

Books, Heavens and Earth

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What does it mean to be Mediterranean writers, whether Turkish or Catalan? There are many things, many constant themes we share, since whatever we do does not send our dreams to sleep, but gives them fresh impetus. It's the call of this intense life, of this rampant diversity, that powerfully draws us through. We are ultimately writers who belong to the world of Mediterranean worlds, with Turkey and Catalonia at either end of the evocative sea.

In order to explain what this represents – both in essence and inadvertently – allow me to turn to a German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder believed that the origin of knowledge and its expression are rooted in the sensations of the soul and the analogies experience draws. In other words, as I outlined above, they are rooted in the life inserted in a given space and time. This life takes on artistic significance, and even secular transcendence, through language, the vehicle for literary genius. This, in turn, is the product of the individuality of each and every community and person combined, with its brawn, its intuition and sensualism, with its alert mind.

As another German thinker, Martin Heidegger, maintained, “language is home to the soul” and we exist through language. As such, we do not find true fulfilment through, for instance, nationhood, historical commitment, but rather via language and our soul. In other words, we find fulfilment through the world in which we live and which we interpret at every turn, through all its different paths and with

all its creatures. The world of yesterday and today, as another Mediterranean writer, the Greek Empedocles, wrote:

*Before now I have been at some time
boy and girl
Bush, bird and scaly fish in the sea.*

In the Mediterranean. I have felt like Empedocles, both materially and in my hopes, and I shall once again. A burning sense of unity – not of uniformity, but of diversity – is what we, human beings nurtured by the genes and the light of Mare Nostrum or the White Sea, as the Ottomans called it, constitute.

This part of the planet, our part of the planet, with its benign climate, has attracted a wide variety of peoples and languages over the course of millennia. As the Mediterranean covers just a small area, these peoples have come to know one another and to intermingle, creating a wealth of ideals and beliefs, of beauty, that is almost unrivalled anywhere else on the planet. Peoples and symbols going back centuries have always been interwoven. There are in this sea and this universe as many different and yet nearby shores as there are waves that wash up on them and merge together.

Hence, each and every human being in the Mediterranean has existed with their ties and their vision intertwined, whether coming together in an embrace or in combat. After all, what would be other than mere stones if we were not paradoxical? My novels and my characters feed off their contradictions.



Indeed, are we anything but a contradiction we eternally bear, resulting thus in energy? All this leads us to Protagoras' sublime definition of what it is to be human: "Man is the measure of all things." And this concept flows immediately into Pericles' introduction of democracy and into the naturalism of sculpture in 5th-century Greece.

But be careful. I am not plaiting erudite garlands, but reaching back into the past to find the roots of today's most heated and pressing issues. What do all the world's communities and individuals enjoy and want? No doubt they want political democracy, the welfare state and the supremacy of human rights. In other words, they want to witness the consequences of Protagoras' axiom, of Pericles' system and of that homocentric sculptural tradition. Thus, the free world and its free hopes articulate the

great universal and universalist fruit harvested from the Mediterranean.

It is from all this that our literary creations derive and spread, with all their different flavours, aromas and colours, of magical vines and grapes, of wheat and freshly baked bread, of oil with the goddess Athena peering through the silvery olive tree with her wide glaucous eyes.

And it is these things, born of the fertile land, that are our gods. Sometimes I see them, eternally youthful, shades of light in the pale green glow of pine trees in the sun in my native Majorca. They rush past and I, absorbed in my own world, write down what they tell me as their old words echo and turn into fresh blood.

The real Mediterranean – not the collection of political and ideological compartments – is unquestionably a polytheistic delight. Or perhaps it is just me who is like that and wants the

community to which I belong to be that way – and, above all, the communities and literatures to which I wish to belong. How swift is my flight in my novels from monotheisms! And I believe we must flee them and run towards the life that calls us, complex and teeming with different facets as it is. Horace, a sensitive Latin poet, evokes this in his *Carpe diem*:

*Be wise, pour the wine,
And restrain far-reaching hopes, for life
is short
And as we speak, envious time slips away,
Seize the day, do not trust tomorrow.*

If we do not live for today, we shall not live at all tomorrow. In the same way, the world would not truly be alive without our books. Granted, we are living in a world of globalisation. However, it must be a version of the Mediterranean on a global scale, a brotherhood or convergence of brotherhoods. Otherwise, we will sink into some kind of overgrown mental and environmental squalor, which will be purely mechanistic, even though we believe it to be scientific in nature.

Indeed, there are even those in the West who regard the rise of China as if the country were no more than a billion consumers ripe for exploitation. There is not even pause for thought to ponder that China is another part of the world much like the Mediterranean. It too has engendered a culture that is luxuriant, iridescent and infinite. Just read Tang's poetry, from the jubilant Li Bai to the sad

Du Fu. Just caress a piece of Song's glistening porcelain...

I do not believe in the doom-mongers, in those who constantly foretell of the Apocalypse – whether they distort nature, unaware that nature and science go hand in hand, or whether they are monotheists, who believe that death heralds a new life. Hence my faith in literature, in aesthetic stimulation, in passionate longing, in the polar star of adventure. The fact is that each one of us has to be able to, has to try to shape his own destiny. Heraclitus, in his small, unsettled kingdom on the coasts of what is modern-day Turkey, was alone in divining this with such clear far-sightedness: "The same river always runs by, but its waters are always different."

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Thus, we may be reincarnated not only as a bush, a fish or an adolescent, but as our first father, the first character in the novel, in philosophy, in life, and hence more real, whose sons we are: Ulysses, Odysseus, another Mediterranean figure, who from the eastern sea reached the west, the rudder of his black ship trembling, overcoming one-eyed monsters and in love with the most lustful of goddesses.

Finally, I write because I have read and I read because I am alive. And so it is that I believe in all of us, in the greatness and ardour of heavens and earth.