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

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

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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).

[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

[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

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

[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

[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.

[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

[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

[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 distuttrice 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

[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 hyperrealistic simulation and the operability of myths, between pastiche and

[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.

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