Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

Literature, Geography and The Poetics of Space

Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes

IL Sileno Edizioni

Geographies of the Anthropocene

Preface by Charles Travis

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The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" edited by the Scientific International Publisher "Il Sileno" (Il Sileno Edizioni) will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and humanists, intersecting disciplines of Geosciences, Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

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Preface

Literature, Geography, and the Poetics of Space: Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes

Charles Travis

This volume brings together seven essays which explore the dynamic interrelationship between narrative, geography, and the perception of space through historical and hermeneutic lenses. Each contribution addresses how the spatial dimensions within literature reflect broader social, political, and cultural contexts. Collectively this volume guides readers through the rich and textured literary landscapes in which place, identity, and narrative form new understandings of the relations between the written word and the geographical imagination. By examining different place settings—both real and imagined—and their influence on literary forms and discourses, this collection sheds light on the intricate and often profound ways that spaces, landscapes, and environments shape the art of storytelling, and how stories and other types of literature shape our perceptions of place.

The first essay investigates eighteenth century French epistolary novels, focusing on "Oriental" travel narratives. These novels serve as cultural mirrors through which European readers gazed upon Turkey, Persia, India, and China. The unique perspective of first-person narration in epistolary form reveals not only the fascination of French audiences with the "Orient," but also offers a window into the complex exchange between geography and identity in an era of burgeoning global curiosity.

The second chapter delves into Chaim Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev*, examining the role of memory and verbal semantics in shaping narrative space. Through a linguistic-typological approach, this chapter reveals how memory, geography, and identity are deeply intertwined in both the narrative structure and the cultural context of Potok's novel, showing how different linguistic traditions influence perceptions of place, memory and identity.

In the third essay, the focus turns to the ancient Etruscan landscape, specifically the practice of viticulture and the concept of *Vite Maritata*. This chapter employs a multidisciplinary approach to reconstruct the vinicultural landscape of Central Italy, emphasizing how the historical cultivation of vines entwined with trees serves as a metaphor for the symbiotic relationship between human practices and natural environments, a fragile, but vital relationship that is rapidly disappearing in these (post) modern times and era of (post) human Carbonate technologies.

The fourth chapter brings readers to postcolonial Morocco, exploring how the avant-garde journal *Souffles* navigated the complex terrain of national identity through geo-linguistic experimentation. This essay highlights how postcolonial literature grapples with the legacies of colonialism, using language as a site of resistance and a tool for the construction of a pluralistic Moroccan identity.

The fifth chapter shifts to the early twentieth century, the era of European showman politics and the Fiume occupation led by Gabriele D'Annunzio. This study explores how a political and artistic avant-garde in two revolutionary magazines—*La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga*—transformed a territorial dispute into an experimental socio-political project. Fiume exemplifies the ways in which geopolitical and artistic ambitions interweave to produce new forms of space and identity, pushing the boundaries of both literature and political activism.

The discussion of space continues in the sixth essay, which examines German Romantic fairy tales. By analyzing the contrast between urban and natural spaces in these stories, the essay highlights how changing environmental and social conditions influenced the portrayal of landscape, reflecting anxieties and aspirations that resonate with contemporary ecological concerns framed by the heuristic of the Anthropocene.

Hayao Miyazaki's fictional worlds come to the forefront in the last chapter, which addresses the ethical and ecological dimensions of his work. Set against the backdrop of war-torn landscapes and the Anthropocene, Miyazaki's films blur the lines between nature and technology, adulthood and childhood. By foregrounding empathy and the ethics of care, the essay illustrates how space in Miyazaki's cinematic narratives foster in audiences a sense of ecological awareness and the potential for healing in an era of environmental degradation.

Together, the essays in this volume offer a multifaceted exploration of how literature not only reflects but actively shapes our understanding of space, geography, and identity across different historical and cultural landscapes.

Through these diverse approaches, the volume emphasizes the enduring power of literary landscapes to inform our perceptions of the Earth and how we create and dwell within our individual and collective *lifeworlds*.

Indice

PART III:

Ecologies of Imagination: Fictional Geographies in the Anthropocene

Introduction

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In 2004, the Royal Geographical Society conference featured a groundbreaking interdisciplinary session titled "*Textual Spaces, Spatial Texts*," which brought together geographers and literary scholars to explore the intersections of narrative and spatiality. Papers presented during the session were published in *New Formations* in 2005, marking a pivotal moment in the evolution of literary geography. This event showcased a significant shift toward interdisciplinarity, underscoring its transformative potential in bridging literature and geography.

In the period prior to this turn, literary geography, an integral branch of human geography, mainly addressed issues of description and representation. Yet, the 2000s marked a paradigm shift, introducing a narrative-driven perspective on the production of place and space. This evolution was influenced by a broader reconceptualization of space in geography, transitioning from a static framework of external coordinates to an understanding of space as dynamic and relational. At the heart of this development were the profound changes in spatial thinking that occurred during the late 20th century. This shift redefined the boundaries between literary geography and narratological approaches to literary space while fostering stronger connections with textual theories. By viewing literary space as a network of intertextual relations, this transformation emphasized the increasing interdisciplinarity of the field, setting the stage for its growth in the early 21st century.

The interdisciplinary domain of literary geography has undergone significant evolution since its inception. Rooted in the interplay between literature and geography, the field has historically engaged with diverse paradigms, from regionalism and humanism to radicalism and quantitativism. Emerging initially as a critique of quantitative dominance in geographical

studies, literary geography sought to prioritize the experiential and interpretive dimensions of space and place, challenging static conceptions of spatiality.

The 1970s marked a pivotal turn with an increasing focus on subjective and cultural understandings of landscapes. This "humanistic turn" emphasized dynamic and relational conceptualizations of place, positioning literature as a medium for generating and transforming spatial meanings. In this context, notable works such as Brosseau's seminal 1994 essay in *Progress in Human Geography* not only internationalized literary geography but introduced a narrative-driven approach to spatial analysis. Brosseau argued that narratives do not merely reflect but actively construct spatial realities, thus providing a critical framework for interdisciplinary exchange. This period also saw the emergence of concepts like "topophilia," popularized by Yi-fu Tuan in his 1974 book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Tuan described topophilia as the human being's affective ties with the material environment. Similarly, Gaston Bachelard's (1964) *The Poetics of Space* offered a methodological perspective on poetic images of "felicitous space," emphasizing the value of spaces that can be loved and defended, further underscoring the profound significance of space during this transformative era.

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a significant enrichment of the field, marked by the "spatial turn" in cultural studies and the "cultural turn" in geography. Foundational theories by Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*, 1974), Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980), and Michel Foucault (1966; 1969: 1972; 1975) emphasized the multiplicity of spatial practices and representations, paving the way for innovative dialogues between geography and literary studies. Edward Soja's 1989 articulation of the spatial turn in *Postmodern Geographies* framed space as central to social and cultural analysis, further solidifying its role as a critical concept in the humanities.

Throughout this period, literary geography expanded its focus to encompass both realist descriptions and imagined spaces, as exemplified by the 2002 collection *Lost in Space* (Kitchin and Kneale) and Westphal's 2007 *Geocritisim*, which explored the textual production of fictional worlds. Thematic influences such as postcolonialism, feminist geographies, and identity studies enriched the discipline, prompting new questions about power, positionality, and the production of space in literature.

Key methodological advancements in the field include geocriticism (Westphal, 2007), literary cartography (Piatti *et al*., 2009), and ecocriticism

(Buell, 1995; Garrard, 2004). These approaches share a commitment to interrogating the spatial dimensions of narrative while incorporating insights from philosophy, sociology, and cultural theory. Westphal's concept of "multifocalization," for instance, emphasizes the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and sensory experiences in analyzing spatial representation, whereas ecocritical frameworks explore literature's capacity to foster environmental awareness and address ecological challenges.

Literary geography's interdisciplinary approach draws upon a rich tapestry of theoretical perspectives that illuminate the complex relationships between space, identity, and the environment. By intertwining methodologies from diverse fields, it investigates the shifting dynamics of natural and urban landscapes, the intersections of power and history, and the evolving ethical responsibilities toward the Anthropocene. Chorographies and travel narratives, for instance, provide frameworks for mapping spatial experiences (Vine, 2017), while geopolitical critiques unravel power dynamics and the tensions embedded in historical and territorial conflicts (D'haen, 2024). Bridging geography, poetry, and philosophy, geopoetics explores the relationship between land and consciousness (White, 2003), whereas relationality and geoaesthetics highlight the interplay between place, perception, and artistic representation (Elias and Moraru, 2015). Psychogeography examines the emotional and behavioral effects of spatial environments, offering innovative interpretations of urban and imaginative landscapes (Guy Debord, 1955). Finally, ecocritical perspectives interrogate literature's engagement with ecological crises, promoting ethical responses (Buell, 2005), while imaginary geographies showcase the creative potential of literature to mythologize nature (Buell, 1995).

By navigating real and imagined realms, literary geography reveals the profound social, cultural, and political dimensions of place, producing transformative and performative visions of shared landscapes. Building on its rich theoretical and methodological heritage, the field continues to explore how diverse literary traditions and geographical imaginaries intersect to broaden our understanding of the world. This ongoing inquiry highlights the multifaceted ways in which literature reshapes and critiques spatial dynamics, while geography, in turn, influences storytelling. This dynamic relationship unfolds as a continuous rhizomatic process, generating an ever-evolving spectrum of perspectives.

Expanding on these foundational ideas, the chapters in this volume embody the richness and diversity of themes at the intersection of literature

and geography. Structured into three thematic sections, they engage with distinct yet interconnected dimensions of this interdisciplinary dialogue. Together, these contributions illuminate how literature not only generates and critiques spatial and geographical imaginaries but also reflects their historical and contemporary significance. The result is a multifaceted exploration that underscores the enduring importance of literary geography in understanding the spatial dimensions of human experience.

The first section delves into imaginative landscapes, exploring how travel, memory, and identity are depicted through real and constructed geographies. It examines how literary works engage with the interplay between individual and collective memory, the perception of cultural "otherness," and the spatial dynamics that shape identity.

Angela Gatto's chapter, *"Oriental" Travel Narratives in French 18th-Century Epistolary Novels,* analyzes how the fascination with "exotic" cultures became a central theme in French 18th-century epistolary literature. By exploring works such as *Mémoires turcs, Lettres persanes*, and *Lettres chinoises*, Gatto investigates how Turkish, Persian, Chinese, and Indian characters traveling through Europe reflect geopolitical relationships and cultural perceptions of the time. The chapter traces how literary trends corresponded with France's historical interactions with these regions, offering a nuanced understanding of the evolving fascination with the "East" in French literary imagination.

In *Verbal Semantics and Memory in Shaping Narrative Space: Identity and Recollection in My Name is Asher Lev*, Matteo Bona examines how memory and identity are constructed through spatial depictions in Chaim Potok's novel. By employing a linguistic-typological approach, Bona compares Indo-European and Semitic language systems, revealing how memory's semantic values influence spatial perception and narrative dynamics. The contribution highlights the role of mnemonic discourse in shaping identity within the Hasidic Jewish community, analyzing how memory interacts with narrative *loci* to create a rich geography of personal and collective identity.

Shifting to the political and cultural dimensions of geography, the second section examines how literature and art engage with territorial conflicts, cultural practices and power dynamics, investigating how historical, ecological, and geopolitical transformations shape and are shaped by literary and artistic expression. The chapters explore diverse contexts—ranging from the ancient agricultural traditions of Central Italy to the postcolonial struggles of Morocco

and the avant-garde politics of Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume occupation—showing how spatial and territorial realities are inscribed in cultural memory and creative practices. Through these case studies, the section highlights the active role of literature and art in redefining notions of identity, authority, and resistance, while reflecting on the material and symbolic dimensions of place and territory.

Silvia Nencetti's chapter, *The Etruscan Landscape of the Vite Maritata*, investigates the disappearing agricultural practice of *vite maritata* as a cultural and ecological legacy of ancient Etruscan viticulture. Using a multidisciplinary approach that integrates botany, archaeology, and literary analysis, Nencetti reconstructs the significance of this practice within the historical landscape of Central Italy. The study sheds light on the fragile interconnection between material culture and literary imagination, by examining the symbiotic relationship between agricultural techniques and territorial identity. The loss of *vite maritata* from the Tuscan countryside mirrors a broader erosion of cultural memory and landscape, highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental and cultural transformations.

Sara Ansaloni's exploration of postcolonial Morocco, *The Post-Colonial Identity in Morocco: Geo-linguistic Experimentation in Souffles*, offers a compelling case of how literary and linguistic experimentation can serve as tools to build modern identities. Situating her analysis within the framework of Abdelkebir Khatibi's *pensée-autre* and Derrida's notions of monolingualism and linguistic plurality, Ansaloni examines the avant-garde journal *Souffles* and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's *Soleil arachnide* as expressions of a pluralistic postcolonial identity. This chapter reveals how the cultural and political tensions of Morocco's post-independence period found resonance in innovative linguistic practices, reimagining national identity as a mosaic of competing historical and geographical narratives. Through its focus on geo-linguistic landscapes, the study highlights the power of literature to critique and reconfigure dominant geopolitical imaginaries.

Daniele Meregalli's contribution, *(Geo)politics as an Artwork: Two Avant-Garde Magazines in Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume*, shifts attention to the intersection of geopolitics and avant-garde aesthetics during the Fiume occupation. Meregalli delves into the revolutionary ambitions of the magazines *La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga*, which transformed D'Annunzio's campaign into a laboratory of political and artistic experimentation. By tracing the evolution of fiumanesimo as a synthesis of nationalism, syndicalism, and artistic modernism,

this chapter underscores the dynamic interplay between geopolitical disputes and radical cultural movements. Meregalli's analysis demonstrates how territorial conflicts, such as the contested ownership of Fiume, became fertile ground for avant-garde visions of artistic and political renewal. Together, these chapters reveal how cultural landscapes and territorial tensions serve as powerful catalysts for literary and artistic innovation, illustrating the multifaceted ways in which space is contested, reimagined, and inscribed with meaning.

The third and final section moves toward ecological and ethical landscapes, addressing contemporary concerns in the Anthropocene, by examining how fictional geographies engage with the environmental and sociological challenges of this era and offering insights into the human-nature relationship and the ethical frameworks that emerge from it. Through the lens of literature and film, these chapters explore how imagined spaces reflect ecological concerns, ethical dilemmas, and the evolving perception of humanity's role within natural systems. From the Romantic ecologies of German fairy tales to the complex ethical landscapes of Hayao Miyazaki's animated worlds, this section highlights how creative narratives interrogate the boundaries between nature and culture, tradition and modernity, imagination and reality.

Maria Ruggero's *Nature and City in Fairytale Space* focuses on the spatial dynamics in German fairy tales, contextualizing them within the environmental and societal transformations that began at the end of the eighteenth century. Through the analysis of *The Brothers* (1795), *The Reconciliation* (1795), and *Undine* (1811), Ruggero traces the dichotomy between urban and natural spaces, emphasizing how the latter is celebrated as a site of human elevation and emotional resonance. By connecting these Romantic ecologies to broader historical shifts, she reveals how fairy tales anticipate the ecological crises of the Anthropocene, reflecting early tensions between industrial development and the natural world.

Similarly, Aldo Pisano, in *Anthropocene and Ethics of Care: A Narrative Ethics Approach in Hayao Miyazaki's Fictional World*, explores the fictional geographies of Hayao Miyazaki's films through a narrative ethics framework. Pisano examines how Miyazaki's works intertwine historical trauma, ecological sensitivity, and utopian imagination. Themes such as the interplay between nature and technology, as well as the fluid boundaries between historical and timeless landscapes, reveal a deep engagement with the ethical dimensions of the Anthropocene. By portraying characters who embody care for others and for nature, Miyazaki fosters a performative

empathy, encouraging viewers to rethink humanity's interconnectedness with the environment as an ethical imperative in a time of ecological crisis.

This volume underscores the intricate interplay between literature and geography, revealing how creative narratives can act as both mirrors and catalysts for cultural, political, and ecological transformation. By traversing landscapes shaped by historical memory, geopolitical ambitions, and environmental concerns, the chapters collectively demonstrate the enduring role of spatial imagination in framing human experience. Whether uncovering the remnants of ancient viticultural practices, reinterpreting geopolitical experiments as artistic endeavors, or reflecting on the ethical landscapes of fictional worlds, the contributions demonstrate how spaces bear witness to shifting societal values and global challenges. Through these diverse perspectives, the volume invites readers to consider how the spatial and the narrative converge, offering profound insights into the ways humans navigate their place within history, culture, and the environment. The power of storytelling can reshape the worlds we inhabit, forging connections between human and non-human realms, enabling us to reimagine the human condition in an ever-evolving landscape.

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PART I:

Imagined Worlds: Travel Narratives and the Role of Memory

1. “Oriental” travel narratives in French 18th-century epistolary novels

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Abstract

In French 18th-century epistolary novels, the “Orient” was the most exploited “exotic” theme. In these novels, characters from different “Oriental” countries travel to France and other European countries to observe other cultures and customs that they later describe through the letters they send to various correspondents. But what is the “Orient”? For the French of that time, the “Orient” was roughly made up of four countries: Turkey, Persia, India, and China.

My work aims to analyze “exotic” narratives in 18th-century epistolary novels. First, I would like to focus on how different “Oriental” countries and populations are portrayed in some of these works, and the influence that said works, along with 17th-century non-fictional travel accounts, had on the readers of the time. Then, I would like to present the different “Oriental” fashions in French literature: the Turkish, the Persian, the Chinese, and the Indian vogues. In order to do so, I would like to analyze one epistolary novel per trend. I would start with the *Mémoires turcs* (1743) by Claude Godard d’Aucour, which portray a Turkish man traveling to France following the example of the Turkish spy of Marana’s *L’esploratore turco* (1684) – known in France as *L’Espion du Grand Seigneur and L’Espion turc* – which is the first epistolary novel with a foreign traveler as its protagonist. To describe the long-lasting fashion for Persia, that was inaugurated by 17th-century Tavernier’s and Chardin’s travel accounts and by Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721),

a masterpiece of the epistolary genre and the "exotic" literary field, I would use Abbé de Rochebrune's *L'Espion de Thamas Kouli-Kan dans les cours de l'Europe* (1746), where a Persian traveler is sent by his sultan to Europe to spy on different countries. An epistolary novel that exemplifies Chinese vogue, that lasted throughout the 18th century with a peak in 1760, is Marquis d'Argens's *Lettres chinoises* (1739), where multiple Chinese correspondents exchange letters while traveling around Europe and Asia. For the Indian craze, that reached its peak in 1750s, I would like to analyze Louis-Antoine Caraccioli's *Lettres d'un Indien à Paris* (1789), where an Indian traveler describes his experience in France and in other European countries to his friend, family, and wives. Finally, I would like to show how these fashions and different interests in epistolary travel narratives corresponded to specific historical situations and to the geopolitical relations that France had with these "exotic" territories in the East over the 17th and the 18th century. For example, the French interest for Turkey was not exclusively due to its geographical proximity and the trading exchanges between the two countries, but also to the Ottoman Empire's presence in European affairs. As for Persia, Mehemet-Effendi's embassy to the French court, and the story of the usurper Thamas Kouli Kan helped make Persia popular. Concerning China, it was made know by Jesuit missionary who were sent there to evangelize the country, while the interest in India corresponded to France's presence in the Hindu peninsula through French East India Company.

Keywords: ***Orientalism, Epistolary Novels, 18th Century, French Literature, Travel Narratives***

1. Introduction

In many French 18th-century epistolary novels, the "Orient" – at that time corresponding roughly to four countries, *id est* Turkey, Persia, India, and China – was a very common and exploited theme. In these novels, characters from different "Oriental" countries travel to France and other European countries to observe other cultures and customs that they later describe through the letters they send to various correspondents.

My work aims to analyze "Oriental" narratives in 18th-century epistolary novels. Despite the presence of other literary forms that deal with "Oriental" themes in 18th-century France, I chose the epistolary genre for two reasons. On the one hand, I believe that the indisputable success of the genre, especially when it portrays "Oriental" *épistoliers,* proves a fashion for and an interest in "Oriental" stories and elements. On the other hand, since epistolary novels are first-person narratives where authors, hiding behind their *épistoliers,* talk about the present time and express their ideas, opinions and feelings while they are experiencing them, I think this genre can give a better and more precise idea of the image 18th-century French had of the "Orient" and "Orientals".

In the following chapter, I will first focus on how different "Oriental" countries and populations are portrayed in some of these epistolary works. Then, I will present the different "Oriental" fashions in French literature: the Turkish, the Persian, the Chinese, and the Indian vogues. In order to do so, I will analyze one epistolary novel per trend. Finally, I will show how historical situations and the geopolitical relations that France had with these "Oriental" territories over the 17th and the 18th centuries shaped the content of epistolary travel narratives. Additionally, I will argue that the "Oriental" elements that can be found in epistolary novels nuance, if not contradict, Edward Said's thesis, according to which the whole narrative of European literature, starting from Aeschylus and Euripides, is a history of literature's complicity in inferiorization of the "Orient", and that such inferiorization is the result of imperialism and colonialism (Said, 1979).

In the 17th century a taste for the "Orient" started being exploited in French literature, even if this interest did not reach the proportions of the following century. But what was the "Orient", and particularly the literary "Orient"? For 17th- and 18th-century Frenchmen, "Orientals" were, indiscriminately,

"les Arabes et les Persans, mais encore les Turcs et les Tartares et presque tous les peuples de l'Asie jusqu'à la Chine, mahométans ou païens et idolâtres" (Galland, 1694, *Avertissement*) or to use Voltaire's more expansive borders, "les nations orientales" are those countries that extend "depuis les Dardanelles…jusqu'au fond de la Corée" (Voltaire, 1756, p. 284). Because of the authors' inability to distinguish between the various peoples, but also because of the lack of reliable material on which to base a better understanding of these realities, in 17th-century novels featuring Chinese, Persian and Turkish characters, as well as in most tragedies with "Oriental" themes, the only "Oriental" element is the name given to the protagonists, who remain Frenchmen and courtiers in their manners and actions, or the role they play (sultan, eunuch, etc.). Even if they are pseudo-Oriental works, they still testify to a growing interest in another reality and in a new literary taste.

However, it was not until the second half of the 17th century that a real knowledge of the "Orient" began to emerge in France. From a political point of view, Europe and the East already had relations with one another, mainly because of the Ottoman Empire's presence in European affairs that led to its attempts to establish its dominance on the continent. Christine Isom-Verhaaren (2011) explains that the Ottoman Empire became a crucial element in the balance of European powers after the fall of Constantinople (1453), and that a Franco-Ottoman alliance started in the 1530s, as proved by their joint campaign in 1543-1544. But it was during the wars between the Turks and several European states that France's King Louis XIV took a keen interest in the commercial, political, and colonial advantages that a contact with the "Orient" could bring. He therefore did not miss the opportunity to act as an intermediary by sending his ambassadors to Constantinople, which did contribute to spread a taste for *turqueries* and curiosity about the exotic world in France. In fact, according to Clarence Dana Rouillard (1941), ambassadors' accounts, but also those by missionaries, merchants, soldiers and travelers, had a double effect on the French: on the one hand, they created the stereotype of the "Turk" that became a familiar figure of literature; on the other hand, these contacts led to relativism, toleration, the comparative study of law, religion, and custom, and, in the end, to criticize multiple aspects of European society.

Given the presence of the Ottoman Empire in France's reality, it is no coincidence that the first epistolary novel to feature a foreigner traveling to France, whose customs and habits are well-portrayed, concerns Turkey. It is *L'esploratore turco*, an Italian novel published in 1684 by Giovanni Paolo Marana and translated into French first as *L'Espion du Grand Seigneur* and

then as *L'Espion turc*, which served as a model for Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes.*

Furthermore, in the second half of the 17th century, colonization campaigns in America, the evangelization work of missionaries in China and India, and the trade in luxury goods by merchants were fundamental in arousing French curiosity about other distant and mysterious lands.

To these elements must be added others that had an even greater influence on 18th-century literature. First of all, it is important to refer to 17th-century travel reports[1], which were the first sources of information on the "Orient", and which made the encounter with the *Étranger* – both in the sense of "foreigner" and "stranger" – one of their main motives. Michael Harrigan (2008), through his analysis of French travelers' accounts, argues that the image travelers gave of the East, despite being influenced by certain long-held stereotypes, was also rich in first-hand observations and impressions. Such portraits, while revealing the tension between the concept of "Orient" and what travelers observed, do also show that the "Orient" is not simply something "man-made", an "idea", as stated by Said (1979).

In addition to *récits de voyage,* there are also the reports published by missionaries from 1702 onwards where they give interesting information about the territories they visited. Such reports, published as letters, described lands, plants and animals, and painted a portrait of the peoples the missionaries encountered.

In numerous epistolary novels, writers never lost the opportunity to exploit all these images of the Other, identified not only with the "Oriental" man, but also with the inhabitant of the "New World". They also used the theme of the encounter between characters from different cultures and countries to confront their worlds and points of view, and to bring about a reversal of perspective (Chamayou, 1999).

Finally, in 1704, Antoine Galland published his translation of *Les Milles et Une Nuits,* a collection of Oriental tales that enchanted readers by opening the doors to magical worlds and transformed the exotic French novel by feeding the imaginations of writers who had rarely seen the wonders of the "Orient" with their own eyes (Martino, 1906).

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[1] See *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant* (1664) and its sequel, *Suite du voyage de Levant* (1674) by Jean de Thévenot; *Six Voyages of Jean Baptiste Tavernier* (1676); and *The Travels of Sir John Chardin* (1686).

It is perhaps superfluous to point out that the image of the "Orient" conveyed by all these works, that influenced Orientalist scholars' research, although less simplistic and richer in detail than in the past, did not correspond exactly to reality. Travel writers, and later novelists, portrayed a stereotyped "Orient", where the landscape was barely sketched and "Orientals" were described simply as handsome men, fancifully dressed, intelligent, perhaps a little vain, but polite and welcoming. This way of "dealing with the Orient", that Said attributes to Orientalism and all its forms is, according to him, "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority of the Orient" (1979, p. 3). However, I think Srinivas Aravamudan's argument is much more compelling and nuanced. According to Aravamudan, Orientalism does not deal with the Orient by "making statements about it, authorizing view about it, […], by teaching it, settling, ruling over it" (Said, 1979, p. 3), but "by dreaming with the Orient – dreaming with it by constructing and translating fictions about it, pluralizing views of it, inventing it, by reimagining it, unsettling its meaning, brooding over it", in short: "a Western style for translating, anatomizing, and desiring the Orient" (Aravamudan, 2011, p. 8).

Readers' first impressions were therefore very positive, and their sympathy for "Orientals" will remain mostly unchanged, even if these peoples are sometimes criticized for their deceit, flattery, and laziness, and for not being Christians. As we will see later, in epistolary novels there is nothing that suggests that the authors considered "Orientals" inferior or peoples on whom they sought control, as suggested by Said who argues that the "Occident" has always seen the "Orient" as inhabited by inferior people whom it wanted to dominate (Said, 1979).

In fact, writers showed interest in many aspects of "Oriental" societies: their religion, rich in superstitions and extravagant rites; the concept of love as it was supposedly conceived and practiced in the East and which was associated to voluptuous seraglios full of beautiful women and ridiculous, yet mysterious eunuchs; and the type of despotic government to which all Eastern countries were subjected (Grosrichard, Miller, Miller, 1979).

However, it is important to point out once again that what we call the "Orient" is roughly made up of four countries, namely Turkey, Persia, India and China. In the collective imagination, the inhabitants of each of these countries had unique characteristics that were widely exploited in literature: the Turks were famous for their gallantry, the Persians had the reputation of being spiritual, the Chinese, although they were chosen as

literary scapegoats, were considered philosophers, and the Indians were deemed poor, but virtuous and sensitive. Since these countries were not all known at the same time, it is not surprising that, depending on the period, the French showed more interest in one people rather than another, and that the people *à la mode* at a given time subsequently gave their physiognomy and character to the peoples of the "Orient" in general. (Martino, 1906).

In this chapter, I will argue that the French interest in the "Orient" that is found in epistolary novels can be analyzed through four main exotic "fashions" – the Turkish, the Persian, the Chinese and the Indian ones – has political, historical and geographical roots. While presenting and discussing each *mode,* I will consider a different epistolary novel in order to show, and this is the goal of my contribution, that the French interest in the "Orient" did not originate from a sense of superiority and that Said's argument needs to be nuanced and put in perspective. In fact, I argue that they had a sincere admiration and curiosity about countries that they saw, according to the historical period, as allies, enemies and competitors.

2. Turkish and Persian fashions and their political roots

I argue that one of the main reasons behind France's interest in the "Orient" is political, and by political I refer here mainly to the complex geopolitical relations Europe, and particularly France, had with Eastern countries. In fact, over the 17th and 18th centuries, alliances were made and broken off, wars were declared, and embassies were sent in hopes of alleviating tensions.

It is not surprising that Turkey, as the geographically closest and most "familiar" land of the "Orient", was, so to speak, the first fashionable country. French interest in Turkey, reflected in the many *turqueries* present in the novels, stemmed not only from the long-standing trade between the two countries, but also from the Ottoman Empire's constant presence in European affairs: the Ottoman forces besieged the Venetian-ruled capital city of the Kingdom of Candia (1648-1669); they fought against the Habsburg monarchy (1663-1664); and from 1683 until 1699, the Holy League had to face once again the Ottoman Empire in the Great Turkish War. Furthermore, given the presence of multiple French ambassadors in Constantinople since Francis I's kingdom who sent letters to friends, families and the *Mercure Galant,* the French were constantly up to date about what happened in the *Sublime Porte*. And under Louis XIV's reign they could see firsthand a Turkish man when in 1669 the Turkish ambassador Soliman Muta Ferraca came to France, followed in 1721 by the ambassador Mehmed Efendi and in 1742 by his son, Mehmed Said Pasha (Longino, 2011). As expected, the processions that accompanied the ambassadors were theatrical and exotic enough to feed the imagination of the French onlookers. While Turkish ambassadors were in France, newspapers, almanacs and special editions kept the public informed about where these "Oriental" guests went, to whom they talked, and speculated about these handsome and gallant men's love adventures. There were also commemorative medals and engravings of their portraits that circulated all over the country.

In the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire, already a source of concern because of its military might, fought against Austria and Russia on and off from the 1760s until the end of the century. These conflicts led to the publication of numerous historical accounts and novels with a Turkish theme, which continued to circulate even as readers' tastes began to change. Among these

works, I would like to briefly analyze the *Mémoires turcs*[2] (1743) by Godard d'Aucour.

The *Mémoires turcs* is a "mixed" novel, divided into two formally distinct parts. In the first, written in the form of a memoir, the protagonist, Dely, tells his story; by contrast, the second part (on which I will focus here) is entirely epistolary, consisting of seven letters that Dely included in his memoirs. Four of these letters are part of the correspondence between Achmet and his slave Atalide, who remained in his harem in Turkey, and two form an exchange between Achmet and a French lady, Madame la Marquise de Chambertin. Achmet is a wealthy Turk who travels to Paris following the Ottoman ambassador. In Turkey, he has left a seraglio full of women, including his favorite, a French woman named Atalide, who is also the main recipient of his letters. Although the couple is sincerely in love with each other, Achmet, once in Paris, does not hesitate to have love affairs with numerous French women, the details of which he recounts to Atalide. Among these women, there are countesses, duchesses and marchionesses who fall victim of Achmet's exotic charm. The Turkish man exploits the effect he has on women to reproduce in Paris a sort of temporary harem in which many women participate voluntarily. One of them, Thérèse, falls so in love with him that she accepts to follow him to Constantinople to become part of his original harem. Despite supporting Eastern traditions such as polygamy and despite his reserves for the Christian clergy that he considers corrupt and hypocrite, once back in Turkey, Achmet shows empathy and open-mindedness by accepting Atalide's pleas to be freed so that she can withdraw to a convent in France. Hence, Achmet reveals that he is not the domestic despot "Orientals", such as Usbek, the protagonist of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes,* are thought to be in much eighteenth-century French writing (De Carolis, 2008).

In fact, Atalide herself shows her readers that the idea one might have of Turkish people and customs does not correspond to reality and is just the fruit of a French stereotype. In the first letter she writes to Achmet she tells him: "je ne m'étois pas attendue, je l'avoue, à trouver de si généreux sentimens dans un Turc, dont je m'étois fait un portrait bizarre. Dès ce jour, Seigneur, je fus votre Esclave à plus d'un titre. Ces idées barbares que je m'étois formées du serrail s'évanouirent dans un instant" (Godard d'Aucour, 1750, p. 91). The same prejudice was at first shared by Thérèse, as Achmet tells Atalide in the second

[2] The full title is: *Mémoires turcs avec l'histoire galante de leur séjour en France. Par un Auteur Turc de toutes les Académies Mahométanes, licencié en droit, & Maîtres-ès-Arts de l'Université de Constantinople.*

letter he sends her: “je tâchais de chasser peu-a-peu de l’esprit de l’aimable Thérèse, les idées barbares que la prévention lui avoit données des Turcs. Je la conduisis moi-même par tout mon petit Palais, qu’elle trouva fort à son gré” (Godard D’Aucour, 1750, p. 158). The following day, Thérèse told him that he was “le plus tendre de tous les hommes” and that “[les] français ne sont pas capables d’une si belle flâme” (Godard d’Aucour, 1750, p. 160). Achmet’s success in convincing her that Turkish men are not as brutal as the French might have depicted them is also proven by the fact that, after joining a sort of orgy he organized, Thérèse begs him to take her with him back to Turkey.

Since the *Mémoires turcs* were published in 1743 and portrays the Parisian loves of a Turkish man belonging to the Turkish embassy in France, I argue that Godard d’Aucour was likely inspired by Effendi’s embassy in 1721, which fascinated the public, especially with rumors about Turkish men’s “aventures galantes”. According to the *Relation du voyage de l’ambassadeur du Grand Seigneur en France, et du sejour qu’il a fait en cette cour,* the Turkish ambassador “se fit concours de tout le Peuple, & principalement des Dames qu’il gracieusa beaucoup, & à qui il fit présenter du Caffé selon la coutume des Orientaux : de sorte que pas une ne sort de son Hôtel sans être également charmée de sa politesse, de la majesté de son visage que de ses manières honnêtes” (Anonymous, 1721, p. 220-221).

In my opinion, the *Mémoires turcs,* whose writing was clearly influenced by the arrival of Turkish ambassadors in France, not only proves the French readers’ interest in the *affaires turques* but it also offers a great example of how the French perceived the Turkish. Despite presenting the Turkish protagonist as “different”, the author uses French characters, what is more women, to deconstruct the stereotype some French readers might have had of Turkish men. Dély, in fact, is presented as a man who is sensitive, passionate, respectful of his lovers’ desires, and far from being despotic and tyrannic. Furthermore, this novel shows that the author is more interested in underlining the flaws of French society than in judging Ottoman customs. In fact, as argued by G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, eighteenth-century Europe, and especially France, was self-critical and open-minded enough to confront other cultures at least as alternative versions of living (1989).

The Turkish fad, begun in the 17th century, was not abandoned - the publication in 1800 of *L’Observateur sentimental,* that tells the story of a Turkish man, is a proof of that - but as the Ottoman Empire lost its influence in Europe and began to suffer its first military defeats, it gave way to other

"Oriental" countries such as Persia (Martino, 1906). The fashion for Persia, which became known thanks to the travel reports by Tavernier and Chardin, first published in 1676 and 1686 and subsequently often republished, was less well-known, but lasted quite a long time. At first, French knowledge of the country was only bookish, since in the 17th century there were no major upheavals in Persian story, and the only source of information about Persia was travelers' reports. In fact, because of the limited amount of accurate information available, when novelists wrote a "Persian" history, they portrayed Turks instead, as if Persians and Ottomans were the same population. For that matter, according to travelers who had visited both countries, Turkey and Persia were geographically close, had the same religion and their mores were quite similar. Subsequently, however, the *Lettres persanes* and the story of the usurper Nadir Thamas Kouli Kan helped to popularize Persia and provided more accurate information about the country. Thamas Kouli Kan was the king of Persia about whom the largest number of accounts were written[3]. He was so famous that in 1745 the Abbé de Rochebrune wrote an epistolary novel entitled *L'Espion de Thamas Kouli Kan dans les cours de l'Europe,* and twenty years after his death, a tragedy about his life was published: *Histoire de Nader Chach, traduit du persan* (1770).

In *L'Espion de Thamas Kouli Kan,* the Abbé de Rochebrune tells the story of Pagi-Nassir-Bek, a Persian spy sent by his sultan to Europe to see what is happening in the European courts. To avoid being recognized, the spy pretends to be an Armenian merchant and, after traveling to Russia, Poland, France and finally Holland, recounts what he sees and learns. As suggested by the subtitle of the novel, *L'Espion de Thamas Kouli-Kan* includes "diverses anecdotes politiques pour servir à l'histoire du tems présent". In fact, the author uses the *escamotage* of the exotic epistolary novel to describe and criticize European contemporary events. All the *épistoliers* are Persians and have a specific title[4] that, while proving the abbé's intention to make his readers believe in the authenticity of the letters they read, also shows the deep research the abbé conducted and his interest in the Persian matters. Alongside considerations of Russia's relations with Sweden and Turkey and of the tensions between

[3] See, for example, the *Histoire de Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi de Perse* (1741) by Jean-Antoine Du Cerceau.

[4] The « Oriental » titles of the *épistoliers* : "Pich–Namas" (director of prayers); "Mouchi El Memalec" (writer of the kingdoms); "Athemadeulet" (prime minister); "Turbedur" (guard of Fathmé's sepulchre); "Courtchi–Bachi" (colonel-general of cavalry); "Alendar–Bachi" (head of sign holders); "Vizir Tchap" (Grand Vizier's second-in-command); "Mehter" (grand chamberlain); "Darogué" (police lieutenant); and "Vaka Nuviez" (prime minister's deputy).

Spain and Portugal, the author presents information about the German Empire and its elective system. However, the real subject of this novel is the War of the Austrian Succession. The author analyses its phases and the role played by Austria, Prussia, France and England. To make the novel even more historic and believable, the spy who travels to Europe is not the spy of an anonymous Persian sultan, but of Thamas Kouli-Kan who, as mentioned above, was such a famous Persian king that he became a literary figure.

Furthermore, the abbé uses Persian, hence Muslim characters, to criticize not Islamism but, as did Montesquieu and many other authors after him, Christianity. In the novel, there is indeed a biting satire against the ecclesiastical world, where the Persian narrator paints an ironic portrait of the Pope. In letter XII, the spy writes to his correspondent that the Pope is so infallible that he can decide, from one day to the next, that virtue is a vice and vice is a virtue, and that he must be believed. In addition, the Pope is the successor of a saint, Saint Peter, whom he honors because:

> N'ayant reçu de lui qu'un pauvre anneau, il l'a si bien su faire valoir, qu'il peut actuellement mettre trente à quarante mille hommes sur pié, et les entretenir assez longtemps. Il possède plusieurs pays en souveraineté. Il marche avec une pompe et un appareil de conquérant. Il a des places, des magazins, des ports, des flottes, une cour, un trésor, des finances, et par-dessus le marché, il ouvre et ferme les portes du Ciel quand il lui plait ; car il en a seul les clés (Abbé de Rochebrune, 1746, p. 154).

L'Espion de Thamas Kouli-Kan is a good example of how "Oriental" characters and references are not used to discredit the "Orient" but to use it to better criticize European, and particularly French, culture in a way that is both more believable and safer from repercussions and censorship. In this novel, the abbé wishes to inform his readers about what is happening in their world from a political point of view and the use of "Oriental" features – such as the titles of the *épistoliers* but also by dating certain letters using the Islamic calendar – proves his interest in Persia but also his desire to instruct while entertaining his readers whose curiosity for the "Orient" he clearly exploits. The choice of Persian characters is not hazardous as, I argue, the abbé de Rochebrune is taking advantage of the success of the *Histoire de Thamas*

Kouli Kan, published in 1741, that is only four years before the abbe's work was published.

However, what makes this novel interesting is its being at the same time similar to and different from its more famous predecessor, the *Lettres persanes.* On the one hand, exactly as Montesquieu's novel, the "Oriental" protagonist writes to friends in Persia, talks about his encounters with French people whose customs he describes and, sometimes, criticizes, and recounts anecdotes from his life. On the other hand, contrary to Montesquieu, and most epistolary novels set in the East, the Persian protagonist does not share theories and philosophical analyses, but focuses on historical and, what is more, current events. What is even more interesting is that the author uses Persian people's points of view not only to criticize Christian religion, which is a well-known device, but to comment on current events as if the Persian characters' perspectives were deemed more objective and reliable when it comes to analyzing European politics and affairs. Furthermore, while providing the image that the French had of Persians, this novel serves as a historical document to use to know more about both Persia and Europe.

3. Chinese spirituality and religion

Unlike other "Oriental" countries, which were discovered by travelers and explorers, knowledge of China, and more generally of the Far East, must be attributed to the Jesuit missionaries who, at the beginning of the 17th century, under Matteo Ricci's impetus, began their mission to evangelize China (App, 2010).

The missionaries were welcomed with great hospitality by the Chinese emperor, who placed his knowledge and archives at their disposal and enabled the monks to make a very precise study of Chinese religion, society, and customs. It was therefore thanks to the missionaries and, among other things, their *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*[5] that, in the 1770s, the French, who in the previous century had known almost nothing about China, could boast a more than respectable knowledge of the territory, its language and customs. In general, despite their idolatry, the opinions the Jesuits gave of the Chinese, and of the government that had so kindly welcomed them, were almost all positive. The Chinese were considered an ideal people, polite, civilized, and virtuous, and their government, although all power was concentrated in the hands of the emperor, was characterized by clemency and kindness in the administration of power. The Jesuits also had the merit of introducing the French to Chinese science and religion, having had the opportunity to translate the scientific treatises and sacred books supplied to them by the emperor. The missionaries also circulated translations of Confucius's works, introducing Mandarin philosophy and helping to forge the stereotype of the Chinese philosopher: hence, the Marquis d'Argens's philosophical epistolary novel, *Lettres chinoises*[6] (1739). This novel, that is divided into five parts, presents the exchange of letters among six Chinese men, two of whom stay in China, while the others travel to Europe and to other "Oriental" countries. These characters are: Sioeu-Tcheou, Yn-Che-Chan, Choang, Kieou-Che, Tao, and

[5] The *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères par quelques missionnaires de la compagnie de Jésus* form a collection of 34 volumes of letters sent to Europe by Jesuit missionaries in China, India, America, and other places. The first collection was published in 1702, but the real collection began in 1703 and continued until 1776. In addition to introducing Europeans to Asian cultures, this collection was intended to promote the churches of the Far East, which needed constant economic resources for their evangelizing mission.

[6] The full title is *Lettres chinoises, ou correspondance philosophique, historique et critique, Entre un Chinois Voyageur à Paris & Correspondans à la Chine, en Moscovie, en Perse & au Japon. Par l'auteur des Lettres Juives & des Lettres Cabalistiques.*

I-Taly. Sioeu-Tcheou is a Chinese from Beijing who, after studying French language and culture, moves to Paris, where he lives for several years. During his stay, he carefully observes French society, which he describes to his friend Yn-Che-Chan, who has remained in China. He does the same when he leaves France to visit other European countries (Switzerland, Germany and Poland). Yn-Che-Chan is also the recipient of letters from Chinese friends who have left Beijing to discover the world whose customs they describe. Among his correspondents are Choang, who lives in Persia; Kieou-Che, who recounts his trip to Japan and Thailand; Tiao, who travels to Russia, then Sweden and Denmark; and I-Taly, who writes from Rome and recounts his past travels and experiences.

The *Lettres chinoises* is a perfect example of French interest in the Far East and particularly in Chinese philosophy. In the novel, the Marquis d'Argens uses his characters to compare the Chinese doctrine of Confucius, that is described as "une Morale […] belle, simple et naturelle" given by "le sage Législateur de l'Empire & le restaurateur de la bonne morale" and Lao Kium's philosophy (d'Argens 1739, p. 65). Lao Kium, who is a "philosophe, ou plutôt un rêveur" propagated a kind of "morale" the author considers dangerous because "il prétend qu'on doit tâcher d'approcher du néant le plus qu'il est possible ; qu'il faut, si l'on peut, s'oublier totalement, & que c'est en cessant de penser, qu'on cesse d'être malheureux" and "si les hommes croient n'être heureux qu'autant qu'ils restent dans une inaction parfaite, dans une molle indolence, enfin dans une espèce de néant, que deviendroient les Républiques & les Etats les plus florissants ?" (d'Argens, 1739, p. 66). Lao Kium's religion is considered as disgraceful as his morals since its dogmas "établissent, comme des vérités évidentes, les extravagances les plus énormes" ; namely, "que le vide, le néant soient les principes de toutes les choses".

Chinese philosophy is only one of the topics covered by the Chinese travelers who also mention Japanese and Siamese religions and philosophies and criticize the tyranny of Thai rulers. As far as Europe is concerned, they criticize the excesses of the Catholic religion and compare it with the Protestant denomination; they make numerous political considerations on German, Swedish, Danish and Polish politics and governments.

The introduction and analysis of different Chinese doctrines show the author's fascination for this country and its inhabitants and the sincere respect they inspired him. The Marquis's criticism of the missionaries and their *récits* and letters prove that he had access to this material and that Jesuits'

accounts circulated and were an object of interest for the French who informed themselves about the Far East, and particularly China, by reading them.

What makes this novel interesting is that, more than other works, the *Lettres chinoises* offers a clear example of the scientific approach proposed by Rousseau: to know the particular(s) through a meticulous and systematic comparison of elements (Todorov, 1989, p. 30). The novelistic Chinese Other steps out of his own space and into the heart of the experience of diversity, as is also the case for the readers of this novel. The polyphonic epistolary form allows what other literary forms do not, that is broaden the horizon of this experience, multiplying comparisons and points of view. While in the Marquis d'Argens' novel China is not always a positive example, through the systematic comparison of mores, the author affirms the fundamental values that should guide people: morality in social mores and tolerance in religion. Jacques Marx goes even further in his assessment of the special place of China and Chinese characters in this work by d'Argens:

> Dans la plupart des relations exotiques inspirées par Montesquieu, l'Occident se dit plus lui-même qu'il ne dit l'Autre. Ce n'est plus tout à fait le cas ici. D'Argens a compris la Chine ; son information va au-delà des simples lieux communs. … Se refusant aux séductions de l'exotisme, l'auteur des *Lettres chinoises* a en réalité donné à l'espace culturel asiatique une présence authentique, et par là, il l'a fait entrer dans une sphère intellectuelle élargie, où pouvait s'appliquer réellement la prétention des Lumières à l'universalité (d'Argens, 162).

I agree with Jacques Marx as I think that, more than other epistolary novels and fictional works in general, the *Lettres chinoises* offers a portrait of the Chinese that tries to contradict the stereotypes of the time and to provide a cultural description that is as objective as possible. In my opinion, d'Argens, while wishing to entertain and interest his readers, seems to care about teaching them about the "Orient" as a reality to discover, respect and, why not, take example from.

4. The historical and geographical reasons behind the Indian craze

In the 17th century, despite their failure, both Henri IV and Richelieu tried to create a *Compagnie des Indes* and later Colbert created and supported different commercial companies: the *Compagnie de la Chine* (1660), *Compagnie des Indes orientales* (1665) and *Compagnie du Levant* (1670).

Until the beginning of the 18th century, the French settled for brief explorations in the interiors of the Indian subcontinent and for some trading centers, such as Chandernagor, where they could purchase agricultural and animal products, minerals and, later, textiles. At the time, the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* depended on commercial and diplomatic relations with the Mughal emperor and local authorities who used the French as pawns against the Dutch and the British, that also showed an increasing interest in the area (Peabody, 2017).

However, when John Law reorganized the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* in 1719 by merging it his *Compagnie d'Occident,* France's global network extended: in the 1730s, the French trade of rice and opium in Bengal, organized around Chandernagor and Pondichery, expanded in exchange for products from China, such as silk, porcelain and tea, and from other geographical areas, among which Manila, Burma, Achin, the Maldives and Mocha. The new directors of the *Compagnie,* Lenoir and Dumas, helped extend considerably France's influence in India, by making alliances with Indian princes, forming an army and becoming the protectors and then the *maîtres* of India. In 1740, when Joseph Dupleix took the direction of the company, he could easily dream about a French empire of the Indies that was able to contrast the British one. However, by the 1760s the company's financial position deteriorated and France's attempts to counter British economic hegemony in Asia failed, and because of British dominance French interests in India shrank and eventually ended (Wood, 2020).

In the 1730s, when France established its brief military presence, India started appearing in literary works, and by the 1750s Indian characters populated French theatre and novel. I argue that it was France's colonial attempts and presence in India, albeit brief, that developed French interest for this country and its customs: while the existence of India was already known,

expansionist attempts made the country familiar and aroused the interests of readers but also of scholars; in fact, it is from the studies about India, its religion and philosophy that the science of orientalism originated. Among the most prominent orientalists, Anquetil-Duperron[7] traveled to India and collected manuscripts which allowed the French to gain a deeper understanding of the peninsula's geography, politics, religion, and history. Literature obviously benefited from this new knowledge and, from the 1760s onwards, literature became somewhat "Indian", as authors of novels and plays embraced this new fashion (Martino, 1906).

While it is undeniable that France had colonial aspirations towards India, I argue that the relation France ultimately had with such country was not as Said tends to describe all relations between Western and "Oriental" countries, that is the claim that Western representations of the "Orient" constitute a discourse whose main purpose is the assertion of Western hegemony over Asia, a story whose protagonists are, on one side, winners, oppressors and colonizers, and on the other side losers, oppressed and colonized "surrogates" (Said, 1979). In fact, Beasley (2008) shows that India invaded French people's mental space through, among other things, their exquisite products which the French, especially women, tried to obtain at all costs. Beasley argues that fabrics such as cotton and silk ended up representing India itself and, as they were deemed unique and luxurious, Indian producers and, by extension, India entered the French imaginary "as places of a superior order of life" (Beasley, 2008, p. 229). According to Beasley (2008), the French recognized Indian superiority when it came to their productions of cotton and silk items that were not simply commodities but forms of art they tried in vain to imitate, and hence looked at such country with respect, admiration and even envy.

The admiration for India and Indian products was not limited to their products but can be seen also in literary works, such as epistolary novels. Besides the famous *Lettres d'Amabed* (1772) by Voltaire which talks about an Indian couple, it is interesting to also mention another novel linked to the Indian craze, that is *Lettres d'un Indien à Paris*[8] (1789) by Louis-Antoine Caraccioli. The novel tells the story of Zator, a young Indian who, curious about France, travels

[7] Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731-1805) was a member of the *Académie royale des inscriptions et belles lettres*, the King's interpreter for Oriental languages and attached to the King's Library for the collection of Oriental manuscripts. In 1754, he joined the French East India Company as a soldier and sailed to India.

[8] The full title is *Lettres d'un Indien à Paris, à son ami Glazir, Sur les Moeurs Françoises, & sur les Bizarreries du tems. Par l'auteur des Lettres récréatives & morales.*

to Paris. During his stay, in addition to writing letters to his friend Glazir about French manners, customs and habits, he exchanges letters with other friends, family and wives. Despite numerous requests to return, Zator does not want to leave, especially since the Revolution has broken out and he does not want to miss an event he knows is destined to change history. In his work, Caraccioli follows Montesquieu's model and makes his characters discuss themes such as religion, politics and philosophy by using literary devices such as satire and the comparison between cultures. What is interesting, besides the analyses he makes about Louis XV and the governments of most European countries, is the image he provides of India. When Zator arrives in France, he cannot prevent himself from praising French beauties, but he also adds: "Si je ne connoissois pas l'Inde, ce lieu me plairoit infiniment" (Caraccioli, 1789, p. 19). Through his protagonist, and at the beginning of the novel, the author cares to underline that India is as good as France (maybe better?). Caraccioli uses again Zator to address French readers when he makes his protagonist tell his friend Glazir that he hopes that Indian ambassadors made the French understand that "l'Inde n'est point aussi inculte qu'on imagine". He goes on explaining that Indians strive to "combattre des dogmes, ou pour les soutenir à la manière des Européens ; mais [ils] n'exer[cent] pas de critique amère contre ceux qui ne sont pas de [leur] avis, &, en cela, [ils] mérit[ent] d'être loués" (Caraccioli, 1789, p. 170-171). Caraccioli's admiration for India is evident throughout the novel, especially when he describes it through Glazir who reports what a friend said: "que va-t-il (Zator) chercher dans les pays lointains?" – and here we see that Caraccioli did know foreign and distant countries were a relative concept as here "pays lointains" refer to France – "Ignore-t-il donc que la presqu'île de l'Inde que nous habitons, est la plus belle région de l'univers ; que la richesse du sol égale la température, & la douceur du climat […] que notre ciel est unique par sa pureté. Où trouvera-t-il un soleil comparable au nôtre ? Des nuits aussi suaves, des mœurs aussi franches." (Caraccioli, 1789, p. 107).

When Caraccioli writes his novel, the dream of conquering India had already been shuttered but it is clear that the French fascination for this distant land was still alive, and that the general idea the French had was, despite everything, sincerely positive. India is described as a beautiful country, with its own philosophy and religion, and whose people are sweet and wise.

This epistolary novel can be associated to the other ones I previously analyzed since they all witness the sincere interest and the deep fascination France had for the "Orient" that they genuinely praised or used to criticize their own customs and societies in different matters from politics to religion,

and often philosophy. However, I believe that the *Lettres d'un Indien à Paris,* while still comparing many aspects of these two different countries and cultures, tends more than the other novels to draw a parallel between India and France where none of the two is considered better than the other in an absolute sense. Caraccioli criticizes and praises both countries but suggests that, despite being different, they are also similar and equally interesting. In letter XXXII, for example, Zator, who loves India but came to appreciate France too, tells Glazir tha "si les prodigies étoient à [s]a disposition, le premier qu[' il] feroi[t] seroit de joinder l'Inde à la France" (Caraccioli, 1789, p. 154) and that "[il] sai[t] trouver l'Inde au milieu de Paris (Caraccioli, 1789, p. 353).

5. Conclusion

Starting from the Renaissance, the French have seen the "Orient" as a place where imaginary and reality could co-exist, where fantasies and dreams could become true. Orientalism as a science was born in this period, and the so-called orientalists were both those authors who looked at the Other in order to enrich their imagination and satisfy their curiosity towards something and someone that was so different and far from themselves, and those who did want to discover this different world, either for a honest *goût pour l'exotisme* or to provide their country with a better knowledge to conquer these territories (Zerrad, 2020).

In *Orientalism,* Said makes a connection between cultural and literary production and European imperialism and argues that rigorous analyses could not avoid raising the question of the relationship between Orientalism and empire. For Said, Orientalism is a clear expression of the power exercised by one group over the other, it is "all aggression, activity, judgement, will-to-truth and knowledge" as the "Orient" has been "politically, sociologically, military, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" produced by Occidental powers (Said, 1979, p. 3, 204.).

Although it is not possible to deny that in the 18th-century France had political and economic interests in the East – and expansionist aims towards India – I argue that this does not necessarily result in the fact that Orientalism was an expression of power and imperialism. At least not in the 18th century. I make such an argument not only because literary texts, and in particular epistolary novels, show that French readers' interest in "Oriental" countries was sincere, but also for historical and geopolitical reasons. In fact, as argued by Dobie (2002), it is in the 1870s that France developed for the first time in history a coherent national policy of colonial expansion, and it is also in the nineteenth century that colonialism and its impact on the "Orient" were addressed in cultural products, as Orientalist discourses and colonial history were more closely connected. What we encounter in Orientalist representation in the earlier period, according to Dobie, is not a celebration or a record of conquest and occupation but an aestheticized representation of an "Orient" by which they were fascinated and that they were discovering.

Also Aravamudan, who agrees with Said about the ongoing use of

Orientalism to enhance the imperial management of subject peoples since the turn of the nineteenth century, nuances Said's argument when it comes to the 18th century and the Enlightenment. According to Aravamudan, "the Enlightenment was not just bent on the domination of the other but also aimed at mutual understanding across cultural differences, for Enlightenment the self was under critique as much as any "other" (2011, p. 3). *Contra* Said, who states that French obsession with the Orient during the Enlightenment was just a preliminary step to the expansion into North Africa and the Levant that began with the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, Aravamudan argues that Enlightenment is not a "pre-Orientalist" stage leading to a racist 19th century and cannot be a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" as imperial bureaucracies had not been developed yet (2011). Hence, although French authors do not depict the "Orient" in an accurate way and add invented elements to their stories, it would be anachronistic to deem these images ideological, a colonial propaganda that led to the eventual outcome of empire. Additionally, in response to Said who sets the starting point of Western dominion and oppression on the East alternatively in Ancient Greece or in the eighteenth century, I would like to use Aijaz Ahmad's argument. According to him, who denies that there is a line of continuity that connects the Ancient Greeks and the contemporaries when it comes to the way of conceiving Western countries, the "civilization map and geographical imagination of Antiquity were fundamentally different from those that came to be fabricated in post-Renaissance Europe" (Ahmad, 1992, p.183). In the same way, it can be argued that the historical and political context of 18th-century France and 18th-century French readers' ideas of the "Orient" were not the same as those that the French, and other Europeans, developed in the nineteenth century. Despite what stated by Said, belief and valued do not remain essentially the same. What Said says, if it can be true for 19th century and 20th century European countries and people, cannot be attributed automatically to everybody dealing with the "Orient" in all times.

Furthermore, contrary to what stated by Edward Said, 18th-century authors did not show a Manichean vision of an "Orient" in opposition with an "Occident" that deemed itself superior. Also, it is extremely simplistic and not entirely accurate to state that in Oriental-European relations Europe was always "in a position of strength, not to say domination" (Said, 1979, p. 40). As shown by Aravamudan (2011), in the 18th century the East was a source of anxiety for Europeans given the size and power of large empires such as the Persian, the Chinese, the Mughal and the Ottoman. How could

18th-century France – that was far from being an empire - feel superior to and considered itself stronger than an old empire such as the Ottoman one that constantly threatened European borders and was, despite being a commercial ally, a military and geopolitical power? In the 18th century Europe had not yet established its sway over China, Japan, Turkey and India so the relations between Europe and Asia were still finely balanced (Rousseau and Porter, 1989). What is more, how can we talk about colonialism in relation to other empires that France never actually colonized, not even when France itself possessed a colonial empire?

Even in a territory like India, that the French tried so desperately to conquer and colonize, the assiduous study of Indian texts that seemed way older than the Bible and the religious crisis that the discovery of these texts entailed – App says that the French even changed the biblical chronology to make the date of Noah's flood anterior to Indian sacred texts! – shows not only French interest and curiosity towards this culture, but a sense of fear and concern that the convictions they had had for so long might be overturned. How can the French feel really superior to a people whose culture seemed older than theirs, and who were calling into doubts all their certainties?

Furthermore, when we read Chardin and Tavernier's *relations de voyage,* along with critical remarks and stories that betray a certain surprise or perplexity, we cannot help but notice their profound and sincere fascination in front of these magical and mysterious countries. The same can be said when we read what the Jesuits in China wrote about the Chinese. It is impossible not to notice the respect they had for a culture that, while different, was considered extremely advanced in areas that extended from astronomy to mathematics, physics and philosophy. Said argues that, according to European, and particularly British and French authors, "the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"", while "the European in rational, virtuous, mature, "normal""(Said,1979, p. 40). Exotic epistolary novels do contradict this statement. Most often than not, they provide a positive image of "Oriental" characters to whom authors attribute a certain charm, intelligence and good looks. They are not depraved, but passionate. Not childlike, but naif. And the Europeans, and particularly the French, often appear in such novels are corrupt, hypocrite, deceitful, and full of vices and weaknesses. Under the mask of Persian, Turkish and Chinese travelers always hides a French author who uses their naivete and their supposed ignorance of Western culture to criticize French absolutism and Christianity, and the parallels that are systematically made between "Oriental" despots and French kings, and Islamic superstitions

and Catholic credulity seem to suggest that the Other was not so different after all, and that there was not a neat and distinct opposition between the “Orient” and the “Occident”.

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2. Verbal Semantics and Memory in Shaping Narrative Space: Identity and Recollection in My Name is Asher Lev

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Abstract

This chapter explores the interplay between memory, recall, and identity perception through spatial depiction in Chaim Potok's novel *My Name is Asher Lev*, contextualizing the semantic codification of memory as seen in the comparison of Indo-European derivations with Proto-Semitic roots. The primary objective of this chapter is to demonstrate how the underlying values within the verbal class related to memory semantics influence spatial perception, representation, and the dynamics of the novel's creative ecology. To fulfill and validate this research hypothesis, a strictly linguistic-typological method was employed, analyzing key idiomatic branches from Indo-European to Romance languages in relation to core Semitic languages, alongside a narratological and geocritical analysis of Potok's work.

This study reveals that the verbal semantic values associated with memory in Indo-European languages maintain a strictly teleological aspect in their verbal classes, with Romance branches preserving a directional prepositional system. In contrast, Semitic languages assign a strongly deontic charge to the verbal classes related to memory. In relation to Potok's novel, understanding the construction of space and spatial perception within the Hasidic Jewish community directly stems from an understanding of the semantic value shaping mnemonic discourse.

Following this, an examination will address how the deontic values of memory interact with narrative loci as vehicles for geographic recollection in identity formation.

Keywords: ***Chaim Potok, Geocriticism, Humanistic geography, Spatial turn, memory, literary criticism, Asher Lev, textual analysis, linguistic typology, synchronic typology***

1. Introduction

1.1 Preliminary considerations

1.1.1 Memory and recall

In all systems of knowledge preservation and reproduction, memory has constituted a central and a formal core to each of them. This study aims to merely scratch the surface of this immense theme, which is central not only to religious narration but also to narrative *stricto sensu*. It explores the close relationship between the Talmud and Potok's literary aesthetics, focusing precisely on their respective forms of *memory*[1] in analytical correlation to *locus* representations throughout the novel *My name is Asher Lev*. Memory is a constitutive element of Talmudic work as it represents (1) a tool for the continuation of tradition, as well as ensuring (2) the intergenerational transmission of works and teachings by rabbinic sages, such as the Amoraim and Tannaim, and (3) it has enabled the transmission of the social and cultural heritage of historical experiences,

[1]The exegetical problem related to the contextual translation of certain complex terms in ancient Aramaic lies in the difficulty of accurately conveying the meanings and nuances of words and phrases in this Semitic language, which is rich in polysemy and specific cultural contexts. Ancient Aramaic, used from the IX century BCE to the III century CE, features a linguistic structure characterized by an extensive system of triconsonantal roots. From these roots, various verbal and nominal forms are derived through the addition of prefixes, suffixes, and infixes. This inflectional morphology allows for a high density of information but complicates translation into modern languages, where cultural connotations and semantic nuances might not have direct equivalents. Furthermore, ancient Aramaic is influenced by the historical and geographical contexts in which it was used, varying significantly among different regional dialects. These factors require exegetes to have a profound understanding not only of the language itself but also of the cultural and historical context to produce translations that faithfully reflect the original intent of the texts. In Biblical Hebrew, the second person singular imperative form of the verb "to remember" (root ז-כ-ר) is זָכוֹר (zakhór). The imperative is formed by removing the imperfect prefix and adjusting the vocalization, often using short, accented vowels. For the root ז-כ-ר, the masculine singular imperative becomes זָכוֹר (zakhór), while the feminine form may vary slightly. A famous example is the command זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ (*Zakhór et-yom haShabbat le-kaddesho*) "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). The imperative in Biblical Hebrew is used in the second person and is directly derived from the triconsonantal root with the addition of specific vowels to indicate the command. Hence, this verb has an inner deontic value which is strictly bonded to its moral purpose.

subsequently forming the historical cornerstone of (4) prayers and specific rituals of the Jewish religion. Finally, (5) memory is closely linked to personal identity, tied to the legacy of the communal experience that identifies *Klal Yisrael* peoplehood, deeply connected to their ancestors, roots, and history as a foundation for maintaining a sense of identity in the pure spirit of continuity with the past.

However, biological memory — or rather, the entire neurophysiological complex that fixes lived experiences on a chemical-physical level — is by nature a fragile means: indeed, as it could be happened to everyone, at some point in their existence, to forget an object, an appointment, a name, etc. Premising that this epistemological tool has a procedural fragility (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010), the discourse revolves around a desirable stabilization. Along with all the historical-anthropological developments that have ensued from it, writing has constituted how acquired knowledge can be truly stabilized on a medium, so that future generations could benefit from the past experiences of their ancestors.

It is equally necessary to preface that the occidental, contemporary concept of memory diverges substantially from the concept of memory shown in the sacred texts of the main monotheistic religions. This issue will sign the main discrimination method in investigating Potok novel, standing out from the concept of memory in occidental set of values in relation to *Zakhor*. *Memory* holds profound deontic and normative significance. This form of remembrance transcends mere recollection, serving as a dynamic process that fortifies the collective identity and continuity of the Jewish people (Braga, 2023). *Klal Yisrael* form a nation throughout its ethos mainly, while the territory of its people signs the crowning of its perilous unwanted wandering. *Zakhor* preserves and transmits religious laws, ethical teachings, and cultural traditions across generations, ensuring that the wisdom of the past informs the present and shapes the future, e.g., from (*Dt. 32: 7*, 2024), "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you". Moreover, in Deuteronomy 8:2 ("Remember the long way that your God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years, in order to test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts: whether you would keep the divine commandments or not"), 8:11 ("Take care lest you forget your God and fail to keep the divine commandments, rules, and laws which I enjoin upon you today") and (*Dt. 32: 7*, 2024) there two verbal form used to identify *memory*: (1) the triconsonantal root *Z-K-R* (רכז) conjugated at the imperative mood in (*Dt. 32: 7*, 2024) and (2)

the triconsonantal root *Sh-K-Ch* (חִכָּשׁ) conjugated at the *Yiqtol* mood in (*Dt., 8 2, 11*, 2024). By anchoring contemporary practices in historical experiences and moral lessons, memory leads the community through present challenges while maintaining a deep connection to its heritage. In contemporary times, memory holds both a conservative value (although it is embellished with nostalgia for a past laden with folkloric values) and a value of political activism likewise, both included under the semantic dome of duty (deontic label).

> Invariably the relations between the practices of memory and the practices of politics are compacted and difficult to unravel. The injunction to "remember," determined in every instance by the social locations of those involved, inevitably raises important questions of ethics. One of our aims is to critically address the memory–politics nexus, demonstrating the diverse ways in which memory works both in the public sphere and in everyday life. As we have implied, what constitutes the formal domain of politics is itself in question, partly as a consequence of the operations of memory (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010).

Memory can be considered as the experiential baggage of a specific community in a specific environment: spatial references become sources for myths and legends, from which moral teachings can be drawn, or simply to carry forward metaphors and allegories that hold more cultural than historical weight. The narration of spaces in a diachronic sense leads to the conception of language as the means for anabatic and catabatic movements within the narrative tissue. The very act of narration implies, strictly, the narration of a place: the logical pointer of human perception can no longer be separated from the subject-environment interaction. There is, moreover, an inherent ambivalence when it comes to memory, especially if this concept concerns the Jewish people: there is undoubtedly a personal, private significance, where memory intertwines with the emotional sphere, with something from the past that will not return, or with a lost, distant place; and there is also a collective significance. Nevertheless, this experiential heritage has a different value from one society to another. It is therefore necessary to underline properly the semantic edges within it works and how its deeper meaning is basically different from *Klal Yisrael* to occidental thought.

1.1.2 Method

The typological analysis method employed in this chapter examines semantic roots and verbal values associated with memory and recollection in both Indo-European and Semitic languages, drawing comparisons of lexical roots and morphological structures with distinct historical evolutions. This method enables an examination of how cultures and languages differentially express the concept of memory, with implications for spatial perception and representation in Chaim Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev*. By integrating comparative and philological analysis, this method highlights how Indo-European languages, through a teleological orientation, conceptualize memory as a goal-oriented process, while Semitic languages incorporate a deontic charge, associating memory with moral or obligatory values. This approach elucidates how these linguistic distinctions influence the protagonist's interpretation of memory and space within a Hasidic Jewish context. Through a narratological and geocritical lens, typological analysis further explores how Potok's use of memory-laden loci creates "memory spaces" that are not mere backdrops but symbols of collective obligation, thereby contrasting with spaces of individual memory.

The methodological value of synchronic typology thus proves essential for accurately interpreting the novel and its spatial construction, as it underscores the scientific significance of linguistic evidence in understanding how language-based memory connotations shape Asher's identity and perception of cultural space. By employing this typological framework, this analysis demonstrates how memory and spatial representation are interconnected within Potok's narrative, where synchronic linguistic structures and their diachronic counterparts offer a critical lens for uncovering identity dynamics and the protagonist's conflict between communal expectations and personal autonomy.

Typological analysis is a comparative linguistic method used to examine and categorize the structural and semantic features of different language families by identifying patterns and variations that reveal deeper cultural and cognitive frameworks. This method involves analyzing both synchronically (within a particular time frame) and diachronically (across historical development) the fundamental roots and morphological structures associated with specific semantic fields—in this case, memory and recollection. Typological analysis examines how verbal roots, morphological processes, and syntactic patterns across languages convey distinct conceptualizations of universal themes, such as memory, obligation, and spatial orientation,

providing insight into how cultures encode and interpret experience. By tracing the semantic evolution of memory across Indo-European and Semitic languages, typology allows for an understanding of how language structures shape perception and meaning, which, when applied to literature, unveils underlying cultural tensions and thematic structures.

1.2 Investigating semantic values and labels of Proto-Semitic and Semitic √*Z-K-R* in its diachronic evolution and in comparative analysis with Proto-Indo-European philology to understand its implication in Potok's novel

1.2.1 Proto-Indo-European branch

To understand how remembrance and recollection work in *My name is Asher Lev*, it is crucial to grasp the primary semantic boundaries of memory concept as perceived and conveyed in the novel from a Western perspective. In Indo-European languages (and consequently their cultures), the concept of memory carries fundamentally a different semantic value compared to Semitic languages. This difference stems from two distinct typological components: the verbal system in Indo-European languages involves a set of teleological allocations, whereas in Semitic languages, it is centered around deontic allocations. This distinction profoundly influences the ways in which Indo-European and Semitic cultures structure and interpret the act of *remembering* and *memory* itself. The semantic *questio* take place from a meaning misplacement. It necessary to point out that the usage of term *memory* has constitutive importance and a determined meaning for western civilization since its etymology derives from a different ancestor from Hebraic language. Proto-Indo-European (henceforth, PIE) is the main ancestor for Germanic and Romance languages, yet its thematic core for describing the act of remembering is based on the zero-grade form **mn̥-*[2]. Zero-grade forms are consonantal and thematic meaning cores that can be modified by epenthetic processes to generate lemmas. In this case, the variant that is investigated derives from the first form. Throughout epenthetic adjunction, the core admits different

[2] See: https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html. This core has three sub-meaning derived, i.e. *mn̥-[1,2,3,4].

meanings: (1) suffixation of the core group (*mn̥- → *mn̥-ti-); (2) The PIE root ∗*men−* in its zero-grade form becomes *mn̥- with *n̥* representing a nasal vowel. This root combines with the nominal suffix *−ti* to form *mn̥-ti-*, which creates an abstract noun in PIE. As this form evolves into Proto-Italic, a key change is the vocalization of the nasal vowel *n̥* into *e*, resulting in *menti-*. This vocalization facilitates easier pronunciation compared to the original consonantal nasal combination. The Latin word *mentio* evolved from *mēns* through the addition of the suffix *-tiō*, which forms abstract nouns indicating an action or result. The base *mēns* (mind) combined with *-tiō* (this radical group shifts the meaning from substantive to abstractive infinite form) to become *mention* (the act of mentioning, act of memory or remembrance). This morphological process involves the straightforward addition of the suffix without significant alteration to the root.

1.2.1.1 In Latin

The transition from *mentio (substative)* to *meminisse* (predicative) in Latin involves distinct morphological and semantic shifts. *Mentio*, a noun derived from the root *men-* with the suffix *−tio*, denotes "mention" or "act of remembering." This form is indicative of an abstract concept or action. In contrast, *meminisse* (perfective[3]) is a verb derived from the same root through a process of reduplication (where *men-* becomes *mem-*) and the addition of the suffix *−isse*, which forms a perfect tense verb meaning to *remember*. This morphological transformation highlights the verb's function in expressing a completed action or state of remembering. Therefore, the perfective value shown by the Latin predicative *meminisse* is way more telic-related that precisely deontic and to illustrate this nature of *meminisse*, it is possible to refer to a variety of Latin texts that highlight the verb's emphasis on the result or ongoing significance of remembering. In Cicero's *De Officiis* (Book 3, Chapter 22), he writes «*Meminisse debemus, ut utilitates eorum quae facta sunt* […]», which underscores the importance of remembering past actions in understanding their ongoing utility and relevance. Similarly, in *Pro Caelio* (Chapter 39), Cicero states «*Meminisse dico non ut hoc solum sit, sed ut hoc fieri non possit* […]», reflecting on how remembrance influences present judgments and actions. In *Tusculan Disputations* (Book 1, Chapter 34), Cicero

[3] The Latin verb *meminisse* predominantly exhibits a telic aspect rather than a deontic one. As a perfective form, it indicates a completed action with ongoing relevance.

uses «*Meminisse hominis est, ut effectus aliquos sentiat*, […]» showing how the act of remembering has a significant impact on human thought and behavior.

Virgil's *Aeneid* offers contextual examples of the telic aspect of memory. In Book 1, Line 626, the line «*Talia flammato secum dea corda volutat, nox erat, et terris late lateque vaganti, densa fremunt silvae, noctisque silentia ruptis* […]», illustrates how the goddess's thoughts and the effects of past events shape the present narrative. In Book 6, Line 522, Virgil notes, «*Fata viam invenient*», indirectly connecting the influence of remembered fates on current actions, reflecting the telic aspect of memory. In Book 9, Line 108, the preparation of faces and men for future events, shaped by past decisions, highlights the lasting impact of memory on the unfolding narrative.

While Ovid's works also reflect the telic value of *meminisse*. In *Metamorphoses* (Book 15, Line 402), he writes, «*Meminisse queat quae facta sunt*,» indicating that remembering past events results in ongoing effects. Similarly, in *Tristia* (Book 3, Elegy 4), Ovid uses «*Meminisse queat, ut lacrimae tunc fuissent* […]», to convey how the act of remembering past sorrows continues to influence the present emotional state. Tacitus's Annals (Book 3, Chapter 60) features «*Meminisse meminerat, quid egisset*, […] » indicating how past memories influence current narratives. In *Histories* (Book 2, Chapter 45), Tacitus writes, «*Meminisse adhibuit, ut res gestae recordaretur* […]» illustrating how the remembrance of past deeds affects present decisions. Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (Book 7, Chapter 49) includes «*Meminisse videtur, ut hoc probetur* […]», demonstrating the lasting impact of remembered facts on current evaluations. Suetonius, in *The Twelve Caesars* (Julius Caesar, Chapter 88), writes, «*Meminisse potuit, ut res gestas recollegit* […]» showing how remembrance of past deeds shapes historical understanding. Augustine of Hippo discusses memory in *Confessions* (Book 1, Chapter 4) with «*Meminisse autem, ut intellegamus quid sumus* […]» reflecting on how remembering past experiences influences personal identity. In *De civitate dei* (Book 11, Chapter 1), Augustine uses «*Meminisse dicuntur, ut novae res fiant* […]» showing the role of memory in understanding divine and historical events.[4]

[4] Manuscripts and codex used for this investigation cf.: Vergil, *Aeneid: Vat. Lat.* 3225, (https://digi.vatlib.it/); Plautus: *Ambros. F. 205 inf*, (https://www.biblioteca-ambrosiana.it/); Ennius: *Fragmenta Antiqua*, (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/); Catullus: *Veron. V,* (http://www.bibliotecacapitolare.it/); Cicero: *Vat. Lat.* 5757, (https://digi.vatlib.it/); Suetonius: *Par. Lat. 6115*, (https://gallica.bnf.fr/); Boethius: *Bas. F III* 15, (https://ub.unibas.ch/).

1.2.1.2 In Ancient Greek

The extended form of **mn̥-* become **mnā-*, and it has a contracted from **mnaə-*. The Proto-Indo-European root **mn̥-* undergoes significant phonological changes as it evolves into historical Indo-European languages such as Ancient Greek (Adrados *et al*., 2010). The expansion of the root from *mn̥-* to *mnā-* involves the addition of a vocalic element, represented by *-ā*. This process of epithesis, or insertion, facilitates the formation of more complex morphological and grammatical variants (Adrados *et al*., 2010). The phonological lengthening with *-ā* helps maintain clarity and stability in the derivation of related words, allowing for a smoother transition to more elaborate forms (Adrados *et al*., 2010). Conversely, contraction to mnaə- involves the reduction of vowel elements, resulting in a more compact and simplified root form. This process, known as syncope or contraction, reduces the presence of intermediate vowels to better fit the phonological patterns of subsequent languages. The presence of -ə- in *mnaə*-reflects an intermediate stage where the root underwent phonological modifications to adapt to linguistic changes over time. In Ancient Greek, these phonological transformations are evident in the formation of terms such as μνήμη (*mnēmē*), meaning *memory*. The expansion to *mnā-* is reflected in the Greek form μνήμη, where the root *mnē-* is extended to fit the morphological needs of the Greek language. Although the specific form *mnaə-* is not directly attested, the reduction of vowels and the phonological simplification are visible in the final form μνήμη. In Ancient Greek, the verb μιμνήσκω (*mimnēskō*), meaning *to remember* or *to recall*, primarily embodies a deontic value rather than a telic one. This shift from the PIE root *mn̥-* to the Greek form illustrates a transition from a telic to a deontic concept. Initially, the root evolved into μνήμη (*mnēmē*), which represents *memory* as a telic state — a result of having stored and retained information. This telic notion implies a completed state or final outcome (Napoli, 2019). In contrast, the verb μνημονεύω (*mnēmoneúō*), derived from the same root, involves an ongoing process of actively engaging with and recalling past information. This process highlights a deontic value, focusing on the action or duty of remembering rather than a final, completed state. Thus, while μνήμη reflects a static, result of memory, μιμνήσκω captures the dynamic and active nature of the recollection process. This deontic aspect is evident in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where μιμνήσκω is used to describe the act of reflecting as one recalls the truth: «ἐνθυμοῦμαι ὡς μιμνήσκω τὴν ἀλήθειαν» («*I reflect as I recall the truth* […]»). Similarly, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the use of μιμνήσκω to describe the act of remembering a discourse underscores the continuous action

of recollection: «[…] ὅτι μιμνήσκω τὸν λόγον» (« […] *that I remember the discourse* […]»)[5]. Thus, while μνήμη denotes a final state of memory, μιμνήσκω emphasizes the dynamic, active process of remembering, demonstrating the shift from telic to deontic values in the Greek conceptualization of memory.

1.2.1.3 Romance branch

The semantic and morphological divergence between *meminisse* in Latin and its equivalents in modern Romance languages (*ricordare* in Italian, *recordar* in Spanish, *souvenir* in French) can be explained through an analysis of linguistic evolution processes. *Meminisse*, a perfective and defective verb in classical Latin, has morphological limitations that led to its replacement by forms derived from other roots. The Latin *recordari*, combining the prefix *re-* (*again*, *back*) and *cor, cordis* (*heart*), indicates an emotional recall of memory. This deponent reflexive verb evolved in Italian as *ricordare* and in Spanish as *recordar* through phonological and morphological regularizations, maintaining the original syntactic structure and semantic function. In French, *souvenir* derives from *subvenire*, with a connotation of assistance or memory recall. In Old French, *souvenir* underwent a semantic reinterpretation, becoming the reflexive verb *se souvenir de*. The grammaticalization occurred in the case *subvenire* to *sa souvenire de* shows its typical patterns (literary *to come to* [*help*], with these attestations in Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 27, «Tanta est necessitas, ut non possit subveniri […]» and in Seneca, *De Constantia* 3.5, « Quod si omnes velint subvenire […]»): (1) semantic bleaching is evident in this case and it shows the passage from a precise meaning of necessity to a passage that means *to remember*; there a (2) phonological erosion and an addition of morphological particles such that reflects the point (1) (e.g., *sub-* has a teleological charge and it changes into a reflexive mark *se*, therefore it changes the focus of the predicative that face a mutation from *agent*-related to *patient*-related verb. Afterwards, this teleological shift needs to be defined with a prepositional mark found in *de*. The motion charge from the locative proclitic *sub-* is thus extroflexed into the lemma and transformed into a prepositional form. This change also leads to viewing the verb as an analytical form, in

[5] Greek quotation used to describe this linguistic process has been obtained with the help of Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (source: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Urb.gr.1) and the codex used are *Codex urbinas* (*Urb. gr. 1*) and *Codex Laurentianus* (*Laur. gr. 10*, source: http://www.bml.firenze.sbn.it/rinascimentovirtuale/pannello14.shtm).

contrast to the synthetic version in Latin (Dell'Oro, 2022; Grandi & Mauri, 2022; Napoli, 2019). This change resulted from phonological processes such as metathesis, apocope, and syncope, and grammaticalization, where a deponent reflexive form becomes a transitive or pronominal verb (Grandi & Mauri, 2022). The transformation of *subvenire* into *souvenir* through phonetic mutations typical of the transition from Latin to French (e.g., vowel reduction and loss of intervocalic consonants) exemplifies these changes. The same process is documented for the Italian verb *occorrere* (transl. [1] *to be needed*, or [2] *to need* and [3] *to occur*). In its passage from non-modal verb to modal verb there is a stage of its evolution that testify its involvement into memory and recall (Dell'Oro, 2022). Its etymology derives from Latin *occurrere*, contract form of *ob* (transl. *against*) and *curro* (transl. *to run*) (Dell'Oro, 2022): in this verb, likewise French *se souvenir de* and its Latin origin *subvenire*, there is a prepositional clitic working as a mark of deictic relation between subjects or between subjects-environment followed by a teleologic verb. As it has been stated before, this pre-modal value of recall, remembrance or memory has been attested in Francesco Da Buti, *Commento al Purgatorio*: «[…] *e questo finge, perché nolli occorrea di far menzione più d'alcuna persona* […]» and in Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, B. 1, chap. 83 «[…] *avendo narrato delle nuove tirannie che ssi cominciavano in Toscana, ci occorre a fare memoria d'un'altra* […]» (Dell'Oro, 2022). In modern Romance languages, the reduplicative clitic (*ri-*,*re-* in Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) and the reflexive particles (observable in French and Romanian) subtend a verbal ellipsis of a teleologic verb in relation to speaker or sentence focus. Yet, it is possible to extend a research hypothesis from this premise and it is necessary to confirm it with forthcoming, synchronic and diachronic typology study. Anyway, checking this proposal with the uniformitarian principle analytical lenses (Grandi & Mauri, 2022; Napoli, 2019), it is possible to confirm that this form is exactly coherent with PIE verb phrase *mens dhē-*, transl. *to set mind*, or the suffixed zero-grade form *dhə-mn̥* (attested in Ancient Greek *thema*, transl. *thing placed*[6]) (Adrados *et al.*, 2010).

1.2.2 The Proto-Semitic and Semitic branch

The triconsonantal root √z-k-r has a long history in Semitic languages, documented in numerous ancient inscriptions and manuscripts and its semantic

[6] See: https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html#dhē-.

connotation has not barely changed during its evolution. Its attestations show the stability of this root throughout the evolution of Semitic languages and related cultures. It is important to preface this chapter by stating that it does not aim to conduct a typological investigation of Semitic languages. Instead, the goal is to briefly overview the history of this consonantal lemma as it appears in various historical records. By examining its usage across different civilizations that have preserved it, we can better understand the differences between its semantic evolution and that of Proto-Indo-European languages. In Akkadian, the root *zakāru* is attested in the *Code of Hammurabi* (𒍝𒅗𒊒, za-ka-ru, *MS Louvre AO* 10237) and in the *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib* (𒅗𒊒𒍝𒅗, *za-ka-ru*, *RINAP 3/1, 3/2*). In Ugaritic, it appears in *Tablet RS 24.244* (𐎇𐎋𐎗, z-k-r, KTU 1.23). In Phoenician, it is documented in the *Inscription of Ahiram* (𐤆𐤊𐤓, z-k-r, *KAI 1*) and the *Stele of Kilamuwa* (𐤆𐤊𐤓, z-k-r, KAI 24) (Donner & Röllig, 2002).

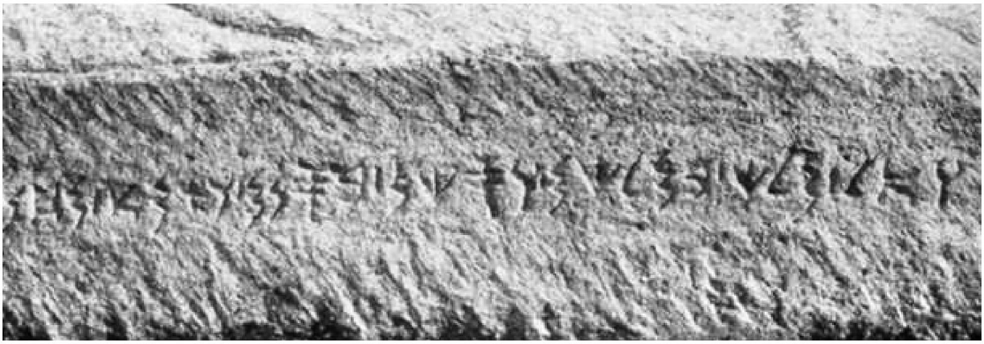

Figure 1. Example obtained from an archive picture of Stele of Ahiram (KAI1, Museum of Beirut) where it is possible to find the attestation of triconsonantal root in phoenician alphabet.

In Moabite, it appears in the *Mesha Stele* (𐤅𐤄𐤏𐤆𐤊𐤓 𐤊𐤌𐤔, transl. «*w-h-'z-k-r kmš*», *CIS II 189*) (Luca, 2008). In Biblical Hebrew, the root רכז (z-k-r) is present in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (רכז, z-k-r, 4QGen-Exod; 4QDeut) and in the *Leningrad Codex* (חֹנ־תֶא םיִהֹלֱא רֹכְּזִיַּו, vayizkor Elohim et-Noach). In Aramaic, the root רַכד (d-k-r) is attested in the *Targum Onkelos* (יִנְּתַּכַדְּת וְיִדְּכוּ, transl. «[…] *u-k'dein t'dakkarni*, *MS British Library, Add. 27031*) and in the *Babylonian Talmud* (רכד, d-k-r, *Berakhot 32b)*. In Classical Arabic, the root رَكَذ, *dha-ka-ra*) is found in the *Qur'an* (فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ, transl. "*fadhkuruni adhkurkum*", Mushaf of Uthman, Topkapi MS) and in the *Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari* (ركذ,

dh-k-r, MS Fatih 1015). In modern Semitic languages, in Hebrew the root זכר (z-k-r) is used in defuncts commemoration in Ashkenazi Jew community for *Hazkarat Neshamot* [יִזְכּוֹר, cf. «*yi*-(z)(k)-*o*-(r)»] and in modern *siddurim* (זִכָּרוֹן, «*zikaron*»), while in Modern Arabic the √*dh-k-r* derivatives frequently appears in media. It should be used to demonstrate the main research hypothesis, which aims to scrutinize the semantic values of movement in PIE memory semantics in contrast to the stative, place-oriented, and deontically labeled verbs and nouns in Semitic languages some excerpts from Arabic language. *Qu'ran*, *Surah Al-Baqarah*, *ayah* 148-152 needs of a particular attention. In this short analysis it has not been investigate any form of coherence between texts, theological analysis and religious beliefs, fact that could render this investigation guilty of speciousness and coherently incoherent with mainstream Orientalist mis-lesson (Farrin, 2010). From its very beginning, the spatial references already appreciable in ayah (148) « وَلِكُلٍّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيهَا ۖ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ۚ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ» [«*And for everyone is a direction toward which he turns. So, race to [all that is] good. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you forth [for judgment] all together. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent*»]; and in (149) « وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ۖ وَإِنَّهُ لَلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ ۗ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ» [« *So from wherever you go out [for prayer], turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Haram, and indeed, it is the truth from your Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what you do*»] and they are converging indeed, and finally, in (152): « فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ» [« *So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me*»]. In *ayah* 148 and 149 it is appreciable an adverb (see *wherever*) used to generalize ambiguity in spatial allocation. By the way, in Arab this form has been rendered with two different terms: (1) أَيْنَ مَا, 'ayna ma, i.e., literally *where* (abstractive) reinforced by empathic, indefinitive particle ما; and (2) مِنْ حَيْثُ, min ḥaythu, which derives from √ḥ-y-th (ح-ي-ث) which means *where* with a geographic-locative label. Therefore memory, represented by imperative conjugation ذْكُرْ has a place-oriented deontic value.

As it is appreciable in this abridged investigation, Proto-Semitic and Semitic languages charge with deontic labels and moral values the recollection acts. Thus, memory changes its connotation from PIE memory-related lemmas formation, which is exclusively movement-oriented and teleologically defined, and a Semitic root formation, being even based on two different cognitive stages in verbal and substantival structures and meaning conveyance. Yet, memory has its value wherever the subject is collocated, and its moral,

inner, and fundamental statement is to recall as a fulfillment of its duty. This deontic imperative stands out prominently in a Semitic language. Therefore, its differentiation from the Western conception of remembrance will help (as it is hoped) to study and investigate the Potok novel. Finally, it must be kept firmly in mind that the history of the people of David is indissolubly linked with the experience of exile, with the awareness derived from being uprooted from their own land. The forced removal from their native land, the political and cultural consequences of an imposed policy, can lead a people to lose their cultural, religious roots and the peculiarities that define their constituent traits. During the period known in historiography as the Babylonian Captivity, the Jewish people were led to a cultural flattening induced by the necessity of having to survive under their new masters (Cohen, 2000). Ezra, a skilled Sopher of the Torah – as Abraham Cohen recalls – managed to give new life to the Jewish community in exile and in the land of Judea, and he also realized that the various dispersed branches of the national tree (which resided sparsely in the lands of Canaan, in Egypt, and in Persia) had to be centered around a solid religiosity (Cohen, 2000).

2. The theoretical framework and literary analysis

2.1 Spatiality, perceptive implications and geocriticism: from Halbwachs to My name is Asher Lev

Thus, for the Jewish religion the homonormativity imposed by the law of the sacred scriptures is that "law of fire" capable of identifying without any doubt a Jew from any other individual belonging to a different religious belief or a particular people. Without focusing on the issues regarding Pharisaic or Sadducean schools (for reasons of time and coherence with the theme), it urges to mention the *Tannaim* Hillel (a Pharisee, founder of the House of Hillel), which considered the orally acquired knowledge from the masters as a strict foundation in his school, knowledge that is still preserved among Eastern peoples today. Therefore, memory becomes the instrument of knowledge *par excellence* (Cohen, 2000). The character Asher (a reference to the patriarch of the eponymous tribe in the Old Testament) in Potok's novel feels the weight of his own history, the moral and ethical implications dictated by his religion, and similarly feels the burden of a heavy family heritage, composed of almost prophetic and monolithic figures. Right from the first pages, Asher clearly explains his situation:

> My mother descended from a family of prominent Hasidim of Sadagora, devout Jews who were followers of the great Hasidic dynasty of Eastern Europe founded by Israel of Ruzhin. On her father's side, my mother could trace her family back to the Rebbe of Berdichev, one of the most holy Hasidic leaders. [...] The little Asher Lev was a junction point of two important lineages, the pinnacle, so to speak, of a reproductive triangle of Jewish potential and burdened with Jewish responsibility (Potok, 2009, pp. 20–21)

The character of this novel represents a singular premise to a wider consideration about homonormativity religious implications in relation to aesthetical awakening of a *gift*: Asher recognizes a gift within himself, a

personal peculiarity of his character. However, this gift leads him to be considered blasphemous: (1) being immersed in a strictly observant reality like that of the Hasidic community, a fact amplified by his patrilineal and matrilineal heritage; (2) the themes he addresses, e.g., *The Brooklyn Crucifixion*, are not only *inappropriate* subjects for a Jew to portray but are themes that, if addressed by a Jew, can be even more offensive to a Christian observer (Potok, 2009). Hence, that "law of fire", which was supposed to separate the people of Israel from others, also managed to curb deviations within itself, recognizing them and ensuring they were self-recognized. This awareness arose spontaneously within the individual, and Asher represents the literary device skillfully used by the author. Finally, it can be asserted that the Jewish religion bases part of its normative framework on the experience of the Exodus, which, in general terms, translates as that experience of expropriation of a fundamental existential component for any people: their own land. The very definition of a people (i.e., the act of being defined, their *raison d'être*) derives from the belonging to a land, from being-there-for-the-world as inhabitants-for-a-land (broadening Heidegger's concept of *being* as *in-der-Welt-sein*). Having lost all geographic reference to their native land, the vivid imagery of the Scriptures compensates for this lack, ensuring solidity within the religious sphere. The focal shift that defines "the people of Israel" as inhabitants of *Eretz Israel* it is changed into "the people of Israel" as the people professing the religion of Israel. It is undeniable that the people of Israel long for *Eretz Israel* as their promised land, but they unite the community around the solidity of their religious beliefs and customs. Therefore, this geographic absence leads to the merging of worship for the divine, which is the moral precept, with the worship of the universalization of the "everywhere": religious righteousness and adherence to the precepts of the Halakhah are valuable not because they are performed in the land of Israel, but because they are performed by a believer. This religious formalization is the cultural legacy of the dramatic history of these people, deprived of their own nation. Memory, therefore, ensures the maintenance of this millennia-old defense mechanism. According to the research premise of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Halbwachs (mindful of WWI facts due to its physical presence) states that the geographical and cultural uprooting he had personally undergone contributed to his understanding of the complexities involved in the process of memorialization and the dialectical relations existing between individual and collective memory (Apfelbaum, 2010). Uprooting consist as trauma and therefore undermine mnemonic stabilization (Apfelbaum, 2010). Moreover, as people moved away and were cut off from their communities and their territorial, cultural, and

social roots, they began to exist as individuals, as separate autonomous entities (Apfelbaum, 2010). Thus, memory can merge the passage of traumatic events, individuals and their communal experience to set a stricter bound that are converging into *identity*, e.g., one of *Arba Parashot*, the *Parashot Zakhor* in memory of Amalek's atrocities (Bleich, 2022). In *My name is Asher Lev*, the author commences yet from the *incipit* to scheme a modulization of mnemonic brief appearances (Potok, 2009, pp. 17, 18, 19) using a precise verb: to *fix*[7]. Each predicative used is directly related to a particular event that has been thereafter labelled in *collective, memorial*, and *individual*: (1) pray at the Synagogue (*collective*); (2) Synagogue and *Shabbat* (*collective*); (3) *Yom Kippur* celebration (*memorial*); (4) *Sukkot* celebration (*memorial*); (5) *Chanukkah* celebration (*memorial*); (6) *Shabbat* and ritual lunches (*individual*); (7) *Shabbat* e *piyyut* chant *Yāh ribbôn ʿalam* (*individual*). Building this textual and metaphoric *Menorah*, the author passes from the public/*collective* to private/*individual* spheres of competency, and tries to destitute the teleological, western label for memory *fixing* it, therefore annulling its movement's trajectory to redefine its action boundaries. Moreover, as the author *fix* the memory and its stream in this metaphor, the young Asher *fix* his father memories portraying him during his reading session or during the prayers. Memory defines identity, and even existence submit to *remembrance*. Losing the memory signifies to lose even one's own existence: e.g., [Asher] «But Dad, is the leader of Russia bad to the Jews? [Asher's father] «Stalin?», he said quickly in Hebrew. «May his name and memory be erased» and he continued bitterly in English: «Stalin comes from the Sitra Achra» (Potok, 2009, pp. 40–41). Asher's father condemns Stalin to *damnatio memoriæ* using a ritual sentence that has an inner reference to Sacred Texts: the form used is «*Yimakh shemo vezikhro*», which is a powerful reference to Amalek's atrocities cited in (*Dt. 25, 19*, 2024) « Therefore, when your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!» and likewise related to (*Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:2*, 2024). Potok in these lines trace a parallelism where Russia is accounted as the nation where a *new* Amalek leads its people against Jews, meanwhile USA is accounted as safe place to stay. The verb יִמַּח (*yimakh*) in the Hebrew phrase “יִמַּח שְׁמוֹ וְזִכְרוֹ» (Yimakh shemo vezikhro, «May his name and memory be erased […]») is derived from the root מ-ח-ה (mem-chet-he), meaning *to erase* or *to obliterate*. Conjugated in the Niphal binyan, which often denotes the passive voice, יִמַּח

[7] See: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fix. Meaning values used is B2, with structure *to verb* + obj. + [**to sth**], or [**at swh.**].

is in the third person masculine singular imperfect (future), expressing a wish or intention for something to be erased (Van Pelt, 2023). Morphologically, the form יִמָּחֶ includes the prefix י (yod) for the future tense and a dagesh forte in the mem, characteristic of the Niphal[8] (Van Pelt, 2023). Russia is identified as the geographical marker for remembering Amalek's atrocities and facts, developing therefore a narrative *locus* that build a semantic dyad between past to narrative present in correlation to space: this dyad is present elsewhere in the novel. The Amalekian interpretation of Stalin recurs throughout the novel, becoming a true *leitmotif*, and this reading is often woven with a central, elusive thread: the warp of the Sitra Achra (Potok, 2009, pp. 52, 57, 69, 71, 76, 77, 81). Russia therefore becomes the counterpart of elsewhere-ness references complex, literally a *sitra achra* (i.e., transl. *the other side*). Especially, this dyad is dissolved in (Potok, 2009, p. 81) where the author describe Stalin death and Rivkeh (Asher's mother) recited «*Ken yo'vdu kol oyeveikha Adonai*», transl. «*So may all Your enemies perish, O Lord!*» (*Judges 5:31*, 2024). Moreover, Chapter five *incipit* (Potok, 2009, pp. 108 - 109) signs a boundary in character development and as well as in novel. The Vienna passage signs cracking point in the young Asher beliefs, perceiving his first, real uprooting feeling. Hence, premising that a significant portion of contemporary Jewish-American fiction is pervasively Jewish in its moral insistence and its reference to Judaic texts (Kremer, 1993), in Potok's work, space is depicted as a living fabric of references, serving as a means to understand the millennial tragedy of a wandering people and its modern, atrocious reiterations. This moral and textual embedding underscores the pervasive Jewish identity that defines the narratives and themes, illustrating the deep connection between contemporary experiences and ancient Judaic traditions. Finally, chapter five starts with Library of Alexandria burning represented in an Asher drawing and the climax ends with the representation with ladover building blaze. This depiction serves as a metaphorical elaboration of Asher uprooting trauma from his America environment, its social and emotional implications. Geographical space and narrative space, therefore, interpolate and complement each other through the hermetic adhesive of memory and recollection. The metacognitive environment represented by the diegesis and the concrete, volumetric space of the world converges into a complex epistemological mass, imbued with sacred Judaic tradition and its

[8] Phonologically, יִמָּחֶ is pronounced /jiˈmaχ/, with the stress on the second syllable and the voiceless uvular fricative /χ/ at the end. This verb denotes a complete and intentional erasure, distinct from gradual processes like erosion, and is often used to curse or express the deontic/volitive obliteration of a malicious person's memory.

contemporary aestheticization in the art of the novel. The verbal value of memory, as deduced from the previously conducted typological analysis (§1.2.2), leads to the conception of space as a tangible assembly of moral values to be upheld. Its comprehension lies not only in the knowledge of the sacred text (*in sich*) but also in its application and in the fulfillment of the moral value inherent in the text's words (*für sich*). In conclusion, Jewish tradition deeply intertwines memory, moral values, and physical space. As highlighted in (*Dt. 6: 6-9*, 2024), «*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates*».

3. Conclusions

Through the understanding of the semantic charge of the verb class grouped under the broader set of predicates that encode memory, recollection, and remembrance, it became possible to equally comprehend their specific use within certain cultural and religious communities, starting precisely from a deep and specific understanding of its use. The ability to discern between deontic and teleological value allows the reader to understand the specific use in the text, while also giving the reader the possibility to ascribe a specific significance. In an author like Chaim Potok, who, although belonging to a specific religious community, writes in a language of Indo-European origin, the underlying question of this study was: does the value of memory in Potok's novel refer to reminiscences strictly and uniquely Semitic, or does it point to the theological value of Indo-European origin? Through a scientific and typological definition of the value of memory itself, and the corresponding predicative class, integrated with a geocritical and narratological analysis of the text, it was concluded that the value used by the author is deontic. This leads to the conclusion that, from a strictly cognitive perspective, the linguistic structure alters spatial perception and its encoding, leaving in other languages a value that those languages themselves, in their native form, would not have.

This analysis confirms the research hypothesis by demonstrating that the semantic framing of memory significantly influences spatial perception and the formation of identity within the novel's intricate creative and moral landscape. Through the typological approach, we see how memory, structured by linguistic conventions, shapes not only the protagonist's internal experience but also his interactions with a collective heritage. This approach reveals the dual role of language: it serves both as a tool for preserving cultural continuity and as a medium for expressing individuality within and against that tradition. In *My Name is Asher Lev*, this nuanced linguistic framework deepens our understanding of Asher's inner conflict, showing how language molds the narrative's exploration of artistic rebellion, moral obligation, and self-discovery.

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PART II:

Art, Politics and Literature: the Formation of Identity Landscapes

3. The Etruscan Landscape of the *VITE MARITATA*

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Abstract

Reconstructing the ancient landscape requires a multidisciplinary approach, and the study of the first steps of viticulture in Central Italy makes no exception. Botany and molecular biology can highlight how vine domestication took place through the selection of the most productive plants, while archaeology can provide chronological anchors and clues about the actors involved in the vine dissemination process. Last but not least, ancient artworks and literature can provide us with the living imagery connected to ancient viticulture.

The vine can climb anywhere, from the trees of a dense floodplain forest to the low artificial supports of poles and nets that constitute the rows of vineyards commonly associated with Chianti Tuscan countryside. Until the dismantling of the *mezzadria* landscape after World War II, however, it was just as common to come across viticulture on living supports, or *vite maritata* (literally, "married vine"). According to Emilio Sereni, in ancient Italy the *vite maritata* constitutes the most visible legacy of Etruscan viticulture. This chapter explores some material and literary sources on viticulture and *vite maritata*, with the aim of highlighting a fragile, historical landscape of Central Italy.

The *vite maritata* is now disappearing from the Tuscan countryside and from the collective imagination, and this represents not only an impoverishment of the agricultural landscape but also a potential loss for our understanding of ancient authors, and for the iconographic and iconological interpretation of ancient and medieval works of art.

Keywords: ***Viticulture, vite maritata, Etruscans, ancient landscape***

1. Vitis vinifera: a social climber

Reconstructing the ancient landscape requires a multidisciplinary approach, and the study of the first steps of viticulture makes no exception (Dodd, 2022, p. 443; Motta & Beydler, 2020; Cianferoni, 2012, p. 30). Botany and molecular biology can highlight how vine domestication took place through the selection and hybridization of the most productive plants, while archaeology and archaeobotany can provide chronological anchors and clues about the actors involved in the plant's dispersal. Unfortunately, the high number of archaeological sites in Italy does not correspond to equally substantial archaeobotanical information, due to the traditional marginalization of environmental factors in classical archaeology. Consequently, information about the diffusion and characteristics of the vine in general is scarce, as is the case with other common species (chestnut, olive, walnut, domestic pine, cypress). However, in Etruscan studies, there was a fruitful exchange of ideas in the early issues of the *Studi Etruschi* journal regarding the possibility of reconstructing the landscape and environment of Etruria. This exchange took place in a climate of multidisciplinary collaboration, supported by key authorities in the field, such as Antonio Minto (Ciacci, 2010, p. 75). The manifesto of Giovanni Negri, an Etruscologist active in the 1920s, on the sources to be used for reconstructing the ancient landscape sounds surprisingly modern: in addition to historical and iconographic documents, Negri (1927, p. 368) recommends the analysis of buried plant materials (the discipline we now call archaeobotany) and residues of spontaneous vegetation preserved among our greenery, which is "deeply humanized." Three recent Tuscan research projects have provided very interesting data on the persistence of wild vines in Etruria (*Vinum*); on native grapevines in the Albegna Valley (*ArcheoVino*; Vignani & Paolucci, 2012, p. 653-661) and on traces of native vineyard landscapes in Siena in the walled city and suburb (*Senarum Vinea*).

The genus *Vitis* includes approximately seventy species, mainly from Central North America and East Asia. Species identification may be conducted from a botanical or from an ampelographic perspective (Mazzanti, 2017). Ampelography describes the morphology of grape varieties and classifies them according to specific diagnostic criteria: features of the shoots (color, pubescence, shape), of the leaves (size, shape, pubescence, dentation, veining, etc.), and of the grape clusters (size, shape, compactness; color, size, and taste of the berries; ripening period).

The only European species is *Vitis vinifera*, which includes two subspecies: *Vitis vinifera sylvestris*, with smaller fruits and a sour taste (Grassi *et al.,* 2006; Arroyo Garcìa & Revilla, 2013), and the domesticated one, resulting from selection and hybridization processes that took place in different times and areas. Today approximately ten thousand varieties (*cultivar)* of domesticated grapevines exist, mainly derived from European *Vitis vinifera* and only to a small extent from American and Asian vines. Anyway, the much more numerous American species (best known in Italy is the Concord grape, *Vitis labrusca*) played an important role in modern European viticulture after the diseases that affected vines in Europe between the 19th and 20th centuries (Russo Ermolli, 2010, p. 59).

Vitis vinifera is a woody vine plant now widespread not only throughout southern Europe but also in Asia as far as the Hindu Kush. The earliest fossil evidence of vines with a similar morphology to the modern one dates back to the end of the Tertiary period (about two million years ago; (Russo Ermolli, 2010, p. 59) and has been found in the southern regions of the Black Sea, between Georgia and Armenia (Robinson, 1999, p. 505). In Europe, *Vitis vinifera* is a natural element in swamplands (Braconi, 2011, p. 56) and in deciduous mixed forests (associated with alder, hazel, hornbeam, elm) rich in moisture, namely those of the large alluvial plains from which today the trees have almost completely disappeared due to human activities.

As a consequence, wild vines population is constantly declining throughout Europe. Italy makes no exception, and today wild vines can be found almost exclusively in gorges and ravines from central Italy to Sicily.

In contrast, cultivated vines often “escape” from cultivation, and they tend to gradually return to the morphology of wild vines (Russo Ermolli, 2010, p. 60). This happens because the vine is predominantly dioecious: individuals bearing male flowers produce only pollen while those bearing female flowers have ovaries and produce fruits (only a small percentage are hermaphroditic). Therefore, vine offspring born from seeds exhibits a strong variability and it tends to lose the characteristics selected by viticulturists through vegetative reproduction (whereas in this second procedure, “daughter” plants are identical to “mother” plants).

Vitis vinifera also behaves as a weed and spreads very rapidly (Ciacci *et al.,* 2012, p. 96). It climbs anywhere, from the trees of a dense alluvial forest to the low artificial supports of poles and nets that make up the rows of modern

vineyards from Italy to California. These features facilitated its domestication by humans, which began for the first time in the same regions where the plant originated, Georgia and Armenia, during the 4th millennium BCE, and later spread throughout the Mediterranean Sea (Robinson, 1999, p. 505). Grapevines and wine quickly gained a major role into the lives of ancient Mediterranean populations. Social consumption of wine became one of the most effective status symbols and a proof of one's social standing and prestige within the community.

2. Prehistoric grapes

Pollen in ancient soils and seeds found in archaeological deposits in central Italy indicate the presence of grapevines already at the end of the 4th millennium BCE (Mariotti *et al.*, 2012). In Italy, there are several Neolithic sites where, in addition to legumes and wild cereals, seeds of wild grapevine have been found, thus indicating that the fruit has been harvested even before domestication (Ciacci, 2010, p. 75). In the coastal caves of Cilento, the analysis of charred wood shed light on the simultaneous presence of grapevine and olive about 5500 years ago: it is reasonable to hypothesize that these were the first attempts to domesticate these two species. Another area that yielded interesting pollen data is Lake Massaciuccoli (4000-2500 years ago): here, high percentages of grapevine are associated with a limited presence of forest species. This could be interpreted as the beginning of deforestation and agricultural practices.

Domesticated grape seeds begin to be recognized positively in Bronze Age sites (2300-800 BCE), anyway before Etruscan era, wild grape seeds are still prevalent (Aranguren *et al.,* 2007; Marvelli *et al.*, 2013).

3. More juicy, more fleshy: Etruscan skills in viticulture

Large-scale Greek colonization started in the 8th century BCE and expanded the varietal circulation of Greek grapevines, along with olive cuttings and cereal seeds. The Euboeans and Phocaeans trade between the 7th and 6th centuries BCE played a primary role in the spread of grapevines through cuttings rather than seeds, resulting in the preservation of the genetic heritage of some grape varieties still cultivated today in Marseille, Spain, Corsica, Sardinia, and Oltrepò Pavese (Ciacci, 2010, p. 76). It is interesting to note how the activities of the Phocaeans in the northern Adriatic regions are also suggested by the cycles of the Homeric heroes Diomedes (grandson of Oeneus, to whom Dionysus gave the vine and the knowledge of viticulture) and Antenor: the myth outlines some possible sea routes of the grapevines.

Fewer data are available on the contribution of the Phoenicians to grapevines circulation. However, they occupied an equally significant spot in the wine marketplace, as evidenced by the trade of wine amphorae and *symposium* equipment such as tripod cups for grinding aromatic herbs according to Assyrian fashion. These Assyrian cups appear in the burial goods of Etruscan and Latial aristocratic tombs at the end of the 8th century BCE.

Meanwhile, in the second half of the 8th century and in the 7th century BCE, viticultural techniques of wild grapevines were refined in Etruria through the selection of female populations (plants with fleshy berries and sweeter taste) and the grafting of Greek grapevines onto local specimens resistant to parasite infections and to salt in the proximity to the sea. The Etruscans set an example of successful viticulture for the Padanian Gauls, the Raeti, and the Veneti, and perhaps also for the populations of the central Adriatic region (Russo Ermolli, 2010, p. 64). To explore the reasons for the rapid establishment of this primacy, a multidisciplinary approach is once again recommended (Motta & Beydler, 2020).

Both the imports of allochthonous grapevines and in-situ selection are attested by grape genetics, linguistics, and historical, archaeological, and literary sources. Grape genetics studies seem to confirm both the importation of allochthonous grapevines into Etruria and in-situ selection (De Lorenzis *et al.*, 2020, p. 23). The following Tuscan grape varieties are considered allochthonous (imports):

- Ansonica/Inzolia, typical of the islands of the Tuscan archipelago. It shows strong genetic affinities with continental Ansonica from the Tyrrhenian area, with Sicilian Inzolia, and with the Greek grape varieties Roditis and Sideritis, therefore it is likely the result of grapevines exchange lead by Euboean traders.

- Sangiovese, the most famous and widespread grape variety in Tuscany today (Vouillamoz *et al.*, 2007).

Genetics also highlight a grape variety resulting from in-situ selection: the Bonamico, nowadays cultivated on the hills of Pisa and in Chianti. It has relevant genetic similarities with wild vines sampled at ancient harbors on former Lake Prile nearby Grosseto in the Maremma Toscana (Ciacci, 2010, p. 78). The disappear of Lake Prile and the subsequent birth of Maremma is one of the most impressive case studies on changing landscapes in Central Italy, and Etruscan-Roman viticulture is a piece of that fascinating mosaic.

Last but not least, historical linguistics also provide interesting insights on grapevines circulation and exchange of viticulture knowledge.

In Latin language, the transition from the common usage of the ancient term *temetum* to name the wine to a new word, *vinum,* probably dates back to the 7th century BCE*,* after the linguistic contacts with Greek settlers. In the following centuries *temetum* still rarely appears in the Latin sources, but with the specific meaning of "indigenous wine".

Another Latin term of interest is *labrusca*, used to indicate wild vines, spontaneously grown, harvested in central Italy by non-Etruscan populations of the Po Valley. The Italian word *lambrusco* (also known as *abròstine*) clearly derives from Latin *labrusca;* today it refers to a group of grape varieties mainly spread in Emilia, which produce a black grape with a slightly acidic taste and late ripening, used to make the popular homonymous table wine. *Labrusca* is also in use today in the scientific terminology to designate the *Vitis labrusca* or strawberry grape, which is (quite surprisingly considering the etymology of the term!) an American species of the genus *Vitis*.

It is sad but not unexpected to acknowledge that our data on wine terminology in the Etruscan language is much more fragmentary (Agostiniani, 2000, p. 103). The *Tabula Cortonensis* is a unique "archival" document in Etruscan language: it records a property transfer, and it dates back to the 2nd

century BCE. There appears the term *vina(c),* translated by most scholars as "vineyard". *Vina(c)* is clearly much closer to Greek-fashion word *vinum* than to *temetum,* as we would expect given the chronological and geographical context of the *Tabula*. We can imagine those land plots as located in the wetlands between Valdichiana and Trasimeno (Braconi, 2010, p. 156).

An onomastic trace of the Roman appreciation for Etruscan viticulture is the habit of designating some vine varieties with Etruscan names, for example the *Vitis Sopina*: it derived from the name of a famous Etruscan aristocratic lineage, the *Supna* of Volterra (Ciacci, 2010, p. 78).

4. Vite maritata: *an Etruscan landscape*

As anticipated, *Vitis vinifera* can climb anywhere, from the trees of a dense alluvial forest to the artificial rows of low poles and nets that make up the vineyards today commonly associated with Chianti and other areas of the Tuscan countryside **(Fig. 1).** However, until the depopulation of central Italy countryside after World War II and subsequent dismantling of the *mezzadria*, it was just as common to come across a completely different agricultural landscape: the *vite maritata*, that is high viticulture on a living support **(Fig. 2)**. According to that technique, vines are allowed to spontaneously grow up the trunk and the branches of a living tree.

Fig. 1. Chianti vineyards (Castellina in Chianti, SI).

Source: author

Fig. 2. *Vite maritata*. Antonio Tempesta, September: Grape Harvest (1599). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (US)

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:September-_Grape_Harvest_LACMA_65.37.280.jpg

Low poles viticulture is typically associated with intensive grapes monoculture, as it maximizes the profits in the available land plot, and it is difficult to combine it with other crops. Conversely, under the vine shoots suspended from the branches of a tree, meadows for grazing livestock or vegetable gardens can be planted, and the trees themselves are productive assets even if they are not fruit-bearing (for example, elms and maples) because they provide forage and wood. Other great advantages of *vite maritata* are that the plants better withstand frosts and do not require expensive fencing systems to protect them from the appetites of wild animals. That is why since the early Middle Age high viticulture has been a perfect fit to *mezzadria* economy, where each family of *mezzadri* needed to be self-sufficient and produce everything they needed. Carlo Goldoni's opening verses in the intermezzo *Il quartiere fortunato* (1744) may be incomprehensible to those unfamiliar with the specific agricultural landscape referenced:

Vedovella ch'è senza marito,
è una vite senz'olmo in campagna.[1]

The expression *vite maritata* refers to an ancient beautiful metaphor that pictures the vine as a bride and the tree supporting it as her groom (literally, "married vine"). The reference to wedding in the technical term for this cultivation technique is already in Cato's *De Agricultura*, but later it will gain a huge popularity in texts of quite different nature thanks to the famous Christian allegory of the vine and the elm firstly spread by the Shepherd of Hermas (with a striking visual counterpart in the central panel of the later Harbaville Triptych; Braconi, 2010, p. 153):

> "As I was walking in the country, I observed an elm and a vine and compared them and their fruits. The shepherd appeared and said to me: 'What are you thinking of by yourself?' 'I am thinking about the elm and the vine,' I said. 'They are very well adapted to one another.' 2 'These two trees,' he said, 'are as a symbol for the servants of God.' 'If only I could know the type which these trees you mention represent,' I said. 'You have the elm and the vine before your eyes?' he said. 'Yes, sir,' I answered. 3 'This vine,' he said, 'bears fruit, but the elm is sterile. However, this vine cannot bear fruit, unless it climbs up the elm. Otherwise, it spreads all over the ground. And, if it does bear, the fruit is rotten, because it has not been hanging from the elm. So, when the vine has been attached to the elm, it bears fruit both from itself and from the elm. 4 So, you see that the elm yields fruit, also, not a bit less than the vine; more, in fact.'" (The Sheperd of Hermas, second parable, translated by Glimm, F. X., Marique, J. M. F.,Walsh, G. G.)

In ancient Greece, the *anadendràs àmpelos* (literally, vine that climbs the tree) was a familiar sight, as the fable of the fox and the grape by Aesop teaches us:

[1] "Poor little widow without a husband, she is like a vine without the elm in the countryside" (my translation).

Fame coacta vulpes alta in vinea
Uvam appetebat summis saliens viribus;
Quam tangere ut non potuit, discedens ait:
Nondum matura est; nolo acerbam sumere.
Qui facere quae non possunt verbis elevant,
Ascribere hoc debebunt exemplum sibi.[2]
(*Fabulae Aesopiae* 4.3)

However, the viticulture model that prevailed in Greece and *Magna Graecia* was low viticulture on wooden poles. Low viticulture was dominant in drier areas of eastern Mediterranean since older times, and we can assume that it prevailed in Greece as well if the vineyard depicted on Achilles' shield flaunts precious silver stakes as supports:

"There upon it he set a great vineyard laden with clusters,
Beautiful, fashioned of gold, while black its bunches of grapes were,
Fashioned of silver the poles upon which throughout were the vines held."
(Homer, *Iliad* XVIII, 561-565, translated by Rodney Merrill; Merrill, 2007, p. 338).

As previously stated, at the dawn of the I millennium BCE the wine produced by the Greeks was superior in quality to the basic wild grapes pressing practiced in the Italian peninsula. Meanwhile, as Aegean vine varieties became prevalent in Central Italy, Etruscan farmers did not adopt low viticulture; instead, they embraced the *vite maritata* technique.

[2] "A famished fox was frantically jumping
To get some grapes that grew thickly,
Heavy and ripe on a high vine.
In the end he grew weary and gave up, thwarted,
And muttered morosely as he moved away:
"They are not worth reaching - still raw and unripe.
I simply can't stomach sour grapes."
Those who belittle what's beyond their ability
Should see if this tory applies to themselves."
(*Fabulae Aesopiae* 4.3, translated by P. F. Widdows. Widdows, 1992, p. 87).

Emilio Sereni in the 60es observed how the *vite maritata* survived not only in Etruria proper (i.e., between the Arno and the Tiber), but also in Northern Italy (Marcadella & Stenico, 2012, p. 119; Sereno, 1992, p. 19) and Campania (Buono & Vallariello, 2002, p. 53; Manzi, 1974), in areas significantly populated by the Etruscans: that is why he considered the *vite maritata* as the biggest Etruscan heritage to Italian countryside landscape (Sereni, 1964, p. 40-43).

The Romans as well initially favored high viticulture, maybe due to the abundance of wetlands in *Latium Vetus* (Braconi, 2011, p. 57; Aversano, R. *et al.*, 2017). In Latin language, high viticulture on living support is commonly named *per arbusta.* Pliny the Elder mentions how the wine of the early Romans was produced from unpruned vines, and that only after king Numa Pompilius' ritual prescription the viticulturists were forced to overcome the *pericula arbusti*, that is, the dangerous climbing trees to prune the highest grapevines:

> *Eadem lege ex inputata vite libari vina dis nefas statuit, ratione excogitata ut putare cogerentur alias aratores et pigri circa pericula arbusti*[3]
>
> (*Naturalis Historiae*, 14, 88)

We could add as evidence the vineyard where Cicero stages the episode of Attius Navius, as the young swineherd brought the pigs to graze freely there (*De Divinatione*, I, 3 cited in Braconi, 2010, p. 154).

The viticultural landscape of central Italy changed radically in the last quarter of the 2nd century BC, when the model of the slave-driven *villa* with its intensive, low vineyards took expanded in an increasingly Romanized Etruria. However, this does not mean that the *vite maritata* disappeared altogether: large estates could be divided into productive units and assigned to tenants, as shown by the case of Pliny the Younger's property in the upper Tiber Valley. Similarly to Middle Age *mezzadria,* in those smaller plots, there was a need for various products, and thus high vines and cereals were cultivated in the same

[3] "By the same law he made it illegal to offer libations to the gods with wine produced from a vine that had not been pruned, this being a plan devised for the purpose of compelling people who were mainly engaged in agriculture, and were slack about the dangers besetting a plantation, not to neglect pruning." Translated by H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library 330. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938.

fields. Pliny the Younger uses crop diversification as a metaphor for rhetorical styles that must have been clearly readable for his peers:

> *Utque in cultura agri non vineas tantum, verum etiam arbusta, nec arbusta tantum verum etiam campos curo et exerceo, utque in ipsis campis non far aut siliginem solam, sed hordeum fabam ceteraque legumina sero, sic in actione plura quasi semina latius spargo, ut quae provenerint colligam.*[4] (Pliny, *Epistulae*, I, 20, 16)

The Romans used the expression *arbustum gallicum* to refer to high viticulture, but *gallicum* here is not an ethnic reference; rather, it is geographical, referring to the persistence of this type of cultivation in the Po Valley (Cisalpine Gaul), formerly populated by Etruscan settlers as remarked by Sereni (1964).

[4] "On my farms I cultivate my fruit trees and fields as carefully as my vineyards, and in the fields, I sow barley, beans and other legumes as well as corn and wheat; so when I am making a speech I scatter various arguments around like seeds in order to reap whatever crop comes up." (translated by Betty Radice; Radice 1969, p. 50)

5. From viticulture to (weird) winemaking

Winemaking is a natural process that was not invented by humans, but rather discovered and refined, as mature berries from wild vines ferment spontaneously. This phenomenon was certainly observed and appreciated in prehistoric times even by nomadic populations: therefore, it is important to stress that viticulture is not a precondition for winemaking (Robinson, 1999, p. 505).

The landscape of central Italy preserves faint traces of Etruscan winemaking, extremely fascinating because of their rarity. The oldest wine infrastructures are primitive wine presses carved off the bedrock (*palmenti*; Masi, 2012, p. 583), found all along western Mediterranean at least since the 1st millennium BCE. In Etruria and ancient *Latium* a *palmento* consists of a swallow pool for crushing the grapes, roughly squared in shape, connected to a square or oval vat placed at a lower level (Olcese *et al.*, 2020, Figg. 1-2). In Tuscany, examples are found in Sansepolcro (AR), Abbadia S. Salvatore (Monte Amiata), Castello di Vitozza (GR), and Giglio, Elba, Capraia Islands (Ciacci *et al.,* 2012, p. 72). Archaeologists often struggle to date them because *palmenti* were used in different time periods. Also, they are similar to other types of rural infrastructures, such as vats for tannin production from chestnut wood.

Traces left by wine presses (Brun, 2012; Dodd, 2017; Lewit & Burton, 2019) are even rarer than *palmenti*: in Etruria, as in Egypt and Greece, most widespread systems were the sack press (consisting of a sack and two wooden beams), and the lever press used since the 6th century BCE (Ciacci *et al.,* 2012, p. 75), both made of perishable materials. Only stone elements may survive, such as recesses carved into the bedrock to set the lever, or press platforms where the grape pomace accumulated, none of which recorded in Tuscany so far.

Nearby Monterchi (AR) there is a fascinating site, which was the protagonist of numerous legends that flourished in the medieval period (Bruni, 1995; Nocentini, 2014). It is a shallow basin measuring 5X4 meters carved from a sandstone boulder, equipped with a drainage hole connecting the bottom of the basin to a rectangular recess located lower down. Whether it was used as a *palmento* for grapes or as tannin vat, locally the basin is known as the "tub of the wild man" (*homo salvatico*) because Middle Age farmers reportedly

believed it was used by a fierce creature (half man and half beast) to slit the throats of its victims and drink their blood, as if it was wine. According to the legend, the wild man was eventually killed by a brave young man using a bullet made from a blessed coin: just one of the numerous occurrences in central Italy ethnographic record of Christian religion fighting and overcoming residual pagan beliefs.

Wandering again between archaeology and ethnography, it is possible to find unexpected traces, or rather, "leftover", of Etruscan winemaking. American folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) collected legends and tales of the inhabitants of Apennine in search of relics of the ancient religion of the Etruscans and ancient Romans (Leland, 1892). Ancient Etruscan divine beings, with just a minimal name alteration, appear as elves or patrons helping with daily life issues. Peasants interviewed by Leland reported the following song:

Faflon, Faflon, Faflon,
a voi mi raccomando!
Che l'uva nella mia vigna
è multa scarsa,
a voi mi raccomando,
che mi fate avere buona vendemmia!

Faflon, Faflon, Faflon,
a voi mi raccomando!
Che il vino della mia cantina
me lo fate venire fondante,
e molto buono.
Faflon, Faflon, Faflon![5]

Fuflun is one of the major Etruscan male gods, found on numerous iconographic and epigraphic sources (Cerchiai, 2012, p. 289). Wherever

[5] "Faflon, Faflon, Faflon, I entrust myself to you! The grapes in my vineyard are scarce. I entrust myself to you, may you give me a good harvest! Faflon, Faflon, Faflon, I entrust myself to you! May the wine in my cellar become full-bodied and tasty. Faflon, Faflon, Faflon!" (my translation).
Inizio modulo
Fine modulo

the word is associated with an illustration (mainly, painted ceramics and bronze foil artworks, such as Hellenistic engraved mirrors and *cistae*), the Etruscan god shows evident iconographic similarities with Bacchus/Dionysus, but differently than his notorious Greek-Roman counterparts the memory of his name did not survive the collapse of the Classical World… except for Leland's song (Camporeale, 2011, p. 209).

Once winemaking was completed, the wine was enriched with numerous weird additives. Etruscan recipes lack ingredients in comparison to Greek and Roman ones due to the shortage of written sources, but graters and strainers among the banquet tools suggests that many additives were popular among the Tyrrhenian aristocracies starting from the 7th century BCE. In Etruria the grater was likely used to prepare the Greek-fashion *kykeiòn*, a beverage made of wine, white flour, and goat cheese mentioned by Homer in the Iliad (Celuzza & Camporeale, 2009, p. 83).

From Latin sources, we know that ordinary wine was consumed as soon as it was clear, drawn directly from *dolia* (*vinum doliare*), while quality wine was transferred into amphorae (*vinum amphorarium*), where it underwent a series of treatments in order to ensure its correct preservation. It was common to expose the amphorae to heat and smoke in specific rooms, or to add seawater to the wine, following a practice already widespread in Greece, where seawater was believed to make the wine sweeter. Depending on the seasons, the wine could be cooled with snow or heated; it was also very common to sweeten it with honey and add flavors such as rose, violet, cedar leaves, cinnamon, and saffron. Many depictions show servants straining wine with special tools: ancient wine makers never managed to produce perfectly clear wine due to technical limitations. Actually, the verb *liquare* (to strain) is sometimes used by poets as a synonym for serving (Cianferoni, 2012).

Due to all these additives and treatments ancient wine was extremely different from the one we are used to. Today in Chianti, there is a trend of recovering ancient grape varieties and winemaking techniques (mainly for promotional purposes), but a glass of true Etruscan or Roman *vinum* would never be appreciated during a contemporary dinner party.

6. Vite maritata today: *a not recommended divorce*

In Central Italy, the *vite maritata* (high viticulture) was firstly implemented by the Etruscans and flourished as a landmark of both ancient wine production, and medieval *mezzadria.* After the World War II, the agricultural landscape changed enormously, and viticulture makes no exception: the intensification of monoculture almost led to the disappearance of v*ite maritata* (Bigliardi, Fabris, 2022, p. 6): it is interesting to note that in E. Manzi's overview on Italian *paesaggi colturali tradizionali* for the *Istituto Geografico Militare,* the *vite maritata* is recorded as surviving in Campania and in Emilia Romagna (residual *piantata padana*), and not in Tuscany (Manzi, 2004, p. 658).

Two recent Italian laws aim at redeveloping viticulture with a special attention to historical vineyards (*l. 238/28 dicembre 2016, Disciplina organica della coltivazione della vite e della produzione e del commercio del vino*; *d.m. 6899/20 giugno 2020*. Gabellieri, Gallia, Guadagno, 2022, p. 23).

There are many good reasons to protect and reintroduce the *vite maritata*. The disappearing of *vite maritata* from the collective imagination represents not only an impoverishment of the agricultural landscape but also a potential loss for the iconographic and iconological interpretation of ancient and medieval works of art (Aceto, 2016). Our understanding of Classical texts may be impoverished as well: Braconi warns that the word *arbustum* is sometimes translated into "fruit tree", concealing any reference to ancient high viticulture (Braconi, 2011, p. 55). Finally, recent studies have also highlighted how the restoration of the endangered ecosystem of *vite maritata* may be beneficial not only to wild species of animals and plants, but also for human beings, as a linear green infrastructure contrasting territorial fragmentation (Bigliardi & Fabris, 2022, p. 6).

Useful, historical, beautiful: *vite maritata* has what it takes to be considered an essential element in Italian landscape, and definitely worth protection and appreciation in the public discourse.

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4. The Post-colonial Identity in Morocco: Geo-linguistic Experimentation in *Souffles*

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Abstract

The post-independence period in Morocco marked a complex redefinition of national identity, catalyzed by cultural and political upheavals. In this context, the avant-garde journal *Souffles* (1966–1972) emerged as a seminal platform for intellectual and artistic expression. Initially envisioned as a pedagogical tool to counter colonial legacies and redefine Morocco's identity, *Souffles* evolved into a politically charged medium reflecting escalating tensions under King Hassan II's regime. This dual trajectory encapsulates the intricate interplay of identity, resistance, and linguistic experimentation in post-independence Morocco. While existing scholarship often foregrounds the political transformations of this era, focusing on repression and institutional change, this study shifts the lens to the cultural and linguistic dimensions of resistance. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks developed by Abdelkebir Khatibi and Jacques Derrida, with a particular focus on their concepts of *pensée-autre*, monolingualism, and linguistic plurality. Through a comparative examination of *Souffles* and Khaïr-Eddine's *Soleil arachnide* (1980), this paper demonstrates how Morocco's avant-garde articulated a pluralistic postcolonial identity in the making.

Keywords: ***Morocco, Avant-garde, post-coloniality, Souffles, identity***

1. Introduction

The period following Morocco's independence in 1956 marked a complex era of cultural and political redefinition, culminating in significant transformations under King Hassan II. This context fostered the emergence of *Souffles* (1966–1972), a revolutionary cultural and literary journal. Founded by a group of Moroccan intellectuals, *Souffles* became emblematic of a burgeoning avant-garde movement. Initially conceived as a pedagogical platform to transcend the limitations of colonial education and express Morocco's multifaceted identity, the journal transitioned into a politically charged outlet amid escalating tensions under Hassan II's regime. The interplay between *Souffles*' early literary ambitions and its later political instrumentalization encapsulates the precarious negotiation of identity, language, and resistance in post-independence Morocco.

Existing scholarship has predominantly analyzed this period through the lens of political reconstruction, focusing on the socio-political transformations under King Hassan II during the "Years of Lead." Historiographical studies by Douglas Elliott Ashford (1961), C.R. Pennell (2000, 2003), Lise Storm (2007), Susan Gilson Miller (2013), and Brahim El Guabli (2019) explore the growth and affirmation of nationalist movements, the democratization process juxtaposed with centralized authoritarianism, and the redefinition of colonial identity in the post-independence era. While these works provide valuable insights into the political landscape, their focus on repression and institutional shifts often omits a crucial dimension: the interplay between cultural resistance, identity deconstruction, and linguistic experimentation.

In parallel, influential studies by Abdelkebir Khatibi (1983) and Jacques Derrida (1996) have explored language as a site of negotiation, examining how colonial legacies and identity multiplicities manifest in linguistic and cultural spheres. Khatibi's concept of "*pensée autre*" and Derrida's critique of monolingualism underscore the dialogic nature of language and identity formation. These analyses, however, often remain detached from the literary avant-garde movements that actively grappled with these challenges, particularly the subversive potential of artistic production to mediate cultural and linguistic tensions. Integrating these approaches through Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism reveals the inherently polyphonic nature of language. Accordingly, languages construct themselves through their contact with other languages,

challenging the notion of a unitary or monologic language (Christensen, 2017).

Among the key studies on *Souffles-Anfas*, it is necessarily to mention Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio's *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology From the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (2015). This anthology, which collected and translated all issues of the review into English, has prompted new scholarship exploring its legacy and broader socio-political implications. Von Osten Marion (2016) highlights *Souffles* significance in fostering contributions from visual artists and transnational solidarity movements, whereas Andy Stafford (2023) contextualizes it within a critique of Négritude and folklorism. Anouar El Younssi (2017) underscores its role in sparking an interdisciplinary and transnational movement that sought to rethink literature and national culture while deconstructing various forms of authority. Teresa Villa-Ignacio (2017) examines *Souffles*' rhetorical strategies, introducing the concept of "decolonizing violence" to show how the magazine dismantled state violence and enacted cultural decolonization. Christensen (2017), however, uniquely combines linguistic analysis with *Souffles*' avant-garde ethos, discussing how a growing disillusionment with nationalist and Salafi ideals led Moroccan intellectuals of the 1960s to establish independent cultural journals, with *Souffles* and its Arabic equivalent *Anfas* emerging as the most influential. The author uses the review to explore the emergence of ideas central to Khatibi and Derrida's reasoning, with the aim of linking poststructuralism to postcolonial theory. While these studies provide important insights, they often focus on *Souffles-Anfas*' later revolutionary agenda, overlooking its early pedagogical phase and its nuanced approach to linguistic experimentation.

The purpose of this research is to underscore the journal's early phase as a concrete, albeit unconscious, articulation of the plural and monolingual identity later theorized by Khatibi and Derrida. By situating *Souffles* within the socio-political context of post-independence Morocco, this study highlights its role as a material manifestation of an emergent pluralistic Moroccan identity. Through an analysis of the early works of *Souffles*, particularly Khaïr-Eddine's seminal *Soleil arachnide* (1980), the research proposes a model of identity that is as dynamic and multifaceted as Morocco itself. These texts, marked by linguistic experimentation and poetic innovation, gave shape to a postcolonial cultural identity that resonates with Derrida's *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* and Khatibi's concepts of *double critique*, *bilanguisme*, and *pensée en langues*. By bridging avant-garde literary expression with critical theory, this study illuminates how *Souffles* pioneered a vision of identity as fluid,

evolving, and deeply rooted in Morocco's cultural and linguistic hybridity.

In the Moroccan context, the historical link between language, identity, and political agency is crucial. Understanding how debates over language use manifested in the past is necessary to comprehend its contemporary applications. Morocco's unique geographical location and rich history have made it an iconic terrain of cultural and linguistic diversity. By the late 20th and early 21st century, linguistic diversity had reached its peak as foreign languages gained significant ground alongside the official recognition of national languages. Modern Standard Arabic, Amazigh, Moroccan Arabic (*Darija*), French, English, and other foreign languages coexist in various domains, from casual communication to media, education, administration, and business. This complex linguistic plurality, a result of historical layers of settlement and occupation, places Morocco as a global archetype of linguistic and cultural diversity. However, this diversity also presents significant challenges, particularly in education and language policy. The debates surrounding the roles of these languages underscore the precariousness of state policy in balancing cultural identity and functional pragmatism. By revisiting the linguistic and cultural debates of the past through *Souffles*, this study provides a deeper understanding of the contemporary linguistic landscape in Morocco, demonstrating the enduring relevance of avant-garde movements in shaping the nation's pluralistic identity.

2. Souffles: the emergence of a Moroccan literary avant-guard

Morocco's independence from France on March 2, 1956, marked the end of the colonial protectorate and the beginning of a complex journey toward nation-building under King Mohammed V. His leadership sought to balance modernization with the preservation of Islamic and monarchical traditions, establishing the foundations of a modern state while navigating tensions over political participation and centralization of power. With the accession of his son, Hassan II, in 1961, the monarchy took a more authoritarian turn. Hassan II's reign, characterized by the repressive "Years of Lead," saw the brutal suppression of dissent, the consolidation of power, and the projection of an image that merged traditional legitimacy with cosmopolitan sophistication (Howe, 2000). Hassan II's embodied the ideal of the modern Arab leader, balancing tradition and modernity. He claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through the 'Alawi dynasty, reinforcing his legitimacy as a custodian of Morocco's Islamic heritage. Simultaneously, he projected the image of a refined, cosmopolitan statesman—sophisticated, urban, and shaped by a French education, which complemented his tailored, diplomatic persona. The ruler understood that his very survival required a strategic negotiation between tradition and modernity, pursuing policies aimed at stabilizing his regime while addressing calls for reform (Gilson Miller, 2013). Hassan II was able to transform Morocco into a bastion of stability in a volatile area such as the Middle East, laying the foundation for a modern constitutional monarchy. At his death on July 23, 1999, the country had reached a high level of professionalization among the population, including the participation of women, and a dynamic civil society. However, this progress came at the cost of human rights. During this period dissidents were arrested, killed and tortured, newspapers were closed and books banned (Howe, 2000). The political tensions of the 1960s, exacerbated by student protests and strikes, culminated in the assassination of Mehdi Ben Barka, a prominent leftist leader and global figure in the tricontinentalist movement. Ben Barka symbolized resistance to neocolonialism and U.S. imperialism, forging alliances with figures like Che Guevara, Amílcar Cabral and Malcom X, championing anti-colonial struggles. His vision of a global solidarity movement deeply influenced progressive currents in Morocco and beyond, creating an intellectual and cultural environment ripe for new expressions of dissent (Nate, 2020).

The 1960s and 1970s were a transformative period across the Maghreb, marked by intense linguistic and artistic experimentation as countries sought to articulate autonomous postcolonial identities. In the wake of decolonization, intellectuals and artists engaged with the dual challenge of distancing themselves from colonial cultural paradigms while forging a modern aesthetic rooted in local traditions. These avant-garde movements reflected the region's complex negotiation between heritage and modernity, producing a diversity of experimental expressions.

In Algeria, experimentation often occurred on the margins, with poets like Youcef Sebti and Nabile Farès pushing boundaries through fragmented syntax, typographical innovation, and calligrams. The rigid control of cultural production by state institutions like the Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion (SNED) relegated much of this experimentation to underground presses or exile, fostering tensions between artistic freedom and institutional repression. In Tunisia, poets such as Chems Nadir, Hédi Bouraoui, and Majid El Houssi embraced a highly intellectualized avant-garde, experimenting with discontinuous discourse, typographic play, and the blending of Arabic and Berber cosmologies with modern poetic forms. Unlike Algeria, much of Tunisia's literary experimentation unfolded abroad, reflecting the exile and alienation central to its thematic concerns (Sellin, 1986). These movements, though varied in pace and form, shared a commitment to linguistic innovation as a means of expressing fractured identities and the postcolonial condition.

In Morocco, this spirit of experimentation found a pivotal platform in *Souffles* (1966–1972), which catalyzed a brief but impactful period of avant-garde literary production. *Souffles* (in French "breaths" or "inspiration"), founded by Abdellatif Laâbi, emerged as a groundbreaking literary and cultural journal. At the core of the first issues was language experimentation, associated with debates on poetry, art and cinema. The standard Arabic language was in fact considered not only unrepresentative of the local identity, but also as extremely limiting in the size and scope of their readership. The contributors to *Souffles*, including Mostafa Nissabouri, Bernard Jakobiak, and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, belonged to the petite bourgeoisie and had been educated in colonial French schools. This upbringing fostered a profound sense of uprootedness and frustration, as they found themselves more comfortable expressing their art in the colonial language than in standard or Moroccan Arabic (Strafford, 2023).

Initially conceived as a pedagogical literary catalog aimed at overcoming the limitations of formal education and helping individuals find their voices in

their preferred languages, the journal's focus soon shifted outward, addressing broader cultural and political concerns. It positioned itself as a revolutionary vanguard, adopting a Marxist-inspired language and aiming to ignite cultural decolonization by breaking ties with French models and the Arab religious canon to forge uniquely Moroccan artistic and literary forms (Harrison, and Villa-Ignacio, 2016). *Souffles* played a key role in fostering transnational dialogues among writers, artists, and activists across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. It published seminal works by figures like Haitian writer René Depestre, Syrian poet Adonis, and Amílcar Cabral, the leader of Guinea-Bissau's independence movement[1]. The journal also featured revolutionary and postcolonial texts, such as the Black Panther Party's program and the Argentine manifesto *For a Third Cinema* (Harrison, Villa-Ignacio, 2016). These contributions reflected its mission to dismantle colonial legacies and create a space for cultural resistance and renewal. Although its pedagogical aims ultimately fell short, *Souffles* succeeded in catalyzing a dynamic and globally engaged cultural movement.

[1] See Issandr El Amrani, "There was Souffles. Reconsidering Morocco's most radical literary Quaterly", *Bidoun*, available at: https://www.bidoun.org/articles/in-the-beginning-there-was-souffles.

3. The Manifesto of Souffles (1966): Towards a Linguistic definition of the Self

In *Souffles*' inaugural publication, conceived as a manifesto, Abdellatif Laâbi outlined the magazine's mission. He emphasized that readers would not encounter a mere dispute between *anciens* and *modernes* but rather a literature capable of addressing a spectrum of curiosities and nostalgias from the past. The manifesto emerged as an ode to language and as a tool to define the "colonial self" beyond the constraints of "otherness." Within a year of its release, Laâbi refined this concept, critiquing anticolonial theorist Albert Memmi and Algerian writer Malek Haddad, who advocated abandoning the colonial language in favor of local languages as part of cultural decolonization (Laâbi, *Souffles* 2, 1966). Beginning with issue 4, *Souffles* expanded its scope to include essays on other humanities disciplines. Despite limited funding, the magazine served as a vehicle for disseminating the works of avant-garde Moroccan artists, such as the Casablanca Group (issues 7-8).

In line with Khatibi's critique, presented in the third issue of *Souffles*, Laâbi denounced the literature produced between 1945 and 1962 as a commodified form of expression, tailored primarily for the French metropolitan audience. This "prostitution" of literature, as he described it, catered to the exoticizing demands of French readers, perpetuating stereotypes of the "Homo Arabicus." Authors often conformed to the expectations of French publishing houses, producing works that romanticized Berber tribes, desert landscapes, bustling souks, and iconic minarets—thereby reinforcing colonial narratives of France's civilizing mission. In contrast, Laâbi advocated for a radical rethinking of linguistic and cultural expression, which he referred to as "linguistic disorientation." This approach, according to Laâbi, could only emerge after navigating the processes of artistic maturity and the eventual decline of colonial literary frameworks (Laâbi, *Souffles* 1, 1966).

Khatibi categorizes Maghrebi writers into two groups, both of which he includes under the term "prostitute literature" due to their strategic appeal to French audiences, albeit for different reasons. The first group, including Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, and Mouloud Mammeri, focused on portraying the social stratifications and minutiae of everyday life in local societies. This approach catered to the exotic tastes of a French readership, reinforcing an Orientalist fascination with the Maghreb as a distant,

picturesque, and fragmented space. However, as the Algerian struggle for independence gained momentum, these writers were criticized for their perceived disconnection from the revolutionary cause, being accused of neglecting the urgent realities of colonial resistance (Khatibi, *Souffles* 3, 1966). The second group, emerging during the Algerian War of Independence, included writers like Malek Haddad, Assia Djebar, and Mourad Bourboune, who aligned their works with revolutionary themes. Yet, despite their focus on the liberation struggle, these authors still targeted French leftist intellectuals, a demographic eager for narratives on rebellion and anti-colonial resistance. Their works, therefore, remained shaped by the expectations of a French readership keen to consume stories of revolutionary fervor. With the end of the war and the stabilization of independence, the global appeal of Maghrebi literature diminished. French leftist intellectuals, previously fascinated by the "rebellious Maghrebi scholar," shifted their attention to contemporary issues, often pathologizing Maghrebi identity and assuming the African question was "resolved" with independence. Maghrebi writers, meanwhile, faced the challenge of addressing their rapidly changing societies through disoriented literary works, reflecting a collective search for meaning in a post-independence context (Khatibi, 1968). While Khatibi's critiques were echoed by Laâbi and reiterated in the introduction of Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio's anthology, there is no quantitative evidence to confirm the specific reception patterns of these works. Nevertheless, the critiques articulated by the writers of *Souffles* remain a powerful denunciation of the Maghrebi literary production that catered to colonial and postcolonial metropolitan expectations.

The review's focus on language aligns with broader philosophical debates about the limits of language in describing reality. Seminal works by De Saussure (1907), Khatibi (1968; 1983), and Derrida (1967; 1996) were pivotal in articulating the disjunction between written language (*langue*) and the poet's inner world (*language*/*parole*). Particularly relevant is Derrida's *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (1996), which confronts the notion of a pure, pre-colonial language, situating French as politically hegemonic in colonial Algeria. Contrary to expectations for a writer shaped by a colonial upbringing, Derrida does not advocate for a return to an originary language. Instead, he describes himself as possessing a single language, an "absolute habitat," where language is considered as both home and exile. Derrida's autobiographical reflections further inform his linguistic critique. His complex relationship with French as a maternal yet foreign tongue elucidates a deeper tension: the inseparability of linguistic exile and creative expression. His French

fluency, tempered by his "French Algerian" accent, became emblematic of alienation and belonging. As he noted, the act of writing reinforced a schism between French literary culture, steeped in tradition and elite transmission, and the lived cultural reality of French Algerians. This fracture is intrinsic to Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which Abdel-Jaouad (2002) interprets as an "unquenchable desire" to expose the interruptions of meaning and identity. Deconstruction, in this light, emerges as an enduring interrogation of non-belonging (*étrangeté*), mirroring the alienation of colonial subjects introduced to French literary heritage. These reflections are not merely theoretical. Derrida's exile from Algeria and immersion in metropolitan French intellectual circles profoundly shaped his critique of language's role in perpetuating colonial power dynamics. Language, for Derrida, is never purely natural or inhabitable; it is always marked by the dislocation of exile and nostalgia, a perspective inseparable from his personal and historical context (Chow, 2004).

Derrida's project, echoing that of Maghrebi surrealist poets, was to reveal the intricate ties between language, territorial belonging, and community identity. The French language, according to *Souffles'* contributors, needed to be pierced, fragmented, and deterritorialized to represent the colonized self. Laâbi, employing Marxist imagery, prepared his readership for a transformative cultural and political movement, stating: "Something is about to happen in Africa and in the rest of the Third World. Exoticism and folklore are being toppled. No one can foresee what this 'ex-pre-logical' thought will be able to offer to us all. But the day when the true spokespersons of these collectivities really make their voices heard, it will be a dynamite explosion in the corrupt secret societies of the old humanism" (Laâbi, *Souffles* 2, 1966, p. 21). Through this proclamation, Laâbi envisions a seismic shift away from the exoticized and folklorized perceptions imposed by colonialism. He foresees the rise of authentic voices from Africa and the Third World, capable of dismantling the remnants of colonial humanism. According to Laâbi, this process of de-alienation and restructuring, initiated by *Souffles*, ultimately aimed to foster a new, original African-based humanism. This vision aligns with a broader call for a genuine and effective process of decolonization—one that transcends political independence to encompass cultural, linguistic, and intellectual liberation.

Issue 3 (1966) of *Souffles* presented two particularly significant contributions to the discourse on cultural and literary decolonization. Ahmed Bounani's *Introduction to Moroccan Popular Poetry* offered a critical overview of the genre, highlighting the inadequacies of academic studies, particularly in their

neglect of Moroccan oral poetic traditions. He lamented how the transcription of these oral forms often stripped them of their beauty and nuanced meanings, a loss emblematic of broader cultural erasures under colonial academic frameworks. Meanwhile Abdelkebir Khatibi's *The Maghrebi Novel and National Culture* provided a groundbreaking analysis of the relationship between literature and the socio-economic structures of colonialism. Anticipating themes he would expand upon in *Le roman maghrébin* (1968), Khatibi referenced Lucien Goldmann's (1963) assertion of a structural homology between the economic systems of capitalism and the literary form of the novel. Goldmann posited that the novel mirrors the individualistic ethos of market-driven societies, where interpersonal relationships are mediated by commodities and economic interests. Building on this idea, Khatibi argued that the development of the Maghrebi novel from 1945 to 1962 was inextricably tied to the anti-colonial struggle but also shaped by the consumerist demands of metropolitan French audiences. While the Maghrebi novel ostensibly emerged as a vehicle for expressing national culture and resistance, it was predominantly written in the colonizer's language, targeting foreign consumption. This dynamic, he suggested, "blurred" the cultural production of the era, as literature became politicized and entangled with the colonial economy. Consequently, some critics contended, Maghrebi literature lacked authenticity, being neither fully rooted in its indigenous culture nor free from metropolitan constraints. Khatibi's analysis went further to address the psychological and existential toll of this phenomenon. For colonized individuals, the imposition of foreign cultural values fostered an "ontological sickness," as they grappled with a society that was simultaneously imposed and alien. This dissonance, Khatibi argued, profoundly influenced the trajectory of Maghrebi literature and underscored the need for a cultural and linguistic reimagining to achieve true decolonization (Khatibi, 1968).

Khatibi elaborated these ideas in *Maghreb Pluriel* (1983), proposing the development of a "*pensée autre*" (thinking otherwise) to decolonize Maghrebi identity. Rather than defining itself in opposition to Western epistemology or Arab-Islamic theology, the Maghreb, as he envisioned it, was a horizon of thought, celebrating plurality, alterity, and difference. This approach embraced a "double critique," directed at both models, situating the Maghrebi self on the geographical, cultural, and metaphysical margins of being. As we will see in the next paragraph, *Souffles*, in its earliest publications, would exemplify this multiplicity, offering a concrete cultural manifestation of the pluralistic identity Khatibi theorized.

4. From a "Seismic" Literature to an Apocalyptic Literary Being: Souffles 1–11 (1966–1968)

One of the primary objectives of Souffles was pedagogical, as the journal argued that the linguistic dualism in Morocco—the coexistence of French and Standard Arabic in spoken and written forms—had significantly undermined the educational foundations of Moroccan youth. As Laâbi remarked in *Souffles* 4: "It is true that in the colonial context the linguistic frustration of the colonized went beyond the mere coexistence of two modes of expression. It undermined his psyche and depreciated his culture" (p. 70). These tensions, exacerbated during the post-independence period, culminated in widespread strikes over the language of instruction in schools. French was seen as a pathway to modernization, while Arabic symbolized a desire to reclaim Moroccan identity after colonialism, albeit with connotations of backwardness. This symbolism was deeply ingrained in the language policies of the early post-independence government: Arabic was prioritized in the first two years of primary school, but French remained the medium of instruction for mathematics and sciences at all levels until the full Arabization of public-school curricula in 1989 (Dichter, 2020).

Mohammed V initiated a process of educational "Arabization," promoting Standard Arabic as the primary language to assert linguistic sovereignty and foster Arab nationalism. Yet, this shift disregarded Morocco's cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly marginalizing the indigenous Amazigh languages. The exclusion of Amazigh voices continued until the 2011 constitution, when Amazigh was officially recognized as a national language. *Darija*, spoken by over 70% of the population, remains uncodified and unrecognized as an official language, although its written usage has grown in recent years, especially in journalism, literature, and social media (Miller, 2017). For Moroccan intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s, the debate over a literary national language was largely restricted to Arabic and French. Many writers viewed French as an integral part of their culture and creative expression. It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the first public advocacy for the valorization of *Darija* began to emerge. This exclusionary focus on Standard Arabic and French left Moroccan youth caught between familiarity with spoken *Darija* and written French but alienated from written Standard Arabic. Moreover, these linguistic policies deeply affected young

Moroccans' ability to master any language. As Laâbi observed: "Even if he was frustrated with his mother tongue, the colonized adolescent still had at his disposal a medium of thought with which he could formulate his revolt and his ideas, and with which he could externalize his personality. After independence, the adolescent lost this imposed medium, but he has not yet reconquered the Arabic language. He is aphasic. His deepest thoughts and personality emerge only in sporadic and imprecise fragments" (Laâbi, *Souffles* 4, 1966, p. 70).

The challenges of Arabization extended beyond linguistic tensions to encompass weak learning outcomes and ineffective methods of teaching Arabic. Instead of addressing policies, curricula, and pedagogies, frustration was often misplaced on the language itself. Arabization faced immense political and systemic obstacles. For example, while Al-Istiqlal, a conservative political party, advocated for fully Arabized education, the monarchy favored bilingual education, viewing French as essential for maintaining communication and exchange with Europe. Removing French entirely risked creating a language vacuum, particularly since high school curricula were not fully articulated in Arabic until the 1980s (Elabbas, 2001). The implementation of Arabization also suffered from critical flaws. The lack of trained Arabic educators led to the recruitment of teachers from the Middle East, particularly Egypt, Syria, and Sudan. However, geopolitical tensions, such as the Egyptian Army's involvement in the "War of Sands" in 1963 against Morocco, resulted in the removal of Egyptian teachers, disrupting the process of Arabization. Further delays occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to unexpectedly high student enrollments in middle schools, which overwhelmed the system. Consequently, the aim of transforming Arabic into a contemporary tool for communication was sidelined, leading to widespread disengagement from the language (Brustad, 2015).

Despite these obstacles, *Souffles* did not seek to determine a single legitimate language for literature or education. Instead, its goal was to reclaim and reconstruct each language as a means of full self-expression, ensuring that linguistic diversity became a source of cultural enrichment rather than division. In particular, the review sought to transcend the stylistic and thematic divisions traditionally associated with language. As Youssef El Kaidi (2023) notes, Moroccan writers in Arabic often found themselves torn between themes of colonial resistance, nationalism, and nostalgia[2], and a manifest desire for

[2] See for reference: Allal El Fassi, Abdelkarim Ghallab, Mohamed Larbi Messari, Mohamed Sebbar, Mohamed Aziz Lahbabi.

the Western model of secular and rational modernity[3]. Conversely, writers who chose the colonizer's language inhabited a geo-linguistic space that was hybrid, fragmented, and layered—situated at the crossroads of cultures, languages, and identities (El Kaidi, 2023). Francophone writers, Marx-Scouras (1986) argues, occupied a position that dissociated literature from nationality: "[t]he Francophone writer is necessarily trans-national, transcending the artifice of national language, literature, and identity" (p. 8). This linguistic materiality intersects with semi-geographies, rendering these writers, in Derridean terms, "exiles of language," fully belonging to space while simultaneously transcending categorization.

The writers of *Souffles* engaged in deliberate linguistic experimentation, enacting what Abdelkebir Khatibi termed a "violence upon literary language." This rupture was manifested syntactically and grammatically through innovative uses of punctuation, space, and form. According to Abdellatif Laâbi (2001), Maghrebi literature in French could only be a "terrorist literature," one that dismantles syntax, phonetics, morphology, and symbolism at every level. Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine encapsulated this approach with his concept of "guerrilla linguistics," articulated in *Poésie toute* (1964), which served as a foundation for *Souffles*' literary techniques. This linguistic violence arose from a fractured reality, where writers felt compelled to destroy language itself to express the schizophrenics linguistic experience of postcolonial Morocco. For Khaïr-Eddine, this violent deconstruction was both a rupture and a return—to a time of oral poetry, where style and technique evoked ancestral modes of expression. Readers were forced to transition from mere reading to listening, reconnecting with an old poetic tradition while simultaneously witnessing the mutilation of the poet's body—the emblem of the formerly colonized subject. Writing became an act of resistance, a seismic activity with corrosive effects, as exemplified in Khaïr-Eddine's *Agadir* (1967). The work, written in the aftermath of the 1960 earthquake, transformed the catastrophe into a symbol of internal fractures, historical violence, and political oppression. For the author, writing was a "*séisme permanent*," a "*violence sismique, dévastatrice et décapante*" (Abboubi, 2023). His ambivalent relationship with Morocco further infused his work, portraying the land as "*humide d'indéfférance*" and "*coupable*" for having allowed itself to be conquered and shaped by external forces (Khaïr-Eddine, 2009).

The complex relationship with his homeland reflects Khaïr-Eddine's

[3] See for reference: Mohamed Zafzaf, Mohammed Berrada, Mohamed Choukri.

personal trajectory. Born in 1941 in Azro Wado (*Pierre-du-vent*), a village in the Anti-Atlas, his early years were marked by familial dislocation. When he was seven, his father moved to Casablanca, and Khaïr-Eddine joined him at eleven, leaving behind his mother, who was repudiated and abandoned in their village. This separation ignited his rebellion against familial, religious, and social authority. In 1965, he chose voluntary exile in France, where he worked as a laborer in the Parisian suburbs. France became the site of his second exile, an ambivalent space of creation and alienation, where he recognized that to be a writer, he had to write from there. Yet, financial constraints forced his return to Morocco in 1979.

In his literary corpus, Khaïr-Eddine navigates three recurring figures: the mother, representing biological ties, the motherland, and cultural origins; the father, an oppressive symbol of power, colonialism, and authority; and the grandfather, an idealized and protective image of the ancestral tribal past. These figures are imbued with layers of love, hostility, and nostalgia, as they reflect his fragmented identity and relationship with Morocco's history and geography. As J.C. Burrec describes, Khaïr-Eddine's time in 1960s Casablanca epitomized his restless existence: "Khaïr-Eddine always seemed to be passing through; he never stopped, already wandering to escape life's grasp. He didn't know himself yet, but already his destiny unfolded in soft then sharp lines through the city's meanderings, fierce will, and dormant instincts"[4]. Poetry became his refuge, his "*ethnie réelle*," his "*liberté libre*," and his "*pain de soleils vibrants*." Yet, throughout his career, he remained a "stateless body" inhabiting a wasteland, suspended between exile and belonging.

In *Soleil arachnide* (1969), a collection of Khaïr-Eddine's poems organized by Jean-Paul Michel and published in 2009, an intentional thematic structure emerges, reflecting a gradual shift from seismic writing to an apocalyptic and dreamlike mode. When the poet's message becomes particularly violent, punctuation and empty spaces dominate, compelling the reader into prolonged pauses. This is evident in *Nausée noire* and *Barrage*, where the fragmented style mirrors the physical and linguistic violence Khaïr-Eddine sought to convey. In contrast, when the dimension becomes dreamlike, punctuation and spacing vanish entirely, drawing readers into his unconscious through a stream-of-consciousness style that materializes his psyche. These transitions reflect complex interactions between the unconscious and reality, mirroring

[4] See Issandr El Amrani, "There was Souffles. Reconsidering Morocco's most radical literary Quaterly", *Bidoun*, available at: https://www.bidoun.org/articles/in-the-beginning-there-was-souffles.

the fraught movement from colonial to postcolonial identity. In this dreamlike state, violence subsides almost entirely, offering a fleeting respite. Khaïr-Eddine himself acknowledged this duality in his correspondence with Abdellatif Laâbi, expressing his aspiration to write a novel where "poetry and delirium would be one" (*Souffles* 1, 7-8). This evolution culminates in a *Manifeste* that combines multiple languages and forms, underscoring the journey from fragmentation to synthesis. The *Manifeste* begins with a striking vertical inscription, "*Je ne perds*." The interpretation of these words is left entirely to the reader, who is prompted to ponder the nature of this "loss." What emerges as the loss of the writer's own body and homeland becomes the raw material of his creative expression. One might consider that what he refuses to lose is precisely this ability to transform loss into writing itself. Initially fragmented across the first three stanzas, the text transitions into a prose paragraph, where the poet directly addresses the essence of dreams. Khaïr-Eddine employs punctuation to reflect the creative process, portraying himself as an actor donning a mask. As he describes, "[t]he poem enters my skin and wears it down, expanding its substance until it erodes my body completely" (p. 85). Language, a tool of divine revelation, enters his body, expanding and ultimately dissolving it, enabling the author to rewrite history through the memory of his ancestors. Yet, as the dream ends, the fragmented style reemerges, waking readers to an anthem of a new, democratic nation, led by a metaphorical dead king.

Violence remains central throughout this trajectory—violence against the colonized body, described as occupied, massacred, and "ironed as a shirt," with writing as its sole "habitable" space. This violence extends to language, which Khaïr-Eddine mutilates and rearranges, symbolizing an obstacle to attaining the oneiric state. The body, crawling, vomiting, and scattering, reflects this rupture, trapped by "*chaînes brûlantes*" and "*résine et fer.*" As the text progresses, a shift occurs from individual particularity ("*syllabe par syllabe je construis mon nom*") to collective multiplicity ("*je m'incorpore à ma saignante multitude*"), manifesting a fluid, fragmented identity. The self flows "*hors mon contenu*," like a shrimp navigating laminar spaces at the city's edges, symbolizing marginality and displacement[5]. Through this apocalyptic vision, Khaïr-Eddine and *Souffles* articulate their ultimate project: poetry as a form of divine revelation heralding a linguistic apocalypse. This poetic endeavor fosters a collective socio-agnatic solidarity that, in its utopian form, transcends individuality. Within the dream dimension of writing, plurality finds its fullest realization. As Khaïr-Eddine demonstrates, the plurilingual

[5] See Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, "Nausée Noire", *Soleil arachnide,* 2009, pp. 21-41.

text embodies a "mad jouissance," deploying diverse tools and techniques to articulate *la pensée autre*—a mode of thought that challenges traditional epistemologies. This *pensée autre* seeks to express a new, *present* identity through its use of language, as Jacques Derrida suggests, while simultaneously embodying a collective truth. Following Khatibi's "double critique," it affirms itself against both Western and traditional Islamic models. In its most surrealist expressions, the poetry of *Souffles* becomes the plural manifestation of a collective identity, realized through a surrealist imaginary. Figures such as "*le sang noir*," "*le désert blanc*," "*le lait dans le désert*," "*l'arbre de caroubier*," "*le chameau*," and "*la figue mûre*" synthesize ecological and cultural symbols that intertwine past traditions with new political and cultural meanings.

In particular, the black blood is a recurring figure in this poetic framework, serving as an emblem of identity and resistance that underscores the profound connection between the Moroccan people and their land. This identity-driven reclamation is juxtaposed with images such as *"le désert blanc"* and *"le lait dans le désert"*, which evoke hope and resilience, symbolizing nourishment and depicting the desert as a site of renewal. The idea of life flourishing in the most desolate place finds its most significant expression in the Sahara Desert, a space intimately tied to the Berber roots of the author. Meanwhile, *"l'arbre de caroubier"* and *"le chameau"* represent endurance and adaptability, drawing upon the ecological heritage of the region to signify cultural survival. Finally, *"la figue mûre"* encapsulates the fruition of potential and the richness of a collective memory imbued with sensuality and abundance.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, the language employed by *Souffles* is not only polyphonic, but it is amplified in its own multiplicity, through the continuous adjustment of style, punctuation, and conventional meanings with the aim of constructing new images and redefining their significance. Through this intermingling of imaginaries, the ultimate experiment unfolds, language as an instrument of collective voice, multiplied to articulate an identity that seeks its own definition.

5. Conclusion: from "apocalyptic" writing to a legacy of resistance

In the early hours of January 27, 1972, Moroccan security forces launched a sweeping operation across Rabat and other cities, arresting students, intellectuals, and unionists in a crackdown targeting the Marxist-Leninist group Ila al-Amam. Among the arrested were Abdellatif Laâbi and Abraham Serfaty, the editors of *Souffles-Anfas*. What had begun as a platform for literary and linguistic experimentation, rooted in Abdellatif Laâbi's vision of cultural emancipation, had by the late 1960s transformed into a politically charged publication at the forefront of anti-colonial and Tricontinental movements. Starting in 1968, the journal embraced a more militant stance, expanding its scope to include revolutionary tracts, essays on Third World solidarity, and critiques of imperialist structures (Harrison, and Villa-Ignacio, 2016). By 1971, the launch of its Arabic-language counterpart, *Anfas*, marked a pivotal moment, as it directly engaged with Moroccan and pan-Arab audiences. This transformation was compounded by external geopolitical developments, particularly the Arab defeat in 1967, which catalyzed *Souffles*' embrace of a revolutionary language. Over its brief but impactful existence, the journal became a hub for diverse voices, publishing works by figures like Adonis, Amílcar Cabral, and Tahar Ben Jelloun, and addressing topics ranging from Brazilian cinema novo to the Black Power, and Pan-Africanism (Aïdi, 2023). This ideological evolution, however, exposed the tensions at the heart of the *Souffles-Anfas* project. While its early issues championed linguistic hybridity and pluralism—embodying Khatibi's "double critique"—the journal's later turn toward Arabic as the primary medium of expression betrayed these initial ideals. The editorial board increasingly framed Arabic as the language of resistance, rejecting French as a colonial remnant. This shift, while ideologically consistent with its anti-imperialist stance, underscored the paradox of a journal that had achieved much of its influence through its linguistic ideals that conceived language as a medium. This tension is perhaps most evident in the final issue of *Souffles*, where the editors openly acknowledged the contradiction of their position: "Despite our ideological and cultural commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle, our ideals were flagrantly compromised by the fact that we expressed them in a foreign language" (*Souffles* 22, p. 240). In advocating for Arabic as the sole vehicle of cultural and political liberation, *Souffles* effectively abandoned the inclusive linguistic experimentation that had initially defined its vision. This pivot, coupled with

the Moroccan regime's harsh repression, led to the journal's eventual demise. Laâbi was arrested in January 1972, tortured, and sentenced to ten years in prison. After serving eight and a half years and having been removed from the National Education lists, he left for France. Serfaty spent 17 years behind bars before being exiled.

Amid resurging debates about decolonization and linguistic identity, the journal's trajectory provides critical insights. Morocco's ongoing "linguistic drama" –a term used by Hisham Aïdi in the inaugural issue of *Souffles-Monde*– continues to evolve, as reflected in the 2011 constitutional recognition of Amazigh as an official language and ongoing debates about *Darija*, standard Arabic, and French. In 2023, the *Souffles* project was revived in digital form, addressing contemporary linguistic and political challenges. The inaugural issue features essays by scholars like Ali Mouryf, who examines Amazigh identity through the history of education, and Yousra Hamdaoui, who explores pan-African publishing and the circulation of Moroccan literature. These contributions reaffirm the enduring relevance of *Souffles*' original mission: to interrogate identity, foster solidarity, and imagine new forms of cultural and political liberation. As a testament to its time and a beacon for the future, *Souffles* reminds us that the struggle for liberation is as much about reclaiming language as it is about reimagining the self and the collective in a constantly shifting world.

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5. (Geo)politics as an Artwork
Two Avant-Garde Magazines in Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume

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Abstract

On September 12th, 1919, Gabriele D'Annunzio, a worldwide famous poet and World War I veteran, leaded an expedition of rebel troopers and aspiring revolutionaries to occupy Fiume, in the region of Istria. Fiume, in fact, had been an important port city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and after the war it was contended between Italy and the newborn Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slaves. However, D'Annunzio's *impresa*, which lasted until December 29th, 1920, and was repressed by the very same Italian army, soon changed into something very different from the mere irredentist blitz that was supposed to be in the first place. As a matter of fact, as demonstrated by a new wave of studies, it became a political laboratory, which attracted many avant-guard intellectuals from all over the world, and produced concrete political projects and actions, such as for instance the so-called *uscocchi*'s pirate economy, the *Carta del Carnaro*, the *Lega di Fiume*, and the *Nuovo ordinamento dell'esercito liberatore*. It also anticipated, with its mixture of nationalism and socialism, populism and leaderism, militarism and anarchy, many of the most diverse experiences of the 20th century, from fascism to *contestazione*. During this time, the idea of transforming Fiume endeavor into a real revolutionary enterprise was first and foremost supported by two avant-guard magazines: Mario Carli's *La Testa di Ferro*, and Guido Keller's and Giovanni Comisso's *Yoga*. The aim of my contribution will be to explore the ideological stands of these two periodicals – an attempt only partially accomplished so far by

critics and historians – showing how they merged D'Annunzio's aesthetic nationalism, irredentists' patriotism, Arditi's *combattentismo*, Alceste De Ambris's syndacalism, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's political futurism in the new synthesis of so-called *fiumanesimo*. In my analysis, first of all I would like to stress how this extraordinary opportunity for avant-garde activists to discuss and enact their visions originated thanks to a little territorial issue; namely, it was the existence of this tiny strip of land disputed by two powers that let first of all the *impresa* take place. In other words, *fiumanesimo* is a limpid example of how a revolutionary movement and its geopolitical situation are always historically intertwined. Secondly, I would like to highlight certain peculiar and surprising instances of these two magazines: like *La Testa di Ferro*'s plan to establish a dialogue, and possibly an active collaboration, between Dannunzian legionaries and left-oriented forces (anarchists, socialists, communists); or *Yoga*'s curious attempt (which embodies the complexity and contradictions of artistic modernism) to make their bohemian individualism coincide with an anti-industrialist cult of nature and an almost *Völkish* patriotism. Finally, I would like to underline how both these magazines evoke as their final goal the possibility of artistic avant-guards to actually make life (and politics) as an artwork – namely, to become fully political and to create an *artecrazia*, where intellectuals are in power, and everyone's creativity is freed from all limitations. It is not a coincidence that these positions, in the end, were in a way already anticipated by Gabriele D'Annunzio's works, even before his direct involvement in politics.

Keywords: ***Fiume, Gabriele D'Annunzio, La Testa di Ferro, Yoga, Futurism***

1. Introduction

In the last decades, a new special interest seems to have arisen for the *impresa di Fiume* and more in general for political *dannunzianesimo*, both in the field of history of ideas and pop cultural production. Until today, D'Annunzio's *impresa* ("endeavor") has often been mainly considered a mere anticipation of fascism: first on the initiative of the regime itself, which assimilated it to its own mythology; then at the instigation of militant anti-fascism, which embraced the same interpretation while reversing it from positive to negative. However, today's prevailing historiographic research has demonstrated that this episode has an autonomous and complex phenomenology, that with its ideological mixture of nationalism and socialism, populism and elitism, militarism and libertarianism, anticipated in fact not only fascism, but the most different political experiments of 20th century[1].

As it is well known, the *impresa* was inspired by a territorial dispute between the Kingdom of Italy and the newborn Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It therefore consisted in the occupation of the Istrian city of Fiume, by mutinied troops of the Italian army, leaded by the internationally renowned intellectual and First World War hero, Gabriele D'Annunzio. It lasted from September 12th, 1919, to December 29th, 1920: a little bit more than a year during which the city was ruled by the poet. A unique case, in fact, of an artist in power in the whole world history.

However, the *impresa* became something very different from the mere irredentist blitz it was supposed to be at first. As a matter of fact, under the rule of D'Annunzio Fiume was not only a place where one could exercise freedoms elsewhere unthinkable, but an actual political laboratory, which attracted from Italy and the world any kind of idealists, subversives, adventurers, artists, and intellectuals. Not by chance the *città di vita* ("city of life") became the place of radical political initiatives, like the *uscocchi*'s "pirate economy", the project

[1] On the *impresa di Fiume*, the great classics are Alatri, 1959; Gerra, 1974-1975; Ledeen, 2002. Other representative texts on political *dannunzianesimo* are Cordova, 2007; De Felice, 1978; De Felice, Gibellini, 1987; Galmozzi, 1994; Gentile, 1996: 225-247; Salaris, 2002; Bordiga, 2013; Alosco, 2014; Guerri, 2019. Two of the last biographies of D'Annunzio pay specific attention to the *impresa* too: Guerri, 2008: 219-261; Serra, 2019: 467-541. Finally, in English, I found appealing the interpretations offered by Bey, 2003: 122-125; Fogu, 2020: 143-157; Champagne, 2019: 94-124".

of an anti-League of Nations known as the *Lega di Fiume*, and the *Carta del Carnaro* (the "Charter of Carnaro") and the *Nuovo ordinamento dell'esercito liberatore* (the "New Organization of the Liberating Army"), both co-written by D'Annunzio with respectively Alceste De Ambris and Giuseppe Piffer.

The idea of transforming the *impresa* in the beginning of an actual revolution was first and foremost supported by two avant-garde magazines: Mario Carli's *La Testa di Ferro* ("The Iron Head"), and Guido Keller's and Giovanni Comisso's *Yoga*. What is mainly interesting about these publications is their intertwining the revolutionary impulse typical of artistic avant-gardes with a form of *geo*political intuition, which brings them to root the very same possibility of revolution in a specific place and time, that is in the historical ground and in the human factor of a community[2]. After all, the extraordinary opportunity for these avant-gardes to debate and accomplish their political visions originated in the territorial dispute of Fiume: without that, the *impresa* would not have even taken place. A limpid example of how any innovative movement is always historically linked to its geopolitical situation.

The purpose of this essay is therefore to explore the ideological stands of these two periodicals – an attempt so far only partially achieved by researchers – underlining some of their most interesting instances: the project of *Yoga* to create a new spiritual aristocracy revolting against the values of European bourgeois civilization; the efforts of *La Testa di Ferro* to establish a dialogue, and possibly an active collaboration, with far-left forces; and the only apparently paradoxical attempt of both, which incarnates the complexity of artistic modernism[3], to make individualism and nationalism match in a new political synthesis. In order to really understand the twine of avant-garde poetics and geopolitical commitment that is distinctive of both these magazines, I will employ not only the methodological tools of literary criticism, philosophical aesthetics, and history of ideas, but also categories that are typical of geopolitical analysis – and in general of political realism – such as "human factor", "grand strategy", "revisionist / conservative power", "hegemonic subject", "soft / hard power", "*noyau* / nation", etc[4].

At last, I intend to bring to light that the actual goal of these magazines

[2] For the most up-to-date definitions of geopolitics, see Graziano, 2019; Fabbri, 2023; De Ruvo, 2024. On the concept of "human factor", see also *Limes*, 2019.
[3] See Adamson, 2007; Cangiano, 2018; Subialka, 2021.
[4] For studies on the general intersection between literature and geography, see Blair, 1998; Brosseau, 1994; Peraldo, 2016; Porteous, 1985; Sharp, 2000; Tally, 2011; Thacker, 2005.

was to bring to life, through politics, the same freedom that is characteristic of artistic creativity: "*fare* la propria vita come si fa un'opera d'arte"[5] (D'Annunzio, 1988: 37). This after all is the poetics of all artistic avant-gardes, which, while attempting to restore the continuum, or rather, the unity between art and life[6], must aim (1) at becoming fully political, and (2) at establishing a regime where everyone's creativity is freed by any limitation and intellectual (understood in the broader sense) rule: *artecrazia* ("artcracy"). Both *La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga* thus confirm that the actual artistic avant-garde is nothing else but a *political* avant-garde aspiring to bring art to power. It is not a coincidence, in the end, that these positions were already anticipated by the works and actions of the very same man who leaded the *impresa*: Gabriele D'Annunzio. We will therefore see how Dannunzian Fiume itself became for these two periodicals the model of the future society.

[5] "[…] *to make* your own life as you make an artwork". All the translations of this chapter are the author's own.

[6] About the definition of "avant-garde" as the attempt to match art and life, see Bürger, 1984.

2. An Italian revolution

In the attempt to transform the climate of Fiume in an actual revolutionary project, Mario Carli – one of the greatest promoters of political futurism and *arditismo* – employed the term *fiumanesimo*, entrusting the task to propagate this ideal to the weekly publication he founded, *La Testa di Ferro*[7]. He summarized this concept in the header of the Milanese numbers of the magazine, with an evident synthetic futurist style:

> FIUMANESIMO = Fiume italiana – città di vita nuova – liberazione di tutti gli oppressi (popoli, classi, individui) – disciplina dello spirito contro disciplina formale – distruzione di tutte le egemonie, dogmi, conservatorismi e parassitismi – fucina di ogni novità – poche parole, molti fatti[8]

La Testa di Ferro was the unofficial newspaper of the *Comando* of Fiume, the true incarnation of the *scalmanata* ("agitated") soul of the *impresa*[9], and the magazine that took responsibility to give voice to Dannunzian legionaries – those who found in *fiumanesimo* not simply a label for a territorial claim, but (as indicated in the header of the first number of the magazine) "la religione nuova del dopo-guerra"[10] – so that they could freely express their ideas and opinions.

In the beginning, *La Testa di Ferro* was published in Fiume from February 1st to June 30th, 1920. In the summer of 1920, it was D'Annunzio himself who invited its editorial staff to leave Fiume. The stands of the magazine, in fact, seemed radical enough to compromise the delicate political balance of the city. The publications restarted in Milan on August 8th, after almost

[7] There are not many specific studies about *La Testa di Ferro* indeed. For a general introduction, see Salaris, 2002: 99-124. For a recap of its editorial life, see Meregalli, 2015. About Mario Carli as an activist in Fiume, see also its own works: Carli, 2021; Carli, 2013.

[8] "*FIUMANESIMO* = an Italian Fiume – a city of new life – liberation of all the oppressed ones (people, classes, individuals) – discipline of the spirit against formal discipline – destruction of all hegemonies, dogmas, conservatisms, and parasitisms – the forge of every innovation – few words, many facts".

[9] See De Felice, 1978: 23-35.

[10] "[…] the new religion of postwar".

two months of pause, showing remarkable graphic and content changes, and lasted until April 17th, 1921 (with an interval between December 26th, 1920, and January 30th, 1921, during the facts of the so-called *Natale di sangue*, the "Bloody Christmas"). In Milan, without any more direct political controls, *La Testa di Ferro* moved under a complete futurist aegis, multiplying the columns dedicated to art and literature, and increasing its own radicality. It ceased publication only with the twelfth number of the second year, after different editorial events, fifty-four numbers overall, and one year and three months of life. Ultimately, it survived the fate of the *impresa* just a little.

The editorial staff of *La Testa di Ferro* was composed almost exclusively by futurists and veterans of the First World War. In addition to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, especially active in the Milanese numbers, there were also Alessandro Forti, Umberto Foscanelli, Cesare Cerati, Emilio Settimelli, Vincenzo Fani Ciotti as known as *Volt*, Piero Belli, Mino Somenzi, Ottaviano Targioni-Tozzetti, Leòn Kochnitzky, Margherita Keller Besozzi as known as *Fiammetta*… plus Guido Keller (who is also Fiammetta's cousin) and Giovanni Comisso: the very same men who founded *Yoga*. *La Testa di Ferro* published D'Annunzio's and De Ambris' speeches and statements as well, including the complete text of the *Carta del Carnaro* and the comment to it by De Ambris himself. Different columns on chronicle, analysis, satire and polemic were also proposed each week.

The ideological themes of the magazine were first and foremost stated in Mario Carli's and Alessandro Forti's articles, even if it is Marinetti who wrote its weightiest political manifesto. As a matter of fact, on August 15th, 1920, the magazine published the founder of futurism's debut article[11], *Al di là del comunismo* ("Beyond Communism"): a text that accomplished the definition of political futurism started in 1918 with the foundation of the *Partito Politico Futurista* ("Futurist Political Party") and continued in 1919 with the publication of *Democrazia futurista*[12] ("Futurist Democracy"). Its importance cannot be measured only because it consisted of a suggestive literary text, but also because it inaugurated an interesting season of ideological openness, without renouncing to the original keynotes of futurist world view.

In this article, Marinetti's main task is defining the lines of a possible "Italian revolution". Its perspective, however, has first – broadly speaking

[11] If we do not consider two very short articles published in the numbers of March 28th and June 13th.
[12] See Marinetti, 1983: 343-469.

– philosophical nuances rather than political ones. As he did in his ten-year career as a cultural agitator, Marinetti claims here a *Weltanschauung* that is above all activistic, tragic, and *agonal*. Namely, he consciously acknowledges and undertakes the dynamism and conflict intrinsic in being itself, stating the corollary for which history always demands "ostacoli da rovesciare, cioè guerre rivoluzionarie"[13] (Marinetti, August 15th, 1920). Revolution is therefore not necessarily tied to a specific political project to realize, but it coincides with a concrete, living, immanent reality, in which all phenomena participate, even the ones that would like to banish it.

Since existence is struggle, Marinetti writes, the utopia of perfect equality and eternal peace of communism is not only unattainable, but not even desirable. It is in fact not possible to attempt to eradicate conflict from being without participating in conflict itself, and therefore protracting it. And if it paradoxically happened, it would be equivalent to the death of life itself. It would be more honorable, instead, to go along with the violent motion of becoming, committing in releasing all human beings from the material and spiritual trammels that limit all their possibilities. This, according to Marinetti, would be the true futurist revolution.

In his reflections, he therefore distinguishes a "dogmatic" kind of socialism (which is utopian, internationalist, and egalitarian) from a "pragmatic" one (which is realist, patriotic, and libertarian). Opposing any abstract cosmopolitanism, he states in fact that an actual revolution cannot break out shaping itself on the example of analogous foreign attempts, but only founding on its own concrete historical and geographic situation, that is electing its national context as an action base. Italy, in other words, deserves *its* specific national revolution, corresponding to its distinctive human factor and its contingent historical needs.

Al di là del comunismo expresses an only apparently paradoxical position for which, in the wake of an ideal Italian revolution, there is no contradiction between individualism and nationalism. In fact, on one side, for Marinetti the Italian national character coincides precisely with the revolutionary aptitude of the avant-gardes to the "individualismo anarchico"[14]; on the other side, the national community is "il massimo prolungamento dell'individuo, o meglio: il più vasto individuo capace di vivere lungamente, dirigere,

[13] "[…] obstacles to overturn, that is revolutionary wars".
[14] "[…] anarchic individualism".

dominare e difendere tutte le parti del suo corpo"[15] (Marinetti, August 15th, 1920): the nation implies the individual, the individual implies the nation. Individuals therefore enhance and, so to speak, truly fulfill themselves only as a *superhuman knot* of relationship with the others; but the others who are closer and more familiar to us are inevitably those with whom we share a language, a culture, a storytelling, a specific space and time: our compatriots. Marinetti's intuition, in other words, is exquisitely *geopolitical*.

For this reason, Marinetti fosters an alliance of classes, inviting the proletariat and the middle class to fight together the social and national revolution. He also proposes to abolish, once the power is obtained, all the institutions of the past and to found new ones, more suitable to the era of futurism, when the Italian genius will realize a "meraviglioso paradiso anarchico di libertà assoluta"[16] (Marinetti, August 15th, 1920). As a matter of fact, futurism intends not only to satisfy the material conditions of the needy, but also to elevate their spirit, "[per] dare a tutti la volontà di pensare, creare, svegliare, rinnovare, e distruggere in tutti la volontà di subire, conservare, plagiare"[17] (Marinetti, August 15th, 1920), that is to fully accomplish their own existential potential. This is in fact Marinetti's final goal: the conquest of power by the Italian "proletariato dei geniali"[18] (Marinetti, August 15th, 1920) – namely, the people as composed by potential artists – and therefore the creation of an "artcratic" regime.

The literary evocation and the political vision of *Al di là del comunismo* synthesize the general conception of *La Testa di Ferro*. Some other articles that reflect on a possible Italian revolution are also those that comment the *Biennio Rosso* ("Red Biennium") struggle and those that analyze the Russian revolution of 1917.

Despite some partial disagreement, the editorial staff of *La Testa di Ferro* applauds the working class' mass mobilization during the clashes of summer and fall of 1920, praising its perfect organization in the appropriation of the means of production. However, it also accuses the socialist movement of having appeased its original revolutionary claims, ceding to Giovanni Giolitti's

[15] "[…] the utmost extension of the individual, or rather: the vastest individual able to live for a long time, to lead, to dominate, and to defend all the parts of their body".
[16] "[…] a wonderful anarchic paradise of absolute freedom".
[17] "[…] [to] give everyone the will of thinking, creating, waking up, renewing, and to destroy in everyone the will of being subjected, conserving, plagiarizing".
[18] "[…] proletariat of the geniuses".

mediation, and settling to get mere economic gains. It would have been its historical duty instead to participate in the overturning of the liberal regime together with the middle class, organizing itself in the structure of a trade union, understood as the perfect revolutionary and government unity. The revolutionary exponents of the middle class – namely Dannunzian legionaries – could therefore insert themselves into the struggle, internal to socialism, between maximalists and reformists, supporting the radical faction and directing it against the upper middle class.

Mario Carli's *Il nostro bolscevismo* ("Our Bolshevism") and *Il piccolo padre bolscevico* ("The Little Bolshevik Father"), and Alessandro Forti's *Fiume e il bolscevismo*[19] ("Fiume and Bolshevism") show that the columnists of *La Testa di Ferro* have sympathy for Bolshevism, above all appreciated for its ability to adapt the revolutionary ideals to the historical reality of Russia, while conciliating together socialism and nationalism[20]. As a matter of fact, in their interpretation, the distinction between Italian socialism – accused of preaching the subversion of society only in words, and of impeding those who believe in the revolutionary value of the First World War – and Russian Bolshevism – bravely willing to gain power with violence, and to *de facto* overcome the suffocating utopia of "dogmatic" socialism – really stands out. Giovanni Grandi shares this point of view too, writing:

> per il testimone scettico e scevro di pregiudizi non è spettacolo banale quello offerto da internazionalisti che difendono palmo palmo il suolo della patria, socialisti che hanno fatto il processo al socialismo e ucciso il principio democratico e che con mezzi che nessuna tirannia osò fin qui adottare crearono uno Stato che è un monumento elevato allo spirito più aristocratico – all'aristocrazia del pensiero e della volontà creatrice.[21] (Grandi, November 14th, 1920)

[19] Appreciations for the Russian revolution is also in De Ambris, February 1st, 1920.
[20] See Veneziani, 2012: 21-62. According to the author, this conciliation characterizes the so called "Italian ideology", interpreted as a "conservative revolution".
[21] "[…] for a witness that is skeptical and free from prejudice, it is not a banal show that one offered by internationalists who defend each span of the fatherland, socialists who put socialism on trial and killed the democratic principle, and who created with means that no tyranny so far dared to adopt a State that is a monument raised in honor of the most aristocratic spirit – of the aristocracy of thought and creative will".

Therefore, Carli explicitly shows to be open to social justice and direct democracy, whereas he claims he wants to contribute to "sollevare la miseria materiale e spirituale delle masse", and to "chiamare accanto alle «élites» anche i rappresentanti del «numero» a partecipare della vita collettiva, a decidere dei propri interessi e del proprio destino"[22] (Carli, February 15th, 1920). No one more than an official who fought in the trenches, Carli said, can in fact understand how much the value of making decisions as a group, as equals, is precious on the battlefield. Besides, the same perspective echoes in the already quoted *Nuovo ordinamento dell'esercito liberatore*, written by Piffer and D'Annunzio in 1920; and it is a principle similar to that of the Soviets, whose system, according to Carli, could be extended in every field of social organization. He in fact concludes *Il nostro bolscevismo* writing, "Ancora una volta: guardiamo all'Oriente! Tra Fiume e Mosca c'è forse un oceano di tenebre. Ma indiscutibilmente Fiume e Mosca sono due rive luminose. Bisogna, al più presto, gettare un ponte fra queste due rive"[23] (Carli, February 15th, 1920).

[22] "[…] [to] lift the material and spiritual misery of the masses"; "[to] call next to the *"élites"* the representatives of the "number" too, so that they participate to the collective life, and decide about their own interests and destinies".

[23] "Once again: we look at the East! Between Fiume and Moscow there is maybe an ocean of darkness. But Fiume and Moscow are indisputably two bright shores. We need to build a bridge between these two shores as soon as possible.

3. Anarchic-Futurist Experiments

On September 26th, 1920, Mario Carli published on *La Testa di Ferro* an article entitled *Agli avversari rossi e ultra-rossi* ("To [our] Red and Ultra-Red Adversaries"), where he addressed the far-left movements, inaugurating an interesting period of debate between futurists supporting D'Annunzio's *impresa* and exponents of Italian individualist anarchism[24]. Carli's call, directed to both socialists and anarchists, is in fact an invitation to recognize that the legionaries have their same revolutionary will, and highlights the points of the *impresa* that show it the most: "Sarebbe ora che questi avversarii riconoscessero che nel tricolore d'Italia c'è anche il rosso, e che questo rosso, dilatato fino a dominare prepotentemente gli altri due colori, dà il vero senso dei limiti e dei fini verso cui deve incanalarsi la nostra azione rivoluzionaria"[25].

The opening had effect: there were many "ultra-rossi", in fact, who replied to Carli's invitation. A fruitful column, *Polemiche di anarchismo* ("Polemics about Anarchism"), published between September 26th to December 12th, 1920, hosted the debate.

The anarchists' letters generally gravitate towards futurism, in which they admit seeing a certain libertarian vocation. They share with the legionaries of Fiume a dislike for socialist collectivism and adhesion to absolute individualism. Beyond contingent questions concerning interventionism and the *impresa*, some fundamental disagreements seem to divide anarchists and legionaries though, that is the problem of nations and the theme of the legitimacy of war.

Overall, the anarchists claim their lack of interest in the *impresa* and reject the idea that revolution is a question of territorial borders. They invite the editorial staff of *La Testa di Ferro* to admit that planning to overthrow all bourgeois institutions "significa volere sovvertire tutto il sistema economico politico sociale, non solo di Fiume o della Dalmazia, o della Italia tutta, ma del

[24] See Carli, September 26th, 1920; Carli, October 3rd, 1920; Brutno, Marinetti, October 10th, 1920; Carli, October 10th, 1920; Occa, October 31st, 1920; Novatore, November 7th, 1920; D'Arcola, November 14th, 1920; Carli, December 12th, 1920; Atomon, December 12th, 1920.
[25] "It is about time that these adversaries recognize that in the tricolor [Italian flag] there is red too, and that this red, dilated until it overwhelmingly dominates the other two colors, represents the true meaning of the limits and goals towards which our revolutionary action must channel itself".

mondo intiero"[26] (Occa, October 31st, 1920). As a matter of fact, it makes no difference that Fiume is part of Italy or of any other nation, "[se] nulla è risolto dell'attuale sistema economico"[27] (Occa, October 31st, 1920). Since any kind of society unavoidably tends, for its own nature, to cage the wild spontaneity of life in its rigid structures, a war that is at the same time revolutionary *and* national can only bring to a refoundation of the same oppressive structure that it fought in the first place. In this sense, for the anarchists the only good war is the one aiming at the absolute and global liberation of the whole humankind.

According to the anarchists, the futurists found instead their utopian view on the ideal of an *individualist anarchic society*, that is clearly a contradictory concept: "Una Società presuppone un'assetto [sic] regolamentato, normalizzato mutuo o codificato. Società, legge, regolamento, norma, o come si voglia dire, è quanto di più eccellentemente antianarchico ed anti-individualistico vi possa essere"[28] (D'Arcola, November 14th, 1920). The true anarchists acknowledge in fact only their own individuality and refuse any goal, expectation, and creed imposed from the others: "L'*io* anarchico non ha confini. Danza sull'arcobaleno del luminoso universo"[29] (Novatore, November 7th, 1920). Futurists indubitably showed that they demolished values as tradition, moral, and religion. All that remains for them is the last sacrifice: abandoning any faith in the nation and declaring themselves pure anarchists.

The legionaries of *La Testa di Ferro* replied with vehemence. About the issue of war, Carli defends, like Marinetti in *Al di là del comunismo*, the agonal character of life, that is its dynamic and conflicting being. He also invites his interlocutors to admit that – for however many reasons one can give – human beings' actions will be always deep down moved by the need to expand the sphere of their free creative possibilities against all the obstacles, even with violence. Undergoing the test of war therefore raises in human beings the savage joy of exercising their own power. Even physical pain shows its vital function, in unloading a shock of reviving energy in the anesthetized organism of fighters and in awakening them from the trapping torpor of bourgeois society. On the other hand, Marinetti, as he

[26] "[…] means to overturn the entire economic, political, and social system, not only of Fiume or Dalmatia, or of the whole Italy, but of the entire world".
[27] "[…] if nothing of the current economic system is solved".
[28] "Society presupposes a regulated, normalized, mutual or codified structure. Society, law, regulations, norm, or however you want to call it, it is the most excellently anti-anarchic and anti-individualistic [thing] there can be".
[29] "The anarchic *I* does not have borders. It dances on the rainbow of the bright universe".

already did in *Al di là del comunismo*, insists on the idea that revolutionary praxis operates efficaciously only in a determined and familiar space: this is why the futurist revolution aims only at Italy. In this sense, futurists preach a practical anarchism, while their interlocutors preach a utopian one.

In closing, Carli adds that he does not demand that the anarchists want an Italian Fiume, but that they at least acknowledge the revolutionary purpose of the *impresa*. He refuses to reduce it to a mere territorial issue, despite claiming the *fiumani*'s right to self-determination. In fact, the great apparent paradox of the political project promoted by *La Testa di Ferro* is that the aversion to an abstract kind of universal revolution coincides precisely with its willingness *to universalize the revolution of Fiume in a constellation of one-thousand other little revolutions*, which are different from each other and simultaneous to the Italian one. The *impresa* would so ideally overcome the mere taking of a city, because it aims to extend its struggle to the whole world, *but without imposing its own specific institutions*. The common ground between all the revolutions inspired by Fiume would therefore be the subversive ideal in the broader sense – revolution in general, as a transcendental, so to say – that is the will to overthrow the institutions in force, and to free people, classes, and individuals materially and spiritually.

Although *Polemiche di anarchismo* ended up in a sort of stalemate, *La Testa di Ferro* continued to show in many other ways its sympathy for ideas and figures of the anarchic movement, promoting both editorial projects (like the launch of the anarchic-futurist magazine, *Vertice* – "Vertex" – born from a collaboration between the anarchists Renzo Novatore and Auro d'Arcola, who participated in the debate of *Polemiche di anarchismo*, and the futurist painter Giovanni Governato[30]) and subversive plans (like the attempt to blow up the power plant of Milan, on December 28th, 1920, realized by the legionaries Mario Carli and Cesare Cerati, and the anarchists Annunzio Filippi and Aurelio Tromba[31]).

As we saw, according to *La Testa di Ferro*, the revolutionary idea of *fiumanesimo* does not impose as a universal model valid for everyone but incarnates precisely in the differences between the various local revolutionary expressions. This ambitious project therefore legitimates an alliance with the far left and the independentists of the entire world, under the common flag of an international political movement – the *Lega di Fiume* – to contrast the

[30] See the advertising in "La Testa di Ferro", December 26th, 1920.
[31] See Cordova, 2007: 103.

European and American imperialism embodied by the League of Nations. The persistent appreciation of *La Testa di Ferro* for anti-colonial movements – the Irish, the Egyptian, the Indian ones – that after the First World War animated the planet seems to aim precisely at laying the foundation for this alliance. In fact, if a revolution takes the character of the people who make it, every revolutionary attempt of peoples fighting for self-determination is worthy of support.

It is precisely in the wake of the question of the *Lega di Fiume* that a short debate between Mario Carli and Volt[32] – another original thinker of political futurism and sci-fi writer, who just arrived on the pages of the magazine – took place.

As well as contesting the term of *oppresso* ("oppressed one") for the people of European colonies – a title that would permit them to lay claim to any right as it were due – Volt expresses strong doubts on the project of the *Lega di Fiume*, which was founded to unite all the "oppressed" people against European-American imperialism. He in fact fears that this project could turn against Italy itself, which is still a colonial power and whose territory hosts foreign minorities. With these premises, how could the *Lega* be the adequate tool to defend Italian national interests, besides those of Fiume itself?

At the end, Volt's open letter ends up reaching a somewhat paroxysmal "clash of civilizations" tone, but his criticism does not appear without reasons. However, Carli answered back, first specifying that the title of "oppressi" is not at all "un ruolo da commedia, ma un vero e proprio titolo di nobiltà, se chi lo porta si batte per affrancarsi dall'oppressione"[33] (Volt, Carli, August 8th, 1920). He clarifies also that, in his perspective, the objective of the *Lega* is not simply contingent, that is tied to the necessity to find endorsements to resolve the international question of Fiume, but it is to create a long-term global solidarity network against the common enemy: "la voracità plutocratica anglo-sassone-francese"[34] (Volt, Carli, August 8th, 1920). To employ geopolitical language, Carli seems to propose a sort of grand strategy, typical of a revisionist power that, to emerge on the world stage, aims at taking the lead of all the countries hostile to the hegemonic subject(s). Regarding the issues of the colonies, he implicitly suggests that a superior grade of civilization and strength gives to a

[32] "About Volt's works and ideological path, see Della Casa, 2022".
[33] "[…] oppressed ones"; "a comedy role, but an actual title of nobility, if who bears it fights to get free from oppression".
[34] "[…] the plutocratic Anglo-Saxon-French voracity".

people the right to dominate another one – in this way, confirming the agonal view of futurism. According to Carli, in fact, the oppressed should not be supported for pity, namely because they are weak, but precisely when, fighting for freedom, they show themselves to be strong and prove to deserve support.

In conclusion, *La Testa di Ferro* embodied the converging or complementary ideas of those movements that, seeing in the First World War revolutionary opportunities, aspired to a both material and spiritual upheaval of liberal Italy. All with the aim to dismantle the old bourgeois institutions, to create a society founded on the absolute creative freedom of individuals, and so to realize "un tipo di uomo libero e forte, unico e indiscusso arbitro dei proprii destini"[35] (Carli, October 10th, 1920). The authors of *La Testa di Ferro* - who were viscerally pragmatic, unbiased, and for this reason opened to an argumentative dialogue with other political trends, like socialism and anarchism - promoted an alliance between the middle class and the proletariat, and planned the establishment of a national regime of social justice and direct democracy.

One of the main purposes of *La Testa di Ferro* is in fact the promotion of a politics that not only satisfies the material needs of the masses but opens to everyone the possibility of developing their own existential potential. It is not by chance that the figure of D'Annunzio strongly and insistently emerges during all the publications of the magazine, whereas the *impresa*, both in its military and legislative sides, appears above all as one (and the best) of his artworks. As an exemplary avant-garde magazine, *La Testa di Ferro* therefore truly incarnated in its revolutionary project the theme of *art-life*, identifying in the extraordinary *ordine lirico* ("lyrical order") established in Fiume – where for more than a year a poet was in power, politics was realized by the creative genius, and revolution itself was a party – the model of its ideal society.

[35] "[…] a type of human being which is free and strong, and the only and uncontested arbiter of their own destinies".

4. The party of the spirit

As we saw, during the *impresa di Fiume*, Guido Keller and Giovanni Comisso – an aviator and an adventurer the former, a soldier and a writer the latter, both "scalmanati" exponents of the *impresa* – actively collaborated with Mario Carli's futurists. In fact, they published on *La Testa di Ferro* some short articles, and then a column entitled *Informazioni dello Yoga*[36] ("Information about Yoga"). The two groups worked together also in June 1920, when they printed the *Primo quaderno della "Yoga"* ("The first fascicle of "Yoga""), entitled *Il ballo di S. Vito* ("Saint Vito's Ball") and managed by the futurist Mino Somenzi: a magazine published in a single issue, with poems, lyric prose, and political articles. Many contributors of this volume are in fact the same of *La Testa di Ferro*; it is therefore not surprising that it was positively reviewed on Carli's periodical[37].

Despite the initial partnership with *La Testa di Ferro*, in the very last months of the *impresa* Keller and Comisso started to publish in Fiume their own avant-garde magazine, entitled precisely *Yoga*. As a matter of fact, a group called Yoga, defined as *Unione di spiriti liberi tendenti alla perfezione* ("Union of free spirits tending to perfection"), had already formed in 1920 – probably in summer – as a club of Dannunzian legionaries who aspired to promote a great spiritual transformation of society. But the magazine *Yoga* is launched only on August 29th on *La Testa di Ferro* itself, as well as in two manifestos[38]. Despite the ambitions, only four numbers will be published, between November 13th and December 4th. All the articles were anonymous or signed by symbols, even if it is possible to attribute most of them to Keller and Comisso themselves[39].

Despite many programmatic points in common with *La Testa di Ferro*, *Yoga* had its own watchwords, sometimes but not always superimposable to those of Mario Carli's group. The first perceivable difference between the

[36] "See Comisso, May 30th, 1920; Comisso, June 13th, 1920; Keller, June 13th, 1920; Keller, August 8th, 1920. *Informazioni dello Yoga* appears instead on the numbers of August 29th, 1920; September 5th, 1920; September 19th, 1920".

[37] See Tignola, June 20th, 1920.

[38] Respectively republished in Somenzi, 2018: 33; and Gerra, 1974-1975: 150-151.

[39] About *Yoga*, see Carpi, 1981; Salaris, 2002: 47-73; Bartolini, 2003; Bartolini, 2020: 13-84. This last book republished *in full* all the articles of the magazine. More information about Comisso and Keller in Fiume are in their own published works. See Comisso, 2002: 3-89, 1103-1174; Keller, 2019.

two magazines is the more "theoretical" nature of *Yoga*. In fact, despite the imaginative appearance of its analyses and proposals, *La Testa di Ferro* mainly kept a political discourse and a pragmatic tone. On the other hand, *Yoga*, while not lacking in contributions focused on current affairs, primarily expressed enunciations of principle and aesthetic suggestions aiming at permeating an action to come.

The worldview of *Yoga* leaps immediately out for its radical idealism, tending to be a form of absolute activism[40]. The claimed ideal of the magazine, in fact, is not a transcendent metaphysical essence, but the ideal embodied in the activity of the spirit, that is the human subject that everyone of us actively is: "Non per un ideale: ma per esser ciò l'ideale"[41] (*Fiori di loto*, December 4th, 1920). Reading this magazine, one cannot count the references to the superiority of the spirit over matter, which is understood not as an ontological dimension opposed to the spiritual one, but instead "*emanazione dello spirito mossa dal senso estetico*"[42] (*Il fior di loto*, November 13th, 1920): namely its product. And in the absolute unit of the spirit not only the whole space but also time is included – "Noi siamo in relazione con tutte le parti dell'universo – anzi anche con il passato e con l'avvenire"[43] (*Profezie*, November 20th, 1920). It is thanks to their exceptional sensitivity that the artists can overcome their own individual identity and source to their eternal transcendental bottom, until they feel the entire spatiotemporal continuum vibrate within themselves.

The idea of a Panic unity between spirit and matter, human being and natural world, often appears in Comisso's lyrical prose, while the articles attributed to Keller – among which stands out a polemic against futurist *a-human art*[44] – insists on the ontological primacy of the human subject, understood as an individual, free from any trammel imposed by external reality. In the framework of this conception, "[il] fato che ci stringe" – the cast-iron necessity that the external world imposes us – "non è che la pigrizia del nostro spirito"[45], namely the self-delusion of a subject that

[40] On Italian activism between 19th and 20th centuries, see Meregalli, 2024.
[41] "[…] not for an ideal: but to be the ideal".
[42] "[…] *an emanation of the spirit moved by the aesthetic sense*".
[43] "[…] We are in relationship with all the parts of the universe – in fact, with the past and the future too".
[44] See *"Arte Aumana"*, December 4th, 1920. Marinetti replied to Keller's criticism precisely on *La Testa di Ferro*, in an article entitled *Polemiche sintetiche* (Marinetti, December 5th, 1920) where he reviewed *Yoga* as a magazine that does not lack of futurist nuances, but also of residuals of *passatismo*.
[45] "[…] [the] fate that grasps us is nothing else than the laziness of our spirit".

does not yet have the courage to undertake the responsibility to create its own world. But one day – the authors of Yoga forecast – thanks to "[l'] ampliamento della cultura della nostra attività, noi stessi ci trasformeremo nel fato"; and therefore "non vi sarà più natura", because "sarà trasformata a poco alla volta in un mondo spirituale"[46] (*Profezie*, November 20th, 1920).

But the idealism of *Yoga*, far from being a mere speculative stand, is also a form of rebellion against the bourgeois principles of economism, in perfect agreement with the poetics of all the European artistic avant-garde of that time: a *rivolta ideale*, as Alfredo Oriani called it, that does not take any value or limit for granted, but protests any conformity, mediocrity, and convention, and tries to transpose in concrete life the infinite freedom of art. Like *La Testa di Ferro*, Yoga too therefore associates this view to a form of anarchic individualism, celebrating life not in its material and economic dimension, but mainly in the spiritual and aesthetic one, all the way to the glorification – in perfect overlapping with the futurist perspective – of extraordinary and energizing experiences, like those of the war that just ended, and violence in general.

From this *Weltanschauung* derives the actual action program of *Yoga*: to create a *party of the spirit*[47], a new aristocracy that transcends the partial interests in collective life and contributes to develop "il senso di razza"[48] (*Il fior di loto*, November 13th, 1920) of Italian people[49]. The perspective of the magazine goes in other words beyond any ideological split, but in the perspective of the unity of the nation. It is in fact only refusing to internalize the *grand récit* imposed by the hegemonic powers of northern Europe and cultivating its own human factor that Italy can in turn become again the protagonist of world history. The editorial staff of *Yoga* therefore shows to have the same geopolitical intuition of *La Testa di Ferro*, when it writes in its debut article:

> È duro ma occorre fin da ora confessare che a mezzo del linguaggio moderno europeo e a mezzo del sistema di vita e di traffico delle razze sovrastanti è vana cosa sperare, per la nostra razza un avvenire indipendente e trionfante.

[46] "[…] [the] extension of the culture of our activity, we ourselves will transform into the fate"; "[…] there will not be nature anymore"; "[…] it will little by little be transformed into a spiritual world".
[47] See *Movimento Yoga*, December 4th, 1920.
[48] "[…] the sense of race".
[49] The concept of "razza", here and in the whole *Yoga*, is understood in an ethnic, historical and cultural way.

> Come è possibile ottenere pensiero, giudizio e diritto italico senza la possessione sicura di una nostra moneta e di una nostra spada e sovrattutto di un mistero realizzato quale nostro valore e fascino?[50] (*Il fior di loto*, November 13th, 1920)

In a few lines *Yoga* synthesizes a general formula for the long-term revisionist strategy of a power that refuses to show interest only to immediate economic and administrative issues: not only equipping with a sovereign currency and sufficient military forces (*hard power*), but also elaborating a collective storytelling, and cultivating its own culture and values, able to seduce, attract, and persuade the other geopolitical actors (*soft power*).

Yoga identifies the Italian anthropological character, as well as in the predisposition to agriculture and navigation rather than in the industrial activity[51], in the invincible tendency to individualism, to the molecularity of localism, and to social conflict: a character that is unavailable to the leveling and the homogenization typical of the modern nation, that the authors of the magazine associate with the "razze negative"[52] (*Lo spirito italico e la reazione europea*, November 20th, 1920) of northern Europe – namely France and England, which are also fequently linked to the disadvantages of parliamentarianism.

It is interesting to note that this analysis of the Italian human factor, apart from recalling the futurist theses of *La Testa di Ferro*, anticipated Robert Ardrey's intuitions on Italy by almost fifty years. In his masterpiece, *The Territorial Imperative*, he in fact identified Italy not with a nation, but with a *noyau*, that is an ethnic nucleus kept together by conflict rather than cohesion[53]. By virtue of the continue stimulation characterizing any *noyau*, in Ardrey's opinion Italy is more disposed than other nations to produce *geniuses*, that is original individuals and cultural trends. An idea that *Yoga* shows to share when, comparing Italy with the other great European nations, one of its authors wrote:

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[50] "It is hard, but we need to confess as of now that through the modern European language, and through the life and trade system of the northern races, it is vain to hope for our race an independent and triumphant future. How is it possible to get Italic thought, law, and right, without the firm possession of our own sword, and, above all, of a realized mystery as our value and allure?".

[51] See *Valori italici*, November 20th, 1920.

[52] "[…] negative races".

[53] See Ardrey, 2014: 151-154.

> per noi, razza di stirpi libere e indomabili, geniale e irrequieta creatrice di nuovo, feconda plasmatrice di fantastiche essenze e rivoluzionari sistemi, può darsi che sia stato escogitato dalle famose razze pensanti [*i.e.* le razze nord-europee] questo sistema di nazione che convenientemente arredato e decorato del sensibile necessario fu da noi ardentemente abbracciato portandoci verso una personalità (forma omogenea e controllabile) e quindi ad un pudore e ad un senso di responsabilità morale che in parte riuscì a trasmutarci, in modo da poter stare alla loro tavola e parlare il loro linguaggio.[54] (*Prospettive italiche,* November 13th, 1920)

The suggested solution to make Italy the protagonist of its own destiny again can therefore only be "anti-European" and sounds as paradoxical as the ones proposed by Carli and Marinetti on *La Testa di Ferro*: not neutralizing, but finding strength in the *noyau*; not removing, but canalizing and normalizing the intimate *polemos* of the Italian spirit. Conflict, after all, generates history: a perspective that pushes *Yoga* not to deprecate, but to exalt the condition of crisis that Italy is experiencing in the first decades of 20th century:

> occorre vincere il nemico che è in noi, facendo scaturire dal cozzo violento delle nostre individualità (uomini contro uomini) e delle nostre stirpi (regione contro regione) nella libera danza del duello e del combattimento secondo gli eroici istinti il nostro verbo di dominio. Non frenesia e lotta secondo le popolari volontà e intelligenze, ma olimpico assecondamento dei fenomeni e degli eventi presente il solenne istinto di razza: indipendenza![55] (*Prospettive italiche,* November 13th, 1920)

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[54] "[…] maybe the famous thinking [north-European] races devised for us – a race of free and untamable bloodlines, an ingenious and unsettled creator of the new, a fruitful shaper of fantastic essences and revolutionary systems – this national system that, suitably furnished and decorated with the necessary sensitivity, was fervently embraced by us. And that brought us towards a personality (a homogenous and controllable form), and therefore to a modesty and a sense of moral responsibility that in part was able to transmute us, so that we could sit at their [of the north-European races] table and speak their language".

[55] "[…] we need to win the enemy within us, bringing out our word of dominion from the violent clash of our individualities (human beings against human beings) and bloodlines (region against region), in the free dance of the duel and the fight, according to the heroic instincts. [This must] Not [be] frenzy and struggle according to the people's wills and intellects, but Olympian indulging the phenomena and the events, being the solemn instinct of the race present: independence!". About the anti-centralist stand of *Yoga*, see also *Unità d'Italia per il decentramento regionale*, November 20th, 1920.

Precisely like for *La Testa di Ferro*, according to *Yoga* a true Italian nationalism can therefore only be founded on the individualistic character of Italians, so close to the revolutionary spirit of avant-gardes. Once again, it is an inescapable dialectical circle. It is therefore necessary to make the two poles of individualism and nationalism wittingly coincide: the avant-garde principle of the ideal revolt against any reality external to the human subject needs to become the (geo)political action that aims at a national revolution. Or, as futurists would probably write, *individualism = nationalism*. The legislative system established by D'Annunzio and De Ambris with the *Carta del Carnaro* would therefore be only the anticipation of this paradoxical and ambitious project, which hopefully will extend itself from Fiume to Italy, and then to the whole world.

5. Conclusions

The analysis that I developed in the previous pages let us identify the differences and similarities between the two avant-garde magazines that animated the *impresa di Fiume*, *La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga*.

In addition to their different contributors, the two periodicals had certainly diverse editorial and aesthetic configurations: more influenced by futurism and oriented towards immediate politics, the former; more theoretical and idealist, if not even anti-industrialist, the latter. But these magazines had also important points of tangency and overlap: first of all the radical and congruent avant-garde poetics inspiring both experiences, and its glaring (geo)political outcome.

As a matter of fact, both *Yoga* and *La Testa di Ferro* pursue the complete liberation of individuals by any limit imposed by the external world – first, by bourgeois society, which institutionalizes art separating it from life, and therefore neutralizes its revolutionary load. Their final goal is in fact to accomplish the full creative freedom of art in life itself: "*fare* la propria vita come si fa un'opera d'arte", indeed. However, as we anticipated in the introduction, if it does not want to remain an empty dream, this kind of liberation necessarily implies a strong political commitment, that is the transformation of the artistic avant-garde into a true political one. It is first and foremost in this way that art, for avant-gardes, becomes life.

It is interesting to underline the virtuous circle established between the historical episode of the *impresa di Fiume* and these two avant-garde initiatives. On one hand, the *impresa* inspired them, offering the historic occasion and the ideological ground where to settle in. On the other hand, *La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga* ambitiously claimed to shape the *impresa* in turn, transforming it into an actual long-time national-revolutionary project. What I called the "geopolitical intuition" of these two magazines, from which many of their main instances derive, is in fact strictly linked to this project: the idea, also instilled by the experience of the First World War, that in history one cannot escape the necessity of conflict and violence; the perspective that a revolution, to be effective, needs to root in the human factor of the people undertaking it; the project to assemble an elite superior to social and ideological divisions, able to take the power and form a new intellectual apparatus to lead the nation;

the need to establish a grand strategy for Italy, forming a coalition of revisionist subjects against the current hegemonic powers; the urgency of elaborating a community storytelling that unites together society and fascinates foreign countries.

As we saw, the two magazines articulate this storytelling in a very similar way, namely as the myth[56] of the coincidence of individual freedom and national interests – or, if you want, of avant-garde idealism and geopolitical realism. In fact, the great revolution that according to *Yoga* and *La Testa di Ferro* will bring to the human being's liberation – the main objective of the artistic avant-gardes – can only happen at a political and collective level. It is therefore not a case that both Marinetti and Carli, and Keller and Comisso choose to be enthusiastically *italianisti*[57]: in this way from artistic the avant-garde becomes truly political, and therefore *geo*political, that is consciously and proudly placed in a certain time and space, active and effective in a specific historical and geographical context. After all, when *La Testa di Ferro* and *Yoga* declare that anarchic individualism is the main human factor of Italy, they seem precisely to find in this anthropological character the very own essence of avant-garde itself. The circle of individualism and nationalism, avant-garde idealism and geopolitical realism that was one of the greatest and most fascinating paradoxes of the *impresa di Fiume* is therefore welded and sealed.

[56] On the importance of myth for geopolitical analysis, see *Limes*, 2020.
[57] See Gentile, 2006.

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PART III:

Ecologies of Imagination: Fictional Geographies in the Anthropocene

6. Nature and city in fairytale space: an environmental and social concern

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Abstract

In my essay I am going to discuss the value of space in fairy tales in relation to the environmental and social changes which started at the end of the eighteenth century. First of all, I will provide a general idea of urban and natural space in the German context. Secondly, I will analyse three different stories, *The Brothers* (1795), *The Reconciliation* (1795) and *Undine* (1811) and I will show how the representation of space follows a specific characterisation: the dichotomy between the two areas, the celebration of nature with a consequent human elevation, the interrelation between natural space and human feelings. The conclusion will confirm the main assumptions of the *Romantic ecology* and will show how the geography of fairy tales tends to absorb and to reflect the initial problems which will reach the climax with the current Anthropocene.

Keywords: ***Romantic Ecology; Fairy Tales, Anthropocene; German Literature; Ecocriticism***

1. A spatial overview

The most recent ecocritical *corpus* working upon the era of the Anthropocene has acknowledged a deep and initial connection with the English and German Romantic period, inaugurating the season of the so called *Romantic ecology,* also known as *Green Romanticism, Romantic ecocriticism* or *Enviromanticism*.[1] The main idea which underlies these studies is that the process of industrialisation, which started at the end of the eighteenth century, activated a series of problematizations in the relationship between man and nature and intellectuals perceived a profound sense of disruption and lack of organicity. The rebirth of nature became crucial in the Romantic aesthetics, as Rigby writes:

> If at the end of the twentieth century "nature", or, more specifically, the biosphere of Earth, was seen to be on the brink of catastrophe, at the end of the eighteenth century nature, as a concept, was being reborn. This romantic reconceptualization of nature occurred, moreover, when the processes of environmental destruction that are now so pervasive were just beginning. Some aspects of contemporary ecological understanding and sensibility have their roots in this romantic rethinking of nature. (Rigby, 2004, p. 1)

This resemantization can be interpreted as a reaction to the reconfiguration of urban and natural space, which is considered in relation to a new utilitarian approach. In particular, the technical and scientific modernisation which affected England and Germany transformed «the face of the land and people's experience of place» (Rigby, 2004, p. 70)

[1] For the general relationship between the Romantic period and the current ecocriticism, see Kate Rigby, *Dancing with Disaster. Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015; K. Rigby, "Romanticism and Ecocriticism", in T*he Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, (G. Garrard, ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 60-79; G., Ellermann, *Thought's Wilderness Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature*, Redwood City, Stanford UP, 2022; D.W. Hall (ed.), *Romantic ecocriticism: Origins and Legacies*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2016; N. Heringman, "Introduction: Romantic Writing and Ecological Knowledge", in *Studies in Romanticism* 62 (1), 2023, pp. 1-7; T. Menely, "Rewilding with Romanticism", in *Studies in Romanticism* 62 (1), 2023, pp. 9-18

and implied the development of new cognitive and literary parameters.

Germany did not exist at the end of the eighteenth century. It was organized in relation to more than 300 fragmentary and small territories. The factual situation entailed the presence of a suggestive *continuum* between natural and urban space; early 19th century towns lived with and from the surrounding environment; they integrated into the landscape and were not perceived as separate from it. (Frevert, 2000, p. 67). These «Kleinstädte», small towns, dominated the German area; the boundaries between anthropized and non-anthropized space were fluid and could hardly be defined precisely. This bond with nature was expressed not only in the conservation of a wild landscape, since the mountains stood out on the horizon from the provincial view (Thalmann, 1973, p. 3), but also in the active cultivation of areas, for example in the form of gardens, which openly embodied an anthropic sign. On the whole, space appeared as cultivated nature, responding to other needs, such as the opportunity to engage in walking as a social practice.[2] In opposition to it, Vienna and Berlin were the main cities: the latter, which in 1790 had 110,000 inhabitants and a military garrison of 30,000 men, represented a vital center, it assumed the form of a big city and it could be compared to Paris and London. In terms of population, Hamburg followed the previous ones, then, at a considerable distance, it was possible to find Breslau, Dresden, Königsberg, Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich. The capital of the Kingdom of Prussia presented itself according to an increasingly anthropized form, based on specific monuments that represented a crucial cultural symbol. In fact, more generally, the city was «an area of signs: towers, churches, castles, gates, alleyways. It is organised in relation to a casual juxtaposition».[3] (Thalmann, 1967, p. 14). From their windows, people were not able to see forests or mountains, but everything was permeated by a spatial semantics, which was determined by cultural or economic places. The city consistently removed the natural environment to give space to a reality which was almost entirely built by man. From a structural point of view, in particular, roads represented an important aspect:

[2] In relation to this social aspect, see M. Gudrun König, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Spazierganges: Spuren einer bürgerlichen Praktik 1780 - 1850,* Wien, Köln, Weimar, Böhlau, 1996.

[3] The translation is mine, the original quotation is as follows «ist ein Ort der Zeichen: Türme, Denkmäler, Schlösser, Tore, Alleen. Sie lebt von Zufall des Nebeneinander».

> Urban streets were traffic axes, lifelines, streams of movement; they connected people with one another and allowed them to perceive and overcome distances. They were places of freedom, but also of social mixing: people of all social classes met here, peddlers as well as merchants, soldiers as well as scholars, maids as well as prostitutes or middle-class women. Even if not everyone was allowed to walk every street at every time and at any speed, it was fundamentally a public place, a place of chance encounters as well as of conscious staging.[4] (Frevert, 2000, p. 70)

Streets were not only perceived as networks of overlapping realities, but «they are paths on which one never stands still, which require haste and speed and lead from the comprehensible to the incomprehensible»[5] (Thalmann, 1965, p. 35). The topography of the city and these mobile games, which are implicit in the construction of roads and which are marked by tortuous labyrinthine contradictions, caused a certain variety on an experiential and cognitive level, dissolving the calm and the uniformity of the German *Land,* countryside. What Thalmann defines, in relation to the urban space, «a reign of contradictions» (Thalmann, 1973, p. 5), provoked an ambivalent perception; it presented negative and positive aspects, it scared and, at the same time, it fascinated:

> The city appeared magnificent and intoxicating, but also monstrous and chaotic. It threw the viewer into confusion, whirled him around, robbed him of his familiar certainties and roots. It brought the hidden into the light and exposed the individual, freed him from familiar social contexts, made him indifferent and anonymous. It triggered fear - and yet at the same time exerted a great fascination on the viewer.[6] (Frevert, 2000, p. 77)

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[4] «Städtische Straßen - das waren Verkehrsachsen, Lebensadern, Bewegungsströme; sie verbanden Menschen miteinander und erlaubten ihnen, Distanzen gleichermaßen wahrzunehmen und zu überwinden. Sie waren Orte der Freiheit, aber auch der sozialen Mischung: Hier trafen sich Menschen aller sozialen Klassen, Hausierer ebenso wie Kaufleute, Soldaten ebenso wie Gelehrte, Dienstmädchen ebenso wie Prostituierte oder Bürgerfrauen. Auch wenn nicht alle Menschen zu jeder Zeit jede Straße in jeder Geschwindigkeit begehen durften, war sie doch grundsätzlich ein öffentlicher Ort, ein Ort der zufälligen Begegnung ebenso wie der bewußten Inszenierung».

[5] «Es sind Wege, auf denen man nie stillesteht, die Hast und Eile brauchen und aus dem Verstehbaren ins Unverständliche führen».

[6] «Die Stadt erschien als großartig und berauschend, aber auch als ungeheuerlich und chaotisch. Sie stürzte den Betrachter in Verwirrung, wirbelte ihn umher, raubte ihm die gewohnten Gewißheiten und Wurzeln. Sie zog das Verborgene ans Licht und stellte das Individuum bloß,

The bigness of the city with its condensation of fertile possibilities, which the life of the small province was not able to provide, translated itself into ferment, freedom, mixture, frenetic movement, but, at the same time, it also produced anonymity, confusion and incoherence. From a cognitive point of view, urban spaces completely changed the perceptions of nature and they entailed a radicalization and a relativization of the main questions of existence. Moreover, they opened to the current idea of city:

> Such a concentration produced, on the one hand, narrowness and conflicts, but, on the other hand, also distances, discrepancies, differences and thus the conditions for individual processes that were inextricably linked to the experience of modernity in the "Sattelzeit".[7] (Frevert, 2000, pp. 74-75)

The late eighteenth century city developed in an embryonal form all those characteristics which are now part of a metropolis, thus confirming the main assumptions of the *Romantic ecology*. Moreover, this environment developed itself *in relation to* the countryside. This spatial differentiation has always been part of the literary and cultural system as a *Leitmotiv* starting from Greek literature with Theocritus, which elaborated the opposition between an idyllic scenario and an urban one (Curtius, 1992, p. 212). The same contrast was in the Romantic period re-signified in relation to the new proto-industrial and, consequently, experiential changes: the regularity and tranquility of country life found opposition in the crowd, in the grotesque, in skepticism and in the cognitive revisitation of one's own certainties. Therefore, this dichotomy between spaces and lifestyles expressed itself in a more social way, causing a decisive re-semanticization. Urban space was perceived according to fluidity, while some romantic intellectuals, including Wackenroder and Tieck, focused their attention on nature to trace a sense of sublimity, «eine Erhabenheit» (Frevert, 2000, p. 67).

Close to cities and cultivated areas, a purely wild landscape stood out, characterised by lakes, rivers, valleys, mountains and forests. From a factual

befreite es aus vertrauten sozialen Zusammenhängen, machte es gleichgültig und anomisch. Sie löste Angst aus - und übte doch zugleich eine große Faszination auf den Betrachter aus».

[7] «Eine solche Zusammenballung produzierte einerseits Enge und Konflikte, andererseits aber auch Distanzen, Diskretionen, Differenzen und damit die Bedingung für Individuierungsprozesse, die unauflöslich zur Modernitätserfahrung der "Sattelzeit" dazugehörten».

perspective, many of these spaces, which are culturally part of the German area, had already suffered the consequences of a strong anthropization. In particular, the *Wald*, the forest, had no more the original dimensions, «the Ercynian forest had more or less vanished» since starting from the sixteenth century «the road and the city had largely dismembered the primeval forest» (Wood, 1993, p. 128). Deforestation had then been exacerbated by the wars of the following century; moreover the German wild landscape had suffered, since the mid-seventeenth century, from other forms of environmental exploitation, due to vagabonds, marauders and fires (Schama, 1997, p. 102). In the eighteenth century the situation had worsened because of the incessant demand for wood. The forest started to become a victim of forms of utilitarianism and destruction carried out by foreign people as well. Solutions about environmental sustainability were soon proposed. The first remedies to the devastation that was affecting not only German forests, but also those of Central Europe, were being put forward in particular by means of the reforestation and the elaboration of the principle of a sustainable economy, which was introduced in 1713 by the Saxon mining captain Ha(n)ns Carl von Carlowitz (Breymayer, 2001, p. 17).[8]

On the whole, the natural and urban geography of the late eighteenth century presented a problematic situation between territorial devastation, urban anthropization that led to new forms of knowledge and the reality of the *Land* that opened to the sublime and to a more profound sense of nature *in relation to* the human being. It is unavoidable to trace in this geography embryonal forms of the current Anthropocene.

This factual context was connected to a specific German *humus*: *das Märchen,* the fairy tale, assumed a relevant importance as it was seen as an active part of Romantic literary poetics. It was conceived as fundamental in the process of formation of a sound cultural identity since «by recovering ancient mythologems, it preserves the memory of an Edenic past, and, in doing so, activates hope in a salvific future». Configured as the «residual oracular space reserved for the modern man, capable of revealing his anamnesis and his authentic path to completeness» (Schuhmacher, 1996, p. 16), the *Märchen* magically connected the lost and disoriented man with the primordial and atavistic forces and, for this reason, in a period of *general* problematization, it was identified as the canon of the poetry. Intellectuals provided a Romantic construction of space (Larcati, 2011, p. 70): as form of art, fairy tale space

[8] In relation to this principle see also H. Küster, *Geschichte des Waldes: von der Urzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, München, Verlag, 1998, in particular chapter 19, "Die nachhaltige Bewirtschaftung und die Neuanlage von Wäldern".

recalled a plurality of symbolic realities, atavistic, universal dimensions and contingent, historical ones, characterized by a multiple semantic value, «symbols of the soul and of history, of the finite and the infinite, of desire and anguish» (Venturi, 1998, p. 132). They were artistically built on the basis of a new perception of the external environment that always emerged from the comparison with factual reality:

> How do young European poets recognize themselves? Within the cognitive process that deals with the creative process, the thought of the first romantics focuses mainly on the relationship with space: with the labyrinth of the city that oppresses them and with the image of nature that has moved away from them. They are both problematic. (Thalmann, 1967, p. 25)[9]

The spatial construction responded, therefore, to the concrete situation, to the disorientation of the citizen, which was translated into the artistic expression of orders that are labyrinthine. At the same time, intellectuals tried to dominate the unstable world with aesthetic means, in order to advance from the uncertain to the sublime (Thalmann, 1967, p. 12). From this, the need to return to a non-anthropized and natural space arose.

If compared with the literary tradition, it is possible to trace an element of discontinuity and Romantic peculiarity. This fairy tale space is indeed centered on the value of the sign, of the symbol that contributes to combine atavistic *topoi*- rivers, valleys, mountains, deserts are archetypes of space (Thalmann, 1967, p. 63) - with the historical, romantic concepts- the research of unity and sublime because of a problematic context.

[9] «Woran erkennen sich die jungen Dichter Europas? Innerhalb des Erkenntnisprozesses, der sich um den schöpferischen Vorgang bemüht, konzentriert sich das Denken der Frühromantiker in erster Linie auf das Verhältnis zum Raum: zum Labyrinth der Stadt, das sie bedrängt, und zum Naturbild, das von ihnen zurückgewichen ist. Problematisch ist das eine wie das andere».

2. Perceptions in fairy tales

Considering the spatial overview and considering the role played by fairy tales in the German romantic *humus*, the question that fuels this essay and in general my research is: how is space declined in the narration in social and environmental terms? Does it convey a specific message apart from being the chosen setting of an action? In order to answer these two questions, I am going to consider and analyse some Romantic fairy tales.

The Brothers was written in 1795 by Ludwig Tieck. It deals with a dispute between Omar and Mahmoud that ends with a final reconciliation, the setting is an Oriental one, near Baghdad. Mahmoud helps his brother to improve his financial situation, but when he himself needs and asks for help, Omar does not return the favor back. Although the tale is set in a foreign city, it is interesting to notice how the spatial context is described and how it conveys a human state of disappointment. After being betrayed, Mahmoud comes back home:

> Mahmoud's heart was deeply touched, and he left his ungrateful brother. "And is it then true," cried he, "that covetousness only is the soul of men? Their own selves are their first and last thought! For money they barter truth and love; do violence to the most beautiful feelings, to gain possession of the sordid metal that fetters us to the grovelling earth in its disgraceful chains! Self-interest is the rock on which all friendship is shivered. Men are an abandoned race. I have never known a friend nor a brother; and my only intercourse has been with men of trade. Fool that I was to speak to them of love and friendship! Only money can be exchanged with each other." Returning home, he took a circuitous path, in order to let his painful emotions subside. He wept at the sight of the noisy market-throng; every one was as busy as an ant in carrying stores into his dingy dwelling; no one cared for the other, unless induced by a sense of profit; all were hurrying this way and that, as insensible as ciphers. He went home disconsolate.[10] (Tieck, 1828, pp. 250-251)

[10] The pages refer to the original quotation, «Machmud verließ mit tiefgerührtem Herzen seinen undankbaren Bruder. – So ist es denn wahr, rief er aus, daß nur Gewinnsucht die Seele des Menschen ist! – Nur sie selbst sind ihr erster und letzter Gedanke! für Geld verkaufen sie Treue und Liebe, stoßen die schönsten Gefühle von sich weg, um das nichtswürdige Metall zu besitzen, das uns mit schändlichen Fesseln an diese schmuzige Erde kettet! – Eigennutz ist die Klippe, an der jede Freundschaft zerschellt, – die Menschen sind ein verworfenes

In that period Baghdad was seen as the centre of nevralgic economic and commercial exchanges. Ludwig Tieck describes this urban environment in relation to a «noisy market throng» where everyone runs and exclusively thinks, in a utilitarian perspective, about money and about the advantages deriving from interpersonal relationships. People are compared to frenzied ants whose scope is merely to get as much as possible. The city conveys a strongly negative meaning, as it is seen only in relation to economic concerns and to the lack of empathy, people do not know anything about «the most beautiful feelings», but they only focus on money and social opportunism. As it is possible to notice, this urban representation reverberates those social elements which have been previously considered: tumult, chaos, confusion, cognitive and human reorganization. During this period Tieck was, indeed, in Berlin, after studying in Halle, Göttingen and Erlangen - where he met Wackenroder -, and he probably was experiencing the strong changes of the city, reflecting them into the text. In other words, Tieck depicts an Oriental city both in relation to the generally shared imagination and values of that place, but also in relation to his personal perception of a capital city.

In the fairy tale, this spatial representation is immediately and significantly connected to another place. Mahmud decides to leave Baghdad in order to move towards the Persian boundary; he leaves behind the tumult of the city with its consequent lack of empathy, of corruption and of sense of immorality, he reaches a natural environment, which is presented in opposite terms. He is now upon a grassy hill, which becomes the setting for an important encounter, since here he meets a beggar, asking for help:

> Seized with a sudden impulse of compassion, he took his last pieces of silver out of his pocket, and gave them to the beggar, who, after a mute expression of thanks, pursued his way.Omar now felt extraordinarily light-hearted and cheerful; the Deity had, for his instruction, held a picture as it were before him of the misery to which man may sink. He now felt power enough within

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Geschlecht! – Ich habe keine Freunde und keinen Bruder gekannt, nur mit Kaufleuten bin ich umgegangen. Ich Thor, daß ich von Liebe und Menschenfreundlichkeit zu ihnen sprach! nur Geldstücke muß man ihnen wechseln! Er machte einen Umweg, ehe er nach Hause ging, um seinen Schmerz etwas erkalten zu lassen. Er weinte, als er das tobende Marktgewüh*l* sah, wie jedermann gleich den Ameisen beschäftigt war, in seine dumpfe Wohnung einzutragen, wie keiner sich um den Andern kümmerte, als nur wenn er mit seinem Gewinn zusammenhing, alle durch einander laufend, so empfindungslos, wie Zahlen. – Er ging trostlos nach Hause».

him to bear with poverty, or by activity to cast it off. He made plans for his sustenance, and only wished he could at once have an opportunity of showing how industrious he could be. Since his noble-minded compassion for the beggar, and the generosity with which he had sacrificed to him his whole remaining stock of money, he had had sensations such as he had never known before. A steep rock abutted on the road, and Omar ascended it with a light heart, to take a view of the country, made still more lovely by the setting sun. Here he saw, lying at his feet, the beautiful world, with its green plains and majestic hills, its dark forests, and brightly-blushing rivers, the sunset of the evening; and he felt like a prince who ruled over the whole, and put forth his power over hill, and wood, and stream. He continued sitting on the peak of the rock, absorbed in the contemplation of the landscape. He resolved to await there the rising of the moon, and then to continue his journey.[11]

If the urban space is related to a utilitarian perspective, the natural environment opens to the expression of those «most beautiful feelings» that the city had dried up. Actually, it is his «noble-minded compassion» which activates another view on the «beautiful world». Empathy and compassion, with a consequent reconfiguration of the interiority, nourish not only a strong humanization and a spiritual elevation, but, at the same time, they find a correspondence with the external environment. This gesture gives the character the opportunity to see this wonderful world, to contemplate the grandiosity

[11] «Von einem plötzlichen Mitleiden ergriffen, zog er die letzten Silbermünzen aus seiner Tasche und gab sie dem Bettler, der nach einem stummen Danke seinen Weg fortsetzte. *Omar* fühlte sich jetzt außerordentlich leicht und froh, die Gottheit hatte ihm gleichsam ein Bild vorgehalten, wie elend der Mensch sein könne, um ihn zu belehren. Er fühlte jetzt Kraft in sich, die Armuth zu erdulden und durch seine Thätigkeit wieder abzuwerfen. Er machte Plane, wie er sich ernähren wolle, und wünschte nur gleich eine Gelegenheit herbei, um zu zeigen wie fleißig er sein könne. Er hatte nach seinem edeln Mitleiden gegen den Bettler, nach der Freigebigkeit, mit der er ihm sein ganzes übriges Vermögen hingegeben hatte, eine Empfindung, wie er sie bis dahin noch nicht gekannt hatte. Ein steiler Fels stand an der Seite, und *Omar* bestieg ihn mit leichtem Herzen, um die Gegend zu überschauen, die der Untergang der Sonne verschönerte. Er sich hier zu seinen Füßen gelagert die schöne Welt mit ihren frischen Ebenen und majestätischen Bergen, mit den dunkeln Wäldern und rothglänzenden Strömen, über alles das goldene Netz des Abendroths ausgespannt; und er fühlte sich wie ein Fürst, der alles dies beherrsche, und den Bergen, Wäldern und Strömen gebiete. Er saß oben auf der Felsenspitze in dem Anschaun der Gegend versunken. Er beschloß hier den Aufgang des Mondes abzuwarten und dann seine Reise fortzusetzen».

of nature with its hills, forests, rivers and it implies the active participation of the subject as he feels «as a prince».

Previously it has been said that some Romantic writers saw nature in relation to the idea of the sublime, as a reaction to urban disorder. In 1792, three years before this fairy tale, Ludwig Tieck wrote *Über das Erhabene,* where he described these feelings which are activated by the external natural environment:

> If I enter a beautiful region, adorned with every charm of attraction, I shall feel, memories and dreams will surround me, everything will tear me away from my ordinary feelings - but if I stand on a cliff that bends far out over the sea, with infinity before me, and nothing but immeasurable abysses below, then the soul will feel elevated, great sublime thoughts will develop from my feelings, I will lose myself in the great mass, and a thousand thoughts of eternity and infinity will dig themselves deep into my inner being.[12] (Zeydel, 1935, p. 544)

Tieck describes a sense of sublime that arises from the natural landscape and that this dimension can provoke in the spectator, celebrating the beauty of nature which causes a different number of profound feelings and «great sublime thoughts». At the end of the manuscript he also writes some notes:

> Man is in two states, he is either «passionless» or «passionate.» Longinus teaches that «Pathos (=passion)» can enhance the sublime. Only great passions are capable of sublimity. The more a person transforms his animal powers into soul powers, the nobler he becomes himself. The more animal

[12] The original quotation is as follows, «Wenn ich in eine schöne Gegend trete, die mit allem Zauber des Reizes geschmückt ist, so werde ich empfinden, Erinnerungen und Träume werden mich umgeben, alles wird mich aus meinen gewöhnlichen Gefühlen heraus reißen,-aber wenn ich auf einer Klippe stehe, die sich weit übers Meer hinaus bückt, die Unendlichkeit vor mir, unten nur unermessliche Abgründe, da wird die Seele sich erhoben fühlen, aus meinen Gefühlen werden sich große erhabene Gedanken entwickeln, ich werde mich selbst in der großen Masse verliehren, und tausend Gedanken von Ewigkeit und Unendlichkeit werden sich tief in mein Inneres graben».

> antipathy becomes an idea, and animal sympathy becomes love, the higher a person stands. Passions have three levels: benevolence, tenderness, love, anger, rage, cowardice, fear, anxiety, grief, despair, self-obscurity, self-love, pride. Mere beauty lies in the middle.[13] (Zeydel, 1935, p. 548)

Tieck creates a connection between human interiority and the external environment. By considering Longinus he agrees with him about the fact that only great passions, for example compassion and empathy, can activate a sense of sublimity which reflects itself on the external environment and which entails a profound sense of organicity between the human being and the natural dimension. Actually, the most striking aspect of the fairy tale representation is that the spatial dichotomy implies two different views of life in relation to the perception of the environment surrounding the character. While the anthropized space is seen in relation to corruption and immorality, as it freezes the beautiful interior values - human beings are compared to animals, to ants -, the natural space determines a strong connection evoking a great sublimity, implying an intimate relationship with the external environment, - the human being is now compared to a prince. Space conveys the level of humanity or inhumanity, elevation or reduction.

The story ends with a positive portrait: the reconciliation of the two brothers.

On the same semantic level, *The Reconciliation* is the title of another fairy tale written by Tieck during that year, in 1795. It is about a committed crime and the absolution of the sin. As it is possible to notice both fairytales deal with the concept of peace, forgiveness and, as the very title suggests, reconciliation that is always conveyed by the external and natural environment, letting us figure out how nature is perceived and what kind of celebrative portrait the author wants to provide *in relation to* the human being. In this fairy tale, the environment is described in two different terms, as interrelation between the subjectivity of the protagonist and the external setting, which is a literary *topos,* and as expression of the final reconciliation by means of its sacredness.

[13] «Der Mensch ist in zwei Zustanden, he is either «leidenschaftslos» or «in Leidenschaft.» Longinus teaches that «Pathos (=Leidenschaft)» can enhance the sublime. «Nur große Leidenschaften sind der Erhabenheit fahig.-Je mehr der Mensch seine thierischen Kräfte in Seelenkräfte verwandelt, je edler wird er selbst-je mehr die thierische Antipathie zur Idee, die thierische Sympathie Liebe wird, je höher steht der Mensch. Leidenschaften haben drei Stufen: Wohlwollen, Zärtlichkeit, Liebe - Haß, Zorn, Wuth- Feigheit, Furcht, Angst-Kummer, Gram, Verzweiflung- Selbstdünkel, Selbst- liebe, Stolz. Das bloß Schöne liegt in der Mitte».

First of all, the story begins with a specific and emblematic space-time setting: it is almost evening and a young knight is walking through «a lonely valley». The description of the surrounding landscape immediately reveals a symbiosis, a connection with the character's state of mind:

> The clouds gradually grew darker, the evening glow became paler, a small stream murmured softly, hidden under the overhanging bushes of the mountain. [...] The sound of the small stream grew louder, the hoofbeats thundered through the solitude, the shadows grew thicker, the ruins of an old castle lay wonderfully on the slope of the opposite mountain [...] The knight sighed and gave himself over to his thoughts [...] The knight became more and more absorbed in his thoughts, he stared fixedly out into the darkness.[14] (Tieck, 1828, p. 111)

This gothic atmosphere immediately creates a relationship between man and nature, between his thoughts and the landscape with its darkness, determining the *incipit* of the fairy tale. The knight meets an hermit, who tells him about his brother's story: he killed Clara, the woman he was in love with. After that, he continues:

> My heart was broken, but my life was now meant to comfort him; we left the castle and laid aside our knight's clothing, a holy robe covered us, and I made a pilgrimage with my brother through forests and over lonely fields until finally this cave took us in. He often stood for days on end by that river and stared into the waves, even at night he was sometimes there and sat on a broken piece of rock, his tears running into the river, my consolation was in vain.[15] (Tieck, 1828, p. 121)

[14] «Die Wolken wurden nach und nach dunkler, der Schein des Abends ward bleicher, ein kleiner Bach murmelte leise, unter den überhängenden Gebüschen des Berges versteckt.[...] Das Geräusch des kleinen Baches ward lauter, der Huftritt dröhnte durch die Einsamkeit, die Schatten wurden dichter, die Ruinen einer alten Burg lagen wunderbar auf dem Abhange des gegenüberstehenden Berges [...] Der Ritter seufzte und überließ sich seinen Gedanken [...] Der Ritter vertiefte sich immer mehr in seinen Gedanken, er sahe starr in die Dunkelheit hinaus».
[15] «Mein Herz war gebrochen, aber mein Leben war jetzt dazu bestimmt, ihn zu trösten; wir verließen die Burg und legten die Ritterkleidung ab, ein heiliges Gewand bedeckte uns, so wallfahrtete ich mit meinem Bruder durch Wälder und über einsame Fluren, bis uns endlich diese Höhle aufnahm. Er stand oft Tage lang an jenem Strom und sahe starr in die Wellen hinein, selbst in der Nacht war er zuweilen dort, und saß auf einem abgerissenen Felsenstück, seine Thränen rannen in den Fluß, mein Trost war vergebens».

From a spatial point of view we can find a dichotomy between the castle, the anthropized space, with a specific social organisation and the natural space, forests, fields and the cave, which implies a holy sense of human connection. It seems that it conveys a disclosure in the interiority, offering the opportunity to think about mistakes and experience a process of maturation which only a pilgrimage provides. The natural setting becomes the place of the elaboration of the sin, it is not a case that Tieck chooses a cave, as a chthonic terrestrial environment, as the place for this human *iter*.

This interrelation between space and humanity is confirmed in the final scene when the reconciliation occurs. Both characters find out that they are relatives:

> They left the cave. – Clouds hung in front of the moon, a holy silence had spread over the world, they entered the lonely forest as if into a temple. – Karl knelt on his father's grave mound. [...] There was a whisper in the treetops like the echo of a soft flute, two shining apparitions sank down, entwined in each other. They came closer. – We are reconciled! blew an unearthly voice, two hands stretched it out over the kneeling man, the words flew over him like a gentle wind: Be honest! – A cloud retreated in front of the moon, the apparitions dissolved into the bright silver shine. – The two mortals watched them for a long time in joyful astonishment. [16] (Tieck, 1828, pp. 123-124)

They get out from the cave and they reach the forest which is now regarded as a temple. As seen before, the German *Wald* had been experiencing for two centuries a process of deforestation and a current following attempt to conserve and preserve it. The link between factual reforestation, fueled by a sustainable ethics, and the literary link is such that:

[16] «Sie verließen die Höhle. – Wolken hingen vor dem Monde, eine heilige Stille war über die Welt ausgegossen, sie traten wie in einen Tempel in den einsamen Wald. – Karl kniete auf den Grabhügel seines Vaters. Wie der Wiederhall einer leisen Flöte flüsterte es in den Wipfeln, zwei glänzende Erscheinungen sanken herab, in einander geschlungen. Sie kamen näher. – Wir sind versöhnt! wehte eine überirdische Stimme, zwei Hände streckten sie über den Knieenden, wie ein sanfter Wind flogen die Worte über ihn hin: Sei bieder! –Eine Wolke trat vor dem Monde zurück, die Erscheinungen zerflossen in den hellen Silberglanz. – Mit frohem Erstaunen sahen ihnen lange die beiden Sterblichen nach. –».

> It is even suspected - and here again there is a connection to the increased reforestation that has been taking place since 1800 - that the fairy tales mostly take place in the forest because the real forest hardly existed at the time they were written down.[17] (Breymayer, 2011, p. 20)

From this point of view, on the one hand, this setting entails a cultural and literary reaction to a real problem. On the other hand, Tieck carries out another semantization since he signifies the *Wald* according to ancestral values.[18] In the fourth chapter of Jakob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, under the heading "Tempel", we read, in fact, the reference to the forest as it responds to the concept of *Heiligkeit*, sacredness, for ancient German people (Grimm, 1844, pp. 59-60). Tieck discovers again this atavistic meaning; the *Wald* assumes holy traits to convey the most important and transcendental moment, implying a spiritual and ancient value with a profound human feeling. In this setting the final reconciliation occurs.

The dichotomy between spaces recalling different feelings can be traced in another fairy tale, *Undine,* written by Friedrich De La Motte Fouqué in 1811. The main spatial division is represented by the natural dimension described as a *locus amoenus,* where a fisherman lives, and the anthropized space. In relation to the possibility to move towards the urban space, he admits:

> Now the matter somewhat troubled me, as I went along, for this slip of land was dear to me, and I bethought me with a shudder amid the noise and brawls of the city, how it might come to pass that in such a bustle, or in some scene not much quieter, I should have perforce to take up my abode. (De La Motte-Fouqué, 1911, p. 15)

If Baghdad, in the other fairy tale, is described in relation to a constant

[17] «Es wird gar vermutet - und auch hier wieder ist eine Verbindung zur seit 1800 verstärkt betriebenen Aufforstung offenbar -, dass die Märchen eben deshalb zumeist im Wald spielen, weil der Realwald zur Zeit ihrer Niederschrift kaum mehr vorhanden war».

[18] For a cultural interpretation of the German forest in other Tieck's fairy tales you can see M. Ruggero, "La foresta nella fiaba romantica tedesca: una lettura storico-culturale ed estetica", in *Echo,* 5, 2023, pp. 95-103.

tumult, also in this case, the city is connected to a sense of unease and to the lack of organicity. The fisherman refers to «noise and brawls» and a «bustle» which reflect those perceptions considered by Thalmann from a theoretical point of view. The city causes a negative reorganization of perceptions and it is seen in contrast to the natural environment. At the very beginning of the tale, indeed, the latter is described in these terms, according to an opposition:

> The part of the country where he lived was right pleasant to behold. The grassy space on which his cottage stood ran far into the lake, and perchance one might well conceive that it was through love of the clear blue waters that the tongue of land had stretched itself among them ; while with embrace as close and as loving the lake sent its arms round the pleasaunce where the flowers bloomed and the trees yielded their grateful shade. It was as though water welcomed land and land welcomed water, and it was this made both so lovely. (De La Motte-Fouqué, 1911, pp. 3-4)

The compenetration between land and water, the focalisation on a flourishing green environment, the positive qualification make this place a real *locus amoenus* where everything lives in a harmonic way. Also throughout the narration the anthropized space is always connected to a problematization among different characters, while the natural one evokes a sense of profound organicity.

3. Conclusion

The literary current of the *Romantic ecology* tends to consider that the first problematizations in the relationship between man and nature can be traced between the end of the eighteenth century and the very beginning of the nineteenth century. In particular, it highlights the rediscovery of nature and its celebration as a reaction to the invasive processes of proto industrialisation.

The analysis of urban and natural space in three different fairy tales tend to confirm the theoretical framework of this current, by providing four crucial results:

1) the clear-cut division between the two spaces,
2) the consideration of the city as the place of tumult and of the problematization also in terms of the plot,
3) the celebration of natural space,
4) the interrelation between man-nature and the narrative actions.

The main scope of the Romantic aesthetics is the research of unity and fairy tales play a crucial role in this specific mission. If the dichotomy between spaces has always existed in different literary *genres,* in this case, the representation of these realities is strongly connected to the attempt to reach a profound sense of *sublime* and organicity, because of a precise historical and cultural fragmentation. It is not a case that above all the first two fairy tales, *The Brothers* and *The Reconciliation,* openly deal with the research of a final and harmonic solution. The literary continuity meets the discontinuity, the atavistic *topos* meets History: the contrast, *tout court*, between spaces is now re-signified in relation to a new contingent context and it underlies a more profound attempt to look for a positive synthesis in a cultural, social and environmental moment of disgregation. From this perspective, spaces maintain the old meaning but they also assume a new one: the German *Wald* and its ancient sacredness is re-discovered as a reaction to the deforestation and to the historical division, the cave becomes the setting of the interiority - whose importance starts to emerge with Romantic intellectuals - by looking for a deeper connection between man and nature, the escape from the city in order to find peace in a bucolic environment is now developed in relation

to the contingent idea of the sublime - which is *par excellence* a Romantic concept. The fairy tale space moves towards this polarity, past and present, the *Leitmotive* express the doubts that the human being has always had, but also those felt now by the Romantic man as it sees the disruption in a more evident way. If some later Danish stories, after the Industrial revolution, will make the problem much more explicit, (Ruggero, 2024, pp. 67-76), between the two centuries the authors were already able to capture a prelude of the current Anthropocene. Looking at the factual and narrative geography of this period is indeed possible to confirm and to reinforce this idea.

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7. Anthropocene and Ethics of Care: a Narrative Ethics approach in Hayao Miyazaki fictional World

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Abstract

This chapter explores the ethical implications within Hayao Miyazaki's films, focusing on a Narrative Ethics approach. First, it begins by examining historical representations in Miyazaki's fictional worlds, which reflect both personal and collective trauma from WWII on multiple levels, highlighting the landscapes altered by war. Following this, the analysis shifts to the timeless and utopian structures in Miyazaki's works, particularly in relation to ecology and the Anthropocene, seen through the interplay of reality and imagination, adulthood and childhood. Recurrent themes include the relationship between nature and technology, depicting boundaries between historical and timeless contexts, as well as between adulthood and childhood. Furthermore, Miyazaki's films emphasize meta-empathy and the ethics of care, encouraging viewers to connect with characters who care for others, nature, and even inanimate entities. Through these portrayals, Miyazaki's characters take on a performative role, fostering a sensitivity towards nature as a living system within the Anthropocene era.

Keywords: ***Narrative Ethics, Ethics of care, Anthropocene, Ecologism, Childhood***

1. Introducing Narrative Ethics

Narratives significantly shape cognitive and moral development by providing indirect ethical experiences that enhance one's understanding and perception of reality (Jensen, 2020; Narvaez, & Mrkva, 2014); as John Gardner argues: «The traditional view is that true art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not debase it» (Gardner, 2000, p. 5).

In this context, narrations can:

a) enhance moral sensibility and empathy through the development of imagination- a theory that we find in moral sense theories and in early modern philosophy (e. g. Adam Smith).

b) broaden our understanding of reality, nature, and humanity by exposing us to diverse values, cultures, and ideas, enriching the listener's perspective (Flesch, 2007).

So, moral identity can be expanded and improved by different experiences, even if such experiences have not actually taken place in real life. Moral identity is continuously inside these narrations; indeed, they can also be stories and life experiences narrated by other people that become a moral guide, performing individual normative interior system of rules of conduct (Gottschall, 2018). Such an experience can be amplified, if different perceptions are involved, i.e. multisensory stimulations through films or VR systems.

About Narrative Ethics, it should be underlined that:

i. pictures activate an ("Embodied simulation") - the physical sensation of something happening to a character on the screen (Guerra & Gallese, 2015);

ii. from the embodied simulation comes the psychic/emotional alignment with the character;

iii. the alignment takes place if there is a positive empathy with the character, even if it is an evil character but involved in a suffered interior conflict. We

also have a form of "negative empathy" as theorized by Lipps which is a not-alignment with the character (Lipps, 2020);

In this paper, we will mainly refer to educational role of Miyazaki's films, but also to the possibility of such films to be extended to a wider public (adolescents and adults) as a narrative tool to frame distinction between nature and technology and human influence on environment. The paper will focus on ethical implications of Miyazaki's narrative analyzing two main topics and how they are linked:

1) Historical and biographical representations mixed with childhood, nature, Anthropocene;

2) Implications of a narrative Ethics of Care about Miyazaki's feminine characters and ecologism.

Before we go deeply into the topic, another methodological note. This article engages with the concepts of the Anthropocene, environment, and the nature-culture relationship primarily from a theoretical and narrative perspective. While geographical dimensions are acknowledged as critical to these discussions—particularly as they ground the Anthropocene in specific places, scales, and material transformations—they are not explored in depth here. The article instead prioritizes an examination of the Anthropocene as a narrative framework that shapes our understanding of human-environment interactions, ethical considerations, and the cultural imaginaries tied to planetary futures. Spatial dimensions, while essential for contextualizing environmental transformations and localizing anthropogenic impacts, are treated here as a backdrop, given the focus on conceptual approaches to how narratives of the Anthropocene influence cultural, ethical, and philosophical perspectives. Limitations in scope thus lead us to foreground theoretical analyses, while acknowledging the need for further studies that incorporate geographic specificity to enrich the discourse on the Anthropocene[1].

[1] For a summarized reference about the approach here adopted see: Dell'Agnese E., 2021, *Ecocritical Geopolitics. Popular Culture and Environmental Discourse*, Routledge, London.

2. Historical representation

A starting point in Miyazaki's narrative is linked to representation of world and nature, according to an historical representation of events. In particular, humans' role in shaping nature through technology is one of the most important topic in his films; usually technology is linked to a deep sense of destruction (Napier, 2018): for instance the war scenes as represented in *Howl's moving Castle* (2004) or *The Boy and the Heron* (2023). War is one of the most important experiences in Miyazaki's life, as it is linked to trauma and regret and it shapes not only nature, but also individual and collective life.

According to Susan Napier (2018), Miyazaki's life rises three levels of regret:

(i) Individual level. Miyazaki was a four-year-old child when he could not force his father to stop and save a needy family on the road during the War;

(ii) Family level. It deals with his family's role in building Caccia Zero components for the Second World War (Arnaldi, 2024);

(iii) National level. It is about Japan's participation to the Second World War and the criticism against fascism (e.g. *Porco Rosso*, 1994).

Historical representation moves from biographical memories, opening a first distinction between childhood and adulthood (e.g. *The Boy and the Heron*, 2024) through a fundamental ethical category: responsibility. This is a narrative ethics topic which derives from the historical and biographical experiences as said above – and it is linked to the individual responsibility of Miyazaki as a child. On one hand, historical representations are linked to war scenarios, and technology both as beginning of Anthropocene and end of "kingdom of nature". On the other hand, the a-historical representations are linked to imagination and nature.

2.1 *My Neighbor Totoro*

One notable example of Miyazaki's approach is *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) as the first important film representative of Miyazaki "philosophy". The story is about two young girls who have moved to the countryside with their father. They experience the trauma of their mother being hospitalised due to tuberculosis (**Fig. 1**). In his life, Miyazaki had the same experience and responsibility with his mother.

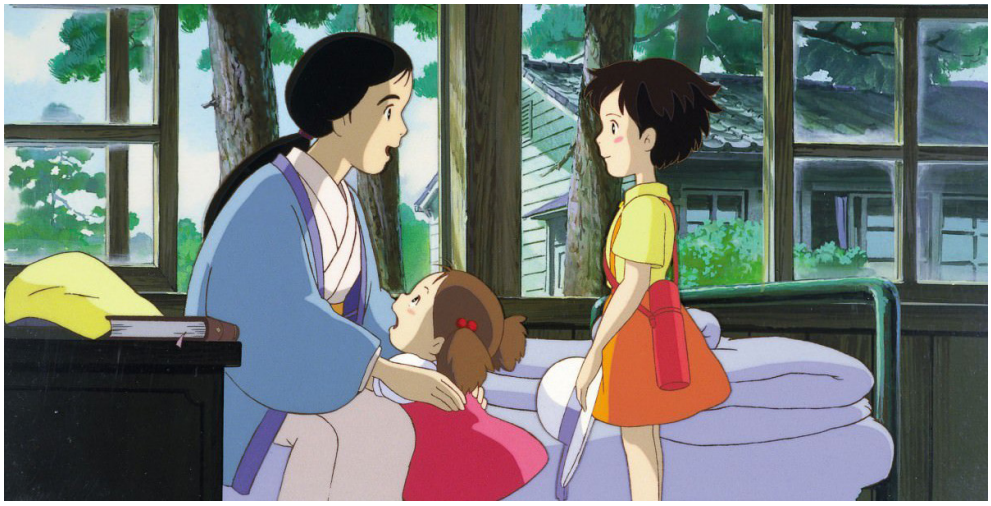


Figure 1. My Neighbor Totoro (1988). The two sisters and their mother

Source: https://screenrant.com/my-neighbor-totoro-mother-hospital-reason/

One of the main characters is Totoro: the "monster of the woods" **(Fig. 2)**, the embodiment of primitive animism – a *näif* perspective about nature which looks at everything as populated by entities with a precise individuality (Trisciuzzi, 2013). Three references provide evidence of this:

1. In the history of religions, the first stage of humanity is referred to 'animism'.

2. In infant psychology, the stage of animism is linked to early childhood

(Von Franz, 2008). According to Piaget's theory, the child progresses from animism to rationality in analogy to the historical development of humanity[2].

3. Shintoism, as one of the main religions practiced in Japan, is not only based on the sacrality of ancestors, but also on the belief that the entire reality is animated by spirits [i. e. in japanese *Kami*].

Figure 2. My Neighbor Totoro (1988). Mei and Totoro

Source: https://www.framedmagazine.it/il-mio-vicino-totoro/

The child Mei, as main character, is representative of childhood's perspective on reality and nature: a utopian vision of humanity who cares about world complexity. This "care" is underlined by the belief in the spirits and the concomitant sensitivity and empathy in opposition to the Anthropocene as technological age which destroys and change such a perspective. According to Heidegger's theory, humans look at world and nature as "*Bestand"*, as

[2] References can be found in all philosophers who read history as a progress; for instance, Giordano Bruno summarize this progress in the three eras: beasts, heroes, humans. We find the same later in August Comte with his three stages: 1) the theological stage, (2) the metaphysical stage, and (3) the positive stage.

resource that can be consumed (Heidegger, 1976). Then, forces and elements of Nature cannot be considered as sensitive entities which deserves respect.

2.2 *Kiki's Delivery Service*

Miyazaki returns on this topic of childhood a year later with *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) - the film focuses on the beginning of adult life. Kiki is a young witch who must leave her familiar place to fulfill her destiny, grow up, and become autonomous. Nevertheless, as she is able to care for herself, she loses her powers. She is no longer able to fly on her broomstick and she is unable to converse with her cat. This represents the conclusion of childhood, and the end of imaginative process as seen in *Totoro*. Kiki disengages from her life as a child to become an adult, assuming her own responsibilities. In the perspective of individual development, here responsibility comes as ethical category which turns childhood into adulthood: it occurs in the sense of personal responsibility in order to survive away from the safety comfort-zone represented by family, rituality, tradition, childhood and nature.

As seen above, responsibility comes in a double meaning and they both are positive meanings:

i. individual responsibility as personal step in psychological development to reach autonomy;

ii. social responsibility as future citizens who must preserve life and nature, respecting its individuality, not considering it as mere resource. This implies a "caring about" approach (Tronto, 1993) by preserving childhood perspective on Nature.

3. Ethics of Care in Miyazaki's films

In addition to historical and fictional representations, Miyazaki's films weave ecologism and environmental ethics with themes of childhood and the Ethics of Care. Here, this ethical framework is applied to all nature. Such ideas have roots in the history of philosophy: from XVII century philosophical animism and eastern pantheism to Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (Lovelock, 1995).

Figure 3. Spirited Away (2001). Chihiro helping the river spirit

Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/MovieDetails/comments/jnj22s/the_healing_of_the_river_spirit_scene_in_spirited/?rdt=39590

The **figure 2** is from *Spirited Away* (2001). The main character, Chihiro, is employed in a spirit SPA in order to save her parents. In this scene she take care of the spirit of the river which requires to bel cleaned, as it is full of garbage, including a bicycle (an episode that relates to Miyazaki's own life

when he lent a hand to clean up a river) (Napier, 2018). The frame is both powerful and immediate. It is relatively simple for the viewer to be horrified by the vast quantity of waste that can often be observed in the seas and rivers. The sequence in *Spirited Away* wants the spectator to empathize with the spirit of the river; in order to achieve this, it is necessary to animate the river. The river is not represented as an amorphous, defenseless entity but event not as anthropomorphous one; rather, it is portrayed as a living entity that requires care.

This moment employs a strategy typical of animation that "animates the inanimate", but it also invites the spectator to assume that point of view by placing himself or herself in the position of observing the river spirit as a suffering creature which needs help. Empathy is a crucial element in fostering a caring approach that needs sensitivity and attention (Gilligan, 2016). Miyazaki usually uses feminine character as they are associated to the Ethics of Care approach, according to Carol Gilligan's theory.

Miyazaki presents the world from a child's perspective, portraying it as a realm inhabited by animated spirits and other sentient beings that endure suffering within a human-altered, often corrupted environment. This childlike viewpoint enables a shift in perspective, allowing us to perceive reality with an instinctive desire to safeguard both the world and nature. In this context, Miyazaki's works can be seen as case studies in Narrative Ethics. Here, Narrative Ethics offers an alternative approach to environmental preservation—not through systematic treatises or normative ethical arguments, but through an immersive experience akin to Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis, which envisions the planet as a holistic, living system. Thus, Narrative Ethics provides a mode of ethical engagement that relies on empathy as emotional resonance. This empathy is intensified when we confront suffering and recognize the inherent vulnerability of the world around us. (Gendler, 2000).

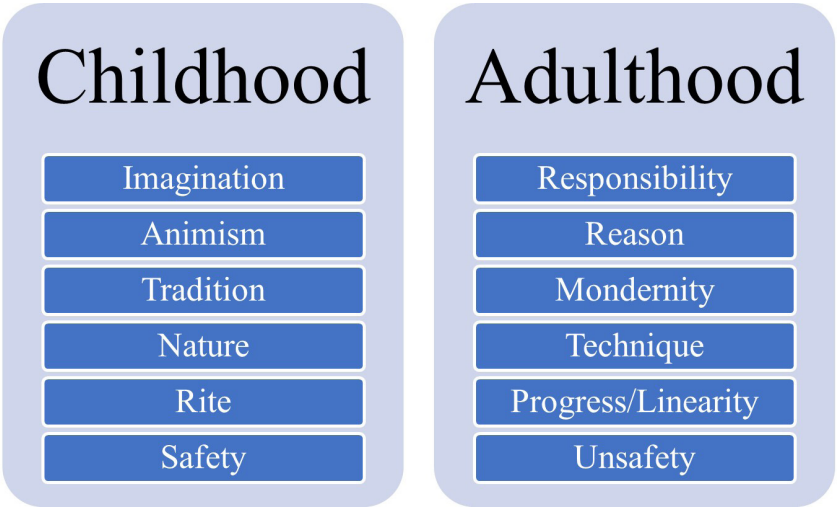
4. Technology and Environment

Furthermore, Miyazaki's films frequently depict nature as threatened by technology and the Anthropocene. The recurring nature-technology dichotomy invites viewers to develop greater ecological sensitivity, though not in the analytical manner of a philosophical-scientific treatise. Instead, it uses the power of the narrative mechanism, which literally places the subject/spectatorin a condition of suffering. Especially in children, such a process strengthens empathy—as shown by neuroscience, which indicates that the neural networks are activated whether experiencing something directly or indirectly (through pictures, films, novels). It also allows for a reinterpretation of the world using narrative thought rather than rational thought (Pulvirenti & Gambino, 2018). For instance, Hans Jonas proposes an "heuristic of fear" as moral strategy to limit humanity's destructive attitude in using technology which transforms nature in a hyper-anthropic space (Jonas, 2009). This means we should fear the consequences in order to act ethically and understand our responsibility for nature and future generations. Miyazaki similarly advocates for an intuitive approach to ethical environmental protection, promoting a vision of the world "as if" we had the eyes of a child, as if we still were living the animistic stage. This is how the director supports the idea of a sustainable citizenship, which takes care of nature without many words or arguments, but simply by entering into empathy with the world (Anders, 2007; Gehlen, 2010).

This topic in Miyazaki's vision, which deals with the relationship between animism and reason, put the basis of a philosophical anthropology: the relationship between nature and technology, nature and culture. The latter should be understood as the way in which humans build their own habitat and world by modifying nature itself through the use of technical tools. This definition, although reductive, helps to understand Miyazaki's ideological position and his democratic-ecological education from the 1960s onwards (Miyazaki, 2021; Napier, 2018; Arnaldi, 2024). The age of technology is an age of the predominance of reason as it shapes reality and nature. It is an exercise of power and control that does not respect nature's vulnerability, leading to disastrous environmental conditions.

Technology, as rationality, is also synonymous with the end of childhood. It marks the end of imagination as active creation in the world and the beginning of control over nature. The spirits (*kami*) no longer inhabit the world; instead,

the subject can control the world through technology. We can consider Scheme 1 and the binary space opened by the relationship between childhood and adulthood.



Scheme 1

Scheme 1 can be viewed as a framework for a philosophical anthropology theory, offering a perspective on the relationship between nature and technology through the enchanted eyes of a child, similar to the animistic worldview. Miyazaki's approach is fundamentally avant-garde, as he explores themes that were not immediately embraced by the public. In line with this avant-garde stance, it is notable that his work was "politically correct" long before the term became a popular trend, as he foregrounds the importance of the female heroine over the traditional male hero. This emphasis on female main character signals Miyazaki as a precursor to the significant sociological shift later seen in the Disney Golden Age of the 1990s. Long before Mulan, Pocahontas, Belle, or Esmeralda (Arnaldi, 2016), Miyazaki introduced characters like Heidi, Anne of Green Gables, and Nausicaä—representations of proactive femininity that stand independent of dominant male figures, breaking away from classic fairy-tale archetypes. These characters are central to an ecological "ethos" that critiques both the age of technology and the devastating impacts of the Anthropocene (Imanjaya & Amelia, 2023; James, 2022). The world Miyazaki describes in his early works through the eyes of

childhood (animism) is already strongly suffocated with Nausicaä and then with Mononoke; here the topics of environmentalism and pollution caused by the overwhelming power of technology in Anthropocene come into play. Nature is in danger, humans do not understand this, and Miyazaki wants to highlight it; through his imagery, he seeks to raise awareness, finding a way that invites people to respect nature beyond any convincing rational argument. Nature must be narrated as a living entity that suffers and rejoices, to empathize with and protect—like children do, like animistic human communities used to do. This is a perspective on nature that captures its vulnerability, thus directing individuals towards their path of responsibility:

> Take, for example, the critical vulnerability of nature in the face of human technical intervention—an unsuspected vulnerability before it began manifesting in irrevocable damages. This discovery, whose shock led to the idea and birth of ecology, entirely alters our conception of ourselves as causal agents in the larger system of things. It highlights through its effects that the nature of human action has de facto changed and that a completely new object, nothing less than the entire biosphere of the planet, has been added to the things for which we must be responsible, as we have power over it. And what an object of staggering magnitude, before which all previous objects of human action appear irrelevant! Nature as human responsibility is certainly a novelty on which ethical theory must reflect (Jonas, 2002, p. 39).

At this point, another major theme that counterbalances Miyazaki's environmentalism comes into focus: the power of technology. Confronted with the vast, natural landscapes that populate his enchanting backdrops—often inspired by European or ancient cities (Napier, 2018)—technology appears cumbersome and invasive. A dichotomy emerges: Miyazaki simultaneously reveres and resents technology; while he acknowledges it as an essential part of life, he also condemns its destructive impact on the natural world. Historically, technology signifies the ascendance of rationality over animistic perspectives. In Miyazaki's work, technological power, translated here into "dominance," enacts Hans Jonas' concept of the "unleashed Prometheus"—humankind endowed with the conscious ability to control and devastate the natural world. In this view, nature is rendered lifeless, devalued, and inanimate, treated merely as a resource subject to human exploitation and technical-rational control. It is

precisely this rationalization of the world, seen as a devaluation that opens the era of responsibility. The imaginative faculty (Smith, 2016; Gendler, 2000), fundamental for empathy processes, enters into crisis. The rationalization of the world excludes the child from empathetic identification and projects them in adult life; it represents the crisis of childhood but also the individual path that evokes the history of humanity, moving from animism to the scientific shape of nature and reality in Anthropocene. Within this framework, Miyazaki builds the foundations of his philosophical anthropology. If rationality marks the end of childhood, and technology the end of primitive animism as nature falls under the complete control of humans, Miyazaki does not demonize technology; instead, he elevates it, rethinking it as a way to combine the real and the ideal, nature and technology, organic and inorganic. From this desire to mix nature and technology emerges: powerful images of robots covered in ivy with mechanisms resembling organs, islands flying in the sky supported by natural forces like the intrinsic power of minerals and stones, and moving castles that resemble wandering monsters (**Fig. 5**). Miyazaki builds marvelous worlds with his hybrid objects, aesthetically unappealing but paradoxically enchanting, because they are close to the Miyazaki's eco-topia (Napier, 2018): here technology derives from nature, relying on its forces without corrupting it. This represents the "good side" of Anthropocene.

Figure 4. Howls moving Castle (2004).

Source: https://ibccdigitalarchive.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2017/11/21/an-addition-to-bomber-command-cinematography-hayao-miyazakis-howls-moving-castle/

In parallel, something happens in Miyazaki's narrative. Human being is increasingly sidelined leaving a very few room for the Anthropocene's scenario; the kingdom of nature has its own life, and every element has a central, vitalistic role. A systemic interconnection among organisms, of which humanity is part, sets the conditions for its own biological existence. The disruption of this balance, in fact, implies the end of humanity itself, which is not the ultimate result but an integral and equal part of everything that comprises the system. It is no coincidence that the Miyazaki's latest short-film focuses on the simple and essential life of a caterpillar, which becomes the center of the universe. It is Miyazaki's last short film, created exclusively for guests of the Ghibli Museum. Here, Miyazaki's anthropology reveals its essential message, aligning with many anthropologies of the 19th and 20th centuries (Pansera, 2019), displacing the human and staging anthropocentric crises through apocalypses.

5. Apocalypse and the End of Anthropocene

The frame from *Ponyo* (2008) in **figure 5** is majestic. The little marine spirit joyfully runs along the crest of a wave that will soon flood an entire village. This frame is the direct expression of nature's rebellion or, more precisely, the impossibility of its absolute control. Ponyo is a film about a beautiful friendship, but the main topic is much more archetypal and ancestral, revealing itself only on a more mature and deep level (i. e. adult awareness). Many symbols related to the origin of nature and the world, and the sea as an ancient god come into play.

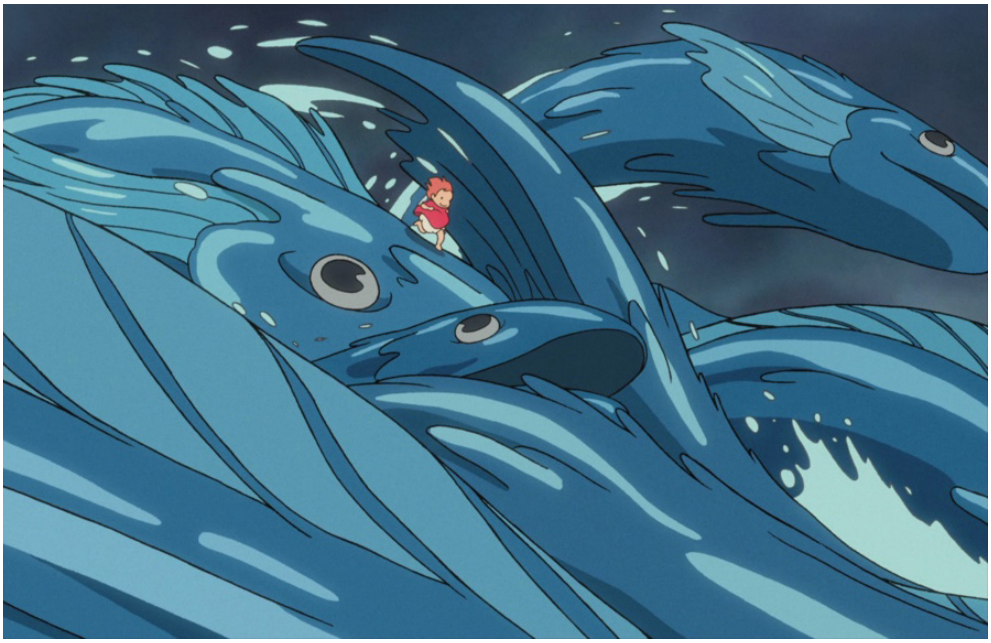


Figure 5. Ponyo (2008).

Source: https://www.polygon.com/animation-cartoons/2020/5/31/21275470/ponyo-worst-hayao-miyazaki-movies-ghibli-still-good

Miyazaki's work foreshadows the power of nature on anthropic landscapes and technological development. It is also a warning and, at the same time, it opens up a new topic: the apocalypse. Apocalypse should be taken in an etymological original

translation as “revelation”. In Miyazaki’s vision it refers to a double meaning:

1) In the way the apocalypse is conventionally thought as end of the anthropic world, linked to catastrophic events. This is a recurring topic in Miyazaki’s work since *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), where the final events are really close to the Bible Apocalypse. Moreover, the end of humanity is a prophesied event during the film. The story is literally set in a dystopian future where humanity is relegated and imprisoned by dangerous, perceived toxic organisms, where nature has already overcome the anthropic space. The same occurs about a quarter of a century later in *Ponyo*, where the apocalyptic event is represented by the rogue wave that overwhelms the small fishing town where the film is set.

2) In the etymological sense, recovering the meaning of “revelation” as previously mentioned. This meaning is precisely the power of nature revealing itself, beyond good and evil, in relation to humanity – a topic that we find in philosophical anthropology of XVIII and XIX century. Nature actually hides a series of potentials that can benefit humanity— for instance, the spirit that animates Nausicaä’s character in her biochemical research, allowing her to grasp the beneficial properties of organisms deemed dangerous. But this vision of a human-nature relationship based on the possibility of developing a positive relationship declines in the later Miyazaki. In Ponyo, the apocalypse is to be considered nature showing its power, to which humanity necessarily succumbs. Here we find the anthropocentric crisis. Miyazaki renders the apocalyptic sequences in a descriptive and not prescriptive sense (Murdoch, 1997). There is no punished human, but the intrinsic and unpredictable activity of nature that reveals its power. Thus, going deeper into the analysis, the apocalyptic scenes carry a meaning connected to the ecological topic and move it into a naturalistic perspective.

Then we find a second level of analysis in considering the apocalypses. They are not only to be understood as macroscopic events that engulf cities and civilizations but as micro-processes occurring in Miyazaki’s personal life. Through the narrative of apocalypses represented by dynamics involving nature, in Miyazaki, these apocalypses are also linked to the interior life - and here we find the connection with the Miyazaki’s trauma. This follows the psychoanalytic interpretation proposed by Napier: «In an interview at the time

with Yōichi Shibuya, images of 'running' and 'sinking' seem to fill Miyazaki's head as he reflected on his age, his responsibility towards Studio Ghibli, and his desire to retire, to 'go somewhere' [...]. It is possible that the director was also concerned about his own declining physical strength» (Napier, 2018, pp. 252-253). The final revelation of Miyazaki's disillusionment comes in *Ponyo*, closing the cycle on magic and childhood. Miyazaki no longer places hope in humanity; the possibility of viewing the world through the lens of care, starting from animism and empathy, slowly fades away and become more pessimistic than before.

6. Aesthetic of Contrast

Another significant aspect to consider Miyazaki's vision is to analyze his later works. In such films Miyazaki condenses his topics, revealing the content through an "aesthetic of contrast". Undoubtedly, *Spirited Away* (2001) is the *magnum opus* of the japanese filmmaker and certainly brought him the greatest notoriety worldwide. When *Spirited Away* won the Oscar, Miyazaki's international fame reached its peak, leading to a relentless pursuit of his earlier works, which were re-evaluated. The topics previously analyzed also find place in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), which is based on the novel by D.W. Jones. In both cases, it seems that the director attempts to bring together opposites.

In *Spirited Away* Miyazaki's technique involves not only writing but also music and graphics. It is, therefore, a comprehensive aesthetic operation that reflects the philosophy and ethics of contrast as a summative topic in Miyazaki's art. Although *Spirited Away* is entirely set in a bustling, dynamic, rhapsodic, and frenetic environment—the bathhouse—this setting is just a pretext to tell what Miyazaki values most: stillness. In fact, this dynamic context represents nothing more than the frenetic activity in Anthropocene age, where humankind is absorbed by movement, work, the power of technology, relentless rhythms, speed, and production. A rhythm in which we are all inevitably evolved (Rosa, 2015). To introduce such an idea, we can consider Kamaji (**Fig. 6**), a spider-shaped character with four arms, forced to work nonstop to keep the bathhouse running. This is not only a critique of the capitalist system and the exploitation of the proletariat, which Miyazaki knows well considering his involvement supporting revolutionary movements in Japan in 1968 (Napier, 2018), but it is also a broader critique of the collapsed work system that absorbs humans, making them part of the technological machinery. This is the entire context of the bathhouse, where there is a constant comings and goings of spirits and attendants.

Figure 6. Spirited Away (2001). Kamaji's character
Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245429/mediaviewer/rm4174207489

And yet, Miyazaki builds that reality graphically and narratively to use it with a clear heterogeneity of purpose, which is not to show restlessness, but rather calmness. This is why *Spirited Away* is a janus word masterpiece, where one meaning literally extrapolates its opposite. The truth of the 2001 film is and is not the bathhouse, even though it is the central setting. The truth lies in the bathhouse as a reality to be abhorred, as the opposite that highlights the value of calm, of the quiet that is expressed in the scene where Chihiro takes the train (**Fig. 7**) and moves away from the confusion of the industrious bathhouse. The truth of Miyazaki's film, after more than two hours of animated feature, can be found in a scene that lasts only a few minutes, whose beauty emerges from the contrast between stillness nature and the movement of "industrial society".

Figure 7. Spirited Away (2001). Chihiro on the train
Source: https://wallhere.com/en/wallpaper/580203

This process is stressed in *Howl's Moving Castle*, a film entirely based on contradiction and contrast. In that case we have also a sequence where the sense of lightness represents a need to detach from chaos. In one of the opening scenes, the wizard Howl steps in to save the main character, Sophie, from two bad-intentioned policemen. To escape, Howl climbs onto the rooftops and then begins to float in the air with extreme lightness, almost as if he had no weight (**Fig. 8**). After chaos and noisy environment of the city, the music also takes on a descending tone to help convey the moment of calm, through the lifting off the ground (Boscarol, 2023). It is an iconic scene of Miyazaki's vision, where the sense of suspension from the ground often recurs in his filmography; it is the desire to soar above and beyond everything just like in children's fantasies. This is a clear symptom of the desire for liberation, for a release from the responsibilities of adult life, which we also see in *Lupin III*, when the thief soars over the Castle of Cagliostro by leaping across the rooftops, in one of the final scenes of *My Neighbor Totoro*, as well as in *Kiki's Delivery Service* or, later, in *Ponyo* who rides the waves, ultimately becoming the focus of *The Wind Rises*. The idea of lightness associated with childhood, returns thanks to the imaginary experience of flight, usually on natural landscapes. Not only this particular sequence (**Fig. 8**) represents the desire to return to a state of calm and irresponsibility, but the entire film does as well. Howl has an absolutely fluid, changing, and sometimes contradictory personality. He embodies this process of contradiction. He is both beautiful and terrible, good and ruthless. Similarly, Sophie changes from young to old

and vice versa, remaining hybrid at the end. The same situation applies to the characters in *Spirited Away*: No-Face is a monster that is both docile and terrifying; Haku is both human and spirit; Yubaba, the evil director of the bathhouse, has a good twin sister who lives in opposition. We find more or less similar oscillatory mechanisms in *Ponyo*, where calm water and stormy water coexist; so, in *The Wind Rises*, love and death coexist. Now, all of this makes sense when linked to Japanese culture. All the scenes, sequences, and moments where Miyazaki conveys that splendid truth of calm, of peace through environments, music, and landscapes are absolutely fleeting. They don't last long, sometimes just a few seconds, at most minutes. The director invites the audience to enjoy those moments of beauty, so quick and elusive. Here returns the Japanese "*Mono no aware"* a motto that combines beauty and impermanence: it exalts beauty precisely because it is short-lived, brief, and must be enjoyed only in that moment. This concept is not only evocative of the entire Eastern spirituality but also of a certain European aesthetic sensitivity of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this case, the ethical function of the narrative comes into play. Through what we can call "pillow shots" (Napier, 2018) – those moments when Miyazaki cuts away from rhapsodic shots to let the viewer breathe, to suspend the narrative – the director allows his audience to remember the experience of aesthetic enjoyment of the present, of the moment, distancing themselves from the engulfing logic of a contemporaneity too fast to be truly lived. Again, the contrast exists within the opposition between nature and technology, unspoiled space and anthropic, toxic space.

Figure 8. Howls moving Castle (2004). Howl and Sophie
Source: https://drafthouse.com/winchester/event/special-event-howls-moving-castle-subtitled

7. Conclusions

We can derive some partial conclusions:

A) About the topics of history and utopia, childhood and adulthood, Miyazaki focuses on the role of boundaries, which are represented in his fictional works as liminal space between historical/a-historical, adulthood/childhood, reality/imagination, nature/technology.

B) About the Ethics of Care, Miyazaki's work focuses on meta-empathy and care skills. Viewers identify with the character who cares for other people, Earth and apparently inanimate entities. Empathy is considered as personal skill of Miyazaki's characters in order to improve respect for all forms of life. Alignment and empathy are also linked to the neurobiological outcomes of "embodied simulation". Through alignment, Miyazaki's characters can be performative promoting sensitivity to nature as living system.

Now, this is not an ethical theory, but it can be considered a paradigm as Ethics of Care is. It supports an ethical approach and a sort of moral reasoning but not in the sense of the traditional ones. That is why narrations today are new myths that can support moral progress providing experiences to people.

Miyazaki invokes an intuitive attitude for the ethical protection of the environment and at the same time a strong critique against Anthropocene. Miyazaki calls for a perspective shift: it is necessary to protect the environment, as it allows individuals to see the world in a different light, to understand our responsibility for nature and future generations. This is Miyazaki's way of supporting the idea of a sustainable approach, one that is able to take care of the world without resorting to excessive rhetoric or debate. Instead, it is achieved through empathy with the world.

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This volume examines the interdisciplinary nexus of literature and geography through a multifaceted lens, blending theories from cultural studies, narratology, and spatial analysis. Beginning with a systemic understanding of literary geography, the chapters explore imaginative, political, and ecological landscapes, emphasizing their relational and dynamic nature. Contributions analyze the production of place and space, highlighting their role in shaping cultural, historical, and environmental narratives.

Key topics include the interplay between memory, identity, and travel in literary geographies, the cultural significance of territorial disputes, and the transformative potential of ecological narratives in the Anthropocene. Methodological frameworks range from geocriticism and literary cartography to ecocritical and geopolitical analyses. Case studies span diverse contexts, such as French 18th-century travel narratives, Etruscan agricultural practices, and Hayao Miyazaki's ethical landscapes. Themes of power, positionality, and environmental responsibility are examined through postcolonial, feminist, and ecological perspectives, illustrating the creative and critical capacities of literature to reshape spatial imaginaries. The volume introduces innovative concepts, including the cultural critique of geopolitics in avant-garde aesthetics, mnemonic geographies in Jewish narratives, and urban-nature dynamics in Romantic fairy tales.

The contributions underscore the ethical and performative dimensions of literary geographies, revealing how storytelling fosters new spatial understandings and responses to global challenges. By reimagining real and fictional spaces this work demonstrates the transformative interplay of literature and geography in shaping our understanding of history, culture, and the environment.

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