

Contemporary Narratives of Mediterranean Tourism (An Introduction)

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“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* (*Mediterranski 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 Moya'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. Moya 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 Vyrion 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.

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