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A Cinematic *Grand Tour* of Sicily: Irony, Memory, and Metamorphic Desire from Goethe to Tornatore

Gaetana Marrone

I also feel a strong urge of the memory of a
Mediterranean culture, of a classical culture as the
matrix of Western culture. Hence, my need to rediscover
in these tall and deep roots the essence of our spirit
before all of this is erased, before it all disappears.

— *Vincenzo Consolo*¹

A palimpsest of multiple cultures – ancient Greek and Roman, Phoenician, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, Spanish, and “Italian” – Sicily is rich and poor, a crossroads of civilizations, and a provincial backwater, traditional and yet, from time to time and in particular milieus, modernist. Deep and enduring class distinctions add yet another layer to the complexity of the Sicilian experience. To many who find the burdens of this culture oppressive and hard to bear, the only viable solution is to leave the island. But expatriation does not untie the tangled knots of history; memories of home haunt the exile in the midst of newfound freedoms and opportunities. For Sicilian writers and artists, the strains of modernity and tradition, emancipation and destiny, longing to escape and loyalty to family, community, and history have been a central artistic theme. The peculiar conditions of their eccentric and often backward, yet historically and culturally pivotal homeland have enabled them to express the common experience of modernity with special poignancy.

Certainly Vincenzo Consolo has portrayed the people of his exasperated and tragic island in such a way that human beings around the globe can identify with their search for selfhood: in his work, Sicily becomes an image for a magnificent past and for the missed opportunities, both individual and collective, of the present. Like other major Sicilian writers (Pirandello, Brancati, Vittorini, Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Sciascia), Consolo’s fiction brims with the fragments of a millennial civilization. Driven by the memory of a classical Mediterranean culture, Consolo combines political criticism with symbolic representations to recover from oblivion “the wounds and the lacerations of a history that can no longer be forgotten,” wounds and lacerations that haunts the artist, producing feelings of displacement and dislocation.² One of my aims is to describe the shapes this anxiety assumes when it is translated to the screen as an existential metaphor for the Italian socio-political body. I view cinema as a vehicle of cultural expression, the specular art of Italian life during moments of vital self-definition. Focusing on films about Sicily, I shall explore the universal aspects of the Sicilian experience and the artistry with which it has been made meaningful to an international public. Like the privileged investigators within

¹ “Colloquio con Vincenzo Consolo,” in Giuseppe Traina, *Vincenzo Consolo* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2001), 130. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

² Norma Bouchard and Massimo Lollini, “Consolo and His Mediterranean Paradigm,” in *Reading and Writing the Mediterranean: Essays by Vincenzo Consolo*, edited by N. Bouchard and M. Lollini (Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 8. For Consolo, the need to rescue what he calls “the matrix of our origins” becomes an ethical imperative. See “Colloquio con Vincenzo Consolo,” *ibid.*, 130.

this essay, who serve as focalizers (Goethe, Moretti, Antonioni, the Tornatore who returns to Sicily in *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*) or like Sicilians who are able to think critically about their own culture (Consolo, Lampedusa, Andò), I travel *à rebours* to revisit sites which mobilize historical grounds, imaginatively. This is a retrospective voyage, for my nomadic (Sicilian) identity.

In this respect, I privilege the figure of the wanderer who traverses a varied and enchanting Sicilian landscape over the “local” figures of legend and tradition. The wanderer eludes the danger of falling, as Gesualdo Bufalino warns us, into well-known “false” clichés: “il gallo,” “il padrino,” “il gattopardo,” “la matriarca,” “la sedotta,” “il vendicatore d’onore,” “Il bandito senza onore.”³ I have selected artists (both Sicilian and *continentali*) who transport us across historical landscapes and who span cultural memory; those who put us in touch with inner worlds. I shy away from the more traveled path of the *questione meridionale*, which inspired such canonical filmmakers as Luchino Visconti, Francesco Rosi, the Taviani Brothers (among others), and Leonardo Sciascia’s austere, violent representations of Sicily, where reality tends to become Mafia-like, everywhere.⁴ This cinematic grand tour is an album of views, a cultural journey of images.

Grand Tour Sicily: *The enlightened traveler*

Italy has attracted scores of travelers since the 17th-century, but it was only during the Ottocento that the “voyage in Italy” becomes a popular custom among the European aristocracy and artists, assuming a great value as rite of initiation, the perfect combination of all travel experiences.⁵ The ancient Norman word *Tour* acquired a new meaning especially among English travelers; it became a scholarly experience. The *Grand Tour*, however, ended in Naples; any further south was considered Africa. Sicily had been perceived as an island with volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, strewn with poverty and bandits, a very arid and dangerous place to visit.⁶ Very few travelers explored the island before mid-XVIII, among them Patrick Brydone (1736-1818), the traveling preceptor of Lord William Fullarton, commonly considered the pioneer of the voyage in Sicily and Goethe’s predecessor.⁷ By the turn of the century, the hybrid heritage of the island, the syncretism of cultures produced by this island crossroads of history, religions, and traditions began to exert an extraordinary fascination on travelers. Sicily is “simply a landscape,” wrote

³ “Sicilia e cinema: nozze d’amore,” in *La Sicilia e il cinema*, edited by Sebastiano Gesù, (Catania: Giuseppe Maimone Editore, 1993), 12.

⁴ Cf. “All my books are nothing but the story of a series of disappointments: historical and personal, present and past, with these ones seen in the light of those of the present, and vice versa.” “La verità dello scrittore,” in *La Sicilia come metafora: intervista di Marcelle Padovani* (Milano: Mondadori, 1979), 71.

⁵ The *Grand Tour* is a combination of the Gothic tradition of *vers sacrum*, a necessary journey for a young man crossing over into adulthood, and the *peregrinatio academica*, concentrating on the importance of studying in majors cultural centers. It meant to form the complete gentleman. The *Tour* is undertaken during the ages of 20 to 25, and it lasts between 6 to 8 months. For a typological synthesis of the “voyage” see, among others, *Il paesaggio siciliano nella rappresentazione dei viaggiatori stranieri*, edited by Nunzio Famoso (Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 1999), 9-24.

⁶ Two events helped change this perception: the opening of the archeological excavations of Pompei and Ercolano to the world and Winckelmann’s work on ancient Italian monuments.

⁷ Breaking the more traditional itinerary of the *Grand Tour*, Brydone leaves Naples for Messina on May 15, 1770 to return on August 1st of the same year. He recounts his travels in Sicily in a series of letters to his friend and traveler William Beckford of Somerly (*A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1776).

Guy de Maupassant, who visited the island during spring of 1885 on his way to Africa, “but it is a landscape in which you can discover everything that attracts the eye and seduces the soul and imagination.”⁸ The island could be easily reached from the south, landing in Syracuse (this was the pilgrims’ itinerary, which included Jerusalem and Malta), or from the north via Rome and Naples, landing in Messina or Palermo.

In the tradition of the picturesque voyage, the purpose of the *Tour* was to nourish the intellect with intense aesthetic emotion. Shortly after arriving in Palermo on April 2nd, 1787 Goethe wrote: “To have seen Italy without having seen Sicily is not to have seen Italy at all, for Sicily is the clue to everything.”⁹ In reading the letters and notes that would later comprise his *Italiänische Reise* [*Italian Journey*, 1816-1817] one feels that what Goethe recounts is more than a sequence of anecdotal incidents, but the spiritual experiences of the individual soul, a kind of quest for wholeness and identity. The epigraph that Goethe chose for his Italian journey was *Et in Arcadia ego* (I also am in Arcadia). He was alluding to the Mediterranean civilization and the aura of the South, rather than the renaissance villas of central Italy or the shaded hills of Tuscany. Thus, in traveling through the Italian peninsula, the German poet was not searching for what had to be seen in sheer travelogue fashion: he was searching for his Arcadia. During his adventurous wanderings en route to Sicily, he has to avoid, like the epic Greek wanderer Ulysses, both the vicious sea-monster Scylla and the voracious whirlpool Charybdis. Once his vessel anchored off the Palermo harbor in a sunny afternoon, after a stormy night at sea; his words describe shifts of pure light, vaporous blue shadows, glimmering buildings, backlit trees resembling an enormous swarm of fire-flies, and “the most beautiful promontory in the world,” Mount Pellegrino:

The city faces north with high mountains rising behind it. The rays of the afternoon sun were shining across it, so that all the buildings facing us were in shadow but lit by reflected light. The delicate contours of Monte Pellegrino to the right were in full sunshine, and a shore with bays, headlands and promontories stretched far away to the left.

In front of the dark buildings, graceful trees of a tender green, their tops illuminated from behind, swayed like vegetable glow-worms. A faint haze tinted all the shadows blue.¹⁰

He is so mesmerized by such a joyful spectacle that he delays stepping ashore and is eventually forced off the ship’s deck. For an artist, the “Queen of the Islands” presents an inexhaustible wealth of vistas to be savored with the eye of a painter.¹¹

During his Sicilian journey, Goethe evokes visions of symbolic necessity inherent even in the most trivial occurrences; he sketches landscapes and architectural sites of staggering beauty; he composes a hymn to ancient Sicily, which reflects on what he had said in a passage of his

⁸ *Sicilia perla del Mediterraneo* (Siracusa: Ariete, 1989), 70.

⁹ *Italian Journey*, translated by W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer, rpt. 1962 (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 246. The letter is dated April 13, 1787. A year earlier, when Goethe was 38 years old, he decided to embark on a journey to Italy (1786-1788). By then he was considered to be the most illustrious guest, the idol of the young, at the Weimar court. Goethe leaves Naples for Sicily on March 29, 1787, and goes back to Naples via Messina on May 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 228. One might note that the *veduta* itself is inseparable from the tradition of the *Grand Tour*. View painting, or drawing, tends to emphasize the drama of locations.

Xenien: What is more difficult than to see what lies in front of your eyes?¹² The difficulty of “seeing” consists in the conscious reception of the visible, capturing the ecstatic power of light and the emotional value of colors. This is one of the key ideas in the training of the photographic eye. Goethe knew that the only media for showing objects in their concrete uniqueness are the visual arts. Sicily becomes the physical threshold where spatial motion and aesthetic desire conjoin. The Sicilian poet Aurelio Pes defines Goethe’s journey in this “sovereignly classic” island as “memoirs of an archaic event, which requires the dismemberment of our being into nature so that man can re-acquire an authentic and creative force.”¹³ In Sicily, Goethe could finally discover vestiges and oracles of a grand history, a giant in every man. This wanderer is a living oxymoron, who travels to remote unfamiliar places in a dream-like state of expectation:¹⁴ he savors faces, costumes, gestures, geographical sites. The many views of Sicily, which he knew well from drawings, are now fitted together into one splendid landscape. In Sicily, Goethe envisions a primal unity and development in everything: the chronicler ultimately transfigured into a seer. Hence, the oracular solemnity and the *pathos* of his farewell to the island that bears the most visible traces of the Mediterranean historical heritage:

After all, what had we seen but the hopeless struggle of men with the violence of Nature, the malice and treachery of their times, and the rancor of their own rival factions. The Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Romans, and countless other peoples after them built and destroyed. Selinunt was systematically laid waste. Two thousand years have not succeeded in demolishing the temples of Girgenti; Catania and Messina were destroyed in a few hours, if not a few minutes.¹⁵

Odysseus’s journey: Tradition and new cultures

With the *Italiänische Reise*, an altered and sublimated state enters into the poet’s vision of human life. Without this poetic consciousness, the journey to Sicily becomes a route to amusing adventures or to various social aims. A cinematic example of such a diversion is Nanni Moretti’s *Caro diario* [*Dear Diary*, 1993]; Chapter II: “Isole” is an ironic displacement of the literary Arcadian motif. Here, Moretti is an exhausted filmmaker who escapes from Rome to the Aeolian Islands in order to write a script. His character embodies the anxieties and frustrations of urban life, searching for new values in a seemingly incongruous present. His journey involves a constant wandering from one island to the next in search of a story, a quest that concludes in the realization that there is no place or character to be discovered, since Eden is forever lost within the time and space of the television soap opera.¹⁶ He is accompanied by an old friend, Gerardo, who has devoted the last thirty years to reading Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which suggests both the narrative structure of the film (an odyssey through modern life) and an implied literary history,

¹² See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, *Xenien* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag, 1986), 19.

¹³ “Il viandante e la sua ombra,” in *Il viaggio di Goethe in Sicilia nell’anno 1787*, photographs by Frank Horvat, prefaces by Aurelio Pes and Willy Fleckhaus (Palermo: Novecento, 1982), 12. Reprinted as “Goethe in Sicilia,” in Aurelio Pes, *Genealogia del fuoco: Poemi* (Palermo: Novecento, 1991), 272.

¹⁴ “I was travelling through Sicily dreaming about it. On this classic soil I felt in such a poetic mood that I hardly suffered from all the discomforts, but could only take in all I saw and experienced and enshrined it in my heart for ever.” *Italian Journey*, 290.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁶ See Manuela Gieri, *Contemporary Italian Filmmaking: Strategies of Subversion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 230.

extending back to its Homeric origins and forward to its postmodern correlative in *Chi l'ha visto?* the Italian TV version of *The World's Most Wanted*.¹⁷

Indeed the course of Ulysses' travel and *The Odyssey* provide a relevant subtext for the film's intellectual navigation. Gerardo's defection from high culture for the popular television medium is framed by his ironic comment to an unresponsive passenger, while on his way to the most secluded island, Alicudi:

After the fall of Troy, could we deny Ulysses the right to roam the world? To stop at Circe's, Calypso's or Nausicaa's? Certainly not. Otherwise there would be no *Odyssey*. And could we deny his family back in Ithaca the right to look for him? His son Telemachus wanders around the Greek Islands with a single message, "Wanted, Ulysses."¹⁸

This statement functions to enhance the scope of culture in the natural environment of the islands, but it also traces the unfolding of Gerardo's newly found (fantasy) daily life in a classical (Mediterranean) literary narrative. For Moretti, *Caro diario* is a kind of journey moving between imagination and reality, a semi-documentary in the French diaristic style shaped by a strong sense that what ultimately matters is not the destination, but the voyage itself. Along with Gerardo, he hops on the boat that takes them to and fro the most mythical islands of the blue Mediterranean Sea (Lipari, Salina, Stromboli, Panarea, and Alicudi). Querying everyone they encounter, they soon discover that life itself may be the answer. Moretti's traveling lens captures the characters' private and social lives as an itinerant montage of deteriorating experiences. We witness, in De Bernardinis' words, "a filmmaker's *transito* through the labyrinthine paths of the world."¹⁹ Tracked as both physical and mental motion, Moretti's journey epitomizes an odyssey in and out of islandscapes. The vista explored by Nanni at the opening of Chapter II (a long shot of Lipari from the ferryboat) is scenography straight from Goethe's *Italiänische Reise*, an ironic reversal of the serene skyline that had welcomed the German poet in Palermo; the glittering magic of the fireflies Goethe witnessed are transfigured into palpable chaos and an unbearably noisy maze. In traveling to and among the other islands, Moretti also shows that the present inhabitants live disconnected lives and they do not succeed in communicating: "All islands are content with their own mania," he states, "maybe it's a metaphor about how we live in society today."²⁰

Against the panorama of the *Grand Tour*, let us now restage the director's filmic journal. In the first chapter of *Caro diario* set in Rome ("In vespa"), Moretti reveals a dream he has had for quite some time, in which he imagines a moving picture of houses, a story made up only of architectural sites. Setting out to realize his dream, he creates, as Giuliana Bruno writes, "a travelogue of specific atmospheres" assembled for the spectatorial tour of the city: ultimately, "the perfect architectural dream is a filmic dream."²¹ But, as Moretti travels through the Aeolian Islands in the following chapter, he describes the local reality with photographic precision and

¹⁷ See Millicent Marcus, *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 295. Marcus defines Gerardo's voyage in meta-literary terms.

¹⁸ Cited from the film dialogue.

¹⁹ Flavio De Bernardinis, *Nanni Moretti* (Milano: Editrice Il Castoro, 1995), 130.

²⁰ Richard Porton and Lee Ellickson, "Comedy, Communism, and Pastry: An Interview with Nanni Moretti," *Cineaste* 21, nos. 1-2 (1995), 15.

²¹ *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 35-36.

with a style characterized by a classic simplicity. He abandons conventional forms of storytelling and is rather engaged in the narrativization of space itself.²² Contrary to the accounts of the grand tourists and the romantic travelers, he no longer speaks of geographical (emotional or intellectual) desire. Moretti transforms the city of Rome into “a moving architectural landscape”;²³ now, his observational gaze evolves into a series of panoramic views, which reframe the codes of realist practice. On the one hand, the director casts a critical eye at the relations between media and culture (from the speed of contemporary life to a youth-centered, middle-class society); on the other, this voyager is traveling through cinematic history. Several films participate in this excursion, beginning with Alberto Lattuada’s romantic feuilleton *Anna* (1952) and ending with Sergio Leone’s *Giù la testa* [*Duck, You Sucker*, 1971]. The inference for us is that cinema, with its power of picturing symbolic action, can represent a vision of reality in terms of collective concerns and neuroses.²⁴ Indeed, Moretti laments in an interview: “We do not speak of films anymore. We speak of video trailers, TV commercials, and ratings; this is the new cultural debate.”²⁵ *Caro diario* is more than a mere critique of film and television. As Marcia Landy argues, “it is an autocritique whereby the filmmaker has begun to forge a different type of cinema.”²⁶

Moretti’s journey to the Sicilian archipelago climaxes in the sequence on the slopes of the volcano, which was also the setting of Roberto Rossellini’s *Stromboli terra di Dio* [*Stromboli*, 1950]. The characters’ wanderings in the *natural* landscape mark the connection between these two films. Both stories are constructed around elements of geology and topography, as if inspired by a Goethean naturalist philosophy of genesis and organism.²⁷ The climbing of the volcanic mountain leads to an epiphany, and Gerardo will eventually surrender to his television addiction.²⁸ At the end he shouts out that Enzensberger and Popper are truly mistaken: “Television does not corrupt the children; they dream with open eyes as once upon a time they use to listen to fables.”²⁹ TV has replaced fables and legends.

Another particularly salient example occurs as the two friends prepare to leave Stromboli: the mayor announces a new plan for regional development, which is designed to attract the grand tourist. This plan includes the hiring of musician Ennio Morricone (known for his spaghetti western soundtracks) and the acclaimed director of photography Vittorio Storaro (famous for his spectacular lighting techniques). “In a Baudrillardian reversal of neorealist practice,” Marcus notes, “island life will be made to simulate cinematic representations of it: the real will be tailored to fit its media image.”³⁰ The mayor’s farewell lines (“To re-build Stromboli from

²² The director himself speaks of “a less formal style.” “Tagli di Nanni,” in Flavio De Bernardinis, *Nanni Moretti*, 5th revised edition (Milano: Il Castoro Cinema, 2006), 12.

²³ Bruno, 36.

²⁴ On this point, see “Alle radici di *Caro diario*: Intervista a Nanni Moretti,” in *Caro diario*, edited by Piera Detassis (Lipari, Messina: Edizioni del Centro studi, 2002), 10-11.

²⁵ “Come parli Nanni?” in De Bernardinis (1995), 9.

²⁶ *Italian Film* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 375.

²⁷ Cf. Bruno on Rossellini’s film: “The story is generated from – indeed, made possible by – the harsh landscape of the island, dominated by an insurmountable vulcano.” *Atlas of Emotion*, 369.

²⁸ Out of the smoking crater comes “the most postmodern” prophecy in the guise of American tourists: a glimpse of future plot development of his favorite soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Here I’m paraphrasing Marcus’s perceptive reading of this scene. See *After Fellini*, 295.

²⁹ Cited from the film dialogue. Gerardo’s attack on the German critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger primarily refers to his 1974 *Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics, and the Media*.

³⁰ *After Fellini*, 295.

scratch! To re-build Italy from scratch, a new way of life!”) can more broadly be construed as a critique of the ideological use of cinema as a vehicle for national renewal.³¹ In this sense, *Caro diario* appears to be a fragment of a larger map drawn for touring Sicily, the cine-island.³²

Re-shaping memory: Mediterranean (cinematic) crossroads

In *Caro diario*, Moretti escapes a world colonized by tourism and seems to be happy only at sea.³³ Unlike Ulysses, he is not a man of cunning. This kind of diary is a quest for generational identity. He resembles the modern hero of the *Bildungsroman*, who values youth as the most significant stage of life (he proclaims at the beginning of his film “Sono uno splendido quarantenne”). Traveling a step further, we are reminded of Eugenio Montale’s poem “Mediterraneo,” which expresses the riskiness of the sea: “To be vast and different/and at the same time static.”³⁴

The infinite and boundless sea was the site of Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *L’avventura* (1960), which followed a group of wealthy Italians aboard a yacht, cruising off the coast of Sicily. These enigmatic characters end up on the island of Panarea (Moretti’s island of exotic parties) to explore the rocky terrain. Here, one of the main characters, Anna, vanishes. *L’avventura* examines the search for the missing person as a metaphor for neo-capitalist boredom. The recurring shots of empty landscapes traversed by solitary observers evoke despair. Nothing really happens in *L’avventura*, at least according to the paradigm of a conventional storyline. Yet the island harbors emotion, especially for Claudia (Anna’s friend), whose “adventurous” vagabondage explores the domain of the senses. In Antonioni’s cinema, women are often screens for the projection of existential anguish. “There exists a psychological law,” explains the director, “which says that to each motion of the soul there corresponds an external motion; to discover these motions is the first task of film authors.”³⁵ As Roland Barthes puts it in a homage to Antonioni, he is “an Einsteinian traveler,” for he does not know “whether he is a witness or a man of desire.”³⁶ *L’avventura* interrogates reality through vision and silence: the Arcadian imagery forever lost. Sicily no longer is Goethe’s fertile wasteland, the enchanted island where the phantom voices of the Sirens awake the senses and the imagination.³⁷

³¹ “Sean Sean,” which is sung by the mayor at the end, is the leitmotif of Leone’s *Giù la testa*, and was composed by Morricone.

³² One might add that Lina Wertmüller, too, uses a formula that typecasts the native culture in *Travolti da un insolito destino nell’azzurro mare d’agosto* (1974), turning the Mediterranean into a commercialized serial image.

³³ Cf. Nanni’s voice over: “Caro diario, sono felice solo in mare, nel tragitto tra un’isola che ho appena lasciato e un’altra che devo ancora raggiungere.” Cited from the film dialogue.

³⁴ “... essere vasto e diverso/e insieme fisso:/e svuotarmi così d’ogni lordura/come tu fai che sbatti sulle sponde/tra sugheri alghe asterie/le inutili macerie del tuo abisso.” *Ossi di seppia*, in Eugenio Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, edited by Giorgio Zampa (Milano: Mondadori, 1991), 54. See also Bruno Fornara, “Caro diario: Tante cose mi piacciono più di tutte,” in A.A.V.V., *Nanni Moretti* (Torino: Paravia, 1999), 99.

³⁵ Cited in Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni: Or, the Surface of the World* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1985), 87. While *Caro diario* explores the islands, *L’avventura* moves from Panarea to the Sicilian mainland, traversing the north-eastern towns of Bagheria, Messina, Taormina, Troina, Santa Panagia, and Noto.

³⁶ “Dear Antonioni . . . ,” in Michelangelo Antonioni, *L’avventura*, edited by Seymour Chatman and Guido Fink (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 212.

³⁷ Cf. how the director addresses the endless speculations about the final message of his film (i.e. the unsolved mystery of Anna’s disappearance): “But there are no answers. After a silence someone says: ‘Perhaps she only drowned.’ Claudia turns suddenly. Everybody looks at each other in dismay. There: this dismay is the connotation of

The theme of the journey and the figure of the wanderer enjoy a privileged status in Sicilian culture, particularly the recurring motif of “having to leave” in order to achieve fulfillment in the Aristotelian sense of *entelechia*, or the development of one’s potential. The contrasting lens is immobility and social stagnation, as in Luchino Visconti’s *La terra trema* (1948), a Marxist meditation on the economic dynamics of the South; or it is the society of crime that inspired the political cinema of Francesco Rosi, Pietro Germi, and most recently Marco Tullio Giordana’s *I cento passi* [*The One Hundred Steps*, 2000], a film of political indictment portraying the complex relationship between a young man and the Mafia.³⁸ Cinematic perceptions of Sicily are often rooted in a rich literary and figurative culture, but they also reflect a somber sense of forceful class exploitation. Film artists eschew the picturesque vision of the island for quite a different image: they hold definite views about how their work should document and denounce political corruption and the role of the local Mafia. They share with Leonardo Sciascia a tragic, Pascalian view of Sicilian history.

Contributing to the cinematic map of the island is one of the most successful films in recent times: Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* [*Cinema Paradiso*, 1988]. Avoiding a static portrait of a small Sicilian town, the film raises questions about how much has changed in the region. It recounts (in flashback) the story of a young boy, Salvatore (Totò), and his friendship with Alfredo, the local projectionist. As the friendship evolves, so does Totò, yearning for the day to make his own movies. When the time comes for him to leave in order to pursue his dream, Alfredo makes him promise to never return. And he keeps that promise for thirty years, until one day a phone call from his mother beckons him back.

Traveling back to Sicily on a voyage of self-recollection, Salvatore can reanimate his past. In *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*, Tornatore’s lens probes the Sicilian landscape to connect the details of local life to the larger realities of national politics. Salvatore returns to his hometown to tell his story, but also to sing a requiem to the cinema that made an entire community dream in the darkness of the movie theatre.³⁹ As Consolo writes in a note to the published screenplay, this film is about “a society that is losing the comforting darkness of the night, the magic of Plato’s cave, where illusions and dreams once took shape as flickering lights. By contrast, our time is lit by a continuous and indifferent electronic light.”⁴⁰ *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* is a film that makes the movie house “the heartbeat of the town”;⁴¹ a metaphor for the modern human condition of existential displacement caused by a civilization that has lost the meaning of the redeeming function of collective dreaming.⁴² In denouncing the disappearance of the grand cinema, with its grand and enraptured spectators, Tornatore is doing something much more than indulging in the nostalgia afforded by *nóstos* [homecoming]: he offers a symbolic rebirth for the many thousands

the film.” “About Myself and One of My Films,” *ibid.*, 182. On this film, see particularly P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 132-43.

³⁸ For a historical approach to films about Sicily, see Gian Piero Brunetta, “Momenti e volti della Sicilia tra pagina, schermo a storia,” in *La Sicilia e il cinema*, 121-139.

³⁹ See Leonardo Sciascia, “C’era una volta il cinema,” in *Opere (1984-1989)*, edited by Claude Ambroise (Milano: Bompiani, 1991), 640-41.

⁴⁰ “La cuna del sogno,” in Giuseppe Tornatore, *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1990), 170. Tornatore has also produced a cinematic anthology on Sicily, *Lo schermo a tre punte* (1996), which assembles some five hundred clips taken from 163 films; and a photographic album entitled *La mia Sicilia*, edited by Pino Agostini (San Giovanni Lupatoto, Verona: Arsenale Editrice, 2007).

⁴¹ Rosario Lizzio, “Intervista a Giuseppe Tornatore,” *Cineforum* 29 (May 1989), 85.

⁴² That is of recreating (and understanding) life “attraverso quelle ombre che si muovono sopra il lenzuolo bianco.” Vincenzo Consolo, “La cuna del sogno,” 170.

of meters of film that were once projected in the old theater. But perhaps his most remarkable achievement lies in the haunting sense of portent that pervades the final scene of the film. Having returned to Rome, Salvatore is shown watching the montage of kisses rescued from the Paradiso's cutting room floor, spliced together by Alfredo, and given to him as a posthumous gift: thus, desires can only be fulfilled "in the illusory paradise of the silver screen."⁴³ Sicily has become the land of dreams and cinematic memory.

In *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*, the art of citing retraces the itinerary of narrative desire. The clips, which were once censored, become the heartbeat and the soul of the adult filmmaker. For this modern Ulysses, it is impossible to return to Sicily, for he is forever bound to live an erratic existence in exile. Instead, the Sicilians who stay behind reject gifts that would waken them from their dream world. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* [*The Leopard*, 1958] is a case in point. Following the well-known reading of the encounter between Don Fabrizio Salina and the king's emissary, Chevalley – in which the historical process that united Sicily to the Kingdom of Italy during the Risorgimento is recounted as a change achieved by accommodation and compromise – the novel takes us on a grand cultural tour. The Prince lingers to absorb the beauty and history of Sicily ("Noi fummo i Gattopardi, i Leoni . . .") before refusing the offer of a senatorial seat: "Sleep, that is what Sicilians want, and they will always hate anyone who tries to wake them, even if only to bring them the most wonderful gifts."⁴⁴ In his characterization of the islanders, Don Fabrizio illustrates the incomparable spirit of "eternal Sicily."⁴⁵

The melancholic immutability, the "feeling of death," described by Lampedusa is fictionalized by Roberto Andò in his film *Il manoscritto del Principe* [*The Manuscript of the Prince*, 2000]. It tells the story of two young men, Guido and Marco (respectively Gioacchino Tasca Lanza and Francesco Orlando), affected by the majestic and overpowering personality of the Prince as he writes *Il Gattopardo*; but it is also a moving portrait of Palermo (a classical site of the picturesque voyage) and its cultural developments. In a highly stylized film, the Sicilian director addresses the issue of art in its relationship to reality and history:

My dare was in fact to be able to show a human journey that will uncover the clandestine nature of the existence of one of the greatest authors in postwar Italy. . . . To reveal, within a man wrongly considered a pessimist and skeptic par excellence, an indication of true hope – a daring faith in humanity unmatched in the Sicilian bog, constitutionally suspicious, resistant to intellectual interchanges, not at all capable of profound inter-class relationships, and tragically incapable of psychologically foreseeing and shaping its own destiny. . . . This story allowed me to show the unspoken lethal quality of my place of origin."⁴⁶

⁴³ Marcus, 213. In later films, Tornatore continues to find inspiration in the mythical, social, and historical heritage of Sicily: from *Stanno tutti bene* (1990) and *L'uomo delle stelle* (1995), to *Malèna* (2000) and *Baaria*, currently in post-production.

⁴⁴ *Il Gattopardo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958), 122. In Visconti's 1963 filmic adaptation of the novel this very scene is reconstructed with an explicit ideological perspective: a Gramscian interpretation of the Risorgimento as a passive revolution. Gesualdo Bufalino echoes the Prince's words in his *Museo d'ombra*: "Badate, qui siamo sangue di greci... Qui i numi sono di casa." In *Opere*, edited by Maria Corti and Francesca Caputo (Milano: Bompiani, 2001), 183.

⁴⁵ "Così parlammo della Sicilia eterna, di quella delle cose di natura . . ." Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, "Lighea," in *Racconti* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1961), 63.

⁴⁶ From "The Manuscript of the Prince," a lecture delivered at Princeton University on April 2nd, 2004. Cited with the director's permission. The film was produced by Sciarlò (Tornatore's film company) in collaboration with RAI

Il manoscritto del Principe shows the special destiny of places like Sicily, with its solitude, its metamorphic ability to be reborn through works and artists like Lampedusa. It chronicles Marco and Guido's journey through their formative years spent with an exceptional sorcerer. So we ask: is the portrait of a classical, grand, feudal despot painted by Orlando in his *Ricordo di Lampedusa* [*Memory of Lampedusa*, 1963] closer to the truth, or is it rather the image of a Lampedusa-Prospero who affectionately bestows upon a young Gioacchino the treasures and enchantments in his possession? They are both true, claims the director, "inextricably united from the moment of the fated encounter with that mysterious personality that will become an essential part of their personal history."⁴⁷ For Gioacchino Lanza (the adoptive son), Lampedusa was Prospero; he was the same, in other ways, for Orlando (the privileged pupil). The answer to the film's primary question can be found in Marco's closing voiceover, after he refuses to meet with his old friend: "My wish is that an unreal place of memory may be the only paradise where the three of us will meet once again."⁴⁸ As Dacia Maraini suggests, desire is sweeter and more important than satisfying the desire itself: the "paradise" resides beyond the physical, in a place where stories become literature and cinema.⁴⁹

Andò's film revives the sense that memory is "spatial," and that its visual process is an emotionally charged affair. Here, Sicily is transfigured into an eternal landscape, a geography of the soul. Furthermore, the gifts that Lampedusa bestows upon his pupils provide an antidote to the potentially fatal seduction of memory in *Il Gattopardo*.

Prospero's Island

In Lampedusa's short story "Lighea" ["The Siren," 1957], a moral parable on death and mortality, we also find a father figure, Professor Rosario La Ciura, who succeeds in eliminating any trace of the "Sicilian crust" in a young friend while reminding him, among the fogs of Turin, of the sea and the beaches of their own island, with its mythical, Greek, and magical suggestions.⁵⁰ La Ciura's senses and imagination were bewitched by his obsessive love for the Siren. Following his mysterious death at sea, we discover that he has left behind a gift for Paolo Corbera (the narrator): a Greek vase with the Siren figures grafted upon it. After many complications, this object eventually survives in the guise of a fragment which only shows "the feet of Ulysses tied to his ship's mast."⁵¹ Like the professor, Lampedusa holds an enchanted view of Sicily's natural, archaic landscape, but he also fears "the approach of demons."⁵² Perhaps even the muddy water moistening the sands of Mondello, or the sunny landscapes of a

Cinema, starring Michel Bouquet as the Prince, and Jeanne Moreau as Princess Licy (the Litvian aristocrat Alessandra Wolff-Stomersee).

⁴⁷ Ibid. Andò also acknowledges that, in his film, he subliminally transposed his own relationship with Leonardo Sciascia, who became his mentor when they both resided in Rome (Sciascia was a representative of the Partito Radicale in Parliament; Andò was searching for opportunities in the cinema).

⁴⁸ Cited from the film dialogue.

⁴⁹ See "Prefazione," in Roberto Andò and Salvatore Marcarelli, *Il manoscritto del Principe* (Palermo: Edizioni della Battaglia, 2001), 6.

⁵⁰ Cf. the Prince, when he declares that, in order to exorcise Sicilians from their inborn sense of immobility, one must send them away very young, before "la crosta è fatta." Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*, 124.

⁵¹ Tomasi di Lampedusa, "Lighea," 94.

⁵² Ibid., 64.

Sicily, which is difficult not to love and impossible to forget, could undergo, like Prospero's island, a sea change of its own, into something rich and strange.

With its ability to invent its own gods, fathers, masters and with its flaring, secret passions – that its history and labyrinthine psyche have never ceased to reproduce – Sicily remains an island that resists control and constantly reinvents itself on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Today's artists have begun to explore new and emerging Sicilian identities forged out of linguistic pluralism, ethnic minorities, and mass culture. The Sicily of today emerges as a mosaic of diversified Mediterranean imaginings. Perhaps the most compelling example is given by Giuseppe Tornatore's latest film, *Baaria* [*Bagheria* in Arabic], which was shot between Sicily and Tunisia with local actors. This is how the director speaks of his hometown, Bagheria: “a town which represents the entire world.”⁵³ At a time when the voyage up north, from Africa, to the Sicilian sunny shores can open up routes for a flow of new emigrants, Tornatore's vision of Mediterranean communion projects an image of multiculturalism as key to the vitality and aura of the Mediterranean civilizations. Such visions expand our cultural horizon, for in many ways they bring back the dazzling image of Goethe's flickering fireflies, which represents a poetic Sicilian world that has also accommodated a desire for change and social regeneration.

⁵³ *La mia Sicilia*, 188.

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