinterpretacij novejše zgodovine.

Knjigo zaključiš z »lingvizmom«, varianto modernizma, ki se je razvila v tako imenovanih svinčenih sedemdesetih in s katero se je modernizem po dogodkih dolgega maja '68 dokončno izpel. S tem študijo pripelješ v osemdeseta leta in hkrati nazaj k svojemu knjižnemu prvencu izpred 35 let, ko si raziskovalno pot začel z analizami postmodernistične literature. Kakšni bodo tvoji naslednji koraki? Kam te v raziskovalnem delu vleče naprej?

Konceptualni aparat, ki sem ga razvijal v zadnjih letih, nameravam nadgraditi, zlasti v povezavi z vprašanjem literarne kronologije oziroma kronologike, torej s problemom neenakega, neenakomernega razvoja literatur sveta, posebej tistih, o katerih mednarodna stroka ve še manj kakor o perifernih književnostih, kakršne so poljska, češka ali švedska. Poleg tega se skupaj s kolegoma iz Luksemburga in Latvije intenzivno pripravljam na monografijo o primerjalni zgodovini malih evropskih literatur.

Na daljši rok se bo krog, ki ga omenjaš, še naprej obračal, tako da se bom mogoče vrnil še kam drugam kakor k svojim teoretskim začetkom – esejiziranje o postmodernizmu je bila pač zaključena zadeva moje generacije. Naj priznam, da me nekaj vleče nazaj k pisanju literature, ki sem ga pred desetletji morda prenagljeno zamenjal za pisanje o njej.
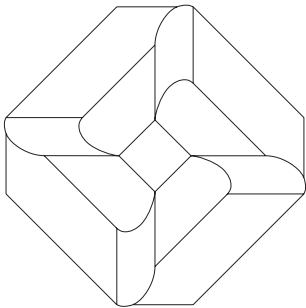
<div align="right">Pogovarjala se je Lucija Mandić</div>

In memoriam

In memoriam
Vlasta Pacheiner Klander
(5. 8. 1932–4. 8. 2025)

Luka Repanšek, Nina Petek

Vlasta Pacheiner Klander se je s staroindijsko sanskrtsko književnostjo ukvarjala 63 let, vse od svojega študijskega bivanja v Indiji, ko je Janku Kosu za berilo *Svetovna književnost* poslala svoj prvi prevod – prepesnitev odlomka *Pesmi o Savitri* iz *Mahabharate*, do nekaj mesecev pred smrtjo, ko je izšel njen dolgo pričakovani posodobljeni prevod *Bhagavadgite*. Njeno dolgoletno prevajalsko ter literarnozgodovinsko in literarnoteoretično delo na področju staroindijske književnosti je bilo leta 2022 nagrajeno z *Medaljo za zasluge Republike Slovenije*, naslednje leto pa z najvišjim državnim odlikovanjem Republike Indije za posebne zasluge za delo na področju sanskrta in sanskrtske književnosti.

Po diplomi iz svetovne književnosti in literarne teorije na Filozofski fakulteti UL l. 1959 in kratkotrajni zaposlitvi na mestu bibliotekarke na Oddelku za slovanske jezike in književnosti v študijskem letu 1959/1960 je na pobudo prof. Antona Ocvirka kot prva Slovenka klasični sanskrt, indijsko kulturo in indijsko filozofijo študirala v Indiji (1960–1962), in sicer na znameniti univerzi *Banaras Hindu University* v Varanasiju (Benaresu). Tik pred odhodom v Indijo je pomagala pri nastanku prvega slovenskega fonetičnega učbenika za tujce, ki ga je v okviru zagrebške fonetične šole dr. Petra Guberine pripravil in leta 1961 izdal prof. Jože Toporišič pod naslovom *Slovenski jezik na pločama: Izgovor i intonacija sa recitacijama*. Ravno posnetki izobraženskega ljubljanskega govora Vlaste Pacheiner Klander so kmalu postali temelj pri usvajanju slovenskega pravorečja za številne generacije študentov slovenistike.

Prevode sanskrtskih del, ki jih je opremljala z obsežnimi, poglobljenimi spremnimi študijami in opombami, je začela vneto izgotavljati takoj po povratku iz Indije, in sicer Kalidasovo *Šakuntalo*, najznamenitejšo sanskrtsko dramo (1966), staroindijsko filozofsko-religiozno pesnitev *Bhagavadgito – Gospodovo pesem* (1970), sanskrtsko liriko, ki je izšla v knjižici *Kot bilke, kot iskre: izbor sanskrtske lirike* (1973) in poleg izbranih

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pesmi Amaruja in Bhartrharija, krajših segmentov Kalidasovega *Oblaka glasnika* in *Letnih časov*, Bilhanove *Elegije o skrivni ljubezni* in Džajadevove *Gitagovinde* ter sanskrtske enokitične lirike (*subhašita*) vsebuje še izbrane rgvedske in atharvavedske himne ter krajše odlomke iz poznovedskih upanišad in grhjasuter. Kalidasova lirska pesnitev *Oblak glasnik*, prototip t. i. glasniške poezije, ki je doživela razcvet v poznem klasičnem in poklasičnem obdobju sanskrtske književnosti, je bila nato leta 1974 objavljena v celoti, skupaj s prevodom cikličnega lirskega dela *Letni časi*, ki se ga tradicionalno sicer pripisuje Kalidasi, a njegovo avtorstvo med literarnimi zgodovinarji ni splošno sprejeto. Med skoraj tridesetletnim hiatom do izida naslednjega prevoda – *Zgodbe o Savitri* (2002), epske pesnitve, vložene v véliko indijsko epopejo *Mahabharato*, ki jo je končala točno štirideset let po objavi na eno sedmino skrajšanega prevoda istega epa v berilu *Svetovna književnost*, je pripravila predelano in dopolnjeno izdajo *Bhagavadgite*, ki je izšla 1990, in se začela intenzivneje ukvarjati s prevajanjem vedske književnosti. Prve prepesnitve himn iz *Rgvede* in *Atharvavede*, ki so bile nato 1973 objavljene v *Kot bilke kot iskre*, so bile za radijsko oddajo (skupaj z upanišadskimi odlomki in primerki klasične lirike, ki so prav tako našli mesto v kasnejši antologiji) pripravljene že leta 1963, nato v posebni oddaji, posvečeni zgolj vedski književnosti, leta 1969, v osemdesetih (1984–1989) pa so sledili literarni večeri z nadaljnjimi prevodi *Atharvavede*, *Jadžurvede* ter zgodbe o Šunahšepi iz *Ajtarejabrahmane*, ki sodi že v poznovedsko pripovedno književnosti. Obsežen korpus prevodov iz vedske stare indijščine, ki se je začel formirati konec sedemdesetih in je v prihodnjih nekaj letih zrasel na dvaindevetdeset skrbno izbranih in mojstrsko prevedenih himn iz vseh štirih Ved, je nato izšel v knjigi *Ko pesem tkem: antologija vedskih pesmi* (2005), za katero je prejela *Sovretovo nagrado* Društva slovenskih književnih prevajalcev za največje dosežke v prevodni književnosti na Slovenskem.

K pripravi radijskih prispevkov jo je neposredno spodbujalo delo (pozneje pa žlahtni spomini nanj) v izobraževalni redakciji TV Ljubljana, kjer se je zaposlila takoj po vrnitvi iz Indije (1962–1968). V njih je poslušalcem in gledalcem uspela nazorno približati naravo, obliko, idejno vsebino in estetiko tega najobsežnejšega korpusa svetovne književnosti. Kot se izkaže v primeru vedskega pesništva, so bili prav ti prispevki vzpodbuda za prevajalske projekte, ki so kasneje dozoreli v knjižne objave. Tudi zgoraj omenjena prepesnitev *Zgodbe o Savitri* je bila že leto prej pripravljena za radijsko igro, prav tako že leta 1965 *Šakuntala*, 1963 drobci iz vedske književnosti in klasične poezije ter leta 1968 *Bhagavadgita*. Ostale priložnostne prevode, ki so se nabirali

skozi desetletja, a se jih ni dalo razširiti, ker gre za preobsežna dela, kar velja zlasti za njene prevode ljudske in klasične epike (*Mahabharata*, *Ramajana*, Kalidasa, Ašvaghoša) ter odlomek iz Šudrakove desetdejanke, ki jih je na radiu predstavila že v letih 1969 in 1970, je nato skupaj z izčrpnimi spremnimi študijami vključila v učbenik *Razgledi po staroindijski književnosti: prevodi in interpretacije* (2021), ki je v soavtorstvu z L. Repanškom ter sodelavci T. Ditrich, N. Petek in L. Škofom izšel pri Založbi Filozofske fakultete. Knjiga po svoji zasnovi predstavlja absolutni unikum v svetovnem merilu, saj je prvi antološko zasnovani učbenik staroindijske književnosti – od vedske himnike iz 15. stoletja pr. n. št. do izteka klasične dobe sanskrtske književnosti v 12. stoletju n. št., ki bralca poučuje skozi obilje izvirnim besedilom zvestih prevodov. V učbenik so vključeni njeni prevodi odlomkov *Zgodbe o Šunahšepi* iz *Ajtarejabrahmane*, Šudrakove zgodnjesanskrtske drame *Glinasti voziček*, Ašvaghoševega epa *Buddhovo življenje*, enega najpomembnejših del budistične književnosti, napisane v sanskrtu, presunljivega Kalidasovega epa *Rojstvo Kumare*, *Vampirjevih povesti*, imenitnega primera sanskrtske kratke zgodbe (za literarno radijsko oddajo prevedene že 1970), izbrani deli ene najpomembnejših poznosanskrtskih lirskih pesnitev *Gitagovinde* pesnika Džajadeve in skrbno izbrani odlomki iz obeh vélikih indijskih epov *Mahabharate* in *Ramajane*. Posameznih zgodb iz *Hitopadeše* (mlajše sestre slavnejše zbirke basni in pripovedk *Pančatantra*), ki jo je s študenti sicer redno brala na seminarju (o slednjem gl. spodaj), ni nikdar objavila. Njeno zadnje delo je popolnoma prenovljena prepesnitev *Bhagavadgite*, ki je nekaj mesecev pred smrtjo skupaj z obsežno spremno besedo Nine Petek *Na robovih minljivega, v osredjih duha* izšla pri Založbi Sanje v razkošni, dvojezični izdaji.

Njene prevode tako vedskih kot klasičnih besedil se je redno vključevalo tudi v srednješolska berila oz. učbenike: v berilo *Svetovna književnost: izbrana dela in odlomki* (1962), ki ga je pripravil J. Kos ob sodelovanju D. Pirjevca in S. Miheliča, je vključen njen čisto prvi prevod, tj. na eno sedmino skrajšan prevod *Pesmi o Savitri* iz *Mahabharate*, ki ga je izgotovila še za časa študijskega bivanja v Benaresu. V *Slovensko berilo za prvi razred srednjih šol* (1971) je poleg *Savitri* nato prispevala še odlomka iz *Ramajane* in Kalidasove drame *Šakuntala*, v *Antologijo svetovne književnosti* (1973) ob *Savitri* že dve himni iz *Rgvede*, kratek odlomek iz upanišade *Brhadaranjaka* ter odlomke iz *Bhagavadgite*, *Ramajane*, Kalidasovih del *Šakuntala*, *Oblak glasnik* in *Letni časi*, prav tako pa eno basen iz *Pančatantre* ter, skupaj z odlomkom iz Džajadevove pesnitve *Gitagovinda*, izbrano Bhartrharijevo

in Amarujevo enokitično liriko. V prvo izdajo *Berila 1* (1987) je bil vključen odlomek iz 7. speva *Bhagavadgite*, v *Branja 1* (2000) poleg odlomka *Pesmi o Savitri* iz l. 1962 še del *Himne Zemlji* iz *Atharvavede* in t. i. mantra *Gajatri* iz *Rgvede*, medtem ko imata Kosova *Književnost: učbenik literarne zgodovine in teorije* (1989) in *Svet književnosti 1* (2000) zgolj odlomek *Bhagavadgite*, *Umetnost besede: berilo 1* (2007) pa *Himno Vodam* iz *Rgvede*, odlomek *Pesmi o Savitri* (različico iz l. 1962) ter nekaj šlok iz *Bhagavadgite*. Edini prevod od naštetih, ki ni bil objavljen nikjer drugje, je basen *O levovih služabnikih in velblodu* iz prve knjige *Pančatantre*, ki ga je prispevala za prvi del *Antologije svetovne književnosti* (*Pančatantro* imamo Slovenci sicer prevedeno iz nemščine v prevodu Frana Bradača, obsežne pasuse iz *Pančatantre* skupaj z vzporednicami iz mlajše *Hitopadeše* pa je kasneje za *Razglede po staroindijski književnosti* pripravil L. Repanšek).

Poleg prevodov iz sanskrta je iz nemščine poslovenila roman *Gora* (1973 s ponatisi) bengalskega pesnika in pisatelja Rabindranatha Tagoreja, Nobelovega nagrajenca za literaturo 1913, ki je v začetku 20. stoletja močno zaznamoval slovenski literarni prostor in čigar vplivi se v sodobni slovenski književnosti kažejo še danes. Posebno mesto v njenem opusu zrelejšega obdobja pa zavzema tudi skrb za literarno zapuščino Janeza Svetine, psihologa in poznavalca indijske duhovnosti, ki ga je počastila kot urednica njegovega prevoda Šri Ramakrišnovega dela *Reki*, ki je izšel postumno (1994), in kot sourednica izdaje rokopisa dela *Slovenci in prihodnost* (1992), po posnetku Svetinovega predavanja pa je v knjižno obliko prelila pisateljeva *Razmišljanja o jogi* (1996).

Njeno raziskovalno delo na področju sanskrtske književnosti so zaznamovale številne razprave v obliki znanstvenih člankov in monografij. Z vsemi tovrstnimi deli (npr. *Prevajanje staroindijskih literarnoteoretičnih terminov*, 1977, *Staroindijska filozofija jezika*, 1983, *Pogled staroindijske poetike na pesniško delo*, 1986, *Staroindijski pogledi na metaforo*, 1987, *Ritmična zgradba šloke*, 1991, *Simbolika vedskih metrumov*, 1996, *Nebo in zemlja vedskega človeka*, 2006 itd.) je postavila temelje literarnozgodovinskega in literarnoteoretičnega pristopa slovenske indologije, ki jima je oblikovala terminološki aparat in jasno začrtala okvir znanstvenega pristopa. Njeni, tudi v mednarodnem prostoru izjemno odmevni deli sta znanstveni monografiji *Staroindijska poetika* (1982) in *Staroindijske verzne oblike* (2001), tretjo monografsko študijo pa je posvetila življenju in delu Karla Glaserja (*Karol Glaser: prvi slovenski doktor sanskrta*, 2017) – prvemu prevajalcu sanskrtske književnosti v slovenščino, čigar prevodni opus, zlasti pa njegove prevajalske rešitve, ki jim je posvetila štiri samostojne študije,

so jo začeli zanimati že ob prevajanju *Šakuntale* (študija *Glaserjev prevod Kalidasove Šakuntale v slovenščino*, objavljena v Zagrebu, je npr. nastala že leta 1968). Sama je na Oddelku za primerjalno in splošno jezikoslovje ter orientalistiko – edini raziskovalno-pedagoški enoti za staro indologijo na Slovenskem – več kot desetletje kot honorarna sodelavka vodila seminar iz prevajanja sanskrtskih besedil (1989–2001), kjer je za delo s staroindijsko literarno zapuščino navdušila mnoge bodoče slovenske indologe. V študijskem letu 1974/75 je sodelovala tudi z Oddelkom za primerjalno književnost v okviru seminarja o staroindijski poetiki. V zgodnjem obdobju svoje kariere (med 1968 in 1980) je bila kot bibliotekarka zaposlena v Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici, od 1980 do upokojitve leta 1996 pa na Inštitutu za slovensko literaturo in literarne vede na ZRC SAZU, svoji tako rekoč matični inštituciji, ki je vzpodbujala njeno raziskovalno delo, zlasti na področju literarne teorije in literarne zgodovine. Skupaj z arheologinjo Bernardo Perc je bila pobudnica ustanovitve Orientalističnega inštituta, ki bi združeval vse, ki so bili na študiju v afriških in azijskih državah, in bi deloval na Oddelku za primerjalno jezikoslovje in orientalistiko, razdeljen pa bi bil na več sekcij (akadologija, arabistika, egiptologija in indologija), a so se njuni daljnovidni in širokopotezni cilji, prvič jasno zastavljeni in ubesedeni že junija 1963 (novembra istega leta je bilo ustanovljeno Društvo jugoslovanskih orientalistov), v nekoliko drugačni obliki uresničili šele decembra 1973, ko je bilo ustanovljeno Slovensko orientalistično društvo, ki je nato delovalo še slabih trideset let.

Vlasta Pacheiner Klander je z letom 2025 vstopila v triinšestdeseto leto ukvarjanja z indijsko književnostjo in kulturo, ki se mu je posvetila z največjo odgovornostjo. Njene zasluge na področju izgradnje slovenske indološke tradicije so nespregledljive, saj bi bila brez nje osiromašena za prevode večine staroindijskih del, ki jih imamo Slovenci prevedene direktno iz izvirnih besedil, ter za skrbno, sistematično in potrpežljivo zgrajen okvir, v katerem lahko danes prevajamo, raziskujemo in poučujemo njeni nasledniki. S svojim delom je v marsičem orala ledino in slovensko indologijo postavila na svetovni zemljevid ter kovala trdno pot prihodnjim rodovom slovenskih indologov.

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– monografije:
Juvan, Marko. *Literary Studies in Reconstruction. An Introduction to Literature*. Peter Lang, 2011.

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Leerssen, Joep, in Ann Rigney, ur. Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

– poglavja v zbornikih:
Novak, Boris A. »Odmevi trubadurskega kulta ljubezni pri Prešernu«. *France Prešeren – kultura – Evropa*, ur. Jože Faganel in Darko Dolinar, Založba ZRC, 2002, str. 15–47.

– članek v spletni reviji:
Terian, Andrei. »National Literature, World Literatures, and Universality in Romanian Cultural Criticism 1867–1947«. CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, let. 15, št. 5, 2013, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2344. Dostop 21. 5. 2015.

– drugi spletni viri:
McGann, Jerome. »The Rationale of HyperText«. http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/public/jjm2f/rationale.html. Dostop 24. 9. 2015.

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– Books:
Juvan, Marko. *Literary Studies in Reconstruction: An Introduction to Literature*. Peter Lang, 2011.

* The City of Publication should be given before the Publisher only if the book was published before 1900, if the publisher has offices in more than one country, or if the publisher is generally unknown.

– Edited volumes:
Leerssen, Joep, and Ann Rigney, editors. *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

– Chapters in edited volumes:
Novak, Boris A. "Odmevi trubadurskega kulta ljubezni pri Prešernu." *France Prešeren—kultura—Evropa*, edited by Jože Faganel and Darko Dolinar, Založba ZRC, 2002, pp. 15–47.

– Articles in e-journals:
Terian, Andrei. "National Literature, World Literatures, and Universality in Romanian Cultural Criticism 1867–1947." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, vol.* 15, no. 5, 2013, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2344. Accessed 21 May 2015.

– Other digital sources:
McGann, Jerome. "The Rationale of HyperText." http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/public/jjm2f/rationale.html. Accessed 24 Sept. 2015.

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