

(Re)Presenting Corsica:

From Object of Fascination to Site of Production in Modern French Literature

By

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Il serait d'autant plus désirable de détruire cette terrible idée
que l'on se fait en France des bandits de la Corse, que ce pays,
entièrement neuf pour le voyageur, offre une mine féconde à exploiter.
Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, *Lettres sur la Corse*

Tout ce qu'on dit sur la Corse est faux.
Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*

La seule chose qui soit difficile sur cette île, c'est d'arriver à savoir
si elle nous donne plus qu'elle ne nous prend.
Antoine Albertini, *Malamorte*

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MAP OF CORSICA



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ABSTRACT

*(Re)Presenting Corsica:
From Object of Creation to Site of Production in Modern French Literature*

This dissertation explores the development of Corsica, a Mediterranean island on the cultural and political periphery of Metropolitan France, as a unique site of literary inspiration and of production in modern French literature. A dialogic pairing of narratives from the early-19th and 21st centuries explores the origins of the French metropolitan literary representation of Corsica (its bandits, its *vendetta*, its landscapes) and the voices of contemporary authors who express their own insular cultural identities, at times reprising imagery and themes of the previous generation.

We begin with the period of French Romanticism (1820s-1840s) during which travel narratives and narrative fictions offer initial exposure to Corsican communities and traditions for many Metropolitan readers. At times, these texts were written without any prior travel or experience within insular communities themselves and relied heavily on the work of others. During this period, travel narratives and narrative fictions therefore exist symbiotically as they create and perpetuate stereotypes of Corsican culture that prevail for many generations. Through close reading and intertextual investigations of works from Gustave Flaubert and Eugène Rosseuw Saint-Hilaire, we will examine how authors individually express their experiences in Corsica, while at times rebuffing dominant literary representations.

The project then shifts to the contemporary period with a focus on Corsican authors Marc Biancarelli, Marie Ferranti, and Jérôme Ferrari, for whom the primacy of the early-19th century representations of Corsica are important focal points. Each of these authors, in their own way, engage in direct dialogue with former literary representations of Corsican communities all the while advancing a reconsideration of contemporary Corsican insular identities grounded in the renewal of the island's diverse cultural practices and traditions. This *renaissance* of sorts engages with various contemporary social movements, for example the resurgence of the Corsican language as well as with numerous calls for political independence.

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INTRODUCTION

La Corse: elle fait parler d'elle, elle fait créer, elle fait écrire.¹
Francesca Albertini

Corsica surges out of the Mediterranean Sea. Its extreme geography creates perilous perches for cities along its jagged coastlines and rocky beaches while also impeding access to the rural interior. Covered with the *maquis*, a lush and dense brush, the verdant landscape thins out as one looks towards the snow-capped peaks of the granitic and volcanic mountains that swell upwards and diagonally create two distinct regions, the *Cismonte* (Upper Corsica) and the *Piumonte* (Lower Corsica). Linking Ajaccio to Bastia, the lonely wagons of the *Chemins de fer de la Corse* slowly pass through this precarious divide, switch-backing along the edges of breathtaking cliffs. In the 1960s, English anthropologist Dorothy Carrington, an anchor of modern studies of Corsica, recalls her memories of first laying eyes upon the Niolo mountain range high in the center of the island near Corte:

As suddenly as release comes from a nightmare, the walls went down, sunlight flooded over us, blue space engulfed us: we had entered the Niolo. Nothing I had been told had prepared me for this landscape. I found an oval plateau entirely ringed by mountains, crenellated as castle walls... The Niolo, whatever its name may mean, makes no impression whatever of darkness, but rather a sphere filled with a luminous blue substance in which one floats, as in a celestial realm.²

Often called the “Île de Beauté,” Corsica consistently attracts waves of seasonal tourists that flock to the island’s beaches, to the paths and trails within the *Parcu di Corsica* (*Parc naturel régional*

¹ Francesca Albertini, “La Corse, carrefour et frontière littéraire,” *Letteraturi di frontiera*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2, 1991, p. 40.

² Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, London, Longmans, 1971 [2008, ed. Rolli Lucarotti], p. 232-3.

de Corse) “[qui] s’étend sur 365 000 hectares”³ – over 40% of the island’s total surface area! Today, tourism has become a lifeline for the economic survival of insular communities.⁴

This *Île de Beauté* is however one of dangerous beauty, as Gustave Flaubert writes in 1845, years following his own voyage across the island: Corsica is “un grand pays grave et ardent, tout noir et tout rouge.”⁵ The majestic, rugged terrain creates innumerable shadows where the secrets of insular culture, tradition, and memory are often relegated. This beautiful obscurity piques the imaginations of travelers and writers alike as they peer into insular culture, often mindful to maintain a careful distance. It is there that they find uncanny funerary traditions, the ground soaked in the blood of vengeance, and traces of the supernatural. These encounters will form the basis for travel and literary narratives beginning in the early-19th century and will persist through the 21st century but with an important shift in perspective: an initial outsider gaze into insular culture and communities will turn inward as contemporary Corsican authors write of their communities and *from* Corsica. To echo French literary critic Jean-Louis André, we are now hearing “le surgissement de la parole des îles longtemps muettes.”⁶

How do authors translate the unfamiliar of insular cultural and environmental landscapes into literature? How do literary narratives construct, sustain, and potentially alter cultural identities, particularly those of an insular community? This dissertation investigates the complex relationships between literary production and expressions of insular cultural identity through a study of modern French literature of the 19th and 21st centuries written about, and at times from,

³ “Présentation,” *Le Parc naturel régional de Corse*, <http://www.pnr.corsica/le-parc-de-corse/>, accessed 4/21/2021.

⁴ Jean-Louis Fabiani, “Le Tourisme comme destin?,” *Sociologie de la Corse*, Paris, Éditions de la découverte, coll. “Repères,” 2020, p. 97: “Le tourisme compte deux fois plus qu’en Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur ou qu’en Languedoc-Roussillon. Les dépenses consacrées à la culture et au loisir par les touristes sont parmi les plus faibles de France, car on continue de venir massivement pour la mer, et non pour la culture.”

⁵ Letter from Gustave Flaubert to Ernest Chevalier, 15 June 1845, *Correspondance* (ed. Jean Bruneau), Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” t. 1, 1972, p. 245.

⁶ Jean-Louis André, “Deux manières d’écrire les îles: la littérature corse et la littérature sarde aujourd’hui,” *Les Langues néo-latines*, Vol. 241, 1982, p. 158.

Corsica. Through a dialogic pairing of narratives from both centuries, this study will explore the origins of the French Metropole's fascination for insular culture, first popularized by works from Prosper Mérimée⁷ and Honoré de Balzac⁸. We begin with early-19th century travel narratives and narrative fictions composed by Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire⁹ and Gustave Flaubert¹⁰, both of whom engage with the development and solidification of Romantic representations of insular culture such as banditry and funerary traditions, which are often crafted around narrative intrigues of a blood-soaked *vendetta*. The early-19th century texts chosen for this study are lesser-known publications that nevertheless offer critical insight into the vast network of literary production of the time.

Contemporary Corsican authors return to these plots, settings, and personages in distinct ways as they challenge and contest Metropolitan representations of insular culture and traditions. The trans-secular pairing of narratives in this study is driven by the ways in which contemporary authors Marc Biancarelli¹¹, Marie Ferranti¹², and Jérôme Ferrari¹³ individually position themselves in relationship to authors of previous generations around themes of banditry, vengeance, and death. These authors are the leading voices emanating from the island today and they entertain a deep relationship with authors of the 19th century all the while offering unique perspectives and articulations of their *insularité*. Marc Biancarelli has expressed on numerous occasions in written and recorded interviews his deep aversion towards early-19th century literature for its caricatures

⁷ *Mateo Falcone* (novella, 1829); *Colomba* (novel, 1840)

⁸ *La Vendetta* (novella, 1829)

⁹ *Lettres sur la Corse* (that appeared in serial form in the Parisian journal *Le Globe* from May 25, 1826 to September 25, 1827); *Souvenirs de Corse* (a collection of short stories published in the *Revue de Paris* from July 1830-July 1831).

¹⁰ *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit* and *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)* (short stories, 1835-6 ?) and *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* (travel narrative, 1840).

¹¹ *Orphelins de Dieu* (novel, 2014)

¹² *La Chasse de nuit* (novel, 2004)

¹³ *Variétés de la mort* (short stories, 2001); *Balco Atlantico* (novel, 2008); *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (novel, 2012)

and sensationalized portrayals of banditry, vengeance, and life in rural villages. For Marie Ferranti, the relationship to the 19th century is just as organic: her profound exploration of funerary rites and rituals echoes the interests of early-19th century travel-writers which positions her work in relationship to those publications and focal points; in many ways, she is *une héritière* of the Romantic generation. Jérôme Ferrari rearticulates the Romantic intrigues of vengeance and codes of honor within the setting of the contemporary village to point at their degradation by insular culture itself. He seeks to move beyond the traditionally violent narrative story arc to nuance contemporary insularity by portraying Corsican village life as more than just an endless series of *règlements de compte*, “les t-shirts ensanglantés ne sont plus les éléments constitutifs de la vraisemblance corse.”¹⁴ With these complementary perspectives and literary traditions, a fundamental question can be asked to guide the present study: *Qu’est-ce que la Corse?* As we will see, the answer is neither singular nor straightforward – there is not *one* Corsica. As though viewing the island through a kaleidoscope, each author will offer a different response, enriching the history and narratives of insular culture and identity.

A Resistant Island

Corsica has a long history of subjugation to continental European political entities that continue to exact significant consequences on contemporary insular communities: “Tout au long de son histoire, elle a eu à se défendre contre les invasions et les colonisations étrangères venues de la mer.”¹⁵ Long held in possession by the Republic of Genoa (1562-1729), it is not until the 18th century that the tides turned when a terrible winter ruined crops and the Genoese continued to

¹⁴ Interview by Natalie Crom with Jérôme Ferrari, December 14, 2012 (5:20-5:23); available online, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHRoDLNVh0>

¹⁵ Francesca Albertini, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

ignore the struggles of local communities. In 1729, resistance mounted in numerous regions, particularly those of the north (Bastia, Cap Corse) and successfully expelled Genoese troops in 1731. Continued resistance against the Genoese attempted to maintain control over the island eventually engaged the French, who in 1737 entered into an agreement with the Republic to provide military assistance when requested.¹⁶ This act began a series of complicated entanglements between France and Genoa in which each contested control of the island in turbulent political times. The disarray benefited insular resistance as grassroots initiatives served as the foundation for the rise of Pasquale Paoli, a military general and political leader who declared the independence of Corsica (from Genoa) in 1755 with the proclamation of its own constitution in 1755.¹⁷ The Republic of Corsica did not endure: in 1768, France renegotiated its contract with Genoa, to its significant advantage, to maintain French military presence on the island for ten years while Genoa removed its troops and repaid its debts to the French. The island effectively became collateral, and the damage was devastating. At the conclusion of the *Bataille de Ponte Novu*, waged from May 8-9, 1769, Corsica was ceded to French control over insular affairs and territory.¹⁸ Following the Napoleonic wars of the early-19th century, travel began to increase between the island and the Metropole bringing with it sustained economic attachment while also political will, dominance, and control, in particular judicial reforms designed to reign-in insular communities. A paramilitary police force named the *Voltigeurs corses* was constituted of Continental and local Corsicans to maintain law and order across the island with the goal of regulating (through elimination) banditry

¹⁶ The articles of the “Convention de la République de Gènes avec la Cour de France, envoyée à la cour le 17 nov. 1737” are reproduced in *Bulletin de la Société des sciences historiques et naturelles de la Corse*, Vols. 1-2, 1882, p. 371-376.

¹⁷ See also, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Projet pour une constitution de la Corse* (ed. Robert Chesnais), Paris, Nautilus, [1763] 2000. For more on Rousseau’s influence throughout the Mediterranean basin: *Rousseau et la Méditerranée: La Réception de Jean-Jacques Rousseau dans les pays méditerranéens* (ed. Jacques Domenech), Paris, Honoré Champion, 2016.

¹⁸ In 2017, Marie Ferranti returned to this battle in her play *La Passion de Maria Gentile* (Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Le Manteau d’Arlequin,” 2017).

and *la vendetta*, facets of Corsican society that would persist as symbols of Corsican culture, broadly speaking. During this period, writers such as Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, Gustave Flaubert, and Prosper Mérimée crafted compelling narrative intrigues around the theme of vengeance in pursuit of their vision of the island to which contemporary authors would return...with a vengeance.

As the 19th century progressed, investments in infrastructure brought paved roads linking the economic capitals of the island, Bastia and Ajaccio, via Corte, the historical capital of the Republic of Corsica high in the island's center. Toward the end of the century, a rail network was engineered across the island: "Le 1er février 1888, les premiers trains circulent entre Bastia et Corte ainsi que sur l'antenne de la côte orientale, provisoirement limitée à Tallone. L'ouverture complète du réseau de base, s'étendant alors sur 295 km de lignes, n'interviendra qu'en 1894, après l'exécution de travaux considérables."¹⁹ Entry into the 20th century was tumultuous for Corsicans as the World Wars put the island's survival at significant risk: "Des milliers de morts, la coupure des relations avec le continent d'autant plus grave que l'île en était devenue de plus en plus dépendante, le retour en catastrophe aux pratiques culturelles les plus archaïques afin de pouvoir survivre, l'absence de circulation monétaire semblèrent plonger la Corse en plein XVIII^e siècle."²⁰ The depletion of the local population led to significant waves of emigration to the Metropole, in particular to Marseille and Nice. Many departed for positions abroad within the political administration of colonies and territories held in French control around the world: "In the 1930s, when Corsica accounted for only 0.75% of the total French population, Corsicans made up 22% of the colonial administration and a similar proportion of the European soldiers in the colonial

¹⁹ "Présentation de l'entreprise," Chemins de fer de la Corse, 2021; available online <https://cf-corse.corsica/presentation-de-lentreprise/>

²⁰ Jean-Louis Andreani, *Comprendre la Corse*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Folio-Le Monde," 2004, p. 133.

military.”²¹ In 1970, the island was administratively separated from the region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur and divided into two regions, Haute-Corse (Bastia) and Corse-du-Sud (Ajaccio). The political reorganization of the map had significant consequences for insular communities and their political aspirations, in particular the rapid development in the intensity of the nationalist movements in the late-1970s-1990s, leading to what Ivan Bourdieu has called “une guerre civile” within the island.²² The long trend in resistance to continental political control continues to this day with the elections of local leaders to the *Assemblée de Corse* that directs insular political and economic policy, led today by the majority coalition of nationalist political groups, presided since 2015 by Jean-Guy Talamoni.²³ As the island began to more strongly direct its own economic and political culture, the heart of Corsican culture was also brought to the forefront in an important social movement, the *Riacquistu*: a “reacquisition” of the specificities of Corsican culture through the arts, literature, music, language, and the environment. As Sarah Brown describes in her research on the origins and trajectory of this social movement, the relationships between this cultural reawakening and insular politics are inextricable: “the *Front régionaliste corse* (FRC) founded in 1966 focused on the ‘revindication’ of Corsican culture, which it argued had been folklorized and exoticized to the detriment of Corsicans’ understanding of their own identities.”²⁴ While also administered from afar, the dominant political actor would also control the narratives and discourse of the island. Through the prism of the Metropole, the story of Corsica was told

²¹ Robert Aldrich, “France’s Colonial Island: Corsica and the Empire,” *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, Vol. 3, H-France for the George Rudé Society, 2009, p. 112.

²² Ivan Bourdieu, *L’Aliénation corse*, Paris, Harmattan, 2004, p. 113. For a chronology of political assassinations, attacks, and other historical moments, see Jean-Louis Andreani, *Comprendre la Corse*, *op. cit.*, p. 324-5.

²³ An interesting figure, Jean-Guy Talamoni is a lawyer known for his defense of Corsican political prisoners. A *docteur ès lettres* with a thesis on early-20th-century Corsican poetry, he is also known for his ties to Corsican author Marie Ferranti. Some of their correspondence has been recently published by Gallimard: Marie Ferranti and Jean-Guy Talamoni, *Un peu de temps à l’état pur. Correspondance 2013-2017*, Paris, Gallimard, 2018.

²⁴ Sarah H. Brown, “The Corsican Quest for the Real: The Struggle for Self-Identification among Cultural Militants in Corsica’s Movement for Cultural Reacquisition,” doctoral dissertation completed at Emory University, 2011, p. 95; Proquest UMI: 3461953.

without its own voice. This position changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the resurgence of insular, Corsican literature expressing its own relationships to history, to one another, and most importantly, to the very nature of the island itself.

Insularity and Relational Identities

What is an island in the first place? A cursory search in the dictionary reveals what seems quite a simple explanation: in English, “a piece of land completely surrounded by water” (Oxford English Dictionary) and in French, “Étendue de terre ferme d’une manière durable dans les eaux d’un océan, d’une mer, d’un lac ou d’un cours d’eau” (Le Grand Robert). In both definitions, water plays an essential role as the condition *sine qua non* of insularity itself: there must be an all-encompassing maritime border. Roger Brunet and Olivier Dollfus consider this dynamic frontier as one that creates “un autre monde dans le monde, à la fois hors d’atteinte immédiate et qui tient dans le creux de la main.”²⁵ Water is then both a force of separation and one of potential (re)creation: “L’île est enfermement, aliénation du monde, et réappropriation d’un espace mesuré. Elle nourrit les rêves de paradis.”²⁶ Brunet and Dollfus portray the island as an enigmatic and dynamic space by emphasizing its geological and experiential singularity. The description of the island as an experience with “aliénation du monde” is of foundational importance because not only will difference be recognized (and at times intensified), but it will also be transformative. In our exploration of the works of contemporary Corsican authors Marc Biancarelli and Jérôme Ferrari, the notion of island as a “paradise” will be strongly contested as both writers emphasize the illusory nature of these “rêves de paradis.”

²⁵ Roger Brunet and Olivier Dollfus, *Géographie Universelle. Mondes nouveaux*, Paris, Hachette/Reclus, 1990, p. 226.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Geology and geography combine to exact an important influence on the development of insular identities. In her studies of the impact of geography on the development of Corsican communities, Marina Casula emphasizes the importance of the relationships between the natural world and the social community: “L’identité collective corse fait largement référence à son ancrage territorial pour se définir, et plus particulièrement à sa particularité insulaire.”²⁷ Given the diversity and extreme challenge of Corsican topography—after all it is a mountain that rises from the sea—insular identity is often developed in a more granular way: “[l’identité] est la construction d’un sentiment d’appartenance à une communauté, parfois attaché à un lieu, c’est-à-dire un environnement physique, matérialisé, particulier: un territoire. Et cette relation peut être vécue différemment selon les spécificités du territoire concerné.”²⁸ Similar to both the United States and France, where regional identities can supplant (or are prioritized) over a national identity, Corsica’s terrain encourages similar associations and connections:

La géographie de la Corse porte l’héritage de cette histoire géologique. Elle explique qu’il existe en fait deux Corses: la Corse alpine et la Corse hercynienne. Elles sont séparées par le corridor de Corte, une diagonale qui va d’Île-Rousse à Solenzara en passant par Ponte Leccia et Corte [...] La chaîne montagneuse qui les sépare sert à la fois de frontière naturelle et administrative entre la Haute-Corse et la Corse-du-Sud. Mais cette partition a eu des conséquences sur l’histoire, d’une part, puisque la Corse a eu à connaître différents épisodes de domination de par sa situation stratégique en Méditerranée et d’autre part sur le développement des deux parties de l’île, isolées l’une de l’autre et divisées en vallées, constituant autant d’identités locales.²⁹

At the local level, Corsican cultural identities are multidimensional. They result from the coincidence of geography and its influence on the tides of history: waves of invasion from the Italian peninsula (dating from Antiquity), stronger economic development of the port of Bastia in

²⁷ Marina Casula, “La Corse: une île-projet au cœur de la Méditerranée,” *Esprit Critique, Revue internationale de sociologie et de sciences sociales*, Vol. 13, 2010, p. 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 5.

comparison to Ajaccio, the relative isolation of Corte in the center of the island, and the cultural proximity of Southern Corsica with Northern Sardinia. As travel writers of the early-19th century observed, the prevalence of banditry and belief in certain superstitions depended largely on where one lived on the island.

While internally regionally diverse, Corsica is still a single island. Throughout this study, we will rely on the critical theories of insularity proposed by Anne Meistersheim who frames this notion in terms of a microcosm:

La première figure de l'île qui s'impose, semblant tout à la fois ouvrir sur toutes les autres et les résumer toutes, est celle de l'île comme microcosme. L'île comme "monde en soi." Même si ce monde est 'microcosme', c'est-à-dire petit monde, monde en miniature. Car entre les deux termes qui composent ce concept de microcosme, c'est le 'caractère monde' qui compte. Quelle que soit sa taille, c'est un 'monde' qui existe. Un 'monde en soi'. Un monde qui se détermine par sa propre fermeture. Et c'est de cette manière, c'est pour cette raison qu'il refusera, autant et aussi longtemps que ce sera possible, la prise en compte de la mesure, de la taille, de l'échelle, celle-ci lui étant évidemment dictée par l'extérieur, donnée par l'Autre, par l'au-delà de la mer, par un centre, une capitale, un État quel qu'il soit.³⁰

The island is indeed its own universe but one that exists in relationship to others. While Meistersheim does not directly engage with literary representations of Corsica, her articulation for contested relationships with "l'Autre" are essential for our examination of both early-19th- and 21st-century literary representations of Corsica. Travel narratives and some narrative fictions sought to explore the social dynamics and forces that dictate the nature of this world while also subordinating them to Metropolitan customs and values. The crystallization of Continental literary depictions of banditry and vengeance with successive depictions of bloodshed solidified stereotypes of insular values. Contemporary Corsican literature resists these Metropolitan perceptions of insular life while also carving out space for the insular voice to express itself

³⁰ Anne Meistersheim, *Figures de l'île*, Ajaccio, DCL Éditions, 2001, p. 23.

independently of others. As Éric Fougères suggests, this insular voice is essential because “l’île est une représentation d’elle-même.”³¹

The relationship to the Continent is at the heart of literature written about Corsica during the French Romantic period. The early-19th century voyager shapes, maps, and relates the contours of the insular space to a larger, external, non-insular public. These travel narratives, I argue, shaped the literary imagination, refining the image until it set, crystallized, and became emblematic, stereotypical, archetypal. The literary representation of Corsica during the Romantic era of the 19th century, in which Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, Gustave Flaubert, and Prosper Mérimée were involved, was indeed one-directional, effectively defining the insularity of Corsica by creating its Other-ness via its exotic landscapes, unfamiliar cultural traditions, and challenging terrain. The contemporary literary works that we will consider in this study by Marc Biancarelli, Marie Ferranti, and Jérôme Ferrari reconsider and redefine the theoretical constructs of insularity. We will look at how Corsican authors reconceptualize and reformulate the imposed archetypes of Corsican cultural traditions, specifically banditry and *vendetta*, to explore the specific impacts of geographical and social insularity on the individual. Contemporary authors engage with the manipulation, destruction, and degradation of the horizon that have elsewhere and otherwise formed a barrier between the Continent and the Island—the historical trauma associated with the invasion, implantation, and domination of Corsica of the 19th century as well as the opening of Corsican society to the world, which is not without its own risks for local village communities.

³¹ Éric Fougères, *Escales en littérature insulaire: Îles et balises*, Paris, L’Harmattan, coll. “Littératures comparées,” 2004, p. 6.

Corsica as an Object of Literary Fascination: Travel Narratives and the Development of the Romantic Literary Gaze in the early-19th Century

In the early-19th century, travelers turned their eye to a relatively unknown destination—Corsica. Its relative proximity to the continent (~349km to Marseille) and renown as the home of Napoléon Bonaparte encouraged travelers to explore the island: “La Corse apparaît alors à la fois inquiétante et attirante à la lumière [d’un] exotisme sentimental qui mêle les descriptions de spectacles insolites aux émotions qu’ils suscitent.”³² Publications appeared most often in the form of travel narratives, or what Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli labels broadly as “la littérature d’information”: works that “offrent au public l’histoire de son passé légendaire, de son présent héroïque illustré d’anecdotes et de descriptions qui révèlent des mœurs assez étranges.”³³ Often, this *littérature d’information* sought to transmit the intensity of social dynamics and customs, such as a fervent attachment to individual liberty even to the point where justice is administered on one’s own. Diverse depictions of pastoral settings, unspoiled natural splendors, and anecdotes of the extreme violence associated with vengeance “commencent à tisser un réseau de termes spécifiques à la Corse [...] Une réalité corse, différente de la réalité française, apparaît, condensée parfois, à force de démarquages ou de simplifications, en visions toutes faites, sur lesquelles se projettent les rêves des écrivains.”³⁴ The settings, sights, sounds, and smells will serve as the foundation of Metropolitan understandings of insular culture as well as the origin for Metropolitan literary representation of the island. Travel narratives are therefore the spaces where discourses about Corsican culture are first presented and solidified, creating a dominant vocabulary and imagery that influences Metropolitan perceptions of Corsican insularity.

³² Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *L’Image de la Corse dans la littérature romantique française*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979, p. 180.

³³ *Idem.*, p. 45

³⁴ *Idem.*, p. 55-6.

Common threads and themes unite a network of travel narratives in the early-19th century and yet each travelogue reads as a different experience with the island's cultural and environmental landscapes. This difference can be attributed to the temporal gap between the period represented and the moment of a text's publication, which could occur several years later. While this break can be easily explained as a reality of publication and the logistics of travel itself, its consequences are significant: the effect of the text is for the reader to engage with the *There and Then* rather than the *Here and Now*. As a result, the travel narrative shares the author's lasting impressions and remembrances or their nostalgia for the voyage itself. As Nathalie Solomon asserts in her work on 19th-century travelogues, *Voyages et fantasmes de voyage à l'époque romantique* (2014), the need to distinguish one's narrative from another creates this competitive space of variable impressions, representations, and perspectives. Ultimately, the focus of the travel narrative lies on the sentiments and impressions of the individual *traveler* rather than the *destination* itself. In other words, the physical destination is subordinated to the emotional and sentimental engagement of the voyager and to their *fantasmes* of the place itself:

C'est donc en termes figurés que se pose la question de la réalité des voyages à l'époque romantique: il ne s'agit pas de douter du déplacement physique, mais de se demander comment les écrivains s'accommodent de la confusion qui s'instaure de plus en plus souvent entre le texte et le monde [...] Donner *son* Orient, *son* Italie, *son* Espagne, ou même *sa* France, voilà ce que se doit de faire l'écrivain en voyage.³⁵

Read in relationship to Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli's comments above, "la confusion" or blurred lines between the reality of Corsica and its textual representation create the space for "les rêves des écrivains" to express their individual engagement with insular culture and settings. Solomon's observations are of critical importance because they foreground an answer to the question *Qu'est-*

³⁵ Natalie Solomon, *Voyages et fantasmes de voyage à l'époque romantique*, Presses Universitaires de Toulouse-Le Mirail, coll. "Cribles," 2014, p. 10-11.

ce que la Corse? as one that is fundamentally polyphonic with each author contributing their own perspective to a larger body of knowledge, one from which authors of narrative fiction will draw heavily all the while they assert their own voices.

Travel narratives do not exist in isolation: they directly influence the development of narrative fiction about Corsica in the early-19th century. Travel narratives serve as the foundations of and the source materials for stories which later inspire other travelers and writers to explore the island. This relationship is fundamentally intertextual: content developed in one narrative will be found in another. The recycling and retransmission between works structures Metropolitan French discourse about Corsica in the early-19th century: The frequent themes of vengeance, the setting of the maquis, and the imposing presence of the patriarch generate static and persistent images of insular society and culture that become stereotypes of Corsican communities, traditions, and landscapes.

The effects of the dialogical relationship between travel narrative and narrative fiction are most impactful in the work of Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), the author of the celebrated short story *Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse* (1829) and novella *Colomba* (1840). Mérimée also published a travel narrative following his 1839 voyage to Corsica entitled *Notes d'un voyage en Corse* (1840). He can be credited with the popularization of the figure of the Corsican bandit and the theme of vengeance in narrative fictions about Corsica during the Romantic period. Mérimée is both an important reference and source of tension at the center of the dialogue between early-19th century literary representations of insular communities and the contemporary authors who return to these narrative settings to reclaim the insular voice. Speaking of his own broad motivations in his own work, Jérôme Ferrari describes in an on-screen interview that he wanted to “[se] servir de la réalité corse comme matériau de fiction littéraire de manière un peu polémique

contre les usages romantiques ou mythologiques qui ont été faits à l'époque et qui nous [he and Marc Biancarelli, referenced in this interview] énervent gravement."³⁶

Mérimée's first story situated in Corsica, *Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse* was published in 1829 in the *Revue de Paris*. It tells of a young child named Fortunato, who crosses paths with Gianetto Sanpiero, a bandit fleeing the police. In exchange for safe passage, Gianetto flips the young boy a silver coin and hides under a nearby straw pile; however, as fate would have it, an unscrupulous police officer appears on the scene and violently threatens Fortunato with imprisonment in order to discover the location of the fugitive: "Sais-tu bien, petit drôle, que je puis t'emmener à Corte ou à Bastia. Je te ferai coucher dans un cachot, sur la paille, les fers aux pieds, et je te ferai guillotiner si tu ne dis où est Gianetto Sanpiero."³⁷ Tempering his expectations for compliance, the police officer removes a shiny pocket watch and catches its glimmer in Fortunato's tantalized eyes: "Le cadran était azur... la boîte nouvellement fourbie... au soleil, elle paraissait toute de feu... La tentation était trop forte. Fortunato éleva aussi sa main gauche, et indiqua du pouce, par-dessus son épaule, le tas de foin auquel [Gianetto] était adossé."³⁸ Shortly thereafter, Mateo Falcone, Fortunato's fearsome father, returns home and learns of the young boy's treachery. Execution is the only remedy for such a brazen transgression of the right of sanctuary: "Mateo fit feu, et Fortunato tomba raide mort. Sans jeter un coup d'œil sur le cadavre, Mateo reprit le chemin de sa maison pour aller chercher une bêche afin d'enterrer son fils."³⁹

Mateo Falcone sets the standard for literary narratives of Corsican banditry and familial honor because of the strength in presentation of the individual characters themselves and of their

³⁶ Interview by Natalie Crom with Jérôme Ferrari, December 14, 2012 (5:20-5:23); available online, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHRoDLNVh0>

³⁷ Prosper Mérimée, "Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse," in *Mateo Falcone, La Vénus d'Ille, Colomba* (ed. Patrick Berthier), Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Folio Classique," 1999, p. 15.

³⁸ *Idem.*, p. 35.

³⁹ *Idem.*, p. 43.

personalities. Mérimée's penetrating presentation further exposes the Metropolitan reader to the extreme social conditions regulating insular culture, in particular vengeance and the role of the patriarch in Corsican families. Gisèle Matthieu-Castellani underscores this point by emphasizing the theme of vengeance in Mérimée's work: "[*Mateo Falcone*] a davantage encore contribué à fortifier dans l'esprit des continentaux la détestable image d'une île sauvage où s'exercent de sanglantes vengeances, des vengeances transversales."⁴⁰ Vengeance, the patriarch, and the presentation of the *maquis* as the home of the formidable bandit craft a dark portrait of Corsican culture and customs that will serve as bedrock for the stereotypes of Romantic literary representation: "C'est avec *Mateo Falcone* que le pays natal de Napoléon Bonaparte entre pour la première fois dans le domaine sacré des Lettres."⁴¹

More than just the strength of its presentation, *Mateo Falcone* is a remarkable story because it precedes Mérimée's own voyage to Corsica in 1839. This fact allows us to return to the relationships between narrative fiction and travel narratives during the early-19th century. In her exploration of the source materials used by Mérimée, Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli concludes that Mérimée drew heavily from a collection of travelogues:

Comme ses prédécesseurs, [Mérimée] emprunte à la littérature d'information les éléments nécessaires à l'élaboration d'une image romanesque de la Corse, qu'il ne connaît pas. Mais l'œuvre d'art naît justement de cette alchimie romanesque: choix des éléments, adaptation, fusion, et enfin organisation d'un ensemble qui forme un tout.⁴²

This "alchimie romanesque" is the product of intentional intertextuality—an active pursuit of resources, materials, and documents that would serve as reference materials for the specific

⁴⁰ Gisèle Matthieu-Castellani, "Mérimée et la Corse," *Littératures*, Vol. 51, "Mérimée," 2004, p. 97.

⁴¹ Antoine Namaan, *Mateo Falcone de Mérimée*, Sherbrooke (Québec), Librairie de la cité universitaire, 1967, p. 36. Namaan might overstate the case given that *Mateo Falcone* is not the first *récit d'inspiration corse* to be published; however, it is perhaps the most successful if posterity is any guide.

⁴² Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

settings and personages with which Mérimée was unfamiliar. Travel narratives were therefore essential elements to narrative fiction.

Ten years later, Mérimée departs for Corsica as an *Inspecteur des monuments historiques* tasked with the identification and description of various archeological sites around the island, which takes the form of a report submitted to the *Ministère de l'Intérieur*: “Dans le rapport que j’ai l’honneur de vous soumettre, je me propose de décrire, en les classant par époque, les différents monuments que j’ai examinés pendant un séjour de deux mois en Corse.”⁴³ Over the course of this report, Mérimée will discuss architectural history, military and political history, and physiological traits of the Corsican people. He also devotes substantial attention to vengeance and to the prevalence of *la vendetta*, what he considers as the manifestation of an insular form of restorative justice: “La vengeance corse, n’est à proprement parler, qu’une forme ancienne et sauvage du duel, que je crois parfaitement national et enraciné chez nous.”⁴⁴ Throughout this report, Mérimée shifts between highlighting Corsican singularity and making its culture more relatable, especially through architecture: “Je n’hésite point à rapporter à une époque antérieure à l’établissement des Romains dans la Corse quelques monuments d’origine inconnue, et absolument analogues à ceux en France ou en Angleterre qu’on nommerait druidiques ou celtiques.”⁴⁵ While this travel narrative responded to an official demand, Mérimée’s observations and research are foundational for his novel *Colomba*, published quickly after his return to the Metropole in 1840.

Colomba is a novel of family honor, vengeance, and of the singular nature of Corsican culture. The story recounts the return of Orso della Rebbia, a veteran of the Napoleonic wars, to his native Corsica at the request of his sister, the eponymous *Colomba*. Orso has been recalled to

⁴³ Prosper Mérimée, *Notes d’un voyage en Corse*, Paris, Fournier Jeune, 1840, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Idem.*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ *Idem.*, p. 35.

finally end the long-waged *vendetta* opposing the della Rebbia to the Barrincini family, whose patriarch previously murdered Colomba's father. Mérimée plunges his reader into the familiar theme of vengeance and the setting of the maquis, both of which he introduced years earlier in *Mateo Falcone*. A remarkable aspect of this novel is its inclusion of specific phrases and perspectives first offered in *Notes d'un voyage en Corse*. For example, in a discussion of the *vendetta*, Orso describes it as "le duel des pauvres,"⁴⁶ echoing the earlier description in the travel narrative. Another example of the connections between the two narratives is found in the similarity between the voice of the traveler-*Inspecteur* and the narrator of *Colomba* who both describe the inherent "passion proverbiale" for vengeance within insular culture.⁴⁷ These two examples are a few among many of the transfer between *Notes d'un voyage en Corse* and *Colomba* and suggest the direct influence of the travel narrative onto narrative fiction within the limited framework of Mérimée's own publications.⁴⁸ The experience in Corsica, while not officially for research for his novel, is nevertheless foundational for the progression in Mérimée's vision of insular culture and traditions, especially the *vendetta*.⁴⁹

The influence of Mérimée's work extends beyond his own corpus to directly inspire other authors and travelers throughout the 19th century. In 1835, Gustave Flaubert composed his own narrative in imitation of Mérimée's entitled *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit*. During his voyage across Corsica in 1840, we wrote to his sister of his plans to meet the "real

⁴⁶ *Idem.*, p. 124-5.

⁴⁷ Excerpt from *Notes d'un voyage en Corse*: "Enfin, sa susceptibilité et **sa passion proverbiale** pour la vengeance, ne sont-elles pas les conséquences de son excessive vanité, qui, même chez les plus grands hommes, dégénère en une ostentation ridicule" (p. 41-2; my emphasis). Excerpt from *Colomba*: "Comme on peut le penser, le mot de vengeance se présente plus d'une fois dans ses récits, car il est impossible de parler des Corses sans attaquer ou sans justifier **leur passion proverbiale**" (p. 124; my emphasis)

⁴⁸ For more on these points of contact and transfer between narratives, see Colette Becker, "Les Notes de voyage de Mérimée: un texte hybride," *Littératures*, Vol. 51, Iss. 1, 2004, p. 129-143.

⁴⁹ This is particularly the case for the re-edition of *Mateo Falcone* in 1842 which included numerous changes from the initial publication. Cf. Maurice Souriau, "Les Variantes De 'Mateo Falcone,'" *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1913, p. 332-342; available online: www.jstor.org/stable/40517209.

Colomba”: “Nous passerons par un village où nous verrons la véritable Colomba, qui n’est point devenue une grande dame comme dans la nouvelle de Mérimée mais une vieille bonne femme racornie.”⁵⁰ An amusing travel narrative (or narrative of travel?) written by Louise Liodet entitled *La Corse à vol d’oiseau* (1873) opens with an energetic dialogue between two unnamed characters about one’s upcoming trip to Corsica. The traveler’s friend does their very best to convince the other of the dangers that lie ahead:

Mérimée, dans sa *Colomba*, ne parle-t-il pas aussi de mœurs farouches, sanguinaires? Vous y voyez des êtres velus comme les animaux! Des hommes qui n’ont pas de forme humaine! Un langage impossible! Je ne sais quel voyageur raconte que si vous vous aventurez seul dans ces parages, vous devez auparavant mettre ordre à vos affaires, car si vous rencontrez un homme armé, et vous ne vous hâtiez pas aussitôt de rebrousser chemin, c’en est fini de vous!⁵¹

And on a lighter note, a study documenting economic development around the island reminds his readers of the small village Fozzano, “(139 hab.) est la patrie de *Colomba*, immortalisée par Mérimée.”⁵² Mérimée’s vision of Corsica continues to be a reference point in the 21st century, particularly for Corsican author Marc Biancarelli, although for him, Mérimée is more a provocation than a cheerful inspiration:

Mérimée propose une vision de la Corse très stéréotypée. Il pose le regard de l’élite, du dominant, du colonial presque, sur un peuple qu’on vient de conquérir et qu’on estime exotique. Il y beaucoup de caricature, même si ce n’est pas conscient de sa part. S’il n’y avait pas eu *Colomba*, s’il n’y avait pas eu Mérimée, on n’éprouverait pas la nécessité de construire ces caricatures. Je l’admets, il voit aussi des choses qui ne peuvent pas être inventées.⁵³

⁵⁰ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (ed. Jean Bruneau), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁵¹ Louise Liodet, *La Corse à vol d’oiseau*, Nice, B. Visconti Éditeur, 1873, p. 7-8; available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1028299>.

⁵² François-Marie Costa de Bastelica, *La Corse et son recrutement: études historiques, statistiques et médicales*, Paris, V. Rozier, 1873, p. 161; available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6558231h>.

⁵³ Interview with Antoine Albertini & Véronique Emmanuelli, 20 September 2015, *Corse Matin*, “Dossier Settimana: le tour de Corse des écrivains (1ère partie)”; Available online: <http://www.corsematin.com/article/derniere-minute/dossier-settimana-le-tour-de-corse-des-ecrivains-1ere-partie>

While Mérimée's vision is deeply contested, Biancarelli concedes that there is some value and truth to "une vision de la Corse très stéréotypée."

While a foundational figure and continued reference, Prosper Mérimée is not the only author whose work engages dialectically with travel narratives and narrative fictions. The popularity of his work however pushes others to the margins, those from which he drew heavily. It is on the peripheral texts of the Romantic period where the tensions between methods of representation and articulation of insular identity that the opening chapters of this dissertation will focus. In the works of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire and Gustave Flaubert, we will go more in-depth into a network of travel narratives and narrative fictions of the early-19th century in which perspectives of Corsican culture will question and subvert the dominant presentations of figures of the bandit, the importance of familial honor in insular communities, and the origins of the *vendetta*. Concentrating on these marginal authors and works adds further nuance to the exploration of Corsican insularity during the early-19th century.

Corsica, Site of Production in the 21st century

The Metropolitan vision of Corsican history, culture, and environment generated in the early-19th century is a central preoccupation for Corsican authors of the 21st century who return to the same landscapes, personages, and intrigues in their own work. The early-19th century articulation of Corsican insularity is claimed by authors of the contemporary period who give new life, perspective, and nuance to *their* insularity. In the 21st century, contemporary literature can be understood as a battleground for the primacy of Corsican identity and culture: "L'affirmation de son identité ainsi que le combat pour sa langue et sa culture font que [la Corse] est plus que jamais un 'ici' au sens fort du terme. 'Un ici' qui est une totalité s'imposant aux yeux d'un continent, ne

serait-ce que géographiquement.”⁵⁴ Contemporary authors Marc Biancarelli, Marie Ferranti, and Jérôme Ferrari return to the insular village, to the shadows of the forests, to the recesses of collective memory, and to the stories that risk erasure. This return to the island can be articulated through two distinct but complementary movements: on the one hand, a return to cultural origins and histories; on the other, a reconsideration of the contours of contemporary insular identity.

Marc Biancarelli returns to some of the original depictions of the Romantic period to reframe their stereotypes and legacies. In Biancarelli’s vision of 19th-century Corsica, the *Voltegeurs corses* are an extermination squad that erases entire villages and ways of life as they implant Metropolitan political norms across the island. Marie Ferranti drives her readers deep into the forests whose shadows provide cover to the legends of supernatural forces that regulate death, reminding her audience that these legends too are part of insular identity. Jérôme Ferrari depicts senseless acts of brutal violence as a radical departure from the principled traditions of banditry and the *vendetta* that signals the demise of contemporary Corsican society. The 21st-century public square becomes the site where the long-revered commitment and passion for familial honor dies in the hands of those for whom death is nothing but a trite necessity. Returning to many of the focal points of 19th-century literary representations has the curious and conflicting effect of pointing to both what insular identity used to mean and how it currently lacks meaning. In both instances, however, these authors call into question contemporary relationships to the geography of the island, to its history, and to its future.

While these authors engage directly with those of the previous generation, the audience has significantly shifted as contemporary authors write to their insular neighbors as well as back against the Metropole:

⁵⁴ Francesca Albertini, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Car le fait est que le romancier écrivant sur la Corse ou qui ne fait même que situer tout ou partie de l'action de son livre en Corse sera perçu comme quelqu'un qui prend la parole à propos de l'île. À partir de ce moment, il n'est plus écouté comme une conscience exprimant un point de vue [et] une sensibilité personnels, mais comme une voix rendant publiques la vie, la sensibilité d'une communauté qui elle, n'a pas la parole ou, en tout cas, ne l'a pas prise.⁵⁵

While this perspective is from the 1970s (at the beginning of the social movement, the *Riacquistu*), it is quite relevant for 21st century authors who give voice to the insular voice, long silent or not yet heard. Antoine Ottavi's comments above conclude with an imperative for the contemporary Corsican author: "Il s'agit bien de faire exister la Corse en littérature avec ce qu'il y a chez elle en particulier et d'universel."⁵⁶ It is worth noting that the expression of the insular voice is most often in French, and not Corsican, a choice with significant risk, as Jean-Louis André argues, "Écrire en français lorsqu'on est corse, c'est se placer d'emblée à l'extérieur d'une culture."⁵⁷ The choice to write in French is important because not only does it reach a broader audience but it is also impactful that authors chose to write in the language of those who have previously defined or portrayed the insular condition. In other words, in some instances contemporary Corsican literature reappropriates the language of Metropolitan representation while re-centering the site of literary production onto the island itself.

Critical Scholarship and Methodology: Close Reading, Intertextuality, Geopoetics

Academic research and publications about 19th-century literary representations of Corsica remain heavily confined to literary history or committed to further explorations of the works of Prosper Mérimée. Publications such as Maurice Ricord's *Découverte littéraire de la Corse* (Paris,

⁵⁵ Antoine Ottavi, "L'écrivain corse et son public," *Études corses*, Vol. 20, Iss. 8, 1973, p. 8.

⁵⁶ *Idem.*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Jean-Louis André, "Deux manières d'écrire les îles: la littérature corse et la littérature sarde aujourd'hui," *op. cit.*, p. 160.

Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1963) or Michel Vergé-Franceschi's *Le voyage en Corse. Anthologie de voyageurs de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2009), are bibliographic in scope and offer voluminous lists of publications, a priceless resource for researchers. In the last decade, the Ajaccian publishing house Éditions Albiana has released several thematic anthologies of 19th century authors who either wrote about Corsica or traveled there, or both: *Corse noire* (ed. Jacques Moretti, 2010) and *Corse blanche. La Corse sans bandit ni vendetta* (ed. Jacques Moretti, 2011). The numerous anthologies and collections, while excellent introductions, offer little analysis or discussion of the works contained therein. Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli's *L'image de la Corse dans la littérature romantique française* (PUF, 1979) is single-handedly the most comprehensive volume of both references to and discussions of early-19th century literature about Corsica and is one that will receive frequent citation in my own work because of the depth of its historical framing and rich insight.

The critical landscape is more limited for 20th- and 21st- century literature. There are a few active trends, directions, and possibilities within contemporary scholarship, but the field is far from complete. Of the authors within this corpus, Jérôme Ferrari is the most frequent object of academic research: In 2016, Cornelia Ruhe at the Universität Mannheim (Germany) organized the first conference devoted entirely to Ferrari's work, which gave way to the publication of the conference papers in *Chutes, ruptures et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari* (Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2018). Shortly thereafter, Mathilde Zbaeren (Université de Lausanne, CH) published the first (and only so far) monograph dedicated to Ferrari's work, *Des mondes possibles. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari* (Lausanne, Archipel Essais, 2019). In December 2020, Kévin Petroni published *L'Adieu aux aspirations nationales. Crises des formes de vie dans la littérature corsophone* (Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2020), a magnificent study of the future for Corsican nationalism through a

literary lens, invoking the work of Ferrari, Biancarelli, and Jean-Baptiste Prédali. Curiously, despite the longevity and scope of Marie Ferranti's literary career, her work has received little attention in peer-reviewed publications. However, she remains very active and present in literary engagements and workshops in the region of Bastia.

Drawing from literary history and limited contemporary scholarship, my research is grounded in original engagement with literary texts themselves and seeks to uncover the various relationships that exist between them. Close reading is an important research and interpretive method that focuses its attention on narrative forms, structural features, and other elements of the written text. This method is capital to identify the ways in which Metropolitan authors write about Corsica (especially those who had yet to visit the island) and the consequences of that representation. Just as well, close reading is an important first step in engaging with contemporary publications to appreciate the ways they represent their *corsité* and engage in dialogue, directly or indirectly, with those authors that exist around them, or even those that came long before. Close reading will help us to understand both the *How?* and *What?* of literary representations of insular communities.

Throughout this study, I will reference and discuss relationships between texts of the same or different generations in pursuit of the hypothesis that a vast literary network informs and influences literary production, especially during the early-19th century. My research adopts a perspective that Gérard Genette has framed as “la transtextualité,” a critical angle that investigates “tout ce qui met un texte en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec un autre texte.”⁵⁸ Close reading will allow us to isolate specific phrases, even entire passages, that are recycled from one work to the next. This notion of a network is best understood as an example of “intertextuality.” What

⁵⁸ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature du second degré*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1982, p. 7.

specifically, though, is intertextuality and how is this concept articulated in my work? Julia Kristeva, who coined the term “intertextuality”, frames this concept as an exchange of signs and utterances between texts: “Quel que soit le contenu sémantique d’un texte, son statut en tant que discours présuppose l’existence des autres discours [...] C’est dire que tout texte est d’emblée sous la juridiction des autres discours qui lui imposent un univers.”⁵⁹ Jonathan Culler argues that “the notion of intertextuality emphasizes that to read is to place a work in a discursive space, relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space.”⁶⁰ My research on early-19th century travel narratives and narrative fiction attempts to define the contours, the language, the discursive strategies, and the codes of the “space” of literary representation of Corsica. In this same sense, strategies of close reading reveal the size of what Kristeva considers “un univers” erected around the island. The notion of intertextuality is also essential to the dialogue between authors of the 19th century and those of the 21st for whom the discourse of insularity is different than that of the previous generation. The relationship between one discourse and another (or within the same utterance) is what the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin terms as a “dialogism”: “Dialogical relations are (semantic) relations between all the utterances within verbal communication.”⁶¹ The intertextual relationships that we will discuss exist in a variety of forms: direct citations and incorporation into another work, influences in the form of a pastiche⁶², or the recognition of a controlling discourse

⁵⁹ Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1974, p. 338-9.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Culler, “Presupposition and Intertextuality,” *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 91, No. 6 “Comparative Literature,” 1976, p. 1382.

⁶¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (trans. Wlad Godzich), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, coll. “Theory and History of Literature,” Vol 13, p. 61.

⁶² When discussing intertextuality, the notion of “influence” offered by Harold Bloom is often addressed and merits attention here as well. While the terms are not interchangeable, I would argue that “influence” is less appropriate in the context of 19th century publications about Corsica because it seems there is less an attempt to replace one text for another. I would argue that this is also not an applicable circumstance to Marc Biancarelli because “influence” seems to suggest an overall shared vision. To read more on the importance of the distinction between influence and intertextuality: Roland François Link, “Intertextuality of Influence: Kristeva, Bloom and the *Poésies* of Isidore Ducasse” in *Intertextualities: Theories and practices* (eds. Michael Worton and Judith Still), Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, p. 130-142.

immediately subverted by the discourse of another (which I argue is the case with some of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's writing, as well as Marc Biancarelli's rewriting of the bandit narrative). These discursive and literary varieties expose a network of rich interactions between authors as they engage with the representation of insular Corsican communities from many different generations.

Additionally, this study deploys a broad geocritical approach to the examination of representations of Corsica from both the 19th and 21st centuries. Geo-critical literary approaches seek to understand the interactions between an environment (natural or socially constructed) and literature, in all its composite parts (narrative structure, character distribution, the editorial process, etc.). Theorized by Bertrand Westphal, *la géocritique* structures its engagement with literature and the environment around four key tenants: "géocentrisme" (place as the primary object of study), "multifocalisation" (proliferation of perspectives leading to a multimodal understanding of Place), "polysensorialité" (the impact of all the senses to understand a Place), and "stratigraphie" (investigations into the temporal layers of cultural memory).⁶³ Each text in this dissertation is studied initially through this critical lens to tease out the individual voice and perspective of each author with regard to their visions of and experiences with Corsica. Furthermore, my research and analysis will engage with a sub-set of the geo-critical approach to literary analysis, *la géopoétique*, with a focus on the strategies of textual representation for the natural landscape: the island is not simply a backdrop, but a living and active presence in many of the works brought together in this study. Furthermore, I will also make use of the notion of the "chronotope" (proposed by Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin) which will emphasize the ability of the landscape to alter and even bend the trajectories of a novel's characters towards it. From this perspective, we will have the

⁶³ Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2007, p. 200.

opportunity to engage with the forces around Corsica that continue to attract and repel those that come near. In the chapters that follow, each of these approaches will be used to one extent or another to guide both my research and analysis of literary texts. The works studied here require different points and levels of critical engagement: the reliance on folklore studies to better understand and expose the importance of Marie Ferranti's *La Chasse de nuit* and the use of elements of cultural studies to situate Jérôme Ferrari's presentation of the rise of nationalism in the 1980s.

Chapter Organization

We begin with early-19th century travel narratives as a privileged outlet of expression where authors share various insular social and cultural realities with Metropolitan readers. The diversity of voices does not however suggest a multiplication of focal points. Funerary rites and rituals alongside vengeance (banditry, *la vendetta*) take the pride of place in many travel narratives of the early-19th century. While foundational elements to insular society, details of funerary rites and rituals alone do little to present the totality of the insular experience. In 1826, Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire begins to expand this horizon in a series of ten letters published in the Parisian literary review *Le Globe*. This series entitled, "Lettres sur la Corse," introduced the Metropolitan reader to *contemporaneous* social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental realities of insular communities. Even with this expansive view of daily life in places like Ajaccio and Bastia, Saint-Hilaire returns at length to funerary traditions and stories of banditry, although with different insight and relatable characters. Benefitting from a shorter format, his letters appear more frequently (at 6-8-week intervals, with a few exceptions) and therefore offer continued contact between his insular experiences and the Metropolitan reader. In Chapter 1, I explore Saint-

Hilaire's creation of new points of attachment to insular communities via the *Lettres sur la Corse* by adopting the visual metaphor of a bridge – a connection point that facilitates contact while also keeping one side at a consistent distance from another. The cultural and social distance maintained in Saint-Hilaire's letters is conveyed through the author's assumptions of Metropolitan (cultural) superiority as well as instances of a quasi-colonialist discourse used to frame social and economic improvement.

Saint-Hilaire's *Lettres* are also narrative. This opening chapter of the dissertation presents a central hypothesis of my research: a symbiotic relationship exists between travel narratives and narrative fictions wherein each one heavily influences and guides the other. Travel narratives serve as source material for narrative fictions that then later inspire travel (and subsequent narratives). In this regard, we will explore this transition within the space of individual letters as well as between the *Lettres sur la Corse* and Saint-Hilaire's substantial series of short fictions published in the *Revue de Paris*, entitled *Souvenirs de Corse*. In addition to the ways in which Saint-Hilaire fashions the contemporary Corsican villages for literary expression, I will propose readings of Saint-Hilaire's narrative work as subversive to popular representations of banditry and vengeance and of the Corsican patriarch.

Travel narratives and narrative fiction continue to work in tandem to articulate a Metropolitan vision of Corsica. In 1840, a singular moment occurs as Gustave Flaubert traverses the island: he confronts his literary imagination with the realities before his eyes, concluding in a letter to his sister Caroline, "Tout ce qu'on dit sur la Corse est faux."⁶⁴ In Chapter 2, I explore some of Flaubert's earliest writings collected in the *Œuvres de jeunesse*: two narrative fictions composed between 1835-1836, the first, "Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit" and

⁶⁴ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (ed. Jean Bruneau), *op. cit.*, p. 72.

secondly, “San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)”; the narratives figure along with the substantial travel narrative *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* that relates his voyage through France and Corsica in the late summer and fall of 1840. These two narrative fictions are important to study for their direct relationship to Romantic literature and its representations of banditry alongside the historical novel. What is more is that these texts are also composed prior to any voyage to Corsica and therefore distill impressions and perceptions of insular culture that are transmitted through travel narratives and narrative fictions of the time, including those of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire. While he works with identifiable antecedents, Flaubert manages to include his own perspectives and twists on these literary portrayals. *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* explores some of the young traveler’s aspirational confrontations with heroic bandits and the legendary “Colomba” – neither of which materialize, at least in their prescribed literary forms. Instead, Flaubert will learn of alternative visions of banditry and of the role of the matriarch in Corsican society, both of which lead to a sudden disillusionment with the narratives that had previously inspired him. This disappointment opens a door for him to express his own visions of not only Corsican society (with a particular proclivity for banditry) but also of where he situates Corsica *spatially*, as a threshold to the Orient, a unique perspective of the Romantic period.

If Saint-Hilaire crafts a bridge into early-19th century Corsica, the 21st-century Corsican author Marc Biancarelli is its gatekeeper. In Chapter 3, we return to the Romantic portrayals of insular traditions, in particular banditry, but this time through a contemporary insular lens. In his novel *Orphelins de Dieu* (2014), Biancarelli recasts the figure of the bandit as an activist involved in a complex network of resistance to Metropolitan political and economic encroachment. As the Metropole tightens its grip on the island, violence turns inward as communities rip themselves apart, eviscerating relationships with one another as well as with the natural environment. The

Metropolitan “Other” adds fuel to a raging fire of the boundaries and expression of insular identity, its *iléité*, predicated on the persistence of its natural, maritime boundary. A curious aspect of this novel is its audience because it is the first novel Biancarelli has written in French (previously, his work appeared in translation from Corsican). This choice reverts the Romantic gaze back onto the Metropole, the responsible actor in part, according to Biancarelli, for the degradation of insular culture and traditions. Not spared from Biancarelli’s critique, contemporary Corsican society is also called to bear witness to its own past.

The past is troublesome as well for contemporary Corsican author Marie Ferranti who plunges her readers into the dark and stormy universe of the *mazzeri*, individuals who possess the power to foretell death at the outcome of a ceremonial hunt in the forests of the mountainous interior. Returning to the morose and grim focal points of 19th-century travel narratives, Ferranti extracts this tradition from the recesses of Corsican culture in fear of its erasure from collective memory. Chapter 4 explores the restoration of this legendary figure in Ferranti’s novel *La Chasse de nuit* (2004) that recounts the story of Mattéo Monacle, the last of the *mazzeri*, as he navigates a significant decision: remain committed to the rituals of the *mazzeri* or turn away from this tradition, effectively ending it. Ferranti’s novel is one of multiple confrontations opposing traditional insular customs to modern realities. From this perspective, Ferranti engages with the question *Qu’est-ce que la Corse?* by bringing elements of the past into the present as though to say, “This is *also* Corsica, *this* is also insular culture.” *La Chasse de nuit* extends the important cultural movement in Corsica of the 1970s-1980s known as the *Riacquistu*. Relaying claim to cultural identity took form through “the production of locally authored historical, ethnographic, and archeological accounts of Corsican culture (which, until that point, were virtually non-existent). It included efforts to energize artistic production that emerged out of the Corsican experience and was written

in the Corsican language, including poetry, literature, playwriting, and theatrical performance.”⁶⁵ Even though composed in French, *La Chasse de nuit* continues the spirit of this movement for cultural reawakening while also staging the conflictual position on contemporary society faced with the nebulous memories of its past.

The contemporary “Corsican experience,” to borrow Sarah Brown’s expression from above, is the central focus of Jérôme Ferrari’s expansive literary work that returns to the settings of the rural mountainous village. In Chapter 5, I engage with several of his publications starting with the short story collection *Variétés de la mort* (2001) and two novels, *Balco Atlantico* (2008) and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (Prix Goncourt, 2012). In these works, I explore the textual strategies adopted to write modern Corsica, which for Ferrari is a dark and desolate universe onto itself. He portrays communities and individuals ensnarled in struggles for survival, relevance, identity, and directions for the future. In Ferrari’s Corsica, the past is subordinated to the future, the traditions of honor and family are but faded memory, and the experience of death is transformed into a platitude. This chapter will focus in large part on the ways in which these visions are textually constructed with an emphasis on character distribution, the tensions between past-present-and-future, as well as a conflictual relationship to the natural landscape itself, which we defined earlier as a foundational element of insular identity. While images of Corsica in Ferrari’s works are far from the sun-soaked vistas encountered by Gustave Flaubert in the mountain passes around Ajaccio, there is some glimmer of hope to be found in these struggles for survival.

Qu’est-ce que la Corse? Just as travelers of the early-19th century sought to answer this question so too will contemporary authors who penetrate the recesses of insular identity, culture, and tradition, continuously turning the wheels of a cultural kaleidoscope that offers new

⁶⁵ Sarah Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

perspective with each new page. The colors of this island will vary from a macabre black, a lush green, a sanguine red, to a breathtaking cerulean that emanate across the horizon of the Mediterranean. Literature then is an attempt to translate these colors into words, into stories, and into memories that express the singularity of the insular experience that this dissertation endeavors to present as a beautifully complicated spectrum.

CHAPTER 1

Constructing Images of Corsica

Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's *Lettres sur la Corse* and *Souvenirs de Corse*

*Il faut rendre justice aux bandits de la Corse:
le voyageur, l'étranger, sont complètement
à l'abri de leurs poursuites...*

Cinquième Lettre sur la Corse (15 February 1827)⁶⁶

In the early nineteenth century, Corsica and Napoléon Bonaparte were inseparable entities, each one colored and influenced an individual's impression of the other. Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli observes during this time that, "Unissent pour la première fois les noms de la Corse et de Napoléon, faisant de l'île le pays du 'Héros', union qui sera, tour à tour, faste et néfaste pour la Corse."⁶⁷ The quick rise and dramatic fall of the Emperor becomes an easy target for his opponents for whom the political pamphlet arose as a privileged outlet of expression. Renowned authors of the time, such as François René de Chateaubriand, a supporter of the Bourbon Restoration, aligned themselves with popular sentiment against Napoléon Bonaparte, as suggested by his essay entitled, "De Buonaparte et des Bourbons" (1814) in which the Chateaubriand casts Napoléon as "un insensé" responsible for several "crimes," the most important and egregious of which for Chateaubriand was an attempt to place a family of Corsican origin on the throne of France: "Croyait-il pouvoir remplacer par sa famille demi-africaine la famille française qu'il venait

⁶⁶ Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, "Cinquième Lettre sur la Corse" in *La Corse d'Eugène Rosseeuw Saint Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits* (ed. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi), Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. "Les oubliés," 2014, p. 315. All subsequent references to Saint-Hilaire's primary source materials are to this edition and occur parenthetically in the body paragraph.

⁶⁷ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *L'Image de la Corse dans la littérature romantique française. Le mythe corse*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979, p. 84. Cf. Maurice Descotes, *La Légende de Napoléon et les écrivains français au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Minard, coll. "Lettres modernes," 1967; and, Robert Morrissey, *The Economy of Glory: From Ancien Régime France to the Fall of Napoleon* (trans. Teresa Fagan), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, coll. "European History," 2013. For the complicated relationship between Napoléon and his insular home see, "Le Rapport ambigu de la Corse et du mythe naissant de Napoléon dans Le Voyage de Lycomède en Corse: Quelques approches actuelles," in *Attentes et sens autour de la présence du mythe de Napoléon aujourd'hui* (dir. Jean-Dominique Poli), Éditions Alain Piazzola—Università di Corsica, 2012, p. 172-182.

d’être éteint?”⁶⁸ Take for another example the short pamphlet entitled, “De Buonaparte”⁶⁹ (1815) that lambasts the former emperor as “un monstre”⁷⁰ and “un tyran”⁷¹ whose creation can be traced back to Corsica itself, an island filled with “vampires,”⁷² presumably of which Napoléon Bonaparte was a descendant and who continue to lurk in the recesses.

Between 1815-1825, a notable shift takes place in the tone of rhetoric used around Napoléon Bonaparte and his insular origins. Discourse moves away from the vindictive political retaliation and racialized othering of the legendary emperor towards piqued interest and genuine curiosity for Corsican culture and traditions: “Napoléon et la Corse, confondus dans un même anathème par les pamphlétaire de 1814 et de 1815, font l’objet, sous la Restauration, d’une campagne de réhabilitation qui prend une plus grande ampleur à la mort de l’empereur.”⁷³ The “campagne de réhabilitation” is of the legendary image of Napoléon Bonaparte, which pushes writers of the early French Romantic period to further explore Corsica as a potential *object* of literary interest: “La littérature d’information, consacrant la Corse pays de Napoléon et pays de la vendetta, fait de nouveau de l’île un sujet d’actualité.”⁷⁴ These new found interests evolved into different yet overlapping trajectories: travel narratives and narrative fiction. Each genre will have significant influence over the other, at times blending one into the other, and erasing boundaries of genre (or redefining them), as authors penetrate deeper and deeper into the recesses of Corsican culture during the 1820s.

⁶⁸ François René de Chateaubriand, *De Buonaparte, des Bourbons, et de la nécessité de se rallier à nos princes légitimes pour le bonheur de la France et celui de l’Europe*, Paris, Mame Frères, 1814, p. 11; Available online: ark:/12148/bpt6k1045640d

⁶⁹ M. R. A. O., “De Buonaparte,” *Du Néron, du Titus du XIXe siècle, au 20 mars 1815, et du gouvernement le plus naturel à la France*, Paris, Montaudon, 1815; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5868827g>

⁷⁰ *Idem.*, p. 6

⁷¹ *Idem.*, p. 8

⁷² *Idem.*, p. 12

⁷³ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

During this period of exploration, the author, historian, teacher, and journalist Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire (1805-1889) asserted himself as a central figure with numerous publications across numerous genres – prose, political essays, and letters – that, until recently, have remained hidden in the annals of the literary history of Corsica.⁷⁵ *Agrégé d'histoire*, Saint-Hilaire launched his professional academic career in Ajaccio, Corsica in 1825 where he taught history and rhetoric before returning to Paris in 1829 to pursue higher-level academic positions and administrative responsibilities.⁷⁶ From 1826 to 1831, he focused intently on writing about Corsica, and at times, *from Corsica*.

While on the island, Saint-Hilaire regularly contributed letters to the Parisian literary journal *Le Globe*, all of which were published anonymously⁷⁷ under the heading, “Lettres sur la

⁷⁵ Maurice Ricord spares no punch in his assessment of the work of Saint-Hilaire: “[l’œuvre] ne vaut guère qu’une mention” (*Découverte littéraire de la Corse*, Paris, Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1963, p. 56). Further distancing the literary quality of Saint-Hilaire from his contemporary Prosper Mérimée, Georges Roger writes: “Le premier, qui, après la révolution libérale, eut l’idée d’évoquer la Corse, ce fut, en 1831, Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, littérateur d’honnête réputation, pas plus génial que Mérimée, ou ouvrier bien moins habile. Il imita du mieux qu’il put son devancier, et s’il convient de lui faire place parmi les chantres de la Corse ce n’est qu’au titre modeste d’accompagnateur laborieusement accordé” (Georges Roger, *Prosper Mérimée et la Corse*, Alger, Éditions Baconnier, 1954, p. 104-5). I dispute the date that Georges Roger asserts for Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire’s insertion into the literary world as 1831, given the record of publications in 1826-1827. Even if the argument provided in his analysis is limited to the novellas published either in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* or the *Revue de Paris*, the first narratives were published in 1829: “La folle de Bastilica” (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, août-octobre 1829, Vol. 1, p. 264-272) and “Le lasso ou la vengeance corse (Tradition du XVI siècle)” (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, août-octobre 1829, Vol. 1, p. 409-417).

⁷⁶ Cf. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi, “Sur les chemins de Corse, un jeune romantique,” *La Corse d’Eugène Rosseeuw Saint Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits* (ed. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi), *op. cit.*, p. 6-14. Christophe Charle does not mention Saint-Hilaire’s time spent in Corsica in his contribution to the dictionary *Les Professeurs de la faculté des lettres de Paris—Dictionnaire biographique 1809-1908*; Christophe Charle, “Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire (Eugène, François, Achille, Édouard, Adolphe),” *Les professeurs de la faculté des lettres de Paris – Dictionnaire biographique 1809-1908*, Paris, Institut national de recherche pédagogique, 1985. p. 153-154. [Available online: www.persee.fr/doc/inrp_0298-5632_1985_ant_2_1_2675; accessed 15 December 2018]. Dider Rey and Eugène F.-X. Gherardi would consider the presence of the Frenchman in an educational setting as a form of *francisation* that marked the 1820s redirection of interest towards the Mediterranean Island, now an important geopolitical outpost of the new monarchical state: “Les différents gouvernements qui se succédèrent jusqu’à la Révolution de Juillet en 1830 n’en considèrent pas moins la Corse en terre étrangère, une sorte d’Italie française, qu’il convient de franciser, faute de mieux” (Dider Rey and Eugène F.-X. Gherardi, *Le Grand Déangement: configurations géopolitiques et culturelles en Corse 1729-1871 (Anthologie)*, Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. “Bibliothèque d’histoire de la Corse,” 2013, p. 44). These social and cultural initiatives will also feature prominently in Saint-Hilaire’s writings as he explores the economic needs and potentials for the island’s path to prosperity.

⁷⁷ One of the earliest attributions of these letters occurs in 1835 in the work of M. F. Robiquet, *Recherches historiques et statistiques sur la Corse* (Paris, Robiquet frère, 1835); Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6558789f>

Corse.” This series was launched on May 25, 1826 and ran through September 25, 1827. As a collection, the *Lettres sur la Corse* offer on-the-ground observations exposing readers to a plethora of topics pulled from current events from mid-1820s Corsica, for example: arguments for increasing the available maritime services between Marseille and Ajaccio (to primarily benefit postal services and port economies; Letters 1 and 2); a first-hand account of a Corsican wedding ceremony and reception (Letter 3); the intensity of funerary rites traditions (Letter 4); a celebratory biography of the infamous bandit *Teodoru Poli*, also written as Théodore Poli (Letter 5); critical observations of the influence of Italian culture in the regions surrounding Bastia and Aléria, on Corsica’s eastern shores (Letter 6); the legacy of Napoléon Bonaparte (Letter 7), which is presented without naming the emperor...; the strategic importance of maintaining possession of Corsica for French expression of geopolitical power in the Mediterranean basin and beyond (Letter 8); and finally, a pair of historical perspectives of Corsica from Antiquity through the 18th century that directly engage with erudite texts written about Corsica (Letters 9 and 10). Through these broad topics, Saint-Hilaire blends the documentary aspect of the travel narrative with his own anecdotes to create social and cultural connections between Metropolitan France and Corsica; however, these connections do not necessarily one closer to the other. In the *Lettres sur la Corse*, Saint-Hilaire demonstrates his deeply ambivalent thoughts about Corsica: pointed criticism of economics and industry are softened by his appreciation for the intimate social connections he makes along the way. As the writer-traveler further penetrates the depths of Corsican culture and society, his mood softens as he falls under the charms of insular life.

In July 1828, Saint-Hilaire published a substantial expository piece entitled, “Des devoirs de la France envers la Corse” which appeared in the *Revue Trimestrielle*.⁷⁸ In this work, Saint-

⁷⁸ Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, “Des devoirs de la France envers la Corse,” *Revue Trimestrielle*, July 1828, t. II, p. 95-204; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k64331505/f105.item>. The *Revue Trimestrielle*,

Hilaire returned to observations and remarks first offered in his *Lettres sur la Corse* while synthesizing, and disagreeing with, travel narratives, historical accounts, and other publications about Corsica that first appeared during the mid-to-late 18th century. For example, Saint-Hilaire wrote critically of the ways some authors had portrayed the 1737-1738 militaristic intervention of Louis XV into the affairs of the Republic of Genoa, at the time in possession of the island: “La plupart des auteurs qui ont écrit sur la Corse, Génois ou Français, qui avaient visité l’île à l’époque de la guerre de 1738, ont fait des Corses un portrait hideux [...] De semblables exagérations ne méritent aucune attention” (p. 380). The “Devoirs de la France envers la Corse” also includes a substantial discussion of the *vendetta*, from an institutional standpoint this time, that aims to alter the perceptions and understandings of the *vendetta* by first providing a detailed account of its numerous codes and rites (p. 387) while also grounding the expansion of the social phenomenon as a form of restorative justice in response to incompetent governmental initiative: “L’influence d’un mauvais gouvernement sur une nature ardente et irascible a développé chez les Corses ce penchant à la vengeance qui a toujours été le trait saillant et distinctif du caractère du peuple” (p. 397). This transitional work is essential as it foregrounds the rich intertextual relationships crafted by Saint-Hilaire between observations and those of previous decades, connections that will prove foundational to literary creation itself. These remarks further underscore the writer-traveler’s

under the direction of Jean Alexandre Buchon, was a liberal-leaning review and journal that survived only two years of publication. Under frequent political threat and police surveillance, Buchon frequently changed position within government – from *Inspecteur des bibliothèques, archives et musées* to *Inspecteur des archives du royaume*, a position gained in 1829 and lost shortly thereafter, “révoqué moins de huit semaines plus tard (le 22 septembre), en raison de ses politiques libérales, par le nouveau ministre de l’Intérieur, le comte de La Bourdonnais” (“Jean Buchon,” *Histoire biographique de l’enseignement* (eds. Isabelle Havelange, Françoise Huguet, Bernadette Lebedeff), Vol. 11, “Les inspecteurs généraux de l’instruction publique. Dictionnaire biographique 1802-1914,” Publications de l’institut national de recherche pédagogique, 1986, p. 200-201; available online: https://www.persee.fr/doc/inrp_0298-5632_1986_ant_11_1_6240). The venue of publication in yet another liberal-leaning journal underscores the political leanings of Saint-Hilaire himself.

deep appreciation of the culture and history of the Corsican people that is, according to him, erroneously represented or needlessly criticized, particularly in literary representations.

Saint-Hilaire's enthusiasm and sustained interest for Corsican culture found a new outlet as he gravitated towards narrative fiction, returning to several of the anecdotes scattered throughout the *Lettres sur la Corse*. Between 1829-1831, he published a collection of short stories in two different venues: first, two short stories appeared in 1829 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (vol. 1, August-September-October); months later, in January 1830, in the *Revue de Paris*, a more substantial collection came out in a series entitled, "Souvenirs de [la] Corse."⁷⁹ These short stories run the gamut in terms of content: from a harrowing encounter with a friendly bandit ("Le déjeuner du bandit") to a fantastical story of love aided by the magical powers of Mediterranean red coral reefs ("Pesce Gianni"), to the legend of the 16th-century hero Sampiero Corso in the historical fiction, "Sampiero et Vanina." This short story offers an alternative perspective on the passionate relationship shared between Sampiero, the celebrated 16th-century leader of the resistance to Genoese subjugation, and his betrothed Vanina, who is portrayed in Saint-Hilaire's narrative as the potential traitor of her beloved.⁸⁰ The substantial scope of subjects and periods covered in the narratives that comprise the *Souvenirs de Corse* suggest the depth of the author's continued fascination for Corsican traditions and folklore, as well as the excitement for the stories of contemporary communities themselves.

⁷⁹ It is currently unclear whether this heading or title is of Saint-Hilaire's own creation or was an editorial decision imposed on his works. Personally, I would lean towards the decision of the editors in this case because of the proximity to Prosper Mérimée's successful short story, "Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse" published by the *Revue de Paris* in May 1829. Additionally, the *Revue de Paris* writes the heading as "Souvenirs de la Corse" while Eugène F.-X. Gherardi, the editor of Saint-Hilaire's collected works, chooses "Souvenirs de Corse."

⁸⁰ This historical legend will also become a focal point for Gustave Flaubert who just years later composes his short scholastic narrative, "San Pietro Ornano. Histoire corse" (1836?) and features the abduction of Vanina in exchange for a ransom to be paid by the *doge* of the Republic of Genoa.

Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire is instrumental to the development of Corsica as an object of literary interest for the French Romantic generation because he stands at the center of a shift in attention towards contemporary Corsican communities and at the forefront of their portrayal in narrative fiction. The contemporaneous nature of Saint-Hilaire's work creates a unique bridge for the writer and his readers to connect with the content (and color) of his observations and as a result, with the realities of insular life; however, the bridge into Corsican communities will also keep the island at a sustained distance from the Metropole. The *Lettres sur la Corse* serve therefore as an entry point into insular societies and folklore, as a form of ethnography of the island itself, that will eventually elevate Corsica as an object of literary interest and production that Saint-Hilaire will explore in the *Souvenirs de Corse*. The emphasis on contemporaneous realities directly contributes to the development of *realistic* literature about Corsica because of the continued exploration and publication of travel narratives focused on Corsican settings (its mountains, its *maquis*), personages (bandits, the archetypal Corsican patriarch, extravagant mourning rituals), and themes (vengeance, familial honor). While Saint-Hilaire contributes actively and substantially to the visual iconography and thematic underpinnings of Romantic generation's literary imaging of Corsica, he often stands at odds with some of the sensational depictions of Corsican culture, in particular banditry and the *vendetta*, that fuel the success of works by Prosper Mérimée (*Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse*, 1829) and Honoré de Balzac (*La Vendetta*, 1830). Further, Saint-Hilaire serves as a counterweight to the exploitation and literary manipulation of Romantic archetypes, that of the Corsican patriarch who is transformed elsewhere into an antagonistic monolith defined by his penchant for unbridled rage. From this perspective, Saint-Hilaire's later narratives cast a critical light on the Romantic image(s) of Corsica towards which he directly contributed with his initial publications.

In this chapter, I will first examine the *Lettres sur la Corse* to study the various images, details, and personages that are presented and then recycled from one letter to the next, to consistently represent Corsican communities of both rural and burgeoning littoral regions of the island, such as the ports of Ajaccio or Bastia. The focus will then be placed on the symbiotic relationship of documentation and narration to examine how Saint-Hilaire first presents contemporary life that serves as the basis of a concluding anecdote often of the customs and traditions of the rural interior. We will then transition to the *Souvenirs de Corse* to identify the ways in which the previous epistolary sequence anticipates and prepares the longer-form narratives. Finally, our study will turn to the iconic personages of the Corsican bandit and of the patriarch who transcend their function as literary characters and are elevated to symbolize Corsican culture, a frequent target of caustic cultural commentary. The Corsican bandit narrative offered by Saint-Hilaire, “Le déjeuner du bandit” (*Revue de Paris*, 1830), does not however align with conventional norms and expectations of bandits as violent criminals. Instead, it proposes a softer, docile, and more relatable figure. Similarly, in “La dot de l’étudiant” (*Revue de Paris*, 1830) the Corsican patriarch will undergo a notable transformation as his rage is tempered by the persistence of his son, Gerò, to loosen this reliance on first impressions and immediate desire to act by lashing out. Even at an early stage in the development of Corsica as a focus of literary interest, we find traces of contested archetypes and of codes of representation that will heavily influence the work of Saint-Hilaire’s contemporaries of the Romantic period.

I. *Reporting Daily Life in Early-Nineteenth-Century Corsica: Travel Narratives*

The serial publication of Saint-Hilaire's *Lettres sur la Corse* in the Parisian journal *Le Globe*⁸¹ coincides with the growing trend of the travel narrative relating voyages and ventures to Corsica.⁸² Before diving directly into the epistolary cycle itself, it is worthwhile to situate these letters within this publishing context to better understand their points of convergence.

At the turn of the 1820s, Corsica, as a subject of popular culture, enters new territory as writers, travelers, and authors reposition their interests and explore its contemporary social dynamics:

L'image historique de la Corse, qui avait connu une certaine faveur dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle, la retrouve au sein de ce renouveau et s'intègre dans l'image nationale. L'abondante documentation qui accompagne ces images va renouveler la curiosité des voyageurs et donner plus de consistance à leurs récits.⁸³

The exposure to contemporary communities allows readers (and writers) to shift their points of engagement with insular communities, moving away from long-past historical periods or of politically motivated discourse (e.g., Chateaubriand's anti-Napoleonic rhetoric) to the *hic et nunc* of places like Ajaccio, Corte, and Bastia:

Les textes consacrés à la Corse découvrent au public des aspects nouveaux: des personnages du présent se substituent aux personnages du passé, des documents sont

⁸¹ This journal is often identified as one of the most important literary journals of early-19th century France, as Joel Boeing observes, because of its recognized support for "liberalism and the new literature" that attempted to set itself apart from the growing Romantic movement within France (Joel Boeing, "The Unending Conversation: The Role of Periodicals in England and on the Continent in the Romantic Age" in *Nonfictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders* [eds. Steven Sondrip and Virgil Nemioanu], Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing, 2004, p. 294). The literary journal's importance is further underscored by its support of "des écrivains encore inconnus, mais destinés à un avenir brillant, comme Sainte-Beuve, Stendhal et Mérimée" (Pierre-George Castex and P. Surer, *Manuel des études littéraires françaises. XIX siècle*, "Les campagnes du Globe [1824-1830]," Paris, Classiques Hachette, 1966, p. 42).

⁸² A relevant question to raise here concerns the circumstances of Saint-Hilaire's employment with *Le Globe*. What was the nature of this relationship? Did Saint-Hilaire initiate contact with *Le Globe* or vice versa? Did the editors of the journal have relations or contacts in Ajaccio through whom they were able to connect with Saint-Hilaire? Whatever the case may be, both *Le Globe* and Saint-Hilaire were well positioned to benefit greatly from the increasing interest in Corsican themes and subjects.

⁸³ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

produits, révélant une culture corse, des anecdotes nombreuses illustrent le comportement des insulaires.⁸⁴

The travel narrative then drives the shift in perspective and reader interest towards the contemporary realities of Corsica – its daily life, its current customs, its continued traditions. As Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli observes, the turn towards the immediate present of Corsica is not at the expense of its legendary figures, its history, or its past, instead it creates space for new and more exciting figures to arise: “Sans rompre avec l’histoire des grands hommes de la Corse, [les récits de voyage] projettent un nouvel éclairage sur d’autres héros du peuple, sur ces ‘bannis’, ces hors-la-loi protecteurs des ‘faibles’.”⁸⁵ The travel narrative will serve as a laboratory, a space of exploration and criticism of numerous elements of Corsican society that were little known or underappreciated, such as funerary rites and traditions; focal points of the travel narrative will serve as the informational bedrock of narrative fictions that begin to appear at the end of the 1820s by authors who had yet to set foot on the island. The travel narrative, then, directly influences the development of literature about Corsica.

Between 1819-1825, an appreciable number of travelogues were published, most notably in 1821 when several were published in short order:

- Jean-François Réalier-Dumas, *Mémoires sur la Corse* (1819).⁸⁶
- J.-F. Simonot, *Lettres sur la Corse, ouvrage destiné à faire connaître la véritable situation de ce pays* (1821)⁸⁷
- Adrien Joly Delavaubignon, *Voyage pittoresque en Corse* (1821)⁸⁸
- P.-P. Pompei, *État actuel de la Corse, caractère et mœurs de ses habitants* (1821)⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *Idem.*, p. 180.

⁸⁵ *Idem.*, p. 192.

⁸⁶ Jean-François Réalier-Dumas, *Mémoires sur la Corse*, Paris, Plancher, 1819; available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5815678s>

⁸⁷ J.-F. Simonot, *Lettres sur la Corse, ouvrage destiné à faire connaître la véritable situation de ce pays*, Paris, Chaumerot jeune, 1821; available online: <ark:/12148/bpt6k6559284z>

⁸⁸ Adrien Joly Delavaubignon, *Voyage pittoresque en Corse*, G. Englemann, 1821.

⁸⁹ P.-P. Pompei, *État actuel de la Corse, caractère et mœurs de ses habitants*, Paris, Kleffer, 1821;

- Robert Benson, *Sketches of Corsica; or, a journal written during a visit to that island in 1823* (1825)⁹⁰
- Hubert Lauvergne, *Mémoire sur la Corse* (1826?)⁹¹

A cursory glance at the various titles of these travel narratives reveals a variety of different approaches to form such as a memoir (Benson's, "Sketches of Corsica") or a more didactic presentation destined to inform the reader (Pompei's, "État actuel de la Corse...").

While the forms of expression might differ, a common element shared amongst these travel narratives is the frequent citation of, and engagement with, previous and contemporaneous narratives. The author of one travelogue tends to directly interact with the work of another, at times noting errors, misrepresentations, or misunderstood elements of Corsican history, traditions, and culture. Let us take an example from Simonot's *Lettres sur la Corse* which reads as an extended erratum of what is found in Réalier-Dumas's *Mémoires sur la Corse*:

L'ouvrage que M. Réalier-Dumas vient de publier n'est point l'histoire de la Corse; c'est un mémoire de soixante-trois pages d'impressions, une espèce de miniature décolorée, où tous les traits caractéristiques sont altérés et confondus.⁹²

Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire is no exception to the direct engagement with the works of other travel writers. In the *Première Lettre sur la Corse*, Saint-Hilaire praises Robert Benson's *Sketches of Corsica* (1825), "Ce petit volume contient plus d'observations justes, plus de faits curieux, et surtout moins de préjugés insulaires, qu'aucun des gros volumes de *tours* qui font périodiquement gémir la presse de Londres" (p. 271). Referencing another's writing in this way is an integral component of the travel narrative because it suggests the extent to which a traveler, in this case

Available online: ark:/12148/bpt6k65582192

⁹⁰ Robert Benson, *Sketches of Corsica; or, a journal written during a visit to that island in 1823*, London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825; Available online: ark:/12148/bpt6k65582088

⁹¹ Hubert Lauvergne, "Mémoire sur la Corse," *Journal des voyages, découvertes et navigations modernes: ou archives géographiques et statistiques du XIX siècle*, Vol.29, 1826.

⁹² J.-F. Simonot, *op. cit.*, p. 1-2. Simonot's critique rests heavily on Réalier-Dumas's emphasis on 18th-century economics, politics, and culture, rather than the post-Napoleonic status quo.

Saint-Hilaire, might have relied on Benson's writings to *prepare* for their own voyage; the travel narrative serves as a guide for later travel that inspires later narratives.⁹³ This dialogue amongst different works is important for its revelation of the vibrant network of travelers who share (and correct) knowledge about Corsica and for its articulation of the travel narrative as an important source of information itself for later exploration.

While the travelogue is a valuable resource, its timeliness raises some questions. It is worth noting that a substantial distance often separates the voyage and the moment of publication for the narrative: Simonot reports being in Bastia for a few months in 1817, although his narrative appears in 1821; several years elapse for both Benson and Lauvergne between their ventures and the subsequent publication of their narratives. The travel narrative has yet to expose the reader to the *Here and Now* of contemporary Corsica. When travel occurred and when the subsequent narrative is published are essential aspects of Saint-Hilaire's work that distinguishes it from those of his contemporaries. The *Lettres sur la Corse* keep Continental readers up to date as though a modern "live stream" of the daily activities occurring within Corsican communities. The emphasis on the present, to the best extent possible, allows us then to engage with the travel narrative (broadly) as a proto-ethnography of insular communities. In *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Marc Augé nuances this temporal vantage point on the particular genre of travel narratives as ethnographic texts:

L'ethnologue de terrain, s'il est consciencieux, a toujours le moyen d'aller voir un peu plus loin si ce qu'il a cru pouvoir observer au départ y est toujours valable. C'est l'avantage de travailler sur le présent – modeste compensation à l'avantage essentiel qu'ont toujours les historiens: ils connaissent la suite.⁹⁴

⁹³ The intertextual relationships we are establishing here will also be the case for Gustave Flaubert who directly engages with Hubert Lauvergne's travelogue at various instances in *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* (1840).

⁹⁴ Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. "La Librairie du XXI^e siècle," 1992, p. 23.

The passage of time is consequential because it continues to generate gaps in experience with contemporary Corsica: the reader is often left with impressions and remembrances of a trek through the mountainous interior rather than an exploration of the Corsican quotidian. It is here that Saint-Hilaire's work takes shape as a bridge of both space and time between the Metropole and Corsica that brings the reader directly into contemporary Corsica.

II. Creating the Foundations of Literature: Observations of Daily Life in the Lettres sur la Corse

Published as a series of ten letters appearing first on May 25, 1826 and running through September 25, 1827 in the Parisian literary journal *Le Globe*, the *Lettres sur la Corse* bring to light numerous aspects of urban and rural communities in Corsica united through a common pursuit: to uncover “l'origine du mal” in Corsica (p. 285), an expression Saint-Hilaire uses to frame what he perceives as economic and social deficiencies in Corsican society. But what are the social, economic, and political realities faced by Corsican communities in 1826? Why do these circumstances and conditions continue to impede prosperity and movement towards “un pays civilisé” (p. 317)? To lead his readers to potential answers for these questions, for which he offers several possibilities, Saint-Hilaire presents numerous topics meshed from one paragraph to another across the collection: environmental observations, illicit commerce, remarks about the weather, details of civil disputes adjudicated in city hall, failed economic opportunities, descriptions of new foods, various forms of music, and distinct social experiences, such as weddings and funerals. The Ninth and Tenth *Lettres* are unique in the series: first, because they are not addressed to the Editor of *Le Globe* as all others are in one form or another (“Monsieur,...”; “À l'éditeur du *Globe*...”; “Au rédacteur du *Globe*...”) suggesting Saint-Hilaire's official responsibilities as a journalist; secondly, because they are a pair of letters that recount the history of Corsica focusing on Roman

rule (*Neuvième Lettre*) and concluding with the island's domination by the Republic of Genoa (*Dixième Lettre*), which is, however, a discussion point that appears sporadically throughout the *Lettres* and serves as a springboard towards the *Devoirs de la France envers la Corse*, that appears shortly after.

Of these numerous topics and avenues of exploration, our attention will focus first on Saint-Hilaire's economic observations, then his experience with funerals, and finally with banditry. While economics and structural investment are potentially out of scope with a literature-focused study, the perspectives offered will provide insight into the ways in which Corsican difference is portrayed outside of literature and will reveal an important connection between focal points of contemporary literature in which the natural environment plays a key role. A discussion of economics and politics will also allow us to explore the various lenses through which Saint-Hilaire observes Corsica, at times adopting a quasi-colonialist gaze onto insular society.

Turning our attention then to funerary rites and banditry brings our study back into the domain of literature as these customs and traditions are pillars in the representation of Corsica during the 19th century. Not only do they set the scenes and tones of various narratives, but they also provide rich terrain for the development of "le mythe corse" during the 1820s during which "naît une image romanesque de la Corse empruntant à la littérature d'information des traits légendaires ou anecdotiques."⁹⁵ Saint-Hilaire contributes to the elaboration of various aspects of "l'image romanesque de la Corse"⁹⁶ as he pursues the melodramatic subjects and focal points of historical fictions and travel narratives published earlier in the decade: vengeance, retribution, and amorous passion. Food, music, and poetry are however not to be neglected entirely! These secondary interests are equally as important because it is through these informative explanations

⁹⁵ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Fagginalli, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 191.

and amusing anecdotes that Saint-Hilaire introduces new characters and settings: the mountainous regions of the rural interior, funerary rites and traditions, legendary bandits, various social customs, and educational access. As Pierrette Jeoffroy-Fagginelli observes, “[Ces] documents viennent illustrer le génie d’un peuple, qui s’affirme comme le parangon des vertus naturelles en révoltes contre l’injustice de la société et des lois.”⁹⁷ By the end of the 1820s, however, the representation of justice will not be that of the submission of the Corsican people to an external political actor (Genoa or France); instead, it will emphasize the tensions between Metropolitan norms of justice and the vendetta, embodied as it were in the figure of the bandit.

The tone of the first few letters in the series *Lettres sur la Corse* is indeed quite accusatory. According to Saint-Hilaire, many of the challenges faced by Corsican communities of the 1820s are “toujours un peu de leur faute” (p. 321). While a search for the “origine du mal” is a thread uniting these letters, what is most fascinating is that Saint-Hilaire does not remain fixed to his accusatory stance. He evolves. He changes course. He disagrees with his earlier predispositions when confronted with the reality before his eyes. As time moves on and as he plunges deeper and deeper into the recesses of Corsican life, he uncovers a substratum of dynamic social activity animated by rich traditions and rituals and with profound respect for familial honor and integrity. By the end of the tenth and final letter in the series, one cannot help but see that the economic and social ills that have befallen the Corsican people over generations are not of their own making; they have often come from exogenous political forces, mainland continental interests and domination. The exterior control of the island is also found in literature in which the Romantic literary representations of Corsica, those that Saint-Hilaire contributes to and will eventually

⁹⁷ *Idem.*, p. 192.

subvert, prioritize the intrigue of the vendetta, those of banditry. The *other* stories of contemporary Corsica will indeed wait their turn.

1. *Economics and Literature*

The first “mal” that Saint-Hilaire observes in Corsica lies in its economy, or lack thereof. While trekking through the heavily forested backcountry of Ajaccio, wherever he sees green, he sees potential exploitation and development: “L’industrie n’a qu’à exploiter ce sol vierge encore, à mettre en rapport ces magnifiques forêts, si propres à la construction et à la mâturation, et qui pourrissent sur le sol où elles croissent” (p. 285). It seems insensible to him that these rich, untouched forests remain so pristine while timber is imported from Northern European countries for use in mainland France:

Des coupes régulières avaient été organisées dans cette forêt royale, dont les bois étaient à peu de frais transportés à Toulon. Expliquez-moi, si vous le pouvez, monsieur le rédacteur, comment il se fait que l’exploitation de cette forêt et de celle d’Aytona⁹⁸ ait cessé, tandis que le gouvernement tire à grands frais ses bois de mâturation du nord de l’Europe (p. 289)

Why draw resources from other economies when continental industries would benefit greatly from the forests of Corsica? Out of plain irritation, Saint-Hilaire concludes that the apparent lack of interest in economic gains renders the forests essentially irrelevant, “[elle] ne vaudrait peut-être même pas les coups de fusil qu’il en coûterait pour la défendre” (p. 342). He continues to drive the point through an attempt to relate this sentiment to other economically underdeveloped countries: For example, the decision to maintain the natural splendor of the forests, a decision to *not* cut it down for timber, remains “une de ces énigmes comme on en rencontre tant dans ce malheureux pays où la nature a jeté à pleines mains tous ses dons” (p. 289-290).

⁹⁸ At this point, Saint-Hilaire is in the *arrière-pays* of Ajaccio, overlooking the gulf. Aytona is a region much farther to the north in the region surrounding Porto.

Saint-Hilaire argues that the time has come for France to turn towards a region closer to its shores and with equally as much opportunity for profit:

Ne serait-il pas temps de tourner les yeux vers une île éloignée à peine de la France de quelques vingtaines de lieues, et dont le climat fertile, sans être dévorant comme celui des Antilles, est susceptible de tous les genres de culture, depuis le coton jusqu'à la canne à sucre? Ne serait-il pas temps d'unir au continent par le moyen facile et peu dispendieux de quelques bateaux à vapeur, que des négociants de Marseille s'offrent à faire construire à leurs frais, cette île si intéressante sous tous les rapports, si peu connue et si digne de l'être? (p. 269-70).

Regular maritime service between the industrial ports of Marseille would be a gain for both France and Corsica as it “exciter[ait] l'émulation des Corses et les spéculations des Marseillais, et unir[ait] à la France par un lien sûr et régulier un de ses plus beaux départements” (p. 270). More specifically, a strong and reliable maritime connection would encourage the development of seasonal migration between France and Corsica where “les laborieux journaliers de la Bourgogne, du Limousin” can find steady, sufficient work that would “faire refluer vers la France cet argent qui vient d'elle” (p. 320). As a matter of personal convenience, a regular maritime connection between Marseille and Corsica would end the frustrating delay in postal services: “On ne verrait plus s'écouler jusqu'à sept semaines entre un courrier et l'autre, espace de temps plus que suffisant pour avoir la réponse d'une lettre écrite aux États-Unis” (p. 270).

In addition to the underdeveloped forest, there is another landscape worth cultivating for both economic profit as well as social improvement – *le maquis*:

Quelques champs d'orge et des châtaigniers suffisent au besoin du montagnard, sobre par paresse, et paresseux par fierté; et le reste de la Corse, partout fertile, partout inculte, se couvre d'inutiles buissons de houx et d'arbousier vulgairement nommés *makis*, dont la végétation vigoureuse accuse la fertilité du sol et la paresse des habitants (p. 283).

Ouf! Saint-Hilaire spares no punch in his blistering assessment of a natural resource in which he only sees profit whereas others see their calm, unrushed way of life. His perspective is that of a

colonist as well in his observations of “la paresse des habitants,” for which his solutions of economic investment and development stand as a certain remedy. This passage is also demonstrative of the ambivalence of Saint-Hilaire’s perspectives: while his *Lettres* craft connections between the Metropole and Corsica, the island is held at a firm distance.

Eliminating the “inutiles buissons” would certainly clear the way to more intensive agricultural development while also eliminating the hiding spots of the most (in)famous of Corsican criminals – the bandit: “Ces makis, qui s’étendent d’un bout de la Corse à l’autre, servant de refuge aux accusés contumaces (*banditi*), ou aux conscrits réfractaires que la certitude de l’impunité a souvent jetés dans le crime” (*ibid.*). Clearing out the refuges of the “conscrits réfractaires” seems to suggest an easier attempt at their capture and return to the systems of justice imposed upon the island “depuis la vigueur qu’a déployée le ministère public sous M. Gilbert-Boucher, procureur général. Un bataillon de voltigeurs corses, établi depuis peu, a contribué aussi à ramener le bon ordre, surtout en réveillant l’émulation de la gendarmerie, découragée par un service pénible” (p. 284). In the short term, the “Voltigeurs corses,” a paramilitary police force constituted on the island to return law and order to insular communities, will only make matters worse as they impose a system of justice that is unfamiliar, foreign even, to people of Corsica.

Breaking *into* these communities, at the outset, is however an argument for breaking *up* these communities. Economic investment and development are presented as a successful civilizing force worthy and capable of transforming the *hic et nunc* of 1820s Corsica into a regional economic power: “Ce n’est que par le commerce que la Corse conquerra la véritable civilisation, celle qui, entée sur les mœurs, finit par prendre racine avec elles et épurer l’arbre en le greffant” (p. 346). The economic potential of Corsica’s future has significant advantage for mainland France as well since the island would possibly serve as a vital port in the nation’s geopolitical projection and

dominance in the Mediterranean: “Qu’il nous suffise de répéter que [la Corse] est la clé de la Méditerranée, ou du moins de la mer d’Espagne, et la gardienne du Midi de la France” (p. 342). Taking on further responsibility and engagement with the Corsican economy will disentangle its Italian-leaning cultural tendencies observed in the regions surrounding Bastia, molding this area into the shape of its southern counterpart in Ajaccio where “la langue et les habitudes françaises s’y sont répandues, du moins sur le littoral, avec une rapidité qui tient du prodige” (p. 327). As we will see in our later studies of contemporary literature, economics and investment are important literary themes and social forces that shape modern Corsica. The exploitation of the forests where Saint-Hilaire only sees profit will begin a slow and catastrophic chain reaction of destruction and devastation that will wipe out entire communities. The destruction of the forests will also erase traditions related to the supernatural forces and beings that influence social interactions and customs across Corsica.

This opening salvo into Corsican culture and society is not uncommon in travel writings of the early-19th century. While it might seem that economics and commerce are out of scope with the larger study, they are crucial elements in the early stages of the development of literary representations of Corsican communities. The expansive natural setting create impressive backdrops for dramatic social intrigues around which novels and stories are composed. More importantly, these economic in-roads into Corsican culture seem to respond to implicit questions raised by Saint-Hilaire: What drives Corsican culture if not prosperity? What is more highly valued than economic wealth? As Saint-Hilaire develops closer and more meaningful relationships in the community, his deeply critical perspectives and positions will gradually soften.

At the outset, however, Saint-Hilaire is taken by the social and economic inertia that he witnesses daily. For Saint-Hilaire, *le Corse* is “hardi, paresseux, insouciant, voilà le Corse tel qu’il

sort de la nature” (p. 315). Even with lush vegetation and arable land on all sides, “le paysan qui a assez de pain de châtaignes ou de pain d’orge pour son année évitera religieusement de planter davantage, et si la récolte manque ou que la grêle dévaste le champ, il en sera quitte pour mourir de faim en quelques mois et dire quelques rosaires à la Madone” (p. 288). Working more than necessary is also certainly out of the question:

Sobre par paresse et par nature en même temps, le montagnard ici dédaigne plus encore qu’il ne craint le travail; content de récolter juste ce qu’il lui faut de châtaignes et d’orge pour sa nourriture, l’idée d’échange de commerce, de provisions pour l’avenir, n’arrive pas jusqu’à lui (p. 314-5).

The emotional sobriety of “le montagnard” can however be broken. Tears can and do fall from time to time from the eyes of even those most stoic and unyielding men. Breaking through this outer shell is a matter of time and of a perfect opportunity to more deeply explore the dynamic social interactions and principles that serve as the bedrock of Corsican culture, namely those of familial honor and respect. There is perhaps no better way to articulate these social pillars than through an in-depth discussion of banditry and the *vendetta*, causes sure to shake *Le Corse* from his “indolence profonde, presque systématique” (p. 314): “Si au récit de quelque entreprise hardie, au nom seul d’un ennemi, au moindre appât d’intérêt ou de gain, on ne voyait briller dans ses yeux l’éclair de l’activité et de l’intelligence” (*ibid.*). Once he cuts through the surface of economic concerns, Saint-Hilaire’s tone will radically change and soften as he penetrates deeper into the recesses of various communities. It is in this softened tone, this curious voyager will begin to listen for the stories of these communities, ones that he will hasten to write himself.

2. *The Breathtaking Beauty of the Landscape*

For all the potential economic gain seen in the verdant landscape, Saint-Hilaire is still astounded by its singular beauty. The rugged mountains and the enormous trees that cover them

exceed the scope of his own imagination and create an impressive backdrop for his anecdotes: “Parvenus plus haut encore, nous avons atteint la région des châtaigniers qui viennent ici à une grosseur prodigieuse; j’en ai vu dont quatre hommes n’auraient pu embrasser le tronc” (p. 288). At times, Saint-Hilaire often relates these scenes in pictorial terms, as opposed to a simple description, to such an extent that the reader feels as though they were observing a painting, displayed *just so* in a gallery of the Louvre. In the *Troisième Lettre*, he shares a beautiful, windswept mountain pass:

Au-dessus de la région des châtaigniers commence celle des hêtres et des frênes, et je ne me rappelle pas d’avoir vu dans aucune autre montagne un luxe de végétation aussi vivace et aussi prodigieux. Les vents, qui n’abandonnent presque jamais ces gorges élevées, ont semé le sol de *cadavres* de hêtres, comme les appelle un illustre écrivain; et rien n’est pittoresque comme **ces** ponts naturels jetés sur les torrents, et **ces** arbres tombés sur d’autres arbres, et qui semblent des échelles gigantesques pour arriver à leur sommet” (p. 288-9; my emphasis).

This passage combines the sheer scale of the verdant landscape layering the mountains with the raw, natural power of the wind to up-end the natural order, “Les vents, qui n’abandonnent presque jamais ces gorges élevées, ont semé le sol de *cadavres* de hêtres.” His use of the term “pittoresque” merits further pause for its suggestion of the profound awe inspired by the singular landscape.⁹⁹ The term “pittoresque” finds its roots in painting and in the visual arts that represent the natural world: “Le *pittoresque* s’y définit comme cadrage d’un site naturel qui mérite d’être peint.”¹⁰⁰ How does one delineate one scene from another in terms of merit or worthiness? In *La poétique du pittoresque en France de 1700 à 1830*, Wils Munsters offers a substantial historical analysis of the term “pittoresque” and of its application in the genres of painting, poetry, and literature,

⁹⁹ Saint-Hilaire also uses the term “pittoresque” to describe clothing as well, “Un mouchoir blanc, arrangé pittoresquement sur sa tête, selon l’usage du pays” (p. 292).

¹⁰⁰ Henri Cometti, “Le paysage du *Grand Tour*, du pittoresque au sublime,” *Cahiers Philosophiques*, No. 157, “La nature,” 2019, p. 15.

wherein he suggests that we conceive of the term “pittoresque” as a practice, as a struggle between normative techniques and the emotional reaction to a singular object such as landscape features; in other words, what is *pittoresque* is a response to that for which representation through classic means is most difficult because of the emotional connection between the artist and the setting itself.¹⁰¹ The reaction is beyond qualifying the scene as beautiful, for example, but one more profound and deeply personal: “Ce qui se découvre dans le paysage pittoresque, ce n’est rien d’autre que cette identité de nature entre la nature extérieure perçue et la nature de l’esprit humain dans ses processus d’associations.”¹⁰²

More than just a passage that expresses his emotional engagement with the environment, what is also remarkable here are Saint-Hilaire’s textual strategies of description that bring the reader into the frame. The use of the demonstrative adjective (“ces”) serves to delineate the visual field and spatially orient objects in relationship to both the narrator and to the reader as we see here: “ces ponts naturels jetés sur les torrents, et ces arbres tombés sur d’autres arbres” (my emphasis). Furthermore, Saint-Hilaire’s use of the demonstrative adjective “ces” bridges time as well, as we see in his description of similar weather patterns that impacted both Corsica and France: “Mais cette année, après un printemps froid et pluvieux, sont venus tout d’un coup et sans intervalle ces chaleurs excessives que vous avez ressenties jusque sur le continent, et ensuite un automne humide, des pluies et plutôt des tempêtes continuelles” (p. 302). The demonstrative also serves to suggest that after all Corsica is not *that* far away from the mainland, again, bridging the Continental reader both temporally and spatially. What Saint-Hilaire draws the reader into however is not always the most beautiful sweeping mountain vistas. The crooks and recesses of the valleys hide a deadly pestilence that wreaks havoc on the most remote of villages perched high

¹⁰¹ Wils Munsters, *La poétique du pittoresque en France de 1700 à 1830*, Geneva, Droz, 1991, p. 27-46.

¹⁰² Henri Cometti, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

in the mountain tops which opens a new opportunity to pursue the rites and rituals of Corsican funerary traditions.

3. *Funerary Traditions*

Across the whole of the *Lettres sur la Corse*, Saint-Hilaire devotes substantial space and energy for social observation and commentary, which is often deeply critical and exacting. Whatever his personal opinions and perspectives about various practices or conditions, he does envision their literary potential, ideally penned by Sir Walter Scott, or someone as equally talented:

Pourquoi le chantre de *Rob Roy*, que vous possédez à présent¹⁰³, ne daigne-t-il pas visiter la Corse? Il y trouverait des mœurs aussi neuves, une nature aussi grande et un plus beau ciel que sur ses vieilles montagnes; et peut-être son talent même gagnerait-il à sortir un instant de cette terre qu'il a épuisée, pour venir chercher des inspirations parmi les Evan Dhu et les MacGregor du Monte d'Oro et des bois de Vizzavona (p. 309).

Inspired by his literary role model, Saint-Hilaire explores the villages nestled deep in the mountains with a desire to “observer des mœurs intéressantes, parce qu’elles offrent quelque chose de naïf à la fois et de sauvage” (p. 305). We have the opportunity here to highlight this quasi-colonial perspective inserted into the *Lettres* which again serve to underscore the (implicit) differences between the civilized Frenchman (of the Metropole) and the (supposed) savagery of the islanders. The distance Saint-Hilaire attempts to maintain from these “mœurs intéressantes” is merely discursive as he follows the paths up into the mountains where new adventures await.

During “une course dans les montagnes” (p. 287), Saint-Hilaire pursues an opportunity to observe a funeral, which he had long sought to witness: “J’étais particulièrement curieux de connaître les coutumes observées dans les funérailles. On m’avait dit qu’elles étaient profondément empreintes d’un caractère national, et en même temps d’une certaine majesté, bien

¹⁰³ No doubt a reference to the serial publications of Sir Walter Scott’s works in *Le Globe*, where Saint-Hilaire is also published and at the same time.

qu'un peu sauvage" (p. 305). Before going further, it is crucial to note that Saint-Hilaire is actively engaging in the early exploration of the most important pillar of the literary representation of Corsica coming out of the Romantic generation: the reverence for death through the prism of funerary rites and traditions. As we can see in these remarks, his exploration is motivated by what he has read or been told about various traditions and rites. Through his own writings, Saint-Hilaire will contribute to the wider dissemination of the "mœurs" and social conventions that are foundational to later literary narratives.

As a preamble to a discussion of the funerary traditions, Saint-Hilaire warns his reader of the grisly details that follow:

Mon voyage a été assez triste: ce ne sont pas des scènes auxquelles j'ai le plus souvent assisté. Car, sans parler du fléau qui a exercé ses ravages dans toutes ces montagnes, la gaieté paraît être complètement étrangère au caractère corse: rien n'est plus rare ici que d'entendre un éclat de rire, ou quelque signe de joie; les hommes la dédaignent, et les femmes craignent de s'y livrer, ou ne le font que furtivement entre elles et en l'absence de leurs époux ou plutôt de leurs maîtres (p. 305).

This sobering austerity of social gatherings will be breached during a funeral where Saint-Hilaire witnesses unbridled expression of grief.

The *récit* begins *in medias res* with Saint-Hilaire's arrival at the home of the deceased, a "riche cultivateur, le chef de son village" (p. 307). Upon first seeing the corpse at the center of the room, the narrator recalls the extraordinary cries of the female mourners surrounding the deceased:

Le défunt était mort la veille de mon arrivée et je trouvai, en entrant dans sa maison, le corps étendu sur une table, avec un cercle de femmes autour de lui, dont les cris et les hurlements avaient depuis longtemps attiré mon attention (p. 306).

Describing the sounds of this performance as "cris et hurlements" suggests his initial surprise with the force of *badatta* itself as an intense performance of individual and collective grief led primarily

by women, a performance that “depuis longtemps avait attiré [son] attention.”¹⁰⁴ Continuing the exposition of the setting in this home perched high above in a remote mountain village, he further describes the performance itself: “Ces femmes qui pleuraient et s’arrachaient les cheveux autour de lui [le défunt], avec une douleur tellement bruyante, tellement convulsives, qu’on aurait pu la croire jouée” (*ibid.*). Then, an unidentified woman unexpectedly enters the home: “C’était une femme déjà âgée et dont la robe noire et à larges plis, ramenée sur sa tête suivant l’usage des matrones du pays, ne laissait voir que deux yeux encore perçants et un nez fortement prononcé” (p. 307). This same woman approaches the corpse “et commença enfin une espèce de chant funèbre en vers réguliers et en strophes” (*ibid.*). In the corners of the room, many of those gathered “gardaient un silence religieux: les hommes, honteux de pleurer, essuyaient leurs yeux, et les femmes sanglotaient tout bas” (p. 308). Following the lamentation, “la cérémonie finit par un large festin où l’on commença par parler du mort, et où l’on finit par parler des vivants, sans que la douleur fît perdre un coup de dent à des convives” (*ibid.*).

In addition to relating his initial reactions to the “cris et hurlements” (p. 306) of the women crowded around the corpse in the center of the room, Saint-Hilaire transcribes a segment of the *voceru*, the funeral lamentation, which he offers to his readers as an example of “cette poésie que l’on ne trouve pas dans les livres, cette poésie de la nature, simple, énergétique et familière comme elle, et qui ne se rencontre plus qu’au milieu des peuples qui vivent sans cesse avec elle” (p. 308):

Ami, disait-elle au mort avec une naïveté touchante,
 ... *Ami*, pourquoi mourir?
 Nous n’étions pas encore lassés de te chérir;
 Époux, pourquoi quitter ta fidèle compagne;

¹⁰⁴ Ruth Emily Rosenberg adopts a different perspective, at least in terminology, referring to this type of public mourning as *voceru*: “The funeral laments improvised by women on the Mediterranean island of Corsica constitute one of the oldest and perhaps most significant oral traditions on the island. Called *voceri* (sing. *voceru*), these laments were traditionally performed over the body of the deceased and accompanied by wailing and other demonstrations of grief” (Emily Ruth Rosenberg, “A Voice Like Thunder: Corsican Women’s Lament as Cultural Work,” *Current Musicology*, No. 78, 2004, p. 31)

Chasseur, le sanglier court encore la montagne;
 Faucheur, pourquoi dormir à côté du sillon;
 Ne reviendras-tu pas pour cueillir ta moisson?
 Ami, pourquoi mourir?

In her significant work into the musical traditions of Corsica, Ruth Emily Rosenberg observes that the Corsican funeral lamentation, the *voceru*, was indeed an improvised oral performance but the lamentations that have survived in written form show their complex and intricate structure:

The textual form of the *voceru*, common to many indigenous Corsican genres, consists of three octosyllabic couplets with end-rhymes (usually on lines 2, 4, and 6). The melodies on which verses were sung varied according to locale of performer but were characterized by descending motion, usually stepwise, and the prolongation penultimate and final notes of each line. Limited melodic variation gave *voceru* the quality of an incantation, and the steady, rhythmic delivery of lines might be punctuated by swaying, waving a handkerchief, or lightly striking the bier.¹⁰⁵

The combination of the intensity of the physical expression of grief with the tenderness of the widow's words to her husband constructs a rich iconography of traditional Corsican funerary practices. The *Quatrième Lettre* paints the portrait of an intricately linked community shattered by the death of one of their own. What stands out from the selected lines of the *voceru* is not only the unanticipated nature of the husband's death, but also the extent to which his life was attached to the land itself: the widow calls for him to return to his fields, to his hunting, and ultimately to her. The intensity of the love expressed through the widow's words do their part in expressing the attachment to life that animates the community, as only death can illustrate: "les hommes, honteux de pleurer, essuyaient leurs yeux, et les femmes sanglotaient tout bas" (p. 308). Emotional stasis is finally broken.

The anecdote of funerary practices is also one of the author's personal transformation born of the experience itself in the remote village: as the ceremony unfolds before his eyes, the poetry,

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Emily Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 34. See also, Ruth Emily Rosenberg, "Prosper Mérimée's *improvisatrice*: the voice of Corsican lament in *Colomba*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 42, Iss. 3, 2014, p. 176-189.

the physical grief of the mourners is no longer simply “quelque chose de naïf à la fois et de sauvage” (p. 304-5) but now whose beauty is “imposante et si poétique” (p. 309) that “il ne manque pour composer le plus piquant tableau que le talent d’un Salvator ou la plume d’un Walter Scott” (p. 287). While it is outside the scope of the immediate study, funerary traditions and rituals will leave a lasting imprint on the narratives produced about Corsica because of their emotional and ritualistic depth. Saint-Hilaire sets the stage for continued exploration of these practices with the inclusion of passages from various *voceri*, the darkened setting, the preeminent role for women in these circumstances. While his anecdote draws from personal experiences, it is not far-fetched to anticipate the ways in which the same or similar scenes could be adopted and included as scenes in fictional narratives, again, returning to the call to the Walter Scotts of France to turn their talents southward, towards Corsica.

4. *Banditry and the Vendetta*

Alongside funerary rites and traditions, banditry and *vendetti* constitute the central cultural curiosities and social deficiencies (to return to Saint-Hilaire’s exploration of the “origine du mal”) conveyed in the travel narratives of both the late-18th and early-19th centuries. Both themes later anchor literature of the Romantic period. It is important to note that these focal points develop around a central theme of vengeance which is construed as a conceptual pillar in the growing understanding of and fascination for Corsican social norms of the time. It further serves to structure the magnificent novella by Honoré de Balzac entitled *La Vendetta* (1830) that recounts the origination and blood-soaked conclusion of a family feud that follows the Piombo family who ascends in Parisian political and social circles during the *Cent Jours* that saw the second, and final, return of Napoléon Bonaparte. Banditry is similarly present in travel narratives and fictions of the

1820s but shares a different purpose: it becomes a lightning rod for definitive political action against Corsicans. Jean-François Réalier-Dumas, a governmental lawyer, composes a travel narrative entitled *Mémoires sur la Corse* (Paris, Plancher, 1819) in which he latches onto banditry as the most important of Corsican social ills:

Il faut au plus vite, brûler les makis [maquis]. C'est là que se réfugient en assurance tous les malfaiteurs dont l'île est infestée; et c'est de là que chaque jour ils font feu sur la gendarmerie, qui se trouve dans l'impossibilité de se défendre. Dans de pareilles circonstances, on s'étonnera que la loi du 10 vendémiaire an 4, sur la responsabilité des communes, n'ait jamais été exécutée en Corse; elle s'exécute encore aujourd'hui en France. Cette responsabilité, trop souvent nécessaire dans les pays de montagnes, est surtout indispensable en Corse. Les communes, alors, auront un véritable intérêt à livrer les malfaiteurs. Au moins cesseront-elles de leur donner un asile.¹⁰⁶

Réalier-Dumas casts banditry as a symptom of a lawless society that needs immediate correction starting with the eradication of “les malfaiteurs dont l'île est infestée.” Réalier-Dumas's remark that villages “donne[nt] un asile” points to his assertion that villagers knowingly hide their own in the *maquis* and are therefore complicit in the fugitive status of the outlaws who “se réfugient en assurance” in the “makis.” Work must be done to align Corsica with the Continent so that law, in particular “la loi du 10 vendémiaire” that sought to standardize rules of general applicability for municipal regulation of criminal and civil penalties.¹⁰⁷ As we see in Réalier-Dumas's observations, bandits were considered “malfaiteurs” who “font feu sur la gendarmerie” and whose disruptive actions impel a collective response from both local Corsican communities themselves as well as from political leadership in Paris.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-François Réalier-Dumas, *Mémoires sur la Corse*, Paris, Plancher, 1819, p. 35; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5815678s>). This publication sets off a series of responses in the form of *Letters to the Editor* of different journals and reviews, in addition to unique publications that sought to correct the record: J.-F. Simonot, *Lettres sur la Corse pour servir de réponse au Mémoire publié par M^r Réalier-Dumas conseiller à la Cour Royale de Riom* (Bastia, Imprimerie d'Étienne Batini, 1820; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6565919t>). Cf. Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 127-141.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Émile Laurent and Jérôme Madival (eds.), *Archives parlementaires recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises de 1800 à 1860*, Paris, Paul Dupont, 1894, p. 693; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k480127c>;

In the *Cinquième Lettre sur la Corse* (published March 6, 1827¹⁰⁸), Saint-Hilaire enters the foray of Corsican banditry with a letter devoted entirely to Théodore Poli (Tiodoro Poli), “la terreur de la Corse” (p. 311). As it happens, Saint-Hilaire finds himself in Corsica at the most opportune moment: weeks following the last stand of Théodore Poli “qui exerçait dans l’arrondissement d’Ajaccio une espèce d’empire, moitié par la crainte, moitié par l’intérêt qu’inspire toujours le courage” (p. 312). Just prior to the publication of this letter, Poli was tracked down and killed: “Après une poursuite de douze jours, après un engagement avec la force armée, où deux voltigeurs furent blessés, il a enfin succombé; et pour terminer dignement sa vie aventureuse [...] il a fini de la mort des braves, les armes à la main, sur un champ de bataille, sans aller porter sa tête sur un échafaud” (p. 312). Even two years after Poli’s death in 1825, the writer can discern the colossal weight of Poli’s stories that will quickly become the material of legends:

Il ne lui manque donc rien de ce qui constitue ici le véritable héros dans les vieilles légendes du montagnard; et il est hors de doute que, dans des temps plus reculés et moins prosaïques, son nom aurait passé à la postérité tout aussi bien que celui de tant de preux châtelains, détrousseurs de passants et redresseurs de torts, qui ne le surpassaient ni en courage ni en mépris des lois (*ibid.*)

Saint-Hilaire’s projection for the future of this figure is exceptionally accurate: Poli was a celebrated and revered bandit whose legendary persona inspired some of the excursions enjoyed by the young Gustave Flaubert in 1840 (subsequently related in his travel narrative entitled *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse*) as well as a recent novel by Corsican author Marc Biancarelli entitled *Orphelins de Dieu* (Actes sud, 2014) in which the reader is exposed to many of the underappreciated aspects of the life of a bandit and to the legend surrounding Théodore Poli.

Saint-Hilaire’s remembrance of Théodore Poli is not only for the blood-soaked *maquis* that he leaves behind, but more importantly Poli’s commitment to his own principles, his traditions,

¹⁰⁸ This letter is also the first published from a different location, Bastia, suggesting the lengths of Saint-Hilaire’s excursions around Corsica during a time in which roads were yet to be fully constructed.

and of the respect that such a stance commands from his community. In this example, we deal with the second iteration of the bandit, as a community activist of sorts. Saint-Hilaire's evocation of this legendary figure is, however, with mixed emotions, but largely positive: a fearsome combatant, a valiant knight ("preux châtelains"), but also a thief ("détrouseurs de passants") and a problem solver ("redresseurs de torts"). These conflicting social identities create substantial tension in the contours of the bandit's portrayal: *who* is a bandit and *what* are their actual roles? Acknowledging other examples and portrayals that precede him, Saint-Hilaire writes to the Editor of *Le Globe* that he will not "remplir les colonnes de votre journal d'histoires de bandits," but instead, will "jeter un coup d'œil sur les causes qui ont pu amener un état de choses si contraire aux lois, qui subsiste depuis si longtemps en dépit d'elles" (p. 313-4).

It is from this inquisitive stance that Saint-Hilaire's letter distinguishes itself from the conversations and perspectives of his contemporaries on the same subject. Yes, banditry does exist, as Saint-Hilaire would certainly admit, and much blood has been spilled on its behalf, but the central question to resolve is its causes and motivations. Are Corsicans at the origin of this societal evil? Or are there other perspectives to consider? Saint-Hilaire offers the argument that you are not born a bandit, but manipulated into one, willingly or not: "Voyons-le à présent tel que les hommes nous l'ont fait" (p. 315). The general reach of the term "nous" also is interesting in this context because on the one hand it implies that Corsicans are an identifiable and separate population while it also implicitly assigns responsibility to the "nous" that is the Parisian/French reader whose governmental politics have had significant consequences for the insular communities. Perhaps then the more intelligent question to ask is not from where banditry originates, but what exacerbated its conditions? For example, the "lois" to which Saint-Hilaire refers above are those imposed specifically against Corsicans, such as the *port d'armes*, the

suppression of jury trials (to encourage bench trials with politically-appointed magistrates rather than a jury of one's *Corsican* peers), and the arrival of the *Voltigeurs corses*: "The military presence was very marked in the first three or four decades of the nineteenth century, and throughout the period a proportionately larger number of military and police was stationed in Corsica than in any other French department."¹⁰⁹

One cause of banditry, according to Saint-Hilaire, is the legal systems into which successive governments (Genoese¹¹⁰ then French) incorporated Corsican communities, either by deception or by force, and required them to judge and penalize themselves:

Les Génois, par un artifice qui réussit presque toujours aux conquérants, ont compris que, pour opprimer un peuple, il n'y a pas de meilleur instrument que la partie de ce peuple qui consent à s'en servir: la carrière des emplois civils a donc de tout temps été ouverte aux Corses; les tribunaux surtout ont été peuplés de magistrats du pays, vendus aux doctrines du pays qui les employait, et la justice n'a plus été qu'une arme légale de la tyrannie. De là, dans la partie de la population qui a protesté le plus longtemps contre la domination génoise, une sorte de haine aveugle et opiniâtre contre des lois et des tribunaux où elle retrouvait des ennemis pour juges. La France, en succédant à Gênes, semble, il est vrai, avoir pris, surtout depuis quelque temps, un système tout opposé: elle a fait de la Corse un département; elle veut la rattacher à elle, la fondre dans son sein par l'action douce et progressive de la civilisation des Lumières, et cependant, sans s'en apercevoir, elle continue dans la magistrature ce système qui, sous les Génois, a causé tant de maux (p. 315-316).

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict, and Banditry in Nineteenth Century Corsica*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 336.

¹¹⁰ As we have seen earlier on a few occasions, colonialism and political subjugation are threads that persist throughout the *Lettres sur la Corse*. Saint-Hilaire frequently targets the island earlier possession and domination by the Republic of Genoa, whose contested control of the island finally ended in 1755 with the declaration of the Republic of Corsica (Genoa failed to recognize this declaration of independence and in a 1768 treaty, it ceded the island to France, who then annexed the island in 1769, officially incorporating it into the monarchy). The subject of colonial rule is one taken up by Saint-Hilaire as he relays comparisons of Ireland and Corsica, ultimately dismissing the connections between the two: "Si la Corse était une nouvelle Irlande, soupirant à la fois pour toutes les émancipations, en religion comme en politique, j'essaierais encore d'élever ma voix, toute faible qu'elle soit, pour faire sentir à ses maîtres que, dans le siècle où nous vivons, la liberté des peuples s'exploite à moins de frais et rapporte plus que leur esclavage. Mais grâce au Ciel qu'il n'en est pas ainsi de la Corse. Elle est un département de la France, et non une colonie; chaque jour le lien des lois, et celui des mœurs, plus puissant encore, l'unissent à notre commune patrie" (p. 319-20). Saint-Hilaire often positions the French state as a remedy to the deficits accrued in earlier generations (economic, social, educational, etc.). Rarely is that same critical gaze cast upon the French possession and control of Corsica: "La Corse est destinée à la France" (p. 341).

Participation in the judicial system leads to its ultimate rejection, according to Saint-Hilaire, who observes the complex aversion (“une sorte de haine aveugle et opiniâtre”) of those who were bought into the promises not only of civil service itself, but also those of the political system itself. To much the same extent, egalitarian politics (transforming Corsica into a *département*) replicates the cycle of indoctrination and forced compliance with a system that is foreign to the community itself. I suspect that it is here that much of the Metropolitan perceptions about the causes of banditry diverge because it is not so much that Corsican culture is fundamentally opposed to justice, much to the contrary, but that it privileges *its* system of justice. Banditry then in this case is best understood as a complex manifestation of political resistance against a system and is not an ideal in and of itself: “On n’empêchera pas le Corse de dormir sur ses vieilles idées, sur ses vieilles préventions contre la loi et contre ses organes” (p. 316). More specifically even, banditry, in Saint-Hilaire’s perspective, is an act of resistance to Genoese political control that can be remedied with deeper French political engagement.

The second cause of banditry is its irreconcilable conflict with the esteem and value placed on a personal guarantee and fulfillment of justice:

Si [le Corse] voit siéger au tribunal où on doit le juger un parent, un ami d’une famille ennemie de la sienne, il n’attendra pas de justice, fût-on même disposé à la lui rendre; il ne croira pas à cet effort sublime d’équité et d’abnégation personnelle, lui qui s’en sent incapable, et qui se fait même une religion de l’être (*ibid.*)

In this hypothetical scenario, Saint-Hilaire draws our attention to the central conflict of banditry in Corsica: who wields the power to exact justice? It is important to keep in mind that the argument here does not lead to a conclusion that *Le Corse* refuses responsibility for his actions, but that a system *other* than that of his peers that attempts to hold him to account is itself a loathsome “effort sublime d’équité et d’abnégation personnelle.” Again, Saint-Hilaire draws our attention to the tension between the system of justice and the individual actor precisely because the outcome is

incongruent with the insular conception of justice wherein the relationships between individuals (even amongst families) are not within the purview of political systems, conceptually or administratively. Because this codified system of laws and punishments is meaningless and without authority, all the better to *prendre le maquis!*: “Aussi voit-on souvent des accusés se dérober à la justice et s’exposer pour leur fuite à des châtements bien plus graves, et à la mort même, prévenus contre des tribunaux composés de leur compatriotes” (p. 316-7). More than a question of political or territorial control, the rationale of banditry is most strongly oriented around principles of justice and of whose responsibility it is to impose its recourse as a means of restoring societal equilibrium.¹¹¹ As we read in the earlier presentation of Théodore Poli, Saint-Hilaire presents him as a “redresseurs de torts” which itself is a form of restorative justice. Although placing himself in the hands of his community, asking that they betray neither his trust nor location to the *Voltigeurs corses* that are likely following his trail, the Corsican bandit is also linked to another famous “outlaw” from the English tradition: Robin Hood. Describing Théodore Poli’s broader intentions, Saint-Hilaire labels the bandit as a “protecteur du faible” (p. 313) and later directly, “comme Robin Hood” (p. 318). The link to the Anglo-Saxon medieval tradition of Robin Hood, the “out-law” who steals from the rich to return to the poor, offers a different prism through

¹¹¹ Cf. José Gil, “L’envie et la puissance. *Giardinu è contragiardinu*,” *La Corse entre la liberté et la terreur*, *op. cit.*, p. 27-56. In this chapter, Gil asserts that traditional Corsican social dynamics and social structures are rooted in the need for social equilibrium and equality. Gil’s sociological framing of Corsican societies, especially those of the interior mountainous regions, is grounded in the need (*l’envie*) for social stasis: “L’envie—l’*invidia*—est une force primaire qui sous-tend les relations humaines. Elle n’intervient pas seulement dans les rapports intersubjectifs, elle structure la communauté et a des effets politiques. Elle est si universelle qu’elle constitue l’une des forces principales du système magico-religieux : le ‘mauvais œil’, par exemple, est lancé par quelqu’un qui envie un autre” (p. 27). Envy regulates individual behavior in so far as each person seeks to return to the middle, to a period of stasis. We see this in the above portrait proposed by Saint-Hilaire in that the good and bad years for crops, the result is the same—“il en retourne avec plus d’ardeur à cette vie primitive.” Extending the perspective to the community, Gil claims that socially developed need for stasis can be seen as the root cause of a *vendetta* following the death of a family member, as a result of imprisonment, etc.: “Il faut voir là une sorte de modèle de la genèse du réseau de circulation des forces à l’intérieur de la société corse: lorsqu’une envie en rencontre une autre qui lui soit symétrique ou opposée, il y a danger de mort. Si deux envies se heurtent directement, il y aura pour la possession de l’objet convoité: ce que l’adversaire possède, il faut se l’approprier ou le détruire” (Gil, p. 34).

which to look at banditry in the Corsican context: The bandit is not simply a criminal fugitive, but instead a militant activist for social justice and liberty for Corsican communities.

Literary depictions of the Corsican bandit exploit these differences in perspective of the bandit as a renegade outlaw and as an advocate for social justice and familial honor. Physical descriptions will cast the bandit in a negative light, while his speech and actions lead the reader to more optimistic conclusions. Even today, the former depiction dominates the latter. Francesco Renucci is one of the earliest authors to incorporate these themes and personages into a collection entitled *Nouvelles corses*, first published in 1827 in Italian and appearing in French translation in 1841.¹¹² The bandit is a frequent figure in Renucci's *Nouvelles* in which he appears as a cultural representative of sorts and is most often depicted in extended dialogue with a Continental political administrator. In one such example, while speaking of the insular norms of vengeance, the politician exclaims: "Périsse enfin cette anomalie d'être nos propres vengeurs! [...] grâce à la France, des lois et des tribunaux sont établis, aujourd'hui que tout, hormis le décret qui défend de porter les armes, a été bien conçu qu'heureusement exécuté."¹¹³ Regarding these same laws, his interlocutor explains, "le général Sionville, convenez-en, bon patriote, a purgé l'île de tant de bandits, y a ramené la tranquillité, nous a fait du bien, nous en fait encore" – to which the bandit retorts with brutal irony, "La tranquillité! oui, celle des tombeaux, ou tout au plus le silence des esclaves."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Francesco Ottavio Renucci, *Nouvelles corses. Historiques et morales* (trans. A. Filippi), Paris, Hachette, 1841 [1827]; available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6564736b>. Some scholars trace the origin point for the (literary?) appearance of the bandit to L'Abbé de Germanes's historical treatise entitled *Histoire de la Corse et de ses révolutions, de l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, Chez Herissant, 3 volumes, 1771-1776; available online: https://www.google.com/books/edition/Histoire_De_La_Corse_Et_De_Ses_R%C3%A9voluti/QI9OAAAACAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0. While the use of the term "bandit" does occur in these historical texts, its usage most often appears in a legal or militaristic context in which the "bandit" is one who has fled imprisonment.

¹¹³ *Idem.*, p. 151.

¹¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 145.

For all the challenge posed by vengeance and insular norms of justice, and the fear and worry inspired by stories of banditry, Saint-Hilaire concludes that the cultural differences or frustrations are not deal breakers for future economic investment in the island, returning here to the overarching themes of economic investment and development on the island:

Il serait d'autant plus désirable de détruire cette terrible idée que l'on se fait en France des bandits de la Corse, que ce pays, entièrement neuf pour le voyageur, offre une mine féconde à exploiter. Les bateaux à vapeur, désirés et promis depuis si longtemps et si nécessaires pour le service des postes, y amenèrent sans doute quelque détachement de cette nuée de voyageurs qui quittent chaque année le ciel brumeux de l'Angleterre pour de doux climats. La France surtout, ce qui importe ici davantage, apprécierait mieux sa magnifique possession à mesure qu'elle la connaîtrait mieux, et l'esprit spéculatif et entreprenant qui caractérise les Marseillais ouvrirait à la Corse, dans un commerce encore à naître, de nouvelles sources de prospérité (p. 319).

Saint-Hilaire asks not that one forget about bandits, but that the “idée terrible” that has crystalized in the eyes of the French observer be corrected. Recentering and reorienting the discussion of banditry and of vengeance, as we have attempted to do alongside Saint-Hilaire, would open the doors to further economic investment in Corsica, both in terms of infrastructure (“le service des postes”) and tourism (“cette nuée de voyageurs...”), and both of which will be both lifelines and death knells for the survival of insular culture through the 21st century.

5. *Moving Towards Literature*

The *Lettres sur la Corse* can be read as a literary travel narrative. “Literary” not so much in style but in proximity to literature itself. The series was published in *Le Globe*, a literary review and journal, which at the time was an important outlet for the nascent Romantic literary movement of the 1820s: “Ce journal sérieux et modéré, libéral avant tout, s'empara du romantisme au point de vue théorique et philosophique, et, fidèle à ses principes, défendit six ans durant sa cause du

libéralisme en littérature, alors seulement protégé par les conservateurs politiques.”¹¹⁵ In terms of narrative fiction and its distribution, *Le Globe* was an early champion of Sir Walter Scott: “Presque à chaque page des feuilles périodiques, son nom s’étale et flamboie [...] Il n’y a pas d’écrivain dont le *Globe*, qui vient justement de se fonder, parle plus volontiers ni avec plus d’admiration.”¹¹⁶ Scott is also featured as a reference in Saint-Hilaire’s own work, as we see in the following example where Saint-Hilaire imagines several of Scott’s characters from the *Waverly* novels in a Corsican tableau:

Le foyer, dont nous occupions la place, tenait le milieu de l’appartement: fort heureusement il était éteint; car mes yeux ne sont pas encore habitués à la fumée comme ceux d’un paysan corse ou d’un montagnard du clan de MacGregor. La table était chargée d’une profusion de viandes de toute espèce, qui me rappela les déjeuners de Rob Roy et de Fergus Mac-Ivor; et en vérité, cette comparaison venait d’elle-même, au milieu de ces hommes demi-sauvages, tous parents, tous alliés, et ne faisant qu’un clan et qu’une famille (p. 294).

Saint-Hilaire further leans on the reference to Scott’s literary world as a means to convey the solemnness of a funeral: “La veillée se prolongea assez tard, et avec plus de sobriété qu’on n’en trouverait dans aucun pays du Nord: c’est la seule différence d’un clan corse avec un clan écossais” (p. 298).¹¹⁷ The references to Walter Scott are a teaser, a means to draw those who enjoy Scott’s bucolic vistas and social dramas into a new setting with new characters and intrigues. Whatever the reason for these insertions into the text of the *Lettres*, they push Saint-Hilaire’s collection into closer proximity to literary circles, interests, and most importantly, readers.

¹¹⁵ Théodore Ziesing, *Le Globe de 1824 à 1830, considéré dans ses rapports avec l’école romantique*, Zurich, C. M. Ebell, 1881, p. 59.

¹¹⁶ Louis Maigron, *Le Roman historique à l’époque romantique. Essai sur l’influence de Walter Scott*, Paris, Hachette, 1898 [1970], p. 114.

¹¹⁷ In the conclusion of the *Quatrième Lettre sur la Corse*, Saint-Hilaire leans again on Scott: “Cette fin un peu prosaïque d’une scène si imposante et si poétique me rappela involontairement la veillée des montagnards d’Écosse, le Coronach, je crois, que Walter Scott a si bien décrite” (p. 309).

The *Lettres sur la Corse* are a staging-grounds for Saint-Hilaire's later engagement with the stories, legends, and settings that are so magnificently explored in his own works, according to Eugène Gherardi, as well as those of others:

L'écriture épistolaire et diaristique permet à l'auteur de rassembler un matériau disparate: observations *de visu*, notes de lecture, impressions de voyage et carnets de route, réflexions et anecdotes, toute une grenaille qu'il ne peindra pas à trouver dans un pays saturé d'histoires. La lettre apparaît comme un des combustibles nécessaires au propulseur de l'écriture fictionnelle.¹¹⁸

While Gherardi focuses on the transition from the *Lettres sur la Corse* to the more substantial *Souvenirs de Corse*, I would argue that an analogous relationship between documentation and narration also exists *within* the space of a single letter. In other words, what Gherardi describes as a relationship between the two publications can be found within select letters themselves in which documentation (“observations *de visu*”) blends into story telling (“anecdotes”). The *Lettres sur la Corse* are written in such a way as to easily flow from one part to another, while both remain complementary to each other. This division is functional: for the reader to understand the circumstances and movements of what Saint-Hilaire shares in his anecdote, a preceding section relating substantive details and contextual information helps to achieve the comprehensibility of the funeral itself, both visually and culturally. Returning to the *Quatrième Lettre* will allow us to better conceptualize these movements and transitions within the space of a single letter than can then be extrapolated far afield, both within Saint-Hilaire's later works (as we will see shortly) and in the works of other writers in the same orbit around Corsica. This letter is divided into two parts: first, documentation of the outbreak of yellow fever, the author's prior knowledge about funerary traditions with some initial details about what to expect; secondly, the anecdote of his participation (as an observer) in the funerary rites and services.

¹¹⁸ Eugène F.-X. Gherardi, “Sur les chemins de Corse, un jeune romantique”, *La Corse d'Eugène Rosseeuw Saint Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits* (ed. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi), Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. “Les oubliés,” 2014, p. 24.

Saint-Hilaire seems to suggest as much as he excuses himself for the slow, laborious build-up to the anecdote itself:

Pardonnez-moi, M. l'éditeur, ce long préambule semi-médical: il a quelque rapport avec le récit d'une excursion dans les montagnes où j'ai été à même d'observer des mœurs intéressantes, parce qu'elles offrent quelque chose de naïf à la fois et de sauvage (p. 305).

What is most interesting in this passage is the way in which Saint-Hilaire himself describes the necessity to provide context clues *prior* to the story itself. Would the anecdote have been incomprehensible otherwise? Would the reader have not been able to experience the scene in the same ways as Saint-Hilaire without prior context clues? The hypothesis that I am attempting to advance here turns around the intricate, bidirectional (symbiotic) relationships of influence between travel narratives and storytelling: documentation, exploration, and *explanation*. All these elements are integral to the success of storytelling, of literature about Corsica during the Romantic generation, as Gherardi mentioned above, "La lettre apparaît comme un des combustibles nécessaires au propulseur de l'écriture fictionnelle." Within the various letters we have analyzed above, we can see the ways that aspects of daily life blend into worthy anecdotes and more developed stories. Perhaps this is the key to unlocking the importance of Saint-Hilaire's writing at this stage: the focus is not that he is the first to transmit images of banditry or of funerary traditions, as we have already seen, travel narratives have taken on that documentary responsibility; instead, Saint-Hilaire takes his observations and molds them into *stories* rather than commentary or observation. As we will see in the coming section, the growing interest in Corsica will produce new focal points and new stories, however their primacy will be questioned by the one who ushered them in, Saint-Hilaire himself.

III. *Writing and Rewriting in Saint-Hilaire's Souvenirs de Corse*

Corsica remains a continued source of fascination for Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire who moves from one writing project to another. In 1830, a series of publications¹¹⁹ appears in the *Revue de Paris* entitled, “Souvenirs de Corse.”¹²⁰ This series proposes a mixture of scenes recalling the years Saint-Hilaire spent on the island (1825-1829?) while also including episodes of historical fiction that return to the legendary leader of the resistance to the Genoese control during the 16th century, Sampiero Corso. From this perspective, the *Souvenirs de Corse* are a varied and diverse presentation of numerous aspects of Corsican culture, traditions, and history, like the content that we find scattered throughout the *Lettres sur la Corse*. At the same time, stories such as “La Trêve de Dieu” are much more focused on thematic content development, in this case a nail-biting conclusion to an inter-generational *vendetta*, while “Pesci Gianni” dives deeper into the supernatural legends and power animating the undercurrents of Corsican society. More than just the diversity and range of content, what is more remarkable about the *Souvenirs de Corse* is their direct engagement with the same myths and clichés that are being developed at the same time by other authors such as Honoré de Balzac and Prosper Mérimée, whose stories begin to solidify literary stereotypes related to familial honor and vengeance, despite either author having spent any meaningful time in these same communities. From this perspective, we will explore the *Souvenirs de Corse* as both a space of original creation at the same time as one of subversion or dissonance

¹¹⁹ Prior to the publication of the *Souvenirs de Corse*, two other narratives are published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*: 1.) “La folle de Bastilica” (août-octobre 1829, vol. 1, p. 264-272) and 2.) “Le lasso ou la vengeance corse (Tradition du XVI^e siècle)” (août-octobre 1829, vol. 1, p. 409-417). Both of these narratives are published in *La Corse d'Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits (1826-1831)* (ed. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi), *op. cit.*, p. 77-100.

¹²⁰ This title is also attributed to another serial publication in the literary journal *Le Papillon. Journal des dames, des salons, des arts, de la littérature, des théâtres et des modes*, signed by “F. D’Urville.” This journal first published this author’s narratives in Issue 17 (Aug. 28, 1832) and Issue 43 (Nov. 27, 1832). [Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k58323932>; accessed January 2019].

where Saint-Hilaire contests the foundations, myths, and scope of the stories of his contemporaries. However, it is their works that will persist in the decades that follow.

The Parisian literary journal *Le Globe* was a hub for Romantic literature where Saint-Hilaire's *Lettres sur la Corse* stood at the intersection of trends such as historical fiction, travel narrative, and the earliest fictional portrayals of contemporary Corsican communities. At the end of the 1820s, another literary journal becomes a central location for literature about Corsica, the *Revue de Paris*:

En 1829, deux récits aux thèmes semblables sont applaudis, lors de leur parution dans la *Revue de Paris*: *Vanina Vanini* de Stendhal (une jeune Romaine découvre un carbonaro dissimulé) et *Mateo Falcone* (un Corse tue son fils qui l'a déshonoré). Ces succès alimentent la vogue, en littérature, d'une Corse aux mœurs pittoresques, aux haines familiales légendaires, qui répondait au goût romantique pour la couleur locale, et au culte de Napoléon, alors très vivace.¹²¹

In addition to these publications, Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli documents a flurry of literary activity in the latter-half of the year 1829 that continues to mark this year as an important one for the literary visibility of Corsica:

En 1829, trois nouvelles et un drame, œuvres sombres et sanglantes, sont consacrés à la Corse. *Mateo Falcone* de Mérimée paraît en mai, le drame de Dulong, *La famille corse*, est représenté en juin, enfin la *Revue des Deux Mondes* publie de juillet à septembre deux Nouvelles de Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire à qui ont été attribuées les 'Lettres sur la Corse' du journal *Le Globe*.¹²²

In 1830, with the appearance of Saint-Hilaire's *Souvenirs de Corse*, we should also acknowledge Honoré de Balzac's novella *La Vendetta* that also deals with the particularity of Corsican vengeance and familial honor, although set in Paris, not Corsica.¹²³ While Saint-Hilaire certainly

¹²¹ Judith Rosenzweig, "Préface" to Honoré de Balzac, *La Vendetta* (ed. Judith Rosenzweig), Paris, Le Livre de Poche, coll. "Libretti," 2017, p. 9.

¹²² Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹²³ Cf. Kris Vassliev, *Le Récit de vengeance au XIXe siècle: Mérimée, Dumas, Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly*, Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Mirail, coll. "Cribles," 2008.

rubbed shoulders with literary celebrities-to-be, such as Mérimée and Balzac, his work subverts the primacy of the blood-soaked renderings of Corsican society through the lenses of banditry and of the *vendetta*, both of which had become literary tropes by the late-1820s. Drawing on his personal experiences all across Corsica, a trait that certainly distinguishes him from his contemporaries, Saint-Hilaire continues to share stories of contemporary Corsican communities that further nuance a reader's understanding of numerous aspects of social customs, in particular a bandit's choice to flee to the *maquis* and the implications of that gesture for familial honor. Our examination of the emblematic personages of the Corsican patriarch and the bandit will demonstrate the ways in which Saint-Hilaire sets apart *his* impressions and representations of these figures from those of his contemporaries. The dialogue that is crafted between competing interpretations and modes of representation points to the richness and vitality of Corsican traditions as ripe material for literary production.

1. *Guiding the Reader from Lettres sur la Corse to Souvenirs de Corse*

An important element of the singularity of Saint-Hilaire's contribution to the development of the Romantic literary image of Corsica during the early-to-mid-19th century is the connection between the *Lettres sur la Corse* and the *Souvenirs de Corse*. Historically, Saint-Hilaire is one of the only authors, if not the only, to create and sustain a series of narratives passing from one genre to another (from the epistolary to the short-form narrative), and across publication venues, during the early-19th century.¹²⁴ Here, we will see two brief examples of how the content of the *Lettres sur la Corse* is used as a springboard for longer narratives found in the *Souvenirs de Corse*.

¹²⁴ The notion of "series" of narratives is indeed one relevant to other authors of the 19th century. As we will see in Chapter 2, Gustave Flaubert has a series of works about Corsica – two short narrative fictions ("Matteo Falcône, ou deux cerceuils pour un proscrit" and "San Pietro Ornano", 1835-6), an unpublished travel narrative (*Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse*, 1840), and an undeveloped theatrical piece provisionally entitled "Sampier" whose traces date

In the *Deuxième Lettre sur la Corse*, the narrator describes the challenging economic situations of Corsican ports and the weak manufacturing and industrial economies of the island by signaling the recourse to traditional extractions of coral in zones far from the Corsican littoral waters: “Quelques faibles expéditions de bateaux corailleurs envoyés tous les ans sur la côte d’Afrique témoignent cependant de leur courage et de ce qu’ils pourraient faire, si un commerce plus étendu et plus lucratif s’ouvrait pour eux” (p. 326). While the fact that this passage specifically describes Corsicans as harvesters of coral far from their own shores, focusing on the broad picture of this industry in general, we can make the extrapolation to the short story entitled, “Pesce Gianni ou les pêcheurs de corail” (*Revue de Paris*, t. XX, p. 100-116). This narrative describes the Mediterranean coral harvesting industry from the perspectives of a Neapolitan fishing expedition to extract coral off the coast of the port of Ajaccio. The presence of these intruders into territorial waters forces a significant mobilization of defenses from local Corsicans, who pursue, but never capture the fisherman Pesce Gianni. Through the strength of his love for a Corsican woman, and

to at least 1845. We could also point to Alfonse Daudet’s group of three narratives that are set in Corsica included in *Lettres de mon moulin* (1869): “La phrase des Sanguinaires,” “L’Agonie de la *Sémillante*,” and “Les Douaniers.” Finally, to Guy de Maupassant, whose numerous short stories have stood the test of time, particularly, “La Vendetta (1883),” which portrays an older woman’s vengeance in a particular way: the raising of an attack dog used to kill and mutilate the body of her opponent. Curiously, however, I wonder to what extent Saint-Hilaire might have served as an intertext for Maupassant. In the *Deuxième Lettre*, Saint-Hilaire describes that some bandits trained dogs for attack: “Quand la loi pour eux n’est plus qu’oppression tout ce qui lui sert d’instrument devient un ennemi; ils mettent la société hors la loi, comme elle les y a mis; **ils chassent le gendarme, ils dressent leurs chiens à le reconnaître, à le flairer vivant, à le dévorer mort**” (p. 283, my emphasis).

aided by the magical properties of red coral,¹²⁵ he can return to Naples with his love and his supernatural riches.¹²⁶

A more elaborated and extended example of this intertextual relationship between Saint-Hilaire's various series comes at the end of the *Troisième Lettre sur la Corse* which discusses marriage arrangements and related rituals in a rural village:

Je crains avoir été trop long; et pourtant j'aurais eu encore à vous parler de la dot et du contrat de mariage. Ce sont les parents de la mariée qui demandent le marié; car la femme est beaucoup trop au-dessous de l'homme, pour qu'il songe à lui faire la cour (p. 299).

In a later letter, the *Sixième Lettre sur la Corse*, Saint-Hilaire picks up where he left his readers at the end of the *Troisième* and further explains his experience with “la dot et [le] contrat de mariage” with one example in particular (perhaps the same?) of a medical student who without a lucrative marriage would otherwise not be able to afford educational costs and contribute to the wellness of the community:

¹²⁵ In discussing the magico-religious superstitions of Corsican women in particular, François Robiquet in 1835 observes that coral was used as a talisman and as a guard against the *mauvais œil*: “Beaucoup de femmes croient encore au *mauvais œil*. Elles supposent que le regard et les éloges de certaines personnes ont une influence funeste, particulièrement sur les enfants, qu'ils frappent subitement de maladies mortelles. Celui qui a fait le mal peut le guérir, en crachant sur l'enfant qu'il a loué. On peut aussi neutraliser le maléfice, en parfumant cet enfant avec la fumée des branches d'olivier ou de palmier, qui ont été bénites le jour des Rameaux. Quelques épreuves également superstitieuses, font connaître s'il est réellement atteint du mauvais œil. L'enfant qui porte sur lui du corail en est préservé” (François G. Robiquet, *Recherches historiques et statistiques sur la Corse*, Paris, 1835, p. 405-6; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6558789f>).

¹²⁶ Fishing in the littoral zones of other countries, regions, and continents was a common practice in the western Mediterranean basin during the 19th century: “The role of Italian fishermen was important for providing the impetus for fishing in different areas of the Mediterranean in the nineteenth century. For instance, in Provence, fishing was usually done and controlled by immigrants, especially Italians. At Sette, while the fishermen of the lagoon were locals, those who fished in the sea were Italians from Genoa, Naples, and Calabria, and Italians founded several coastal settlements in Corsica [...] Later, the French conquest of Algeria, rich in fish, coral, and sponges, prompted many fishermen, especially Neapolitans and Genoese, to settle there. In 1830, after the French had captured Algiers, the waters of Algiers saw boats from Sardinia, Tuscany, Naples, Sicily, and so on” (Annalisa Marzano, *Harvesting the Sea: The Exploitation of Marine Resources in the Roman Mediterranean*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, series “Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy,” 2013, p. 85). Continuing to elaborate the historical background information for fishing in foreign littoral zones, Eugène F.-X. Gherardi describes an important struggle with fishing in far-off locations – the free-spirited nature of Corsicans themselves: “On s'est étonné de voir les bateaux corses aller pêcher le corail sur les côtes de Barbarie, tandis que les Napolitains viennent le recueillir en abondance sur les rives même de la Corse; mais les patrons indigènes qui le recueillaient autrefois s'étant aperçus que, par suite du sentiment d'indépendance naturel au Corse, leurs équipages désertaient sans cesse, ont voulu éloigner la tentation, et ont préféré des expéditions plus lointaines, mais d'un résultat plus certain” (*La Corse d'Eugène Rosseuw Saint-Hilaire, op. cit.*, p. 326, note 4).

Et la science étant à beaucoup meilleur marché en Italie qu'en France, il va de soi-même que c'est en Italie, à Pise ou à Rome, qu'émigre le montagnard qui reviendra veiller à la santé des habitants de son village [...] La plupart des jeunes gens qui se destinent à la médecine, trop pauvres pour réunir la faible somme nécessaire à leur voyage, se marient même avant l'âge, et la dot de l'épouse couvre les frais de l'université (p. 328-9).

The premise then of *la dot* in the case of the medical student mentioned here is that the future financial stability offered by a medical degree is used as leverage to secure the marriage arrangement.

It is important to keep in mind that the above passages are pulled from the *Lettres sur la Corse* which are presented as a documentary epistolary sequence from the observer-narrator-traveler who is present in Corsica. With that detail in mind, the reader can suppose that these types of marriage arrangements are indeed possible in certain familiar circumstances across different, and perhaps wealthier, communities in Corsica. With an eye on the contribution to the Romantic literary image of Corsica, in addition to providing Continental readers with these documentary details, Saint-Hilaire also sets a foundation for the contextualized use of these social hierarchies in later fictions, and as a case in point, the narrative published in the *Souvenirs de Corse*, “La dot de l'étudiant ou compte sur le mariage” (*Revue de Paris*, 1830, tome XVII).

“La dot de l'étudiant” presents a similar narrative as the situation already described in the *Lettres sur la Corse*: a young man from modest means, Gerò Caïtucoli, excels in all his academic pursuits and rises through the ranks of his class. Gerò falls in love with his beloved Rosa, and later seeks to attend medical school in Pisa on the condition of a financial guarantee offered by a *dot* from Rosa's family. The plot twists when the fiancée, Rosa, reveals that she is pregnant. The situation spirals out of control as accusations of adultery run wild and “le tribunal de famille” is organized by Gerò's father to bring *Corsican* justice to the situation. This call to action fails when Gerò admits that he is the father. All is forgiven and the union later celebrated, “Rosa colla sa joue

fraîche sur les joues tannées du vieux Corse, honteux et ravi de se trouver grand-père” (p. 142). Even though both Gerò and Rosa are the integral components of the narrative action, it is the father, the patriarch, who is at the center of the narrative and whose evolution is most remarkable.

2. *Recasting the Rage of the Patriarch*

“La dot de l’étudiant¹²⁷” is indeed suspenseful – the revelation of Gerò’s identity as the father, and the ways he attempts to throw his family members off his trail is quite an engaging read, but there is more to this short story that meets the eye. Under the plot point of supposed sexual promiscuity and a subsequently revealed pre-marital sexual relationship lies an example of Saint-Hilaire’s subversion of prevailing representations of vengeance, and that born of a father’s immodest rage and anger. Saint-Hilaire proposes a counterweight to the Romantic image of the unwavering Corsican patriarch¹²⁸ in the depiction of the père Caïtucoli whose ire meets its match in the unwavering convictions of his son, Gerò, and his wife, Rosa.

We mentioned earlier that the narrator witnesses a family tribunal called for by the père Caïtucoli in response to claims of Rosa’s sexual impropriety. The tribunal serves to avoid application of the French *Code pénal*:

- Mais les lois, dit timidement la vieille mère [de Gerò]?
- Les lois! reprit le montagnard en montrant l’escopette, voilà toutes celles que la Corse connaissait avant le code français et, du temps de cette justice-là, m’est avis, on ne voyait pas tant de juges prévaricateurs et de femmes adultères. (p. 135).

¹²⁷ *Revue de Paris*, t. XVII, 1830 (July?), p. 139-57;

available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57752441/f144.item.r=Revue%20de%20Paris%201830>

¹²⁸ Here, I am referring to the depictions of a central father figure as seen in Mérimée’s *Mateo Falcone* (1829) and Balzac’s *La Vendetta* (April 1830). In the stories of both authors, the patriarch is singularly responsible for the fate of their child: Mateo Falcone, tied by honor and tradition, executes his son for his transgression of the sacred law of asylum (and perhaps as well for betraying a Corsican to a member of the *Voltigeurs corses*); in Balzac’s narrative, Monsieur Piomboro is unrelenting in his refusal to acknowledge his daughters love for a member of an enemy family (who Piomboro wants to eliminate entirely) only adds fuel to the fire of the family feud that ultimately leads to the death of the Piomboro family.

Wielding the *escopette*, a type of handgun, the father asserts himself as the judge, jury, and potential executioner of the accused, but *not* without first hearing from the accused: “Jamais Pietro Cautucoli n’a condamné quelqu’un sans l’entendre. Va me chercher la jeune fille” (p. 133). Despite the previous disavowal of the French penal system, and the rebuke that the *Code civil* serves as no deterrent to dishonorable behaviors, Saint-Hilaire sets up this scene to show that vengeance is still a process or system committed to uncovering the truth: honorable vengeance is *not* an unprincipled reaction to blind rage. Gerò’s father explains this process: “Gerò, mon fils, dit-il au jeune homme d’une voix impassible, que fait un Corse quand on l’a offensé? ‘Il se venge, mon père, replit vivement le jeune homme’” (p. 136-7). Gerò, who slowly comes to understand the gravity of the situation and the potential for a disastrous conclusion, responds for Rosa when asked who the parent of the child is: “*Sono io il padre di questa creatura*” [I am the father of the child].¹²⁹

This admission of pre-marital sexual intercourse and consequential pregnancy disarms the patriarch and reveals the importance of this narrative as one writing against the traditional representation of the ruthless paternal figure. It is the association of this personage that Saint-Hilaire’s narrative engages most directly: the *connotation* of the ruthless Corsican man whose need for vengeance exceeds his willingness to negotiate with the truth. My hypothesis is that Saint-Hilaire effectively publishes a subversive counterweight to the portrait of the Corsican patriarch featured in Prosper Mérimée’s short story “Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse.”¹³⁰ Even though there

¹²⁹ This sentence is composed in Italian, not Corsican, which relates perhaps better to the circumstance that Gerò’s medical education takes place in Pisa. This is a peculiar circumstance because contrary to what Eugène F.-X. Gherardi suggests in his introduction to his edited volume of the collected works, Saint-Hilaire *also* includes expressions and phrases that are in fact Italian, not just Corsican. The linguistic similarity is well understood but it is not appropriate to equate each language with one another, even if the Corsican language is closer to Italian than it is to French.

¹³⁰ The sources of *Mateo Falcone* have long piqued the interest of scholars. In the early 1920s, a spirited academic debate ensues between G. Courtilier and Gustave Charlier as they return to the question of Mérimée’s source materials. Courtilier arguing that Mérimée most certainly drew from numerous sources: “Le thème de Mateo Falcone se trouve dès le XVIIIe siècle chez Germanes et chez Gaudin où probablement Renucci, Benson et d’autres encore l’ont repris directement ou non. Mais il est impossible d’affirmer à qui d’entre eux Mérimée l’a emprunté. On peut soutenir par contre qu’au moment où Mérimée compose sa nouvelle, aucun de ces auteurs n’est sur sa table. Et si l’on

are no traces of Saint-Hilaire's correspondence or preparatory documents, the coincidence of publication for both stories in the *Revue de Paris* ought to give a moment's pause.

In Mérimée's narrative, the father, Mateo Falcone, executes his son, Fortunato, for betraying the trust of a bandit who sought refuge in their home, violating the sacred right of refuge. The mother of Fortunato pleads to Mateo for his mercy:

Giuseppa courut après Mateo et lui saisit le bras. — C'est ton fils, lui dit-elle d'une voix tremblante en attachant ses yeux noirs sur ceux de son mari, comme pour lire ce qui se passait dans son âme. — Laisse-moi, répondit Mateo: je suis son père.¹³¹

In "La dot de l'étudiant," a very similar confrontation occurs between the father and the son, however with the intervention of both his mother, and Rosa:

Le vieux Caïtucoli, stupéfait de cette audace, ne prononça pas une parole, mais son visage basané se couvrit d'une pâleur livide: il mordit sa lèvre, indice certain de vengeance chez les peuples méridionaux, et sa main chercha convulsivement le manche de son stylet. Gerò ne recula point, mais un cri de terreur s'échappa de toutes les bouches; Rosa, toujours dévouée, lui fit un rempart de son corps; et la vieille mère, au risque de sa vie, osa retenir le bras de son mari (p. 140).

veut une hypothèse fort plausible, en l'absence de tout témoignage émanant de l'auteur même, on pourrait supposer que Mérimée n'a fait que mettre en œuvre une note qu'un ami, studieux lecteur, lui aurait communiquée, ou un récit, une de ces gibernes familières aux gens qui ont voyagé en pays étranger, qu'il aurait entendu raconté" (G. Courtillier, "L'inspiration de *Mateo Falcone*," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1920, p. 167; available online: www.jstor.org/stable/40518196). Charlier takes significant issue with these claims, asserting that in fact, Mérimée most likely drew his inspiration and source material from Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, author of "Des devoirs de la France envers la Corse" which appeared in July 1828 in the *Revue Trimestrielle*: "M. Courtillier n'a pas, en effet, rassemblé toutes les versions du conte des déserteurs. L'une d'elles lui a échappé, et, pour comble de malchance, c'est précisément la seule dont on peut affirmer, sans le moindre doute, qu'elle a été connue de l'auteur de *La Guzla*. Au commencement de 1828, Alexandre Buchón prenait la direction d'un périodique nouveau: la *Revue trimestrielle*. Son ami Mérimée ne devait pas tarder à y collaborer: il y publiait dès le mois d'avril un fragment de sa *Jacquerie* encore inédite. Or, dans le cahier suivant, celui de juillet 1828, voyait le jour une longue étude intitulée *Des devoirs de la France envers la Corse*. Elle y précédait immédiatement un curieux article de Stendhal. Comment serait-elle demeurée ignorée de celui que Henri Beyle se plaisait à appeler "son élevé Gazul"? A propos des livres récents du baron de Beaumont et de Réallier-Dumas, ainsi que de la *Dinomachia*, poème héroï-comique de Salvador Viale, ces pages exposaient avec force détails et sur un ton sympathique la situation matérielle et morale de Tile et de ses habitants. Elles ne sont pas signées, la *Revue trimestrielle* imposant l'anonymat à ses collaborateurs, mais peut-être ne serait-il pas impossible d'en déterminer l'auteur. Ce qui importe davantage, c'est qu'on y peut lire l'anecdote qui allait fournir à Mérimée le thème de sa nouvelle" (Gustave Charlier, "La source principale de *Matéo Falcone*", *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1921, p. 341; available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40518284>)¹³¹ Prosper Mérimée, "Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse," in *Mateo Falcone, La Vénus d'Ille, Colomba* (ed. Patrick Berthier), Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Folio Classique," 1999, p. 41.

The *vieux Caïtucoli* wants to deliver justice, as it is required in this situation, according to his understanding of tradition and of principle. Placing this narrative situation in its literary historical context, Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli observes:

La transgression de l'interdit d'aimer, sujet banal en littérature, devient dans le milieu corse transgression du code de l'honneur, source de vengeance et de mort. Les références répétées à l'honneur et à la passion confèrent aux personnages, et en particulier au personnage du père corse, une certaine grandeur qui n'est pas exempte de férocité.¹³²

We can *see* the rage building up within père Caïtucoli: “son visage basané se couvrit d'une pâleur livide”; “il mordit sa lèvre”; “sa main chercha convulsivement le manche de son stylet.”¹³³ His rage, however, stops there—it does not lend to action. He concedes the silence of his son and the protests of his mother and Rosa, and shifts to a recognition of and appreciation for whom his son has become: “Ce courage de son fils, cette fierté d'homme et de Corse, qu'il n'avait pas soupçonnée en lui, le révoltait et le charmait en même temps; il aurait voulu l'étrangler, et pourtant il était fier de lui!” (p. 141).

In the classical sense of the expression, this narrative could have been a tragedy—the hero murdered by his father, leaving Rosa and her future child alone. Instead, Saint-Hilaire takes a different route to distance his work from another violent portrayal of a Corsican father imposing “justice” on his son—he appends a comedic conclusion where a laugh or smile breaks the tension built up across the story. The question, though is, *why*? The behavior of the *père Caïtucoli* is unconventional precisely because his anger does not morph into physical violence and frustrates the “need” for vengeance as an element of the narrative structured around a Corsican family. The

¹³² Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹³³ The facial features expressing rage and the attempt to re-arm himself will also anchor Gustave Flaubert's portraits of the bandit in his narrative *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cerceils pour un proscrit* (1835) and *San Pietro Ornano* (1836). These two works will be discussed at length in the following chapter and will continue to explore the extent to which intertextuality fuels the development of literary representations of Corsican communities during the 1830s. In this case, the discussion might tilt more towards an example of direct citation.

conclusion of Saint-Hilaire's story is then ironic because of its reversal of a deeply rooted *connotation* that is already closely associated with an enraged and vengeful Corsican father. From that, I argue, Saint-Hilaire subverts literary representations of Corsican communities at an early stage in their development. A similar strategy of departure from nascent archetypes and stereotypes is also at play in the much longer narrative, "Le déjeuner du bandit," which recounts the narrator's atypical run-in with a bandit that will alter our own conceptions of not only the bandit's background, but also more importantly, his humanity.

3. *Disrupting the Bandit Narrative: "Le Déjeuner du bandit" and the Charming Outlaw*

A few years pass between the publication of the *Cinquième Lettre sur la Corse* and the appearance of Saint-Hilaire's shorty, "Le déjeuner du bandit," in the *Revue de Paris* in 1831. It is an autodiegetic account of the narrator's encounter with Gallucchio¹³⁴, an active bandit in the Fiumboro region of eastern Corsica (in the area surrounding the coastal cities Aléria and Ghisonnacia) during the mid-to-late 1820s. The narrator encounters Gallucchio while he is *en route* to his father's funeral service after which he is expected to offer a reception to the congregants.¹³⁵ As we will see, the central focus of this narrative is not so much the shared

¹³⁴ The *Cinquième Lettre* makes direct reference to the protagonist of his bandit narrative, "Gallucchio": "Gallucchio, est, dit-on, actuellement en Grèce et y emploie plus dignement un courage qu'il réhabilite par une si belle cause" (p. 318). The narrative bridge between the *Lettres sur la Corse* and the *Souvenirs de Corse* is even more clearly established when the central plot element of "Le déjeuner du bandit" (the bandit-turned-guide) is offered at the conclusion of the *Cinquième Lettre*: "Un Français, surtout s'il est employé, peut parcourir l'île entière et désirer plutôt que craindre de les rencontrer [les bandits]; car il trouvera en eux des guides obligeants, souvent même des compagnons de voyage agréables" (p. 318-9). Referencing the Greek Wars of Independence (1821-1825) that attracted many Corsican mercenaries, see Stephen Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict, and Banditry in Nineteenth Century Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 348. This historical detail will be a crucial element of our subsequent discussion of Marc Biancarelli's engagement with the bandit narrative in Chapter 3 of the dissertation.

¹³⁵ Eugène F.-X. Gherardi makes the observation that Gallucchio (also known as Giuseppe Antomarchi) was a known associate of Théodore Poli's network of bandits in the Fiumboro region of Corsica: "Galluchju bascule dans l'engrenage du banditisme, multiplie les exactions, donnant la mort pour se maintenir en vie. Il se lie d'amitié avec Teodoro Poli, le 'roi des bandits,' et s'érige en redresseur de torts" (E. Gherardi, "Sur les chemins de Corse, un jeune romantique," *op. cit.*, p. 208, n. 4). An interesting connection indeed that might have also inspired Marc Biancarelli's

adventures of the two characters, as it is the realization of the narrator's errors of misperception and prejudicial assumptions of Gallucchio's backstory and of banditry in general.

Physical appearances are disorienting. Gallucchio is not what one would expect from a fugitive bandit in 19th-century Corsica – his elegant dress and clean-shaven face clash with the fear inspired by his rifle:

Malgré le fusil qu'il portait, compagnon inséparable du Corse dans toutes ses excursions, son extérieur n'avait rien qui fût fait pour inspirer la crainte: c'était un homme d'une trentaine d'années, à la taille exiguë, à la jambe sèche et grêle, à la démarche agile comme le cheval que je montais. Son costume moitié montagnard, moitié citadin, se composait d'une veste courte de poil de chèvre, vêtement ordinaire du paysan corse; mais un collet de velours noir, une chemise de percale très fine et très blanche au lieu de la chemise de grosse taille que l'on ne change pas même tous les dimanches, enfin un pantalon de drap fin et des bottines qui annonçaient certaines prétentions à l'élégance. Un menton fraîchement rasé écartait toute idée de *vendetta* pour quiconque connaît le vieil usage corse (p. 204; emphasis in the original).

The narrator's peculiar interest in Gallucchio's beard signals two possibilities for the status of a *vendetta* as Stephen Wilson has meticulously observed: "Not cutting the beard was of course both a sign of general mourning and of a vengeance unfulfilled."¹³⁶ The mosaic of clothing and accessories destabilizes the narrator because the features and accessories are incongruent with what he expected from a Corsican bandit: "son extérieur n'avait rien qui fût fait pour inspirer la crainte." The eclectic combination of his clothing which the narrator observes as, "moitié montagnard, moitié citadin," is at first understood as an attempt to wear the clothing styles of the time and to associate his personage with the values and cultural norms of urban society, while at the same time refusing to totally abandon his traditional accessories: "le fusil qu'il portait" and

Orphelins de dieu (Actes Sud, 2014) and a secondary character named Joseph Antomarchi, the lieutenant of Théodore Poli...

¹³⁶ Stephen Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 399. Wilson's presentation of numerous other travel narratives from the time period suggests that the relationship between facial hair and mourning was not as simple as shaven or not-shaven. It seems that the emphasis on letting a beard grow as a mourning practice was to let it grow unkempt and disheveled.

“une veste courte de poil de chèvre.” The description of his clothing is certainly amusing, funny even – but perhaps there is more than meets the eye. Saint-Hilaire’s presentation of Gallucchio puts forth the complexity of the individual and of his circumstances, breaking with the rigid archetype and stereotypes that have come to define the outer shell of the individual bandit as one of deeply engrained criminality. In this presentation, and in similar passages that we will approach in our discussions of works by Gustave Flaubert and the contemporary Corsican author Marc Biancarelli, clothing becomes a symbol of Corsican cultural diversity as well a tool to question power dynamics. Moreover, clothing comes to serve as the entry point to an individual’s relationship to a bandit because of the externalized form of identification. Despite his own doubts and questions, the narrator holds to his suspicions, keeps up his guard up and remains attuned to Gallucchio’s movements: “seulement deux petits yeux gris, singulièrement mobiles donnaient à son visage une expression inquiète et qui allait parfois jusqu’à la menace” (p. 205).

In addition to the eclectic physical appearance of Gallucchio for the narrator, the ease of conversation and its interests are just as surprising and unexpected because they point to the depth of his character: “Mon compagnon de voyage développa les vues les plus neuves et les connaissances les plus variées: la population de chaque canton, ses ressources, les intérêts du pays, ceux même de l’administration française, et jusqu’à notre code, tout paraissait lui être familier” (p. 205-6).¹³⁷ The familiarity with the “code,” the *Code pénal*, that is used to justify the eradication of the *vendetta*, is hardly surprising and is actually quite entertaining—just imagine the scene! Both interlocutors understand the situation that the *Code* creates for those who hold fast to “le vieil usage corse” of the *vendetta*, but it is the one threatened with arrest that is the least of all concerned with it: “il n’avait pas contre la société et ses lois l’irritation d’un homme qu’on pouvait croire en

¹³⁷ The use of the possessive adjective *notre* is worth noting as it implies the cultural separation that still categorizes Corsica and Corsicans as “not French,” a determination based squarely on a geographical claim.

guerre avec elle” (p. 206). In addition to Gallucchio’s avowed understanding of the *Code pénal*, he also makes pure mockery of the bureaucratic system by using his own wax seal for letters to submit his own authority, if not sovereignty, for his person and for his movements—regarding a letter written to local church officials for the organization of the funeral for his father: “Puis ma signature avec mon timbre, c’est-à-dire deux poignards en croix. Le sceau du roi n’est pas plus respecté dans l’île” (p. 212). This sense of earned-respect and self-entitlement is later seen when Gallucchio enters the church and sits in the back row of the funeral services: “un triple rempart de bonnes femmes nous dérobaient aux regards: à leurs coups d’œil inquiets, à leurs signes de croix redoublés, on eût dit que Satan venait d’entrer dans le saint lieu; mais mon compagnon s’inquiétait assez peu de la ressemblance; peut-être l’eût-elle amusé s’il y avait pensé” (p. 210). How can we reconcile that the appearance of the bandit inside of the church inspires such solicitous a response from the others gathered there, all the while the narrator is still only slightly on edge? The reactions of the female parishioners ought also to be read into the frame of our own discussion for what they suggest about the images, predispositions, and assumptions about the character of the bandit and the nature of the *vendetta*. This situation would point to the concern about what Gallucchio *might do* and without warning, regardless of what clothing he wears (signing the cross is then a preventative measure).

The reactions of the narrator and parishioners allow us to return to our discussion of principled violence in the framework of honor. In his initial description of the bandit, the narrator points to the presence of Gallucchio’s rifle as a potential risk for himself. The parishioners who sign the cross also acknowledge the potential for violence simply because of the bandit’s presence. It would seem that both reactions rest on the premise that at moment gunfire might erupt and that violence is the result of a shift of fancy, a whim. Taking on the life of a bandit is not the result of

blind rage or unrestrained emotion, as Gallucchio explains, “une vengeance de Corse et de bandit ne se rassasie pas pour si peu” (p. 214). Saint-Hilaire’s careful construction of presence and presentation makes the reader smile and as a result, the eclectic costumes and assertive nonchalance disarm the situation and put at least the narrator at ease.

The comedic circumstances come to an end when Gallucchio must confront a violation of familial honor whose expiation might risk his own life. Exploring the depths of a bandit’s honor and commitment to family, Saint-Hilaire inserts a secondary plot arc in his narrative that puts Gallucchio to task in a situation where familial honor is transgressed and later restored. The vignette recounts the aftermath of a sexual assault against a woman named Tonina, who is betrothed to “un de ses parents, le plus habile tireur à la barbe la plus épaisse de l’endroit” (p. 222) to settle a long-waged family *vendetta*. During a walk through the forest, she is assaulted by “un de ces vauriens qui déshonorent l’habit de montagnard” (*ibid.*) and when questioned, she wrongly identifies Gallucchio as her assailant (who has taken on Gallucchio’s appearance as a disguise). The real Gallucchio takes to the *maquis* “en bonne et légitime guerre; mais il n’attaque pas de jeunes filles, il ne fait pas la guerre à ses compatriotes, il ne met pas une *pieve* [paroisse] à feu et à sang pour deux yeux noirs, fussent-ils aussi beaux que ceux de Tonina” (*ibid.*). Based on the previous description of the assailant, Gallucchio is able to correctly identify the actual perpetrator: “c’était un misérable, un voleur de chèvres, qui n’aurait pas eu assez de courage pour faire un bandit” (p. 226). Gallucchio makes the important distinction between living as a thief and a criminal and retreating to the *maquis* as a bandit. The critical difference hinges on the finality of the retreat itself: to protect oneself as a petty criminal; or, to protect societal values and customs, as the earlier discussion of Théodore Poli concluded. To this end, José Gil observes that even though in the *maquis*, the bandit is still an engaged social actor: “au maquis, il ne fait que continuer

la vendetta, s'attaquant uniquement à ses ennemis, étant un homme parfaitement honnête.”¹³⁸ As a means to restore the honor of Tonina, Gallucchio devises the clever scheme to momentarily betroth her to her assailant then kill him so that she becomes quickly thereafter a widow: “la jeune fille [...] se trouva fille, femme et veuve en un jour; elle hérita de tout ce que la justice voulut bien ne pas prendre du patrimoine de son mari qui n'avait pas eu le temps de lui laisser beaucoup de regrets” (p. 228).

The case of Tonina and Gallucchio could by itself have made for an interesting narrative, but that it is inserted into the larger frame of “Le déjeuner du bandit,” as a short *récit encadré*, or story within a story, puts into question its function and use for the larger narrative itself; perhaps even more so for the narrative series *Souvenirs de Corse*. As mentioned previously, the thrust of Saint-Hilaire's short story is the honorable aspect of banditry, “car on peut être bandit et avoir des mœurs” (p. 225). Living the roughneck lifestyle that Gallucchio enjoys is not a disqualification for a moral, principle-bound way of life. Even though armed, opposed to French administration at the policy level, and with already numerous murders under his belt (“J'en suis au quarantième, je crois; je l'ai atteint au cœur avant-hier, comme il dormait appuyé sur un arbre...”, p. 224), his recourse to fatal violence is with cause and with justice in mind, even if that is “justice à la Corse” (*ibid.*). While this “justice” is different in scope and in form with respect to normative systems of law and order, the *vendetta* is nevertheless grounded in a set of principled actions motivated by honor and the pursuit of justice that restores social equilibrium: “La vendetta vise à établir l'équilibre entre morts et vivants; et à travers lui, l'équilibre entre deux groupes sociaux.”¹³⁹ Returning to José Gil's proposition of viewing banditry as a system maintaining equilibrium or stasis in Corsican society, the perspective offered here underscores the *vendetta* as a form of restorative justice that brings

¹³⁸ José Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

peace and calm back to the middle (although at the potential cost of significant bloodshed and death).

“Le déjeuner du bandit” offers an important perspective of the ways that literary representations of Corsican communities and traditions are designed and contested during the early-19th century. With its earlier preparation in the *Lettres sur la Corse*, this narrative offers to the reader numerous avenues for engagement with Corsican communities and traditions (*les bandits d'honneur*, religious beliefs, social hierarchies, etc.) that go beyond the constraints of the one-track *vendetta* narratives that dominate depictions of Corsica during this same period, and during our own.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

In the 19th century, however, Corsica is not a fictional setting, but it is nevertheless *turned into* a space of fiction, as Alexandra Bezert further observes broadly:

Les spécificités culturelles et la singularité de l'île en font un théâtre particulier qui a poussé un grand nombre d'écrivains 'extérieurs' à la prendre pour cadre de récit. Prosper Mérimée, dans *Colomba*, ne pouvait situer son récit qu'en Corse, île dont les mœurs sont le sujet même de l'intrigue.¹⁴¹

While the intrigue generated by the practice of banditry, of intense funerary rites and customs, and of the particularity of the *vendetta*, might provide fruit for a deeply engrossing read, the success of a literary portrayal is not without risk for the community depicted: “Or, lorsque l'image archétypale se superpose à la réalité observée, elle devient stéréotype et risque de tomber dans

¹⁴⁰ One could point to numerous graphic novels and films: René Pétillon, *Enquête corse* (graphic novel, 2000); Jacques Audiard (dir.), *Un prophète* (film, 2009); Daniel Blancou, Patrice Camberou, François Pottier, *Sous le feu corse. L'enquête du juge des pailloles*, Paris, Futuropolis, 2016; Antoine Albertini, *Malamorte*, Paris, JC Lattès, 2019 and *Banditi*, with the same editor in 2020.

¹⁴¹ Alexandra Bezert, “Influence réciproques de récits littéraires,” in *Les possibilités d'une île* (dir. Éric Fougères), Paris, Éditions Pétra, coll. “Des îles,” 2014 p. 198.

l'idée reçue, lieu commun posant la question de 'déformation' de la culture originelle par la littérature."¹⁴² Something is weakened in the exchange of views resulting from the proliferation of publications about Corsica in the 1820s. Saint-Hilaire is even surprised at the disconnect he experiences between the pastoral settings he is familiar with in literature and what lies before him in Corsica: "Ce qui m'étonna le plus fut de n'y trouver aucune simplicité" (p. 296).

Our analysis and study of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's epistolary and narrative cycle has focused on its existence as a laboratory of creation and contestation of some literary representations of Corsica that developed during the early-19th century. Saint-Hilaire proposes dynamic and vibrant depictions of Corsican communities that become more approachable for Continental readers. The ports of Ajaccio and Bastia, alongside the interior mountainous regions of Corte, are worlds that are made relatable for the Metropolitan reader but still retain their individual singularity and exotic novelty. Broadening the scope of the reader's experience with Corsican communities, the *Lettres sur la Corse* present numerous additional prisms through which daily life, economic circumstances, and cultural traditions of littoral and mountain-based communities are viewed. These *Lettres* offer the reader new imagery and lexical associations to deeply experience Corsica. Saint-Hilaire's narrative cycle *Souvenirs de Corse* expands and fully develops the cultural anecdotes offered in the *Lettres*. Additionally, these narratives propose alternative perspectives to prevailing and prejudicial assumptions, for example that blood violence and rage are the norm in insular communities, as we explored in the short story, "La dot de l'étudiant."

In the short-term, Gustave Flaubert will have to square what he has read about Corsica with his own experiences while traveling through the *maquis* and the mountains from Ajaccio to Bastia.

¹⁴² *Idem.*, p. 202.

He will experience the warm hospitality of individuals resembling more the amiable Gallucchio than the fearsome Théodore Poli (although he is deeply enamored by the legendary figure). The world the young traveler constructs for himself through his reading will collide with the one he experiences. Several decades later, Marc Biancarelli will return to the question of the “origine du mal” in Corsica, with a particular eye on banditry and the ways in which Corsican communities contributed to their own degradation, seemingly confirming what Saint-Hilaire argued all along – the “origine du mal” is “un peu de leur faute.”

CHAPTER 2

Approaching Alterity: Gustave Flaubert's Corsican Corpus (1835-1845)

Car c'est là voyager! On arrive dans un lieu, des amitiés se lient,
 et à l'heure où elles vont s'accomplir, tout se défait,
 et l'on sème ainsi partout quelque chose de son cœur.¹⁴³
Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) is well known for *Madame Bovary* (1857), *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869), and for the work that only his death interrupted, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1880). In these three cornerstones of 19th-century French literature, a common thread can be found to unite them all: the frustration felt with being handcuffed by life's circumstances, and more particularly by *where* one lives. Emma Bovary dreams of excursions and adventures in Paris that would provide the much-needed escape from her Norman isolation; Frédéric Moreau evades the difficulties of his life by escaping to Paris, St. Cloud, and the forest of Fontainebleau; the *deux bonshommes* Bouvard and Pécuchet can no longer stand to live in the modernizing Paris of the early 1840s so they move to Chavignolles.

Like his literary characters, early in his life Flaubert too suffers from the imprisonment that his Norman surroundings impose, referring to his hometown as, "cette huître de Rouen."¹⁴⁴ Unable to physically flee, Flaubert turns towards literature even at a young age, as both consumer and producer, as a means of escape; these various writing projects together form his *Œuvres de jeunesse*, unpublished writings of diverse genres (historical drama, expository essays, narrative fictions) composed during the period from 1831-1845. Critical attention to this collection of early writings has often focused on the long-narratives *Novembre* (1842) and *L'Éducation sentimentale*

¹⁴³ Gustave Flaubert, "Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse" in *Œuvres de jeunesse* (eds. Claudine Gothot-Mersch and Guy Sagnes), Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," t. 1, 2001, p. 714. References to this volume will occur in the body of the paragraph, signaled as *OCI* followed by the page number.

¹⁴⁴ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (ed. Jean Bruneau), *op. cit.*, p. 45. All future citations to this volume will occur in the body paragraph as *Corr. I* followed by the page number.

(1845) as prototypes to later published novels *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869).¹⁴⁵

In Flaubert's *Œuvres de jeunesse*, two short stories and a travel narrative coincide with a small number of diary entries (*journal intime*) to treat Corsica as a source of inspiration and as a literary setting. Along with several letters and a *brouillon* for a theatrical play entitled, "Sampier," these various pieces drafted between 1835-1845 combine to form what I propose to consider as the *Dossier Corse* that reflects Flaubert's sustained attention, interest, and meditation on Corsica as an object of literary inspiration. More than just a site of personal reflection, the *Dossier Corse* continues to reveal the vibrant connections between narrative fictions and travel narratives that represent Corsican cultural and environmental landscapes. Like the ways in which literature informed how Flaubert writes about Corsica without having seen it with his own eyes, literature too will inform how he travels across the island and what he hopes to find in its shadows. How will Flaubert position his own visions in relationship to what has preceded him? What will come of the confrontation between the communities portrayed in Romantic literature and Flaubert's personal, physical experience in these same places?

Two short narratives *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit* and *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)*, both composed between 1835-1836, serve as starting points in this discussion of when and how the fascination for Corsican landscapes, traditions, and history take root in Flaubert's early literary production. In a study of Flaubert's narrative fictions that precede his travel to Corsica, I will examine the ways in which the Corsican thematic materializes within Flaubert's early writings and how this vision relates to previously published narratives by other authors with similar thematic scope. Drawing heavily on intertextual research and analysis, I argue

¹⁴⁵ *Novembre. Fragments de style quelconque* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* in *OC I* p. 757-831 and p. 833-1080, respectively.

that Flaubert draws significant inspiration from Romantic depictions of Corsican traditions, in particular of banditry, to offer his readers a lens through which to view an island that he had not yet seen.

The second half of this chapter will focus on Flaubert's 1840 travel narrative *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse*. I first approach the travel narrative through its potential literary relationships, as a well-situated genre of the Romantic period, again highlighting intertextual relationships that show the scope of influence for narrative fictions of the Romantic generation to prejudice expectations for cultural contact. I then examine the confrontations with the unexpected difference between Norman France and Mediterranean Corsica through close readings of passages recounting the environmental landscape around the port city of Ajaccio as well as a longer passage devoted to the formidable bandit of the early 1800s, Théodore Poli. Driving our study in each part of this chapter is the larger framing question, *Qu'est-ce que la Corse?*, that for Flaubert begins as a canvas for fiction that later serves as the setting for significant personal transformation.

I. Intertextual Literary Engagements: Flaubert, Mérimée, and Saint-Hilaire

Gustave Flaubert first encountered Corsica through literature. Short stories and novellas published by authors of the French Romantic generation such as Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), and Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire (1805-1899) were likely some of his first points of contact. These literary introductions to numerous Corsican personages, themes, traditions, and communities served as direct sources of inspiration and even as starting points for Flaubert's own narrative fictions written between 1835-1836 that also pursue a Corsican thematic: *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit* and *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire*

corse). These two narratives are included in the album *Narrations et Discours*¹⁴⁶ that collects numerous compositions of different genres (prose, historical fiction, literary commentary) written as academic assignments under the direction of Honoré-Henri Gourgaud-Dugazon, Flaubert's teacher at the *Collège Royal de Rouen*.¹⁴⁷ What textual features, such as narration and description, will he recycle for his own creations? Where does he diverge from the model text and propose his own perspective and vision for insular communities and customs? Through an examination of these cross-generational connections, we will continue to expand the reach of the Romantic literary network that actively constructed, sustained, and adjusted the imaginations and perceptions of Continental readers about Corsican landscapes, personages, and traditions.

1. Flaubert and Mérimée

Flaubert's first *narration corse*, "Matteo Falcône, ou deux cerceuls pour un proscrit" is directly inspired by the celebrated short story, *Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse*, published by Prosper Mérimée in the *Revue de Paris* in 1829. On the opening page of Flaubert's story in *Narrations et Discours*, we find the following summary:

Un enfant se joue dans les champs. Il entend des coups de fusil. Un homme poursuivi arrive. Il le cache grâce à une pièce de monnaie. Le même autant séduit par les promesses d'un garde le livre. Matteo le père de cet enfant apprenant cette lâcheté le couche en joue et le tue (*Narrations et Discours*, NAF 14137 f^o 1v^o).¹⁴⁸

Drawing heavily from Mérimée's narrative, Flaubert's portrayal recounts the interaction between a young child named Albano, a bandit, and a police officer. Like Fortunato in Mérimée's narrative,

¹⁴⁶ Gustave Flaubert, "Narrations et Discours," *OC I*, p. 23-43.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. "Gourgaud-Dugazon (Honoré-Henri Gourgaud, dit)," *Dictionnaire Gustave Flaubert* (dir. Éric Le Calvez), Paris, Classiques Garnier, collection "Dictionnaire et synthèses," 2017, p. 528.

¹⁴⁸ Gustave Flaubert, *Narrations et Discours*, "Mattéo Falcone, ou deux cercuels pour un proscrit," Bibliothèque nationale de France Gallica, NAF 14137, folio 1v^o; available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000578c> Guy Sagnes also provides this narrative summary of the text in the introduction to this work, *OC I*, p. 1220.

Albano offers refuge to the fugitive bandit, but later betrays his location in exchange for a shiny gold coin. Upon hearing of his treachery, Albano's father, "Matteo Falcône," executes his son. Flaubert concludes his narrative much differently in comparison to Mérimée's *dénouement*: following the execution, Albano's cadaver is sent down a river flowing into Ajaccio where it is discovered by his mother, who soon after dies of grief and sorrow: "Une femme accourt, pâle, échevelée, et regarde longtemps et fixement le cadavre [...] Puis elle tomba par terre en poussant un cri d'agonie... Aussitôt arriva le fossoyeur apportant un cercueil. 'Vous vous êtes trompé, dit quelqu'un de la foule, il en faut deux!'" (*OCI*, p. 27).

The use of Mérimée's short story as a model text is not entirely coincidental: drawing from a reference source was a common pedagogical method in French classrooms of the 1830s. According to Françoise Douay-Soublin, in these circumstances, students were exposed to the general outline of a story and then were asked to compose their own narratives based on the given elements (in this case, Mérimée's *Mateo Falcone*):

Une première solution consiste à tirer une matière d'un texte existant, après avoir fait composer l'élève, à lui donner comme corrigé, le texte initial. C'est ainsi que Gourgaud, le professeur de rhétorique de Flaubert à Rouen, ayant lu le *Mateo Falcone* de Prosper Mérimée dans la *Revue de Paris* en 1829, en raconte les grandes lignes à son élève [...] Ce n'est qu'après avoir composé son propre *Mateo Falcone* que Flaubert sera autorisé à lire l'original.¹⁴⁹

Douay-Soublin's historical presentation does not however investigate what happens *after* the student reads the source text (assuming that the classroom reading was indeed the first exposure) and leaves open the potential for subsequent correction and revision. Jean Bruneau, eminent scholar of Flaubert's early writings, and later editor of his *Correspondance*, also suggests that

¹⁴⁹ Françoise Douay-Soublin, "Le recueil de discours français pour la classe de rhétorique," *Histoire de l'éducation*, no. 74, "Les Humanités classiques" (dirs. Marie-Madeleine Compère and André Chervel), Institut national de recherche pédagogique (ENS-Lyon), May 1997, p. 163.
[Available online: <http://ife.ens-lyon.fr/publications/edition-electronique/histoire-education/RH074.pdf>]

Flaubert would not have been able to access the reference text until *after* his first draft is complete, and then is used as a basis for comparison:

Gourgaud avait sans doute lu le conte de Mérimée intitulé *Mateo Falcone* qui avait paru pour la première fois dans la *Revue de Paris* en mai 1829 [...] Le collégien a ‘corsé’ le sujet, et ajouté à la mort d’Albano celle de sa mère – d’où le sous-titre. Comme dans le cas de ‘l’Anneau du prieur,’ Flaubert renchérit sur le caractère déjà horrible du sujet, et son ‘frénétisme’ le porte à des extrêmes que n’eût pas approuvés le goût de Mérimée.¹⁵⁰

Numerous questions can be raised: when did Flaubert first read *Mateo Falcone*, before or after composing his own narrative? If after, is the manuscript NAF 14137 a corrected copy of a first attempt? Unfortunately, the chronology of access to the reference text and the specific steps of the writing process cannot be further investigated with the current manuscripts. Nevertheless, regarding our broader questions of intertextual relationships between Flaubert and authors of the Romantic generation, it is important to consider Mérimée’s role as a source for Flaubert’s literary exploration of Corsica because of Mérimée’s widely acknowledged impact on the literary visions of the Romantic generation: “C’est avec *Mateo Falcone* que le pays natal de Napoléon Bonaparte entre pour la première fois dans le domaine sacré des Lettres.”¹⁵¹ Mérimée is not the only author with active publications about Corsica, fictional or expository, during the 1820s—Flaubert too will draw inspiration from a contemporary of Mérimée: Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire.

2. *Le Romantisme frénétique*

The colorful warmth of the Corsican landscape that opens *Matteo Falcône* is juxtaposed to the dark, hellish nightmare of its epilogue. Immediately after learning of the treachery of his son (who betrays the location of the bandit to the police), Matteo Falcone executes his son: “Le soir,

¹⁵⁰ Jean Bruneau, *Les débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert (1835-1845)*, Paris, A. Colin, 1962, p. 64.

¹⁵¹ Antoine Naaman, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

le Corse dit à Albano de le suivre jusque derrière la colline [...] Un quart d'heure après, [la mère] entendit un coup de fusil et le bruit que fait quelque chose en tombant dans l'eau..." (*OCI*, p. 27).

Flaubert opts to continue for a bit longer to include the frightful presence of the child's cadaver, and the fatal grief of his mother:

Une femme accourt, pâle, échevelée, et regarde longtemps et fixement le cadavre. Elle se cramponna aux barreaux de la morgue et répétait avec douleur: "Oh mon enfant! mon enfant!" Puis elle tomba par terre en poussant un cri d'agonie... Aussitôt arriva le fossoyeur apportant un cercueil. "Vous vous êtes trompé, dit quelqu'un de la foule, il en faut deux!" (*ibid.*)

The conclusion reveals the meaning for the narrative's subtitle, "deux cercueils pour un proscrit" in that two dead bodies are buried. However, this does not resolve an important element of the subtitle: which character is "un proscrit"? If we consider Albano's interaction with the bandit as the driving force of the narrative, it is possible to consider the fugitive as the "proscrit" in the more literal sense of the expression (being an outlaw). However, the French term "proscrire" also suggests "banishment" or "exclusion", which could just as well apply to Albano, who is banished quite gruesomely from his home and from his community. The solution to this situation's ambiguity is not a simple black/white distinction but is rather resolved through the understanding that both perspectives are possible in the given situation. The absence of a moralizing gaze, and even authority of the narrator, leaves open the readability of this narrative, assigning to the reader the critical eye that rests upon the bandit's role in the death of the other two characters, Albano and his mother.

With the execution of the son and the subsequent death of the mother, the narrative and its conclusion are indicative of Flaubert's early fascination with death, dying, and Hell. These themes drive earlier works collected in the *Œuvres de jeunesse* such as, "Rage et Impuissance. Conte malsain pour les nerfs sensibles et les âmes dévotes" (December 1836), "Rêve d'enfer. Conte

fantastique” (March 1837) and “La Danse des morts” (May 1838). Just as in *Matteo Falcone*, in each of these works, Flaubert explores the dimensions and contours of the hellscape, how Satan often intervenes, and how death can be a more enticing option than life’s continuation. We can situate these narratives, and *Matteo Falcône* in particular, in relationship to the larger movement of literary Romanticism. In this case, the relationship is as a tributary, to again borrow the expression from Pierre Daprini, to the sub-movement known as *le Romantisme frénétique* (or, *romantisme noir*). A younger generation of French Romantics organized as a constellation around Charles Nodier, Théophile Gautier, and Gerard de Nerval, writers, poets largely, displaced by the weight of a *Romantisme hugolien*: “La présence étouffante de Hugo contraint bien souvent les jeunes à quitter ce qu’ils avaient pris pour un havre de salut.”¹⁵² Jean-Luc Steinmetz describes the thematic links unifying the “Petits romantiques” that contributed to this literary undercurrent: “Tendant à la littérature le miroir de la mort, ils seront d’abord reconnus par ceux qui savaient quelle place le néant occupe au sein de toute pensée. ‘Frénétiques’, ‘maudits’ autant de termes qui dénomment *a posteriori* ceux-là même dont le désir eut quelque chose à voir avec l’innommable et qui, dans la reconnaissance qu’ils firent, le décrivent d’une certaine façon, avec un certain tour.”¹⁵³ In her considerable work on this literary genre and movement within the French tradition, of its reception, and its criticism, Émilie Pézard observes the common stylistic and organizational elements of these works that intentionally sought to frighten and horrify their readers but with a social end, to one that brings attention and recognition:

Ce roman cherche à susciter des émotions violentes en multipliant les scènes d’assassinat, de cannibalisme, d’exécution capitale, voire d’inceste et de viol; il met en scène un héros mystérieux et passionné, dangereux pour tous ceux qu’il côtoie; il prône la révolte, celle

¹⁵² Jean-Luc Steinmetz, *La France frénétique de 1830*, Paris, Éditions Phébus, 1978, p. 11.

¹⁵³ *Idem.*, p. 32-3. Steinmetz continues on p.33: “La douce folie, d’autant moins saisissable qu’elle s’enlace au fil des jours, le suicide, la violence et la haine, à l’image d’une Histoire violente et haïssable, les échéances et les échecs de la création, les misérables sophismes du hasard, les fastes de l’exécution capitale, l’amour au-delà de la tombe [...] autant de centres de gravité que hante une pensée inquiète, celle d’un siècle s’ouvrant au nihilisme.”

de la passion individuelle contre la loi sociale, ou celle des classes opprimées au nom de la justice.¹⁵⁴

While *Matteo Falcône* might not correspond to each of the above criteria, it nevertheless does “suscite[] des émotions violentes” in different ways: Albano’s indifference to the bandit, Matteo Falcône’s incensed execution of his son, the fatal grief of his mother. Each of these scenes and moments continues to darken the cloud that has already been cast over Corsican communities through their earlier depictions of death and dying¹⁵⁵; moving from observation to narration, Flaubert’s short narrative continues to further nuance the construction and presentation of the images and scenes generated through the Romantic literary imagination of the early-1830s.

3. *Flaubert and Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire*

Also included in the album *Narrations et Discours*, is a second composition featuring Corsican themes and situations, this time focusing on 16th-century Corsican history: *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)*. This historical narrative presents a similar situation of literary inspiration and textual appropriation from another author; however, as Jean Bruneau suggests, the composition is perhaps a product of Flaubert’s own interest rather than that of an academic requirement: “Seul de tous les textes contenus dans le Cahier des *Narrations et discours*, il n’est pas précédé du sujet donné par le professeur: ce serait donc une ‘narration’ comme les autres, destinée à être lue par Gourgaud, mais dont Flaubert aurait choisi lui-même le sujet.”¹⁵⁶ Even with an unrestricted selection, that Flaubert chooses a historical fiction based on a legendary figure of

¹⁵⁴ Émilie Pézard, “La vogue romantique de l’horreur: roman noir et genre frénétique,” *Romantisme*, Vol. 160, No. 2, 2013, p. 43-44. Cf. Mario Praz, “The Beauty of the Medusa” and “The Metamorphoses of Satan” in *The Romantic Agony* (trans. Angus Davidson), London, Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1951, p. 23-91.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, “La Trêve de Dieu” in *Nouvelles et autres écrits* (ed. Eugène F.X. Gherardi), *op. cit.*, p. 101-113.

¹⁵⁶ Jean Bruneau, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Corsican history suggests the extent to which the young writer was seduced by the possibilities that Corsica would offer for his literary imagination. After all, his previous composition in the album, “Portrait de Lord Byron,” is an *éloge* to the English poet who also visited Corsica in 1821 and whose voyage is later related by his ship’s captain, Robert Benson: *Narrative of Lord Byron’s Voyage to Corsica and Sardinia, During the Summer and Autumn of 1821*.¹⁵⁷

San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse) recounts an episode in the life of the legendary Corsican historical figure Sampiero Corso (as he is more commonly known), whose bravery and courage are celebrated and immortalized in the 16th-century struggle against political domination by the Corsican people against the Republic of Genoa. In this particular instance, Flaubert narrates Sampiero’s kidnapping of Vanina, the daughter of *Le Doge*, the ruler of the Republic of Genoa. As with *Matteo Falcône*, *San Pietro Ornano* also engages in the network of literary Romanticism by pulling directly from another narrative published in the *Revue de Paris*, this time Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire’s “Sampiero et Vanina” (*Revue de Paris*, Tome X, 1831).¹⁵⁸

In critical scholarship on Flaubert’s early works, competing views are held as to whether Saint-Hilaire’s narrative serves as a reference source worthy of serious consideration and import. If limited only to the story arc itself, the differences between the two texts are too numerous to even posit a relationship between the two narratives: Saint-Hilaire’s narrative never shows an attack against the port of Genoa, nor does it show the kidnapping and ransom of Vanina in exchange for *Le Doge* laying down his arms against the Corsican-led invasion. However, Guy Sagnes overstates the case when he writes that “[Flaubert] ne doit rien en tout cas au récit de Saint-

¹⁵⁷ Robert Benson, *Narrative of Lord Byron's Voyage to Corsica and Sardinia, During the Summer and Autumn of the Year 1821: Compiled from Minutes Made During the Voyage by the Passengers, and Extracts from the Journal of His Lordship's Yacht, the Mazeppa*, Paris, A & W Gaglianani, 1825.

[Available online: <https://books.google.ch/books?id=TbY8AAAAAYAAJ&dq=lord%20byron%20corsica&pg=PR8-IA1#v=onepage&q&f=false>]

¹⁵⁸ Cf. “Sampiero et Vannina,” *La Corse d’Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits* (ed. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi), Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. “Les oubliés,” 2014, p. 169-201.

Hilaire, ‘Sampiero et Vanina’, paru en 1831 dans *La Revue de Paris*” (*OC I*, p. 1224-5). Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli is more cautious in her observations that Flaubert’s narrative picks larger-picture details (place and time) and so distinguishes itself on the direction of the plot: “Comme dans le texte de Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, Sampiero est en mer quand il apparaît pour la première fois, mais sa destination est autre. Flaubert en effet n’emprunte que le lieu initial et quelques détails du costume mi-italien, mi-musulman, cependant, ces emprunts enflamment son imagination.”¹⁵⁹ While the narrative content and action of Flaubert’s fiction does not directly trace itself back to Saint-Hilaire’s narrative schema, the portrayal of the historical figure does indeed borrow from its source materials and thus offers a compelling archetype for his own literary manipulation.

The psychological portrayal of Sampiero Corso demonstrates intertextual relationships that have been overlooked so far in scholarship of this work which has focused mainly on narrative intrigue. “San Pietro Ornano” returns to Genoa and is trapped within the confines of the port. His fleet is destroyed one ship at a time and while contemplating his imminent defeat (and later execution of Vannina), “Ornano était resté pensif, la tête baissée sur sa poitrine; son regard fixé sur Vannina était sinistre et **ses lèvres pâles et tremblantes** semblaient se contracter d’un rire lugubre” (*OC I*, p. 43; my emphasis). Similarly, in Saint-Hilaire’s narrative, the depiction of Sampiero’s lips is also emblematic of his anxiety, fear, and insecurity: “Ce fut le tour de Sampiero de **pâlir**: mordant violemment **sa lèvre**”¹⁶⁰; “Sampiero **mordit sa lèvre** et ne répondit pas.”¹⁶¹

Additionally, the “rire” of Sampiero is also an important detail bridging these two narratives as both authors also use this gesture as an external representation of fear. In the previous citation from Flaubert’s narratives, the quivering lips of Sampiero contract and give way to a “**rire**

¹⁵⁹ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

¹⁶⁰ Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, *La Corse d’Eugène Rosseeuw Saint Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits* (ed. Eugène F.-X. Gherardi), *op. cit.*, p. 178; my emphasis.

¹⁶¹ *Idem.*, p. 197.

lugubre” (*OCI*, p. 43). Sampiero also laughs in Saint-Hilaire’s depiction of events, ““Je pars à Aix, dit-il d’une voix brève. Un mot encore, cousin: qu’allait-elle faire à...à Gênes?” prononça-t-il enfin avec **un éclat de rire convulsif**.”¹⁶²

A final point of convergence in the psychological portrayal of this character is found in his trembling movements, either through his voice or through his hands. All but admitting defeat through the reception of the Genoese emissary bringing a letter. Sampiero opens it “en tremblant” (*OCI*, p. 43) seemingly unsure of what its contents will reveal. Similarly, faced with the unknown consequences of his actions, Saint-Hilaire’s Sampiero trembles moments before his execution of Vanina, “Il y avait même un léger tremblement dans sa voix quand il prononça, avec une scrupuleuse exactitude, la formule *absolve te*.”¹⁶³

The relationships of these physical (trembling) and psychological gestures (*le rire*) suggest Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire’s narrative as a potential source for the character depiction that Flaubert sought to further explore in his own presentation. What distills from the comparison of these two texts is the extent to which Flaubert draws from the well of literary sources to draft and compose his own narratives. As with Prosper Mérimée’s short story, Flaubert appropriates only certain components of the source materials to enhance his own presentation. As we will see in the following section, Flaubert’s interest and fascination goes deeper than the borrowing of surface level elements of characters. His work shows significant engagement, even at a young age, with important images and associations with Corsican society, notably banditry and the *vendetta*, two dominant interests of the Romantic generation broadly speaking.

¹⁶² *Idem.*, p. 185.

¹⁶³ *Idem.*, p. 197.

II. *Engaging with the Romantic Portrayal of Corsica: Bandits, Codes of Honor, and the Exotic.*

Flaubert's first Corsican narrative *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit* interacts with an important literary trope of French Romantic literatures about Corsica: vengeance. In this short narrative, vengeance will follow complex acts of betrayal: first, the protagonist, Albano, will betray a bandit to the police (who later reveals Albano's treachery to his father, Mateo Falcône); second, for his abandonment of the responsibility to protect someone who requests safe passage or asylum, the ire of Matteo Falcône culminates in the execution of his son. Working through the leitmotiv of vengeance, our analysis of this narrative will continue to tease out Flaubert's relationships with his Romantic counterparts while also exploring the individual and personal visions and conceptions that he offers of Corsica.

1. *Corsican Bandits and Codes of Honor*

Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit engages with the deeply interwoven elements of the Romantic generation's depictions of Corsica: hospitality, bandits and their conflicts with the *gendarmes*. As we saw in our earlier chapter focusing on the works of Eugène Rosseuw Saint-Hilaire, some early-19th century travel narratives highlight banditry as a representation of the moral baseness of Corsican communities because it demonstrated their proclivity for unbridled anger manifest through violent retaliation. In these travel narratives, banditry opposes honor (how can a bandit be *honorable*?) and as a result, it is used to further darken the exogenous presentations of Corsican communities, especially those of the rural interior. Associating vengeance with intense violence, as a form of exact reciprocity (retributive justice), overshadows, if not entirely casts aside, the foundations of banditry in Corsican communities as a cultural practice deeply rooted in the codes of familial honor and moral responsibility.

Codes of honor, and their transgression, are the vectors by which Flaubert's narrative proceeds from the initial appearance of the bandit to the execution of Albano at his father's hands. This study of *Matteo Falcône* will discuss two different codes of honor and their infractions: those regulating banditry and that of hospitality. In each case, we will anchor our analysis in the narrative itself all the while drawing on historical sources and intertextual relationships to clearly articulate the reach of the Romanic literary framing of Corsica more clearly. Broadly speaking, I interpret Flaubert's short story as an overture to the importance of honor in Corsican society in ways that vindicate and justify the violence of bandits all the while portraying banditry as a system of justice unto its own, incompatible with the system of justice that Metropolitan political powers sought to impose during the early 1800s.

2. *The Outward Appearances of Corsican Banditry*

The physical description of the bandit influences the perception we as readers have of his character, as a form of moral judgement influenced by the personage's presentation on the page. Often, the evocation of Corsican bandits connotes a rough and brutish man, isolated in the dense vegetation of the *maquis* as part of his escape from the clutches of law enforcement; his wounds, ragged clothing, and slovenly appearance correspond to an image of criminality and of lawlessness. In *Matteo Falcône*, Flaubert opts for a hybrid presentation that paints the negative portrait of the bandit, all the while leaving discrete access points for further exploration of the bandit's character, which appears to be a risky venture indeed.

The bandit appears on the scene through a flurry of gunfire, wresting Albano from his nap:

[Albano] entend des coups de fusil qui se succèdent, il se détourne en sursaut, et aussitôt un homme vient se jeter en courant sur le tas de foin. Ses cheveux étaient éparés, ses vêtements étaient en lambeaux, la peau de son genou était déchirée, beaucoup de sang s'en écoulait, et l'on voyait à la trace de ses pas que là un proscrit avait passé (*OC I*, p. 25).

The life of the outlaw is not glamorous by any stretch of the imagination. A disheveled and injured figure bursts onto the scene and immediately we perceive the lack of cleanliness and the strangeness that highlights the peculiarity of his body, especially in contrast to Albano, “un bel enfant [...], de longs cheveux tombaient en boucles sur ses épaules, à chaque sourire vous auriez dit une parole de joie” (*ibid.*). The tousled physical appearance of the bandit along with the physical energy that his character brings to the scene serves to further isolate his appearance in the visual field; moreover, the wounds on his body suggest recent violence: from his knees flows “beaucoup de sang.”

A second series of physical descriptions of the outlaw at the moment of his arrest by the *gendarmes* grants the reader further access to his character:

Le fugitif fut tiré de dessous le tas de foin, ses genoux chancelaient, ses lèvres étaient pâles et ses yeux rouges de colère, ses mains palpitantes tâtonnaient à sa ceinture comme pour en chercher un poignard; il n’y trouva qu’une plaie profonde et retira son poing tout ensanglanté (*OC I*, p. 27).

Through suggestions of preceding additional violence, we discover a salient access point to learn more about this personage. The narrator offers an important link between anger (*la colère*) and vengeance: the bandit, whose eyes are bloodshot with rage, seeks the dagger that is no longer attached to his belt, as though a gesture out of habit—vengeance then becomes the outlet of his rage.

These two descriptions, one physical and one temperamental, combine to offer a general portrait of the singular figure that is the Corsican bandit that stresses his distinct physical presence (torn clothing, bloodstains) and highlights his violent tendencies. As a whole, this portrait permits us to say, “là, un proscrit avait passé” (*OC I*, p. 25). The syntax of this description, in particular the role of the French indefinite article “un” serves a double function: first, it is the combination

of these physical traits that makes the person appear as a bandit; secondly, the indefinite article generalizes the figure to the extent that it could be anyone, not just the outlaw who is currently being described by the narrator. Finally, this lexical choice also mirrors the original description offered by Mérimée's text, the term "proscrit" suggests that his person has transgressed societal norms and customs, by consequence is therefore excluded from the community.¹⁶⁴

Returning briefly to the intertextual relationships between this narrative and that of Prosper Mérimée, the initial description of the out-law in Flaubert's text immediately resembles what Mérimée proposes in his short novella *Mateo Falcone*: "Enfin, dans le sentier qui menait de la plaine à la maison de Mateo parut un homme coiffé d'un bonnet pointu comme en portent les montagnards, barbu, couvert de haillons, se traînant avec peine en s'appuyant sur son fusil. Il venait de recevoir un coup de feu dans la cuisse."¹⁶⁵ As we can see, both authors' initial descriptions mirror one another in terms of their physical description (admittedly, Flaubert offers a less developed overall presentation) but diverge at an important detail: Mérimée suggests that the bandit has already been shot ("un coup de feu dans la cuisse") while Flaubert's description of the bandit's body suggests that perhaps he fell at some point as a result of injurious terrain ("la peau de son genou était déchirée", "une plaie profonde"). While the intertextual link is predicated on the physical wounds of the bandit, what distills from these two diverging perspectives? Flaubert's bandit with a skinned-knee leaves at least some chance that he might be able to continue running; however, Mérimée eliminates this chance, or at least makes fleeing on foot a less promising option as the bandit already leans on his rifle to assist his gait ("en s'appuyant sur son

¹⁶⁴ The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1835, 6th edition, Vol. 2, defines the term "proscrit" as follows: "Il se dit, par extension, de ceux qui n'osent retourner dans leur pays, à cause de quelque fâcheuse affaire." For additional analysis of this term and its impact in literary representations of bandits, see the previous chapter and section, "Refining and Disrupting the Bandit Narrative: 'Le Déjeuner du bandit' and the Charming Outlaw."

¹⁶⁵ Prosper Mérimée, *Mateo Falcone*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

fusil”). Certainly a discrete point in the text, Flaubert’s inventiveness shows an writer already willing to adapt and play with his own imagination, and with the expectations of the reader which will serve him well in his later works. The few liberties that Flaubert takes with the legendary figure of the bandit will reappear in Marc Biancarelli’s novel *Orphelins de Dieu* (2014) that directly engages with several of the same stereotypes we have described here: physical appearance, a penchant for retributive justice, and misunderstood (or misrepresented) commitments to familial honor.

3. *Insular Codes of Honor Confront Continental Norms of Justice*

Early-19th-century representations of Corsican communities in both narrative fictions and travel narrative often rely heavily on the communal values of honor through two different, but related traditions: the funeral lamentation (*voceri*) and vengeance. As we observed earlier in numerous publications from Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, as well as other *écrivains-voyageurs* from the same period (e.g., Benson and Réalier-Dumas), a decedent’s honor frequently inspires an improvised funeral lamentation performed by women, the *voceri*, that serves as a narrative focal point for accounts of these traditions and practices—the intensity of the performance and the passion of the lamentation strike deep chords with observers and offer fertile space for cultural comparisons. While the lamentation praises the deceased, it also served as a call to arms for the surviving family—a call for the *vendetta*:

A *voceru* was an incantation for the most bloodthirsty instincts of men; it battered any pacific notions into submission. No one could stand up against those inspired tragediennes who drove their men to murder—the weakest, the most irresolute or reasonable—by an overwhelming force of suggestion.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

The suggestion is not for a call to murder for the sake of murder, let us be clear. Dorothy Carrington's above claim of the "overwhelming force of suggestion" driven by the *vocera* is best understood as an appeal to restore honor, personal or familial, through physical violence—blood violence, vengeance. These two clarifications serve to frame our discussion of honor as a value at the discrete individual level and as a collective (familial) value that will have significant, and devastating, consequences for the interactions between different characters in Flaubert's narrative that portrays violations and restorations of familial honor following tragic mistakes. Our analysis of insular codes of honor will develop over an examination of their violations, first in respect to the safe harbor of the bandit and secondly, in the consequences that their transgressions require. Additionally, this narrative offers an innovative perspective on the activities of bandits and the reasons for their flight to the *maquis*, no longer a simple fugitive escape, but a manifestation of the tension between insular codes of honor and the continental system of justice.

Flaubert's *Matteo Falcône* approaches the cultural tenant of honor through the transgression of one of its codes, and perhaps most important: the *loi de refuge*, the promise of asylum to those in need. In this narrative, Albano falls victim to his youthful ignorance, or what Flaubert signals in the narrative summary that precedes the text itself, to "cette lâcheté" (NAF 14187, f° 2; *OCI*, p. 1220) that pushes him to betray the bandit hiding from the police.

As Albano lays in the sun, "il entend des coups de fusil qui se succèdent, il se détourne en sursaut, et aussitôt un homme vient se jeter en courant sur le tas de foin" (*OCI*, p. 25). On the run, the bandit seeks refuge and the promise of safe passage to avoid the police: "Par grâce! Par pitié, oh! cache-moi!" (*ibid.*). Albano, "qui jouait toujours avec sa chatte," ignores the bandit entirely; not willing to waste more time and risk capture, the bandit bribes the young boy (although does

not wait for a response): “[Le bandit] lui jeta une pièce de monnaie qui, en tombant, affaissa le foin” (*ibid.*). This flip of a coin simultaneously seals the fates of both characters.

On the surface, the scene is simple: a fugitive needs a place to hide and in his dire straits, he offers a bribe that evidently pleases Albano who picks up the coin, “il la faisait sautiller en souriant” (*ibid.*). It is here that the first transgression of what is commonly referred to as the *loi de refuge* occurs. This cultural code, as its name suggests, involves the acceptance and protection of those who seek safe passage, regardless of their motives and circumstances. Marie Susini, Corsican author active during the 1970s-1980s, describes this cultural norm of hospitality as “la loi de refuge” referencing for this discussion the *Mateo Falcone* of Prosper Mérimée. During an interview with France Culture in 1969, she describes the narrative situation as the following: a young child is executed by his father “pour avoir transgressé cette loi qui n’est pas écrite, et qui est sacrée en Corse, avoir trahi quelqu’un qui était chez lui et qui cherchait refuge.”¹⁶⁷ As it stands, from a cultural perspective, payment, *especially* as a bribe, ought not have occurred in this situation in which the bandit asked for safe passage. However, the bribe is a critical element of the narrative because it shows the potential emotional weaknesses of the character Albano, whose will is influenced by bright, shiny objects and not an understanding of the appropriateness of his actions or of their cultural significance.

For a short-time, the reader is held in suspense—is Albano going to betray the location of the bandit or will he assist his flight? Upon interrogation, Albano defies the *gendarme*’s request for cooperation:

- Enfant, n’as-tu pas vu un homme courir par ici? il était blessé avait les habits déchirés.
- De qui voulez-vous parler?
- D’un homme que nous cherchons.

¹⁶⁷ Marie Susini, “La Corse et les écrivains français”, 18 January 1969 [rediffusion 10 June 2017], *France Culture*, Radio France, 19 :30-45; available online: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-nuits-de-france-culture/la-corse-et-les-ecrivains-francais-marie-susini-1ere-diffusion>

—Du tout, je n’ai rien vu, si ce n’est une chèvre qui cherchait son maître; encore marchait-elle à pas lents et je vous assure qu’elle était en fort bon état. Est-ce là votre affaire? (*OC I*, p. 26)

This ridiculous, and very entertaining, response enrages the police officer whose fundamental authority has been questioned by a sarcastic child describing an ambling goat:

—Tu te moques de la justice, Albano.

—Et pourquoi êtes-vous venus me réveiller?

—Il le fallait.

—Allez à tous les diables!

—Ah! C’est ainsi que tu traites la justice du canton? Tiens, misérable. (*ibid.*)

Comic relief (the alleged goat) and brutal violence (the physical threat) coincide to animate this confrontation between Continental norms of justice (represented by the *gendarme*) and insular responses to this power dynamic. Albano, as young as he is, already demonstrates utter disdain for the “justice du canton.” His lack of participation or cooperation with the police is a rebuke, an act of resistance to a non-Corsican system of justice. Albano’s antagonistic response points to a lack of shared values and understanding between cantonal administration (*fonctionnaires métropolitains*) and local inhabitants.

Nevertheless, Continental justice prevails. Mounting pressure on Albano culminates in a bribe, this time through the form of a shiny watch: “[Le gendarme] se retourna vers Albano, et, lui présentant une montre, il ajouta: ‘Albano, si on te la donnait?’” (*ibid.*). Accepting the watch means revealing the location of the bandit who, quickly thereafter, “fut tiré de dessous le tas de foin.” (*OC I*, p. 27). Albano commits his second transgression of the *loi de refuge* by revealing the location of someone who sought protection which is compounded by the fact that the betrayal is to a police officer. For this double transgression, there is only one remedy : Albano must die at the hands of his father, “Un quart d’heure après, [la mère] entendit un coup de fusil et le bruit que fait quelque chose en tombant dans l’eau” (*ibid.*)

Matteo Falcône embodies the insular system of justice that relies on the family structure to repair harms made to others. Here, we are not comparing visions of justice to find one that is more appropriate, as a potential moralizing value judgement; rather, Flaubert offers the negative extreme of each perspective: on the one hand, the continental system of justice does not eschew threatening murder to coerce testimony, and on the other the insular codes of justice permit that a father execute his son because of cultural betrayal. This parallel comparison of the negative extremes of both systems of “justice” presents a vision of both Corsican society and of Parisian norms that are far removed from one another. The violence that is presented in *Matteo Falcône* is not unprincipled, amoral violence. However disproportionate the strength of Matteo Falcône’s response to Albano’s transgression, it is nevertheless tied to the importance of hospitality and honor, especially when threatened by Continental norms. It is worth noting as well that it is the police officer that betrays Albano, perhaps as a third form of betrayal in the short story and reveals his transgressions—the officer denounces the transgressive Corsican child to his Corsican father.

Following his arrest, the bandit is the first character to speak, and does so directly to Matteo, incorrectly identifying him as the one who betrayed his location to the police, but nevertheless the one to whom he addresses his emotional appeal for understanding:

Oui, c’est donc toi, qui m’as livré; va, tu es un lâche. Sais-tu ce que j’ai fait, moi? J’ai voulu venger une injure faite à ma fille; j’ai frappé sur le prince, et son sang est retombé sur ma tête pour se mêler au mien” (*ibid.*).

Speaking directly to Matteo, the bandit appeals to his paternal instincts: he evades the police because he retaliated against someone who injured his daughter, “J’ai voulu venger une injure faite à ma fille.” In her recent work *La Vendetta: Crimes d’honneur en Corse au XIX^e siècle* (2015), Caroline Parsi reframes this example of murder as a *crime d’honneur*: “[qui] peut se définir comme l’homicide commis en réparation d’une offense faite à l’honneur d’un individu ou de sa famille. Il

comprend un large éventail de situations et de valeurs et reste une composante incontournable de la société insulaire du XIX^e siècle.”¹⁶⁸ This definition does not exculpate the bandit for the life that he took, but it does help insulate him against perceptions that a tendency towards violence is his natural disposition: violence is not for the sake of violence, but for repairing transgression. Here, we have an important point of entry into the life, past experiences, and personal motivations for the bandit to flee through the *maquis*. Although this backstory is not developed in this narrative, it nevertheless echoes our previous discussion of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire’s short story, “Le Déjeuner du bandit,” which recounts the narrator’s interaction with a bandit accused of sexual misconduct.¹⁶⁹ The backstory of the bandit is not found in the commonly identified reference text of Mérimée’s *Mateo Falcone* and therefore suggests another relationship with literary representations of bandits with which Flaubert was familiar. Whatever the case may be, what remains is that the bandit in this narrative is a character far more complex than his surface presentation of simply a criminal fugitive on the run. The daughter’s mention in the narrative invites the reader to reconsider from which perspective we view the activities of the bandit and their relationship to the important notion of honor that regulates Corsican communities.

4. *Approaching the Orient?*

Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit evolves through contrasts of light and dark: vibrant colors illuminate the scenes of horrific violence that unfold in the narrative. An expansive, rolling field opens the narrative and we see the young Albano drifting into his dreams:

C’était en Corse, dans un grand champ, sur un tas de foin que, à moitié éveillé, Albano, couché sur le dos, caressait sa chatte et ses petits, tout en regardant les nuages qui passaient

¹⁶⁸ Caroline Parsi, *La Vendetta: Crimes d’honneur en Corse au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Éditions Vendémaire, coll. “Chroniques”, 2015, p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ We will see later that this code of conduct is questioned and repurposed in Marc Biancarelli’s novel *Orphelins de Dieu* that we will discuss in the following chapter.

sur le fond d'azur et le soleil qui reluisait de son éclat de pourpre et dardait ses rayons sur la plaine bordée de coteaux (*OC I*, p. 25).

The tranquility of the scene is matched by its warmth from the sun “qui reluisait de son éclat de pourpre.” The opening scene is structured by chromatic associations from mixtures of yellows (*champ, foin*), a vibrant blue (*azur*), and the violet rays of the sun (*pourpre*). Such vibrant colors are attached to the generalized setting itself—little is given to the reader in terms of more precise geographical orientation other than the term, “Corse” (three occurrences) and later, “un canton” (two occurrences). The entire island is cast in the brilliant sunshine whose “éclat de pourpre” illuminates the fields. This final color is the most significant on the one hand because of its visual impact for the scene (“son éclat”) but also because of the deep cultural associations it evokes: the deep purple of imperial robes and the splendor of Mediterranean Antiquity.

These chromatic elements raise an important question about *where* Flaubert situates Corsica. This notion is more a concern for cultural affinities and attachments than it is about geographical position and location. The chromatic vibrancy of topography and of the skyscape evoke a region far removed from the stereotypical cloud-cover of Normandy (although the features named in Flaubert’s text are admittedly not unique to Corsica). Our gaze and our imagination are turned southward by this colorful evocation of the warm, vibrant landscape that opens this short narrative. But just how far south does our gaze go? Given that *Matteo Falcône* was composed in 1835, Pierre Diaprini suggests that this early narrative could possibly engage with the cultural trend of a southward gaze turning towards the Orient (Northern Africa and the Middle East):

L’Orient est dans l’air du temps, mis non seulement à la mode (en France) par les *Orientales* de Hugo où certains poèmes ne sont guère supérieurs à la plume de ce Flaubert (juvénile), mais aussi, plus sérieusement, par les nombreuses relations de voyage, ouvrages historiques et philologiques que Flaubert ne lisait pas encore mais qui participent, avec les tableaux et lithographies des peintres, à cette ‘renaissance orientale’ dont Raymond

Schwab, dans un ouvrage érudit, verra une des marques de la culture du dix-neuvième siècle, et dont la sensibilité de Flaubert est tributaire dans ce dithyrambe oriental.¹⁷⁰

Edward Saïd credits this gaze and increased interest in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean shores to the proliferation and increased accessibility of travel narratives during the mid-19th century:

L'Orient était en train de s'ouvrir bien au-delà des pays islamiques. Ce changement quantitatif était dû, dans une large mesure, au fait que les Européens exploraient sans cesse et toujours plus avant le reste du monde. L'influence de plus en plus grande des récits de voyage, des utopies imaginaires, des voyages moraux et des comptes rendus scientifiques attirait l'attention sur l'Orient d'une manière à la fois plus aiguë et plus large.¹⁷¹

To further nuance these spatial distinctions, Jean Bruneau observes the elision of the Mediterranean basin and the Orient during the early-19th century, creating a potentially indistinguishable cultural and geographical mass: "Pour Flaubert, comme pour bien des auteurs de son temps, le Midi et l'Orient sont des termes presque synonymes qui évoquent à la fois le soleil, l'antiquité et le monde méditerranéen."¹⁷² Does Corsica fit within this fascination for the Orient that captured the attention of 1830s France? Are we engaging with the Orient *through* Corsica? *Where* is Corsica in relationship to the Orient? These complex questions are first raised with the use of various colors in *Matteo Falcône* to set the stage for the narrative itself. In Flaubert's subsequent narrative, *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)*, the relationship to the Orient is further explored through a depiction of Corsica as a cultural crossroads. These questions are ones that we will continue to raise in our extended analysis of the *Dossier Corse* as each additional text and

¹⁷⁰ Pierre B. Daprini, "De l'imaginaire 'orientale' de Flaubert dans ses *Œuvres de jeunesse*," *New Zealand Journal of French Studies*, Vol. 10, Iss. 1, 1989, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Edward Saïd, "Redessiner les frontières, redéfinir les problèmes, séculariser la religion," *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident* [trans. Catherine Malamoud], Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. "Points," 2015, p. 209.

¹⁷² Jean Bruneau, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

letter will add more complexity to this growing kaleidoscope of colors that Flaubert begins to assemble in this early narrative.

III. Crafting the Corsican Hero: Flaubert's San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse) [1836?]

San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse) is the second *fiction d'inspiration corse* included in Flaubert's album *Narrations et Discours*. It recounts the story of the legendary Sampiero Corso, as he is more commonly known, and emphasizes his bravery and courage in the fight against political domination of the Corsican people by the Republic of Genoa during the 16th century. As Guy Sagnes observes, *San Pietro Ornano* is the product of a burgeoning and sustained personal interest for the young writer: "Flaubert se détache des habitudes de la rédaction scolaire. À l'histoire corse dictée qui ouvrait le cahier fait pendant, à la fin, l'histoire corse choisie. On assiste à la naissance d'une manière personnelle dans le prolongement d'un apprentissage imposé" (*OC I*, p. 1224). In *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)*, Flaubert constructs the image of this historical personage by removing him from a geographically Corsican context and placing him on the high seas amidst an intense confrontation with the imperial powers of Genoa. The individual character will be at the center of the narrative and will serve to portray Corsica as a cultural crossroads, opening towards the Orient.

San Pietro Ornano arrives in Genoa to impose his authoritative will, and that of sovereign France, against the Republic of Genoa: "La France était en guerre avec Gênes; elle avait trouvé en Corse un puissant auxiliaire en la personne de San Pietro" (*OC I*, p. 40). The military leader's presence in this Continental capital served to "traiter [...] des conditions de la paix" (*OC I*, p. 41) between the two enemies (France and Genoa); taking a less diplomatic approach, San Pietro Ornano opts to "imposer des conditions, et faire trembler un doge sur son trône" (*ibid.*).

Threatening first the destruction of the city, San Pietro Ornano concludes with his most important condition, which is neither militaristic nor monetary, but instead, amorous: “Je te demande ta fille, je te demande Vannina” (*ibid.*). Refusing this condition, *Le Doge* exclaims, “jamais tu n’auras Vannina, et Gênes sera plutôt ton esclave que ma fille ta maîtresse!” (*OC I*, p. 42). Not accepting the refusal of his sole condition, San Pietro Ornano devises a violent kidnapping scheme that successfully captures Vannina from the city: “Puis il y eut du sang, des cadavres, des cris, et Vanina fut enlevée” (*ibid.*). Upholding his promise to sack the city of Genoa, Ornano returns with a naval fleet prepared to lay siege; however, his ships scatter in an unexpected attack leaving his ship alone in threatening waters—on the bridge, “écumant de rage, il jura sur sa tête qu’il tuerait de sa propre main quiconque parlerait de se rendre” (*OC I*, p. 43). Unbeknownst to him, Vannina already dispatched an emissary to *Le Doge*, her father, to cease the hostilities. Receiving the reply, “Ornano restait pensif, la tête baissée sur sa poitrine; son regard fixé sur Vannina était sinistre et ses lèvres pâles et tremblantes semblaient se contracter d’un rire lugubre” (*ibid.*). Ornano understands that he must execute his beloved for her treachery: “Il pâlit, tourna sur elle un regard plein de pitié et d’amour, puis, s’adressant à l’envoyé: ‘Ce soir, vous saurez ma réponse!’” (*ibid.*).

1. *Sampiero Corso, The Historical Figure and Hero of the Corsican People*

Who was Sampiero Corso? As economic interests shifted Westward from Constantinople during the 1500s, the island of Corsica and its people were subject to the Republic of Genoa, a financially dominant Continental power in the Western Mediterranean basin. Just as well, during the mid-16th century, the insular territory played an important role in the geopolitical power balances of the region, opposing Spain, France, and the rising importance of the Ottoman Turks:

La date de 1553 correspond pour sa part à l’ouverture d’une période agitée par une guerre d’origine extérieure qui projette au premier plan une nouvelle tranche d’histoire

‘événementielle’. Une fois de plus enjeu des rivalités hégémoniques entre les grandes puissances méditerranéennes, l’île est ballotée au gré des initiatives françaises, espagnoles, italiennes et...ottomanes, car même le Grand Turc s’est intéressé à elle!¹⁷³

To further complicate these power struggles in the region, Corsica served as an important military position for purposes of power consolidation and projection as a “plateforme avancée d’une présence française en Méditerranée, la Corse servirait de base à d’autres entreprises en direction du Sud, vers la Sardaigne, vers Naples ou même jusqu’en Sicile.”¹⁷⁴ To advance its initiatives and status within this region, the French Crown engaged Sampiero Corso as a mercenary to execute strategies and efforts in the Western Mediterranean basin in an attempt to limit rivals’ further expansion into the region. It is during these power-plays of the 1550s that we can situate Flaubert’s *San Pietro Ornano*. Recall that San Pietro Ornano opens in his remarks to *Le Doge* that his presence is backed by “La France, notre alliée” (*OC I*, p. 41).

Just as in Flaubert’s narrative, the historical Sampiero Corso could also be seen as the victim of a significant betrayal. The role of the French in the coordinated assault of Genoa was not for the liberation of Corsica, but rather to open the door for its own deeper political encroachment and implantation: “Les Français, eux, essaient de mettre en place dans l’île une série d’institutions: l’activité des officiers royaux n’excède cependant guère ce qu’on a coutume de voir sous un régime prolongé d’occupation.”¹⁷⁵ Effectively, the French strategy of the 1550s-1560s was one of a transfer of power from Genoa to its own hands, and not to surrender the island to its own political self-determination. These goals did not come to fruition as the conflicts drew in Spain and England. On April 3, 1559, the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis served as an official end to these hostilities and

¹⁷³ Francis Pomponi, *Mémorial des Corses*, “Soumissions et résistances, 1553-1796,” t. 2, Ajaccio, Albiana, 1982, p. 11.

¹⁷⁴ *Idem.*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁵ Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *Histoire de Corse*, “Des origines au XVIIe siècle,” t. 1, Paris, Éditions du Félin, 1996, p. 317.

guaranteed Genoa's territorial possession of Corsica but not without a few concessions concerning a prohibition on retaliation against Corsicans that fought alongside France:

On obtint la promesse des Génois de ne pas exercer de représailles contre la personne et les biens des Corses, qui comme Sampiero, avaient servi la France. C'est donc envers le Roi [de France] que la République [de Gênes] se trouvait engagée à accorder aux Corses un pardon total. De sorte que le Roi, pour s'assurer de l'exécution de l'engagement, serait habilité à recevoir les doléances des Corses et à jouer, en quelque sorte, le rôle d'arbitre entre eux et Gênes. Gênes subit donc une limitation certaine de sa souveraineté dans ses affaires intérieures.¹⁷⁶

Effectively, Genoa remained in territorial possession of the island through the early 1700s all the while the French Crown maintained its administrative and financial presence and pressure on the island. Resistance to both French and Genoese political pressure culminated in the 1730s uprisings, the first movement of Corsican nationalism leading to its own proclamation of independence; a short-lived but blood resistance fell to French forces at Ponte Novu on May 9, 1769, which marks an official date for the transfer of full power, control, and possession of Corsica from the Republic of Genoa to the French State.

2. *Corsica, A Cultural Crossroads*

San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse) is a striking character study driven by significant events and circumstances in Corsican history. Through a kaleidoscope of colors and experiences, this narrative raises important questions of Continental representation and reception of Corsican culture, particularly its history, in the early-19th century. Through the construction of its central character, this narrative frames Corsica as a cultural crossroads linking Continental Europe with the Orient.

¹⁷⁶ *Idem.*, p. 329.

Flaubert's Corsican hero is first described as someone who resembles the ship's captain, "un homme qui paraissait le maître" (*OC I*, p. 40) whose garb is a combination of styles and influences from across the Mediterranean region, "à moitié grec et italien" (*ibid.*). The introductory presentation becomes richer with the addition of colors as well as physical descriptions that complement these extraordinary experiences:

Sa tête, belle et fière, était entourée de longs cheveux qui venaient s'appuyer en boucles sur ses épaules nues et basanées; un riche poignard et un long cimeterre pendaient à sa ceinture blanche et bleue, et dont le nœud doré, tombant jusqu'à terre, venait de temps en temps essuyer sur ses sandales rouges un peu de cendre échappée de sa large pipe de jonc (*ibid.*)

The strong physical stature of Sampiero (although not yet named at this point in the narrative) is matched with the vibrant colors of his clothing and accessories. His upper-body, strong and nude, conjures images of statues of Antiquity although here added with the olive-tinted skin ("ses épaules nues et basanées") frequently associated with peoples from the Mediterranean basin. The combination of two different weapons, the *poignard* and the *cimeterre*, shows the attachment of this character to his native island and shows the proof of his exotic conquests: the *poignard* is a frequent accessory for men, while the *cimeterre* evokes handheld weapons of Middle Eastern and North African cultures. The color palate combines blue with white to reflect the clouds in the sky or the white tops of the sea itself; the golden knot of his belt an outward symbol of wealth (through conquest?); and the red sandals transport the warmth of the desert or (of warmer climates).

This image of physical beauty and strength is quickly met with fear. Docking the ship in the port of Genoa, Sampiero observes the crowd along the quays:

Son regard était hautain, il semblait mépriser toute cette multitude qui montrait du doigt, avec respect et crainte, un homme qui, naguère paysan de Corse aux mains pleines de goudron, n'avait eu d'autre éducation que celle de dompter la tempête, de faire sauter une sainte-barbe, ou de bombarder une ville (*ibid.*)

This description toys with the larger question of representation that we are addressing: how are those who hail from Corsica perceived by a Continental audience? What associations and combinations are needed to convey the object at the center of the narrative?

In stark contrast to the positive and radiant description first offered by the narrator, the assumptions and presuppositions of the port-side public supplant the initial impressions the reader is given of the ship's captain: The bright, luminous captain from the first paragraph is darkened by tar ("goudron"), storms ("tempêtes"), gun-powder ("une sainte-barbe"), and explosions ("bombarder une ville"). These darkly-hued associations are attached to the fact that the captain is Corsican ("naguère paysan de Corse") and that each element of the series feeds off one another. The central figure is still recognized and appreciated "avec respect et crainte." It is only after this explosive series of associations that we are finally given the subject's name, "un homme qui n'avait d'autre nom que San Pietro Ornano, d'autre seigneurie que sa frégate et d'autres sujets que ses marins" (*ibid.*). The final element in the initial exposition of this character is that his life is lived on the open sea, "aux manières rustiques et sauvages", and that his arrival in Genoa is for a specific purpose, "faire trembler un doge sur son trône". This *incipito* is remarkable in that it presents two opposing perspectives, that of the (intrigued) narrator and that of the apprehensive citizen of Genoa, all the while remaining timeless, offering little contextual detail that would situate this historical figure more precisely in his time, other than the phrase "un doge sur son trône." San Pietro Ornano symbolizes the centuries-long Corsican combat against the subjugation of insular communities by Continental powers; he projects a collective voice calling for independence. The traits and features used to construct the historical figure are as diverse in their presentation as they are in their origins. The mosaic signals the rich history of the island itself, after all the secondary title of the narrative is "*(Histoire corse)*," as a rich composition on its own.

The panoply of colors and traits used to portray this legendary figure carries over the question raised in the previous section about *where* Flaubert situates Corsica. San Pietro Ornano's Corsica is one that is within reach of North Africa and the Middle East, the lands of the Orient; the chromatic elements of the text, according to Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, "se fondent dans un ensemble plus vaste, celui de l'Italie et d'un Orient imaginaires."¹⁷⁷ These remarks extend Jean Bruneau's previous observation of the Mediterranean basin as a cultural conglomerate attracting much attention during the first half of the 19th century. The physical presentation of San Pietro Ornano projects cultural connections and exchanges, situating Corsica within reach of the Orient, but not entirely folded into its cultural specificity. This narrative offers an important occasion to further articulate Corsica's role or status in this cultural geography, and more precisely, as cultural crossroads. This meeting point or intersection is often of unexpected coincidences, of numerous differences. In a short time following the composition of *San Pietro Ornano (Histoire corse)* and *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit*, Flaubert will finally experience the cultural and environmental landscapes of Corsica that have until this point remained "imaginaires." Both narrative fictions prime the young writer-and-soon-to-be-traveler for contacts and confrontations with his own predispositions to stories of Corsican communities and to the prejudices that have seeped through similar narrative publications. However, little will prepare him for the stunning beauty of the Mediterranean shoreline, the dynamic sea, and the weight of the island's force on his own literary imagination for the years and decades that follow.

¹⁷⁷ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

IV. *Confronting Alterity: Flaubert's Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse (1840)*

Il faisait du vent, un vent tiède qui venait de courir sur les ondes,
il arrivait de là-bas, d'au-delà de cet horizon, nous apportant vaguement,
avec l'odeur de la mer, comme un souvenir de choses que je n'avais pas vues.
(*OC I*, p. 716)

Towards the end of the summer of 1840, Gustave Flaubert sets off for Corsica by way of the Loire Valley, the *Midi*, and the Var. He recounts his experiences as a travel narrative entitled, *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse*, originally destined for his family members and never published during his lifetime.¹⁷⁸ Such an extensive itinerary comes after the successful completion of the *Baccalauréat* for which his father, Dr. Achille-Cléophas Flaubert, offers the congratulatory gift of the trip to his son: “Pour le récompenser, ses parents lui offrent un voyage, le premier grand voyage de sa vie. Le docteur Flaubert, qui n'était pas aussi inculte qu'on veut bien le dire, avait pensé ainsi ouvrir de nouveaux horizons à son fils.”¹⁷⁹ Although celebratory, the voyage across France and through Corsica remains a didactic experience curated and chaperoned by a family friend, Dr. Jules Cloquet for whom Flaubert nevertheless has a few personal reservations: “L'instinct donc me dit que le voyage sans doute me plaît, mais le compagnon guère, après tout j'ai peut-être tort, grand tort. Pour ce qui est de son caractère et de son humeur il est excellent, mais le reste?” (*Corr. I*, p. 64) As much as the choice for his guide, the destination might have come a significant surprise for the *bachelier* whose sights were initially set on Spain as he remarks in his *Cahier intime de 1840-1841*: “Je dois aller en Espagne avec M. Cloquet. J'étudie l'Espagne autant que je puis;

¹⁷⁸ Gustave Flaubert, “Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse,” in *OC I*, p. 645-726.

¹⁷⁹ Jean Bruneau, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

changement, c'est la Corse—je pars de Rouen par le vapeur—Maxime, Ernest, Huet, chemin de fer—à Paris” (*OC I*, p. 747).¹⁸⁰

Whatever the exact timeline and initial itinerary of the trip, what drives its organization is the possibility to experience what the world offers outside of the confines of Norman France. In a letter dated August 29, 1840, Gustave's father offers a meaningful piece of travel advice to his son via Michel de Montaigne's essay *De l'institution des enfants*: “l'on voyage pour rapporter principalement les humeurs des nations et leurs façons, et pour ‘frotter et limer notre cervelle contre celle d'autrui’” (*Corr.* I, p. 68).¹⁸¹ Dr. Flaubert's reminder is two-fold: traveling is for the purpose of writing (“pour rapporter”) and also for the benefit of confronting alterity (“frotter et limer...”). Confronting Otherness in Corsica is not simply an encounter with that which is unfamiliar but will also include reconciliations with preconceived notions of Corsican communities (previously exposed through literature) with on-the-ground experiences in places like the village of Vico, just north of Ajaccio. The “Other” in this case can be understood not only as the Corsican individuals that Flaubert encounters along his trek from Ajaccio to Bastia, but also with the unexpectedness and the difference of the natural environment of Corsica and of its maritime surroundings.

In our study of this travel narrative and of contemporaneous selections from the *Correspondance*, we will focus on the different levels and depths of confrontations with alterity in Corsica. First, we will identify literary relationships that helped Flaubert plan his itinerary across the island and those that inspired *how* he chooses to develop his narration. Secondly, we will

¹⁸⁰ Even in the month prior to his departure, Flaubert still seems to be unaware of where he is actually going, here writing to his childhood friend and confidant Ernest Chevalier: “Je ne sais encore ce que je ferai, ni où j'irai ces vacances, je suis dans le plus grand embarras, si je dois faire mon voyage des Pyrénées” (*Corr.* I, p. 64).

¹⁸¹ Originally cited in by Jean Bruneau, *Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert (1835-1845)*, *op. cit.*, p. 285; Reference to Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, Livre I, chap. XXVI, *De L'institution des enfants*, *Œuvres complètes* (éd. Albert Thibaudet), Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” 1937, p. 164.

examine an experience with environmental alterity through a significant passage devoted to the spectacle of light (and shadows) produced by trees and brush overhanging the paths around Vico, a region north of Ajaccio. Finally, we will close with the importance of the Mediterranean while opening towards what lies beyond its horizon—the Orient, and perhaps more importantly, literature.

1. *Flaubert's Literary Connections*

Pyrénées-Corse is an amalgam of reported experiences alongside significant, deep personal reflection about their importance. The combination of observations and personal introspection distinguish this narrative from others written during/following travel to Corsica during the 1820s-1830s from authors such as Robert Benson¹⁸², Jean-François Réalier-Dumas¹⁸³, and even Prosper Mérimée¹⁸⁴; however, we must keep in mind that *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* was for his family's benefit and not intended as an official publication.

Ever still, Flaubert's narrative resembles a patchwork, a literary quilt of memories and thoughts sewn together as one. As Claudine Gothot-Mersch notes in her presentation of the travel narrative, "*Pyrénées-Corse* est donc rarement écrit sur le vif: Flaubert s'y met quand il s'installe quelque part pour plusieurs jours [...] Cette méthode l'a amené à prendre de la distance par rapport à ce dont il parle, à aller vers le commentaire plutôt que de s'enfermer dans une description minutieuse et systématique" (*OC I*, p. 1232). The space between experience and writing is incredibly important because it shows that Flaubert meditates more on his experiences rather than

¹⁸² Robert Benson, *Narrative of Lord Byron's Voyage to Corsica and Sardinia, During the Summer and Autumn of 1821*, *op. cit.*, 1825.

¹⁸³ Jean-François Réalier-Dumas, *Mémoires sur la Corse*, Paris, Plancher, 1819.
Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5815678s>

¹⁸⁴ Prosper Mérimée, *Notes d'un voyage en Corse*, Paris, Fournier jeune, 1840.
Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k102660n>

he offers the play-by-play of his adventures, however, those types of details are hardly lacking in his writings. This retrospective aspect of the travelogue permits us as readers to experience Flaubert's affective and material engagement with the sites that he visits; additionally, such a delay in writing also encourages us to consider the lasting memory and impressions that Flaubert maintains of his impressions of Corsica.

2. *Preparing the Route Across Corsica, Through Literature*

An important facet of the travelogue is a reconsideration of how reading influenced his expectations for Corsicans and their communities. Here, I will address moments where Flaubert stops and questions the portrayals offered by authors such as Prosper Mérimée and Hubert Lauvergne, authors whose works strongly predispose the young traveler to images and scenes of Corsican communities and traditions. Then, I will turn to Flaubert's narration of his arrival in Corsica by approaching this episode through the critical lens of the "Robinsonnade" and will shed light on how this spectacular entrance serves to further distinguish Corsica as a world unto itself and that gives access to other reaches of the Mediterranean world.

Prosper Mérimée often serves as an important anchor in our discussion of Flaubert's *Dossier Corse*, alongside others of the Romantic generation. Curiously, however, Mérimée is never mentioned directly in *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* even though his literature is certainly a driving force for its organization. While Mérimée's *Mateo Falcone* certainly marked a generation, and likely served as Flaubert initiation to Corsican culture, the 1840 publication of Mérimée's novel *Colomba* has more direct significance on Flaubert's travel across Corsica—he envisions an opportunity to *meet* the "real" Colomba, as well as following-up on promises to encounter bandits along the way:

C'est un si drôle de pays que le préfet même ne peut pas s'empêcher d'aimer les bandits quoiqu'il leur fasse donner la chasse. [Le préfet] m'a promis de m'en faire connaître quelques-uns dans les courses que je [vais] faire avec M. Cloquet dans le pays de la montagne. Nous passerons par un village où nous verrons la véritable Colomba, qui n'est point devenue une grande dame comme dans la nouvelle de Mérimée mais une vieille bonne femme racornie. (*Corr. I*, p. 73)

Fiction meets reality where “la véritable Colomba” exists, or at least the person around whom Mérimée constructed his eponymous character.¹⁸⁵ It is interesting as well to note the tone of Flaubert's remarks in this letter: his voice sounds thoroughly entertained and amused by contrast between what he sees before his eyes and what he read previously, especially for the construction of Colomba. Additionally, and perhaps most strikingly, is that at the end of September 1840 and the beginning of October 1840, at the time when Flaubert is set to arrive in Ajaccio, the Ajaccian newspaper *Journal de la Corse* publishes in serial format and in excerpt both *Colomba* and *Notes d'un voyage en Corse!*¹⁸⁶ Although an encounter with a gang of bandits would have been ideal, banditry itself frames the young traveler's touristic aspirations and in particular, he seeks a meeting

¹⁸⁵ Georges Roger, among others, traces the sources of *Colomba* to a *fait divers* of a familial vendetta; Cf. Georges Roger, “Les sources directes et l'action de *Colomba*,” in *Prosper Mérimée et la Corse*, Alger, Éditions Baconnier, 1945, p. 173-199. Based on current understandings of the origins of the mythical Colomba, her home is situated in Fozzano, in the region of Sartène, relatively far from Ajaccio, especially on horseback. See Dorothy Carrington, “Violence and Piety,” in *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 119, “The real Colomba Bartoli was just as ruthless and less attractive. She was a widow in her late fifties at the time of the drama that inspired Mérimée, a masterful woman, fanatically vindictive. She gave Mérimée her lovely, inappropriate name and the idea of a new type of heroine; but he never attempted to portray her character, not even transposed into the figure of a young girl. In the same way he derived the idea of his story from the vendetta of Fozzano, but without reproducing its events. They engage less sympathy than those he relates.”

¹⁸⁶ See Annex 1.

with Théodore Poli, the most widely recognized bandit of the early-1800s (however by some accounts he is killed either in 1827¹⁸⁷ or 1831¹⁸⁸).

Travel narratives also acquaint Flaubert with Corsica and give structure to his own itinerary and social surroundings. Of the numerous potential *intertextes*, Hubert Lauvergne's *Mémoire sur la Corse* (1826) is the only one that receives direct reference within Flaubert's narrative. A personal connection is made when the two travelers cross paths in Toulon (because of Flaubert's chaperon, Dr. Cloquet?): "M. Lauvergne, un de mes amis, que j'ai fait en voyage, un homme à moitié poète et à moitié médecin, offrant un bon mélange de sentiments et d'idées" (*OC I*, p. 688).

Lauvergne's *Mémoires sur la Corse* exposes Flaubert to the activities of bandits, the position of women in Corsican society, and the differing notions of justice within and amongst insular communities. This narrative makes its first explicit appearance (although not by title) as a casual footnote from Flaubert himself:

Dans un curieux mémoire que M. Lauvergne a publié sur la Corse, il dit qu'il a vu un jeune garçon de douze ans environ s'amuser à tenir sa mère couchée en joue au bout de son fusil; il lui faisait faire ainsi toutes les évolutions qu'il lui commandait et la faisait danser comme un chien avec un fouet. Le père était à deux pas de là et riait beaucoup de cette plaisanterie barbare (*OC I*, p. 707).

¹⁸⁷ In his *Cinquième Lettre sur la Corse*, published March 6, 1827, Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire writes that Théodore Poli had been trapped and killed a short time before: "Le fameux bandit Tiodoro Poli, la terreur de la Corse, qui échappait depuis sept ans aux plus actives recherches, et qui exerçait dans l'arrondissement d'Ajaccio une espèce d'empire, moitié par la crainte, moitié par l'intérêt qu'inspire toujours le courage, Tiodoro n'existe plus: après une poursuite de douze jours, après un engagement avec la force armée, où deux voltigeurs furent blessés, il a enfin succombé; et pour terminer dignement sa vie aventureuse, qui sera sans doute pour les pâtres de ces montagnes le sujet de plus d'une chanson populaire, il a fini la mort de braves, les armes à la main, sur un champ de bataille, et sans aller porter sa tête sur un échafaud" (*La Corse d'Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire. Nouvelles et autres écrits, op. cit.*, p. 311-312).

¹⁸⁸ Celebrated Corsican journalist Santu Casanova commemorates the 100th anniversary of Théodore Poli's death in 1931, "Tiadoru cascò anch'ellu sottu e palle vindittere di i vultisgiatori corsi, in 1831" [Théodore also fell under the vengeance of the *Voltigeurs corses* in 1831] (Santu Casanova, "Tiadoru, banditu," *Annu Corsu*, 1932; available online: http://archive.wikiwix.com/cache/index2.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fcorsica.net.free.fr%2Fhtml%2Ffrancais%2Ftextes%2Ftiadoru_poli_banditu.htm)

The above footnote description in Flaubert's narrative is even more important in that it combines both Lauvergne's own reported observations and Flaubert's *transformation* of a few important details of the same moment. Let us look at Lauvergne's account for comparison with the quote above:

J'ai été témoin d'une scène dont le souvenir m'attriste encore; c'était un enfant qui forçait sa mère à sauter, à grimacer devant lui, en la couchant en joue avec le fusil de son père. Tandis qu'un voyageur pâlera devant ce simulacre de crime, ce même père s'applaudira de la facilité de son fils à retenir ses leçons, lui proposera un but avec l'arme chargée, et s'il l'atteint il l'élèvera vers le ciel et ne manquera pas de présager en lui un autre Alcide.¹⁸⁹

Putting these two passages side-by-side, we can easily distance Flaubert's rendering from the source material while hearing echoes of *Matteo Falcône* through the portrayal of familial violence ("couchée en joue avec son fusil"). This footnote seems to be a clumsy paraphrase in comparison to Lauvergne's comments which offer a moralizing perspective that underscores his own perceptions of the cultural practices of the Corsican interior. Flaubert further embellishes the account of Lauvergne by inventing details such as age ("un jeune garçon de douze ans") and including stylized metaphors to amplify the horror of the situation, "il lui faisait faire ainsi toutes les évolutions qu'il lui commandait et la faisait danser **comme un chien avec un fouet**" (*OCI*, p. 707; my emphasis). This discrete element of the travel narrative invites us to reconsider its composition *following* Flaubert's return to Rouen: "J'en étais resté à Marseille de mon voyage, je le reprends à quinze jours de distance. Me voilà réinstallé dans mon fauteuil vert, auprès de mon feu qui brûle, voilà que je recommence ma vie des ans passés" (*OCI*, p. 704). Lauvergne's

¹⁸⁹ Hubert Lauvergne, "Mémoire sur la Corse," *Journal des voyages, découvertes et navigations modernes: ou archives géographiques et statistiques du XIX siècle*, Vol. 29, 1826, p. 289. Available online: https://books.google.com/books?id=rhZDAAAACAAJ&dq=Hubert+Lauvergne+Mémoires+sur+la+Corse&source=gbs_navlinks_s [Consulted August 2, 2018].

narrative therefore serves the double role as both as a reference work and as a remembrance of times past as an aide in the composition of Flaubert's own narrative.

Regarding other perspectives offered in literature or in contemporary travel narratives, Flaubert does not hide his disappointment:

Tout ce qu'on dit sur la Corse est faux et il n'y a pas de pays plus sain et plus fertile, jusqu'à présent nous en sommes enchantés, et l'hospitalité s'y pratique de la manière la plus cordiale et la plus gracieuse. Nous avons été forcés de quitter notre hôtel et nous sommes logés dans de belles et bonnes chambres, dormant dans de bons lits et nourris à une bonne table, ayant chevaux, voitures et valets à nos ordres (*Corr. I*, p. 72).

As this letter to his sister Caroline describes, the perspectives of others predispose Flaubert to Corsica. These unnamed points of view ("Tout ce qu'on dit...") cast an overwhelmingly dark and gloomy portrait of the island and of its communities while drawing implicit comparison of their manners to those of Continental norms. More specifically, Flaubert's surprise at Corsican hospitality seems to conflict with various stereotypes of their harshness. Flaubert's declaration summarizes his first confrontation with difference that results in the correction of the cultural lenses through which he previously viewed the insular experience (and contributed to with his earlier short stories). In many ways, this remark speaks to the core of Continental French perceptions and awareness of Corsica more broadly during the first half of the 19th century: diverse publications about Corsica are taken at face value and are assigned a significant truth value by their reader (and author!).

3. *Literary Insularity: Shipwrecks and the Robinsonnade*

The beauty of the Mediterranean Sea masks its ruthless power. After seeing the sea for the first time from the shores of Marseille, Flaubert embarks for Ajaccio from the port city of

Toulon.¹⁹⁰ The crossing turns harrowing when a storm tosses the ship across the waves *en route* to Corsica. While this episode does not recount experiences in Corsica, it nevertheless aligns Flaubert's narrative with tropes of literary narratives in insular settings. Frank Lestringant describes this transition as a crucial structural element of travel narratives: "Tout récit de voyage combine en des proportions variables l'aventure et l'inventaire. Aventure d'un sujet singulier en des lieux successivement traversés; inventaire de curiosités, d'objets, de coutumes, de lieux géographiques et rhétoriques que la relation recense après coup."¹⁹¹

How the main character, or in this case the narrator, arrives on the island is an essential element to the (insular) travel narrative itself because it marks a transitional zone between topologies and serves to clearly delineate the island from the mainland. The episode of the maritime crossing in *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* serves as a critical element of narrative composition in two important respects: first, in generating suspense and intrigue to captivate the readers' attention before, secondly, exposing the singularity of the narrative space, the island itself. This insular geography is itself unique, according to Joël Bonnemaïson, because of its disconnection, its perceived rupture with the mainland: "L'île se meut dans une autre dimension de l'espace-temps: c'est un *lieu nu*, qui se tient seul et dont les liens naturels avec le reste du monde ont été coupés."¹⁹² The un-linked space of the island, cut-off from the natural world ("les liens naturels [...] ont été coupés"), suggests that the island itself is a world onto its own. Corsica, then, is extraordinary.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Jacques Papin, "Les Passages de Flaubert à Toulon", *Les Amis de Flaubert*, Bulletin No. 64, 1984.

Available online: https://www.amis-flaubert-maupassant.fr/article-bulletins/064_017/

¹⁹¹ Frank Lestringant, *Le Livre des îles. Atlas et récits insulaires de la Genèse à Jules Verne*, Geneva, Droz, 2002, p. 221. It is also important to note that Lestringant's perspective requires/oblige that the transmission of the inventory ("inventaire") be posterior, occurring after-the-fact of travel and (initial?) contact.

¹⁹² Joël Bonnemaïson, "Vivre dans l'île: une approche de l'iléité océanienne," *L'Espace géographique*, Vol. 19-20, Issue 2, 1990-1991, p. 120.

Flaubert opens the episode of the *traversée* with a description of the smooth seas and winds off the coast of Hyères:

Quand nous sommes partis de Toulon, la mer était belle et promettait d'être bienveillante aux estomacs faibles, aussi me suis-je embarqué avec la sécurité d'un homme sûr de digérer son déjeuner. Jusqu'au bout de la rade en effet *le perfide élément* est resté bon enfant, et le léger tangage imprimé à notre bateau nous remuait avec une certaine langueur mêlée de charme. Je sentais mollement le sommeil venir et je m'abandonnais au bercement de la naïade tout en regardant derrière nous le sillage de la quille qui s'élargissait et se perdait sur la grande surface bleue. (p. 690; italics in the original text)

Keeping in mind the intended audience of this passage being Flaubert's family, the levity of his writing comes to the forefront. Describing the "estomacs faibles" and "*le perfide élément*"¹⁹³ alongside the sarcastic remark of having boarded the ship "avec la sécurité d'un homme sûr de digérer son déjeuner," one need not think too hard to anticipate the seasickness and nausea that will plague a certain traveler. Despite these two examples of negative foreshadowing, the young traveler relates his ease during the crossing. One description in particular echoes the dreamlike state of the character Albano of *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit*: "Je sentais mollement le sommeil venir et je m'abandonnais au bercement de la naïade tout en regardant derrière nous le sillage de la quille qui s'élargissait et se perdait sur la grande surface bleue" (*ibid.*). While the physical circumstances are indeed different between the fictional character and the seafarer, the deep blue hues of the Mediterranean Sea exacts a similar effect on Flaubert as it did on Albano who also slowly drifts to sleep under the blue sky of Corsica ("C'était en Corse, dans

¹⁹³ Periphrastic way to describe the Mediterranean Sea (recalling the *Perfide Albion*) that inserts underscores its penchant for danger: "Ce mot, qui peut suivre ou précéder le nom qu'il modifie, se prend quelques fois dans une acception plus étendue, et comme synonyme de méchant, dangereux, redoutable, nuisible. La mer est appelée par périphrase, *le perfide élément*" (L. Carpentier, *Le Gradus français, ou dictionnaire de la langue poétique*, Paris, A. Johanneau, 1825, p. 900). The italicization of the *périphrase* inserts a brief moment of levity into the narrative as it foregrounds the looming storm that will shortly be narrated.

un grand champ, sur un tas de foin que, à moitié éveillé, Albano, couché sur le dos, caressait sa chatte et ses petits, tout en regardant les nuages qui passaient sur le fond d'azur..."; *OC I*, p. 25).

As the ship's trajectory shifts so too do the winds. The sea which inspires countless dreams and musings transforms into a relentless assailant whose slow punches are wonderfully recounted in the following passage:

À la hauteur des îles d'Hyères, la brise ne nous avait pas encore pris, et cependant de larges vagues déferlaient avec vigueur sur les flancs du bateau, sa carcasse en craquait (et la mienne aussi); une grande ligne noire était marquée à l'horizon et les ondes, à mesure que nous avançons, prenaient une teinte plus sombre, analogue tout à fait à celle d'un jeune médecin qui se promenait de long en large et dont les joues ressemblaient à du varech tant il était vert d'angoisse. Jusque-là j'étais resté couché sur le dos, dans la position la plus horizontale possible, et regardant le ciel où j'enviais d'être, car il me semblait ne remuer guère, et je pensais le plus que je pouvais afin que les enfantements de l'esprit fassent taire les cris de la chair. (*OC I*, p. 690)

It was smooth-sailing ("Je sentais mollement le sommeil venir et je m'abandonnais au bercement") until the waves began to smack the ship's sides "avec vigueur" to such an extent that the noises from the creaking wood are recounted: "sa carcasse en craquait (la mienne aussi)." The ship is inching closer to a brewing storm that changes the aspect of "l'horizon et les ondes" making them appear darker, "une teinte plus sombre."

The reference to a queasy physician begins a passage in the narrative where the physical (medical) reality of the maritime crossing (nausea, seasickness) exacts a significant change in the emotional and psychological status of Flaubert. The only immediate remedy available to the nausea is to focus attention on what does not appear to be moving (as much), the *au-delà*: "J'étais resté couché sur le dos [...] regardant le ciel où j'enviais d'être car il me semblait ne remuer guère." Entering into this dream-like stage is far from the lazy comforts that Albano appreciates atop his "tas de foin" in *Matteo Falcône*, Flaubert conjures his child-like temperament as a means to quell his ailments ("afin que les enfantements de l'esprit fassent taire les cris de la chair"). The serenity

sought is far from obtained as his malaise overtakes his body and mind: “Je ne voyais que le bout du mât, mon œil fixe et stupide placé dessus en suivait tous les mouvements cadencés sans pouvoir s’en détacher, comme je ne pouvais me détacher non-plus de mon banc de douleurs” (*OC I*, p. 690-1). Despite his best intentions and his most ardent efforts to calm his mind and body, the strength of the storm prevails: “Le mouvement que je m’étais donné occasionna encore une purgation, qui fut bien la plus cruelle, et de nouvelles douleurs qui ne me quittèrent réellement qu’à Ajaccio sur le terrain des vaches. Quelques heures après être débarqué, le sol remuait encore et je voyais tous les meubles s’incliner et se redresser ” (*OC I*, p. 692-3).

The pernicious nature of the maritime crossing stands in stark contrast to the ravishing beauty of the Mediterranean Sea. The calm of the warm blue water is counterbalanced by the nauseating rock of the ship caused by crashing waves. From a literary perspective, what is the importance of this transitional episode to the larger travel narrative and for Flaubert’s vision of Corsica? Flaubert combines the simple transmission of information (recall Lestringant’s “inventaire”) with a stylized series of different events and of his reactions to a moment that is seared into his memory. As readers, we are pulled into the action through the suspense generated by the storm itself: will the boat sink from sustained damage? Will any of the passengers be lost at sea?

Narrating the storm and concern for a shipwreck aligns this passage of *Pyrénées-Corse* with an important trope of insular narratives of the 18th- and 19th-centuries: the *Robinsonnade*. This feature of the text is one that frames shipwrecks (or their potential) and stormy seas as a rite of passage for the sea-farer to arrive safely on an island, just as Daniel Defoe’s title character in

Robinson Crusoe (1716).¹⁹⁴ Inspired by these adventures, Diana Loxley observes the foundation of a new literature:

The early years of the century witnessed a literature haunted by the dark, Gothic mood of introspection and confinement; by the 1880s, ‘popular’ and ‘children’s’ literature had turned, by contrast, towards a universe of possibility in which male heroes, descendants of Robinson Crusoe, made manifest their resourcefulness in struggles on desert islands or the high seas, in confrontations with savages, tyrants and beasts, and who, unscathed, brought back to the homeland their tales of adventure.¹⁹⁵

Similarly, Valérie Stiénon observes a strict adherence to the Crusoe formula in her comprehensive evaluation of French adoption and adaptation of the *Robinsonnade* by the 1800s: “La robinsonnade oscille entre, d’une part, un schéma défini *a priori* par la récurrence globale de ses composantes narratives et de ses actants et, d’autre part, la référence plus ou moins explicite au roman initial de Defoe ou à l’une de ses réécritures.”¹⁹⁶ More than just the creation of a new literary genre or popular trend of 18th-and-19th-century literature, the challenge of accessing the island highlights the island’s geographical independence, storms and potential shipwrecks serving as lines of defense. Flaubert’s proximity to these literary codes highlights the importance of the discovery of the island itself whose cultural and environmental splendors will continue to inspire and enthrall the young *écrivain-voyageur*.

The challenge of accessing the island is a rite of passage required to enter the island. In their expansive work *Géographie Universelle. Mondes nouveaux*, Roger Brunet and Olivier

¹⁹⁴ In Defoe’s novel, a stormy sea risks the drowning of the eponymous character whose (fortuitous) shipwreck leaves him stranded on an island where he will set off on many different adventures and expeditions before returning to Portugal (and then England) thanks to the arrival of a ship bound for England.

¹⁹⁵ Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1990, p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ Valérie Stiénon, “La robinsonnade d’anticipation: Sur une forme composite et ses péripéties,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2015, pp. 250-266. Project Muse: [doi:10.1353/nfc.2015.0006](https://doi.org/10.1353/nfc.2015.0006); accessed August 2018. See also, Marie Fradette, “*Et si quelqu’un venait un jour: robinsonnade et quête de sens*,” in *Lurelu*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2013, p. 82, “Le roman de Marie-Danielle Croteau invite à entrer dans *l’univers des robinsonnades, ces récits qui traitent de près ou de loin de la thématique de naufrage*” (my emphasis). See also, Margaret Cohen, “Sea Adventure Fiction” in *The Novel and the Sea*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010 [paperback edition, 2012].

Dollfus emphasized the importance of the difficulties faced by the voyager for the experiences and adventures that will unfold while on the island: “On n’y accède qu’au terme d’une épreuve, un rite de passage qui marque la coupure; mais dès que l’on y est, on l’a toute à soi car elle est un espace fini, dont on sait faire le tour. Rites de l’approche, prise de possession, béatitude et finitude.”¹⁹⁷ This critical framing focuses on the island as “un autre monde dans le monde”¹⁹⁸ and as a type of “aliénation du monde”¹⁹⁹ that places a confrontation with alterity at the center of the insular experience. Penetrating the rural interior, Flaubert will certainly be cut-off: separated from the outside world and separated from his sense of self. Crossing the island in good company, the cultural and environmental landscapes that unfold before his eyes will forever be a part of the *écrivain-voyageur*, the island “nourrit les rêves de paradis.”

4. *Vico’s Light*

Flaubert’s first impressions of the natural spaces of Corsica are mediated through the refracting prism of the local environment. There are few, if any, descriptions of the topography of the port of Ajaccio, nor of the mountain regions surrounding the bay. Initially, the only way for Flaubert to understand and comprehend the Corsican landscape, and to later describe it, is through analogy, a strategy he adopts in a letter to his sister Caroline, writing to her on October 4, 1840, two days following his arrival in Ajaccio:

Ce que j’ai vu de la Corse jusqu’à présent se borne à peu de chose quant à l’étendue—je connais Ajaccio et aux environs un lieu nommé Cilledanicia—le pays où je suis ne ressemble pas plus à la Provence qu’à la Normandie, et j’ai été très étonné de trouver des aloès et des bananiers (*Corr. I*, p. 73).

¹⁹⁷ Roger Brunet and Olivier Dollfus, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Flaubert himself is quite disoriented by the uniqueness of the Corsican landscape and the only recourse is to dialogue with the environment through relatability: he is unable to make a clear analogy between what he *has seen* elsewhere and what he is currently *seeing* before his eyes. His points of reference, the regions of the Midi and of Provence which he experienced for the first time en route to Corsica, are somewhat useful as bases for comparison but do not allow him to make a direct comparison as he attempts to explain to his sister landscapes that are entirely foreign. His shock (“j’ai été très étonné”) at the presence of plants such as aloe and bananas trees (“aloès et des bananiers”) underscores the unexpectedness of the terrain that he encounters along his way.²⁰⁰ This letter is of substantial importance to our analysis of this travel narrative, as it combines both “l’aventure et l’inventaire”²⁰¹ (to borrow again Frank Lestringant’s formulation) as well as impressions that are later fleshed out. These first encounters are decisive for the *récit* because they set the tone for the singular experience of Corsica, as perceived by an *écrivain-voyageur* deeply entrenched in his Norman vision and conception of the world.

Ajaccio is the point of departure for the trek across the island. It is from there that the traveling party, on October 7th (according to Flaubert’s chronology), ventures into outlying regions, Vico in particular (due North of Ajaccio):

Nous avons quitté la vue d’Ajaccio et nous nous sommes enfoncés dans la montagne. La route en suit toutes les ondulations et fait souvent des coudes sur les flancs du maquis, de sorte que la vue change sans cesse et que le même tableau montre graduellement toutes ses parties et se déploie avec toutes ses couleurs, ses nuances de ton et tous les caprices de son terrain accidenté (*OC I*, p. 693).

²⁰⁰ Recall Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire’s initial surprise of Corsica in the *Quatrième Lettre sur la Corse*: “J’y ai aussi trouvé de nos colonies tous leurs inconvénients, l’isolement, la séparation profonde avec le continent, le retard des courriers [...] et enfin, pour compléter la ressemblance, la fièvre jaune, ou du moins une maladie qui mérite ce nom par la teinte de même couleur qu’elle répand sur la figure de ses victimes” (Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, *op. cit.*, p. 301).

²⁰¹ Frank Lestringant, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

The mountain range situated immediately behind Ajaccio (today largely built-up and developed for high-rise housing developments) requires that the travelers take an indirect route to reach Vico: The path is sinuous, forcing numerous switchbacks because of the mountainous topography (“La route en suit toutes les ondulations”). The indirect path is not problematic or troublesome even if it delays the journey somewhat; Flaubert is rather quite pleased at the variability in scenery which offers new perspectives on the landscape itself. Looking over the edge of the path to the bays below, “Toute la nature rayonnait de soleil, la mer au fond scintillait sur le sable et ressemblait avec ses trois golfes à un tapis de velours bleu découpé en trois festons” (*OC I*, p. 694). Using terms and phrases that recall artistic painting (and that of landscapes in particular), Flaubert describes what he sees as a “tableau” in which the lighting demonstrates “toutes ses couleurs, ses nuances de ton”; it is the light itself that also shows the “caprices de son terrain accidenté,” an interesting turn of phrase indeed that suggests both the sudden topographical variability as well as a whimsical impression as a consequence of this unstable terrain.

Natural light marks the journey to Vico through the brush, the famous *maquis*, of the Corsican mountains where Flaubert will soon have his first experiences with local village life, radically different from the more urban and familiar situation of Ajaccio. To reach these villages, however, the traveling party will have to continue up through the mountainous regions, penetrating ever so slowly into the interior of the island. The dense foliage penetrated by radiant sunshine offers a striking lightshow where each aspect of the natural environment contributes their part to overall luminescent performance:

Toute la route était déserte, et l’œil ne découvrait pas un seul pan de mur. Tantôt à l’ombre et tantôt au soleil, suivant que la silhouette des montagnes que nous longions s’avançait ou se retirait, nous allions au petit trot, baissant la tête, éblouis que nous étions par la lumière qui inondait l’air et donnait aux contours des rochers quelque chose de si vaporeux et de si ardent à la fois qu’il était impossible à l’œil de les saisir nettement (*ibid.*).

Far from the more relaxed experience (relatively) of riding in a stage-coach from one provincial waypoint to another, traveling along the sinuous paths requires that the pace of travel yield to the natural conditions of the path: “Nous allions au petit trot” to not precipitate the sinuous trail, “baissant la tête” to avoid the low-clearance of trees, all-the-while blindsided by the spectacle of the light’s ever-changing nature, “Tantôt à l’ombre et tantôt au soleil, suivant que la silhouette des montagnes que nous longions s’avançait ou se retirait.” Shifting from dark to light, the lightshow continues to mesmerize Flaubert who admittedly becomes dazzled by the fluctuating appearances of the boulders aligning the path: “la lumière [...] donnait aux contours des rochers quelque chose de si vaporeux et de si ardent à la fois qu’il était impossible à l’œil de les saisir nettement.”

The dancing light is described as well in Flaubert’s letters back to Caroline, although there his tone is more succinct and less reflective. Reading this letter alongside the narrative offers the striking comparison of two distinct reactions (although not opposed) to what seems to be the same moment. From the recent re-edition of the *Correspondence* by the *Centre Flaubert* of the *Université de Rouen*, scholars and researchers profit from the digital transcriptions of letters that offer new glimpses into the thoughts and reactions of Flaubert. In this excerpt from an October 6, 1840 letter to his sister, Flaubert describes more succinctly and in different terms the path taken to Vico:

Tout le pays est couvert de montagnes et les chemins montent & descendent continuellement de sorte que l’on est enfoncé dans des gorges et des maquis et que tout à coup le paysage change comme un tableau à vue, et un autre horizon apparaît. [La] route que nous parcourions ~~était au~~ contournait le bord de la mer et nous marchions sur le sable, il y avait un soleil comme tu n’en connais pas qui illuminait toutes les côtes et leur donnait une teinte blanche et vaporeuse, tous les rochers à fleur d’eau ~~brillaient~~ scintillaient comme du diamant et à notre gauche les buissons de myrtes embaumaient.²⁰²

²⁰² Lettre de Flaubert à Caroline Flaubert-Hamard, Ajaccio, 06 octobre 1840; Bibliothèque de l’Institut de France, H 1355, ffos 171-174. *Collection Lovenjoul*; La Pléiade, t. I, p. 72. Available online: <http://flaubert.univrouen.fr/jet/public/correspondance/trans.php?corpus=correspondance&id=9558&mot=du+diamant&action=E>

Flaubert's comments rejoin those proposed in the formal narrative account we saw just above, although here in epistolary form they are much more direct. In describing the sinuous paths of the trail, Flaubert similarly characterizes his perceptions as “un tableau à vue” where light changes the viewer's perspective of the landscape, resulting in an amalgam of different horizons (“tout à coup le paysage change [...] et un autre horizon apparaît”). In this passage alone, we see two examples of the search for *le mot juste* by crossing out two segments (“~~était au~~” and “~~brillaient~~”) to replace them with more visually evocative verbs: “contournait” (physically bending) and “scintillaient” (shimmering, glistening).

Flaubert's visions result from the coincidence of immaterial light with the physical reality of the Corsican landscape. The frequent change in scenery, mediated through light shifting and dancing through different apertures and across different surfaces channels Flaubert's emotional engagement with not only his surroundings, but also *himself*, Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli explains: “Quel que soit le jeu des influences littéraires, nées de la Grèce et de l'Orient, ces références à la lumière correspondent à quelque chose de plus profond en lui, que ce soit au désir d'un ‘ailleurs’ plus coloré, plus chaud, ou à un goût sensuel marqué pour tout ce qui est fluide et lumineux.”²⁰³ Jeoffroy-Faggianelli's observation is judicious, but could take an additional step: it is not the desire to be elsewhere (“un ‘ailleurs’ plus coloré”) that takes over, rather Flaubert grapples with the fact that he is already in this space, he already is *ailleurs*, both physically and emotionally.

²⁰³ Pierrette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

5. *Vico's Bandits: Flaubert and Théodore Poli*

While the *écrivain-voyageur* does devote substantial attention to numerous other aspects of Corsican culture and daily lived experiences in *Pyrénées-Corse*, banditry often anchors Flaubert's attention and interest: "C'est un si drôle de pays que le préfet même ne peut pas s'empêcher d'aimer les bandits quoiqu'il leur fasse donner la chasse. [Le préfet] m'a promis de m'en faire connaître quelques-uns dans les courses que je [vais] faire avec M. Cloquet dans le pays de la montagne." (*Corr. I*, p. 73). The promise to encounter bandits should be taken with a grain of salt—this excerpt from his letter to Flaubert's sister Caroline is an expression of overboiled anticipation. Nevertheless, the excitement to meet the figures who have long animated his imagination as well as that of the Romantic generation, continues to fuel his excitement. A standard feature of Romantic representations of Corsica, the bandit has long fascinated Flaubert as we have seen in our study of *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit*. What is different now is that Flaubert hopes to *encounter* one of these formidable pillars of Corsican society, and in a version that perhaps corresponds to its Romantic imagining, and to experience life in the *maquis* as though he were alongside its most famous inhabitant of the early-19th century, Théodore Poli.

In *Pyrénées-Corse*, Flaubert chronicles in detail the historical and political circumstances surrounding Théodore Poli's defiance of Continental French paramilitary political forces (*les Voltigeurs corses*) and the development of his legendary status amongst Corsicans who revered his opposition. In the passage that follows, we will observe Flaubert's elevation of the singular figure on the one hand by recycling Romantic imagery and stereotypes relating to bandits, and on the other, an attempt to cast a new light on this figure, and by broader extension, onto others who flee to the *maquis*:

Vico est la patrie du fameux Théodore dont le nom retentit encore dans toute la Corse avec un éclat héroïque; il a tenu douze ans le maquis, et n'a été tué qu'en trahison. C'était un simple paysan du pays, que tous aimaient et que tous aiment encore. Ce bandit-là était un noble cœur, un héros. Il venait d'être pris par la conscription et il restait chez lui attendant qu'on l'appelât; le brigadier du lieu, son compère, lui avait promis de l'avertir à temps, **quand un matin la force armée tombe chez lui et l'arrache de sa cabane au nom du roi.** C'était le compère qui dirigeait sa petite compagnie et qui, pour se faire bien voir sans doute, voulut le mener rondement et prouver son zèle pour l'État en faisant le lâche et le traître. **Dans la crainte qu'il ne lui échappât il lui mit les menottes aux mains en lui disant: 'Compère, tu ne m'échapperas pas, et tout le monde vous dira encore que les poignets de Théodore en étaient écorchés. Il l'amena ainsi à Ajaccio où il fut jugé et condamné aux galères. Mais après la justice des juges, ce fut le tour de celle du bandit. Il s'échappa donc le soir même et alla coucher au maquis;** le dimanche suivant, au sortir de la messe, il se trouva sur la place, tout le monde l'entourait et le brigadier aussi, à qui Théodore cria du plus loin et tout en le mirant: 'Compère, tu ne m'échapperas pas.' **Il ne lui échappa pas non plus, et tomba percé d'une balle au cœur, première vengeance. Le bandit regagna le maquis d'où il ne descendait plus que pour continuer ses meurtres sur la famille de son ennemi et sur les gendarmes,** dont il tua bien une quarantaine. Le coup de fusil parti, il disparaissait le soir et retournait dans un autre canton. **Il vécut ainsi douze hivers et douze étés, et toujours généreux, réparant les torts, défendant ceux qui s'adressaient à lui, délicat à l'extrême sur le point d'honneur, menant joyeuse vie, recherché des femmes pour son bon cœur et sa belle mine, aimé de trois maîtresses à la fois.** L'une d'elles, qui était enceinte lorsqu'il fut tué, chanta sur le corps de son amant **une ballata que mon guide m'a redite.** Elle commence par ces mots: **'Si je n'étais pas chargée de ton fils et qui doit naître pour te venger, je t'irais rejoindre, ô mon Théodore!'** Son frère était également bandit, mais il n'en avait ni la générosité ni les belles formes. Ayant mis plusieurs jours à contribution un curé des environs, il fut tué à la fin par celui-ci qui, harassé de ses exactions, sut l'attirer chez lui, et sauta dessus avec des hommes mis en embuscade. La sœur du bandit, attirée par le bruit de tous ces hommes qui se roulaient les uns sur les autres, entra aussitôt dans le presbytère. **Le cadavre était là, elle se rua dessus, elle s'agenouilla sur le corps de son frère, et agenouillée, chantant une ballata avec d'épouvantables cris, elle suça longtemps le sang qui coulait de ses blessures** (*OC I*, p. 696-97; my emphasis).

Flaubert opens this portrait of the hero by underscoring that this historical personage was and will forever be a legendary figure recognized across Corsica: his name, Théodore Poli, “retentit encore dans toute la Corse avec un éclat héroïque” and that he was a figure “que tous aimaient et tous

aient encore.” This initial presentation of Poli is cast as the Romantic *héros sauvage* through his prowess, his fearlessness, and his refusal to abandon deeply rooted cultural values (that of the *vendetta*) even when faced with significant obstacles (“la justice des juges”). The individual’s ability to escape (in the immediate) and to persevere historically (for his cultural longevity) is equaled by his sense of duty to his local community—a Corsican *Robin Hood*, of sorts: “Il vécut ainsi douze hivers et douze étés, et toujours généreux, réparant les torts, défendant ceux qui s’adressaient à lui, délicat à l’extrême sur le point d’honneur, menant joyeuse vie, recherché des femmes pour son bon cœur et sa belle mine, aimé de trois maitresses à la fois.” This series of present participles (- *ant*) and accolades (“toujours généreux”, “son bon cœur et sa belle mine”) reanimate the fugitive-turned-bandit-turned-hero and continue the elevation of his legendary status through the juxtaposition of “bandit” and “noble”, where a clear label of disregard for societal norms concerning justice, as understood from a metropolitan perspective, clashes with the positively received (and intentioned) reputation of Poli in Corsica. He further impresses as an amiable showoff tempting not only local authorities but also local hearts. His heroism is elevated above the standard accomplishment of numerous *vendetta*, but rather accentuates active resistance to French political intervention and presence over an extended period of time: his weapons are taken “au nom du roi” and he is condemned by the judicial authorities based in Ajaccio, who send him “aux galères.”

Flaubert enthusiastic presentation of the bandit shifts to an escape-and-capture adventure narrative that blurs the line between narrative and historical reality: “Il l’amena ainsi à Ajaccio où il fut jugé et condamné aux galères. Mais après la justice des juges, ce fut le tour de celle du bandit. Il s’échappa donc le soir même et alla coucher au maquis.” For Poli, the death sentence serves as a catalyst for more intense resistance, a battle which can only be waged in the true home of the

Corsican bandit, the *maquis*, which should have been a safe haven, but has become second front for his resistance. With these segments of the travel narrative, we continue to observe a shift in the writing process of the narrative itself that moves towards the literary: “Raconter, c’est comme avec *Pyrénées-Corse*, mettre en récit au profit d’un lecteur, même fictif, l’expérience et les découvertes du voyage.”²⁰⁴ This long passage dedicated to Théodore Poli surpasses the transmission of biographical information and we see yet again how Flaubert’s curiosity for Corsican culture and traditions fuels his literary imagination, inspiring the young author to “mettre en récit” his visions.

The *tableau* of Théodore Poli concludes by recycling an important figure in the visual iconography of funerary rites of 19th-century Corsica - a woman who laps up the remaining blood from a corpse: “Le cadavre était là, elle se rua dessus, elle s’agenouilla sur le corps de son frère, et agenouillée, chantant une ballata avec d’épouvantables cris, elle suçà longtemps le sang qui coulait de ses blessures.”²⁰⁵ The consumption of the cadaver’s blood, the most peculiar and uncanny aspect of this entire scene, is representative of the close-ties of blood-family relations, as well as a visual (and visceral) call for vengeance: “Where a death had occurred by violence, the funeral ritual inevitably differed in some important respects [...] During the wake also the women soaked handkerchiefs in the blood of the victim, and their dirges became specific incitements to vengeance.”²⁰⁶ While the handkerchief is the element missing from Flaubert’s scene (perhaps an intentional omission to amplify the macabre aesthetic), the collection of blood is nevertheless a similar gesture conducted by the aggrieved.

²⁰⁴ Alexandre Bonafos, “Vides tous les horizons. Flaubert à l’épreuve du voyage (1840-1847),” in *Flaubert voyageur* (ed. Éric Le Calvez), Paris, Classiques Garnier, coll. “Rencontres,” 2019, p. 67.

²⁰⁵ Stephen Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict and Banditry in Nineteenth Century Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 379: “The term *balata* or *baddata* used generally in the south and sporadically elsewhere instead of *voceru* means both ‘funeral dirge’ and ‘dance’, and this usage suggests that assimilation of the two was once more widespread.” A similar scene will reappear in Jérôme Ferrari’s *Balco Atlantico*, discussed in Chapter 5.

²⁰⁶ *Idem.*, p. 381.

This scene is significant because it recycles moments from other narratives that describe and frame death rites and mortuary traditions in early-19th century Corsica. This scene could also be the rewriting of a story heard along the way by the guides leading Flaubert and Dr. Cloquet through the region. It is a scene that eerily resembles the one we discussed in our analysis of Eugène R. Saint-Hilaire's *Troisième Lettre sur la Corse*, relating observations of funerary traditions in Corte, because of the singular intensity of the reaction to death itself. Further still, this scene recalls the conclusion of *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit* when the mother of Albano falls over his corpse immediately prior to her own death: "Une femme accourt, pâle, échevelée, et regarde longuement et fixement le cadavre. Elle se cramponna aux barreaux de la morgue et répétait avec douleur: 'Oh mon enfant! mon enfant!'" (*OCI*, p. 27). Taking a broader view of Flaubert's writings from 1835-1840, one could reasonably argue just as well that the inclusion of this extreme mortuary practice lays the foundation for a subsequent *vendetta* reflects the morbid themes of Flaubert's early works. Returning again to the potential influences of *Le Romantisme frénétique*. Anthony Glinoeer has recently qualified this submovement of the Romantic period as "paralittérature," because of this trends use of often recycled themes such as, "la persécution, l'exécution capitale, les cimetières, les châteaux en ruine, la torture et les sévices" all framed within "[une] structure actantielle [...] souvent réduite à sa plus simple expression (une victime, un protecteur, un scélérat ou un monstre et quelques adjuvants)"²⁰⁷; as an example of these composite elements, take for example Flaubert's *Rage et Impuissance* which recounts the protagonist M. Ohmyln, who is buried alive and whose only recourse is to escape through his

²⁰⁷ Anthony Glinoeer, *Le Romantisme frénétique*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, coll. "Les littératures," 2009, p. 22; see his especially insightful commentaries, "Un modèle de paralittérature" and "Le roman frénétique romantisant," p. 74-94.

dreams to the Orient: “Maintenant rêve donc l’Orient dans ta tombe, dans une pensée de volupté et dans des rêves dorés!” (*OC I*, p. 180).

Following Poli’s escape from the *gendarmes*, “Le bandit regagna le maquis d’où il ne descendait plus que pour continuer ses meurtres sur la famille de son ennemi” (*OC I*, p. 696). Flaubert’s use of the term “meurtre” to describe Poli’s actions merits our attention because it touches on the important question of internal *versus* external perspectives as we discuss the deeply rooted tradition of the *vendetta* in early-19th century Corsica. While few would disagree with the definition of murder as an intentional killing of another person, the motivation for this life-taking is what is questioned, albeit implicitly. As Caroline Parsi has noted in her significant work *La Vendetta: Crimes d’honneur en Corse au XIXe siècle*, honor killings (for example, those completed in the name of the *vendetta*) served as a point of substantial cultural divide and misunderstanding between Corsicans and non-Corsicans alike during the 19th century:

Longtemps, les insulaires se sont efforcés de répondre à leurs détracteurs en niant ou en minimisant les traits qui leur étaient reprochés [...] Corses et non-Corses s’accordent à considérer la violence comme caractéristique de l’île. Ils n’en tirent pas les mêmes conclusions, les Corses affirmant souvent la positivité des valeurs attachées à la vengeance par le sang: la solidarité familiale, l’honneur, la loi et l’ordre, le respect envers les morts.²⁰⁸

In his framing, Flaubert qualifies both the attacks against “la famille de son ennemi” and those against the *gendarmes* as “meurtres.” Parsi’s perspective invites us to consider the cultural nuance of the circumstances and specifically from the insular perspective. Yes, murder has occurred, and through an external cultural perspective we are easily positioned to condemn Poli for his actions. Adopting an internal insular perspective does not celebrate murder, instead it better explains *why* it was a necessary end in itself as a demonstration of the cultural importance of familial honor. This nuanced perspective on familial honor is one we examined earlier in our discussion of *Matteo*

²⁰⁸ Caroline Parsi, *op. cit.*, p. 11-12.

Falcône when we considered the personal circumstances of the bandit following his outburst directed at the young Albano: “Sais-tu ce que j’ai fait, moi? J’ai voulu venger une injure faite à ma fille; j’ai frappé sur le prince, et son sang est retombé sur ma tête pour se mêler au mien” (*OC I*, p. 27). Placing these concerns into a literary context, both historically and analytically, Dorothy Carrington further articulates the fascination with bandits and mourning:

By the nineteenth century the vendetta had become a fantastic anachronism, a primitive survival that set the Corsicans apart as Frenchmen and Europeans. Visitors observed and studied it, commented on it in books, reports, and articles, horrified or fascinated according to temperament. Most were deeply attracted by what is courageous and disinterested in the custom: the fortitude and tenacity of the opponents, their willingness to sacrifice their tranquility, their prosperity and their very lives to the abstract idea of honor. That people could feel strongly about anything other than money seemed in itself admirable to visitors from a Balzacian France; the violence of Corsican passions offered an exhilarating affirmation of the human scale.²⁰⁹

Parsi’s commentary alongside Carrington’s historical framing here points to the importance of the willingness to adopt a cultural perspective in order to understand what underlies its foundation, rather than a rash race to judgement and condemnation from the outside. For some, confronting alterity and cultural difference only left enough room for judgment and derision, rarely nuance and subtlety.

While Flaubert was unable to encounter Poli along his travels, this interlude in the narrative serves to demonstrate the depth of his fascination for these legendary figures of Corsican culture and lore, as well as Flaubert’s own perspectives of these communities. Théodore Poli’s life and celebrity-status serve first as a cultural observation where continental values and morals are opposed to their insular counterparts, as Carrington also remarks above. Flaubert’s narrative

²⁰⁹ Dorothy Carrington, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

attempts to humanize this figure by showing what lies beneath the surface of the (literary) portrait of a Corsican bandit and calls for empathy and understanding:

Il ne faut point juger les mœurs de la Corse avec nos petites idées européennes. Ici un bandit est ordinairement le plus honnête homme du pays et il rencontre dans l'estime et la sympathie populaire tout ce que son exil lui a fait quitter de sécurité sociale [...] Quand ils ont fini leur contumace, ils rentrent chez eux comme des ressuscités, ils reprennent leur ancienne façon de vivre, sans que rien de honteux ne soit attaché à leur nom (*OCI*, p. 698).

This ideological correction and change in cultural perception in relationship to banditry recalls our earlier analysis of banditry in Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's short story, "Le déjeuner du bandit." In both cases, preconceived notions are thrown against the lived social realities of Corsican communities and from that, the unexpectedness of difference results in substantial change in perspective. Flaubert plunges into this conversation at the level of cultural judgement, injecting much needed nuance into the discourse that he himself participated in by writing *Matteo Falcône, ou deux cercueils pour un proscrit*. Flaubert's confrontation with his assumptions about Corsican values and community, a demonstration of what his father recommends via Michel de Montaigne—"frotter et limer notre cervelle contre celle d'autrui"—results in a change of perspective and an opening of new horizons.²¹⁰ Learning of the true realities of banditry is just one example of the cultural confrontations and corrections that Flaubert undergoes during the course of his time in Corsica and that lead to deeper reflections and considerations of his self, his perspective on the world as he experienced it, and most fortunately, opened a path to literature.

V. Leaving Corsica, Entering Literature

Just as the maritime crossing from Toulon to Ajaccio is recounted, so too is the return route from Bastia to Toulon, although the storm encountered is that of the emotional difficulty of leaving

²¹⁰ Originally cited in by Jean Bruneau, *Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert (1835-1845)*, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

Corsica. This separation anxiety that Flaubert endures points to the impact of his experiences and cultural confrontations in Corsica, an adventure that will touch not only his life but also his literature. In this final piece of our analysis of Flaubert's experience of Corsica, we will closely look at the final paragraphs of *Pyrénées-Corse* where the memorialization of pivotal moments of his adventure will encourage further reflection, exploration, and perhaps most importantly, moments that mark a path opening to literature.

While departing the port of Bastia, the young seafarer's thoughts are already with those whom he not only is leaving behind, but those who live across a different horizon:

La nuit fut belle, je dormis, je rêvai, je regardai la lune, la mer; je pensais aux peuples d'Orient qui par la même nuit regardaient les mêmes étoiles et qui s'acheminaient lentement dans les sables vers quelque grande cité, je pensais aussi à mon voyage qui allait finir, je regardais le bout du mât se balancer à droite et à gauche, j'écoutais le vent siffler dans les poulies et, à travers les écouteilles, les bruits des vomissements montaient jusqu'à moi; j'avais pour eux le dédain du bonheur (*OC I*, p. 722).

Taking the celestial reference, "les mêmes étoiles" also as a spatial and temporal marker, we can reasonably ask whether Corsica exists under this same sky? While Flaubert's thoughts head towards what lies beyond the darkened horizon, where he places the "peuples d'Orient," how does Corsica fit into an Oriental(ist) geography, if at all?

For Flaubert, the Orient lies *beyond* the visible horizon as seen from littoral France and is attached to nostalgia for Mediterranean Antiquity that has left its traces in both dust and ruins²¹¹; take for example the moment when Flaubert reflects on the first time he saw the Mediterranean Sea while seaside in Marseille, "Elle a quelque chose de grave et de tendre qui fait penser à la Grèce, quelque chose d'immense et de voluptueux qui fait penser à l'Orient. À la baie des Oursins [...], je me serais cru volontiers sur un rivage d'Asie Mineure" (*OC I*, p. 684). At the moments

²¹¹ See Jeffrey Thomas, "Flaubert aux arènes" in *Flaubert voyageur* (ed. Éric Le Calvez), Paris, Classiques Garnier, coll. "Rencontres," 2017, p. 85-99.

when the Orient is evoked in *Pyrénées-Corse*, often Flaubert appends both a spatial referent and a historical referent that demonstrates a clear cultural referent “à la Grèce” or even “Asie Mineure.” This rubric would then reasonably include Corsica because of its historical and geographical situation. And yet, this cartographic imposition encounters heavy resistance when taking Corsica into consideration. Why? Either the notion of the “Orient” merits reconsideration for the inclusion of Corsica into its rubrics or Corsica occupies a different space, perhaps all on its own, and is not a component of Flaubert’s Orient, even at this early stage. When writing to Caroline, Flaubert describes his perspective from the mountains and that he was able to see “un autre horizon” (*Corr. I*, p. 74), one that lies beyond Corsica itself and that will tantalize Flaubert for years to come. Corsica, at least spatially, functions then as a threshold to this “autre horizon,” wherever it may lead. This is not in any way to diminish the importance of the voyage itself or of the value of the experiences across the island. Rather, choosing to situate Corsica outside of the Orient and conceiving of it as a type of threshold or stepping-stone serves to valorize not only its cultural specificity but also its insularity by acknowledging its difference, and to borrow Anne Meistersheim’s concepts related to notions of insularity, to recognize Corsica as its own “cosmos.”²¹²

In the years following his return to Rouen, Flaubert will hardly resist the charms of the Mediterranean Sea, of Corsica, and of the Orient more broadly following his adventures in Corsica. Flaubert continues to experience moments of euphoria, of rapture with thoughts of the natural landscapes he witnessed over the course of his excursions; in June 1842 he describes these moments of emotional transport to his childhood friend Ernest Chevalier, who at this moment, coincidentally, is working in Corsica for the first few years of his burgeoning judicial career:

²¹² Cf. Anne Meistersheim, *Figures de l’île*, op. cit., 2001.

“Seulement quelques fois quand le soleil se couche, je songe que j’arrive tout à coup à Arles. Le crépuscule illumine le cirque et dore les tombeaux de marbre des Aliscamps, et je recommence mon voyage” (*Corr. I*, p. 96). While he might restart the trip in his thoughts with Arles, the conclusion remains the same: Corsica. Flaubert finishes his letter to Ernest Chevalier with a poem composed by Théophile Gautier that expresses his longing to return to Corsica:

Ah! je veux m’en aller dans mon île de Corse,
Par le bois dont la chèvre en passant mord l’écorce,
Par le ravin profond,
Le long du sentier creux où chante la cigale,
Suivre nonchalamment en sa marche inégale
Mon troupeau vagabond (*ibid.*)²¹³

Flaubert reclaims Corsica for his own, by way of Gautier, writing that he wishes to return to “mon île de Corse.” This single line is telling of the entire value of the experience in Corsica for Flaubert himself but also for the numerous other writers, travelogues, and artists that came before and will certainly follow: everyone’s experience in Corsica is personal and different.²¹⁴ Corsica’s natural beauty, cultural traditions, and complex history are ripe materials from which artistic creativity has drawn inspiration and will continue to explore. Flaubert describes the lasting impressions he feels in the following way: “C’est là un beau pays encore vierge du bourgeois qui n’est pas venu le dégrader de ses admirations, un pays grave et ardent, tout noir et tout rouge” (*ibid.*)

To continue to explore this “beau pays grave et ardent, tout noir et tout rouge”, a few years later, in 1845, Flaubert sketched out a historical drama entitled *Sampier*, devoted to the legendary historical figure about whom he already wrote the short fictional narrative, *San Pietro Ornano* (*Histoire corse*). This project never materialized and remained at an embryonic stage in his *Carnet*

²¹³ Théophile Gautier, “La Mort dans la vie,” *La Comédie de la Mort*, Paris, Dessart éditeur, 1838, p. 76.

Available online: https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Page%3AGautier_-_La_Com%C3%A9die_de_la_mort.djvu/81

²¹⁴ Recall as well Natalie Solomon’s observation that the travel narrative expresses the individual attachment to the destination: “Donner *son* Orient, *son* Italie, *son* Espagne, ou même *sa* France, voilà ce que se doit de faire l’écrivain en voyage” (Natalie Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 11).

de Voyage No. 2, f^{os} 54r^o-56v^o, his preparation for its completion is still significant in that it announced his requirements for documentary accuracy as a pre-condition to a writing project.²¹⁵ Flaubert generously waited to send his list, hoping that his friend Ernest Chevalier first settled-in in Corsica in May 1845, “Je te demanderai même plus tard quand tu seras installé quelques renseignements que je désire” (*Corr. I*, p. 231). Writing again the following month to Ernest Chevalier, Flaubert appended a substantial *post scriptum* requesting a considerable amount of biographical and bibliographical information needed to further elaborate his project:

Voici deux choses que je te demanderai: 1° il y a à Bastia ou à Ajaccio, plus probablement à Bastia, des libraires qui ont publié des recueils de Ballata corses. Aurais-tu l’amabilité de m’en acheter quelques-uns? 2° Je désirerais m’occuper de l’histoire de Sampier Ornano qui vivait vers 1560-70. Penses-tu que je puisse avoir en Corse quelque renseignement particulier sur cet homme et sur cette époque? Je voudrais connaître l’état de la Corse de 1550 environ à 1650, la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle et la 1^{ère} du XVII^e environ. – Si tu ne trouves rien tout de suite, je t’en reparlerai plus au long dans ma prochaine lettre. (*Corr. I*, p. 237)

Although Flaubert promised to expand on his project (“je t’en reparlerai plus au long dans ma prochaine lettre”), after this particular letter there is little trace of the continued existence of this project. *Sampier*, then, faded into the archives of what could have been...²¹⁶

Flaubert’s cycle of Corsica-inspired narratives functions as a sandbox, a laboratory even, where the young author experiments with different literary styles and genres, narrative strategies, aesthetic preferences, and his own personal ambitions. Flaubert’s Corsica is multimodal and polyvalent: a transitional space of discovery and wandering, a conduit for reflection about what

²¹⁵ Marie-Jeanne Durry, *Flaubert et ses projets inédits*, Paris, Nizet, 1950. See also, Gustave Flaubert, *Carnets de voyages*, Carnet n°1: Notes prises au cours d’un voyage en Italie en 1845 - 1845-04-1845-05: Ville de Paris / Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Rés. Ms 82; Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/html/und/litteratures/flaubert-carnets-de-voyages?mode=desktop>

²¹⁶ Sergio Cigarda resurrects this aborted literary project, and the earlier narrative *San Pietro Ornano* (*Histoire corse*) in his analysis of Flaubert’s 1862 novel *Salammbô*. Cigarda argues that many of the narrative threads that unite these two historical dramas are brought back to life in the *roman carthaginois*; Sergio Cigada, “‘San Pietro Ornano’ e la genesi di ‘Salammbô,’” *Studi francesi*, Vol. 7, Iss. 19, 1963, pp. 40-52.

lies beyond the horizon, and a place where the natural environment is indissociable from cultural traditions (the famous *maquis* where bandits escape capture). It is in this sense that *Pyrénées-Corse* distinguishes itself from other travel narratives of the period in that we are dealing more with a preface to a literary career of experimentation with aesthetics and poetics: “*Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* provides unusual snapshots of Flaubert’s emergent thematic and descriptive preferences and how this substance is forged by his inimitable style.”²¹⁷ If a physical trip is not in the immediate future (Flaubert moves to Paris shortly thereafter in 1841 to begin his formal legal studies), he promises nonetheless to travel when possible, and to write about his excursions: “Je réserve dix cahiers de bon papier que j’avais destinés à être noircis en route, je vais les cacheter et les serrer précieusement, après avoir écrit sur le couvert: papier blanc pour d’autres voyages” (*OC I*, p. 726). It is the future with which Flaubert concludes this travel narrative, changing the focus of his work, by opening it towards what is to come, towards literature.

²¹⁷ Mary Orr, “Provincial Transfers and French Cultures: Flaubert’s *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse*” in *Visions/Revisions: Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Culture* (ed. Nigel Harkness, Paul Rowe, and Timothy Unwin), Oxford-New York, Peter Lang, coll. “French Studies of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, 2003, p. 84

CHAPTER 3

Reframing the Nineteenth Century Bandit Narrative for the Twenty-First Century in Marc Biancarelli's *Orphelins de Dieu*

*D'une histoire de langue. C'est de ça que je veux parler.
Et de quatre salauds qui l'ont coupée à mon frère.*²¹⁸

Marc Biancarelli (1968-) is a dark horse of contemporary Corsican literature. Despite numerous anthologies of short stories and several novels published since 2000, little is known about this writer outside of Corsica, especially in contrast to his more famous counterparts Jérôme Ferrari and Marie Ferranti who have excelled in Parisian literary circles. Perhaps the unfamiliarity with this author is due in large part to the fact that the majority of his publications are initially in Corsican and published regionally and only later are they translated into French, coincidentally, by Jérôme Ferrari.²¹⁹ Marc Biancarelli's anthologies of short stories such as *Prighjuneri* (*Prisonnier*, Ajaccio, Éditions Albiana, 2000; trans. Jérôme Ferrari) and *Stremu miridianu* (*Extrême méridien*, Ajaccio, Éditions Albiana, 2007; trans. Jérôme Ferrari), now in simultaneous bilingual translated editions, include numerous stories of individuals trapped in their insular condition(s): emotional solitude, the amorous isolation of being single, and economic peril in the rural interior of Corsica brought on by the touristic low-season. The themes of isolation, economic depression, and rejection of a tourist-season driven economy reach a head in the novel *Murtoriu o a baddata di manusuetu* (Ajaccio, Éditions Albiana, 2009; trans. Jérôme Ferrari, *Murtoriu: Ballade des innocents*, Arles, Actes sud, 2012) in which a lonely bookseller rages against the economic decline of his community during the winter months, threatening his own livelihood, while at the same time revealing the same community's continual disinterest in the Corsican

²¹⁸ Marc Biancarelli, *Orphelins de Dieu*, Arles, Actes Sud, coll. "Babel", 2014, p. 22; from this point forward, all page number references to this primary source material in this chapter will occur in between parentheses in the body paragraphs.

²¹⁹ The timing of these translations ought to be read in consideration with the fact that Jérôme Ferrari at this point was of wide recognition for his 2012 novel *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (Arles, Actes sud).

language, its literatures, its poetry, its music, and its customs. Across his numerous works, Biancarelli takes aim at France as a colonizing power, both culturally and territorially, that has now for generations disassembled villages across Corsica. However, for all the pain and destruction that has been caused by French political and economic implantation in Corsica since the *Bataille de Ponte-Novo* (8-9 May 1769), after which Corsican communities had little choice but to capitulate to the French monarchy, cultural attrition is presented just as much as a self-inflicted wound as one of external origin. Communities that turn away from their past traditions, customs, language, and heritage are targeted by Biancarelli's incendiary writings, but are left with the possibility of redemption in the form of a cultural reawakening. From this perspective, I would consider Biancarelli's works, generally speaking of course, as a continuation of the *Riacquistu*, the late-1970s to early-1980s Corsican social movement known for its invitation to return to historical and traditional roots with new found appreciation for insular arts, performance, literature, the Corsican language, and culture. As Jean-Louis Fabiani argues, turning inwards, back into insular origins meant debasing or even rejecting cultural trends from abroad: "Il s'agit d'insister sur l'originalité absolue, le raffinement et la complexité des formes culturelles locales, afin de leur conférer une dignité égale, voire supérieure pour les plus radicaux, aux formes consacrées de la culture dite légitime importée de l'extérieur."²²⁰ Curiously, there is perhaps no other image or representation of Corsican culture better known, and yet more deeply misunderstood, than the bandit. However, this legendary figure of history is just as much an "originalité absolue" as it is "importée de l'extérieur" through literature, comic books, and television.

In *Orphelins de Dieu* (2014), Marc Biancarelli engages with externally driven perspectives of Corsican culture as he reframes important cultural obsessions of 19th-century authors and

²²⁰ Jean-Louis Fabiani, *Sociologie de la Corse*, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, coll. "Repères," 2018, p. 70.

travelers for the 21st-century reader: Corsican banditry and *la vendetta*. The narrative follows the central protagonists Vénérande and Ange Colomba as they both seek vengeance for harms done to them by a common enemy, the *Santa Lucia*, a gang responsible for acts of untethered violence terrorizing villages across the island. Vénérande and Ange Colomba penetrate deep into the mountainous interior as they hunt down the members of this gang, picking them off one by one all the while risking their own lives in the process. This central thread of the narrative encompasses another: a series of visceral flashbacks of the life of Ange Colomba as a bandit and then as a former accomplice of the *Santa Lucia*; the stories of his life serve both as a confessional and as a distraction from the arduous trek through the mountains. Not simply a rendering of Ange Colomba's own past, the numerous flashbacks interspersed throughout the novel offer new perspectives of the history of Corsican communities during the early-19th century which was a time of systematic expansion of Continental French political and economic aspirations.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, writers of the early-19th century focused their gaze intently on banditry and the *vendetta*: For travel writers, descriptions of bloodshed served to portray the (perceived) unbridled lawlessness of the island; for authors of fiction, the *vendetta* fueled a suspenseful and gripping narrative intrigue while at the same time transmitting much of the same substance as travel narratives. In both cases the representations of banditry and of the *vendetta* crystallized various stereotypes of Corsican communities and culture that persist through the 21st century, the consequences of which continue to influence literary creation. In an interview conducted following the publication of *Orphelins de Dieu* in 2014, Marc Biancarelli describes his conflictual relationship with authors of the French Romantic generation, such as Honoré de Balzac (*La Vendetta*, 1829), Alexandre Dumas (*Les Frères corses*, 1844), and Prosper Mérimée (*Mateo*

Falcone. Moeurs de Corse, 1829; *Colomba*, 1840). Biancarelli is most troubled by the lasting impression of Corsican culture and history left by their writing:

Je n'ai pas lu tous ces auteurs. Dès qu'ils ont parlé de la Corse je ne les ai pas lus. Leurs textes sont des resucées du romantisme français du XIX^{ème} siècle. Ça m'a gonflé. Je ne me vois pas perdre du temps avec tout cela. J'éprouve à leur égard, une véritable aversion idéologique. Je trouve que leur influence est pathétique [...] Mérimée propose une vision de la Corse très stéréotypée. Il pose le regard de l'élite, du dominant, du colonial presque, sur un peuple qu'on vient de conquérir et qu'on estime exotique. Il y beaucoup de caricature, même si ce n'est pas conscient de sa part. S'il n'y avait pas eu *Colomba*, s'il n'y avait pas eu Mérimée, on n'éprouverait pas la nécessité de construire ces caricatures. Je l'admets, il voit aussi des choses qui ne peuvent pas être inventées.²²¹

“Le regard de l'élite, du dominant” is responsible for the scurrilous distortion of Corsican culture and traditions as found in the literature published during the French Romantic period. However, as we have previously discussed, Mérimée is not the only author of the period who engages with the legacy of banditry and the *vendetta*, but as Biancarelli suggests, the generational perennity of his work indeed transforms it into a type of reference work that Biancarelli concedes has some elements of truth: “Je l'admets, il voit aussi des choses qui ne peuvent pas être inventées.” What is most problematic for Biancarelli is that the perspectives of Continental French writers become the dominant discourse *about* Corsican communities that keep the veil lowered on the complexity of traditions such as banditry and *la vendetta* during the early-to-mid 19th century.

At the center of this novel is a sustained meditation on the transformation of Corsican communities during the 19th century: the corruption of their traditional values and practices, such as banditry and the *vendetta*, as well as the systematic destruction of the forests and depletion of natural resources of the mountains. *Orphelins de Dieu* is a novel of multiple confrontations: of

²²¹ Interview with Antoine Albertini & Véronique Emmanuelli, 20 September 2015, *Corse Matin*, “Dossier Settimana: le tour de Corse des écrivains (1ère partie)”, <http://www.corsematin.com/article/derniere-minute/dossier-settimana-le-tour-de-corse-des-ecrivains-1ere-partie> [Accessed 11 May 2017].

those opposing different characters and most importantly of different generations, including the present one, that of the contemporary reader, to whom Biancarelli makes the most penetrating appeal at the end of the novel: “Ne vous retournez pas sur votre création” (p. 225).²²² How does the past continue to haunt the present of Corsican communities? For Biancarelli, Corsica is a bleeding body floating in the Mediterranean Sea, a victim of both self-imposed wounds and those inflicted by “les uniformes de la tyrannie [qui] souillaient notre terre par l’injustice et la corruption” (p. 200).

Through the portrayals of Ange Colomba, the legendary bandit Théodore Poli, and the gang *Santa Lucia*, Biancarelli reframes the literary representation of “honorable”²²³ Corsican banditry by recasting the visual and conceptual legacy of Romantic literatures as well as the cultural tensions generated by the Continental gaze on the Corsican subject, a gaze that is poignantly returned by the novel’s conclusion. The literary gesture here is not to be understood as a simple antonymic binary in the sense of writing the exact opposite of the Romantic portrayal (e.g., writing a positive conclusion to Prosper Mérimée’s short story, “Mateo Falcone. Mœurs de Corse”). Instead, the circumstances are far more nuanced: in *Orphelins de Dieu*, Biancarelli adopts aspects of the Romantic narrative of Corsican banditry, such as its intrigue and character distribution, as a means to recount a different story, that of the political activist foundation of

²²² See also the elegantly crafted perspective of Kevin Pétroni in “L’Orphelin de Dieu”, *Zone Critique*, “Portraits”, 5 July 2016, p. 4 (Accessed: 16 Oct 2016). <http://zone-critique.com/2016/07/05/portrait-de-Marc-biancarelli/>, “Et c’est ce qui produit dans *Murtoriu* comme dans *Orphelins*, si l’on songe au fait que la dimension archéologique de ces lieux est immédiatement menacée par l’oubli, car, si la littérature peut imaginer, imiter, combler ce temps perdu, aucun des procédés narratifs utilisés ne saura dire ce qui a véritablement eu lieu. Le roman se trouve confronté à sa seule vérité, qui n’est pas de dire le passé du présent, mais bien le présent du passé, d’affirmer, en d’autres termes, que le souvenir réellement éprouvé est bien l’absence du souvenir.”

²²³ This term is largely fluid in 19th-century travel narratives as it varies according to the author from “bandit d’honneur” to “bandit décoratif.” Broadly speaking, the honorable bandit is the lone bandit who flees to the *maquis* during a *vendetta* (at its beginning or end) called to restore familial honor. In some iterations, the term “décoratif” is used to fuse the image of the bandit with that of the topographical landscape itself to such an extent that the *maquis* and the bandit are inseparable; cf. Giulio Tatasciore, “Il banditismo d’onore corso nell’immaginario di viaggio francese (1815-1915), *Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, No. 15, Iss. 13, 2013, available online: <http://diacronie.revues.org/422>.

banditry and its horrific implosion stemming from the numerous attempts at its eradication over the 19th century.²²⁴ Furthermore, Biancarelli invites us to bear witness to the cultural trauma associated with the attempted *francisation* of Corsica.²²⁵ Finally, the discursive thrust of Biancarelli's novel proposes a reconsideration of Corsican insularity for 21st-century communities grounded in both its history and its insular environment.

To explore Biancarelli's intricate rendering of early-19th century Corsica, our analysis in what follows will draw heavily from critical theories of intertextuality and dialogic relationships between/amongst literatures and literary representations. Intertextuality, as both a critical methodology of literary analysis and as a circumstance of literary production, serves as a crucial springboard for our analysis because Biancarelli's point of origin is neither an original character²²⁶ (the bandit) nor an original narrative circumstance (vengeance).²²⁷ Instead, Biancarelli works

²²⁴ The political struggles of the late-18th and early-19th-centuries forced France to more deeply intervene to retain its long-sought Mediterranean territorial possession at a moment of intensifying political posturing in the region: "le furtif retour des Britanniques à Bastia, en avril-juin 1814, démontrait néanmoins que le Royaume-Uni n'avait pas abandonné toute idée de se rendre maître de l'île [...] Ce fut à Florence que le consul de Russie rencontra les émissaires insulaires, la plupart anciens cadres du royaume anglo-corse, désireux de chasser les Français" (Didier F. Rey and Eugène F.-X. Gherardi, *Le Grand dérangement. Configurations géopolitiques et culturelles en Corse (1729-1871)*, Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. "Bibliothèque d'histoire de la Corse," 2013, p. 40.)

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44, "Les différents gouvernements qui se succédèrent jusqu'à la Révolution de Juillet 1830 n'en considérèrent pas moins la Corse en terre étrangère, une sorte d'Italie française, qu'il convient de franciser, faute de mieux."

²²⁶ It is worth noting here that both as central characters and as mere allusions or passing references, many of the figures we will encounter in Biancarelli's novel have already been discussed in previous chapters, in particular the well-dressed and vivacious bandit named Gallucchiò of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's "Le déjeuner du bandit" whose appearance in Biancarelli's novel is most stunning: Ange Colomba concludes another period of his story telling with Vénérande, "Voilà, fille, ce que fut cette histoire. Voilà ce que furent Poli, roi des forêts, et Antomarchi, dit *Gallochju*, le Coq Hardi, qui ne connaissait pas la peur et aimait parader avec des habits neufs. Et maintenant, laisse-moi dormir, et rêver une dernière fois à ce que furent ces heures" (p. 168).

²²⁷ In the epigraph and in several interviews since the publication of the novel, Biancarelli speaks openly of the influence of the American Western on the composition of his novel and often refers to Charles Portis's 1968 novel *True Grit* (adapted for the cinema in 1969 starring the legendary John Wayne and later, in 2010, by Joel and Ethan Cohen) as an important source of inspiration. A foundational reference indeed as much of Biancarelli's novel follows a similar structure to *True Grit*, with a few substantial changes: a woman approaches a dried-up alcoholic US Marshall Reuben "Rooster" Cogburn with a contract killing to avenge her father's murder. Not willing to sit idly as Rooster does his work, she follows along and participates in much of his investigation that ultimately leads to her father's killer. More than just offering similar narrative intrigues, 19th-century Corsica and American Far West share much in common and each serve as a salient reference point for the other: sparse population, first glimmers of economic development, rugged terrain, and the fabled home of many an outlaw (but as André Bazin observes in his classic essay on the genre of the Western, "Gallopings horses, fights, strong and brave men in a wildly austere landscape could not

directly with what Barbara Johnson describes in her work entitled *Critical Difference* (1985) as the phenomenon of the “already-read”: “that aspect of a text that it must have in common with its reader in order for it to be readable at all.”²²⁸ This concept applied here rests on the premise that the reader is already familiar with bandit narratives and might immediately conjure in their own imagination their experiences with Corsican banditry from works like “Mateo Falcone” or *Colomba* as they enter the diegesis of Biancarelli’s novel. These (literary) experiences, physical or imagined, serve as an “Available Design”²²⁹ for readers to activate their imagination as they begin to read a text that already rings familiar. In Johnson’s view, re-reading, and perhaps even re-writing, engages with that which has already been read/written and is therefore grounded in the creative networks of intertextual dialogues, as argued by Mikhail Bakhtin, that underlie literary creation.²³⁰ We must acknowledge, however, that this potential circumstance might not apply to all readers of Biancarelli’s, especially those outside of the French Metropolitan and/or insular cultural idiolects. How then could this type of reader engage Biancarelli’s work? The force of Biancarelli’s novel lies in its discursive thrust to advance a new vision for the legacy of banditry,

add up to a definition of the genre nor encompass its charms”; André Bazin, “The Western: or the American Film *par excellence*” in *Film Theory* [eds. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and Karen Shepherdson], New York, Taylor & Francis, Vol. 2, coll. “Critical Concepts in Media Studies”, 2004, p. 132; this article originally appeared in Jean-Louis Riepeyrou *Le Western, ou le cinéma américain par excellence* [préface par André Bazin], Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1953, p. 5-13). The question here, however, is what relationship can we extrapolate between the American genre and Biancarelli’s novel? On the surface, both seem to focus on the nature of the individual in a space where institutionalized enforcement of the law is limited, if even present. Regarding the abstract notion of justice, towards what does human nature incline: lawlessness or principled righteousness? Much like the American Far West, the insular setting, which Biancarelli frames as a “huis clos,” makes for a ripe laboratory to test and explore the experience of isolation (Marc Biancarelli, interviewed by Pierre Gambini, France TV, France3 Corse ViaStella, “Altri’Menti avec Marc Biancarelli,” October 8, 2018 [Available online: <https://youtu.be/7mfQXJT9vQ8>].

²²⁸ Barbara Johnson, “The Critical Difference: BartheS/BalZac,” *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985 [1980], p. 3.

²²⁹ See Richard Kern, “Available Designs in Literacy,” *Literacy and Language Teaching*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 67-106. Organized on a continuum ranging from linguistic knowledge to conceptual knowledge, Available Designs, according to Kern, “involve both a cognitive and a social component” (p. 67) and argues that “It is the *interaction* of all of these Available Designs, drawn upon by writers and readers operating in a given sociocultural context, that allows readers/writers to produce and interpret meaning through texts” (p. 68).

²³⁰ Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist), Austin, University of Texas-Austin Press, series “Slavic Series” (No. 1), 1981; also, Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, “Theory and History of Literature” (No. 13), 1984.

not as an expression of deep-rooted values of familial honor, but instead of its disaggregation, a result of exogenous political forces; Continental France did not invent banditry, but its political encroachment into insular communities rendered it unrecognizable. Through close reading of narrative and linguistic features that structure different scenes and episodes, we will focus on the creation of a new discourse about 19th century Corsica that extends to the contemporary generation and serves as a conduit for the expression of cultural identity.

I. A Violent Beginning: The Mutilation of Petit-Charles

Orphelins de Dieu is a tale of vengeance called for by the central character named “Vénérande” following the horrific assault and battery on her brother, “Petit-Charles,” whose only fault was to have been at the wrong place at the wrong time: Petit-Charles and his herd of sheep are taken as an easy target by members of the *Santa Lucia*. Some of the animals in the herd are shot at point-blank range; others are stolen. Le Bigleux, the group’s leader, silences Petit-Charles in the most gruesome manner:

Le chef plongea ses doigts dans sa gorge, il enfonça jusqu’à saisir la langue au mieux, et les poings serrés du malingre étaient suffisamment vigoureux pour qu’il ne pût mordre. Ce fut assez rapide. Il sentit le poignard aiguisé à la meule lui couper la langue. Sans presque aucun mouvement de sciage, juste ce fer tranchant enfoncé dans la gorge et sectionnant la chair. Il ne réussissait même pas à hurler, seul un râle désespéré accompagnait les secousses désarticulées de ses jambes [...] L’exécuteur, lui, n’avait pas tremblé. Il avait le geste assuré de celui qui manie habituellement le couteau. Mais le signe de croix n’avait pas été fait avant d’opérer (p. 37-8).

The assailants must be made to pay, according to Vénérande, who later hires “Ange Colomba,” the story’s second central protagonist, as a hitman tasked with accomplishing her vengeance: “C’est leur peau à tous que je veux” (p. 24). After some careful negotiation in a dark tavern, a heavily intoxicated Ange Colomba agrees to be her trigger-man and reveals that he knows the

identities of Petit-Charles's assailants: "Je sais pas comment tu as fait dire à un muet que son agresseur avait des yeux bigarrés, mais tu as fait un sacré bon boulot, petite. Parce que moi, le bigarré, je sais qui c'est" (p. 60). From this moment of mutual understanding begins a relationship that will accelerate towards its fateful end. A rapport struck in violence will be led to term with substantial bloodshed, intense sexual violence, debilitating alcoholic intoxication, and gut-wrenching misery. At the close of the narrative, Ange Colomba holds up his end of bargain to eliminate each of the remaining members of the *Santa Lucia* responsible for the mutilation of Petit-Charles, at the hands of Le Bigleux, but not without one final cost: his own life. Weakened from his wounds, Ange Colomba cedes the way for Vénérande to take the final moments of her brother's assailant's life into her own hands:

Puis elle se baissa, et lui enfonça la pointe du poignard dans la gorge, appuyant pour que la lame pénètre bien avant de lui imprimer une torsion pendant qu'il gémissait comme une pucelle et d'entamer précautionneusement un mouvement de va-et-vient du poignard, afin de scier la chair, pour qu'il ait le temps de bien déguster le tranchant de la lame dans sa propre viande, et de comprendre tout ce qui lui arrivait, et comment il mourait. Il cessa de gémir avant d'être mort, alors elle lui ouvrit complètement la gorge, changeant de position afin de taillarder encore, jusqu'à l'os, et ne s'interrompit que lorsqu'elle le sentit contre le tranchant (p. 196).

Vengeance for Petit-Charles dominates the narrative story arc and serves as a *récit cadre* for a secondary plotline: the (auto)biography of Ange Colomba which unfolds as both he and Vénérande traverse the rural interior on their path to meet the *Santa Lucia*. These interruptions in the central narrative are recounted in reverse chronology in which the beginning of Ange Colomba's life meets the narrative present of his death (i.e., his entry into the world of banditry is detailed immediately prior to his own death, so that both stories come to full circle). While the analepses detail the personal remembrances of an individual character, these segments of the narrative expose the ideological undercurrents of Biancarelli's work which is to show the ways in which

Corsican communities fell victim to many destructive forces: those of continental French political aspirations in the form of the *Voltigeurs corses*, those of economic exploitation of natural resources, and perhaps most importantly, of the self-inflicted wounds brought on, among others, by forgetting the past: “Il n’est plus rien qui rappelle qu’on ait vécu ici, ou que ce fut possible, ou que des voix résonnaient et qu’on les entendait” (p. 222). The novel serves then as a call to the contemporary reader to recognize what has been taken, to remember what has been lost, and how.

II. New Visions of Banditry, Honor, and the Vendetta in Early-Nineteenth Century Corsica

As we have seen in preceding chapters, French authors such as Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire and Prosper Mérimée made ample use of the bandit and of the *vendetta* as anchors for their literary depictions of Corsica in the early-to-mid 19th century. The use of the bandit as an archetype or literary trope allowed these authors to penetrate deep into the rural interior to portray and comment on various aspects of Corsican communities far from the developing littoral regions around Ajaccio and Bastia. The bandit serves as a synecdoche, an emblem of the rough-and-tumble morals of Corsican customs and traditions and as such the figure serves to further distance Corsican communities from their Continental counterparts; on the other hand, the bandit serves as an entry point or guide into the Corsican community and reveals that there is much more than what appears on the page or meets the eye, and even more, what does not align with common conceptions or stereotypes.

Marc Biancarelli reframes the figure of the bandit through an intricate manipulation of the codes of banditry: its initial declaration, its personages, its evolution, and its fatal conclusion. Biancarelli’s use of similar language, setting, and narrative circumstances of 19th-century literary depictions of banditry serves to situate the reader within this literary universe; however, these

layers will slowly be peeled back as the narrative progresses to reveal a series of social and cultural horrors glossed over in the literatures of previous generations. This is not, however, to suggest that 19th-century depictions of Corsican communities, bandits included, were entirely rose-colored. Writers of the early-19th century most heavily focused their attention on the *visible* elements of banditry and vengeance; in *Orphelins de Dieu*, Biancarelli explores the *substrata* of banditry and the crisis of its proliferation, caused not by the presumptively inherent immorality of Corsican culture, but by external political and social influences that forever altered insular communities. Adjusting the long-held image of the solitary Corsican bandit and of the familial *vendetta* redirects the reader's attention to complex social and cultural dynamics that serve as foundations for the customs of the *vendetta* themselves.

In this opening section of our analysis of *Orphelins de Dieu*, we will discuss the central character Ange Colomba's engagement with and disruption of various codes of the *vendetta*. Focusing our attention on Ange Colomba will prepare us to scratch away many more layers of the complex realities of Corsican communities during the early-to-mid 19th century, a time period during which the systematic implantation of Metropolitan political aspirations radically altered the political, cultural, and environmental landscapes across the island.

1. "What's in a name?"²³¹: *The Layers of "Ange Colomba"*

Biancarelli's engagement with the mythological image of the Corsican bandit is first seen by the choice to assign his principal character, Ange Colomba, a variation on the name of the figure most directly and immediately associated with Corsica: "Colomba," the eponymous protagonist of Prosper Mérimée's 1840 novel. Because of the intertextual phenomenon of the "already read,"²³²

²³¹ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II.

²³² Barbara Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

the nominal association of these two literary characters initially invites the reader to reimagine the courage and determination of Colomba della Rabbia in celebration of her commitment to restoring her family's honor.

While the gender swap (male/female) and the role swap (bandit vs. actor of vengeance) are certainly considerable adjustments, Biancarelli's choice for "Ange Colomba" ought to be considered in greater depth given the author's admitted aversion and distaste for Mérimée's novel. Much like the literary veneer applied to Corsican communities and traditions in the 19th century, "Ange Colomba" is an ironic, even playful false front for a former bandit whose origins and evolution we discover with each successive chapter. The interspersed flashbacks to different periods of Ange Colomba's life reveal his transformation *away* from the angelic, principled character that his name would otherwise imply, and towards "l'horreur et la damnation, ce qui lui vaudrait le pseudonyme par lequel il serait connu de tous" (p. 43): "L'Infernu," a sobriquet of Sicilian origin that roughly translates into English as "Hell" via the French, "L'enfer."²³³ Satan is also a fallen angel.

This is not a name that is given with ease, but one that is earned following his initiation into the groups lead by Théodore Poli and Joseph Antomarchi, both leaders of parallel resistance movements operating across Corsica and as mercenaries in Tuscany. In the aftermath of a battle against the "Grand-Duc" of Tuscany who sought to take control of region surrounding Castiglioncello, Corsican mercenaries scatter to receive their pay, but not before the last bodies fall at the hands of Ange Colomba:

Poitrines transpercées à coups de poignard, visages défoncés à la masse par des guerriers fous des forêts, couverts de sang et réclamant leur dû. Les cris épouvantables avant que tout ne s'arrête. Et voici que deux grivetons désespérés se jettent dans les bras l'un de

²³³ Tommaso Alfonsi, *Il Dialetto còrso nella parlata balalnina*, Bologna, Arnaldo Forni Editorie, 1979, p. 80. This nominal form designates the character as the living incarnation of Hell; moreover, the nominal definite article in French requires that this be understood as "The Hell."

l'autre, tandis qu'un jeune homme, muni d'une hache, se déchaînait comme l'enfer, leur fait éclater la crâne et les met en bouillie jusqu'à ce qu'il ne reste rien d'eux, gagnant ainsi à jamais son nom de guerre (p. 106).

The reputation of Ange Colomba will eventually precede him: “Évoquer son nom, c'était évoquer un diable en action, c'était appeler sur soi le mal absolu. Alors ainsi l'appelait-on, *L'Infernu*, l'Enfer, et ce triste anthroponyme avait depuis bien longtemps enfoui dans la plus grande insignifiance sa véritable identité” (p. 18). However, at the outset of the novel, Ange Colomba is not the celebrated and feared bandit of years past. He is a decrepit, old man: “La vérité était que le temps s'était écoulé, et que l'on ne cherchait plus trop ce vieux malfaiteur d'un autre âge” (p. 19). Because “ne...plus trop” (not too often) is not the same as “ne...plus” (no longer), some in the village are still enticed by the bounty on his head and hope to find Ange Colomba, “la poitrine trouée, comme cela arrivait toujours en définitive à ceux de son espèce” (p. 20).

The slow revelations of this character's background are important elements of the novel because they mirror and describe the corruption of traditional honor-based practices of banditry in Corsica during the early-to-mid 19th century. During the course of our previous discussion of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's experiences and narratives *Les Lettres sur la Corse* and *Souvenirs de Corse*, we often insisted on banditry as a traditionally honorable pursuit, one tied to clear guiding principles that would have excluded random violence, or violence for the sake of violence.²³⁴ As Ange Colomba's own trajectory reveals, and as we will continue to uncover in what follows, groups of bandits became groups of men for whom violence served as the means to its own end: “Que sommes-nous devenus? Une horde. Une meute de chiens enragés, et le sang et

²³⁴ See as well José Gil, “La vendetta: Circulation et contrôle de la violence” in *La Corse: Entre la liberté et la terreur*, *op. cit.*, p. 91-144.

la haine sont les seuls ingrédients de notre combat. Les seules choses qui nous maintiennent encore en vie” (p. 204)

2. *New Perspectives on the Vendetta: Familial Honor Revisited*

Orphelins de Dieu begins with Vénérande’s need for vengeance, which is after all, as her name would suggest, cast as a form of veneration for her brother Petit-Charles. To assure its success, she seeks out the help of Ange Colomba and finds him alone in a quiet, dark village tavern. This confrontation is pivotal not only for the evolution of the relationship between the two characters but also for the contemporary reception of this novel because it problematizes preconceived notions of the Corsican bandit in the early-19th century. The challenge here is not to say that Biancarelli’s presentation ought to supplant, and therefore correct, previous representations of banditry. Instead, what we will see here is how Biancarelli questions the foundations of banditry – in this case, the principle of familial honor as what calls for the *vendetta*. Honor cannot be bought, but retribution certainly *can* for the right price and Ange Colomba is a deeply discriminating client.

Ange Colomba does his level best to keep a low profile with different styles of clothing and heightened attention to personal grooming: “Vêtu comme un citadin, le col bien mis et le veston boutonné avec élégance. Un chapeau mou de feutre à bord mince lui donnait l’air d’un étranger, et même sa barbe grise avait été rafraîchie au rasoir” (p. 20). Despite the disguise, which itself is amusingly conspicuous, Vénérande is certain that she knows the person in front of her, a fact that Ange Colomba acknowledges with a warning or a plea for discretion: “Tu me connais, apparemment, mais eux ne me connaissent pas. Je n’ai pas que des amis. Et puisque tu sais tout, tu sais aussi ce que vaut ma tête” (p. 21). Ange Colomba understands why Vénérande sought him

out and rebuffs her initial attempts to hire him for her reprisals, “Je sais très bien pourquoi tu es venue. C’est non. Rentre chez toi” (*ibid.*). However, the promise of a cash payment is enticing and keeps him seated at the table and attentive to the story of Petit-Charles’s mutilation: “Il ne pouvait se mentir, le besoin d’argent ne le laissait pas insensible” (p. 22). Ange Colomba invites her outside and away from earshot: “Viens avec moi dehors et dis plus précisément ce qui t’amène” (p. 23).

Vénérande reveals her own understandings and experiences with banditry as she appeals to Ange Colomba’s vanity: “Vous avez combattu avec Poli. Je le sais. Il redonnait aux pauvres ce qu’il prenait aux curés” (p. 21). Alluding to the Anglo-Saxon medieval tradition of Robin Hood, she envisions the heroic outlaw (bandit) in his fight against a greedy sheriff (a Metropolitan *fonctionnaire*?) to restore property and liberty to individuals and communities across the island; in Vénérande’s eyes, the underlying principle of banditry is to restore the rights of the injured and the aggrieved. In many ways, Vénérande’s remark articulates much of our own subject here – *How* are bandits perceived from within Corsican communities as well as from the exterior, and through what important features and aspects? Ange Colomba’s response, “Ces histoires de curé, c’est n’importe quoi” (p. 22), reveals that for him, the rose-colored image of banditry is a tall tale told to quell anxiety, and perhaps even to justify the at-times nefarious activities of bandits across the island.²³⁵ Money, however, is the complicated element of this scene, just as it was for the young Albano in Flaubert’s *Matteo Falcône*, and risks upending everything.

Through the pairing of Ange Colomba with Vénérande, Biancarelli disrupts traditional understandings and associations with the *vendetta*, a cultural rite that dictates and regulates

²³⁵ A similar quotation will anchor a substantial portion of our later discussion of Marie Ferranti’s *La Chasse de nuit* (Paris, Gallimard, 2004) because a central character, Lisa Zanetti, claims that the legends of the *mazzeri* (individuals gifted with the supernatural power to predict and announce death) are the inventions of priests and clerics meant to regulate and control communities across the island. Here, in Biancarelli’s novel, the relationship between the Church and banditry is less clearly articulated; one could perhaps posit a relationship between rural parishes and bandits, the latter defending the area from the steady encroachment of Metropolitan political aspirations and cultural norms.

reactions to offenses and wrong-doings publicly directed at families, as Kris Vassiler explains: “La vendetta fait figure de loi transcendante, apte à redresser le tort subi par l’unité familiale, à laver par le sang le déshonneur public.”²³⁶ The attack against Petit-Charles is a transgression of the sacred status of familial relationships, “Pour le Corse, les liens de sang sont sacrés.”²³⁷ Just as the family is a bond forged in blood, the *vendetta* too requires blood violence: the harms are “lav[és] par le sang.”²³⁸ The complication that we encounter here is one of responsibility: who is responsible for the reprisal and just how far can one go?

Blood violence is not just *any* blood violence. The *vendetta* is regulated by various codes and practices that dictate how to react to violence or to injury caused to a/the family; these codes also prescribe when and under what circumstances a response is required. In her significant work on the 19th-century *vendetta* and criminality in Corsica, Caroline Parsi draws clear examples of practices and codes of the *vendetta* and emphasizes the subsequent responses of surviving family members:

La vendetta est une pratique codifiée, presque mécanique, répondant à un certain nombre de rituels. Ainsi, l’individu qui s’estime offensé signale l’entrée en conflit à son adversaire par la formule ‘garde-toi, je me garde!’. Ensuite, les maisons des deux familles se

²³⁶ Kris Vassiler, “Colomba: La vengeance entre classicisme et romantisme,” *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France*, 100^e année, N° 5 (Sept. – Oct., 2000), p. 1313.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Caroline Parsi offers an alternative definition that emphasizes the importance of frequent intentional homicide as a constitutive element of the reprisal: *La vendetta* is an “enchaînement d’homicides opposant au moins deux familles ou deux clans et ayant pour but de laver par le sang les offenses” (Caroline Parsi, *op. cit.*, p. 9). The documentary record is not clear about whether in the implicit cultural code of the *vendetta* this reprisal can only be engaged following intentional homicide. Earlier, Parsi described the *vendetta* as a series of murderous reactions, but later clarifies that this act of reprisal can be claimed following *any* transgression of cultural codes related to familial honor: “Ces meurtres seraient le produit d’un code de valeurs implicite que chaque habitant est tenu de respecter. Car l’importance de la respectabilité, de la famille et de la mémoire des défunts régit l’ensemble des relations sociale entre les villageois” (*ibid.*, p. 55). While this may be the case with the documentary record, K. Vassiler has noted that mid-19th century narrative fictions amplify the dramatic effect of cultural codes of honor and their transgression for the sole purpose of engaging the “spectateur”: “La vendetta s’éloigne donc de la vengeance typique, telle qu’elle apparaît par exemple dans *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* de Dumas, *La Cousine Bette* de Balzac ou *La Vengeance d’une femme* de Barbey d’Aurevilly: entreprise éminemment secrète, dominée par la dissimulation et les coups de théâtre, la surprise et le dévoilement. Au contraire, la vendetta implique l’acte anticipé conforme à une tradition bien ancrée et destinée à la satisfaction des ‘spectateurs’ devant lesquels il se déroule” (Kris Vassiler, *op. cit.*, p. 1315.).

transformant en ‘petites forteresses’. Durant toute la durée de la vendetta, les familles restent cloîtrées dans leur maison aux volets fermés; cela peut durer de longs mois.²³⁹

In addition to the absence of any form of *mise en garde* in the novel, Biancarelli problematizes the cultural tradition of the *vendetta* by engaging a non-family member, in this case Ange Colomba, to actively pursue the restoration of Vénérande’s familial honor.²⁴⁰ The inclusion of Ange Colomba into the situation changes the nature of the circumstances linking Vénérande and Ange Colomba to the extent that the concepts of “vengeance” (retributive justice) and “*vendetta*” (codified retaliation to familial injury) become indistinguishable, and therefore synonymous, as acts of reprisal.²⁴¹ Biancarelli adopts familiar foundational plot elements and motivations of early-19th century narratives constructed around the themes of revenge and interfamilial conflict all the while reducing the importance of the family unit itself. The conflict is one of and between individuals for whom honor seems a fleeting value given the immoderate thirst for pain and blood. As a result, the honor-clad traditions of the *vendetta* (itself a form of restorative justice) become almost indistinguishable from outright vengeance (as a form of retributive justice). But first, money.

As the narrative evolves and as the relationship between the two characters deepens, so too does the nature of this quest for retribution. The line between *vendetta* and retribution is further blurred because of the financial incentive leveraged for Ange Colomba’s engagement: the *vendetta*

²³⁹ Caroline Parsi, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

²⁴⁰ Earlier, we discussed the honorable plight of Galluchiò (in Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire’s, “Le déjeuner du bandit”) and the anonymous bandit who crosses paths with Gustave Flaubert’s Albano: both individual characters refer to their current predicaments as the result of their (failed) attempts to restore familial honor (recall that Flaubert’s bandit cries that he only wanted to respond to “une injure faite à ma fille” [Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, *op. cit.*, p. 27]). Vénérande hardly resembles either of these two bandits and a comparison to Mérimée’s Colomba della Rabbia would be inapt because Vénérande generates a murder-for-hire scheme, that through the guise of retribution for familial injury, appears as a *vendetta*.

²⁴¹ Differentiating vengeance from *vendetta*, Kris Vassiler argues that, “Si l’acte vengeur en général est indissociable de la problématique de l’identité individuelle, la vendetta s’y inscrit, pour sa part, par un biais bien particulier: celui d’une sensibilité extrême à l’appartenance familiale” (Kris Vassiler, *op. cit.*, p. 1313)

offers “la possibilité de filer les poches pleines vers la retraite à laquelle il aspirait” (p. 24). Restoring Vénérande’s familial honor is a financial transaction for Ange Colomba. Vénérande is aware of his dire straits and digs deeper to convince him to accept the commission by directly attacking his pride: “Moquez-vous de moi, mais la vérité c’est que vous avez vidé tout à l’heure tout ce qui restait dans vos poches. Et vous faites pitié. En fait, si vous fuyez, c’est parce que vous êtes pauvre, et que vous avez honte de le montrer” (p. 25).²⁴²

The monetary circumstances mitigate claims to tradition or honor, at least at first. As the narrative unfolds, the attack planned on the remaining members of the *Santa Lucia* becomes as important for Vénérande as it is for Ange Colomba, for whom this final act serves to correct the numerous errors of his own past, while at the same time ending the life of Le Bigleux, the one responsible for much of the violence, theft, and terror that reigned over the island during the 1830s, following the death of Théodore Poli:

Je ne veux pas dire par là que je suis quelqu’un de bien, j’ai fait des horreurs bien avant qu’on se connaisse, toi et moi, et tu as dû en entendre parler, mais Le Bigleux faisait les choses par plaisir, pas par nécessité. C’était un tordu, voilà. Il volait, mais s’il pouvait tuer au passage, ou semer le mal rien que pour le semer, il le faisait (p. 152-3).

Ange Colomba’s position has shifted significantly and now seems to be one that seeks to exact vengeance on behalf not only of himself, but for the wider community, terrorized for years by Le Bigleux and the others of the *Santa Lucia*. From this perspective, we return to the conversation proposed in earlier chapters concerning the foundational role of honor in banditry. Here, Ange Colomba seeks to redress the harms that not only he himself has inflicted (“j’ai fait des horreurs”) but also for his complicity in the broader scheme, as he candidly admits, “J’ai filé un coup de main

²⁴² Drinking to financial ruin was certainly a source of shame and dishonor in Corsican communities, as observed by Stephen Wilson, *Feuding, conflict, and banditry in nineteenth-century Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 95, “Though alcohol consumption increased in Corsica, especially from the 1870s, heavy drinking among men was normally confined to Sundays and feast-days, and drunkenness could be regarded as shameful.”

ou deux” (p. 152). He has himself become the target of his own vengeance that he will accomplish at the novel’s conclusion. As he recognizes his own death on the horizon, Ange Colomba begins to tell his own stories.

3. *Shifting Narrative Perspectives: Resurgence of the Past to Question the Present*

In addition to reversing literary tropes of representation Corsican bandits, Biancarelli further nuances his portrayal of Ange Colomba through the character’s own first-person storytelling. Through variations in narrative voice that shifts between the first- and third-person narration (incorporating as well shifts between internal and external focalization), alongside balancing analeptic episodes with the narrative present, the reader follows the story of Ange Colomba from the present moment to his encounter with Théodore Poli, the revered Corsican bandit of the 1820s. The central narrative of Vénérande’s quest for retribution serves as the *récit cadre* for these numerous crisscrossing elements of Biancarelli’s narrative. Extradiegetic analepses are not simply tools for deeper connection with Ange Colomba; instead, they are part of his slowly evolving rite of contrition that he hopes to accomplish prior to his death. They also encourage reflection on the evolution of the character, his own actions as well as those who influenced his transformation into *L’Infernu*, an identity that he hopes to bury with his own demise.

Of the numerous flashbacks that occur in the novel, those unleashed by severe intoxication uncover new depths to the character: A series of related narrative analepses reveal Ange Colomba’s past engagements with the *Santa Lucia*, his family history, and his solitary wanderings across Corsica whilst avoiding the bounty on his head. At times these stories are told directly to Vénérande via direct discourse, while other moments of Ange Colomba’s past are recounted by a

shift towards a third-person narrative perspective; in both cases, the heinous and gruesome details of Ange Colomba's past come to light.

Alcohol plays an important role in this novel. As a general statement, many of these memories are the result of the character's deep intoxication following heavy binges of strong liquor such as *l'eau-de-vie* and *absinthe*, both of which serve as protective shields and as ephemeral escape routes: "L'absinthe, c'était nécessaire. Pour oublier tout ce qu'il avait fait. Pour soigner aussi les maux qui lui brisaient le corps, les fatigues, depuis qu'il avait pissé rouge" (p. 28). Ange Colomba's reliance on alcohol stems from the need to distance himself from his past ("Pour oublier...") but also to allow him to forget (and forgive?) the deterioration of his body that over the years has suffered heavily from much abuse ("Pour soigner..."). Rather than palliate the pain of the present moment, intoxication "le menait plus sûrement vers d'anciens tourments que vers l'apaisement qu'il convoitait en général en se soûlant" (p. 42).²⁴³ The use of the expression "anciens tourments" ought to give pause for its evocation of past pain and suffering: what in Ange Colomba's past continues to haunt him? With each long pull from the bottle, he returns to a harrowing escape or a moment in his life that he wishes to forget. Slowly but surely, our access to the recesses of the character is developed over the combination of excessive alcohol consumption and the narrative flash-back, all the while Ange Colomba lays there, "Ivre à s'en être rendu malade, et inéluctablement embourbé dans la plus navrante des solitudes" (p. 51). Within this solitary

²⁴³ The visceral flashback to specific moments and events, even while intoxicated, echoes what critical theorists and trauma scholars would classify as the resurgence of a/the traumatic event: "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century" (Cathy Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience and the Possibility of History," *Yale French Studies*, No. 79, "Literature and the Ethical Question" [ed. Claire Nouvet], 1991, p. 181). Although in this circumstance, the catalyst for resurgence is indeed consumption itself, which raises the question of whether Ange Colomba's actions are intentional: does he *want* to remember? If so, why?

altered state, “Il se souvenait [...] de la raideur du corps de *Saetta*, puis de ses yeux [...] qui avaient vu, bien au-delà, dans un territoire où les mortels ne vont jamais, quelque chose qui l’avait fixé pour pénétrer son âme” (p. 50). Through this painful solitude, he recognizes his suffering as divine restitution for his crimes: “Ce sang dans les urines, il le voyait comme un mauvais présage, et même une mise en garde que Dieu lui-même lui envoyait, d’autant que depuis toujours il imaginait bien que le Très Haut n’était pas de son côté, et qu’Il n’allait pas tarder à lui demander des comptes pour les actes innommables qu’il avait commis” (p. 23).

While some flashbacks are historical, others are confessional. They are tacit admissions of guilt and of wrong-doing for which one last opportunity remains to make amends: avenging Petit-Charles. He accepts Vénérande’s proposition for vengeance, for justice, as a means to a particular end: “Ce contrat, ça pouvait être la bonne aubaine” (p. 28). Ange Colomba is already dying, his health is seriously failing him when he sides with Vénérande—accepting this contracted *vendetta* is a suicide planned well in advance; according to the priest conducting the mortuary rituals over Ange Colomba’s corpse after the final member of the *Santa Lucia* is killed, he speaks to Vénérande about her companion: “Il paraissait effectivement très mal en point. Il serait peut-être mort même sans ses blessures” (p. 217). Vénérande recognizes that Ange Colomba’s death was the only means to assure her safety; he stays behind to allow her to escape the *mêlée* while he fires cover shots to fend off the others. Rather than mourn the death of Ange Colomba, a person she has come to cherish by the novel’s end, Vénérande celebrates his escape from his own solitary misery: “Adieu, dit-elle, intérieurement, adieu vieil homme, puisses-tu maintenant reposer en paix, et puissent les charognards qui guettaient ta présence oublier qui tu étais, jusqu’à la fin des temps” (p. 218-9). The *vendetta*, ironically, becomes his own escape route, his own path towards some semblance of spiritual and personal redemption before the time comes for him to die.

The harrowing and grisly past of a former bandit is a way in which Biancarelli “re-reads” the legendary bandit and confronts its honor-bound mythologies. Biancarelli manipulates the codes, imagery, and violence of the *vendetta* to reveal its hidden violence not only for the victims, but also the perpetrators who become victims themselves of their own making. In the sections that follow, we will continue to peel back the layers of banditry to unearth networks of organized crime, military engagement, and gratuitous violence, violence for its own sake. Another wave of violence will also occupy our discussion – the deeply destructive implantation of Metropolitan political and economic aspirations that will forever alter the cultural and environmental landscape.

III. Disaggregating a Tradition: Unraveling Banditry

In *Orphelins de Dieu*, Biancarelli unsettles the popular image of the Corsican bandit as an itinerant, transitory, and most importantly, solitary figure traversing the *maquis*, each time fleeing the clutches of the police. Biancarelli proposes an innovative depiction of this figure as a collaborative political activist, as one amongst many, in the fight against the political and economic encroachment of continental European powers into the insular space. However, these political struggles of the early-19th century are not limited to Corsica, as we will soon see, but branch out to Greece and various regions of Italy during the 1820s. The laudable political engagement and principled opposition to exogenous political control is tempered by Biancarelli’s explorations of the evils of banditry: its gradual evisceration of community values and ultimate degradation of the individual. To achieve this reimagining of the Corsican bandit as a sort of political activist, Biancarelli’s narrative relies on three important realities of early-19th century Corsican history that are presented as flashbacks in the narrative: the defiance of conscription into French military forces, a paramilitary group known as the *Voltigeurs corses*; the engagement of Corsican men as

mercenaries in the Greek War of Independence (1821-1825); finally, the transformation of collective banditry into a criminal gang raining terror upon the Southwestern Corsican regions of Fiumboro and Porto-Vecchio. The sustained dialogue with the representations of previous generations will continue to add depth of meaning and add further nuance to our current understandings of banditry in Corsica, but also to the *rappports de pouvoir* that frame the relationship between contemporary Corsican communities and the Metropole.

1. *An Active Resistance Movement: Théodore Poli and the “Voltigeurs corses”*

In early-19th century French literature and travel narratives, banditry is often represented as a solitary adventure whose encounters with others are seemingly random occurrences – the bandit just appears on scene. In literary works that we have previously discussed by authors Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, Prosper Mérimée, and Gustave Flaubert, the bandit simply bursts onto the scene and surprises the central protagonists (e.g., Flaubert’s Fortunato) or Saint-Hilaire’s narrator of the short story “Le déjeuner du bandit.” This sudden and haphazard appearance is also marked by signs of his plight: tattered clothing, often littered with bullet holes, wounds, bandages; at times, the bandit brandishes a dagger or rifle. For its engagement with the Corsican bandit as a legendary figure, *Orphelins de Dieu* offers a new perspective on the traditional figure by emphasizing the plurality and collective nature of networks of bandits zigzagging their way throughout Corsica and the surrounding regions of the Mediterranean.

In addition to internal political disputes of the early-to-mid-19th-century Corsica, Biancarelli represents the bandit, both as an individual and collectively, as an active participant in the struggles for independence elsewhere in Europe since, as Stephen Wilson has observed, “some

bandits engaged in ‘revolutionary’ causes outside of Corsica.”²⁴⁴ One cause in particular that gained much attention is the Greek Wars of Independence that spanned the 1820s as Greece fought for sovereignty from the Ottoman Empire, which had long dominated the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Through a first-person extra-narrative analepses, Ange Colomba recounts his and others’ participation in the battles abroad as newly minted mercenaries:

Lorsque la cause fut entendue, et que nous eûmes compris que notre étendard était définitivement à terre, nous nous sommes engagés pour la Grèce. Mais pas tous. Poli est rentré en Corse, avec une bonne partie de la bande du sud, espérant y jouer un rôle malgré tout. Mais on nous parlait de ce conflit lointain, au besoin de soutien de nos frères chrétiens, et aussi de la stabilité de la solde. La guerre, on savait faire, alors la faire pour notre compte ou en tant que mercenaires grassement rétribués, finalement, c’est du pareil au même [...] Je me suis donc embarqué avec les autres volontaires (p. 162)

This historical snapshot offers a rich and complex new perspective on the multiple engagements of the Corsican bandit, as Stephen Wilson has again noted, the attraction to these distant causes “seems to have been mercenary service as such and not the particular cause which was involved, and bandits seem to have enrolled as readily in ‘reactionary’ armies.”²⁴⁵ However, the financial caveat alters this altruistic, ideologically committed representation and undercuts this presumed commitment to liberty: “Mais on nous parlait de ce conflit lointain [...] et aussi de la stabilité de la solde. La guerre, on savait faire, alors la faire pour notre compte ou en tant que mercenaires grassement rétribués” (*ibid.*). Participation then was for some a financial transaction rather than an ideological commitment or demonstration on the part of the members of the *Santa Lucia* that left for Greece (first with Poli, then on their own terms). The financial interests of Ange Colomba and presumably others as well are juxtaposed with the cause-dependent Poli whose commitment is to

²⁴⁴ Stephen Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Corsica, where significant losses accumulated: “Notre étendard était définitivement à terre” (*ibid.*) Even though this battle is lost, another is yet to win, although in a different country and for a different community. For Ange Colomba and those with whom he still fights, whether Corsica has fallen is irrelevant at this point; for Poli, however, hope is not yet lost, “Poli est rentré en Corse [...] espérant y jouer un rôle malgré tout.”

Biancarelli’s representation of the political engagements of Théodore Poli with his followers in and outside of Corsica confronts the stereotypical portrait of the solitary bandit as a self-interested fugitive seeking only to escape the grasp of police custody and imprisonment. While the evasion from the *Voltigeurs corses* is an important aspect of the literary narrative, Biancarelli digs deeper into the experience of banditry to reveal new complexities, motivations, and justifications for a life on the run. However, the collective energy of resistance mutates into a specific form of targeted violence in Biancarelli’s novel in which those perceived as non-native to Corsica will later be singled-out for attack. The group mentality that guides these individuals towards fighting for common political causes takes a turn as the itinerant mercenaries transform into a terrorizing, monstrous gang, the *Santa Lucia*, that disrupts and destroys numerous communities in Italy (Tuscany in particular) as well as villages in their native Corsica.

In early-19th century Corsica, banditry also existed as a group enterprise under the direction of clear leaders, for example, Théodore Poli, “surnommé le Roi de la Montagne: tous les bandits sollicitaient l’honneur de servir sous ses ordres.”²⁴⁶ His influence was felt widely across Southern

²⁴⁶ Raoul Colonna de Cesari-Rocca, *La Vendetta dans l’histoire*, Société Générale d’Éditions, Paris, 1908, p. 82; Available online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65653294/f84.item.r=Poli> [Accessed April 18, 2018]; Gustave Flaubert, *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse*, in *Œuvres de jeunesse*, *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 696-7; Pierrette Jeoffreoy-Faggianelli, *op. cit.*, p. 390-392; the Wikipedia page dedicated to this figure offers useful biographical details, photographs of his gourde (frequently referenced by Flaubert and by Biancarelli), and transcriptions of selected letters, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Théodore_Poli; François-Guillaume Robiquet, *Recherches historiques et statistiques sur la Corse*, Duchesne, Rennes, 1835. This resource offers numerous statistical and judicial records concerning the arrests and attempted prosecutions of Poli during the 1820s-1830s and is an useful source for the history of the implantation of the criminal justice system in Corsica in the early-19th century.

Corsica, a region referred today as the “Delà des Monts”, or in Corsican, “Pumonti” (encompassing the urban centers of Porto, Ajaccio, Sartène, Porto-Vecchio, and Bonifacio). Santu Casanova, a reputed Corsican journalist of the early-20th century, composed a piece in commemoration of the centennial anniversary of Poli’s death and describes him as the elected sovereign of Corsican bandits: “Tiadoru fù elettu re di a machja da tutti i banditi corsi riuniti in furesta d’Aitoni” [“Théodore was elected king of the *maquis* by all of the Corsican bandits reunited in the Forest of Aitoni”].²⁴⁷ What is most instructive and revealing from these two perspectives, those of Raoul de Cesari-Rocca and Santu Casanova, is their emphasis on Poli as an impressive figure and also on his leadership of a wider network of individuals operating under his orders and guidance.

As Biancarelli’s novel reaches its fatal conclusion, the remembrances of Ange Colomba’s past bring him to a crucial, definitive moment in his life – a happenstance encounter with Théodore Poli. The initial confrontation between Ange Colomba and Théodore Poli is remarkable for our purposes because it not only introduces the group dynamics that we will continue to explore, but also because we see Ange Colomba grapple with his own understandings of the traditions and realities of banditry in Corsica, as well as his realization of its potential promise:

Et alors, ils sont venus, un matin, alors que nous étions en train de travailler au battage avec mon père, et mon destin a basculé. Il y avait là une vingtaine d’hommes, à cheval, et je distinguais mal leur capitaine, à cause du soleil que j’avais dans les yeux. Je pensais que c’étaient des gendarmes, parce que certains en portaient l’uniforme, et puis parce que j’étais stupide et ignorant. Il suffisait d’ouvrir les yeux pour voir que ces uniformes étaient rapiécés aux endroits où des balles les avaient percés, il suffisait d’un peu de bon sens pour remarquer l’accoutrement hétéroclite de cette compagnie, qui portant la veste du pays, qui en chemise ouverte jusqu’à la ceinture, et comprendre que ceux-là étaient les nôtres, et pas des soldats étrangers. Le capitaine ne m’adressa pas la parole, mais lorsque le soleil s’effaça derrière ma main que j’avais mise en protection je vis à quoi il ressemblait, et je peux dire que jamais je n’avais vu quelqu’un qui en imposait avec un tel naturel. Je le revois encore

Available online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6558789f/f9.item.r=Poli> [accessed April 18, 2018].

²⁴⁷ Santu Casanova, “Tiadoru Poli, banditu,” *Annu Corsu*, 1932 [in Corsican; the translation is my own], available online: http://corsica.net.free.fr/html/francais/textes/tiadoru_poli_banditu.htm [Accessed November 20 2018];

[...] Théodore Poli lui-même, jusque-là rien qu'un nom, un fantôme que l'on évoquait, pas encore tout à fait un héros, mais voué à le devenir, c'était donc lui le capitaine en face de moi, me surplombant sur son cheval, appuyé sur le pommeau d'une selle cloutée. Il me regarda un instant, plutôt amical, mais toujours sans mot dire, avant de lâcher entre ses dents un jet de salive. Puis il éperonna doucement son cheval pour se remettre en route avec un dernier clin d'œil pour me saluer (p. 185-7)

The richness and importance of this passage comes from its engagement with many of the threads that we have been weaving together throughout this study: mistaken visual appearances and lesser-known nuances of realities of Corsican banditry. Much of what appears before Ange Colomba is not immediately identifiable: "l'accoutrement hétéroclite de cette compagnie" leaves the viewer with few stable reference points and compounded by the obscurity of the figure on horseback, backlit by the sun ("à cause du soleil que j'avais dans les yeux"). The first impression is however significant over the long term, as Ange Colomba describes retrospectively emphasizing its importance for the present moment: "Je peux dire que jamais je n'avais vu quelqu'un qui en imposait avec un tel naturel. Je le revois encore." It is worthwhile to emphasize the retrospective aspect of this passage: Ange Colomba returns to this primal scene of his life as he approaches his own death with all the knowledge and understanding that he has gained along the way. This first encounter then with Théodore Poli is with a figure of legends, of stories: "Théodore Poli lui-même, jusque-là rien qu'un nom, un fantôme que l'on évoquait, pas encore tout à fait un héros, mais voué à le devenir, c'était donc lui le capitaine en face de moi, me surplombant sur son cheval, appuyé sur le pommeau d'une selle cloutée." This encounter will fundamentally alter the course of Ange Colomba's life ("mon destin a basculé") first as an early escape from the clutches of a horrifically abusive father:

Oui, avant de prendre la clé des champs, avant de me mettre à courir comme un dératé pour rejoindre la troupe qui s'enfonçait dans les montagnes, j'ai quand même eu la présence d'esprit de régler un vieux compte avec l'enflure et le pochtron qui m'avait servi jusque-là de père, de maître, et de tortionnaire à ses heures (p. 188).

While the triumphant defiance of his father might have spurned his initial desire to flee, the “compte[s]” of “la troupe” are of a different form of parental relationship – that of the colonizer and the colonized.

The clothing worn by these men is an external, visual reminder of the contested relationships between insular communities and French political, militaristic encroachment throughout Corsica from 1815-1830. While the encounter between Poli and Ange Colomba is indeed fictional, the historical reality of collective resistance to the “soldats étrangers” (p. 186) is not. At the time in which this encounter with Ange Colomba is set, Poli and his group were in direct confrontation with the paramilitary forces sent to Corsica during the 1820s: known both as the “gendarmes” and most commonly as “Voltigeurs corses.”²⁴⁸ These military officers served as an extra-judicial enforcement mechanism created specifically with the objective of ending banditry, inter-and-intra-communal feuding, and served to mitigate the high-crime rates in Corsica. As historian Stephen Wilson observes of 19th-century Corsica, these royal military forces were more heavily concentrated in Corsica during the early-19th century in comparison to other regions in mainland France: “The military presence was very marked in the first three or four decades of the nineteenth century, and throughout the period a proportionately larger number of military and police was stationed in Corsica than in any other French department.”²⁴⁹ Further, these military forces were not just composed of Continental soldiers, but were also composed from the recruitment of local Corsicans into their ranks in what is essentially a “poverty draft”: local villagers were recruited into this military force to more easily police local populations with members of the same community. During one of the first moments of Ange Colomba’s initiation

²⁴⁸ Two other nominal references in the novel to these police forces are “Les Collets jaunes” as well as “Les Bleus.”

²⁴⁹ Stephen Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

into the group led by Poli, a troubling conversation is held with another character, *Le Saetta*, who explains the military draft process: “Bientôt les gendarmes arriveront dans ton village, et il te faudra tirer un numéro. Tu es pauvre, tu les suivras, parce que tu n’auras pas le choix, et tu ne seras jamais plus un homme libre” (p. 187).²⁵⁰

These historical details read into the narrative further alter the conception of the bandit’s flight into the *maquis*: No longer simply a self-serving escape route found in Romantic literary portrayals, the flight of the bandit now also represents an element of organized resistance to the destructive forces of French occupation. Biancarelli flips the emphasis of the traditional bandit narrative to focus instead on the pursuers, the *Voltigeurs corses*. From this vantage point, we can envision a shift in the assignment of protagonist/antagonist labels to the narrative (here in the sense of A. J. Greimas’s *schema actantiel*²⁵¹) in which the paramilitary troops become the antagonist presence to Corsican communities.

Adopting Ange Colomba’s analeptic perspective (again, which is retrospective in nature), the reader is plunged into the destruction of numerous villages at the hands of the *Voltigeurs corses*, including his own, whose violence knew few limits. Recalling a moment from his childhood when the paramilitary troops arrived in near-by villages, Ange Colomba remarks the destruction of their livestock: “Nous étions petits lorsque montèrent les colonnes infernales [...] ils poussaient le bétail et l’éventraient avec leur baïonnettes” (p. 179). He continues with more stories of physical violence against his fellow villagers, swinging from the gallows: “Ils étaient pendus aux châtaigniers, deux ou trois, et ils tournaient sur eux-mêmes au gré du vent, et les gens

²⁵⁰ Additionally, desertion and resistance to conscription was a justiciable crime in Corsica during the same time period, “Resistance to conscription and desertion seem to have been common avenues into banditry here. Teodoro Poli became a bandit in 1820 after killing a gendarme who had him arrested as a draft-evader” (Stephen Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 340). This detail further complicates the situation for Poli, not only as a fugitive bandit but also draft dodger.

²⁵¹ A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale*, Paris, P.U.F., 1966 (nouvelle édition, 1986), p. 174-185 and p. 192-212.

attendaient longtemps, que la troupe se soit éloignée avant de les décrocher” (p. 180). The ambivalence of the number of bodies as expressed in Ange Colomba’s recollection, “deux ou trois,” echoes the celebrated *Ballade des pendus* composed by the 15th-century French poet François Villon whose lamentation speaks to the witnesses of execution (from the perspective of the hanged, “Vous nous voyez ci attachés, cinq, six”) and asks not for their simple pity and sorrow, but their understanding: “Se freres vous clamons, pas n’en devez / Avoir desdain, quoy que fusmes occis / par justice.”²⁵² The two or three executed individuals still hanging in the wind were perhaps executed by native Corsicans who were recruited to join the military forces sweeping across the island, which offered an opportunity to settle old scores: “In 1822, the *Voltigeurs [c]orses [...]* included a high proportion of native Corsicans volunteers, who knew the terrain, the language, and local customs. Additionally, many of them were motivated by having old scores to pay off against bandits.”²⁵³ The lynching is even more troubling then in this regard: native Corsicans with scores to settle turn over their community members to what is perceived and understood as a subjugating force—and to execute them from the limbs of the island’s most symbolically important agricultural crop, the chestnut tree (*le châtaignier*) adds to the horror.

The grassroots response to shifts in power dynamics is not simply a war of attrition fought from the *maquis*. Violence inflicted against the local communities and villages that resist compliance is returned in kind against the soldiers and troops that are increasingly more visible across the island. Retaliation against *Les Voltigeurs corses* is led by groups of individuals with a firmly held moral and political imperative. Ange Colomba recalls one such credo: “*Honneur aux vrais patriotes, écrivait-ils, et honte éternelle à tous ceux qui oublient le pays auquel ils doivent*

²⁵² François Villon, “L’Épitaphe Villon,” *Poètes et romanciers du Moyen Âge* (ed. Albert Pauphilet), Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” 1952, p. 1221.

²⁵³ Stephen Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

le jour” (p. 200; emphasis in the original). This call to action adds yet another layer of nuance to our continued discussion of the importance of honor as a driving force for banditry. In this example we see that the concept and ideal is expanded to a political and national objective, “Honneur aux vrais patriotes,” insofar as resistance to political encroachment is of elevated importance. The relationship between banditry and its traditions steeped in familial honor and expands honor-bound action to include avenging harms done to communities, to the homeland itself.

As that which is considered honorable and worth defending expands, so too does the violence inflicted to protect it. The retaliation strategy adopted by Poli and his followers targets not only material and physical destruction but also the psychological degradation of their enemies:

Nous surgissons des tempêtes, lorsque les Bleus ne s’y attendaient pas, et nous mettions à sac leur campements. Si le temps était aux grandes chaleurs, nous allumions des incendies autour de leurs casernes, et nous nous emparions de leur bétail famélique, qu’ils n’avaient plus le temps d’engraisser [...] Peu à peu, face à nous, ils devinrent des pantins, des ennemis de pacotille, et il s’en fallut de peu, fille [Vénérande], de vraiment peu, qu’ils n’abandonnent cette guerre et qu’ils ne capitulent (p. 201).

The elimination of resources (“nous brûlions leurs jardins misérables”) reduces confidence in future victory (“...et qu’ils ne capitulent”). The escalation of violence is unexpected for the *Voltigeurs corses* (“les Bleus”) and shows the increasing energy and passion that fuels the resistance movements. While the above description does show a coordinated effort of attack, what is most striking is that the resistance does not target the *Voltigeurs corses* on a purely strategic level (as though attacking their supply lines and munitions), but their personal livelihood.

In what begins as clearly articulated political resistance to the *Voltigeurs corses* and to the slow encroachment of French political aspirations, the opposition movement later mutates into an abstract, nebulous spectrum of cultural identities structured around a “Here/There” or “Us/Them” binary. Either you are *with* them or *against* them. Biancarelli teases out these cultural demarcations

between those defending insular values and communities (Ange Colomba, the *Santa Lucia*) and the *Voltigeurs corses* that seek their eradication:

Ils étaient eux et nous étions nous. Tout simplement. Et, entre eux et nous, il n’y avait qu’un fleuve de sang et de haine, et l’incompréhension la plus profonde. Et aussi la soumission la plus abjecte. Nous savions qu’ils nous détestaient, et nous les détestions tout autant. Voilà ce qu’étaient les choses, et je crois bien qu’elles étaient ainsi depuis toujours, je veux dire depuis le jour où des troupes semblables à celles-ci étaient arrivées chez nous (p. 184-5).

The Us/Them distinction is clearly marked by defining each position in direct opposition to one another: “Ils étaient eux et nous étions nous. Tout simplement.” Flowing between these factions is “un fleuve de sang et de haine” representing the brutal reprisals from each side stemming from what Ange Colomba poignantly describes as “l’incompréhension la plus profonde.” His retrospective remark suggests the extent to which both sides mutually misunderstood one another and would seem equally as applicable to the 21st century as it does to the narrative framework of 19th century banditry: To what extent are Corsican communities understood by those on the outside? How open are these same insular communities to the world around them? Trapped in the insular landscape, these conflicts have little other avenues to escape but to turn inwards, back into the very communities of the island themselves.

2. *Eviscerating Communities: Immigrants and Perceptions of Otherness*

The violence and humiliation suffered at the hands of the *Voltigeurs corses* fanned the flames of another wave of violence that roiled a village neighboring Vénérande and Petit-Charles. The Us/Them mentality that we discussed just above is generalized to encompass more than just the paramilitary forces – it latches on to anyone perceived as different, as Other. The objection or conflict applies then to the *person* and to their supposed origins, be they French or Italian, and in

particular, Sardinian. In this section, we will discuss a challenging episode found at an early stage in the novel where Vénérande witnesses an incident of hate and bias following her initial encounter with Ange Colomba. The political affiliation and activism staged against the presence of the *Voltigeurs corses* turns into targeted violence against the foreign Other, those who are perceived as non-native Corsicans, thereby establishing a communal insular identity fueled by geographical realities derived from a *Here vs. There* binary.²⁵⁴ While not entirely in the same vein of our earlier discussions of Biancarelli's readjustment of the figure of the bandit, our study of ethnically driven violence reveals new layers and complexities about the history of Corsican communities at this time of substantial political and cultural transition and upheaval in the early-19th century.

For centuries, Corsica and Sardinia have been entangled in the web of geopolitical struggles of the Western Mediterranean basin. Just as Corsica was used as a bargaining chip in Continental politics, reaction to Sardinian political encroachment and imposition during the late-18th century was particularly tense and continued through the early-19th century.²⁵⁵ To the extent possible, these brief details are intended to situate the historical context around a pivotal episode in the novel that describes a moment of abject humiliation: a Sardinian family is physically

²⁵⁴ What I am trying to convey here is that community identity seems to be more solidly formed because of invasion, where communities collectively assert their frontiers and boundaries. My argument is not that Corsicans are inherently ethnically prejudicial.

²⁵⁵ Sardinia and Corsica are sister islands, related geologically to the Italian peninsula. Their respective geographical sizes are also emblematic of their historical political relationships, Sardinia (the larger) dominated Corsica (the smaller): The Kingdom of Sardinia (14th-19th centuries) long considered Corsica as a territorial possession, even though the rights to Corsica were ceded to the Republic of Genoa in the 15th century. During the late-18th and early-19th centuries, the political relationship between these two islands was particularly divisive—The Kingdom of Sardinia exacted increasing political control in the geopolitical struggles of the Western Mediterranean, often using Corsica as a pawn in continental politics, “It was above all for this reason that Charles-Emmanuel [King of Piedmont-Sardinia] became interested in Corsica and stirred up the troubles on the island. If he could establish a protectorate over it, even occupy it, he could use it as an exchange for certain lands on the continent in which he was interested.” (Thadd E. Hall, *France and the Eighteenth-Century Corsican Question*, New York, New York University Press, 1971, p. 59); Recently in 2016, Corsican and Sardinian political officials signed a symbolic agreement recognizing the struggle of each other's culture in the battle for political autonomy; Nicole Marie, “Corse-Sardaigne: une date symbolique, un accord historique et un espoir partagé”, Corse Net Infos, 29 April 2016, online—https://www.corsenetinfos.corsica/Corse-Sardaigne-Une-date-symbolique-un-accord-historique-et-un-espoir-partage_a20911.html

assaulted, humiliated, and reduced to nothing except for their own tears and pain—all because a female member of the family fell in love with a Corsican man in a community fiercely opposed to any such interaction. This event is recounted from the point-of-view of Vénérande, a rarity in the novel, the main character, shortly after her initial meeting with Ange Colomba where she entreated him for assistance in settling the score against the *Santa Lucia*. While walking away from the tavern and towards her home, she witnesses a gathering of villagers abusing a young woman:

Des bergers en chemises sans cols et en costumes bruns de velours côtelé tiraient après eux une femme qu'ils avaient attachée par le cou, comme ils l'auraient fait pour une de leurs chèvres, et des criardes en jupons longs et aux pieds nus, qui tenaient des bâtons, harcelaient la prisonnière en l'agonisant d'injures hideuses. Elle [Vénérande] remarqua que la plupart des hommes, et certaines femmes aux longs nez, avaient des visages identiques, tandis qu'un autre groupe [...] semblait lié par une génétique différente [...] la captive avait, elle, une tête différente, sans parler de son attitude de contrition et d'abandon au sein de la frénésie environnante (p. 31) ²⁵⁶

Vénérande witnesses the group parade the young woman through a public street to humiliate and shame both her and her family to the deepest possible levels. Treated as an animal heading to slaughter with collar around her neck and a rope attached (“une femme qu'ils avaient attachée par le cou, comme ils l'auraient fait pour une de leurs chèvres”), the unnamed woman is subjected to further verbal abuse from various female spectators (“des criardes [...] harcelaient la prisonnière

²⁵⁶ The physiological details recounted here are also ones that are systematically noted in numerous other travel narratives across the 19th century, most notably in Mérimée's *Notes d'un voyage en Corse* where he dedicates substantial space to the analysis of facial features as a means to situate the archeological history of the ruins he set out to observe and document as an *Inspecteur des monuments*: “L'habitant de Bastia ne se distingue pas de l'Italien de la côte orientale. Je décrirais ainsi ses traits caractéristiques: le visage allongé, étroit; mais le diamètre horizontal de la tête très-grand, le nez aquilin, les lèvres minces et bien dessinés, les yeux noirs, les cheveux noirs et lisses, la peau d'une teinte uniforme, olivâtre. Ces traits sont ceux de beaucoup de Génois, et se rencontrent fréquemment dans la Provence et le Languedoc. Si l'on sort de Bastia, et qu'on se dirige vers les montagnes, les grands traits, les figures allongées deviennent fort rares. Le Corse des districts du centre, d'une race, peut-être autochtone, ou du moins de la plus ancienne de l'île, a la face large et charnue, le nez petit, sans forme bien caractérisée, la bouche grande et les lèvres épaisses. Son teint est clair, ses cheveux plus souvent châains que noirs. Parmi les bergers qui vivent toujours en plein air, il n'est pas rare de trouver de beaux teints colorés. Il faut bien se garder de confondre l'effet produit sur la peau par une chaleur constante, avec la couleur même de la peau. Le montagnard de Coscione ou de ses environs de Corte est hâlé, noirci par le soleil; mais il a des couleurs carminées, et la teinte de sa peau est claire” (Prosper Mérimée, *Notes d'un voyage en Corse*, Paris, Fournier Jeune, 1840, p. 57-9).

et l'agonisant d'injures hideuses") to which the conveyed solemnness of the prisoner stands in stark contrast with "son attitude de contrition et d'abandon". Through the narrative tool of *focalisation*, in this case *focalisation interne*, the reader witnesses this scene through the eyes of Vénérande, who like the reader, is little aware of what *precisely* is occurring and why. The arrest and seizure of the woman's body does not seem to be directed by any officially sanctioned police presence, if there are any police present to begin with, since those pulling her chains are dressed as shepherds.

The captive woman in this episode is a Sardinian woman who is accused of laying false claim of sexual assault against a villager named Jean-André, her apparent sexual partner and love interest. Vénérande hears a woman in her vicinity describing the situation to those around her and targets the woman in an aggressively emphatic smear campaign:

La salope sarde, dit la femme en colère, elle a dit que Jean-André avait voulu la violer! Elle a le con en feu c'est ça la vérité! D'abord elle l'attire, et ces gens veulent faire croire qu'il a commis un crime, Jean-André! Des pervers, c'est, les Sardes, et des menteurs! Mais ça va se payer! (p. 32).

From this unverified by-stander account, the heart of the accusation is the captive's cultural origin as a Sardinian woman as the invectives are also generalized to Sardinians: the demonstrative plural adjective combines all into the same group—"ces gens veulent faire croire"; the plural article "des" also normalizes and generalizes participation in the group—"Des pervers, c'est les Sardes" and "des menteurs." The objection in all of these examples is *to the person*, specifically to her *origins*, and *not* to the situation of alleged sexual assault, which has fallen by the wayside.

As an apparent attack on the dignity of a Corsican man, a punishment must be exacted:

Un homme sortit des ciseaux de tonte, et l'on empoigna fermement la fille, mais celle-ci ne résista pas. Elle relevait la tête, refusant de s'incliner face à la horde monstrueuse, et elle serrait les mâchoires dans un rictus de haine. On commença à la tondre [...] Et lorsqu'on l'abandonna, elle tomba plus qu'elle ne s'assit sur une des grosses pierres de l'air

de battage, démolie, et son crâne scarifié d'où émergeaient quelques restes de touffes honteuses semblait surgir d'un tableau aberrant inspiré d'anciennes danses macabres (p. 33)

Mutilation, both physically and emotionally, hardly seems an apt expression to describe what this woman endures, and, somehow, miraculously, survives. The head-shaving gesture echoes a specific form of treatment of prisoners, most visually reminiscent of the humiliation strategy underlying Nazi Germany's imprisonment and extermination of ethnic and religious minorities across Europe during the late-1930s and early-1940s. In a French political context, this scene resonates more directly with the practice of shaving women bald who were suspected of "horizontal" collaboration during WWII in the specific form of amorous, sexual relationships with German soldiers or even Russian soldiers:

Horizontal collaborators served as metonymic signifiers for the "vertical collaborators" who, under the Vichy government, maintained an upright appearance while they capitulated to the Germans, raised their hands in the Nazi salute, and welcomed "The New Europe" into their beds. These women with shaved heads were used as communal purgatives, scapegoats for the French who themselves had whored for jobs in Germany, for extra food, and for peacetime amenities especially during the years 1940 to 1943.²⁵⁷

This example, just one of many from the narrative, represents a limited cultural shift from political resistance against the imposition of continental political norms to intentional cultural antagonism and persecution that targets non-native communities in Corsica. What is unfolding here in the text is an intensification of the hatred and deep-rooted animus for what-and-whomever is perceived as arriving from *outside* of Corsica—the Continent just as much as the larger island in the Corso-Sardinian archipelago. Following the mutilation of the Sardinian woman, the group meets in a local bar: "Des hommes commentaient entre eux les différentes phases de l'humiliation des étrangers, se félicitant d'un équilibre restauré [...] des propos puérils et taquins s'échangeaient,

²⁵⁷ Kristine Stiles (ed.), "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma," *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 49.

mais toujours la punition des Sardes restait au centre des débats” (p. 33). The humiliation of foreigners is not sporadic, but rather occurs in “différentes phases” which the narrator describes as the restauration of equilibrium.

For Vénérande, witnessing the initial physical confrontation and the celebration that follows, triggers visceral memories of her brother’s own disfigured body after being attacked by the *Santa Lucia*, the underlying narrative thrust of the novel. A moment of significant hesitation takes place where Vénérande considers her *need* for vengeance: observing the jubilant crowd around the captive woman, her eyes meet those of the Sardinian woman whose gaze is seared into Vénérande’s thoughts, “les yeux de la fille qu’on tondait la hantèrent encore un court instant” (p. 34). Returning to the present moment, she questions the meaning of this traumatic flash-back, “elle ne savait pas à quoi tout cela correspondait” (*ibid.*). Hearing the laughter and envisioning the face of the tortured woman, she opts for revenge, “gagnée par un sourire crispé, dédaigneux, et incompréhensible, de rejoindre la ville sans plus marquer de halte” (*ibid.*). Her external emotional expression, an ambiguous smile, confirms this moment as a catalyst for her final decision to act—she will reconnect with Ange Colomba and order the murder of the members of the *Santa Lucia* who attacked her brother.

While the examples that we have just analyzed are not clearly situated within the context of banditry or of its literary representation, the torture of the Sardinian woman serves as an important transitional episode both narratively (internally) and thematically. First, this scene is strategic in that it provides the means for Vénérande to validate her own motivations for vengeance in response to the violence perpetrated against her brother Petit-Charles. While the individuals responsible for the humiliation of the Sardinian woman are not identified, it is important to keep in mind that this scene is recounted from Vénérande’s perspective. The anonymity of the group

also serves to intensify the violence itself as well as the visceral reaction of Vénérande. This scene is pivotal in the novel for its reflection of the violence of retributive justice itself that continues to haunt Vénérande while it also serves as fuel for her own desire for retribution.

For the larger narrative that seeks to recast the Romantic image of Corsica, this moment shows the extent to which the fight for protection against the political outsider, a cause championed by the *Santa Lucia*, is pushed to the extreme of identity-based violence seeking to eradicate the visually (mis)perceived *Other* in an insular community. This gives substantial pause to our analysis because of the interest in understanding the critical perspective that is at work in this episode: what, if anything, is being criticized? If in earlier portions of our work, we identify clear targets for Biancarelli's critical discourse, how can we situate this episode in dialogue with the others? That the target of this violence is a person of Sardinian origin is meaningful in its own right in that it points towards an intense, grounded sense of geographical identity constructed around clear borders and frontiers most fervently defended when transgressed. Changing the target of attack will also alter the nature of the assailant; this violence will intensify and is characterized in a very precise way that relates to the pastoral and agrarian traditions of Corsica—by representing the bandit as an animal.

3. *Questioning an Honorable Tradition, Textually: The Animality of Banditry*

In addition to its depiction of lesser-known aspects of banditry in early-to-mid 19th-century Corsica, such as its collective political engagements, *Orphelins de Dieu* often presents a deeply critical perspective of the tradition that echoes the moralizing gazes on the practice as found in travel narratives by writers such as Jean-François Réalier-Dumas (*Mémoires sur la Corse*, 1819) and J.-F. Simonot (*Lettres sur la Corse pour servir de réponse au Mémoire publié par M^r Réalier-*

Dumas, 1820).²⁵⁸ In these writings, the authors treat banditry and the *vendetta* as the outward representation of a society lacking moral virtue and responsibility; what is most interesting with *Orphelins de Dieu* is that this moralizing perspective is forced in-ward as the narrator and the central protagonist, Ange Colomba, turn their attention back on their own communities. Using a sustained metaphor of animality, the narrator and the novel's characters offer deeply penetrating perspectives on the violence that rips across the island: Communities first torn apart by ravages of the *Voltigeurs corses* then begin to tear themselves apart one by one, piece by piece.

The animalistic metaphor deployed in *Orphelins de Dieu* manifests often as a visual evocation of physical appearance, both for characters and settings. Shortly after Ange Colomba and Vénérande seal their pact, Ange pursues an initial hunch about the identity of those involved in the assault of Petit Charles. His suspicions lead him to Faustin, a former member of the *Santa Lucia*, now very aged: “[Ange Colomba] aperçut alors **la petite vermine** qu’il recherchait, un homme pas très grand, **presqu’un freluquet, à la face de rat et aux oreilles invraisemblables**, et qui gueuletonnait avachi près d’une nappe avec **d’autres énergumènes de son acabit**” (p. 71; my emphasis). In a carnivalesque portrayal of the character, the animalistic metaphor takes form as a combination of multiple layers of insults to physical appearance (which one can hear as though from Ange Colomba’s own mouth) alongside the debasement of the individual to diminish the former bandit known for his prowess and for the fear he inspired, rendering him, comically, into a parody of himself. One could even ask what there was to fear to begin with.

Ange Colomba is not spared the vituperative animalistic metaphor. Entering his dwelling for the first time, Vénérande is horror-stricken by the squalor:

²⁵⁸ Cf. Pierette Jeoffroy-Faggianelli, “Le pays de la vendetta,” in *L’Image de la Corse dans la littérature romantique française, op. cit.*, pp. 127-141.

Comment un homme qui sait tant de choses peut-il vivre ainsi, **comme une bête**, pensait-elle, **comment a-t-il pu se satisfaire de n'être plus qu'un prédateur, et un prédateur édenté en plus**, et qui aurait plutôt dû être en train de s'occuper de petits-enfants, et de leur raconter sa vie tout en profitant d'un repos bien mérité (p. 101; my emphasis)

Knowing of Ange Colomba's alcohol-fueled rituals, one can easily imagine empty bottles, trash, food waste, litter, dust, overturned furniture, and other muck covering the floors. Vénérande takes another jab by questioning what satisfaction he draws from his life as only "un prédateur" all the while comedically chiding him as "édenté en plus." The mix of levity with the seriousness of Vénérande's observations furthers the carnivalesque portrayals of Biancarelli's characters in which the legendary bandit, current or former, is turned on itself, upending readers' expectations with the visual presentation of these celebrated figures.

While the sustained metaphor of animality might be most often understood as a visual cue, it takes on a different, more violent meaning when used to describe various interactions between or amongst different groups of characters. Biancarelli makes use frequent of the verb *abattre* as a rhetorical polysemy, permitting its repeated usage across a variety of instances and circumstances, for example:

1. *To physically bring someone/something to ground-level*, "Un homme se posta aux fenêtres et il réussit à **abattre** un des fuyards, qui s'écroula **à la manière d'un sanglier et battit le sol** de son pied encore un moment, le temps que les nerfs aient fini de se crisper" (p. 63; my emphasis);
2. *To shoot someone/something with a firearm*, "**L'abattre. Saetta**. Mais qui aurait bien pu **tirer** sur Saetta?" (p. 44; my emphasis);
3. *To slaughter an animal*, "*Le cheval aussi il est mort, des hommes ont dû l'abattre. Mais ce n'était pas sa faute, c'est juste qu'il était trop blessé*" (p. 54 [original italics]; my emphasis).

The extent of the usage of the verb "abattre" generates an atmosphere of a slaughterhouse, best exemplified by the horrific mutilation of Petit-Charles. As we know, Petit-Charles, Vénérande's

brother, falls victim to the gang in an act of random violence, but it is *how* he is victimized that is of our immediate attention in the following passage recounting his mutilation:

Ils le tenaient plaqué au sol...Le chef plongeait ses doigts dans sa gorge, il enfonça jusqu'à **saisir la langue au mieux**, et les poings serrés du malingre étaient suffisamment vigoureux pour qu'il ne pût mordre. **Ce fut assez rapide**. Il [Petit-Charles] sentit le poignard **aiguisé à la meule lui couper la langue**. Sans presque aucun mouvement de **sciage**, juste **ce fer tranchant enfoncé dans la gorge et sectionnant la chair**. Il ne réussissait pas à hurler, seul un râle désespéré accompagnait les secousses désarticulées de ses jambes. Il ne pouvait bouger aucune autre partie de son corps, les hommes maintenaient fermement la prise. Ils se parlaient vite, **comme ils auraient fait en châtrant un cochon, quand chaque mot, chaque geste doit être décisif**. L'exécuteur, lui, n'avait pas tremblé. Il avait le geste assuré de celui qui manie habituellement le couteau. Mais le signe de croix n'avait pas été fait avant d'opérer. (p. 37-8; my emphasis).

The manipulation of Petit-Charles's jaw, his tongue, and the precision of its amputation suggests an adroit butcher, the individual wielding the knife first kept it extremely sharp, and secondly knew the physical maneuvers needed to efficiently dismember his prisoner in record time. What purpose does such a violent scene serve? Is this violence simply gratuitous? Here we are confronted with the inward gaze operating under the surface of the novel: a narrative of Corsica, from Corsica, about its own unraveling. I suggest that this scene, along with the previous examples of the extended animalistic metaphor, serves as an example of the willingness and capability of the insular community to turn on itself, becoming its own worst nightmare.

The imposition of silence is a feature of the early-19th century narratives that we have previously analyzed: in both Mérimée's *Mateo Falcone* and Flaubert's *Matteo Falcône*, silence is bought from the young boy (although later betrayed); by the simple presence of Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's Galluchiò in the church hosting his father's funeral service (*Le déjeuner du bandit*), gazes are averted and heads turned; the same author portrays the tensions between the expectation of silence and the imposition of "Continental" justice in *La Trêve de Dieu*. In Flaubert's narrative, purchasing silence is a reversal of the honor-bound custom of silence itself – as a traditional

cultural code, it should not have to be bought. By extension, exacting silence through Petit-Charles's mutilation itself is a violation of the code of silence that has long reigned over the island itself, but for a significantly different set of circumstances: the imposition of silence is no longer to allow for familial honor to be reconciled by/from the family as a means to regulate the codes of the *vendetta* – the *vendetta* can no longer be declared. Supplanting this generations-old practice marks the arrival of a different type of power structure and criminal, the mafia. Petit-Charles is rendered speechless²⁵⁹ in a violent application of the *mafiesque* law of silence, *l'omertà*.

While silence is a finality for Petit-Charles, the act is an overture to contemporary Corsican communities. Recent events and efforts of community organization in the last-half of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 offer a new lens from which to view the role of animality in Biancarelli's novel: a warning about organized crime's increasing dominance in insular communities. In 2019, Corsica again saw its most recent spike in the number of per capita homicides, sustained attacks on secondary residences, numerous *règlements de compte*, and increased volatility of what many have labeled “le grand banditisme” in its efforts to secure Corsican political and economic independence.²⁶⁰ As of January 30, 2020 over 500 murders have been committed in the span of 25

²⁵⁹ While the physical attack led by members of the *Santa Lucia* is indeed cruel and disgusting—to which the villains add the death of “encore trois autres bêtes” (p. 38)—the manner in which this attack was carried out is arguably the true motive for vengeance: the *Santa Lucia*'s members degraded and handled Petit-Charles as though he were a sheep in his own flock, making him and his family perhaps no better than the animals they raise and slaughter themselves. As a result, he is rendered *speechless*, and by extension, an *animal* himself: “The ability to speak is what marks man as man ... Language, in granting all of this to man is the foundation of the human being” (Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (trans. Peter D. Hertz), San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1982, p. 112); Cf. Jean-Louis Labarrière, “Aristote et la question du langage animal,” *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2, 1993, p. 247-260; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/metis.1993.1000>

²⁶⁰ The “Santa Lucia” is perhaps analogous to what journalists and observers have labeled as “le grand banditisme” in Corsica, although with far less (reported) violence. The expression “grand banditisme” is often used to describe various iterations of organized crime and its affiliates with crimes such as larceny, racketeering, extortion, or corruption. While admittedly the scope is different, what I would focus on is the breathtaking violence and more particularly on the how the imposition of silence figures at the center of much of the newspaper coverage of this subject. In his review of the recently published monograph exposé *Vendetta: Les héritiers de la Brise de mer* (Paris, Plon, 2020), Damien Delseny writes, “Le grand banditisme est un monde de silence. Et quand il se mâtine d'accent corse, la règle se renforce d'un théorème: “acqua in bocca”. L'eau dans la bouche, celle qui empêche de parler” (“Un parrain corse veut faire interdire un livre sur le grand banditisme,” *Le Parisien*, June 9, 2020; available online:

years, preserving Corsica’s status as a “murder capital” in France and in Western Europe (based on a percentage of murder per capita).²⁶¹ Of the calls to action to reduce crime and violence in Corsica, an important ancillary movement has risen in prominence: “Maffia no, a vita iè” of which Marc Biancarelli is an original founding member, alongside fellow author and colleague Jérôme Ferrari. The “Maffia no” movement is organized almost entirely online through the social media platform, Facebook, and it there that the group’s founding members “posted” their manifesto on September 25, 2019.²⁶² Writing for the preeminent French newspaper *Le Monde*, Jacques Follorou describes the opening meeting of the group on the same day as the publication of their manifesto: “Selon eux, ‘continuer de se taire n’est pas responsable; aussi, nous prenons l’initiative d’inviter la population à une prise de conscience des menaces qui compromettent gravement les intérêts collectifs de notre société. (...) Il faut isoler culturellement ceux qui détruisent impitoyablement les formidables potentiels de notre territoire’.”²⁶³

Through the description of the horrific mutilation of Petit-Charles and the progressive degeneration of Corsican bandit, Biancarelli’s novel can be understood to signal the disentanglement of Corsican communities with their past and with the deeply held esteem for the honorable traditions that originally marked the singularity of their culture. Financial transactions for exacting vengeance, multiple-perpetrator sexual assaults, theft, and the physical imposition of

2020-8332350.php). Cf. Violette Lazard and Marion Galland, *Vendtta: Les héritiers de la brise de mer*, Paris, Éditions Plon, 2020 and Marie-Francoise Stefani, *One famille dans la mafia: Corse, au coeur de l’enquête*, Paris, Éditions Plon, 2020. Lionel Luciani, “Banditisme en Corse: une année marquée par la violence et les assassinats,” *France3: Corse-ViaStella*, 30 December 2019, Available online: <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/corse/banditisme-corse-annee-marquee-violence-assassinats-1768165.html>

²⁶¹ Cyril Graziana, “Mafia corse: la fin de l’omerta?,” in “Zoom de la rédaction,” *France Inter*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/le-zoom-de-la-redaction/le-zoom-de-la-redaction-30-janvier-2020>.

²⁶² Maffia NON, a vita IÈ, “Communiqué de presse – 25 septembre 2019,” Available online: https://www.facebook.com/MaffiaNO.AVitaIE/posts/100697601337369?_tn_=_K-R

²⁶³ Jacques Follorou, “Une emprise mafieuse d’une intensité jamais atteinte,” *Le Monde*, September 25, 2019; Available online: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/09/25/corse-un-collectif-antimafia-appelle-la-societe-civile-insulaire-a-la-mobilisation_6013026_3224.html.

silence point to the development of society founded in violence, physical intimidation, and fear. The *bandit d'honneur* of the Romantic period, the glory illuminating Théodore Poli, was lost to a collective thirst for violence borne of eviscerated principles of honor and respect for generations-old traditions. Remaining honorable is unsatisfying and no longer enviable in a world nourished with blood, sex, and greed.²⁶⁴

IV. *Reconnecting Past, Present, and Future in Contemporary Corsica*

When you wipe away the varnish of a literary representation what are you left with? Is the raw material of literature recognizable to readers? Marc Biancarelli's *Orphelins de Dieu* raises important questions for contemporary Corsican communities by returning to communal origins and stories, as the author himself describes: "Je reviens aux sources orales de l'île, à sa culture populaire."²⁶⁵ *Orphelins de Dieu* portrays a past that has however become unfamiliar, foreign even. It is the strangeness of the past portrayed in *Orphelins de Dieu* that is most profound because it points to the separation of generations that has been carved out by misunderstood history, cultural, and tradition. Do contemporary readers recognize this Corsica of the past, one *without* the embellishments of literature?

For successive generations, the representation of Corsica has been controlled by an exterior perspective; in other words, the island exists, and subsists, through the work of others, those outside of its insular communities. As we have seen earlier, the literary representations first launched in the 19th century continue to reach the modern reader; but more than just a question of

²⁶⁴ France3: Corse-ViaStella even uses the tag "banditisme" to filter news articles related to mafia-related crimes, assassinations, and criminal trials!

²⁶⁵ Antoine Albertini and Véronique Emmanuelli, "Dossier Settimana: Le tour de Corse des écrivains (1ère partie)," *Corse Matin*, 20 September 2015, URL: <https://www.corsematin.com/article/derniere-minute/dossier-settimana-le-tour-de-corse-des-ecrivains-1ere-partie> [Accessed November 2018].

sustained iconography and persistent stereotypes, the “fact” of literature has transformed contemporary Corsica into a “fiction” that is often readily believed. Biancarelli argues that these same stories offer far too simplistic rendering of Corsican society and culture which itself has faded in memory. This separation of shared knowledge and experience, I argue, triggers a cleavage of generations that can be better understood as an experience of exile, albeit of a different sort, as Edward Saïd describes, “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past.”²⁶⁶ Biancarelli attempts to repair this separation, either forced or voluntary, between contemporary Corsican communities and their past in numerous ways throughout *Orphelins de Dieu* by returning to the corruption of traditions, the destruction of the environment, and the evisceration of communities in the rural interior. For all the viable accusations that one could raise against French authors active during the Romantic period, the transformation of Corsica during the 19th century, for better and for worse, was also accomplished because of itself – villages, farmers, and others saw some glimmer of hope in the promises of industrialization, in the new ways of the modernizing world, turning their back on the old, the past, “their land, their past.”

To frame this concluding discussion, we will read *Orphelins de Dieu* through the conceptual lenses of estrangement and of exile that simultaneously implicate both the novel’s characters as well as its readers and their contemporary communities. The underlying narrative strategy is to this end deeply incendiary: the sun-soaked vistas are no more; the forests and the *maquis* are exploited to depletion and the burned to their roots; the legendary, heroic bandit is reduced to his own decrepitude and misery. For all of the destruction and obliteration of the Corsican landscape, both culturally and environmentally, redemption is nevertheless imaginable: Edward Saïd argues that through the decomposed identities that result from exile it is nevertheless

²⁶⁶ Edward Saïd, “Reflections on Exile,” *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 197.

possible to “reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities” of the life left behind.²⁶⁷ Although unconventional and unsettling, these new vistas offer different opportunities to engage with the geographically-situated realities of Corsican insularity: the reader is pushed to reconfigure the boundaries of the insular *cosmos*²⁶⁸ and to arrive at new relationships with contemporary Corsican insularity, as much a geographical phenomenon as it is cultural.

1. *Flattening the Insular Landscape – Tensions of Visibility and Invisibility*

From the outset of the novel, the reader is placed in an unstable position of estrangement because the referent of the narrative landscape does not align with its visual reference: there is no such *Île de Beauté* to be found in Biancarelli’s novel. The majestic, verdant valleys and snow-capped mountains that feature prominently in the visual iconography of the island²⁶⁹ are darkened and flattened into featureless, indistinguishable landscapes.

Although the back-cover of the novel (in French, *quatrième de couverture*) describes “une traque à travers les montagnes corses du XIX^e siècle,” the rugged mountainous landscape is rarely noticed. In the novel’s exposition, the dilapidated manor home where Vénérande and Petit-Charles live is described as atop “une colline” (p. 11) and adjacent to another, “déchirée par des rochers monstrueux” (*ibid.*). Its altitude and edifice (“une mosaïque étrange de pierres de taille en granit rouge de proportions diverse,” *ibid.*) evoke times past in Corsican history as a bastion of the Republic of Genoa, which the narrator casually describes the remnants as “une forteresse qui

²⁶⁷ *Idem.*, p. 198-9.

²⁶⁸ See Anne Meistersheim, *Figures de l’île*, Ajaccio, DCL Éditions, 2001.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Gaston Vuillier, *Les Îles oubliées: Les Baléares, la Corse, la Sardaigne. Impressions de voyage*, Paris, Hachette, 1893 [Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k107260s>]; for the post-World Wars iconography of the burgeoning tourist industry, see the magnificent exposition catalog, Musée de la Corse. — *Corse-Colonies. Colloque 19-20 septembre 2002* (Avant-propos d’Anne Meistersheim), Corte, Éditions du Musée de la Corse; Ajaccio, Éditions Alain Piazzola, 2004.

surgissait des oliveraies pour défier seule la mer” (*ibid.*). For however imposing the natural terrain may be, it fades into the background of the novel or even manifests as a passing reference, in the following example as the antonym of Ange Colomba’s long-sought *Ailleurs*: “Il rêva d’un pays plat, écrasé de brumes, et de quartiers citadins où les maisons à étages surplombaient des échoppes bigarrées” (p. 94). The fading landscapes are further confused when characters’ names are elide with toponyms: the *Santa Lucia* is both a gang and a region in Southern Corsica – the confusion leads one to ask whether the members of this gang from this area or if they take Saint Lucie as their martyr patron saint?²⁷⁰ It is worth noting as well that some character names are often italicized, for example *Le Saetta* and *L’Infernu*, also encouraging one to ask whether these characters are indeed embodiments of a particular place (a conclusion that seems plausible given our earlier discussion of the origins of Ange Colomba’s sobriquet).

What happens then when the mountains that are so often associated with the Corsican landscape fade away? Or, more importantly, when they are not written? Flattening the Corsican landscape is potentially destructive as insular identity is intimately linked to its geological contours. As Marina Casula has observed in the specific case of Corsican insularity, geographical are crucial to the development of community relationships and on the construction of individual identities.²⁷¹ What is most important in Casula’s remarks is that she observes the anchoring of Corsican identity in the *geological* reality of the insular existence, “un environnement physique, matérialisé, particulier.” Rounding out mountains into hills, promontories into plateaus, darkening the setting with an ever-absent sun all reduce the Corsican landscape into a horizontal plane whose contours are indistinguishable. Little reference to the maritime border, the defining element of

²⁷⁰ See Stephen Wilson, “Santa Lucia di Tallao,” *op. cit.*, p. 25-31.

²⁷¹ Cf. Marina Casula, “La Corse: une île-projet au cœur de la Méditerranée,” *Esprit Critique: Revue Internationale de Sociologie et de Sciences sociales*, 13.1, 2010, p. 5.

geological insularity further disorients our understanding of the insular landscape precisely because our attention is not drawn to it; we no longer see the island in its entirety, only a bleak landscape.

The frustration felt with a featureless landscape reveals not only our own predispositions and expectations about Corsica as a literary setting in the sense that we as readers expect to “see” the mountains; our reaction also points towards Biancarelli’s discursive strategy and method for writing from the interior, a perspective from which the visibility of the mountains is rarely in question because they are taken as a constant. The absence of narrative description does not however suggest that the mountains are entirely gone or absent. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan advances an interesting parallel to literary description that he names, “Visibility,” a concept that proves useful for our circumstances here, he writes: “Many places, profoundly significant to particular individuals and groups, have little visual prominence. They are known viscerally, as it were, and not through the discerning eye or mind. A function of literary art is to give visibility to intimate experiences, including those of place.”²⁷² By flattening the landscape, Biancarelli renders it essentially invisible even to the “discerning eye or mind” but it is precisely the absent landscape with which we are so familiar that the novel draws in the reader to the “intimate experiences” of the mountains and valleys themselves; it is precisely the invisibility that “draws attention to areas of experience that we may otherwise fail to notice.”²⁷³ Biancarelli’s novel is then even more complex as it relates to the geographical connections with insular identity and to the guiding question of the present study, *Qu’est-ce que la Corse?* As we have seen in our earlier discussions in this chapter, the Corsica of a (literary) imagination, its solitary bandits and *vendetta*, is *not* the

²⁷² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, coll. “Geography,” 2014 [First edition, 1977], p. 162.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

setting of Biancarelli's novel. In addition to the reversals of diegetic roles, as well as the exposition of new aspects of banditry, the disturbances or frustration in expectations for the setting itself has a deeper discursive meaning and function as Biancarelli's novel actively reimagines the landscape, physically and culturally, but this time, from the interior.

The questions that Biancarelli effectively poses in *Orphelins de Dieu* turn around the ways in which Corsican culture and history are seen from its own perspective and through the consequences of its participation in these stories, however oblique and veiled they may be at the outset of the novel. Why does it matter though whether the perspective is internal or external? As a scholar of Mediterranean insularity, and in particular Corsica, Anne Meistersheim advances the compelling hypothesis that insularity is a double-faceted phenomenon: what an external observer views as an island, as an element in a larger geological system (at the regional or planetary scale), is understood from a fundamentally different interior perspective. From the insular perspective, the island is a universe unto itself, independent of what lies beyond its horizon. Anne Meistersheim continues to underscore this point in *Figures de l'île* by insisting on the refusal of an externally controlled definition of insular contours and boundaries because the island is its own "microcosme."²⁷⁴ In Meistersheim's formulation, insularity and geography are intricately linked, however the specific scale of its features is immaterial to the creation of an insular experience: "Quel que soit la taille, c'est un 'monde' qui existe" independent of an external structuring gaze, "par l'au-delà de la mer, par un centre, une capitale, un État quel qu'il soit."²⁷⁵ In other words, Corsica's existence is not determined by any perspective other than its own: a geographer or State may declare this land an island, a geographical feature that participates in the larger system of planetary geology; on the contrary, the insular perspective is of its own planetary scale, "Ce monde

²⁷⁴ Anne Meistersheim, *Figures de l'île*, *op. cit.*, p. 23

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

est ‘microcosme’, c’est-à-dire petit monde, monde en miniature.”²⁷⁶ The creation of a world unto itself, as Meistersheim argues, lies at the heart of the insular experience, “Un monde qui se détermine par sa propre fermeture.” Biancarelli’s flattening of the landscape does not create a “new” Corsica, but a “different” Corsica, one whose topographies have been glazed over by a (literary) perspective “dictée de l’extérieur, donnée par l’Autre.” As a result, the unfamiliar insular setting offers a chance to renew relationships and understandings with Corsica, for both readers *within* the island and for those on its periphery.

Flattening the landscape, using generic toponyms, and designing an intricate syntactic game of chess that occludes different settings of the narrative surprisingly brings sustained attention to insular landscape. The sense of unfamiliarity and strangeness that comes of this narrative setting results in a paradoxical relationship for the reader: it further emphasizes the distances, both geographical and cultural, that separate the reader from the actual insular landscape itself. As a result, the strangeness of the landscape becomes a beacon, a mass around which the reader enters into orbit. Describing the relationships between reader and literary landscape, the 20th century Russian formalist theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes this type geographical point of entry into the literary significance of the narrative (referring back to the metaphor of planetary orbit) as a *chronotope*: these geographical focal points are “the organizing centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative.”²⁷⁷ This particular “meaning,” I would argue, is double. First, the hills and mountains of Corsica are certainly locations that determine the narrative’s evolution, from

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist), Austin, University of Texas Press, “Slavic Series No. 1”, 1981, p. 250.

Bakhtin's perspective, "where the knots are tied and untied," in that major plot events do occur there: the corporeal mutilation of Petit Charles, the first acts of reprisal by the duo Ange Colomba and Vénérande, and the final assault against the *Santa Lucia* that not only accomplishes the *vendetta* but also ends Ange Colomba's life. Secondly, this reading begins to (re)isolate the island anew because its unfamiliar presentation in the narrative invites new inquiry and acknowledgement of the separation between a reader's expectations and the nature of Biancarelli's text itself; in other words, the reader is pushed to recognize an alternative insular landscape, one *written* from a different perspective. As a result, the *chronotope* creates the separation required to recognize an island, as earlier described by Meistersheim as "un monde en soi": "L'insularité caractérise une forme géographique résultant d'une discontinuité physique majeure qui entraîne l'isolement par rapport aux grandes terres ou aux continents."²⁷⁸

The significance of the landscape as a *chronotope* is not solely limited to its narrative utility but serves as a crossroads of sorts for the narrative and cultural significance emanating from the artistic project of literature itself:

The chronotope [...] emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All of the novel's abstract elements—philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect—gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.²⁷⁹

The "body" of the novel emerges as a representation not just of a landscape or visual field, but to "intimate experiences, including those of place."²⁸⁰ It is here that we can return to the interior perspective of the insular experience offered in Biancarelli's novel to consider how the diegetic

²⁷⁸ Joël Bonnemaison, "Vivre dans l'île: une approche de l'iléité océanienne", *L'Espace géographique*, Vol. 19-20, No. 2, 1991, p. 120.

²⁷⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 250

²⁸⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

world itself is (re)constituted and manipulated from within, to see how the eviscerated landscape is one of the island's own making.

2. *The Slow Burn of Corsican Villages: Environmental and Cultural Degradation*

The encroachment of Continental political and social norms during the early-19th century also encouraged the exploitation of another aspect of Corsican communities: their natural resources. During the late 1820s, environmental speculation and exploitation sought to profit from several of Corsica's natural resources, such as timber, cork, and various cereals.²⁸¹ Harvesting timber served both the logging industry but also the leather industry through the extraction of tannic acid, a toxic pollutant. In the mountainous interior, villagers responsible for the extraction and production of tannic acid became strangers to one another as much as the land became unrecognizable: "Nos villages devenaient des lieux de désolation et de désespoir" (p. 185). If in the previous section we discussed a flattened, unremarkable setting for the narrative, in this section we will discuss how the land was carved up and destroyed by its inhabitants in hopes of a higher gain from industrial agricultural practices, at the expense of their very villages, families, and bodies. Our discussion will turn away slightly from Romantic Corsica and away from banditry, to explore the polemic of political encroachment and exploitation of Corsica during the early-19th century. Through the lens of environmental degradation, we can engage with the economic forces

²⁸¹ Cereals were most prominently cultivated in Corsica during the period 1825-1875 because of the sheer amount of available, uncultivated land; Stephen Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 9: "In the half-century between 1825 and 1875 the territory devoted to cereals in the island tripled to a maximum of just under 75,000 hectares. In many villages, the increase was even more marked. At Serra-di-Scopamène [Corse-du-Sud], for example, the amount of land under cultivation rose from 9 per cent at the end of the 18th century to 59% in the 1880s, while at Sisco in the Capo Corso the amount rose from 16 to 67 percent in 1861. As this indicates, cereal production was increased not by introducing improved methods or achieving higher yields but simply by extending existing methods to more land. Such land was usually of poor quality or difficult to use or both. Terracing of hillsides to make new flat surfaces was at its apogee in the third quarter of the century. Some new crops were introduced with government encouragement, notably hemp and linen, potatoes and tobacco, but none was really successful"; See also, F. Mouillot, *et. al*, "Corsica," *Mediterranean Island Landscapes* (I. N. Vogiatzakis, *et. al*, eds.), Springer Science + Business Media, 2008, pp. 220-244.

that forever altered the Corsican landscape and with the complicity of local villagers whose abandonment of traditional agrarian practices resulted in the separation of the farmer from their land.

Crossing through the mountains on their hunt for the remaining members of the *Santa Lucia*, Ange Colomba and Vénérande encounter a farmer along her path through the pass. While Ange Colomba asks for safe passage and accommodation, Vénérande's attention turns to the desolate landscape that surrounds them. Noticing her focused attention, the farmer begins to explain her surroundings:

Le tannin, dit la grosse femme d'une voix rauque de tuberculeuse. Les hommes du nord sont venus, les entrepreneurs d'au-delà des mers, et ils ont embauché tout le monde pour couper les arbres, les châtaigniers, et les envoyer à l'usine, en amont, où on fabrique la teinture dans des cuves en acier. Ils fondent les troncs dans les cuves qui bouillonnent, et ils rejettent le jus dans la rivière. Il n'y a ni poissons ni anguilles qui flottent, et les sources saignent comme si la chimie imbibait le sol. Il n'y a plus d'arbres, et ceux qui les possédaient coupent d'autres forêts en d'autres lieux, ils sont devenus des ouvriers aux yeux rongés par l'acide, et leurs cheveux tombent avant qu'ils ne vieillissent, et leurs poumons recrachent les produits qu'ils ont respirés jusqu'à ce qu'ils meurent. Et les anciennes futaies sont mortes aussi, et des pluies torrentielles ravinent maintenant nos terres, sans rien qui les retiennent. Notre pays est mort, et il ne reste que nous, que Dieu a oubliés ici, afin que nous souffrions, afin que nous payions tous les jours pour le mal que nous avons fait aux montagnes (p. 134-5).

This description could apply just as well to American Appalachia coal mining regions of Eastern Kentucky, of the rainforests of the Amazon, as it does to the mountainous communities of Corsica during the early-19th century, whose natural resources were exploited to the point of depletion. Substantial timber resources were used for the extraction of tannic acid at profitable quantities for exportation to the Continent. This chemically intensive process required the deforestation of valleys and the injection of numerous toxins to the streams, depleting them of life: "Il n'y a ni poissons ni anguilles qui flottent, et les sources saignent comme si la chimie imbibait le sol." The land bleeds ("les sources saignent") as fish and fresh water are systematically destroyed by a

ruthless chemical predator. Intensive deforestation results in unopposable flooding of villages, “des pluies torrentielles ravinent maintenant nos terres, sans rien qui les retiennent.” The land itself has become a predator, village life its prey.

In earlier discussions, we have couched the presence of the *Voltigeurs corses* as a paramilitary invasion; here, we would be better suited to discuss a form of collaborative exploitation between “Les hommes du nord” and the local villagers they hired (“ils ont embauché tout le monde”).²⁸² Financial gain came at the expense of a shortened life where bodies were slowly dismantling themselves: “Ils sont devenus des ouvriers aux yeux rongés par l’acide, et leurs cheveux tombent avant qu’ils ne vieillissent, et leurs poumons recrachent les produits qu’ils ont respirés jusqu’à ce qu’ils meurent.” For those that survive the torrential rains, “sans rien qui les retient,” life is turned into an eternal cycle of restitution for the harm inflicted upon the mountains: “il ne reste que nous, que Dieu a oubliés ici, afin que nous souffrions, afin que nous payions tous les jours pour le mal que nous avons fait aux montagnes.” This is such a powerful expression of an individual’s recognition that punishment will define the rest of her life from which there is no respite, no possibility of a pause, no reprieve. The weight of this passage extends far beyond its 19th-century narrative context. Marc Biancarelli targets both “les entrepreneurs d’au-delà des mers” and the local villager in the dismantling of the island’s agrarian cultural fabric, its traditions, and its values. The Creator of this island abandons those souls who remain because of their destruction of His creation, “pour le mal que nous avons fait aux montagnes.” They become “Orphelins de Dieu,” estranged not only from their Creator, but also their land, their homes, and their lives. Corsica transforms into a zone for the expiation of sins and wrongs committed, in the

²⁸² This collaborative economic situation resembles what we studied earlier with regard to the collaboration of native Corsicans and the *Voltigeurs corses*, whose intimate knowledge of the local communities and customs facilitated the task of conscription and/or fugitive pursuits and arrests of those resisting the draft.

eyes of the farmer speaking, a literal Hell on Earth where death is far more enviable than survival. Although a situation of dual actors with shared responsibility, it is of the former that Biancarelli remains most wary. As both an expository passage in that it shares new perspectives of the consequences of Metropolitan encroachment, Biancarelli also raises the flag of further cultural decline and abandonment – he seems to be asking his readers, *What else are we willing to lose?*

Conclusion

Qu'est-ce que la Corse? This question should give even greater pause because of the challenge that *Orphelins de Dieu* offers to the commonplace realities of early-19th century Corsica propagated through French literature of the same period, texts that continue to impress upon us even to this very day. Nevertheless, Biancarelli adopts the indulgent visions of banditry and the codes of representing the *vendetta* to uncover the harsh and gruesome realities of the lives of bandits and of those who were their victims, as well as the community that surrounded these legendary figures. As a challenge to archetypal honorable bandit, Biancarelli portrays this figure through both his horrible solitude and the grisly violence left in his wake.

The decline of Ange Colomba is self-inflicted (after all, he buys into the allure of Théodore Poli's life) but it is not as simple as a poor choice or misguided decision. Reflecting on his present circumstances and the encounters that lead to that point, Ange Colomba describes his perspective of the systems of domination and manipulation that drove cultural transformation and environmental destruction, reducing the island into an unrecognizable world, a hellscape:

J'ai ma théorie sur ce pays. Je me dis que Dieu l'a choisi pour y expérimenter tout ce que les hommes sont capables de mettre en œuvre pour s'affronter et se détruire. Je crois comme ça que cette ordure qui est Notre Seigneur a pris un peu de tous les ingrédients les plus pourris de la nature humaine et qu'Il a foutu tout ça dans un bocal, avec nous au milieu pour voir ce que ça pourrait donner, et comme ça Il saurait, et Il éviterait de reproduire partout le même potage (p. 153).

The insular space as a testing grounds and a zone of exploration has long framed inherent conditions of insularity: “Nous avons pu constater que les îles constituent souvent un laboratoire de la nature.”²⁸³ From Ange Colomba’s perspective, the metaphorical experiment pits one against the other “pour s’affronter et se détruire” in the hopes that what is produced is kept contained and confined to the island: “Il éviterait de reproduire partout le même potage.” As Anne Meistersheim continues to observe in her work *Figures de l’île*, the scientific interest in Corsica (as well as other islands) extends to the experimentation with political and cultural systems from the 18th century through to the modern era during which “les institutions de la décentralisation furent aussi expérimentées en Corse: le conseil régional, qui existe maintenant dans toutes les régions françaises, fut créé en Corse un an avant les autres régions, dans le cadre de son ‘statut particulier.’”²⁸⁴ The status of Corsica as an experiment, or as experiment-able, directly engages with the most important undercurrent of Biancarelli’s novel: the relationships between the Continent and the Island. In the context of political and cultural experimentation, resistance to external (Continental) expectations is a defining feature of Corsican insular identity: “l’îleité ne pouvait se concevoir sans une nécessaire relation à l’Autre qui permet au système insulaire de se définir et de se construire”²⁸⁵; *Corsité* results from the resistance to perineal external domination that constructs and affirms a cultural identity: “C’est cette tradition de résistance qui a, à notre avis, forgé une certaine façon cette réputation de terre violente qui perdure, depuis l’époque romaine jusqu’à nos jours.”²⁸⁶

Returning to Ange Colomba’s comment above, what comes of this confrontation with “tout ce que les hommes sont capables de mettre en œuvre”? For Biancarelli, cultural degradation:

²⁸³ Anne Meistersheim, *Figures de l’île*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

²⁸⁴ *Idem.*, p. 133.

²⁸⁵ Marina Casula, “La Corse: une île-projet au cœur de la Méditerranée,” *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

“Notre pays est mort” (p. 135). The combative opposition imagined in this situation results in capitulation: local villagers selling out one another in hopes of gaining favor with the new political order incrementally cementing its dominance; farmers sacrificing themselves and their land for Continental economic and capitalist gain. More troubling then is not necessarily the destruction of the local community and its natural environments, but the destruction of the individuals who composed these communities and whose links to the land form the bases of community identities and relationships. The environmental destruction of the Corsican landscape is an obliteration of communities in that the individual is separated, forcibly, from the source of their origins and from home of their cultural traditions. While certainly a strong statement and declaration, there is still room for reconciliation, a gesture that first requires recognition of the past, of the distances that have separated individuals not only from their communities, but also from each other. In conclusion, *Orphelins de Dieu* proposes to read anew the “already read” in hopes of offering a new perspective into 19th-century Corsican communities that leaves the contemporary reader asking oneself: *How could I have not known?*

CHAPTER 4

Returning to Cultural Origins in Marie Ferranti's *La Chasse de nuit*

*It may be difficult for anyone unacquainted
with Corsica to believe that mazzeri still exist there,
and still practice their dark calling.*²⁸⁷

*Mazzeru, à l'heure où j'écris,
plus personne ne sait ce que
cela veut dire.*²⁸⁸

Marie Ferranti (1962-) is one of the most prolific Corsican authors of the current generation and sets all her narratives in Corsica. Her professional literary career began with the publication of *Les Femmes de San Stefano* (Gallimard, 1995) for which she was awarded a prestigious French literary award, the *Prix François Mauriac*, for the best debut novel of the year; several years later, she earned the *Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie française* for her novel *La Princesse de Mantoue* (Gallimard, 2002).²⁸⁹ Published exclusively by Gallimard in its esteemed *Collection Blanche*, Ferranti's literary *œuvre* intimately explores the shadows of tight-knit community relationships (*Les Femmes de San Stefano*, 1995), reverence for death (*Histoire d'un*

²⁸⁷ Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, London, Longman Group Limited, 1971, p. 58. Ferranti begins her novel with an epigraph citing (in translation) this same English anthropologist who has written extensively of Corsica: "J'ai appris d'ici que les hommes doivent veiller, garder leur vengeance jusque dans leur sommeil." In an interview with *Télérama* conducted in 2017, Marie Ferranti recounts the earliest moments of conception for *La Chasse de nuit*, a moment at which she stumbled across one of Carrington's books in her personal library: "Quand j'ai commencé à travailler sur le mazzeru, je suis tombée sur un livre de Dorothy Carrington dans ma bibliothèque, acheté et oublié des années plus tôt. J'ai entamé sa lecture, mais je l'ai rapidement arrêté: quand je commence un roman, je ne veux pas être parasitée par la connaissance, je préfère rester dans l'insu" (Interview with Stéphane Jarno, "Marie Ferranti: Il y a cent ans, le chamanisme avait encore droit de cité," *Télérama*, August 4, 2017; available online - <https://www.telerama.fr/livre/marie-ferranti-il-y-a-cent-ans-le-chamanisme-avait-encore-droit-de-cite.160989.php>).

While over thirteen years after the publication of her own novel (in 2004), Ferranti's work comes back to light with the publication of the *bande dessinée* aptly entitled *Mazzeru* from Jules Stromboni (Brussels, Castermann, 2017; also interviewed in a segment with *Télérama*: <https://www.telerama.fr/livre/la-bedeteque-ideale-155-mazzeru-le-souffle-corse-de-la-mort.156415.php>

²⁸⁸ Marie Ferranti, *La Chasse de nuit*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Folio," 2004, p. 19. All in-body parenthetical citations refer to this edition of the novel.

²⁸⁹ "Prix littéraires," *L'Académie française*, "Les prix et fondations," Available online:

http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-prix-et-fondations-prix-litteraires/les-laureats?prix=&laureat=Ferranti&annee=&oeuvre=&prix_institut=&prix_ancien=&genre=&theme=&editeur=&form_build_id=form-n7F9tLA39_XlCXr1wBbbQUtP5eDfEfHVq562PMmnW2Y&form_id=academie_prizes_search_form&op=Rechercher

assassin, 2018), traditions of the *chant funèbre* (*Maîtres de chant*, 2004), and a recent exploration of Corsica's political subjugation to Continental powers through the theatrical piece *La passion de Marie Gentile* (Gallimard, coll. "Le Manteau d'Arlequin," 2017). Linking one work to another are thoughtful meditations on the complex relationships between past and present, between lovers, and between modernity and forgotten rituals of the past. Through a revival of folklore and of numerous rural traditions and histories, Ferranti brings new light, through literature, to the dynamic forces of the Corsican village to turn the insular gaze inward, back onto itself.

In 2004, Ferranti took a step away from her specific form of Corsican realism to throw her reader into the world of the supernatural and of superstition with her novel *La Chasse de nuit*, which features the legendary figure of the *mazzeru*, a person wielding the supernatural power of premonition, and more specifically, the ability to foretell death. Prediction of death is at times equated with its causation in Ferranti's novel and the social relationships of the (fictional) village Zigliaro are upended in a catastrophic chain reaction of events. Anchoring the narrative's intrigue is a difficult choice made by its central protagonist, Mattéo Monacle, whether to renounce his powers and status as a *mazzeru*, no longer believing in the importance of the tradition or its value to the community.

La Chasse de nuit brings together complicated amorous relationships, the dominant role of women for rural Corsican culture, the preeminence of death and its reverence by the wider Corsican community, the mysterious and occult forces that animate village life, and the seismic shifts experienced by rural villages following the 20th century's World Wars that heavily impacted insular life. More importantly perhaps, Ferranti's novel raises important questions of how insular communities relate to and construct their own notions of Corsican identity, which as Elena Filipova remarks, is fundamentally a consequence of a particular geography: "l'insularité, qui à la fois

rompt une continuité territoriale avec le continent français et rend immuables et incontestables les frontières du territoire corse, ‘périphérique par excellence’.”²⁹⁰ While geographical insularity itself is almost certainly an integral element to Corsican identity, Marie Ferranti will complicate the notion of a collective Corsican identity by representing a community’s deeply conflictual relationship to its past traditions and rituals. For some, *that* Corsica (the one of the past) is perhaps not worth keeping in *this* Corsica (the one of the present). The tensions between progressive, forward-looking cultural identities and those rooted in the traditions and memories of the past structure and complicate the social dynamics of the rural village Zigliaro; these same tensions also frame the discursive gestures of Ferranti’s novel more broadly as they actively recreate a ritual practice itself at risk of disappearance. Within this adherence-to and rejection-of tradition that forms the central knot of the novel lies an important question that will guide our discussions and reflection: what happens when the current generation begins to no longer recognize the former? or worse, forgets about it?

Marie Ferranti raises these questions in *La Chasse de nuit* as an exploration of the scission between generations and social groups through the prism of rupture and abandonment of the traditions and practices of *mazzerisme*. Numerous characters turn away from this cultural tradition, as well as others, and even leave their maternal village, in hopes that the modern, post-War world will offer *something* better, safer. Marie Ferranti’s literary gesture is then even more important and remarkable as she pens a novel of the slow demise of a centuries-old tradition and ritual, which effectively counteracts this slippage in cultural memory, perpetuating the practices of *mazzerisme* for future generations to remember. In this chapter, I will ground the exploration of this division, in the (geo)critical theory of *Place*, a term often used to evoke the sentimental and affective

²⁹⁰ Elena Filipova, *op. cit.*, p. 398. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.3917/ethn.083.0397>

attachments born of personal experiences within a particular area, called *Space*, for example: cultural traditions, history, artistic production, among many others. The decision to abandon tradition and to turn away from the experience of *Place* raises an important question that will further drive another discussion that flows through this chapter: if you can, how do you return to a long-held tradition? This study will require significant investigation into the origins of *mazzerisme* as a cultural practice, how it is understood and appreciated by external audiences, and what can be distilled from its literary representation. Working from the intersections of literature, anthropology, folklore, and ethnography, the analysis here will explore the roles and responsibilities of the *mazzeru* and the significance of Marie Ferranti's literary representation of this individual for insular communities and especially for the cultural moment of renewed attention to the unique character of Corsican communities.

I. The Story Arc

La Chasse de nuit is an autodiegetic fictional narrative that takes place in the late-1930s to early-1940s and that recounts a critical juncture in the life of the novel's protagonist, Mattéo Monacle, a resident of the village of Zigliaro, located in a heavily forested and mountainous region southwest of Ajaccio, Corsica.²⁹¹ Mattéo is no ordinary villager—he is a *mazzeru*, a person with the supernatural power to predict and announce the forthcoming death of a member of his community following a yearly ceremonial night-time hunt in the forest surrounding his village: “Cette chasse de nuit désigne ceux qui vont mourir” (p. 11). The death of the individual member of the community is foretold through the physical suffering of the animal itself: “Dans le cri de l’animal qui meurt, je reconnais la voix de celui qui a été désigné par le sort, parfois je le vois

²⁹¹ The village itself seems to be a fictional creation, but the Southwestern region of Corsica, especially around the important city Sartène, is known for its deep-rooted belief in supernatural activity...

avant même que l'animal ne soit abattu, autrement, le regard de l'animal mort ne trompe pas” (p. 12).

Through the screams and injuries of the disfigured, dying boar captured and assailed by the hunters on one particular night in the spring of 1938, Mattéo Monacle recognizes the face of Petru Zanetti, the husband of Lisa Zanetti, “le coup de bâton lui ayant fracassé la gueule, laissait présager que Petru aurait le visage abîmé par la blessure et qu'elle serait mortelle” (p. 13). The premonition of Petru Zanetti's death is equally troubling for Mattéo because, among other things, it forces unwanted interactions with Petru's wife, Élisabeth (Lisa) Susini, with whom Mattéo entertains a complicated emotional and affectionate relationship. She ceaselessly confronts, admonishes, and pleads Mattéo to change the premonition. Hearing the news of Matteo's fatal premonition, Lisa is torn between what she *wants* to believe, that the premonition is a meaningless ritual, and what she *should* believe, that Mattéo's prediction might indeed materialize: her ambivalence will carry her throughout the novel as she refuses to accept the ritual's identification of her fiancé Petru (“Ces vieilles légendes sont absurdes,” p. 32) while at the same time remaining deeply wary of their possibilities and fatal consequences (“Je suivrai Petru partout. Personne ne pourra lui faire du mal,” p. 31). Lisa and Mattéo will even go to the point of staging a different hunt, one that is performative where Mattéo adopts the role of the sacrificial animal, to redirect the trajectory of fate itself. The central narrative conflict is then set as Mattéo must decide which is more important: upholding the ritual tradition of the premonition or forsaking his identity as *mazzeru* and leaving everything behind. Matteo too will confront the future of his role as the last of the *mazzeri*, a decision that will almost certainly end the tradition and ritual itself.

In the end, however, the premonition does not materialize: Death targets a different victim instead, Petru's father. Mattéo abrogates his roles and responsibilities as *mazzeru* and retreats to

the seclusion of the forests surrounding Zigliaro, the *Bois de Foscolo*, just as the destruction of World War II looms over the horizon, bringing with it the potential for Italian annexation of the island and waves of emigration to the Continent: “La plupart de mes amis sont morts. Beaucoup ont fui cette île pour trouver sur le continent une vie meilleure” (p. 189). The attrition of the village and its surroundings leaves him with fewer and fewer connections to his past: “Je suis devenu étranger à celui que j’étais alors. Il ne reste rien du monde que j’ai connu dans ma jeunesse” (*ibid.*). In the years following the end of the war, some semblances of life return to the village, but coats of paint cannot mask the ruin: “J’enrage pourtant de voir Zigliaro défiguré. Des maisons sont effondrées; d’autres encore restaurées, selon la mode étrange de peindre les volets d’un bleu criard” (p. 191-2).

The disfiguration of the village is symptomatic of the cultural separation, attrition even, that will slowly creep across the island until there are no longer any who “[connaît] les pierres des chemins, le nom des lieux, les endroits poissonneux de la rivière, le nom de leurs voisins et de toute leur parentèle et savaient ce que la couleur d’un ciel veut dire” (p. 189). Mattéo is also lured towards the horizon with his new lover and partner, Caterina, who muses a spontaneous, unrestrained cruise throughout the Mediterranean, “L’été approche. Nous naviguerons le temps qu’il nous plaira...” (p. 196). For Mattéo, who has long sought to “connaître cet exil [qu’il a] toujours méprisé,” remains deeply reticent and his departure from Corsica forever in the conditional: “Ce serait avec amour que, bientôt, avec Caterina, je partirais” (p. 198).

II. Insular Folklores: Death, Dying, and Superstitions of Corsica

Returning to the legend and lore of the *mazzeru* is a dive into oral histories and into the legends and lore of both worldly and supernatural dynamics that have long animated Corsican

communities, particularly those of the rural, mountainous interior. Anchoring the literary narrative of *La Chasse de nuit* in the island's supernatural folklore for contemporary readers serves as both the initiation to these various traditions as well as a renaissance of these legends, for it is through the text itself that the stories are (re)told and brought back into life.

What are these legends? What are their sources? In large part, the stories of the *mazzeru* are passed down orally from generation to generation—written sources and their origins are yet to be clearly identified; contemporary ethnographic and anthropological research draws heavily from collections of interviews and anecdotal evidence from members of different communities. However, from the perspective of literary history and of the representation of Corsican communities through literary narratives, the supernatural and the magico-religious superstitions of insular communities leave a long paper trail: the interests of the early publications of the 19th century that introduced Corsican traditions and beliefs, specifically those related to funerary and mortuary rites, to Continental audiences for the first time.

As we discussed in depth in earlier chapters, the traditional practices and customs of Corsican communities often captivated travelers to the island and provided a fertile source of inspiration for their later narratives, both travelogues and fictions. Travel narratives of the late-18th and early-19th centuries focused heavily on documenting funerary rites and traditions with particular attention paid to mourning rituals such as the improvised funerary lamentation, the *voceri*. Similarly, improvised funeral lamentations, scenes of intense mourning rites, and even gruesome death frame both the travel accounts and narrative fictions of Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, Gustave Flaubert, and Prosper Mérimée. What distills from these early Romantic perspectives and depictions is that death and dying as cultural experiences distinguish and isolate Corsican culture from Metropolitan *mœurs*. With increased attention and access to the Corsican

interior, travel writers of the mid-to-late 1800s benefited from new possibilities to continue uncovering the cultural specificities of Corsican communities, with a marked interest in religious beliefs, superstitions, and the occult. Beginning in 1883, deeper cultural research and exploration begins into the vital forces that structure insular community, forces that are invisible, supernatural, but nevertheless present and deeply respected by communities.

Even though we are considering drastically different historical moments, the legacy of the Romantic period is still perceived in later-19th-century travel narratives for the attention focused on the macabre and the morose, specifically through the curious ways in which death finds itself yet again at the forefront of cultural interest. An exploration of these late-19th-century publications will allow us to better situate Ferranti's literary gesture in the framework of cultural curiosity and (re)discovery in the context of political power and insular identities. To this end, I propose an overview of the intellectual history and interest in Corsican superstitions beginning in the 1880s and running through the 1970s, a period during which a remarkable shift in orientation and focus occurs in both institutional research and insular cultural politics. In the analysis that follows, I will examine a transition in late-19th-century academic research and discovery as a form of proto-ethnography that documented oral histories and first-person accounts, pushing travel narratives as a genre beyond the surface-level (visual) cultural interests that anchored travel narratives of the early-19th century, such as physiognomy, dress, and Neolithic architecture. Resembling the Romantic portrayals of Corsican funerary rites and traditions, travel narratives and other academic publications of the late-19th century contribute to what Bernard Biancarelli and Christine Bonardi consider the "énigme corse"²⁹² – an expression used to describe the complex realities of the insular *cosmos* that resists outsiders' understandings of insular culture and traditions.

²⁹² Bernard Biancarelli and Christine Bonardi, "De quelques monstres anthropologiques insulaires," *Ethnologie française*, "Corse. Tous terrains," *op. cit.*, p. 491.

During the 1880s-1890s, the first academic research-based publications, different from travel narratives, appear documenting Corsican lore and legend, specifically addressing superstitions and supernatural *croyances*: “Ce sont aussi les grands débuts des sciences historiques et archéologiques dans l’île: plusieurs revues scientifiques sont créés à cet effet, dont le *Bulletin des Sciences Sociales Humaines et Naturelles de la Corse*.”²⁹³ In 1883, Jean-Baptiste Frédéric Ortoli publishes *Les contes populaires de l’île de Corse* which includes many different categories of narratives: “Contes populaires” (which are divided into two subcategories: 1. “Contes proprement dits”; and, 2. “Contes pour rire”) and “Légendes.”²⁹⁴ It is this second category of Ortoli’s work that distinguishes this anthology from others published earlier in the 19th century because of its dedicated focus on the supernatural: fairies, the devil, *les revenants* (the dead who return to the world of living—zombies?), as well as narratives of saints’ lives and other divine experiences.²⁹⁵ This collection is significant not only in its content division, but also because Ortoli attributes many of the narratives to specific *conteurs* and their home village (Ottavino, Porto-Vecchio, etc.) to create an early collection of Corsican folklore and oral histories, translated into French.²⁹⁶

In 1893, Gaston Vuillier, a renowned magazine illustrator, travel writer, and naturalist²⁹⁷, published the travel narrative *Les Îles oubliées. Les Baléares, la Corse, et la Sardaigne*, which

²⁹³ *Ibid.* The *Bulletin des Sciences Sociales Humaines et Naturelles de la Corse* ran in publication from 1881-1937 with 103 issues over its 39-year existence.

²⁹⁴ Jean-Baptiste Frédéric Ortoli, *Les contes populaires de l’île de Corse*, Paris, Maisonneuve et C^{ie}, 1881.

²⁹⁵ In particular, Francesco-Ottaviano Renucci, *Nouvelles corses* (trad. A. Filippi), Paris, Hachette, 1841 (1833 for the original anthology written in Italian, *Storia di Corsica*, Bastia, Fabiani, 1827); see also the 1963 anthology presented and annotated by Geneviève Massignon, *Contes corses*, Gap, Orphys, coll. “Annales” (No. 40), 1963; this edition is most useful because of its thematic index, however dates and regions in which these stories were collected are not often provided, as is frequently the case with anthologies and collections of oral histories from Corsica.

²⁹⁶ In the original text, there is no indication of which language was used to communicate the story itself. Although the final publication is in French, it is entirely possible that the original material was most likely provided in Italian and then later translated.

²⁹⁷ Cf. François Pouillon, “Le Grand Tour des illustrateurs – Gaston Vuillier (1845-1915)” in *Exotisme et intelligibilité. Itinéraires d’Orient*, Bordeaux, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, coll. “Études culturelles,” 2017, p. 95-111. For more on his specific work on Corsica, see the very astute analysis offered by Lucie Desiridi, “En Corse:

offers another early investigation into local legends and lore of supernatural powers and superstitions. As opposed to Ortoli's anthology of stories, Vuillier's travel narrative takes form as a series of transcribed interviews with local villagers, individuals whose voices are notably absent from the travel and literary narratives of the Romantic generation.²⁹⁸ In the following excerpt, Vuillier describes his contacts and relationships with those encountered along his way across the island's interior regions, benefiting greatly from Corsican hospitality and conviviality:

Nous passons parfois nos soirées ensemble après avoir partagé quelque plat de truites que nous arrosons d'une bouteille de vieux vin de son cellier. Quelle douceur et quelle énergie à la fois dans ses prunelles noires où passent tour à tour de sombres éclairs et des caresses! Combien de ses récits, que j'écoute les coudes sur la table, m'intéressent!

C'est ainsi que je pénétrais dans le cœur même des croyances corses, conservées encore par les vieilles gens, par les bergers des sommets, par les habitants d'obscurs villages enfouis dans le pli de quelque haute montagne que les nuées caressent en passant.

Que de coutumes bizarres et de superstitions rares il y avait en ce pays et qui vont disparaissant! Mais bien des années s'écouleront encore avant d'avoir déraciné cet attrait du merveilleux qu'on trouve chez les montagnards.²⁹⁹

It is through these festive soirées “bien arrosées” that Vuillier begins to *listen* to the fascinating stories recounted by his generous hosts, “les coudes sur la table.” As a result, Vuillier's presentational and documentary strategy shifts away from visual observations and tends toward the transmission of cultural realities and circumstances by giving voice to native Corsicans.

le voyageur-artiste”, in *Bérose - Encyclopédie internationale des histoires de l'anthropologie*, Paris, URL [10670/1.ghmvzx](https://doi.org/10.10670/1.ghmvzx)

²⁹⁸ It seems most likely that these interviews were first conducted in Corsican and then later translated and transcribed into French. As Alexander Mendes has observed in his doctoral study of education policy and language acquisition in Corsica, “By the latter half of the nineteenth century, figures indicate that peripheral regions like Brittany, Occitania, and Corsica were among those with the lowest competence in French” (Alexander Mendes, “On Multilingual Corsica: Language, Multiplicity, and Globalization.” Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2018, p. 14; see also the excellent work by Eugène F.-X. Gherardi, *Précis d'histoire de l'éducation en Corse, Les Origines: De Petru Cirneu à Napoléon Bonaparte*, Corte, Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique, 2011; available online: <https://issuu.com/crdp-corse/docs/precis-educ>)

²⁹⁹ Gaston Vuillier, *Les Îles oubliées. Les Baléares, La Corse, et la Sardaigne*, Paris, Hachette, 1893, p. 245.

Nevertheless, Vuillier's perspective is still of one who lives outside of the insular space and community as he introduces what will follow as "bizarres" and "rares."³⁰⁰

Death remains a looming presence that nourishes, albeit morbidly, a sustained fascination and interest as one penetrates deeper into the recesses of insular customs and traditions. In one such example, Vuillier learns of the beliefs (*croyances*) in invisible spirits that animate the winds and the clouds and that are feared for their fatal powers; he transitions from one invisible force of nature to another, finishing with vampires, *Streghe*, that haunt local villagers:

Il [his interlocutor] m'entraîne dans sa demeure, me fait asseoir, et, comme le jour s'achève, allume une torche de résine.

"Les plaintes des eaux, me dit-il ensuite, le chant nocturne des hiboux, le vol des oiseaux, les sons vagues qui s'élèvent le soir, le passage des escarbots crépusculaires qui vous effleurent de l'aile, les silhouettes des nuées, les gémissements du vent, toutes les formes, tous les bruits de la nature ont une signification pour celui qui sait voir et comprendre. Nos ancêtres, qui, sans cesse en éveil, habitaient les forêts, avaient appris à lire dans le grand livre, avaient observé et pouvaient présager l'avenir. Aujourd'hui les générations nouvelles ne vivent plus autant avec la nature et ne savent pas écouter ses voix. Dans ces nuées qui descendent maintenant sur le flanc de la montagne et vont recouvrir le village d'un pâle suaire, les esprits malfaisants qu'on appelle les Gramante vont s'envelopper et descendre avec elles. Gardez-vous de demeurer exposé à leurs maléfices, il faut tenir les portes closes, et veiller à ce que la maison soit pourvue d'eau bénite.

"L'homme n'est point seul sur terre, continua-t-il: en dehors des animaux, il y a les éléments qui souffrent et pleurent, et des êtres que nos sens ne perçoivent pas, mais qui existent surement. Les *Streghe*, par exemple, ou vampires. Ce sont des apparences de vieilles femmes qui s'introduisent la nuit dans les maisons sans qu'on puisse les apercevoir, qui s'attachent à la gorge des petits enfants, et aspirent leur sang avec avidité. Le lendemain, les pauvres mères trouvent les petits êtres étouffés. Dans les temps anciens, on a vu quelque fois de ces horribles créatures; aujourd'hui, elles sont invisibles, et la mort seule des petits témoigne [de] leur venue. 'Prenons garde aux Streghe', se disent entre elle les femmes de nos montagnes à l'heure du coucher, et certaines mettent alors sous leur oreiller quelque serpe ou une faucille pour tuer les vampires."³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Idem.*, p. 240. Water is an important element in superstitious practices that ward off death in many Indo-European cultures, especially those of the Mediterranean basin; cf. Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore*, "Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview," Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1980, p. 93-133.

These reported conversations and exchanges offer far more nuanced and enigmatic perspectives of the lore surrounding death in Corsican culture, especially in comparison to the stories of assassination conveyed by writers of the Romantic generation. Death resides within the vital systems of nature itself, particularly in the clouds (“les nuées”). Hidden within the fog and the brume are the *Gramante*, who are ever more threatening precisely because one pays less and less attention to the sounds of nature: “Aujourd’hui les générations nouvelles ne vivent plus autant avec la nature et ne savent pas écouter ses voix.” This is an important point that will drive our later analysis of Ferranti’s novel: Vuillier sounds a warning alarm about the risks of the “les générations nouvelles” turning away from their cultural practices and traditions resulting in a fundamental break in connection. He has already made this observation earlier in his introduction to the discussions of the supernatural: “Que de coutumes bizarres et de superstitions rares il y avait en ce pays et qui vont disparaissant!”³⁰² Both Vuillier and his interlocutor acknowledge the risks of cultural attrition at the dawn of the 20th century, unbeknownst to these two, it will be a time that will present a pair of significant obstacles and challenges to insular communities: world war, modernization, and substantial emigration.

Alongside Vuillier’s reported interactions and discussions with rural islanders, the following year, in 1894, Julie Filippi publishes one of the earliest academic research articles summarizing and organizing the specific substance of different Corsican legends and superstitions. Her article, “Légendes, croyances, et superstitions de la Corse,”³⁰³ presents definitions and clearly contextualized examples of local lore and legend: *les Stree* (witches); *le fullettu* (“un petit homme qui [...] s’attaque surtout aux gens qui sont couchés [...] mais on ne le voit pas”³⁰⁴); *les revenants*

³⁰² Gaston Vuillier, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

³⁰³ Julie Filippi, “Légendes, croyances, et superstitions de la Corse,” *Revue des traditions populaires*, t. IX, August-September 1894, p. 457-467.

³⁰⁴ *Idem.*, p. 459.

(spirits that appear around someone on their deathbed, “ils font le simulacre de l’enterrer”³⁰⁵); *le mauvais œil* (the infamous “evil eye”); Catholic Christian prayers that combat malevolent forces, such as the evil eye, for example, prayers to Sainte-Lucie. Tucked away amongst these many different superstitions and *croyances* that Filippi describes is one that is of critical importance for our broader study, the consequences of failed, or incorrectly performed, baptism: “Si au moment du baptême le parrain ou la marraine se trompent d’un seul mot en récitant le *Credo*, l’enfant devient stregho ou stregha, ou bien Mortolaio.”³⁰⁶ In our later discussion of the origins of *mazzerisme*, the subject of failed baptism will resurface as a potential origin for the powers of premonition; for the moment, it is worth signaling this academic publication as one of the earliest explanations of the consequences for a failed baptism, which results in the transformation of an infant into a being with supernatural powers to foretell the death of others.³⁰⁷

Of these local legends and lore that reach Continental audiences during the latter half of the 19th century, one seems to have escaped attention: the belief in the power of an individual to *predict* the death of another member of his/her community through a ceremonial, nocturnal hunt of the boar. Was the legend of the *mazzeru* overlooked by travelers? Was it a tradition withheld from discussion? The answers to these questions are not immediately clear as publications from the late-19th century and at the turn of the century fall silent on the subject. Given this circumstance, I hypothesize that the tumult of World Wars I and II significantly disrupted the momentum of the late-19th-century’s Continental interest in the cultural specificity of Corsican communities which

³⁰⁵ *Idem.*, p. 460.

³⁰⁶ *Idem.*, p. 463. The term, “Mortolaio” is a portmanteau from Italian suggesting first death (morto) with the suffix – “laio” a position of agency or action (someone doing something); in this case, the term “Mortolaio” would be a death-causer...an assassin? An undertaker? (My deep thanks to Lauren Surovi who helped me with this understanding.)

³⁰⁷ To be clear, this is likely not the first discussion of Corsican *streghe*; rather, this is the earliest source in my research that draws a causal relationship between baptism and transformation.

resulted in these gaps of knowledge and understanding.³⁰⁸ Perhaps as well, one speaks not of the *mazzeri*.

It is not until the 1950s that explicit reference is made to the existence and activities of the Corsican *mazzeri* for the first time by Dorothy Carrington, a widely regarded English anthropologist and specialist in Corsican culture, who in 1957 publishes the groundbreaking article, “Les ‘mazzeri’,” with Pierre Lamotte in *Études Corses: Revue Trimestrielle*.³⁰⁹ Carrington’s ethnographic work becomes intellectual canon in Corsican cultural studies and serves as an anchor and reference point for later generations of scholars in a wave of new research and cultural inquiry. In 1971, Carrington published *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, a monograph straddling personal memoir and professional ethnography that offers the larger public a first-look at this traditional practice: “[The *mazzeri*] are intermediaries between death and the living, or what one might describe as ‘death’s executioners.’”³¹⁰ Although published in the United Kingdom and first in English, the reception of this work resulted in a sizeable shift in Corsican cultural studies that culminated in a series of significant colloquia held in France in the late-1970s that renewed attention for the peculiarity of the relationships with death in Corsican culture. The leading ethnographic and cultural studies journal *Études corses*, produced a substantial double issue devoted to these broad interests, in part as an *acte de colloque*, while also advancing new possibilities for cultural studies research.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ The turn of the century for Corsicans, however, was a vibrant period of cultural development, literary production, and political activism for insular communities; cf. Jean-Guy Talamoni, *Littérature et politique en Corse: imaginaire national, société et action politique*, Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. “Thèses,” 2013.

³⁰⁹ Dorothy Carrington and Pierre Lamotte, “Les ‘mazzeri’,” *Études Corses. Revue Trimestrielle, Société des Sciences Historiques et Naturelles et les Archives Départementales de la Corse*, Nouvelle série, Nos. 15-16, Spring-Summer 1957, p. 81-91. [Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65652180>]

³¹⁰ Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

³¹¹ *Études corses* (dir. Fernand Etti), “La mort en Corse et dans les sociétés méditerranéennes” (Colloque de Bastia, March 1976), Special edition, Nos. 12-13, 1979.

The increased academic interest in Corsican subjects of the 1950s-1970s corresponds with various movements calling for the re-opening of the *Università di Corsica* in Corte (closed since 1769): In 1961, the *Association générale des étudiants corses de Paris* was formed; years later, in 1974, the *Conseil régional* elected to place the university back in Corte; the following year, the *Académie de Corse* was created; finally, in 1981, with Pascal Arrighi at the helm, the *Université de Corse* welcomed its first cohort of 711 students.³¹² The timing of this *renaissance* of cultural attention and appreciation for traditional practices and customs coincided with the rising tides of political movements for Corsican self-determination of the 1970s-80s, whose complementary social and cultural movement, known as the *Riacquistu*, which sought to restore and reinvigorate Corsican culture in both micro-regions and at the macro-insular level.

This review of the academic and historical cultural interests in death, dying, and superstitions in 19th-century Corsica will contribute greatly to the analysis that follows of Marie Ferranti's representation of Corsica in her novel *La Chasse de nuit*. The cultural practices that deeply intrigued *écrivains-voyageurs* such as Gaston Vuillier and academic audiences suggest a shift away from transmitting cultural comparisons from an exterior perspective and towards deeper understanding and engagement with the cultural specificity and uniqueness of Corsican communities. This survey of academic publications and history serves as a placeholder of sorts, to foreshadow the direction of the discussion that follows because it is in this same avenue that we will approach Marie Ferranti's work as it scrapes off the dust of cultural memory, lest it truly all be forgotten forever.

³¹² 'Historique', Università di Corsica Pasquale PAOLI, établissement public national à caractère scientifique, culturel et professionnel,

Available online, https://www.universita.corsica/fr/universita/historique/#timeline_date_separator_1972 [Accessed September 1, 2019]. As fate would have it, Jérôme Ferrari portrays the first years following the Université de Corse-Corté's reopening in the short story "Ethnologues" in which the professor Théodore Morrachini directs a master's thesis about the *mazzeru* (*Varités de la mort*, Arles, Actes sud, coll. "Babel," p. 217-236).

III. Reintroducing the Lore of the Mazzeru

What is *mazzèrisme* and what is the importance of this legend's literary representation for contemporary audiences? In the following section, we will draw on anthropological and ethnographic research conducted on the specific tradition of *mazzèrisme* since the 1950s when the earliest publications first acquainted the academic world to the networks of the *mazzèri*. This discussion will evolve through a comparative approach between the conclusions of social science research of previous generations and the literary dramatization offered in Ferranti's novel. The intent here is not to identify discrepancies or alignment between formal studies and literary representation, but rather to investigate the reach of Ferranti's novel as a social gesture of welcoming and (re)connection with the traditions of the past.

Marie Ferranti engages with a specific tension experienced by Corsican communities in the ruinous aftermath of the 20th-century World Wars: continue to uphold and respect centuries-old traditions; or, disavow customs and embark on a new path offered by a new, modern world order. Conscripted for the World War I (1914-1918) decimated Corsican villages, especially those of the rural interior. For the lucky few that survived in the trenches, returning home offered little comfort: otherness and non-belonging in their own community stood as reason enough to pack up again and return to the Continent. At the same time, anchoring the literary narrative in the island's supernatural folklore initiates or reacquaints the contemporary reader with the legends, traditions, and practices of previous generations, bridging the gaps carved out by the passage of time. We must first begin with the rich lore and legend of the tradition of *mazzèrisme* and of the "étranges rêveries et le rendez-vous de chasse de Foscolo" (p. 189) around which Ferranti's novel will turn.

1. *Mazzerisme: Practices, Principles, Traditions*

The *mazzeru* is a person, male or female, who is able to predict the death of a member of their community following a yearly ritual hunt that occurs at night, a *chasse de nuit*, of which the frequent prey is the wild boar (*le sanglier*). Through both the battered body of the animal and the sounds it emits as it succumbs to its wounds, the *mazzeru* foretells the death of a member of their community; as the central protagonist Mattéo Monacle recalls, “le regard de l’animal mort ne trompe pas” (p. 12). Since 1957, scholars have proposed numerous definitions of the *mazzeru* that at times diverge considerably, but converge on a similar, and very peculiar detail: the entire experience of the *chasse de nuit* is said to be a dream:

(1) Dorothy Carrington (1957):

C’est la nuit, en songe, que les “mazzeri”, ou plutôt leur double, car, en réalité, ils ne quittent pas leur lit, se rendent à une chasse nocturne, poussés par une puissance mystérieuse. Leurs terrains de chasse sont des lieux incultes et sauvages au maquis impénétrable et situés près d’une rivière. C’est là qu’ils se postent à l’affût de la première bête qui vient à passer – sanglier le plus souvent, mais aussi n’importe quel animal même domestique, veaux, porcs, chèvres ou chiens.

La bête tuée, le, ou les “mazzeri”, car ils partent en chasse tantôt seuls, tantôt en bande, la retournent sur le dos et c’est alors qu’ils s’aperçoivent que le visage de l’animal est, en réalité, celui d’une personne de leur village. Cette personne meurt inévitablement et réellement peu de temps après la chasse nocturne et au plus tard dans l’année qui suit.³¹³

(2) Roccu Multedo (1975):

Le *mazzeru* est un homme comme vous et moi, qui fait des rêves de chasse. Il se poste, en esprit, au gué d’un ruisseau. Il abat la première bête sauvage ou domestique qui vient à passer et qui est l’esprit d’un être humain. Après l’avoir tuée, il retourne la bête sur le dos. Il s’aperçoit alors que le museau de l’animal est devenu le visage d’une personne de sa connaissance, qui va mourir. Cette personne vivra trois jours au

³¹³ Dorothy Carrington, “Les mazzeri,” *op. cit.*, p. 83; [Available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65652180/f93.item>]

minimum, ou un nombre impair de jours, et un an, au maximum. En effet, la bête tuée représentait son âme: c'est pourquoi, privé d'âme, son corps ne tardera pas à dépérir.³¹⁴

(3) Dorothy Carrington (1995):

Death's messengers, as they might be termed, they are a category of people endowed with particular occult gifts exercised in the course of their night-hunting. They are known as the *mazzeri*. The masculine singular form is *mazzeru*, the feminine *mazzera*, plural *mazzere*; but terms *mazzere* and *mazzeri* are commonly used, in defiance of grammar, to designate the singular of either sex. Regarded with a mingling of awe and dread they cannot be forgotten or ignored; for the *mazzeri* are not phantoms, but real people living in the villages and known to their neighbors while practicing their dark calling.³¹⁵

(4) Philippe Pesteil (2001):

Le *mazzeru* est un individu (homme ou femme) qui en rêve, se dédouble et quitte sa demeure pour battre le maquis. Armé d'un fusil, parfois d'un couteau, d'un bâton ou d'une tige d'asphodèle, il tue lors d'une chasse nocturne, un animal (sanglier, cochon, chèvre) qui se révèle être l'esprit d'un habitant du village. C'est en retournant la dépouille ou en entendant le cri de la bête blessée que le bourreau de la mort, reconnaît et identifie sa victime.³¹⁶

(5) Tony Fogacci and Vaninna Lari (2013):

Comment peut-on définir le 'mazzeru' ou la 'mazzera'? Personnage clé de la société corse, il est à la fois un intermédiaire ou acteur de passage symbolique du monde des vivants vers le monde des morts. En Corse, la personne qui est dite 'mazzeru' ou 'mazzera' est un individu bien réel, homme ou femme, faisant partie de la communauté, qui rêve le plus souvent d'une chasse pendant son sommeil, de là l'analogie faite avec le chaman, qui lui, peut cumuler plusieurs fonctions: prêtre, sorcier, magicien, devin, et guérisseur traditionnel.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Roccu Multedo, *Le Mazzerisme, un chamanisme corse*, Paris, Éditions L'Originel, coll. "Terres de tradition," 1975, p. 12.

³¹⁵ Dorothy Carrington, *The Dream-Hunters of Corsica*, London, Orion Books Ltd., 1996 [1995], p. 55.

³¹⁶ Philippe Pesteil, "Contribution à l'étude d'une reconstruction identitaire séductive. Le Mazzeru corse," *La Ricerca Folklorica*, No. 44, "Antropologia dei processi migratori," Oct. 2001, p. 107.

³¹⁷ Tony Fogacci and Vaninna Lari, "The Corsican Mazzeru at the Dawn of the 21st century: The End of a Shape of Shamanism," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Rome (MSCER Publishing), Vol. 2, No. 8, 2013, p. 764.

As Roccu Multedo anticipates in his own work, excerpted above, when faced with a plethora of potential definitions, orientations, and experiences related to the *mazzeru*, it is indeed challenging to settle on and adopt just one angle, and so “[c]es définitions ne peuvent constituer que des approches.”³¹⁸ In this sense, one can relate to *mazzerisme* through many of its features: the dreamscape, the rites of initiation, the use of weapons, the type of animal killed, among many other aspects of the practice. These substantive differences in definition and orientation towards the *mazzeri* can also be attributed to the diversity of community practices and traditions themselves and to the plethora of meaning offered by the original Corsican noun itself: “Il n’est pas inutile de remarquer que les diverses appellations du *mazzeru*, à savoir *acciaccatori*, *culpatori*, *culpamorti*, témoignent d’une atteinte portée à l’existant, d’une modification des êtres ou des choses sous l’effet d’une action violente.”³¹⁹

Additionally, some scholars have noted that the tradition of the *mazzeru* is said to be original to the Southern region of Corsica (*Pumonti*) which perhaps explains the nominal diversity itself:

Les “mazzeri” — ce peuvent être indifféremment des hommes ou des femmes, nous le répétons—se rencontrent en très grand nombre dans le Sud de l’Île, dans la Rocca, mais on en trouve beaucoup aussi dans le centre, dans le Niolo, dans le canton de la Soccia et dans la haute vallée du Taravo. Le nom de “mazzeri” est loin d’être le plus fréquent, mais on les appelle aussi “lanceri” ou “acciadadori”, et dans la région de la Chera “culpadori”. Tous ces mots comportent l’idée de tuer, d’une manière ou d’une autre, et nous serions tentés d’appeler ces personnages des “tueurs”, si ce mot n’était si souvent employé de nos jours et avec un sens si particulier.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Roccu Multedo, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³¹⁹ Philippe Pesteil, *op. cit.*, p. 107. Philippe Pesteil reports again in his ethnographic research that the awareness of *mazzerisme* in other regions is the result of indirect exposure through media outlets: “Le *mazzerisme* n’est pas répandu à l’ensemble insulaire. Des *piève* n’en connaissent même pas le nom et sa compréhension qui n’est donc pas partagée par tous les locuteurs, relève d’une lecture audiovisuelle. Nous avons recueilli des témoignages indiquant que le terme et les pratiques sur découvertes lors d’une émission télévisée” (p. 108).

³²⁰ Dorothy Carrington, “Les Mazzeri”, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

In addition to the rich etymological details that Carrington provides in this excerpt, it is important to note that she is one of the only scholars to suggest that the *mazzeru* is type of assassin (“tous ces mots comportent l’idée de tuer”) that is directly implicated, in one way or another, for the death of an individual; however, notions of “murder” seem inapplicable to this ritual or tradition because of its peculiar circumstances, “nous serions tentés d’appeler ces personnages des “tueurs”, si ce mot n’était si souvent employé de nos jours et avec un sens si particulier.” Does this implication in a person’s death equate responsibility for the same? Carrington’s use of the term “tueurs” to describe this mysterious figure, if only tangentially, raises an important question that will be central to the narrative intrigue of *La Chasse de nuit*: to what extent is the *mazzeru* responsible for their acts?

“Responsibility” is an important undercurrent of *La Chasse de nuit* because of its multifaceted manifestation. “Responsibility” is itself a vast term that connotes personal obligation, blame, burden, accountability, tasks, and many others. It is a critical lens through which we view how various characters relate to one another and to the tradition of *mazzerisme*. Here, we will focus on two aspects of this theme that are most important in the novel: responsibility relative to the outcome of the premonition (i.e., is the *mazzeru* responsible should the premonition materialize and the village member die?) and the sense of responsibility related to the tradition itself in terms of whether *mazzeri* should continue to exercise their ritualistic roles? The challenge with these questions derives in large part from the perspective from which they are posed: as an insider questioning the value of tradition itself or as an outsider peering into its recesses. In the novel, and its analysis offered here, both perspectives rise to the surface, forcefully and simultaneously, to further nuance Ferranti’s presentation of the legend and lore of the *mazzeri*.

If Petru Zanetti were to die, *would* Mattéo Monacle be responsible? *Should* he be responsible? For Lisa Zanetti, the answer is “Yes!” because for her the premonition is itself a death knell. If Petru’s face had not been interpreted in the face of the boar, she would have little reason to take issue with Mattéo for his visions. There would be little foundation for her desire to stage another hunt in which Mattéo serves as the ceremonial animal and Lisa the *mazzera*, all in an attempt to redirect Death’s direction. Lisa Zanetti is not alone in this perspective that sees the individual as responsible for death and destruction: Marcu Silvarelli also asks himself similar questions of his participation in a tradition that results in the death of his own uncle, a death Marcu himself predicted: “Il se prit d’affection pour moi et me rapporta comment, au cours d’une chasse, alors qu’il n’avait guère lui aussi plus d’une quinzaine d’années, il avait vu, pour la première fois, dans les yeux du sanglier abattu, la mort de l’un de ses oncles qu’il chérissait tendrement” (p. 22). Lisa and Marcu both see the individual as the one responsible for accelerating the inevitable, death itself, and adopt a position that it would be better, comparatively, that the premonition or even mention of the dream itself itself not be uttered. Silence insulates against the fear of lingering death.

The notion of responsibility is not as simple as guilt or innocence because the circumstances are not criminal, but ritualistic, and it is here that an outsider perspective, that of the literary critic or anthropologist perhaps, enters the arena. The fatal outcome, although deeply disturbing, is outside the scope of responsibility, as Ève Emmanuelle Schmitt has recently argued, because this specific form of death is “une forme de fatalité sans intentionnalité”³²¹ and as a result the *mazzera* “n’est ni responsable ni exorcisable”³²² for the realization of their premonition(s). The

³²¹ Ève-Emmanuelle Schmitt, *Les guérisseurs traditionnels corses. Approche psychanalytique du ‘don de guérison’ et du rituel thérapeutique*, thèse de doctorat de l’Université de Strasbourg, 2019, p. 73.

³²² *Ibid.*

notion of responsibility then disappears if one accepts wholeheartedly the tradition, its attendant rites, and their outcomes, death included. Dorothy Carrington also writes of this distinction by describing the ritual as a demonstration of Corsican reverence for death itself: “Agents de la mort, les ‘mazzeri’ sont inconscients et irresponsables. Ils tuent aveuglement la première âme qui se présente à leurs coups. C’est là une image frappante du Destin qui frappe aveuglément, de la fatalité à la mort, et l’on sait d’ailleurs que cette croyance en la fatalité est un des traits les plus constants du caractère corse.”³²³ The “fatalité” announced by the *mazzeru* is what Suzanne Doppelt has described as “la transmission d’un décret”³²⁴ which would place the *mazzeru* as a messenger of sorts. These anthropological perspectives effectively minimize Lisa Zanetti’s claim for Mattéo’s potential responsibility for Petru’s looming death: as a leader of a ritual related to the fatality of life itself, the *mazzeru* is not responsible for what is ultimately inevitable, death itself.

While an academic discussion of ritual might easily dispense with the notion of responsibility, its weight continues to haunt Ferranti’s characters who reflect on the physical and psychological violence inflicted upon their community because of the tradition itself, as we see with Marcu Silvarelli. The question of responsibility then becomes one of commitment and whether the community is more important than dedication to an antiquated ritual? The anxiety, fear, and pain of living as *mazzeri* drives Ferranti’s characters such as Marcu Silvarelli, Agnès (who refuses her role at an early age), and Mattéo Monacle to ultimately abandon their ritualistic powers and turn away from the traditions of previous generations. Their sense of responsibility to the upholding the tradition diminishes; the practice of the *chasse de nuit* is no longer worth continuing, and so it fades. The critical importance then of Ferranti’s novel can be further understood or presented as one that brings these questions and tensions to the forefront while at

³²³ Dorothy Carrington, “Les ‘mazzeri’,” *op. cit.*, p. 90.

³²⁴ Suzanne Doppelt, “Anthropomagie: Le chasseur de nuit,” *Vacarme*, No. 19, 2002, p. 80.

the same time reintroducing the tradition to new audiences for whom the question of responsibility will be their own.

2. *Weapons, Victims, and Roles of the Mazzeru*

The premonition of a person's death by the *mazzeru* occurs at night during a *chasse de nuit*, a hunt that takes place either individually or with a group and most often in a sylvan setting. The methods and modalities of this hunt vary greatly from one example to another, either because of variance in oral histories and collected testimonials or because of regional variations of the *mazzeru*'s practices. However, in most cases the *chasse de nuit* is most often understood as an individual experience in which the singular *mazzeru* “se dédouble et quitte sa demeure pour battre le maquis.”³²⁵ As both Dorothy Carrington and Roccu Multedo clarify in their own formulations, the “dédoublement” observed by Philippe Pesteil suggests that the physical body of the *mazzeru* remains in place while the corporeal double advances through the oneiric experience, as Tony Fogacci and Lari Vannina conclude from their own research, “Il se poste, en esprit, au gué d'un ruisseau.”³²⁶ However, the confrontation can also be collaborative. At one moment during the year, different communities of *mazzeri* are said to combat one another:

Il s'agit des batailles nocturnes opposant les *mazzeri* des villages rivaux et qui ont lieu dans la nuit du trente et un juillet au premier août, *I mazzeri* combattent les uns contre les autres, souvent à l'aide du *tarabuchju*, l'asphodèle, et l'issue du combat déterminera le village qui perdra le moins d'âmes dans l'année et la qualité comme la quantité des récoltes.³²⁷

³²⁵ Philippe Pesteil, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³²⁶ Roccu Multedo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³²⁷ Tony Fogacci and Lari Vannina, *op. cit.*, p. 765.

Fogacci and Vannina’s research further elaborates the rich traditions of *mazzèrisme* to suggest the connections between villages and *mazzèri*; however, the question remains whether these yearly battles are “en esprit” or in person?

Fogacci’s and Vannina’s observations and syntheses of their collected oral histories propose one of the only research-based conclusions that the combat amongst *mazzèri* serves as a bellwether of agricultural yields and success for the coming harvest; however, they are not alone in identifying the use of plants and other botanicals as components of the nocturnal hunts of a single individual or collectively as a group. Asphodel (*asphodèle*) is a flowering plant related to a lily, often white in color, it is often associated with Greek mythology because it is “said to cover the Elysian meads.”³²⁸ Dorothy Carrington describes in her work that these plants are not for ceremonial or decorative purposes: “à Socca, ce sont des tiges d’asphodèle” that are used in combat rather than weapons or other implements “en usage dans la réalité.”³²⁹ In 2017, Jules Stromboni published the graphic novel *Mazzèru* which is of particular interest here as each division of the novel into parts is marked by a beautiful rendering of different plants and flowers, including the asphodel, and is accompanied with the following description:

On a longtemps associé un sens funeste à l’asphodèle. Dans l’antiquité, on en fleurissait les tombes. Dans la mythologie grecque, la Plaine des asphodèles était un lieu des Enfers où les âmes fantômes, n’ayant commis de leur vivant aucun crime ni action vertueuse, étaient condamnés à y mener une existence vaine. En Corse, on raconte que les *mazzèri*, lors de leur affrontement annuel la nuit du 31 juillet au 1^{er} août, s’armaient de tiges d’asphodèle. Enfin, dans le langage des fleurs, elle incarne l’amour perdu.³³⁰

In addition to the asphodel as a weapon of sorts used in the *chasse de nuit*, batons, clubs, and other blunt objects fabricated from wood are the weapon of choice; Fogacci and Vannina explain: “Le mot *mazzèru* découle sans doute de *mazza*, massue ou maillet, outil de bois qui

³²⁸ “Asphodel, n.,” OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/11645

³²⁹ Dorothy Carrington, “Les Mazzèri,” *op. cit.*, p. 85.

³³⁰ Jules Stromboni, “Asphodelus cerasfier (3),” *Mazzèru*, Bruxelles, Éditions Castermann, 2017, no page.

rappelle l'ancienne pratique consistant à assommer le moribond afin de l'aider à franchir lorsque l'âme passée, le corps tarde à s'éteindre.”³³¹ In his examination of oral histories related to *mazzerisme*, Philippe Pesteil discovers that firearms too are sometimes weapons used during the hunt: “Armé d'un fusil, parfois d'un couteau, d'un bâton ou d'une tige d'asphodèle.”³³²

Once the animal is subdued, the true work of the *mazzeru* begins: through the wounds of the animal, recognizing the identity of “[celui/celle] qui mourra d'ici trois jours à un an” (p. 13). Roccu Multedo further suggests that recognition comes about through an *interpretation* of the animal's mangled remains: “Il [Le *mazzeru*] s'aperçoit alors que le museau de l'animal est devenu le visage d'une personne de sa connaissance, qui va mourir.”³³³ Françoise Hurstel rejoins this observation and adds that the individual identified is not simply a member of the community, but might also be of relation to the *mazzeru*: “Ils découvrent alors que ces animaux ont le visage d'une personne, connue d'eux parfois même un membre de leur famille.”³³⁴ Relational proximity is also a concern addressed by Philippe Pesteil who suggests that the process of identification could also take place aurally: “C'est en retournant la dépouille ou en entendant le cri de la bête blessée que le bourreau de la mort, reconnaît et identifie sa victime.”³³⁵

In the preceding descriptions of the weapons used during the hunt, Pesteil, Fogacci, and Vannina all seem to assert that the *mazzeru* is active in the hunt in so far as s/he is actively pursuing the attack of the animal. However, Carrington and Multedo posit that the *mazzeri* are indeed participants in the hunt, but their role is much more passive: “Ils se postent à l'affût de la première bête qui vient à passer” (Carrington's definition, 1957); “Il abat la première bête sauvage ou

³³¹ Tony Fogacci and Lari Vannina, *op. cit.*, p. 762.

³³² Philippe Pesteil, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³³³ Roccu Multedo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³³⁴ Françoise Hurstel, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

³³⁵ Philippe Pesteil, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

domestique qui vient à passer et qui est l'esprit d'un être humain" (Multedo's definition, 1975). To what extent is the *mazzeru* engaged as a participant? Is it important whether the *mazzeru* is an active or passive participant? Whether actively seeking out the animal or waiting for the opportune moment seems to depend on an individual's perspective or experience. However, what is most important here is that the *mazzeru* functions as a type of connective tissue between worlds because of the ability to split its body: "C'est la nuit, en songe, que les "mazzeri", ou plutôt leur double car, en réalité, ils ne quittent pas leur lit, se rendent à une chasse nocturne, poussés par une puissance mystérieuse."³³⁶ The entry into the oneiric experience, according to Carrington, is caused by a "puissance mystérieuse" that raises the question of whether the individual *chasse de nuit* is a voluntary exploit. Further elaborating the potential for a magical/supernatural higher-power, Tony Fogacci and Laura Vaninna approach the corporeal split differently, focusing instead on Death's victim and on the *mazzeru* as the guide to the departed's soul:

Ce rôle de passeur est endossé par un être désigné par le terme *mazzeru*, qui deviendra générique au fil du temps; il désigne donc un personnage au rôle psychopompe, c'est à dire qui a le devoir (ou le don?) de guider l'esprit vers le monde des morts, de permettre ce franchissement vers l'autre côté. Nous considérons par cet acte de séparation que le corps, ainsi privé de son âme ne peut plus vivre, le passage définitif provoque alors la mort du corps physique [...] Si on peut considérer de manière simpliste que le *mazzeru* possède le don de voir la mort en rêve, il convient de souligner que son rôle consiste plus précisément à détacher la vie du vivant, de conduire l'âme du mort dans l'Autre monde.³³⁷

³³⁶ Dorothy Carrington, "Les mazzeri," *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³³⁷ Tony Fogacci and Lari Vannina, *op. cit.*, p. 762. The separation of bodies and souls described here is distinct from Carrington's earlier articulation of a dual universe and from accounts that the *mazzeru* is able to double his/her body to perform the hunt while remaining in bed. Fogacci and Vannina suggest that the division between body and soul applies to the victim and not to the "passeur"—in this framing the *mazzeru* is one who transports someone whose soul has already departed. However, they do suggest that "son rôle plus précisément à détacher la vie du vivant"—this clarification on its face appears an important internal contradiction within Fogacci and Vannina's broader presentation of the *mazzeru* because it no longer aligns with its description as a "psychopompe"—does the verb "détacher" suggest that the *mazzeru* rips life away from the victim and therefore is a "tueur" (to use Carrington's expression)? From this position, it is unclear what stance Fogacci and Vannina take in regard to the role of the *mazzeru*; however, all is not lost, the confusion points instead to the rich and diverse practices that are related to the tradition in the southern regions of Corsica.

Analogous to the Greek mythological personage Charon, responsible for the transportation of souls across the River Styx, from one world to another, and to the Grim Reaper, the *mazzeru* is possibly a psychopomp particular to Corsican tradition and customs. Conceiving of the *mazzeru* as a “passeur”³³⁸ of sorts returns us to our conversation about the underlying conflict of responsibility that persists throughout the novel. If we adopt the perspective of “passeur” we are able again to sidestep the discussion of responsibility because the role of the *mazzeru* is to guide a departed soul from one world to another. This transitory role is not as heavily emphasized in the narrative because of competing perspectives related to Mattéo’s potential responsibility for Petru’s foretold death; however, the this new role is just as important for the larger discussion of this novel because the notion of transition, of passing from one realm to the next, underscores the responsibility of the novel itself: to transport the reader from one experience to another; however, in the instance of the novel, what comes of this passing is not death, but the (re)transmission of cultural traditions, rites, and rituals.

IV. Ferranti’s Dramatization of the Night-Hunt: Announcing Petru Zanetti’s Death

From an autodiegetic narrative perspective adopted in *La Chasse de nuit*, we experience the rites and the rituals of the night hunt and the consequences of the fatal premonition made by Mattéo Monacle, “Le premier soir de pleine lune, au printemps” (p. 11). This retrospective vantage point is unique for its point-of-view from the *mazzeru* himself, a rarity in literature or publications about the *mazzeri*; additionally, the novel is structured in the form of un-dated journal or personal

³³⁸ Suzanne Doppelt describes this figure in similar terms, “Berger ou autre, mal baptisé sans doute – mot oublié, incorrectement prononcé – il est un passeur contraint, intermédiaire entre les vivants et les morts” (“Anthropomagie: Le chasseur de nuit,” *Vacarme*, No. 19, 2002, p. 80). In this remark, notice again the emphasis on baptism as the origination of the powers of premonition...

diary³³⁹ kept by the central protagonist as he returns to the precise event that forever changed the trajectory of his life. Our attention turns first to the exposition of the novel for its rich description and presentation of the numerous rites and facets of the ceremonial *chasse de nuit* as we explored above. More than just a literary rendering of the hunt itself, Ferranti's novel explores the oneiric experience as emblematic of the different realms of consciousness experienced by the *mazzeru* all the while inviting readers back into this dynamic, supernatural experience.

The ceremonial hunt begins:

Le premier soir de pleine lune, au printemps, nous chassons la nuit, en meute.

Une fois l'an, nous nous retrouvons, hommes, femmes et chiens, sous le grand chêne blanc, près de la rivière. L'eau est la demeure des esprits. Celle des morts qui n'ont pas encore expié leurs fautes et se cachent dans les eaux vives. Ce sont les âmes errantes qui nous appellent dans les rêves. Alors ni le taureau furieux ni le sanglier ni la chèvre égarée ne peuvent nous échapper. Cette chasse de nuit désigne ceux qui vont mourir.

Nous nous présentons face au vent. L'homme aux chiens dirige de la voix la meute et les rabatteurs. Ils attendent sur les hauteurs, débusquent l'animal et le poussent vers nous. Armés de pierre, de bâtons, de fusils, de poignards, nous nous mettons en ligne et la battue commence.

Pour que l'animal ne sente pas l'odeur de l'homme, certains se couvrent de peaux de renards tués moins de huit jours plus tôt, d'autres s'enduisent le visage de sang séché mêlé à de l'huile. Moi, non. Quelques heures avant la chasse, je me prépare soigneusement. Je m'enferme avant le coucher du soleil, me lave et me gratte la peau à la pierre ponce, me rase entièrement la tête et mets des vêtements plus noirs que la nuit, lavés et laissés à l'air depuis trois jours.

Avant de commencer la battue, je ramasse un peu de terre, m'en frotte les paumes, en respire l'odeur. Je n'ai ni fusil ni poignard. Mes seules armes sont un bâton, la mazza, taillée dans un sarment de vigne, et mes dents. Je deviens l'animal. Je suis le mazzeru, celui qui frappe et annonce la mort.

Dans le cri de l'animal qui meurt, je reconnais la voix de celui qui a été désigné par le sort, parfois je le vois avant même que l'animal ne soit abattu, autrement, le regard de l'animal mort ne trompe pas (p. 11-12).

³³⁹ "En écrivant ces pages, j'ai parfois l'impression de raconter l'histoire d'un autre ou même de l'inventer. Je jouis de ces impressions dans le secret, comme jadis, quand je contemplais les collections de mon père" (p. 189).

In this iteration of the *chasse de nuit*, the hunt is a collective experience, a community event that occurs each year during the Spring, “Le premier soir de pleine lune, au printemps, nous chassons la nuit, en meute.” Ferranti’s portrayal above does not suggest that this is one of the annual competitions between villages; instead, the communal aspect of the hunt is presented as a form of collaboration: the *mazzeru* is aided and assisted in the hunt, and curiously at that, by members of the village from whom one will be targeted for death. The collaborative experience takes the form of a gauntlet composed of numerous community members “[a]rmés de pierre, de bâtons, de fusils, de poignards, nous nous mettons en ligne et la battue commence.”³⁴⁰ This portrayal of the *chasse de nuit* is indeed innovative as few oral histories or studies describe or suggest such a level of collaboration between hunters and community members. As a result, Ferranti suggests the close connection between the community as a whole and the *mazzeru*, who is, after all, one of their own.

What further distinguishes this rendering from other presentations of the *chasse de nuit*, especially those within the ethnographies of Dorothy Carrington, Roccu Multedo, and Philippe Pesteil is the relationship constructed between *mazzeru* and animal during the hunt itself. To throw off their human scent, the hunters cover their bodies with the remnants of other animals: “Pour que l’animal ne sente pas l’odeur de l’homme, certains se couvrent de peaux de renards tués moins de huit jours plus tôt, d’autres s’enduisent le visage de sang séché mêlé à de l’huile.” Curiously, the one with the powers of premonition, Mattéo Monacle, refuses these corporeal and superficial disguises and proceeds instead with a cleansing of his entire body: “[Je] me lave et me gratte la peau à la pierre ponce, me rase entièrement la tête.” As the others cover themselves in animal blood and excrement to become more *animal-like*, by denuding his body, Mattéo Monacle claims

³⁴⁰ In one of the oral histories collected by Roccu Multedo, the hunt is described as an ambush: “[Le mazzeru] se poste, en esprit, au gué d’un ruisseau. Il abat la première bête sauvage ou domestique qui vient à passer et qui est l’esprit d’un être humain” (Roccu Multedo, *op. cit.*, p. 12).

to *become* the animal: “Je deviens l’animal.” This moment in the novel’s exposition is important in two different ways: first, keeping in mind that this scene itself is retrospective, it foregrounds his later wavering sense of responsibility that serves as the foundation for many narrative conflicts since Mattéo becomes his own hunter because of the debilitating guilt and uncertainty of whether the premonition of Petru Zanetti’s death will materialize; secondly, that this hunt is a larger metaphor for the elimination of tradition itself, hunted and chased out of communities one person at a time. The cultural tradition of *mazzèrisme* begins to attack itself from within.

In this rich opening of the novel, Ferranti also introduces the reader to aspects of *mazzèrisme* that often remain on the periphery of collected oral histories: magic, traditional spirits, and their relationships with the natural environment. When recalling the scene of the hunt itself, Mattéo describes: “L’eau est la demeure des esprits. Celle des morts qui n’ont pas encore expié leurs fautes et se cachent dans les eaux vives. Ce sont les âmes errantes qui nous appellent dans les rêves” (p. 11). This is not the lush sylvan landscape or the dense *maquis* so often used as a narrative setting for thematically “Corsican” literature. The sylvan setting in Ferranti’s novel is remarkably different because the *chasse de nuit* occurs at a boundary that separates distinct worlds: on one side, “la demeure des esprits” and on the other, the community of Zigliaro itself. That the waters are filled with the spirits of the dead “qui n’ont pas encore expié leurs fautes” and who cross boundaries “dans les rêves” suggests the importance of these points of coincidence and collision between these two worlds.

Additionally, the novel’s exposition bridges together various traditional and popular legends (folk and urban) all the while weaving into the mix several motifs of the Christian religious tradition. Wearing clothes “plus noirs que la nuit” imaginatively suggests popular imagery associated with the Grim Reaper (this time with a *mazza*, a wooden club, and not a scythe) who

moves through the night and collects his victim's soul. Leaving for the hunt under a full moon ("Le premier soir de pleine lune") and the subsequent transformation (therianthropy) into the body of an animal ("Je deviens l'animal") suggests that the *mazzeru* is more similar to a werewolf than that of a body-doubled human being wielding a *mazza*. The elements relating to Christian traditions further complicate this narrative presentation: Are the spirits contained in the water the ones that ultimately drive the premonition or selection for the death? I wonder whether these errant souls are suspended in a liquid purgatory which would ultimately raise the question on which side we would find the narrative setting? These elements offer a dynamic and inviting (although uncanny and unsettling) entry into the legend and lore of the *mazzeru* as experienced, if only imaginatively, by Marie Ferranti. Her exposition crosses boundaries between different realms of existence and crafts connections between this tradition and ones that are more stable and firmly rooted in our own cultural imaginations (for instance, purgatory or werewolves), all to throw the reader directly into the complexity of competing worldviews and experiences. Ferranti's mosaic, kaleidoscopic approach to the legend and lore of the *mazzeri* ultimately underscores the deep complexity of their existence that will entangle and snarl not just Mattéo Monacle, but also the reader, who unknowingly has just stepped into a dreamscape like no other.

V. The Sylvan Dreamscape of the Mazzeru

In addition to the substance of the legend, Ferranti delivers the reader into the dynamic setting of the tradition itself: the supernatural forest, the *Bois de Foscolo*. There is more than meets the eye in this natural setting: lost souls and magical beings live below the canopy and in the streams that flow through the forest; the hunt too is an experience that crosses spatial dimensions—it is a dream. What are the contours of this dreamscape? As readers, how do we position ourselves

relative to a dream that is related through the form of a personal notebook or diary? The discussion that follows will take place across two different, although related, tracks: first, we will focus on the forest at the center of the novel as a site of transition between the “material world [] and the realm of the spirits”³⁴¹ as we seek to identify and better understand the forest as the setting of the legend and lore of the *mazzeru*, as represented in Ferranti’s novel and as explored by contemporary anthropology. Then, our discussion will turn towards the experience of the dream itself as a space of collective engagement that draws both the novel’s characters and the reader into the traditions of the wider Corsican community.

1. *Le Bois de Foscolo*

The forest in Ferranti’s novel is a particular space in that it offers both seclusion and confrontation: Mattéo Monacle escapes the consequences of his premonition by returning to the same place where the fatal identification of Petru Zanetti took place. The *Bois de Foscolo* represents both the past and the future and serves as a stark physical reminder of the different paths Mattéo’s life could have taken; however, the detours of destiny are the result of different actors all together: the supernatural forces that give life to the forest.

The two settings of the narrative, the village and forest, mark distinct spaces for the action that unfolds throughout the novel. The *Bois de Foscolo* is quite removed from Zigliaro:

C’était loin de Zigliaro. Il fallait marcher longtemps avant d’y parvenir, passer la fontaine aux Quatre-Chemins, couper à travers bois et prendre un sentier à main gauche, malaisé à pratiquer. Je devais puiser l’eau à la source et me ravitailler au village, ce qui m’obligeait à m’y rendre au moins deux fois par semaine, mais j’aimais cet endroit (p. 29).

³⁴¹ Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

When returning to the village, Mattéo observes the concentration of homes around the village center:

Comme je passais le col de Bocca rossa, le village m'apparut, enserré dans les montagnes, borné au nord par le bois de Foscolo, à l'ouest par la colline de Goloso et au sud par la rivière de Fiume santu. Je contemplai les maisons jaunes et grises qui se chevauchent les unes sur les autres, serrées autour de l'église. De l'autre côté de la place, la maison des Zanetti et la mienne se détachaient des ruelles tortueuses. Ceintes de jardins clos de murs, vues de Bocca rossa, les propriétés semblaient des îlots de verdure (p. 41)³⁴²

The *Bois de Foscolo* and the village Zigliaro are together the ancestral homes of the Monacle family, represented by its manor house *Torra nera*. In earlier generations, the estate was ripe with activity as a hunting ground and as an active vineyard owned and operated by the Monacle family: “À l'époque des vendanges, les journaliers, qui venaient de toute la région, y dormaient près des bêtes. Tous les matins, la porte monumentale s'ouvrait pour laisser passer hommes, bêtes et carrioles” (p. 25). Now it sits empty, dilapidated and no longer projects the power and prestige of his family that for generations influenced local politics: “Mon arrière-grand-père, Louis Monacle, l'a achetée avec le terrain, le plus beau de la contrée, il y a de cela un peu plus de cent ans. C'est la seule maison qui puisse rivaliser en grandeur et en beauté avec celle de Francesco Zanetti” (p. 26). This revelation of Mattéo's family history coincidentally, and understandably, underscores Lisa Zanetti's already conflictual relationship with Mattéo whom she accuses of targeting Petru out of amorous and/or familial jealousy.

³⁴² It is important to keep in mind that this description of the village of Zigliaro depicts a village from the mid-to-late 1930s, decades prior to the periods of extensive modernization of the Ajaccian metropole in which Zigliaro will be incorporated; also, during this same period the Corsican population fluctuated between ~290,000 and ~320,000 inhabitants (Paul Lefèbvre, “La population de la Corse,” *Revue de Géographie alpine* (eds. Paul and Germaine Veyret), Vol. 45, No. 3, 1957, p. 561. According to demographic statistics published by INSEE in 2020, the Corsican population increases at an annual rate of 1%, now at ~335,000 and is one of regions with the highest population growth in the Republic, “Au 1er janvier 2017, la Corse compte 334 938 habitants. Depuis 2012, la population insulaire augmente en moyenne de 1,2 % par an, soit trois fois plus rapidement qu'en moyenne métropolitaine. Ce dynamisme est dû uniquement à l'excédent migratoire. La région abrite une population plus âgée qu'en métropole.” (Antonin Bretel, *INSEE Flash Corse*, No. 15, 30 November 2020, p. 1; Available online: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4986099?sommaire=4986944>).

Mattéo's return to his family domain reveals additional layers of the complex ambivalence of his personal situation and predicament: on one hand, it shows his desire to validate the importance of his family in relationship to the Zanetti family; on the other, it suggests Matteo's interest in turning away from the present circumstances of his life (his role as a *mazzeru*) by recognizing his life as it could have been had he followed the path charted for him by his parents.³⁴³ In these moments, Mattéo physically retraces the steps of his youth and as readers we encounter a deeply torn character, gripped by the anxiety of how the future will unfold and how to reconcile that trajectory with his past. Returning to the *Bois de Foscolo* and to *Torra nera* is also a way for Mattéo to confront the possibilities of the life he could have led, had he bent towards the wishes of his family, those of his father in particular. The scenes of a return to the site of familial origins that are scattered throughout the novel are but one avenue through which Ferranti meditates the importance of links and connections to the past and to previous generations threatened not only by time but also by the significant power of cultural change itself.

The perceived distance separating the *Bois de Foscolo* from Zigliario also marks both cultural difference and temporal (generational) distance. Following the news of the premonition reaching Zigliario, Lisa confronts Mattéo in the *Bois de Foscolo* where she demands that he explain the nature of the prediction: "Je resterai jusqu'à ce que vous me disiez ce qu'il en est" (p. 30).

³⁴³ The suggestion here is premised around the notion that remaining a *mazzeru* is a choice and one that can be overturned with another baptism. Petru's wife, Lisa, is often heavy-handed in her admonishment of Mattéo's inability to change the trajectory of Petru's life. From this perspective, Lisa has not understood at all the "powers" of the *mazzeru*, a fact that Agnès, a secondary character who takes on a maternal role in her concern for Mattéo, brings attention to when she describes Lisa's family history, "Elle a été élevée ailleurs. Il faut lui laisser du temps..." (p. 38). This characterization of Lisa's understanding and awareness of the tradition of *mazzerisme* is therefore rooted in notions and understandings of culture and tradition firmly grounded in Corsican insularity that is indeed ambiguous: is Mattéo contrasting the rural interior with the quickly modernizing littoral region? Or, is Lisa originally from the Continent? The political sub-plot returns at the end of the novel, after Mattéo's eventual renunciation of his role as a *mazzeru* and at a moment when he seeks to determine his next steps in life. His partner, Caterina, asks, "Tu vas te présenter aux élections? dit Caterina. – Non, j'y renonce. Je ne déteste pas qu'on m'appelle sigò Mattéo, mais, ce matin, j'ai découvert une île toute différente de celle que j'ai toujours connue. Je vois ses limites. J'ai envie de les franchir" (p. 196).

Responding to Mattéo's intransigence and refusal to provide any information of these assurances, she attacks the very social protection provided by the forest itself: "Vous vivez comme un vagabond au fond des bois, vous êtes habillé comme un gueux! Vous vous adonnez à ces croyances d'un autre âge pour cacher l'affreuse jalousie qui vous dévore..." (p. 32). For Lisa, the life experienced in the forest stands at odds with her own experiences in Zigliaro and Ajaccio; she marks a clear distinction between the comfort of her life in Zigliaro (plain) and Ajaccio (modern) and her assumption of Mattéo's resulting social descent ("au fond des bois"; "comme un gueux!").

Lisa's observation that the legend and lore of the *mazzeru* and those that live deep in the heavily forested rural interior are of "un autre âge" merits further attention for what it reveals of how different generations relate to one another and for what it suggests about a central knot in the narrative plot. The use of the narrative present in the comment reveals Lisa's perspective that the *Here and Now* of Corsican communities has moved on from the traditions and rituals of the past; contemporary Corsica exists in a different "âge." Her derision reveals her own perspective that the passage of time ought to alter cultural practices and replace them with seemingly more up-to-date ones, those that are more appropriate for the *modern* cultural experience that is no longer attached to the belief systems of the past. As we will see, her perspective is not unique in the novel; indeed, it is shared amongst others, especially Agnès and the tertiary character Marcu Silvarelli, whose circumstances we will discuss later in this chapter.

Dismissing a practice for its sense of belonging to another generation is not without substantial risk and consequence for the present moment. Rejecting a time period also risks the dismissal of the place, the cultures, the experiences through which time flows and exists. In his deep investigations and development of the intricate relationships bridging time, space, and place,

Edward Casey suggests that both “Time” and “Place” exist symbiotically, each one supporting the other to construct the human experience:

There is *no (grasping of) time without place*; and this is so precisely by virtue of place’s actively delimiting and creatively conditioning capacities. Place situates time by giving it a local habitation. Time arises *from* place and passes (away) *between* them. It also vanishes *into* places at its edges and *at* its edges.³⁴⁴

Perhaps then the true strength and weight in Lisa’s comment that Mattéo lives in “un autre âge” is not so much a *rejection* of Time as it is a refusal on her part to acknowledge its continued impact for the present moment. While she attempts to push away the tradition, she seemingly respects its power and place in the cultural fabric of the village. The ambivalent stance of this character stands at odds with the significant consequences of the World Wars for Corsican communities: the disavowal of tradition for the sake of modernity, for the promise of something new. Before the declaration of war in Europe, different battles are however already taking place within the *Bois de Foscolo*, battles whose outcomes are as decisive for the future directions of Corsican communities.

2. *The Magic of Streams*

Within the *Bois de Foscolo* lies an entirely different world, one in touch with and in confrontation with the realms and spirits that are only accessible in alternative realms of consciousness. Its distance from the active village life in Zigliaro is not indicative of its emptiness or its irrelevance to the dynamics of the village itself; instead, it plays an integral part of its vitality. In his magnificent study *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert P. Harrison suggests that entering the forest is akin to entering a different world entirely: “Outside of the law and human

³⁴⁴ Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, coll. “Studies in Continental Thought,” Second Edition, 2009, p. 21 (emphasis in the original).

society one was in the forest.”³⁴⁵ The forest is a fundamentally transformative space, Harrison continues: “One could not remain human in the forest; one could only rise above or sink below the human level.”³⁴⁶ Rising and falling above these levels, to borrow Harrison’s expressions above, is not without assistance from higher powers. Harrison continues by describing the Forest as the home of the supernatural forces that inhabit our world, although contained in the Forest, they continue nevertheless to extend the reaches of their influence: “Age-old demons, fairies, and nature spirits continued to haunt the conservative woodlands, whose protective shadows allowed popular memory to preserve and perpetuate cultural communities with the pagan past.”³⁴⁷ The intense transformational changes that take place in the forest call to mind the forests of Beyroul’s fateful *Tristan et Iseut*, those of battles within Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain, ou le Chevalier au lion*, and the enchantment found in William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In each case, the forest serves as a liminal space where the human world encounters the powers of magical realms.

Ferranti’s characters also succumb to the supernatural forces of the forest. Lisa’s confrontation causes Mattéo to lose consciousness, he collapses and “les visions se sont déchaînées” (p. 36). Agnès appears later and helps him find his strength enough to be able to talk about these visions:

–Je n’ai pas reconnu le bois de Foscolo, mais je savais que je m’y trouvais. Il n’y avait plus de chemin nulle part. Je ne savais quelle direction prendre. L’horizon était bouché, le ciel se confondait avec la terre. Il y avait une forte odeur d’herbe mouillée, mais je n’en voyais nulle part, tout avait perdu sa couleur. Je peinais à marcher comme si je gravissais une rude montée. J’étais penché vers le sol, presque à quatre pattes; je sentais mes membres gourds.

–C’était les sorcières de Foscolo qui appuyaient sur tes épaules pour t’empêcher d’avancer, dit Agnès. L’odeur d’herbe mouillée est le signe de leur présence (p. 36).

³⁴⁵ Robert Pouge Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 61.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *Idem.*, p. 62.

Mattéo's description of the forest and Agnès interpretation of his memories suggest that there is more to the *Bois de Foscolo* than what meets the eye. The forest is a dynamic, magico-religious space where human experiences interact with supernatural forces and beings, as Agnès intimates to Mattéo, "Les sorcières te convoitent [...] tu es le dernier mazzeru" (p. 37).³⁴⁸

Flowing through the *Bois de Foscolo* and around *Torra nera* are streams filled with the errant spirits of the dead: "L'eau est la demeure des esprits. Celle des morts qui n'ont pas encore expié leurs fautes et se cachent dans les eaux vives. Ce sont les âmes errantes qui nous appellent dans nos rêves" (p. 11).³⁴⁹ The *Bois de Foscolo* acts as a point of convergence between the material world (inhabited by Mattéo, Dorothea, Memmu, *Torra nera*, etc.) and the spiritual world (that of the dead, and of "les âmes errantes"). Not simply an instance of cohabitation but rather of frequent interaction, in her study of mortuary traditions in Corsica, Françoise Hurstel suggests that water serves as a material intermediary for the dead and the living because of a mutual need for replenishment:

Les morts demandent à boire, il faut préparer de l'eau à leur intention sur le bord des fenêtres. Ils reviennent hanter les vivants pour demander des messes afin d'accéder au paradis. Ils demandent de la lumière pour retrouver leur chemin. On raconte aux veillées qu'ils peuvent se venger cruellement s'ils ne trouvent pas aliments, boisson, lumière.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Agnès is suggesting that Mattéo is the "dernier mazzeru" of their village or micro-region. In an earlier chapter, we learn of the existence of Marcu Silvareli "un homme respecté, le plus grand chasseur du pays; ses récits de chasse étaient célèbres, mais après la guerre (WWI), on ne croyait plus guère en ses prédictions. Il ne restait à Zigliaro que des vieillards, des femmes, des hommes au regard perdu" (p. 19). This theme of the "last" *mazzeru* is mirrored in Biancarelli's *Orphelins de Dieu* as Ange Colomba is the last living remnant of a tradition.

³⁴⁹ Roccu Multedo also observes the magical property of water, in this case as the home to numerous fairies of Corsican legend and lore: "Toutes nos fées: Chilina, Mammanna, Morgana, dans les Vallerustie, le Casàconi, le Boziu, ou bien à Ascu, (où les Nasimozze se tiennent à l'ubac du ruisseau de Ranza) se cachent dans les fiumi ou dans les fontaines. On peut même entendre crisser leur queue, certains jours, comme au moment de l'élévation, à Frassetu, pendant la messe de l'Ascension" (*Le Mazzerisme. Un chamanisme corse, op. cit.*, p. 32).

³⁵⁰ Françoise Hurstel, *op. cit.*, p. 167; For more on the roles of water and vessels in relationship to superstitions and the supernatural, cf. Alan Dundes, "Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview," *Interpreting Folklore*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1980, p. 93-133.

The vengeful nature of spirits residing in the streams flowing through the forest is a provocative aspect of the novel to consider in further detail. For Mattéo, who were those who “[l’]empêcher d’avancer” (p. 36)? And in which directions does one “avance[.]”? Considering our earlier discussion of the *mazzeru* as a psychopomp, we are led to ask an important question: is Mattéo Monacle set to deliver Petru to the spirits of the streams? In Ferranti’s narrative, the spirits of the streams are filled with the souls of previous generations, of time immemorial, who recognize their potential erasure should Mattéo re-enter the society of Zigliaro, one where his family’s power was well known: “[*Torra nera*] C’est la seule maison qui puisse rivaliser en grandeur et en beauté avec celle de Francesco Zanetti” (p. 26). These details are neither pursued nor revealed in the narrative itself but nevertheless they introduce a significant complication in not only our external appreciation of Mattéo’s roles and responsibilities (as readers) but also for how he expresses his own grasp of what it means to be a *mazzeru*, and what is more, the consequences of whichever decision he takes. Ferranti relies on the streams of the *Bois de Foscolo*, the lands of “les sorcières,” as a space of conversion between the traditions of the forests and the realities of the village. These intersections are mediated through the figure of the *mazzeru*, a transporter of souls, both to and from the land of the Dead: “Ces seuils sont bien évidemment des entrées symboliques faisant communiquer le monde des vivants avec l’au-delà du monde des morts.”³⁵¹ Similar to the transitory experience *with* the *mazzeru*, Marie Ferranti exposes how the dreams of the *mazzeri* encourage the participation of not just those in their communities, but also that of the contemporary reader through the text itself.

³⁵¹ Tony Fogacci and Laura Vannina, *op. cit.*, p. 765. See also the fascinating comparative study by Olena Berezovska Picciocchi, “Les Génies de l’eau dans l’imaginaire populaire de Corse et de l’Ukraine carpatique,” *Studii și cercetări filologice. Seria Limbi Străine Aplicate*, vol. 12, 2013, p. 260-271.

VI. *The Night-Hunt, a Collective Dream*

In *La Chasse de nuit*, the dreamscape is ubiquitous: It takes form as the night-hunt itself, as nightmares suffered by several of the novel's characters, and as projections for Corsica's future following the World Wars. These different visions and experiences impact many characters, but Mattéo Monacle seems most susceptible to their emotional weight since he often loses consciousness and later awakens physically injured and in a confused state of panic: “[Agnès] me trouva gisant, les vêtements en lambeaux, les pieds en sang” (p. 33). Even with physical evidence before her, Agnès still questions whether the oneiric experience is even real: “Qu'en est-il, Mattéo, de cette chasse? L'as-tu vraiment rêvée?” (p. 16). After all, how could this hunt be a *dream*?

Contained in the individual dreamscape or defined by a community's collaboration and participation, the oneiric experiences of the *mazzeri* are rich and deeply complex experiences that through literature continue to further define the insular experience. In this section, I will discuss how the novel's characters relate to one another with respect to the premonitions of Mattéo Monacle, such as Agnès's appeals for a new baptism and Lisa Zanetti's restaged *chasse de nuit* that fails to achieve desired results. These experiences force encounters and interactions with individual characters who are not participants *in* Mattéo's dreams but are nevertheless directly affected *by* their contents. I will then approach a second aspect of the dreamscape born of its literary representation—the participation of the reader. This collective experience in the dreamscape of the *mazzeru*, I argue, is yet another way in which Marie Ferranti reconstructs and reframes cultural traditions for the contemporary reader (insular, Continental, or foreign) and responds to concerns for the erasure of tradition from cultural memory and practice against which literature serves as a final bastion.

The term “dream” refers to a collection of images, at times incongruous and fantastical, that are produced, according to Bernard Lahire, in the mind while a person sleeps: “[Le rêve] est un produit de l’imagination, mais que les rêveuses ou rêveurs vivent comme s’ils étaient plongés dans la réalité la plus vivante [...] le rêve apparaît bizarre, incohérent, délirant ou incongru aux yeux mêmes de celui ou de celle qui l’a produit.”³⁵² Lahire draws a careful distinction between the experience of being awake and of being asleep, while at the same time asserting the resemblance between these two levels of consciousness (“comme s’ils étaient plongés dans la réalité la plus vivante”). This perspective aligns in part with how anthropologists have come to frame the ritual experience of *mazzèrisme* as a simultaneous in-body and out-of-body experience because the dreams of the *mazzèri* are understood to be a physical reality (recall Mattéo’s injured body); the oneiric experience blends into the awakened experience and perhaps vice versa.

Speaking of dreams often tilts the conversation in a certain direction: The intellectual legacy of Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis at the dawn of the 20th century and author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), often pushes a discussion of a dream towards an attempt to reveal its deeper meaning as an analytical (and clinical) entry point into the psyche/condition of the individual subject. In other words, *what does the dream reveal about the dreamer?* This question has opened countless in-roads and intersections between psychoanalysis and literature as the voluminous works of Cathy Caruth³⁵³, Shoshana Felman³⁵⁴ and Elissa Marder³⁵⁵ have demonstrated. Given that we too are approaching a dreamscape recounted in a literary setting, we

³⁵² Bernard Lahire, *L’Interprétation sociologique des rêves*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. “Laboratoire des sciences sociales,” 2018, p. 10-11.

³⁵³ Cf. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, History, and Narrative*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016 [1996] and *Literature in the Ashes of History*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Shoshana Felman (ed.), “Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading, Otherwise,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 55/56, 1977; —, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, coll. “Pierres vives,” 1977.

³⁵⁵ Elissa Marder, *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity (Baudelaire and Flaubert)*, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, coll. “Cultural Memory in the Present,” 2001.

might also be tempted to follow the path of the analysand and learn more about the protagonist Mattéo Monacle (or even about Ferranti herself). While potentially fruitful and certainly worthy avenues of reflection, I propose to ask a different question: What does the literary representation of this specific dream *do* as a specific discursive literary gesture in itself? In other words, what are the consequences of this novel's presentation of several aspects of the oneiric experience of the *mazzeri*? To answer these questions, my analysis will posit the dream of the *mazzeri* as a collective (social) experience in the sense that the oneiric experience implicates not just the individual dreamer (Mattéo Monacle), but also those surrounding the dreamer (Agnès, Lisa), as well as those who *read* the dream – the reader. Drawing inspiration from elements of social psychology, sociology, and psychoanalysis, I will discuss how the dream serves as a binding agent for the community that encircles Mattéo Monacle (for better and for worse) and most importantly for the reader whose implication in the narrative serves to rekindle the legend and lore of the *mazzeru*; after all, it is through this diary that the stories of the *mazzeru* are transmitted. I will argue that *La Chasse de nuit* functions as a “*récit de rêve*”³⁵⁶ that engages the reader with the traditions of previous generations in ways that bridge numerous elements of Corsican culture and community. Further, I suggest that through storytelling, Ferranti's work solemnly commemorates a ritual practice on its own course to obsolescence and to erasure from living memory.

1. *Gathering Around Mattéo's Dreams*

At the outset of the novel, the *chasse de nuit* that occurs each Spring on the first full moon brings together members of the entire village of Zigliaro: “Le premier soir de pleine lune, au printemps, nous chassons la nuit, en meute. Une fois l'an, nous nous retrouvons, hommes, femmes

³⁵⁶ Bernard Lahire, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

et chiens, sous le grand chêne blanc, près de la rivière” (p. 11). The collective involvement of the village frames the *chasse de nuit* as a yearly celebration, a summer festival of sorts marking an important date in the calendar.³⁵⁷ The collaborative aspect of this hunt should not be understood as a sign that Mattéo enjoys an otherwise positive relationship with the community at other times during the year: “Tu sais qu’on évite mon regard. On craint que je retrouve celui qui m’a regardé, à la chasse, dans les yeux de l’animal mort” (p. 35). The immediate consequence and devastation of the novel’s central premonition brings a constellation of female characters into Mattéo Monacle’s orbit: Agnès (long-time caretaker and family friend), Lisa Zanetti (Petru’s wife), and Caterina (a serendipitous love connection). Each of these characters offer Mattéo an escape route from his current dilemma that at times are self-interested (Lisa’s protection of her fiancé Petru) and at others for the best possible outcome for Mattéo’s future as we will see through Agnès’s encouragements to turn away from the *chasses de nuit*.

Lisa Zanetti is pulled towards the dream for the obvious reason that it is her fiancé who is slated to be Death’s next victim. Her only aim is to cancel the premonition against Petru. Her initial reaction is to put up as many defenses as possible by lambasting and berating Mattéo into submission: “Qui vous commande? Que savez-vous? dit-elle. Je sais que l’on répand parfois une rumeur qui justifie le crime quand il a lieu. Ensuite, on n’a plus qu’à s’en prendre au mauvais sort!” (p. 30). And yet, despite her frustration and anger, she stays in Mattéo’s orbit in the most intriguing of ways: Lisa adopts an adamantly ambivalent position against the veracity and

³⁵⁷ Dorothy Carrington suggests this date’s religious significance is grounded in the deep affinities between Corsicans and the plight of the Maccabees: “One may suppose that 1 August corresponds with a pagan festival, the significance of which has been forgotten. The Catholic Church masked it, rather confusingly: now dedicated to Saint-Pierre-Aux-Lines (St Peter of the Chains), 1 August was formerly the feast day of the Maccabees [...] Fighting against overwhelming odds to preserve their ethnic and cultural identities, the Maccabees have held a strong appeal for Corsicans, who have so often found themselves in a like situation. James Boswell reports that the favourite reading of Pasquale Paoli, whom he visited in 1765, was the first book of the Maccabees which, with the second, is classed by the Protestants as apocryphal” (Dorothy Carrington, *The Dream Hunters of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 71).

possibility of the premonition while at the same time remaining very wary of its potentially fatal outcome. Her character in the novel is an interesting one because she embodies the competing and dynamics energies of a community that deeply questions its own foundations while at the same time it attempts to deepen its roots. Her initial forceful resistance suggests that the tradition of *mazzerisme* is incongruous with the beliefs and priorities of contemporary society; however, her intense skepticism suggests her respect and appreciation for the old ways and will serve as the basis for our later discussion about the importance of tradition in a contemporary Corsican community.

For Agnès, the most effective remedy is distance, at all costs. The most pressing task is first to convince Mattéo Monacle to annul his powers of premonition and to once-and-for-all disavow his role and responsibilities as *mazzeru* through a new baptism: “Fais-toi baptiser, Mattéo. Oublie ces chimères, tes dons de mazzeru, toutes ces vieilles légendes!” (p. 83); “Mazzeru, tu l’es encore. On ne cesse jamais de l’être sauf si l’on se fait baptiser de nouveau” (p. 110).³⁵⁸ Agnès’s perspective is heavily informed by her own past experiences as *mazzera* and her successful transformation *from* this role through her own process of renunciation: “J’ai refusé dans le temps d’être mazzera; je ne le regrette pas. Un prêtre m’a baptisée de nouveau et je n’ai plus eu les visions terribles de ces chasses sanglantes” (p. 34).³⁵⁹ Agnès’s presence around Mattéo and his dreams

³⁵⁸ This is a situation that we have previously encountered in Julia Filippi’s presentation and description of Corsican traditions and superstitions in Julie Filippi, “Légendes, croyances, et superstitions de la Corse,” *Revue des traditions populaires*, t. IX, August-September 1894, p. 457-467. Regarding incorrect baptism and its impact on the development of the *mazzeru*, see also: Pesteil, *op. cit.*, p. 107; Roccu Multedo, *Le Mazzerisme, un chamanisme corse, op. cit.*, p. 11-39.

³⁵⁹ In his research about regional variations in the lore of the *mazzeru*, Philippe Pesteil points to the involvement of the Catholic Church in the dissemination and development of the legend of the *mazzeru*. He concludes that institutional involvement is ultimately a form of social and community regulation: “La croyance aux apparitions nocturnes est énoncée comme véhiculée par les ministres du culte eux-mêmes qui se servent de l’ingénuité des villageois pour instaurer une sorte de couvre-feu empêchant les règlements de compte: le fantôme au service de l’ordre public, la référence policière est affirmée. Loin d’être remerciée pour son rôle en définitive pacificateur, l’église se voit attribuer dans cette interprétation un rôle pervers jouant sur la peur et utilisant à dessein le surnaturel” (Philippe Pesteil, *op. cit.*, p. 110). Whether the Catholic Church played an active role in the development and dissemination in the lore of the *mazzeru* is beyond the scope of our work here. Pesteil’s conclusions are nevertheless beneficial for our purposes in

does not serve to alter them, rather the dream brings these two characters into closer contact to the extent that Agnès can focus her efforts on securing Mattéo from a future of endless premonition and further pain. Her continued interventions encourage Mattéo to accept the argument that the powers of premonition are not worth their while because they are nothing but “[de] vieilles légendes.” Relinquishing the powers of premonition and no longer participating in the *chasse de nuit* and the *chasses sanglantes* (described by Marcu Silvarelli) is, for Agnès, the most effective exit strategy for Mattéo. To this end, she even suggests framing Petru’s death in a different city, to insert reasonable doubt concerning Mattéo’s involvement: “Ailleurs, Lisa ne pensera plus à la prédiction, elle croira à un accident” (p. 39). Mattéo’s prevarication forces Agnès to devise another way to distance him from Zigliario: “Épouse Caterina” (p. 83) and start a new life elsewhere, far from the village itself.

Caterina’s entry into the narrative space surrounding Mattéo’s dreams is strangely coincidental because out of nowhere she just *appears*.³⁶⁰ Her unexpected and unexplained arrival is nevertheless most serendipitous for she instantly enraptures Mattéo: “Elle seule pouvait me rendre à moi-même. Caterina ne savait pas que j’étais mazzèru; dans cette ignorance, je puisais la certitude de sa franchise” (p. 75). Her presence in relationship to the dreamscape is a calming one, one that leads him away from his anger, from his violent hunts:

that they point to the weight of folklore and legends of the supernatural especially in the mountainous forests of Southern Corsica (Cf. Michel Casta, “La religion dans les constructions identitaires en Corse (XVIII-XX siècle)”, in *L’Identité, entre ineffable et effroyable* (dirs. Olivier Lazzarotti and Pierre-Jacques Olgner), Paris, Armand Colin, coll. “Recherches”, 2011, p. 184-193). This is certainly not to suggest that these communities are *not* Christian; instead, the supernatural and superstition intersect with Christian beliefs to form community structures: “Dans ce monde de l’Au-delà, s’entrecroisent deux dimensions: une dimension païenne ancienne chargée de magie avec la dimension du surnaturel chrétien” (Françoise Hurstel, *op. cit.*, p. 160).

³⁶⁰ Although a sudden presence in the narrative, Caterina and Mattéo are already known to one another and Mattéo is aware of where she lives in Ajaccio, where he flees following the death of Francescu Zanetti, Petru’s father: “Le lendemain, à la première heure, je partis pour Ajaccio, courus chez Caterina” (p. 75). From a narratological standpoint, her mention here serves as an extra-diegetic analepse to which the reader remains entirely unaware for the entire duration of the narration.

Depuis quelques jours, j'étais serein. Je ne faisais plus de mauvais rêves. C'était la première fois que je goûtais cette paix sans appréhension; d'habitude, je craignais qu'elle ne soit le repos nécessaire à la chasse ou pire à des visions sanglantes qui venaient me hanter. Agnès avait-elle raison? Était-il temps de ne plus être mazzeru? D'ailleurs, que restait-il de cette vie de mazzeru? (p. 84)

The solace and comfort Mattéo experiences in Caterina's presence incidentally encourages him to understand Agnès's calls to turn away from his powers and it is through this complicated relationship of characters that significant doubt slowly creeps into the narrative and attention can again be turned towards the cultural transformations that took place following World War I: "Tout a changé. Avant, le mazzeru, c'était quelqu'un, aujourd'hui, personne ne croit plus à nos histoires; pour tous ce sont de vieilles légendes d'autrefois. On ne veut plus entendre parler de la mort" (p. 38).

2. *Implicating the Reader: Collective Dreaming through Literature*

Marie Ferranti's literary representation of the *chasse de nuit* is best considered as a "récit de rêve" because of its engagement of another important figure who gathers around the dream of the *mazzeru*: the reader who also experiences the dreams of the central protagonist.³⁶¹ While examining the foundational role of the dream in the celebrated medieval narrative *Le Roman de la Rose*, Claire Nouvet describes the complicated circumstance of a literary narrative itself premised on a dream; she suggests that as readers we are placed in a difficult position in relationship to the novel because "A 'literary dream,' [the novel] asks us to read *as* a dream that [which] *might* not have been dreamt but *could* have been dreamt."³⁶² According to Nouvet, via Maurice Blanchot,

³⁶¹ Cf. Bernard Lahire, "La variation des formes d'expression," in *L'Interprétation sociologique des rêves*, *op. cit.*, p. 357-393.

³⁶² Claire Nouvet, "Dangerous Resemblances: The Romance of the Rose," in *Yale French Studies*, Special Edition "Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature" (eds. Daniel Poirion and Nancy Freeman Regalado), 1991, p. 196 (emphasis in the original).

the “literary dream” asks that we as readers “dream the dream.”³⁶³ Nouvet’s careful and meticulous observations of the dream in the *Roman de la Rose* has important consequences for our present engagement with *La Chasse de nuit*: through the act of reading, we reconstruct the private dream(s) of the night-hunt and participate in their violent evolution and fatal consequences. As a result, I argue, the night-hunt becomes a collective experience involving not only the community of hunters themselves, but also readers of the contemporary generation who take part in the tradition even through considerable distance, temporally and culturally, in a way that surpasses the active general engagement of a reader in the evolution of the novel; reading Ferranti’s work is itself a form of participation in, and perhaps even a *renaissance* of the tradition itself, and most importantly, through literature.

The reader’s engagement with the dreams of Mattéo Monacle is textually motivated, not merely conceptual or philosophical. The opening of the novel (*incipito*) is composed almost entirely in the present tense, bridging the present of the narrative with the present of the reading experience:

Une fois l’an, **nous nous retrouvons**, hommes, femmes et chiens, sous le grand chêne blanc, près de la rivière. L’eau **est** la demeure des esprits. Celle des morts **qui n’ont pas encore expié** leurs fautes et **se cachent** dans les eaux vives. Ce **sont** les âmes errantes qui nous **appellent** dans les rêves. Alors ni le taureau furieux ni le sanglier ni la chèvre égarée ne **peuvent** nous échapper. Cette chasse de nuit **désigne** ceux qui vont mourir (p. 11; my emphasis).

Mattéo Monacle is both narrator and lead actor in this scene, it is *his* hunt that the community witnesses and supports. What is not immediately understood, or readily apparent in this short passage, is that this scene took place in the past. Keeping in mind that this entire novel is composed as a sort of *journal intime*, the use of the present tense is rooted in its linguistic iterative aspect to describe the past, the present, and the future. Whether past or present, the reader plays the role of

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

active participant (one *amongst* the collective “nous”) and/or that of an active spectator to the event itself (one *watching* the collective “nous”). In both situations, the oneiric experience is a communal event, one that engages more than just the dreamer his/herself.

If the reader and the novel (its narrator and its characters) are then placed into a dialogic relationship centered around the dream in which each person is an active participant, could we then say that the dream is a shared entity? In other words, does the literary narrative of the *mazzeru* become a dream shared between the reader of the dream and the figure who dreams? In his work on the possibility of shared and communal oneiric spaces, French psychoanalyst René Kaës raises a similar question: “Si le rêve est une expérience éminemment personnelle, cette expérience peut-elle être partageable, conjointe et commune avec celle d’autres sujets? [...] Quelle est alors la nature du lien entre les sujets qui partagent ainsi un espace onirique commun et conjoint?”³⁶⁴ Considering our previous discussion of the constellations of characters in orbit around Mattéo, it seems that his dreams are “commun” in so far as they involve the community and that they are also binding (“conjoint”) as they connect individuals across time and space.

Even though Kaës’s work deals heavily with the clinical and analytical settings of psychoanalysis, considering the dream as a shared space opens several avenues of reflection within our broader discussion of participation and re-creation of cultural traditions. At the outset of the novel, Mattéo declares (as a reminder): “Mazzeru, à l’heure où j’écris, plus personne ne sait ce que cela veut dire” (p. 19). Cultural attrition has wiped *mazzerisme* from the collective consciousness of the contemporary generation, however this is perhaps a circumstance that can be addressed and remedied by the collective dream, especially in a literary form. Kaës suggests that an important component of the shared oneiric experience is the creation of new relationships and new dialogue:

³⁶⁴ René Kaës, “À propos de la polyphonie du rêve,” *Le Coq-héron*, vol. 191, no. 4, 2007, p. 45.

“La rencontre plurisubjective fait de chacun pour chaque autre un interlocuteur et un étranger.”³⁶⁵

The shared dreams of Mattéo Monacle, regardless of their textual form or genre, become a space for dialogue with the reader that opens different avenues to a new collective experience through direct engagement with cultural traditions of previous generation. The *chasse de nuit* (even if fictional) becomes a shared experience because it is common to both reader and character (and therefore “partagé” between the same as well).³⁶⁶

In conclusion, let us return to the notion of responsibility in relationship to the dreamscape that we have discussed earlier. Within *La Chasse de nuit* responsibility weighs heavily on many and its significant burden is a direct cause for much of the narrative conflict, both interpersonally (e.g., Lisa vs. Mattéo) and intrapersonally (e.g., Mattéo’s intimate anguish). Asking that one gather around the dreams of the *mazzeri* is tantamount to asking one to *participate* in the dream and its outcomes: those who drive the wild boar in the direction of Mattéo Monacle are as involved as he in the process of premonition as the one(s) who wield the *mazza*; despite her avowed rejection, Lisa’s significantly ambivalent relationship to these rites and traditions is also a form of participation in so far as she acknowledges, albeit tacitly, the potential results stemming from this “gathering”; reading of the legend and lore of the *mazzeri* recreates (and reanimates) their practices

³⁶⁵ René Kaës, *La Polyphonie du rêve. L’expérience onirique commune et partagée*, Paris, Dunod, coll. “Psychismes,” 2002, p. 91.

³⁶⁶ Even more curious is Dorothy Carrington’s observation of the ways that a dream can be shared through physical touch: “Les *mazzeri* sont particulièrement doués pour ces visions. Ils sont parfois d’autres visions qui avertissent de la mort, à l’improviste en plein jour. Ces visions, ils peuvent donner à d’autres personnes de les partager en les touchant, de préférence en mettant leur pied sur le leur” (Dorothy Carrington, “Les *mazzeri*,” *Études Corses. Revue Trimestrielle, Société des Sciences Historiques et Naturelles et les Archives Départementales de la Corse*, op. cit., p. 86) In this same article, Carrington further elaborates this point as she shares an unfortunate anecdote: “Il est dangereux, dit-on, de se lier avec un ‘mazzere’, car tout en vous aimant celui-ci vous entraîne fatalement à la mort. À ce sujet, on nous a rapporté qu’il y a environ trente ans, dans le Sartonais, une femme ‘mazzere’ notoire, qui chassait presque toutes les nuits, se promenait avec son mari lorsqu’elle s’écria tout à coup: ‘Voici un beau chien, donne-moi ton bâton!’ Le mari vit également le chien, mais s’aperçut que c’était un esprit, le sien. ‘Ne le tue pas, cria-t-il à sa femme, ce chien, c’est moi!’ Mais la femme, poussé par une force irrésistible, le tua quand même. La nuit suivante le mari tomba malade et mourut peu de temps après. Selon notre informateur, il avait pu partager la vision de sa femme, parce qu’à ce moment il la touchait” (*idem.*, p. 89).

for the current moment. However, as we have seen often in *La Chasse de nuit*, gathering around the dreams is not without substantial risk: Marcu Silvarelli alerts Mattéo Monacle that the dreams, when they transition into the *chasses sanglantes*, rip apart communities; Lisa Zanetti's visceral reactions to the premonition of her fiancé's looming death suggest that the dream and the traditional practice of *mazzerisme* are not worth sustaining. At the same time, *not* gathering drives the death knell into the tradition itself; the refusal to participate ends the practice. At the heart of this "rencontre plurisubjective" are also the complex interplays between the reader and their experience with Corsica as a *Place* – has the transition to a "modern" society chipped far too much away from cultural traditions so much as they are no longer recognizable?

VII. *The Ebb and Flow of Cultural Traditions and the Role of Literature for Cultural Survival*

La Chasse de nuit portrays several significant transitions and transformations of Corsican communities, especially those of the rural interior, during the interbellum period of the 20th century. The soldiers that returned from the trenches of World War I confronted the stark realities of the post-war era as they reappeared in villages that were drained of vitality and vibrancy, of life. World War II quickly appeared on the horizon and threatened these same communities with new waves of enlistment, of familial upheaval, and with the risk of occupation by Fascist Italy in the early-1940s. For many, emigration became the only viable escape route and so the Corsican diaspora cycled anew.

For those that remained behind, the struggle turned to a different form of survival, that of ways of life that had persisted for generations. In this regard, Marie Ferranti offers a deeply probative and timely exploration of the ways through which generations relate to one another through traditional practices. Specifically, Ferranti approaches these connections through the

prism of doubt, a leitmotiv that serves not only to highlight narrative intrigue (will the premonition come to bear?) but also to fuel questions of the necessity or relevance of *mazzerisme* as a tradition in the 20th century. Drawing on critical theories of folklore studies and cultural studies, we will explore how generations relate to one another through the transmission of traditions. More specifically, we will focus our attention on the use of narrative (oral and written) as a tool to combat cultural attrition by recasting the bonds between generations with stories that reconnect history, culture, and tradition.

1. *Literary Restoration and Tradition's Evisceration: The Risks of Telling Stories*

La Chasse de nuit opens in the spring of 1938 during a tumultuous period between the 20th century's World Wars that devastated Corsica. Although not assailed by air raids and infantry invasions, the interior regions of the island were hollowed out³⁶⁷, left bare from population losses incurred by conscription. Of all departments and regions of Metropolitan France, Corsica experienced the highest military conscription and enlistment; with an estimated population of

³⁶⁷ The impact of the wars was certainly felt in proportion to the long-standing reality of Corsican emigration, especially at the turn of the 20th century at which time waves of emigration were already departing the island: "La Corse, en cette fin de XIXe siècle, est en premier lieu une région que l'on quitte pour bâtir un destin ailleurs. Au regard de la pauvreté de l'île et de la faiblesse de l'industrie, trois grandes destinations dominent dans ce mouvement migratoire qui va contribuer à bâtir la diaspora corse: les Amériques, l'Empire colonial français (dans l'administration ou dans l'armée) et l'Hexagone avec, comme ville-référence, Marseille, mais aussi les universités françaises où les étudiants corses se rendent désormais, plus que vers les universités italiennes qu'ils délaissent. Les Amériques s'affirment très tôt comme une destination. Les Corses se retrouvent en Amérique du Sud, à Haïti, à Saint-Dominique, aux États-Unis, mais aussi à Porto Rico où l'on compte un tiers de Corses parmi les Français présents sur l'île au milieu du XIXe siècle. En ce qui concerne l'Empire colonial français, Sylvain Gregori a montré que 57 % des volontaires de Haute-Corse s'engageaient à l'époque dans les troupes coloniales. Enfin, Marseille et l'Hexagone s'affirment comme des destinations régulières. On compte, entre 1870 et 1914, six cercles et trois comités corses dans le Sud de la France, illustrant les liens entretenus par cette communauté diasporique. La communauté corse devient, à la fin du siècle, l'une des composantes majeures du port phocéén" (Marie-Françoise Attard-Maraninchi, "Premiers migrants, premiers départs (1870-1896)", *Un siècle d'immigration des Suds en France*, Groupe de recherche ACHAC, Paris, 2006; available online: <https://www.achac.com/immigration-des-suds/exposition/corse-immigrations-des-suds-et-emigrations-1870-2020/premiers-migrants-premiers-departs-1870-1896/#>; additionally, for new perspectives of Corsican emigration into Latin and the Caribbean, see the recent work by Marie Jeanne Paoletti Casablanca and Laetizia Castellani, "L'émigration corse à Porto Rico au 19^e siècle: familles et réseaux familiaux. L'exemple balanin", *Amérique Latine Histoire et Mémoire. Les Cahiers ALHIM*, No. 39, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4000/alhim.8557>

300,000 inhabitants at the outbreak of World War I, of which 50,000 estimated enlisted; over 10,000 never returned.³⁶⁸ World War II transformed another crop of able-bodied men into soldiers, dismantling yet again the family structures of the rural interior. Prior to the Italian occupation of the early-1940s, many families fled the island and settled in coastal cities such as Marseille and Nice, as Mattéo recalls in his journal: “En quelques jours, on vit hommes, femmes, et enfants s’entasser avec valises et cartons dans l’autocar qui les conduisait à Ajaccio. Certains partaient à pied ou à dos d’âne dans l’espoir d’embarquer pour Nice ou Marseille” (p. 185).

Ferranti’s novel depicts the theatre of war at a place where its most fortunate and celebrated conclusion is perhaps most devastating: at the home front. As soldiers return to their villages, they carve out new trenches in the landscape through social isolation and exclusion. They push away all those who waited so long for their return. Reflecting on his teenage years, Mattéo Monacle recalls the hollow shells of men that returned from the fronts and simply persisted in the village and were never truly able to settle back in: “Après la guerre de 14, alors que je n’étais qu’un jeune garçon d’une quinzaine d’années [...] Il ne restait à Zigliaro que des vieillards, des femmes, des enfants, des hommes au regard perdu” (p. 19). Mattéo’s recollection is of a group of individuals linked together only by geographical proximity, hardly of a community bound together. The experience of war exacts centripetal and centrifugal forces on the community, separating and binding at the same time. It is through the collective experiences of narrative that the bonds of community will be reestablished, if only for enough time as to permit a chance to flee once again.

Following the war, hunting became the favored pastime for many veterans. These hunts were not a quaint, weekend jaunt into the forest; they are mass slaughters of animals, “des chasses sanglantes” (p. 22), after which the odors of deteriorating carcasses wafted through and settled

³⁶⁸ Cf. Francis Pomponi (dir.), *Le Mémorial des Corses*, “L’île éprouvée (1914-1945)”, Vol. 4, Marseille, Éditions du Prado, 1990.

upon the village: “Certains jours, il flottait dans l’air une odeur de viande corrompue que les anciens soldats ne détestaient pas” (p. 20). These hunts were intimately violent and resulted in the animal being reduced to an unidentifiable pile of flesh and fur: “parfois [ils] s’acharnaient sur la bête au point de n’en laisser qu’une bouillie de chairs écrasées et de poils” (*ibid.*). Although not a soldier, Mattéo Monacle nevertheless participated in these *chasses sanglantes* to quell and temper his rage: “Je me changeai, pris la mazza. J’étais dans une rage folle. Je humai le vent, suivis le chemin de terre que je savais être le passage habituel des sangliers, gravis la colline qui mène à la source verte et me postai” (p. 59). For both Mattéo and for the returned soldiers, the hunt was for the pure pleasure of violence in addition to serving as an outlet to channel rage, anger, and disappointment. With respect to Mattéo’s participation, we are far from the traditional, rituals of the annual *chasse de nuit* that brings the community together, far from it indeed. However, and perhaps surprisingly, for the soldiers, the “chasses sanglantes” appear to be one component of their arduous return into the folds of community life.

Following the hunt, men settled in a local café and shared their experiences of war - not the harrowing battles themselves, nor their escape from danger, but of the filth of shared living spaces, the trenches, the smells of burning bodies, and of ubiquitous death itself:

Ils se réunissaient au café et parlaient de la guerre des heures entières. Ils ne racontaient pas des batailles ou de hauts faits. Ce n’était que des histoires de faim, de crasse, de froid qui rongait les os, de rats crevés, de boue, de cadavres pourrissants dont ils n’arrivaient pas à oublier les yeux vides (p. 22).

The soldiers too were victims of a “chasse sanglante,” a “bouillie de chairs écrasées et de poils” in the trenches of Europe, but they are still capable of speech and of bearing witness to their own trauma (“...des histoires de faim, de crasse, de froid...”).³⁶⁹ The sharing of stories and listening to

³⁶⁹ Cathy Caruth analyzes wartime trauma and the stories of soldiers emphasizing that for some, the traumatic experience is not necessarily with the struggle of war (perhaps ever unknowable) but with the confrontation with that

those of others is palliative because on the one hand it refers to the past in the hopes of moving forward in the future, an experience that Cathy Caruth, via Sigmund Freud, describes as the “life drive,” a post-traumatic recovery:

In the life drive, then, life itself, and the language of creativity, begin as an act that bears witness to the past even by turning from it that bears witness to death by bearing witness to the possibility of origination in life. History, here, is reclaimed and generated not in reliving unconsciously the death of the past but by an act that bears witness by parting from it. The language of the life drive does not simply point backward, that is, but bears witness to the past by pointing to the future.³⁷⁰

Here, Caruth makes the claim that History serves as the vehicle for the transition away from the past that haunts the present (e.g., traumatic visions and nightmares) as the individual progresses towards a future no longer tethered to the horrors of the past. The “language of creativity,” that of storytelling, offers an opportunity to renew the lease on life. From this perspective, the decoupling of past and present in the stories relayed by the returned soldiers in Ferranti’s narrative would serve to propel them into the future, less burdened and less encumbered by the past.

While troubling for some, the experiences of the past serve as a rich source of inspiration for others. At the café alongside the war veterans, Marcu Silvarelli, the *mazzeru* of the previous generation, also begins to tell the stories of his past and of “les chasses telles qu’elles devaient l’être et la beauté de ses récits apaisa les anciens soldats” (p. 22). This might appear an unexpected conclusion drawn from such a bloody event (the *chasse de nuit*), however, according to Mattéo Monacle, Silvarelli’s stories “traversaient le monde des vivants et rejoignaient parfois le monde des morts” (*ibid.*) Just as his role as *mazzeru* allows him to pass from one realm to another, or to

which we can never know, death itself: “The return of the traumatic experience is not the direct witness to a threat to life but rather the attempt to overcome the fact that it was not direct, to master what was never fully grasped in the first place. And since consciousness cannot bear witness to death, the life of the survivor becomes the repetition of the reality that consciousness cannot grasp. In the traumatic encounter with death, life itself attempts to serve as the witness that consciousness cannot provide” (Cathy Caruth, “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival.” *intervalla: platform for intellectual exchange* 2, “Trauma, Abstraction, and Creativity” (2014-15), p. 22; available online: <https://www.fus.edu/intervalla-files/vol2/3-CC.pdf>).

³⁷⁰ Cathy Caruth, “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival,” *op. cit.*, p. 25.

simultaneously occupy two different ones, the stories that Silvarelli shares with his fellow soldiers allow them to cross boundaries of existence and of experience: “C’est pourquoi l’on écoutait Marcu Silvarelli et sa voix charmait les anciens soldats comme une musique étrange et familière à la fois” (p. 21). Much like Ferranti’s own narrative, gathering around Silvarelli’s stories of the past and of the rituals of the *chasse de nuit* serves to (re) transmit the “unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures, and our traditions” passed from one to another through an “interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing.”³⁷¹ Silvarelli uses the legend and lore of the *mazzeru* to distract those beleaguered by their trauma in an attempt to reintroduce these men into their community while at the same time (re)transmitting the tradition itself with others. Folklore and cultural memory, and in this case specifically oral histories, then become a counterweight, a remedy even, to the destructive social upheaval inflicted on insular communities through a distant war. In the critical terminology of folklore studies, the stories of Silvarelli’s hunts take form as a type of folklore narrative called a “survival” which exposes listeners to traditions of their communities but leaves them to draw their own personal conclusions about their importance: “[Survivals] are phenomena that have purposes and meanings for human beings among whom they are found, even though the origins of these phenomena may be obscure and their initial purposes and meanings may be unknown or may have been different.”³⁷² In this case, I interpret the “purposes and meanings” of the legends and lore of the *mazzeru*, transmitted by Silvarelli and by Ferranti, as restorative gestures, ones that encourage the survival not only of the oral histories themselves, but also of the members of the community

³⁷¹ Martha Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*, Logan, Utah State University Press, 2005, p. 12.

³⁷² Robert A. Georges and Michael O. Jones, “Survival, Continuity, Revival, and Historical Source,” *Folkloristics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 65.

who have slowly drifted away. This is an opportunity to restore relationships and contact with community and with history, to recount “les chasses telles qu’elles devaient l’être” (p. 20).

Not only an invitation for renewed experiences with tradition and the roots of community, the stories shared by Marcu Silvarelli encourage those returning from war to speak as well, to tell their own stories. Inspired by Silvarelli’s nostalgia for the past, the soldiers, “se mirent à raconter” (p. 21):

Ils ne parlèrent plus de rats ni d’ordures, mais montrèrent aux femmes et aux enfants le déroulement des batailles sur une carte; ils parlèrent des journées passées à attendre l’attaque qui ne venait pas, des camarades perdus, du vin qui console. Ils indiquaient le nom de la ville, du village, de rivière ou de la plaine où un ami, un frère, un fils ou un mari était tombé, et ils pleuraient en silence (*ibid.*)

The soldiers relieve the experience of war as though they too were prey, hiding for days on end from an attack that never came, at least one that they escaped. Walking back through the memories, perhaps with a map present (the use of the verb *indiquer* suggests an instance of physical demonstration or presentation), brings back the memories of their fellow soldiers who lost their lives, of various battles, of their horrific trauma. While certainly an emotionally challenging experience, “Les larmes les guérissent du malheur. Peu à peu [...] la vie reprit son cours ordinaire” (p. 21).

While crucial for the survivors of war and their continued recovery from trauma, retelling the stories of the *mazzeri* fundamentally alters Silvarelli’s own relationship to his powers of premonition and to the tradition itself, “On disait que Marcu Silvarelli avait perdu ses dons de mazzeru. [Le père de Mattéo] disait que sa parole s’était tarie comme la source de l’*ochju* d’autrefois” (*ibid.*). As Silvarelli listens to the stories of the soldiers and witnesses the outcomes of their *chasses sanglantes*, piles of mangled carcasses, he feels again the fear and worry that surged up within him during one of this earliest *chasse de nuit* during which he fortold the death

of his own uncle. His fear and shame bring upon self-imposed silence and reclusion: “Marcu se crut un monstre, pensa perdre la raison. Il faisait des rêves éveillés, voulait rester dans le noir, n’osant plus confier à personne son terrible secret” (p. 22). We are yet again brought back to the foundational question and conflict of the responsibilities of the *mazzeri* one the one hand as psychopomp guiding souls to the afterlife, and on the other, to paraphrase Dorothy Carrington, as Death’s messengers eliminating bodies, souls, and entire families. In this sense, Marcu Silvarelli might conceive of his speech as a catalyst for Death itself. From the silence that ensues between Marcu and Mattéo, we understand that the traditional practice of the yearly hunt is essentially abandoned and that Silvarelli no longer shares the content of his dreams for fear of further threatening his family; he turns against his responsibility to the traditional practice because he fears his own contributions to its demise.³⁷³ In the end, *mazzerisme* is no longer a valued or worthwhile tradition, because of the violence it potentially engenders, and is best stifled, ignored, and forgotten.

2. *Tradition’s Inertia, Modernity’s Momentum*

Even though the night-hunt is an important community event, it is with significant hesitation and reticence that some in Mattéo’s orbit participate in its rituals, particularly Agnès and Lisa Zanetti. As we discussed earlier, these two characters gather around Mattéo’s dreams in different ways: Agnès encourages Mattéo to walk away from it all, to renounce his powers of premonition; Lisa’s position is much more intriguing because of the ambivalence of her various relationships to the oneiric space – she is torn between acceptance and rejection of the premonition.

³⁷³ We saw this earlier in relationship to Silvarelli’s concern about the life of his uncle: “Il se prit d’affection pour moi et me rapporta comment, au cours d’une chasse, alors qu’il n’avait guère lui aussi plus d’une quinzaine d’années, il avait vu, pour la première fois, dans les yeux du sanglier abattu, la mort de l’un de ses oncles qu’il chérissait tendrement” (p. 22).

She doubts the possibility of *mazzerisme*, resorting to penetrating derision and mockery, but leaves just enough room to allow for the premonition to be true, to effectively allow Petru's death. In this section, I will discuss the pivotal role of doubt and skepticism that frames many of the interactions between characters in *La Chasse de nuit*. Doubt allows characters such as Lisa Zanetti and Mattéo Monacle to distance themselves from that which they resist (or fear); at the same time, the expression of doubt opens space for dialogue and interaction between conflicting points of view or perspectives, and, optimistically, to encourage them to reapproach that of which they remain skeptical or unsure. Our discussion of doubt will invite a nuanced perspective of how characters (and readers) experience Corsican traditions and customs and how these various experiences distinguish different generations while also (re)connect one to another.

We begin with Lisa Zanetti for whom the news of the fatal premonition of Petru's death is acknowledged but not fully respected. During the early morning hours following the hunt, a procession winds through Zigliaro, announcing the successful conclusion of the night-hunt in the *Bois de Foscolo*: "c'était la procession des fantômes pénitents qui annoncent la mort prochaine dans une maison" (p. 13). Lisa awakens as the spectral procession passes in front of her house, "[E]lle a cru entendre prononcer le nom de son époux. Elle s'est levée; la nuit était claire; elle a ouvert la persienne: la rue était déserte" (p. 16). Did she hear what she thought she heard? Did she understand the chant, "Petru! Petru!" to be the fatal premonition? For her husband, nothing of the sort, "il a persuadé sa femme que c'était un mauvais rêve" (*ibid.*). Petru's persuasiveness does not last long – Lisa leaves during the early morning to confront Mattéo at a cabin used for hunting parties in the *Bois de Foscolo*. She wastes no time cutting down Mattéo's position by strongly asserting that his premonition is motivated by deeply-rooted familial distrust between the Zanettis and the Monacles: "Que Petru soit revenu à Zigliaro a dû réveiller les vieilles rancœurs, les rivalités

qui remontent à la nuit des temps. Vous avez toujours haï les Zanetti. Les deux familles se sont toujours détestées” (p. 31). The source of the premonition, according to Lisa, is pure jealousy. Lisa continues her admonishments pointing to the invisibility of the tradition itself: “Vous invoquez toutes ces choses obscures que personne ne peut vérifier” (p. 32).

Lisa doubts the supernatural power of the premonition, dismissing the entire spectacle as the fruit of jealousy. This is not some magico-religious ceremony, but instead an outrageous and outlandish performance grounded in a series of lies and misinformation. In this sense, “doubt” takes shape as a refusal to believe. It seems like a total rejection of the tradition, its rituals, and its specific outcome. In terms of generational interaction and engagement, Lisa’s position suggests the challenge of (completely) disregarding the experiences and beliefs of a previous generation. Her description of the ritual hunt as an *obscure* practice suggests that as time has passed, fewer and fewer remain attentive and *in touch* with the practice itself; as a result, the ritual practice itself becomes the focus of scrutiny, not the decisions of many to lose touch with it. What is most interesting in this frontal assault is that regardless of the origin (jealousy) or the motivation (superstition) for announcing Petru’s looming death, Lisa’s own belief in the possible outcome remains unchanged: she fears for Petru because this “chose[] obscure[]” *might* prove true.

Following the initial confrontation between Mattéo and Lisa in the *Bois de Foscolo*, Agnès describes these different levels and layers of experience that distinguish each character all the while degrading Lisa’s contemporary generation:

Que sait-elle de cette île? Tout cela est vieux comme le monde, et le monde aujourd’hui est tout neuf. Personne ne veut plus se retourner vers le passé; le lien est rompu. La guerre a dévoré les âmes; notre village est dépeuplé. Je me demande quelle chimère a pu attirer Petru à Zigliaro. C’est peut-être l’orgueil qui l’a poussé à revenir? Certains croient pouvoir changer le monde...Je ne comprends pas. Petru ne sait même pas notre langue. D’ailleurs, qui la parle encore? Nous ne sommes plus qu’une poignée à la savoir. Notre temps est passé, Mattéo. (p. 38-9; my emphasis).

Agnès's comments penetrate deep into many of the generational tensions we have previously discussed: the aftermath of the World Wars, the continuity of the Corsican language as a vernacular, the awareness of the traditions and rituals that animated and enriched the lives of earlier generations. Lisa is only an inhabitant of the island, according to Agnès, because she understands little of its past – “Que sait-elle de cette île?”. The focal point of Agnès's irritation is that Lisa, and others as well, have moved on from Agnès's experience with Corsica. In other words, generational experiences are incompatible with one another: “Tout cela est vieux comme le monde, et le monde aujourd'hui est tout neuf.” The move away from the past is also observed in the attrition of the Corsican language, “Nous ne sommes plus qu'une poignée à la savoir.” Agnès's indictment of a younger generation offers a deeply pessimistic and fatalistic vision for the future of Corsican culture and tradition—Agnès anticipates cultural erasure through the act of forgetting, “Personne ne veut plus se retourner vers le passé; le lien est rompu” (p. 38).

Lisa Zanetti's prevarication and indeterminant stance on how to alter the course of fate persists throughout the novel and one moment in particular merits our deeper attention here – when she seeks Mattéo's help to stage another hunt. In this episode, her fear and worry reveal her true belief in the tradition itself and channel her energy into designing a new *chasse de nuit* that would annul the selection of Petru Zanetti (at the risk of identifying another victim). Reflecting back on this moment in his journal, Mattéo writes, “La réussite de notre entreprise était des plus incertaines. Il aurait fallu que je chasse le mouflon moi-même et que la nuit soit tombée avant de mimer cette grande chasse au mouflon; enfin, en voulant être celui qui empêche la mort annoncée, je trahissais les miens” (p. 130).³⁷⁴ Mattéo acquires a decapitated sheep's head that he wears as part of his

³⁷⁴ Several of the ethnographic studies that we have collected here would question this process of the hunt itself – if the *chasse* is an entirely oneiric experience, how would a staged experience result in the same outcome of a premonition? Can the ritual really be re-staged so easily? And artificially at that? Underlying Lisa's participation in

costume, clearly echoing his earlier remark, “Je deviens l’animal” (p. 12). He assumes the role of the hunted animal and Lisa that of the *mazzera*: “Je me saisis de la tête du mouflon, la mis devant mon visage et dis à Lisa de se préparer à frapper” (p. 131). Turning around in circles in the small hut or shed where the spectacle unfolds, Lisa attempts to strike Mattéo, who in turn manages to escape and deflect her attempts:

Lisa tenta plusieurs fois de m’attraper mais n’y parvint pas. Ses gestes étaient maladroits, elle s’épuisait en vain : j’évitais tous les coups. Je m’amusais de la hargne qu’elle mettait à m’atteindre sans y réussir. Je me déplaçais autour d’elle, la défiais, me baissais, me relevais, m’approchais d’elle jusqu’à sentir son souffle; je le frôlais, la narguais, grisé de se sentir sa rage impuissante. La fatigue commença à se faire sentir: la sueur coulait sur mon visage, mes pas étaient moins bien assurés. Elle s’arrêta pour reprendre souffle. Elle fit une dernière tentative pour m’atteindre; à bout de forces, elle ahanait. Je vis son visage grimacer sous l’effort; son bras se leva, elle porta le coup, mais je l’esquivai, Lisa fut déséquilibrée et tomba à terre. Elle se releva avec une agilité que je ne lui aurais pas soupçonné un instant plus tôt. Elle avait la bave aux lèvres; son regard était trouble (p. 131-132).

Extenuated and suffering from fatigue-induced hallucinations, Lisa throws dirt from the floor into Mattéo’s eyes and cries, “--C’est Petru que j’ai vu, dit-elle. / La chasse du grand mouflon avait échoué” (p. 132). While incredibly eerie, the staged hunt is itself a test of the strength of Lisa’s own ambivalence which teeters now towards her acknowledgement of the supernatural powers of the *mazzeri*, or at least in the tradition itself. She too marks him for Death. The importance of this scene is also for its reversal of roles: In the position of the hunted animal, Mattéo acknowledges an additional layer to the violence of the ritual itself, “Je connus alors la peur de l’animal traqué” (p. 132). Lisa as well transforms in the spectacle: “Elle avait la bave aux lèvres.” The fear that

this performance is her stalwart belief that the hunter (i.e., Mattéo) individually selects the victim and in so doing is responsible for their death; Lisa’s insistence on this staged hunt suggests she does not regard the *mazzeri* as a psychopompe (*passseur*) who accompanies Death’s victim across the threshold to a different world. However, Mattéo knows that this spectacular setting is nothing but a fool’s errand – his own body position and movement throughout the room suggest that he wants only to convince Lisa that her hunt was valid (all the while knowing it will not work out the way intended): “La réussite de notre entreprise était des plus incertaines. Il aurait fallu que je chasse le mouflon moi-même et que la nuit soit tombée avant de mimer cette grande chasse au mouflon; enfin, en voulant être celui qui empêche la mort annoncée, je trahissais les miens” (p. 130).

Mattéo inspires might also be read as one of the unintended consequences of the ritual that encourages him to distance himself from the practice.

Lisa returns from doubt to deep belief in the power of the ritual itself. Comparing this scene to the initial confrontation with Mattéo at *Torra nera*, I find opposing and parallel dynamics below the surface of the narrative: first, that of an outsider (Lisa) looking back towards a community's past; second, that of insiders (Agnès, Mattéo) looking beyond the present of community and towards the future. In both cases, doubt mediates these relationships: for Lisa, doubt brings her closer to tradition; for Mattéo, continued doubt of the importance of ritual pushes him away from it. These competing forces come to a head in the spring of 1939 when Mattéo prepares for another yearly hunt that quickly degenerates into horrors of the *chasse sanglante* that Marcu Silvarelli feared would return:

Il y eut un grand silence et les hommes s'agglutinèrent autour de l'animal mort et commencèrent à tirer sur lui, chacun à leur tour. Ensuite, ils tapèrent sur la bête avec la crosse de leur fusil [...] Les hommes taping sur l'animal de plus en plus fort; ils ahaiaient; certains juraient, blasphémaient; leur chemise était trempée de sueur; enfin, ils sortirent leur couteau et dépecèrent ce qu'il restait de l'animal gisant, jetèrent les morceaux aux chiens qui sautaient pour les attraper. Les hommes avaient du sang jusqu'aux coudes, leur visage en était éclaboussé (p. 156-7)

At the end of this hunt, Mattéo is asked about his visions, to which he responds: “Non, je n'ai rien vu, hormis ce que tous ont pu voir” (p. 158). What he sees is the degeneration of the traditional hunt itself, now a blood bath of unconscionable violence. This moment is pivotal in the novel because it occurs at a time when Mattéo continues to reel from what he understands to be Lisa's constant agony (especially after her failed attempt to redirect the course of Death): “À peine éveillé, la pensée de Lisa m'obsédait” (p. 137) and he himself reels from “la mauvaiseté qui [lui] dévorait le cœur” (p. 152). Like Agnès and Lisa, Mattéo refuses to rest in stasis, he must act, and at this critical moment, he moves closer than ever to renunciation of his role. With Agnès, he

describes his participation in the *chasse sanglante* in which he subverted his role as a guide (psychopomp) to save Petru: “Au moment où les fantômes penitents allaient traverser le torrent, j’ai ouvert le cercueil. Ils ont disparu aussitôt. Petru n’a plus rien à craindre” (p. 162). He is now one step from his renunciation in front of the village during mass: “Le prêtre se rapprocha de moi jusqu’à ce que son visage touche presque le mien, me demanda si je voulais me confesser et si je le faisais de mon plein gré [...] ‘Défiez-vous de moi, dis-je. Je suis celui qui tue. Je suis mazzeru.’” (p. 166). His confession is an admission that his activity as a *mazzeru* and his belief in the separation of body and soul prior to death goes against the teachings of the Church, to whom he now submits himself:

For underlying all these old Corsican beliefs is the concept of a dual universe, composed of the physical, or material world, and the realm of the spirits that lies beyond appearances. When a man dies his soul moves into the spirit realm; in this, of course, Christianity agrees. But whereas Christianity maintains that the soul dwells in the body up to the moment of death, according to Corsican belief it is claimed and taken by the spirits a year or less before.³⁷⁵

As is often the case in Ferranti’s novels, there is certainly more than meets the eye. The public shame and humiliation of Mattéo’s confession does little to remedy the situation because he is cast out of his community. Agnès fears for his soul because he confessed rather than experience a full baptism: “Les âmes errantes ne te laisseront en repos. Fasse le ciel que tu n’aies pas menti!” (p. 172). Just when he thought to have gained his freedom, Mattéo realizes his continued attachment to the tradition he has long sought to eliminate. In a way, Ferranti seems to suggest that the traditions of the past are themselves inescapable even if one refuses to believe in them. Literature then serves the crucial role as the guardians of these traditions, memories, and communities. This push-and-pull, this ebb and flow of an individual’s attachment to community

³⁷⁵ Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

and to its traditions mediated through doubt, either past, present, or future, sits at the core of Ferranti's novel and further nuances the experience with Corsica as *Place*.

3. *Bridging Experiences and Generations*

Characters in the novel occupy the same narrative space but entertain wildly different relationships with the world that surrounds them. Even though itself a single insular unit in geological terms, Ferranti exposes different islands within the island that construct identities based on origins, construed now in terms of geography (or at least not exactly) but in terms of an individual's age. Over the course of the entire novel Lisa Zanetti is perceived as an "outsider," a label assigned directly by Agnès for her lack of understanding and her contempt for *mazzerisme*: "Pour elle, ce sont des croyances absurdes que certains d'entre nous partagent encore par ignorance" (p. 38). Agnès's perspective here is quite ambiguous – who is this "nous"? Is this a generational (age-based) "nous" or is it a geographical/cultural "nous"? Mattéo defends Lisa in as equally mysterious terms: "C'est une femme moderne..." (*ibid.*). His reply raises further questions: are the rituals of *mazzerisme* incompatible with "modern" Corsica? Are modernity and tradition incompatible? Can the modern generation return to traditions? In this concluding section, I will address perhaps the most profound implications of Marie Ferranti's *La Chasse de nuit*: the reconnection or introduction of readers to the traditions, rituals, customs, and practices of past generations of Corsicans.

Qu'est-ce que la Corse? The simplistic syntax of question conceals a more complicated one that is taken for granted – is there *one* Corsica? The singularity of the location does not imply the singularity of the culture: Corsica might be one geographical and geological entity, it is after all an island and not an archipelago; at its core, however, are a plurality of experiences,

communities, and traditions unique to different areas of the island. The attention to different adventures, communities, and cultural landscapes has marked our study of the literary representation of this island since the beginning of this project: Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire's exploration of the Ajaccian quotidian revealed shocking similarities to Continental norms; Gustave Flaubert's contact with the natural and ecological sublime turned the attention away from the ominous *maquis* and towards the natural splendor of the mountains and sea; Marc Biancarelli reminds us to peel away at the chips and cracks in the veneer of a painting to reveal what it conceals. Ferranti's novel can be read to argue, as I do here, that the experience of Corsica is that of numerous layers, some certainly more substantial than others; it is not a singular experience as projected in other artistic representations—it is not just the *vendetta*.

Ferranti invites us to consider more substantial and contemporaneous cultural concerns caused by the rupture between the past and the present, of the uprooting of village life, of the attrition and erasure of the past for want of the promise of a modern future. In more concrete terms, this “forward” movement takes shape as the promises of modern urbanization (the development of Ajaccio, for example, that serves as a clear counterweight to life in the village of Zigliaro) or of an entirely fresh start in Continental France. These two movements away from the traditional village suggest the allure of modernity to alter trajectories of communities and to break the inertia imposed by Tradition. Lisa Zanetti appears so seriously, so deeply separated from her community (adopted or not) that she is unaware of its history, its past. Marcu Silvarelli makes the tacit decision to encourage rupture, silencing his stories, hoping that the community forgets, at least those that remained behind in the waves of emigration, of diaspora. Perhaps most notably, Mattéo Monacle seeks to break with the past by altering, if not eliminating entirely, his present.

At the center of this novel, Marie Ferranti raises the alarm about the consequences of dispensing with the Past, of saying that the previous generation's experiences are not part and parcel of the Present—even worse, perhaps, not even knowing how the Past informs the Present; or choosing to ignore it. Dorothy Carrington reflects on this slow process of cultural attrition and forgetting of cultural origins in the late-20th century:

Would [Corsica] produce any more great prophetic figures like Paoli and Napoleon? [...] The question was less easy to answer than it is now; for now one knows that the indigenous culture of Corsica has run its span. The way of life, the concepts that prevailed there since the Neolithic era in an unbroken, slowly evolving tradition, are being annihilated day by day, and the Corsicans will soon become like other people, like those of continental France and of Europe as a whole, and eventually the world, all forced into the same mold that is shaping our work, our homes, food, thoughts, and perhaps our very dreams. If Corsica gives birth to any outstanding individuals they will no longer be marked by the peculiar insular genius, for the characteristics of the people – as most others – will have disappeared.³⁷⁶

Ferranti's novel is an attempt, and a successful one at that I would argue, to fill-in these gaps, these ruptures that drive apart the past and the present. She acknowledges the challenges faced by communities in the post-war era during which priorities and realities were forced to align with the order of the new world; the village, she effectively argues, became insufficient. No longer needed, it becomes disposable, forgettable. Through her writing, however, she returns to these important sites of culture and of contact between generations through shared stories and legends.

Dorothy Carrington's warning above came just prior to a momentous time in Corsican history during which an important resurgence occurs in cultural histories, insular identities, and political aspirations, known as the *Riacquistu*.³⁷⁷ Anne Meistersheim describes the "Riacquistu"

³⁷⁶ Dorothy Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica*, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

³⁷⁷ Jean-Guy Talamoni argues however that the political resurgence of the 1980s-1990s is the second iteration of this cultural movement that began at the beginning of the 20th century, "U primu riacquistu" as evidenced through the increased publication of literature in the Corsican language; *cf.* Jean-Guy Talamoni, *Littérature et politique en Corse: Imaginaire national, société et action publique*, Ajaccio, Albiana, coll. "Thèses," 2013. Also, Ange Pomonti, "Le plurilinguisme comme élément structurant de l'objet 'littérature corse'," *Revue de sociolinguistique*, "La langue et la

as the various movements and engagements of the 1980s-1990s combined as a larger movement of the *re-appropriation* of Corsican culture across different platforms, genres, and fora: “Réappropriation de la langue, des expressions artistiques et culturelles, des savoir-faire, réactivation ou recréation d’une forme d’identité collective, réappropriation de l’Histoire.”³⁷⁸ Marie Ferranti’s *La Chasse de nuit* contributes greatly to this cultural re-awakening and further explores and develops the contemporary Corsican reader’s experience with/in Corsica through representing experiences singular to the island itself. I would further argue that *La Chasse de nuit* can be read as an attempt to re-Place Corsica via a literary experience with a tradition geographically unique to Corsica. The traditions of *mazzerisme*, however onerous, gruesome and outrageous they may be, and that are slowly disappearing, they are nevertheless integral elements of the Corsican experience, past, present, and future.

guerre: témoignages oraux et écrits littéraires en occitan” (dir. Joëlle Ginestet), Vol. 81, 2017, Available online: <https://journals.openedition.org/lengas/1160>.

³⁷⁸ Anne Meistersheim, “Du *riacquistu* au désenchantement: Une société en quête de repères”, *Ethnologie française*, “Corse. Tous terrains,” Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, Vol. 38, Iss. 3, 2008, p. 407. Jean-Louis Fabiani argues that the *Riaquistui* is more than a reappropriation of culture, but instead a reversal of stigmatization: “La logique de l’inversion des stigmates permet de rendre compte de la plupart des prises de position revendicatives en matière culturelle: la réappropriation (*riacquistu*) d’une culture perdue ou déniée est prise dans cette thématique. Les formes d’expression dont on estime qu’elles ont été dévalorisées par la culture dominante font l’objet de réhabilitation et d’investissement” (Jean-Louis Fabiani, *Sociologie de la Corse*, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, coll. “Repères”, 2018, p. 69).

CHAPTER 5

Writing Modern Corsica

Jérôme Ferrari's *Variétés de la Mort*, *Balco Atlantico*, and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*

Pour qu'un monde nouveau surgisse,
il faut d'abord que meure un monde ancien.
Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome, p. 22³⁷⁹

Jérôme Ferrari (1968-) penetrates deep into the recesses of contemporary insular Corsican society to reveal heavily conflicted communities at odds with themselves and with the world(s) around them. Since 2001, Jérôme Ferrari transforms Corsica into a site of literary production. While Marc Biancarelli and Marie Ferranti explore the vestiges and recesses of the past to rekindle the flames of the present, Ferrari explores the disengagement of the present where the stories of the *mazzeri* and of heroic bandits fall on deaf ears and where they (might) no longer matter. His earliest works take form as short stories, published by the regional publishing house Albiana in Ajaccio and entitled *Variétés de la mort* (2001). These narratives are a staging ground of sorts for themes, settings, and even various characters that either appear physically in later works or as a passing reference. As the moribund title would suggest, many of stories in this collection offer a somber vision of contemporary insular society from both insular and continental perspectives when characters flee Corsica to live in Paris, and vice versa. Ferrari's work takes on the challenge of history and memory in both *Dans le secret* (Actes sud, 2007) and *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (Actes sud, 2010), the latter plunging the reader into multiple episodes of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), with a particular focus on the horrific experience of torture. From Algeria, Ferrari returns to his adopted insular community with *Balco Atlantico* (Actes sud, 2008)

³⁷⁹ Jérôme Ferrari, *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, Arles, Actes sud, coll. "Babel", 2013, p. 22. To facilitate in-body citations of Ferrari's novels, the following abbreviations will be used to refer to each "Babel" edition, followed by the page number: *Variétés de la mort* (*Variétés*); *Balco Atlantico* (*Balco*); *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (*Sermon*).

and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (2012), the latter often cited in discussion about the author because it was awarded the *Prix Goncourt* in the same year. A brief interlude into history and quantum mechanics brings Ferrari back to the heart of his philosophical interests and centers (after all, he holds an *agrégation* in philosophy) with the novel *Le Principe* (2015) and three long awaited years later, he returns his literary setting to Corsica in *À son image* (2018). A prolific writer while also a full-time teacher in the region around Ajaccio, Ferrari is an important leader in the contemporary Corsican literary scene³⁸⁰.

The rural Corsican village anchors much of Ferrari's vast literary corpus in which he focuses heavily on the challenges of present-day insular society: its struggles with building and maintaining a sense of community and the places where it thrives, its conflicted relationship with the past as a reference point or source of inspiration, and its conflicts with the very land of the island itself, the *sol natal*. Long gone are the heroic bandits of the *maquis*. Once revered, death is now a convenience. The legends of yore are hidden in the archive. A stranger to the *écrivain-voyageur* of the nineteenth century, Corsica is now a stranger unto itself. In a series of connected narratives, Ferrari explores the complex social dynamics of the contemporary Corsican village that appears on the verge of collapse. While he does portray the demise of the village, he still manages to leave open the possibility for its renewal. There is still some life, some beacon that emanates from the island he now calls home. The Corsican villages and landscapes that feature in his literary works are ones that he grew up *with*, but not *in*:

Peut-être que la chose la plus importante à savoir, c'est que je suis né à Paris et que j'ai grandi en banlieue parisienne dans une famille corse. Pendant mon enfance et mon adolescence, j'ai passé toutes mes vacances en Corse et j'ai fini par m'y installer en 1988, comme je le désirais depuis très longtemps. Je venais juste d'avoir 20 ans.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ As mentioned in the chapter devoted to Marc Biancarelli, Ferrari is at times the sole translator of Biancarelli's work into French.

³⁸¹ Jérôme Ferrari in *Les mondes possible de Jérôme Ferrari. Entretiens sur l'écriture avec Pascaline David*, Actes sud/diagonale, 2020, p. 9.

Much like the characters that will fill the pages of his expansive literary corpus, Ferrari hears and responds to a call emanating from the island: “Je pense que si la vie donne à quiconque la possibilité d’expérimenter ce que c’est que de vivre en Corse-du-Sud et à Vitry-sur-Seine, le choix est vite fait.”³⁸² The “choix [...] vite fait” casts Corsica as an attractive alternative, one filled with promise, with hope. But is it? Can it be? Jérôme Ferrari’s writing leaves these challenging and penetrating questions for his readers to grapple with as they explore, perhaps for the first time, the complexity of contemporary Corsican society from an *insular* perspective.

“Experimental” is a word one could use to frame Ferrari’s works to the extent that each novel is itself a narrative of experimentation: “L’île sert de terrain d’expérimentation”³⁸³ for the social, political, and moral forces that contribute to Ferrari’s explorations of the disaggregation of insular society, from the vantage point of the rural village, and its potential reconstruction. In his novels and short stories, we encounter characters who explore different hypotheses, permutations, and avenues for their future within the insular cosmos. Cornelia Ruhe also observes these themes of exploration and creation throughout Ferrari’s works:

L’acte démiurgique, les lecteurs et lectrices de Jérôme Ferrari ne le savent que trop bien, est cher à l’auteur, qui fait de tous ses protagonistes les architectes de leur propre univers, que cet univers soit nationaliste comme dans *Balco Atlantico*, proto-philosophique bien qu’au fond purement individuel comme dans *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, ou alors physique comme dans *Le Principe*.³⁸⁴

At stake in his novels is whether Corsica is itself capable of something new, or if insular culture is locked into an ever-lasting cycle of destruction, at its own hands. At play are the struggles of immigrant communities, of the dreams of Corsican nationalism, of sexual liberation, and even

³⁸² *Idem.*, p. 12.

³⁸³ Cornelia Ruhe, “Le venin de la subjectivité: Narration et ambiguïté dans les romans de Jérôme Ferrari,” in *Chutes, ruptures, et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari* (dirs. Sarah Burnautzki and Cornelia Ruhe), Paris, Les Classiques Garnier, coll. “Rencontres,” No. 334, 2016, p. 216.

³⁸⁴ *Idem.*, p. 221.

release from the strong grips of the island itself. It is often the case that these experiments devolve into ruthless violence where individuals face off against one another and with their community: colonies collapse, remnants of the past are covered in layers upon layers of *oubli*, academic dreams are quashed before they even truly begin. Ferrari's characters arrive at the brutal recognition of the futility of their dreams and/or of their own insufficiency to realize them. Self-awareness comes at a significant price, however, as sparks begin to fly and fires burn everywhere. With the creation of each new world, another is destroyed.

How do you *write* this contemporary, disengaged and dwindling insular experience? How do you *write* contemporary Corsica? Jérôme Ferrari actively engages in the literary (re)construction of the island through a complex exploration of social spaces and dynamics of the rural mountainous village. In comparison to his literary colleagues, Ferrari distinguishes his voice and vision of contemporary Corsica through intricately woven narratives that feature recycled characters and settings in the (fictional) village of Olmiccia. While recent scholarship has focused on Ferrari's broader philosophical vision, few scholars have yet to study the exact nature of Ferrari's vision of Corsica itself. The short story collection *Variétés de la mort* and novels *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* offer a unique site of exploration for the construction and evolution of Ferrari's vision of Corsica because of these shared plot lines, characters, and narrative décor. More than simply substantive elements of literary narrative, these recurrent features coalesce to form a unique vision that expresses Ferrari's singular dark and morose outlook on the island's seemingly impossible future, engaging with the question around which this larger study is oriented: *Qu'est-ce que la Corse?* The answer to this question will require diligent attention to both the structural forms of Ferrari's connected works, such as narratological order, as well as to the specific ways in which Ferrari positions his characters (and narrators) in

relationship to the natural environment. The features that we will examine throughout this chapter contribute to a *poétique*³⁸⁵ that structures not only Ferrari's works but also present-day reflection on the dynamics of Corsican insularity.

I. *Poétiques du personnage: Dynamics of Character Distribution in Variétés de la mort, Balco Atlantico, and Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*

In Jérôme Ferrari's literary universe, characters find it hard to remain in one place and settle. They travel often and for some, as widely as Southeast Asian French colonial territories of the 1950s. Several characters just pass-through Corsica en route to another destination, knowingly or not. Others return definitively, permanently. Some die. The village of Olmiccia, situated in the region surrounding the city of Sartène, in southwestern Corsica, serves as a point of coincidence and of collision for many of Ferrari's characters whose paths cross as mere acquaintances, lovers, or mortal enemies. As a narrative setting, Olmiccia anchors what some critics have labeled "la trilogie corse,"³⁸⁶ a series of three novels published in quick succession: *Balco Atlantico* (2008), *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (2010), and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (2012). However, the "trilogie" is hardly sequential: *Balco Atlantico* is set in large part in the year 2000 and is unrelated to the events that take place in the novel *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, in which the author portrays

³⁸⁵ In the idiolect of critical literary theory, *la poétique* is a methodology deployed to better understand and uncover the structural composition of a literary text and is distinct from the interpretive act: "La poétique vient rompre la symétrie ainsi établie entre interprétation et science dans le champ des études littéraires. Par opposition à l'interprétation d'œuvres particulières, elle ne cherche pas à nommer le sens mais vise la connaissance des lois générales qui président à la naissance de chaque œuvre. Mais par opposition à ces sciences qui sont la psychologie, la sociologie, etc., elle cherche ces lois à l'intérieur de la littérature même. La poétique est donc une approche de la littérature à la fois "abstraite" et "interne" (Tzvetan Todorov, "2. Poétique," *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. Points "Essais", 1973, p. 19). *La poétique* is a crucial approach that seeks to uncover the "How?" rather than the interpretive "What?" of a literary text, although the two are not as far apart as it would seem here. While it might seem that the *poétique* of a given work applies to that work itself, Todorov argues for a larger vision, one that projects onto the possibilities for literature: his notion of *la poétique* aims for "une théorie qui présente un tableau des possibles littéraires, tel que les œuvres littéraires existantes apparaissent comme des cas particuliers réalisés" (*idem.*, p. 20).

³⁸⁶ Cf. Claire Devarrieux, "Jérôme Ferrari, Maure dans l'âme," *Libération*, "Livres," October 31, 2012, [Available online: https://next.liberation.fr/livres/2012/10/31/jerome-ferrari-maure-dans-l-ame_857394]

several moments and periods of the Algerian War (1954-1962).³⁸⁷ *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* picks up immediately where *Balco Atlantico* concludes.

What, then, links these novels? While some of the narrative events might be connected from one novel, for example the use of interdiegetic prolepses (flashforward) and analepses (flashback), character distribution is the foundational element to their shared strength. Numerous personages appear across several works and as a result create salient links amongst different diegetic spaces. Take for example a lesser known and studied collection of Ferrari's short stories *Variétés de la mort*, in which Théodore Moracchini is first introduced in "Un sol natal" and then returns in "Ethnologues." Both stories serve as crucial context and background for the reader to engage with Théodore more deeply as he becomes a primary character of *Balco Atlantico* where he is also an autodiegetic narrator in one of the novel's many parallel chapters. As Ferrari's work accumulate, so too do the historical connections between many of these oft-appearing characters. With successive publications, we continue to learn more and more of the past histories of characters such as Marcel Antonetti, a central voice of *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, or Marie-Angèle Susini, the anchor of *Balco Atlantico*, both of whom share their childhood village of Olmiccia. These connections, among others, are further intertwined in *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* as soon as Marcel's grandson, Matthieu Antonetti, takes on ownership and management of the corner bar of the village square, long-held by Marie-Angèle.

The sustained presence of numerous characters across several of Ferrari's works creates a literary universe that stages the complex social dynamics and realities of contemporary Corsican communities. The cyclical entry-and-exit of characters as a form of narrative strategy echoes what

³⁸⁷ Cf. Lena Seauve, "Du point de vue des bourreaux: Regards sur la torture et émotions du lecteur dans *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* de Jérôme Ferrari" in *Chutes, ruptures, et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari* (dirs. Sarah Burnautzki and Cornelia Ruhe), *op. cit.*, p. 63-79.

19th-century French author Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) used as the basis for the elevation of his monumental opus *La Comédie humaine*. To achieve this significant and vast project, one or two characters would have hardly been sufficient – a substantial cast and distribution of characters was required and that would, at some point, link each work to one another; like what we will discover in Ferrari's narratives, Balzac too elaborated on this element of his own work in his *Avant-propos* (1842):

[Walter Scott] n'avait pas songé à relier ses compositions l'une à l'autre de manière à coordonner une histoire complète [...] En apercevant ce défaut de liaison, qui d'ailleurs ne rend pas l'Écossais moins grand, je vis à la fois le système favorable à l'exécution de mon ouvrage et la possibilité de l'exécuter.³⁸⁸

How characters appear and interact with one another on the page of the novel sheds light onto what Balzac believed was the central thrust of his opus: “écrire l'histoire oubliée par tant d'historiens, celle des mœurs”³⁸⁹ and so, “l'œuvre à faire devait avoir une triple forme: les hommes, les femmes, et les choses, c'est-à-dire les personnes et la représentation matérielle qu'ils donnent de leur pensée; enfin, l'homme et la vie, car la vie est notre vêtement.”³⁹⁰ Balzac's literary mission can therefore be tied to his investment in a schematic organization of French society as it existed with a particular emphasis on how individuals, or groups of individuals, relate to one another through extant social conventions and *mœurs*.³⁹¹ The Balzacian *intertexte* serves as an important reference point for our examination of the internal *poétique* that structures Ferrari's works because the

³⁸⁸ Honoré de Balzac, “L'Avant-propos de la *Comédie humaine*” in *Écrits sur le roman, Balzac. Textes choisis, présentés et annotés par Stéphane Vachon*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, coll. “Références,” 2000, p. 286. In a series of interviews accorded to Pascaline David, Ferrari suggests that the reappearance and interaction of various characters from different narrative situations was *not* preconceived: “Le mode d'interaction, par exemple, le contenu des dialogues, tout ça, je n'en sais rigoureusement rien à l'avance. Ce qui ne veut pas dire non plus que l'exercice relève de la transe ou de la révélation mystique” (*Les mondes possibles de Jérôme Ferrari. Entretiens sur l'écriture avec Pascaline David, op. cit.*, p. 80).

³⁸⁹ *Idem.*, p. 287.

³⁹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 283.

³⁹¹ *Idem.*, p. 281-2, “Si Buffon a fait un magnifique ouvrage en essayant de représenter dans un livre l'ensemble de la zoologie, n'y avait-il pas une œuvre de ce genre à faire pour la Société?”

frequent appearance of certain characters creates consistency with the narrative setting itself and establishes salient connections between different narratives; additionally, repetition also encourages depth of character development and the occasion for readers to recognize and engage anew with many of the characters they have met elsewhere.³⁹² The coincidence of numerous layers of interconnected characters gives structure to works such as *Variétés de la mort*, *Balco Atlantico*, and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. The latter two form a deeply engrossing diptych of a contemporary Corsican community during the 1980s-2000s.

More than just the appearance and reentry of certain characters in different narrative landscapes, Ferrari's character distribution also upends the social dynamics of the very village he attempts to portray by exposing its fault lines and the cracks in its foundation. Character distribution highlights the challenges of present-day relationships with one another within the insular community. In *Balco Atlantico*, the social dynamics and hierarchy of the village are heavily regulated by affiliation with and proximity to the political nationalist group *Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale Corsu* (FLNC). The social and political primacy of characters such as Stéphane Campana, leader of the local FLNC group, will be mitigated by the character named Hayet, a young immigrant woman from Morocco who is pushed to the edges of her adopted community by deep-rooted ethnic prejudice only for her recoil to upend everything. It is in this space of fluctuating power dynamics implicating various characters that our attention will focus most intently because these interactions crystallize the social spaces and interpersonal dynamics of community in the village of Olmiccia. In his novels, Ferrari makes strategic use of narrative point

³⁹² Take for example, Antoinette de Langeais who is featured widely early on in the *Comédie humaine* as an essential, primary character in works such as *Ferragus* [1833], *Le Père Goriot* [1835], not to mention the eponymic novel *La Duchesse de Langeais* [1834], but then her character exists as a slight reference or allusion in later works such as *Illusions perdues* (completed in 1843) and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* [completed in 1847]); see, Groupe International de Recherches Balzaciennes, Groupe ARTFL (Université de Chicago), Maison de Balzac (Paris). *Balzac. La Comédie humaine. Édition critique en ligne*.

of view to undercut the social tensions that otherwise push certain characters to the margins of society; strategic narrative decisions elevate minority voices to narrative superiority, displacing others who hold positions of higher social status, bring into the forefront present-day tensions and realities of the insular rural village.

What are the strategic narrative decisions that result in these variable power dynamics connecting various characters? What is narrative dominance and how is it achieved? In an analysis of character distribution and appearance in narrative fiction from both French and English literary traditions, Alex Woloch argues for closer reading of what he calls “character-space,” defined as “that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole.”³⁹³ The “space and position” to which he refers is first a character’s status within the narrative structure as a primary, secondary, tertiary character, or “minor” character; secondly, he analyzes the consequences of interaction with characters *outside* of their realm of influence such as primary characters with secondary, secondary with tertiary, etc. Furthermore, Woloch argues that a study that places its “emphasis on the balance between different kinds of characterization – and the asymmetrical space that different characters occupy within the novel – is relevant to the significance of the novel as a whole.”³⁹⁴ Woloch’s articulation of power relationships, narrative positioning, and the social significance that arises out of these dynamic interactions will be critical theoretical contributions to our analysis of Ferrari’s complex portrayal of contemporary Corsican communities.

What would asymmetrical systems of power resemble in terms of narrative elements? How do we assign primary, secondary, tertiary roles within a Ferrari’s substantial cast of characters that

³⁹³ Alex Woloch, *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 14.

³⁹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 45.

appear across numerous narrative spaces (short stories and novels)? In his critical analysis of the distribution of characters and their systems of interaction in Émile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Philippe Hamon offers criteria for evaluating power relationships between characters through an analysis first of their ability, on one hand, to be alone in a scene, and then, of their variability in narrative perspective:

Certains personnages apparaissent toujours en compagnie d'un ou de plusieurs autres personnages, en groupes fixes à l'implication bilatérale, alors que le héros apparaît seul, ou conjoint avec n'importe quel autre personnage. Cette autonomie est souvent soulignée par le fait que le héros seul dispose du *monologue* (stances), alors que le personnage secondaire est voué au *dialogue*.³⁹⁵

For Hamon, a primary character is one who can appear alone in a scene and who is also able to engage in a monologue. The primary character is one who can appear alone and say “Je.” This definition is critical to organize different narrative voices and perspectives particularly within *Balco Atlantico*, a novel whose organization is vertiginous and wildly chaotic precisely because of the social dynamics upended by narrative voice and superiority. As we will see in the discussion of this novel, it is often the case that socially inferior characters are the ones who wield the power of monologue and who, from Hamon's perspective above, dominate in turn the power structure of their narrative frameworks.

Drawing inspiration from the Balzacian *intertexte* and the theoretical framing engaged above in the works of Alex Woloch and Philippe Hamon, this opening section will explore character distribution in three different works by Jérôme Ferrari: *Variétés de la mort*, *Balco Atlantico*, and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. We will first start with a comprehensive schematic of the different relationships and associations that link these works together. Then, we will explore

³⁹⁵ Philippe Hamon, “Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage,” *Littérature*, No. 6, May 1972, p. 91-2; Available online: www.persee.fr/doc/litt_0047-4800_1972_num_6_2_2665; Cf. Philippe Hamon, *Le Personnel du roman. Le système des personnages dans les Rougon-Macquart d'Émile Zola*, Genève, Droz, 1983 [2013], p. 150-185.

in detail the “character-space” of three characters, Hayet, Khaled, and Théodore Moracchini, who all exist on the margins of society because of their status as outsiders. Our attention will focus on the disruption caused by Ferrari’s recycling of the character named Théodore Moracchini, a figure on the outskirts of his community but also of his own sense of self for whom returning to his *sol natal* becomes a restorative gesture. We will then continue to explore the margins with attention focused on tensions between social primacy and narrative dominance as seen in *Balco Atlantico*. For both Théodore and Hayet, among others, how will they react to the island’s call to them? How will their presence be received and what will those tensions reveal about contemporary Corsican society as it grapples with its insular status in the 20th and 21st centuries? Through a study of how these characters create and disrupt notions of community and how they access narrative power, we engage with the social importance of Ferrari’s work as a representation of contemporary Corsican communities as an intricate mosaic of colliding experiences and perspectives that Mathilde Zbaeren describes as “[un] psaume chanté par une multitude de voix.”³⁹⁶ However, this polyphony is not always harmonious because some individual voices are heard louder than others while other players sing to a different key entirely. This discord suggests one element of Ferrari’s vision of insular communities as spaces where individual relationships are both challenging and nearly impossible.

Before going further, it is important to note that this “multitude de voix” described by Mathilde Zbaeren has thus far received little critical attention, despite the literary celebrity of Ferrari’s recent works. We will begin with a visual schematic (**Figure 1**) that shows the numerous relationships between characters found in *Varitétés de la mort*, *Balco Atlantico*, and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. A prose rendering of these connections follows (**Table 1**). More importantly,

³⁹⁶ Mathilde Zbaeren, *Les mondes possibles, des romans de Jérôme Ferrari*, Lausanne, Université de Lausanne (CH), coll. “Archipel Essais”, p. 25.

the schematic work here helps to identify those characters who are cast to the margins of village society and those who attempt to keep their hold on its center.

The Narrative World of Jérôme Ferrari's *Variétés de la Mort* (selections; 2001), *Balco Atlantico* (2008) and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (2012)

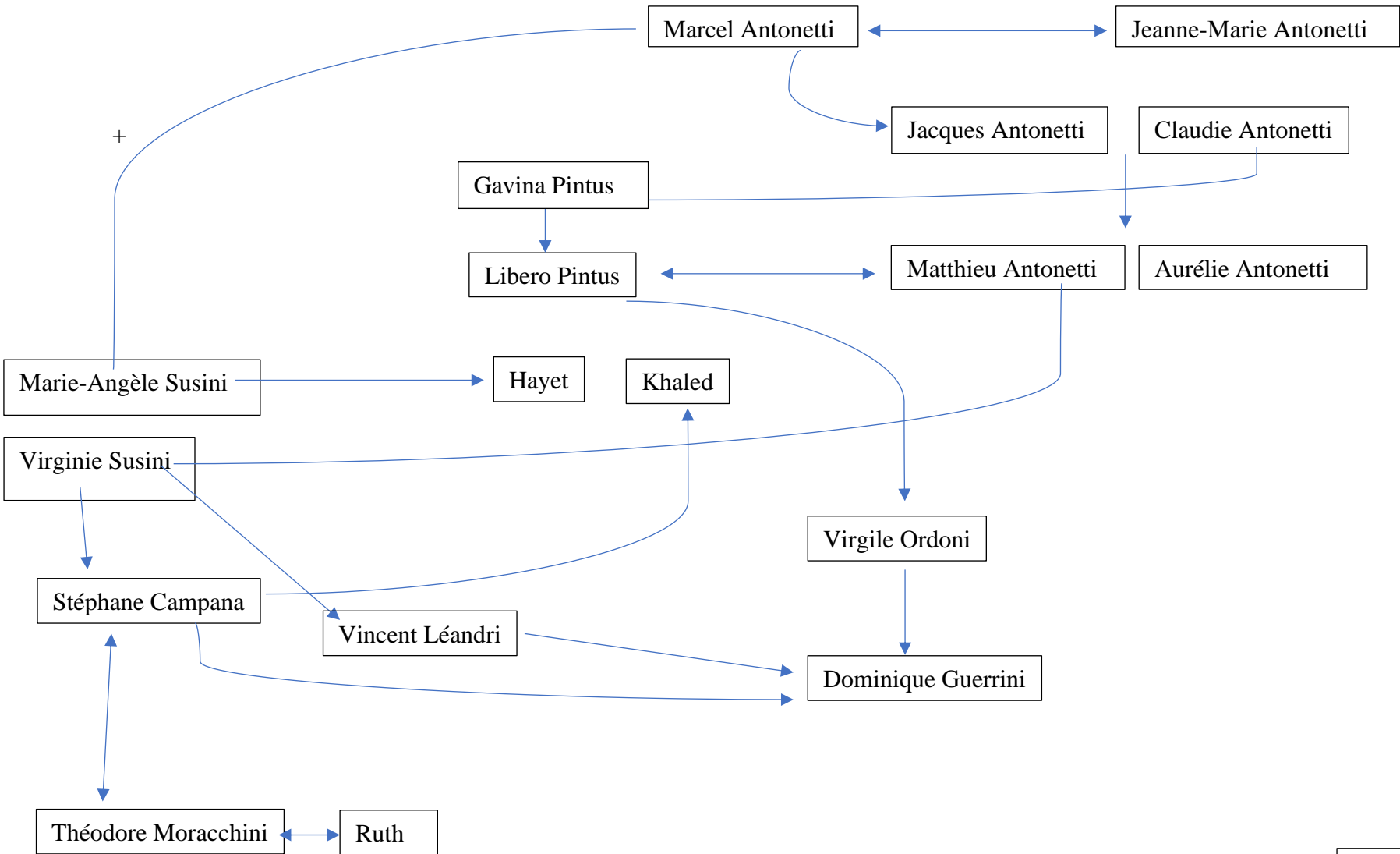


Figure 1

The Narrative World of Jérôme Ferrari’s *Variétés de la Mort* (selections; 2001), *Balco Atlantico* (2008) and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (2012)

Central Character	Narrative Appearances	Biography
Marcel Antonetti	<i>Où j’ai laissé mon âme</i> <i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i>	Marcel Antonetti first appears in <i>Où l’ai laissé mon âme</i> as a secondary character. <i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i> opens and closes with the life and death of Marcel Antonetti, grandfather of <i>Le Sermon</i> ’s central character, Matthieu Antonetti. Born shortly after WWI, Marcel serves as a soldier in WW2 (along with many other drafted Corsicans) and is left disenchanted at the war’s conclusion, which takes its toll on his family members whom he often verbally abuses and blames for his misery. After the war, he finds a position in the colonial administration of different colonies in Africa and later survives the wars of Algerian independence (1954-1962). A serious illness brings him back “vers le village de son enfance” (<i>Sermon</i> , p. 148) in Corsica – Olmiccia, where Matthieu manages the village tavern alongside Libero Pintus. He is the father of Jacques Antonetti, father of Matthieu Antonetti.
Hayet - Khaled	<i>Balco Atlantico (Hayet and Khaled)</i> <i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome (only Hayet)</i>	Hayet and Khaled are two siblings originally from Morocco who emigrate to Corsica to join an uncle who has been living in the island for quite some time in southern Corsica; “Balco Atlantico” refers to their home in Larache, Morocco (map). Hayet finds employment in the bar owned by Marie-Angèle Susini and becomes the object of endless sexual harassment and aggression by Vincent Léandri and Tony Versini, two of Stéphane’s associates and bar regulars. After the death of her brother and then that of Stéphane Campana, she leaves the bar and the village once and for all, and never returns (which occurs at the opening of <i>Le Sermon</i>). Khaled never secures legal employment, and in his desperation to provide for his sister, begins to traffic drugs into and around the region of Sartène
Marie-Angèle Susini -Virginie	<i>Balco Atlantico</i> <i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i>	A childhood friend of Marcel Antonetti, Marie-Angèle Susini is the daughter of a woman deeply estranged from her own family because of a series of abortions and stillbirths resulting from extramarital sexual intercourse. Marie-Angèle’s daughter, Virginie, is often present in and around the bar. Virginie, even though a pre-teen, becomes the object of Stéphane Campana’s sexual attraction, although he promises to her that he will never engage in sexual activity, despite mutual interest, until she is of age. Once of legal age, Virginie begins an intense relationship with him, to the continued ire of his mother, and after his assassination in the middle of the street, Marie-Angèle describes her reaction to Théodore Moracchini, “Oh! Théodore! Je ne suis pas très croyante mais j’ai remercié Dieu de m’avoir permis de contempler de mes yeux la charogne de ce porc!” (<i>Balco</i> , p. 18).
Théodore Moracchini - Ruth	<i>Variétés de la mort, “Un sol natal” & “Ethnologues”</i> <i>Balco Atlantico (only Théodore)</i>	Théodore Moracchini (husband of Ruth) first appears in “Un sol natal” (<i>Variétés de la mort</i>) as a disenchanted and philandering anthropologist whose academic future is destined to mediocrity. An unlikely invitation to travel to the Amazon rainforest for a research project present itself, which results in significant plagiarism, and his departure from Paris to Corte, Corsica (without his family). In Corsica, Théodore reconnects with his familial roots and origins, all the while teaching and leading research (“Ethnologues”) and later interacts presumably with Stéphane Campana in <i>Balco Atlantico</i> . In <i>Balco Atlantico</i> , Théo often frequents the bar managed by Marie-Angèle

		Susini. Across all three narratives, Théo often suffers from intense hallucinations and deliria that take form as historical episodes (“Ethnologues” and “Un sol natal”) and as “Excès de mémoire” (as the chapters are titled in <i>Balco Atlantico</i>).
Matthieu Antonetti	<i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i>	The grandson of Marcel Antonetti, son of Jacques and Claudie Antonetti, brother to Aurélie Antonetti, an archeologist who frequently travels between Paris and Algeria. In his childhood, Matthieu often spends school holidays and summer vacations in Olmiccia where he befriends Libero Pintus and Virgile Ordoni. While his grandfather’s financial contribution is what affords the purchase of the bar, Matthieu is often absent from its management, leaving Libero in charge of daily operations. Jacques Antonetti falls gravely ill and dies in a Parisian hospital, Matthieu chooses not to return to Paris to be with his family, setting in place a significant rift with his family. His life begins to spiral out of control as the success of the bar dwindles and his relationship with Libero strains. He returns to Corsica for the last time to testify against Libero Pintus in his murder trial for the death of Virgile Ordoni.
Libero Pintus	<i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i>	Libero Pintus of Olmiccia, Corsica, is a stand-out academic whose successes propel him through the university life in Paris, which he can afford because Matthieu Antonetti’s family relationships with the Pintus (Matthieu’s mother, Claudie is a long-time friend of Gavina Pintus). Disappointed with the prospects that life in Paris offers, Libero returns to Olmiccia and takes on management and ownership of the bar. Falling into the same misadventures as previous owners (the greed of cash; addiction to sex, drugs, and alcohol), Libero throws himself into a dark world, haunted by violence. Following a dispute at the bar, he kills his childhood mentor and friend Virgile Ordoni.
Stéphane Campana	<i>Balco Atlantico</i>	Stéphane Campana is an avowed nationalist whose activism begins in earnest at the Université de Corse-Corte, where he crosses paths in class with Théodore Moracchini. He entertains a deeply erotic, but not sexual, relationship with Virginie Susini, who remained a minor for much of their relationship; Marie-Angèle abhors Stéphane and celebrates his death with Théodore Moracchini. Stéphane Campana is responsible for several deaths, most notably of Dominique Guerrini (<i>Balco</i> , p. 178). He is killed in the street in front of Marie-Angèle’s home by Vincent Léandri.
Vincent Léandri	<i>Balco Atlantico</i> <i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i>	Vincent Léandri recalls the mysterious “Régimbart” of Gustave Flaubert’s <i>L’Éducation sentimentale</i> – a character who is often present at the tavern run by Marie-Angèle Susini where he sexually harasses and insults Hayet for her Moroccan origins. Towards the end of <i>Balco Atlantico</i> , he begins a relationship with Virginie Susini, through whom he learns of Stéphane Campana’s involvement in the death of his friend, Dominique Guerrini. Vincent is responsible for the assassination of Stéphane Campana in front of the home of Marie-Angèle Susini, while Virginie is inside.

<p>Virgile Ordoni</p>	<p><i>Balco Atlantico</i> <i>Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome</i></p>	<p>Virgile Ordoni is a village outsider, socially removed all the while heavily involved in different relationships. He is closely tied to Libero Pintus and Matthieu Antonetti, whose introduction takes place while Virgile “occupé à châtrer les jeunes verrats regroupés dans un enclos” (<i>Sermon</i>, p. 38). He supplies the bar with much of its local produce (cheese, charcuterie) to “saigner honnêtement” the influx of tourists (<i>Sermon</i>, p. 96). Virgile is directly involved in the death of a minor character, Pierre-Emmanuel Colonna, whom he castrates in the street. Maimed and bleeding in the street, Pierre-Emmanuel is shot at point-blank range by Libero.</p>
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1. *Quête de sens (insulaire?): Théodore Moracchini, Monologue, and the Insular Beacon*

Théodore Moracchini is one of two characters in this corpus with access to monologue, which, by Hamon's definition, elevates him to the status of a primary (dominant) character in the diegetic world crafted by Jérôme Ferrari. Furthermore, he is one of the only characters to appear in multiple novels, even though he descends into figurative abstraction in *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. He is a very complicated character because rarely do we witness him actively engaging with others. Instead, he operates as a persistent observer behind the scenes and reporter of events around him, as though each chapter were a page of his personal diary. While Woloch emphasizes the importance of competition and dominance in his articulation of "character space," this question regarding Théodore Moracchini is not really one of displacement but more so the reach of one's voice: Théodore is not the loudest person in the room but is the only upon whom most, if not all, others rely on to exist. In some ways, he is a narrative gatekeeper because it is from his memories and recollections that many of these events and personages exist. At the same time, the uncertainty of his own memories raises the question of his reliability as a narrator to begin with. His power of monologue however transmits one of the most important stories of them all in Ferrari's work – Théodore's response to the call of the island to return, the call of the *sol natal*. Drawing inspiration from Woloch's notion of "character space" and Hamon's hierarchy of characters based on access to monologue, our analysis of Théodore Moracchini will focus on the conflicting ways in which the insular space is packaged as a safe haven, filled with the restorative promises of insularity and isolation that quickly reveal themselves as broken promises. At the very center of Théodore Moracchini's extended monologue is a reflection on the true nature of the *sol natal* and whether its call is not only heard, but worth hearing from the outset.

The insular cosmos is a concept we have often insisted on throughout this larger study with an emphasis on the ways in which various rituals, customs, and traditions distinguish the insular experience (e.g., funerary traditions). However, up until this point we have engaged little with the specific call that emanates from the island itself, the *pharos* that brings those from afar into its clutches. What, if anything, brings anyone to the island? Many of Jérôme Ferrari's characters discern this beacon through the dim of their own lives and surrender to its appeal to leave behind their life, if only temporarily, for want of something, anything better. But is it all that is promised? I propose to focus first on the early iterations of Théodore Moracchini's character³⁹⁷ within the collection *Variétés de la mort*, focusing on two short stories, "Un sol natal" and "Ethnologues" to discern the attraction of the *sol natal* and the empty promises that are found there. These stories are starting points for a deeply troubled character and are therefore important for the ways in which they frame the island as a presumptively restorative space of refuge, developed more concretely in *Balco Atlantico*, but never fully realized.

Islands attract for far more than just their natural beauty and relative isolation. Writing of the continued appeal of islands, Gilles Deleuze observes that the insular space serves as a zone of personal detachment and reconnection:

L'élan de l'homme qui l'entraîne vers les îles reprend le double mouvement qui produit les îles en elles-mêmes. Rêver des îles, avec angoisse ou joie peu importe, c'est rêver qu'on se

³⁹⁷ In an interview, Jérôme Ferrari elaborates on his inspiration for this character and his amusement with writing his existence: "Ce personnage apparaît dans deux nouvelles dans *Variétés de la mort*, et je me suis beaucoup amusé à l'écrire. C'est un personnage que je ne peux faire apparaître qu'à la première personne, parce que j'ai bien en tête sa manière de parler et de penser systématiquement ignoble. À l'époque, j'écrivais avec Marcu Biancarelli, il écrivait son recueil de nouvelles [*Prighjuneri, Prisonnier* (nouvelles), Ajaccio, Albiana, 2001, translated by Jérôme Ferrari], on rigolait beaucoup. Dans *Balco Atlantico*, j'ai eu très envie de le faire revenir et j'ai vraiment essayé de faire en sorte que ce qu'on apprenait dans *Balco Atlantico* reste cohérent avec ce qu'on savait de lui depuis *Variétés de la mort*. Pendant *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, vu qu'il est plutôt calme et un peu sous cachets, il est à la maison, il n'a plus de raisons d'apparaître au bar. Je suppose qu'il coule une existence paisible et morne avec Marie-Angèle" in *Chutes, ruptures, et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari, op. cit.*, p. 245-6.

sépare, qu'on est déjà séparé, loin des continents, qu'on est seul et perdu – ou bien c'est rêver qu'on repart à zéro, qu'on recrée, qu'on recommence.³⁹⁸

The appeal of the island is found both in its separation from the mainland and its potential as a starting point for different personal experiences altogether (“rêver qu'on repart à zéro, qu'on recrée, qu'on recommence”). As a form of personal and geographical isolation and exclusion, according to Deleuze, insularity offers the possibility of restoration for the individual *because* of separation and disarticulation from a mainland. In this sense, this is the call of the island, the beacon it emanates. We can observe this “double mouvement” in the various appearances of Théodore Moracchini who flees Paris and lands in Corte, and later in Olmiccia. His quest for academic and personal glory results in his separation from his world, from which only an escape to a world separated from the rest, Corsica, can hope to restore and offer respite.

The narrative webs begin to tangle with the overlap of “Un sol natal” and “Ethnologues” as both narratives recount Théodore’s academic and social experiences in Corte. “Ethnologues,” serves to fill in the different gaps present in “Un sol natal” where his university experience is referenced but not explained in further detail³⁹⁹:

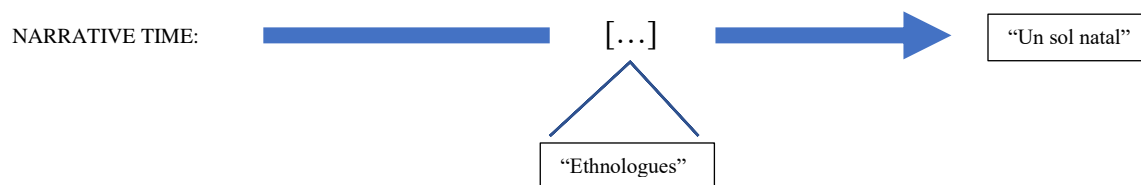


Figure 2: Temporal Overlap of “Un sol natal” and “Ethnologues”

³⁹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, “Causes et raisons des îles désertes,” *L’Île déserte. Textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, coll. “Paradoxes,” 2002, p. 15.

³⁹⁹ The lack of information provided is what Gérard Genette has identified as an “ellipse explicite”, cf. Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. “Poétique,” 1972, p. 139-40.

As a result of this coincidence in temporal layers of narrative, both stories momentarily share the same diegetic space and time and thus create a complementary pair of narratives that portray early moments in Théodore Moracchini's experiences in Corsica. While "Ethnologues" extrapolates some of the details of "Un sol natal," both narratives are similarly organized around scenes of university life interspersed with episodes of Théodore's schizophrenic hallucinations of important scenes and personages in Corsican history.

Théodore Moracchini first appears in "Un sol natal" at the conclusion of his graduate studies that do not end with the long-awaited spectacular doctoral dissertation defense presentation: "J'étais resté digne en m'entendant décerner d'un ton condescendant la mention assez honorable — alors que dans la scène de mes rêves tous les membres du jury m'ovationnaient debout et en larmes" (*Variétés*, p. 59). The shame and humiliation of an "assez honorable" oral defense sends him spiraling towards his own demise into a mediocre life replete with indifferent ambition: "C'était la confrontation avec la conséquence horriblement concrète de ces petits mots, *mention assez honorable*, non pas la conclusion d'études brillantes mais le début d'une vie entièrement médiocre" (*Variétés*, p. 71). A mediocre thesis begets a mediocre teaching position "dans une obscure université de banlieue" where he teaches "négligemment l'anthropologie à quelques Arabes fourvoyés et à un Tchèque anémique — et je périssais d'ennui" (*ibid.*). Théodore palliates his *ennui* with alcohol and a series of extra-marital affairs that upends his marriage to his wife Ruth, along with the relationship with his own children, his professional responsibilities, with everything: "Baiser avec une ardeur névrotique était mon seul but, mon unique ambition et pour le reste, je me montrais digne de mon père: tout se perdait dans la renonciation" (*ibid.*). This trajectory towards self-destruction is interrupted by a last-minute invitation to travel to Venezuela and Colombia to conduct ethnological research about "les Ti-Gwai," a population indigenous to

the Amazon rainforest. Seeing this opportunity as a path to reclaim the glorious title of a university professor, Théodore commits a significant act of plagiarism and misrepresents his research and his conclusions. Nevertheless, he manages to publish to such successful acclaim that he merits a “nomination comme professeur d’université, à l’âge exceptionnel de trente-trois ans” (*Variétés*, p. 81). Contrary to what he expects, his life remains as hollow as it has always been, filled only with the fleeting gratification that frequent sex and alcoholic intoxication can provide. In a moment of sudden self-recognition or awareness, he decides that “le plus simple est encore de faire ce que je fis moi-même, sans ménagements, sans compassion, je veux dire—fuir” (*Variétés*, p. 83) towards another “sol natal, n’importe quoi, avant de crever, de me retrouver vraiment à la rue, et dans mon demi-sommeil, je pensai à la Corse” (*Variétés*, p. 88). His decision to flee (“fuir”) suggests that his destination might be one of safe harbor or sanctuary (a tradition of Corsican hospitality, as it were), but as we will see, his hopes for Corsica evaporate in the blink of an eye. Théodore’s tumultuous experience at the Università di Corsica and in the city of Corte will continue to raise questions about the meaning of Corsica as a “sol natal” and the nature of the beacon that brings Théodore back to its shore to teach at the Università di Corsica in Corte where his life will continue to spiral out of control.

In “Ethnologues,” Théodore returns to the island where his father was born, and who likely was forced to emigrate in the years following World War II. As for many in continental Europe, the world war was a significant disruption; however, in the aftermath of the wars, insular communities saw significant numbers of their own leave for the Continent in search of better economic opportunity in coastal cities such as Marseille and Nice. If we are to trust the supposed age of Théodore as indeed 33 years old (the age of his tenured promotion) and his family situation, the 1990s narrative setting would likely place him as a second-generation “Continental” French

citizen (his father being born in the 1940s?) for whom Corsica remains a place of familial origin. Contemplating his present decision to return to the island, memories begin to surge from the depths: “La dernière fois que j’y ai mis les pieds, j’avais huit ans. C’était un mois d’août torride et je m’ennuyais consciencieusement dans la maison de mes grands-parents paternels, dans un village dont j’ai oublié le nom et l’aspect général” (*Variétés*, p. 88). Crossing time and space, his sudden reminiscence brings him to a clearly defined memory and moment, but in an undefined space lacking any contours (“dont j’ai oublié le nom et l’aspect général”). The village and the island remain but a foggy detail in Théodore’s memory. Nevertheless, the experience and memories of the village rise to the surface, although initially with unfortunate associations, like when Théodore was played with a bit *too* roughly by other children in the village, his mother runs out of the house screaming at his father, “Des sauvages! tranche ma mère en se signant. Comme tous les habitants de ce pays! Je pense que tu auras compris qu’il est tout à fait hors de question pour nous de revenir y passer nos vacances. Mon père baissa la tête sans répondre” (*Variétés*, p. 89). This memory serves to exemplify the divide the experiences between his life on the Continent, the life of the village, and the unenviable position of his father who is torn between two families. Further still, the Us/Them-Continent/Island binary encourages Théodore to question himself whether he is a part of that “Them” and of the “There” of the island: “Comment comprendre que cette terre étrangère ait pu malgré tout éveiller en moi la bienfaisante brûlure de la nostalgie alors que seul mon nom de famille me reliait à elle?” (*Variétés*, p. 89). An excellent question indeed – how do you (re)connect to the place where you only have the vaguest and most fleeting of memories?

The autodiegetic narrative perspective centers on the conflictual process of (re)connection with the long-forgotten insular community, its stories, and ultimately, Théodore’s Corsican heritage. While other characters and events appear in third-person forms in “Un sol natal” and

“Ethnologues,” the monologue elevates the flight (*fuir, la fuite*) of the character to that of a central narrative element, subordinating the stories of others (although not eliminating them entirely). The beacon of the island becomes the pulse of the story itself. But this heartbeat is not as restorative or protective as Théodore would have hoped. While Corsica becomes his new home, its ability to provide refuge is limited: “La Corse ne valait pas mieux que le reste” (*Variétés*, p. 92). He arrives on the island only to find a replication of the world he just departed, although this time filled with those who also heard the call of the island to return but also found nothing instead:

Je trouvai tant de gens qui me ressemblaient que j’en eus la nausée: absents depuis des décennies, dérivant sur leurs propres orbites aléatoires, si incapables de se supporter qu’il leur fallait à tout prix savoir ce qu’ils étaient, qu’il leur fallait être quelque chose, ils s’étaient soudain imaginé qu’ils avaient une patrie et ils étaient revenus, tout comme moi, bercés par la symphonie lyrique de leurs illusions (*Variétés*, p. 90)

This passage is a beautiful demonstration of the lyrical void of the island at the center of Ferrari’s work(s). Those of the Corsican diaspora, “absents depuis des décennies,” float through space along “orbites aléatoires” that they mistakenly assume can be course-corrected by landing in Corsica. This promise of reconnection with cultural, familial, or even personal histories is nothing but “[une] symphonie lyrique de leurs illusions” that leaves them all “paumé[s] en quête de sens” (*Variétés*, p. 90-1). This insular beacon, is it a light of false hope? An impossible promise of adventure or restoration? The realization that the “quête de sens” is destined for failure pushes Théodore over the edge and towards his first in a long series of schizophrenic hallucinations casting figures of Corsican history, embodied (in spirit form) by “Gianfranco de Lanfranchi,” who appears as “une silhouette précise mais translucide” (*Variétés*, p. 94). Weeks and months pass in Gianfranco’s company where discussions of “[la] vente inique aux Français” (i.e., the Republic of Genoa’s cession of Corsica to the French; *Variétés*, p. 106) are followed by glorious tales of Pasquale Paoli’s courage and valor against “Les Français qui nous attaquèrent au début du moi de

mai 1769” (*Variétés*, p. 107). The force and vitality of these discussions with Gianfranco push Théodore to further investigate their traces in the university library and archives only to discover his stories of military might and glory were lies – Gianfranco collaborated with both the Genoese and the French to exterminate Corsican resistance: Théodore screams at the fantom, “Ignominie! Vous avez sur la conscience un nombre de morts incalculables, vous avez trahi votre pays et votre chef, et vous voudriez que j’apprécie encore votre compagnie?” (*Variétés*, p. 115). This revelation is destructive because it shows the illusions of the *possibility* for any attachment to the past in Corsica. The stories of legendary grandeur, of valiant efforts to combat the French, of the heroism of Corsicans, are inventions. The legends of the past are themselves phantomatic. Much like the truth of banditry to Marc Biancarelli’s *Vénérande*, they are fictions. However, there is some comfort found in these stories and episodes of the past, even if entirely devoid of truth: “J’irai m’asseoir dans le fauteuil du salon, je boirai du whisky et, avec Gianfranco, nous parlerons encore tous les deux – et désormais sans vous” (*Variétés*, p. 121).

Is there a *sens insulaire*? If we take Théodore Morrachini’s experiences as our guide, the answer is likely, “not really” or “at least, not a positive one.” What he finds there is nothing but a lack or, to use his expression, “ce fut le désespoir” (*Variétés*, p. 93). It is almost as though in Corsica the present exists independently of the past; neither depend on the other for survival. There is however a glimmer of hope found deep within the recesses of the archive: Théodore finally succeeds in calming down his life. He finds solace. While his hallucinations of Corsican history might have their facts a bit distorted, Théodore finds comfort in them because of the requisite confrontation between what he thought he wanted and what he obtains. There is still something quite intriguing about this story of a man, a ghost, and the archive: Ferrari’s point is also that the voice of the “sol natal,” the beacon that reaches far and wide, is not heard at the surface level of

Corsican communities; instead, one must dig, one must *re-learn* the stories of the past for there to be any hope at transmitting what remains of insular culture. From this perspective, Ferrari's stories, while deeply critical of contemporary society, supply the remedy to its own ills; the archive where the *sens insulaire corse* is best found is in the insular voice itself, in literature. The *sol natal* is the page, the text, the novel that (re)constructs the origins of Corsican society and culture, ones that Marc Biancarelli and Marie Ferranti, each in their own way, add their voices to form a harmonious *polyphonie corse*.

2. *The Character-Spaces of Hayet and Khaled: Immigration, Temporality, and Insularity*

The calls and beacons of the island are however not entirely welcome invitations by all. In *Balco Atlantico*, race, ethnicity, and cultural identity are very much at the center of character interactions and of the social dynamics animating life in Olmiccia. Ethnicity and cultural identity determine the scope and the extent to which many in the village interact with two siblings, Hayet and Khaled, two young Moroccan immigrants who settle in Ajaccio (Khaled) and in Olmiccia (Hayet). The narrative presences and powers of displacement of this brother-sister tandem raise important concerns for how communities of different ethnic heritages and experiences interact with one another in the insular landscape of Corsica, bringing into the forefront (Corsican) insularity's ultimate challenge – the existence of a border made permeable by immigration. Relating to these characters through the prism of their ethnicity and perceptions as cultural outsiders brings to the surface important questions of immigration and insularity that Jérôme Ferrari frames through the discourse of Corsican political movements for increased autonomy and/or political independence. Here, we will focus on the challenge to deeply rooted notions of *corsité* in *Balco Atlantico* by the presence of North African immigrant communities setting down

roots within the contemporary Corsican village, conflicts and cultural tensions brought to the forefront through specific narrative strategies that ground interpersonal relationships within the novel.

Immigrants from Algeria and Morocco are two of the most sizable immigrant communities in contemporary Corsica.⁴⁰⁰ The historical origins of these communities settling in various parts of Corsica can be traced back to colonial-era agricultural programs, as Marie Peretti-Ndayie observes, and particularly those supporting Corsican viticulture in colonized lands:

Depuis plusieurs décennies, la physionomie des ‘entrants’ a changé en Corse. À des vagues migratoires originaires principalement d’Italie, et souvent saisonnières, ont ainsi succédé des flux originaires principalement du Maroc et du Portugal. La proportion importante de Marocains dans la population étrangère est liée à l’histoire coloniale. Nombre d’immigrés originaires du Rif ont en effet suivi les viticulteurs qui les employaient déjà en Algérie et qui ont été ‘rapatriés’ en Corse [after Algerian independence], impulsant ainsi des flux migratoires qui perdurent jusqu’à aujourd’hui.⁴⁰¹

As kinship migration expanded in the wake of decolonialism, immigrant communities began to develop in several regions of eastern and southern Corsica known for intensive agricultural exploitation and viticultural investment: “Les Marocains vivent essentiellement sur la Plaine Orientale (de l’agriculture), dans l’Est de l’île, le grand Sud, la Balagne, et dans les deux pôles urbains que sont Bastia et Ajaccio [...] Cette répartition spatiale découle directement des emplois à occuper.”⁴⁰²

⁴⁰⁰ Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), “Étrangers – Immigrés en 2016. Région de Corse (94),” June 25, 2019, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4177174?sommaire=4177618&geo=REG-94>

⁴⁰¹ Marie Peretti-Ndayie, “Passé colonial et phénomènes contemporains d’identification et d’altérisation. Le prisme corse,” *L’Homme et la société* (eds. Bernard Hous and Thierry Pouch), No. 175 “Adieux aux colonialismes?,” 2010, p. 90.

⁴⁰² Marie Mathieu and Rachid Alaoui, “L’immigration marocaine en Corse: une force de travail silencieuse,” *Hommes et migrations*, “Marocains de France et d’Europe”, No. 1242 (March-April), 2003, p. 56; DOI <https://doi.org/10.3406/homig.2003.3973>; see also the recently published work by Antoine Albertini *Les Invisibles: Une enquête en Corse*, Paris, J.C. Lattès, coll. “Les invisibles,” 2018 (in paperback, Éditions Points, coll. “J. C. Lattès,” 2018).

A similar pattern of kinship migration brings both Hayet and Khaled to Corsica. The siblings are originally from the area surrounding Tangiers, Morocco and they often spent their afternoons on the city's seaside boardwalk, "Balco Atlantico." The expansive oceanic horizon gives way to reflection on the restrictions and limitations the sea imposes on their lives: "Les gens aiment venir se promener ici parce que l'horizon est immense. Mais que vois-tu en réalité? L'océan est un mur, nous sommes entourés de murs, il y a des murs liquides et des murs solides. Nous sommes toujours du mauvais côté" (*Balco*, p. 40). The stark contrast is very poignant between "les gens" (tourists? wealthy residents?) who come to admire and take in the expansive horizon are those who can *traverse* the "murs liquides"; on the other side, the locals, such as Hayet and Khaled, whose lives are blocked by its expansiveness ("nous sommes toujours du mauvais côté"). For these siblings, the path to a better life will involve skirting the walls of the Mediterranean Sea, finding their momentary weak points, and allowing enough time for them to attempt a passage across its dangerous waters migrating from Tangiers to Marseille to Ajaccio to Olmiccia: "Khaled donne la moitié de l'argent au passeur [...] Il ne veut pas se faire avoir et que nous nous retrouvions à l'aube, seuls et sans un sou, sur une autre plage d'Afrique" (*Balco*, p. 77). Wary of what is yet to come, the crossing to Corsica and the first sights of the island leave Hayet deeply uneasy about the promise of this future life and longing for the comforting familiarity of her home:

Je suis encore si triste à Marseille, en prenant le bateau. Le lendemain, dans l'aube pluvieuse, nous voyons, depuis le pont, la grande masse sombre de l'île percer la brume. Je me sens emplie de crainte, pas même de curiosité, en découvrant de loin la terre sur laquelle je devrai vivre. Notre oncle nous a dit qu'elle était très belle. Mais, sous les nuages bas, elle ne fait que rendre ma tristesse plus poignante (*Balco*, p. 78).

This eerie confrontation with the imposing geology of the island is a common rite of passage to the insular experience itself as we have seen previously in our discussions of the literary trope of

La Robinsonnade.⁴⁰³ This entrance into the insular realm will however not be alleviated once the ship reaches port and the siblings disembark from the ship. Reaching the port of Ajaccio might indeed be *terra firma* but their futures are far from secure. After their first week, “Nous quittons notre oncle. Khaled a trouvé du travail. Il est plongeur dans un restaurant qui le loge. Et moi, j’ai rencontré Marie-Angèle Susini” (*ibid.*). Meeting Marie-Angèle Susini will prove fateful, and fatal, for everyone.

The promise of a better financial situation is not matched by the new circumstances of their lives. For Khaled, life above the restaurant where he is employed in Ajaccio is drab, dirty, and indecent: “Il dit que c’est quand même mieux que chez nous. Dans un sens, c’est vrai mais chez nous, au moins, il y a une porte aux toilettes” (*Balco*, p. 108). In Olmiccia, Marie-Angèle offers her employee, Hayet, more comfortable material conditions at the expense of deep personal discomfort and insecurity:

- Il est content d’apprendre que j’ai une belle chambre, avec une salle de bains, juste au-dessus du bar. Il demande si tout le monde se comporte correctement avec moi. Je lui dis que Marie-Angèle est une femme adorable, qui a une petite fille, et que les hommes qui fréquentent le bar, des habitués, sont très gentils et ne permettraient pas qu’on me fasse du mal. Je pourrai venir te voir un jour, dit Khaled
- Non, je pense que non. Tu sais pourquoi. (*ibid.*)

Khaled’s worry about whether Hayet is treated both *well* and *respectfully* (“correctement”) demonstrates his fraternal concern as well as his own anxieties about how immigrants are received in Hayet’s community (and perhaps his own). Hayet’s hesitant tone in her refusal that he come to

⁴⁰³ This particular passage from *Balco Atlantico* echoes our earlier discussions about *La Robinsonnade* that left its imprint on several 19th-century travel narratives and narrative fictions, including Gustave Flaubert’s *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* (1840) and Prosper Mérimée’s *Colomba* (1839). In each example, including the one from Ferrari’s narrative shown here, the stress and anxiety of the crossing darkens the maritime horizon (often rife with potential for shipwreck) but are alleviated once safely docked in port. Cf. Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*, New York, St. Martins, Press, 1990; Valérie Stiénon, “La robinsonnade d’anticipation: Sur une forme composite et ses péripéties,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2015, pp. 250-266. Project Muse: doi:10.1353/nf.2015.0006.

the bar (“Non, je pense que non”) shows that she already understands the wider community’s dynamics of race and ethnicity, its anti-immigrant stance, especially in Ajaccio: “Dans toute la ville, il n’y a qu’un seul bar dans lequel se retrouvent les Arabes. Ce n’est pas seulement par goût d’être ensemble [...] Ici aussi, il y a des murs invisibles” (*ibid.*). Like the “murs liquides” that enclosed Hayet and Khaled in Morocco, the social and ethnic “murs” are invisible boundaries drawn around different quadrants of a community and as a result, vastly different experiences within the same *spatial* community.

At this point, I would like to return to the notion of “character-space” as an entry point to a deeper understanding of the social dynamics at play in Ferrari’s novel as they relate to the confined space of the village itself. Drawing attention to these complicated relationships reveals the importance of different character tandems for the social value of Ferrari’s work. Alex Woloch’s elaboration of the “character-space” relies on an analysis of the functional role of the character and their interaction with others in the narrative space. If we apply Philippe Hamon’s perspective that access to a character’s inner thoughts draws the bright-line distinction between heroes of the novel, Hayet emerges as one of the novel’s central protagonists, alongside Théodore Moracchini, as well as a narrator in her own right. Hayet’s role as a central protagonist, I argue, stems from her power to bend the trajectories of others *towards* her, in addition to her power of monologue (to apply Hamon’s definition to the chapters of the Ferrari’s novel entitled “Derrière vous, la mer”). The power of introspection and of self-talk is how this character resists what Alex Woloch considers the “flattening” of figures in the narrative, leaving them only to their physical presence in a scene: “Narrative flatness, in fact, produces a disjunction between ‘personality’ and ‘presence,’ disassociating the full weight of interior character from its delimited, distorted exterior

manifestation.”⁴⁰⁴ Hayet leaps off the pages of the novel and indeed runs away from the space of the narrative itself. Hayet’s central role runs counter to the social exclusion and manipulation she experiences within the social strata of the village. As a central figure of the narrative, she asserts her primacy as she warps the (narrative) space around her: when around other characters, their attention is always focused on her. It is her presence that becomes cherished, protected, and resented. Her movements influence those around her, although she is socially confined to the space of the bar itself. Hayet becomes a central figure around whom all characters will orbit, but not without significant resistance.

An unwanted sexual advance is the catalyst for the disaggregation of Olmiccia. At the bar, Hayet becomes the target of relentless sexual harassment by some of the regular customers, initially “très gentils,” but now questioning the limits of their curiosity for Hayet: could one from the group sleep with Hayet, even though she is “une Arabe”? Torn between his sexual curiosity and his racialized views of the world, Tony Versini gives in to his aversion to mixed-race sexual attraction: “Tony entreprit de s’expliquer. Ce n’était pas la question que la fille soit belle ou pas, ni qu’elle lui plaise, c’est juste qu’il ne pouvait pas baiser une Arabe” (*Balco*, p. 122). Hearing this remark, the bar erupts into a brawl: Hayet strikes Tony; Marie-Angèle “se mit à lui faire des reproches auxquelles il ne savait pas quoi répondre” (*Balco*, p. 125); Vincent Léandri promises him “la raclée de [sa] vie”; Dominique Guerrini guarantees the threat to Tony adding, “Et quand tu te relèves de la rouste de Vincent, moi, je te donne le reste. Va te coucher, redescends en ville, on t’a assez vu ici” (*ibid.*). How does this interaction relate to Hayet’s primacy in the novel? While the scene itself is narrated from a third-person perspective, it marks a turning point in the social dynamics of the village because Hayet, once an outsider, is now defended by those from within

⁴⁰⁴ Alex Woloch, *The One vs. The Many*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

the community. Moreover, she is now capable of *displacing* others, of pushing other socially dominant characters to social margins such as Tony Versini. This alteration in the power dynamics of the village will have disastrous consequences for her brother, Khaled.

The community's envelope of protection and compassion does not however extend to Khaled, who learns of her mistreatment and directly confronts Tony at the port of Ajaccio, "Le lendemain après-midi, alors qu'il allait acheter des cigarettes sur le port, Tony fut abordé par un Arabe qu'il n'avait jamais vu" (*Balco*, p. 126). Later, Stéphane Campana and Tony Versini track down Khaled to the small studio apartment he shares with his roommate Ryad, located above the restaurant where he is employed as a dishwasher:

Tony et Stéphane tirèrent en même temps. Il alla s'écrouler sur les toilettes à la turque, dos au mur. Ils entrèrent dans la pièce pour lui donner le coup de grâce. Sur leur gauche, assis sur un lit, un autre Arabe les regardait, la bouche ouverte. Stéphane s'approcha rapidement et lui tira deux balles dans la tête (*Balco*, p. 128).

Khaled's death, I argue, is derivative of the displacement of narrative centrality of Stéphane Campana and his attempts to reclaim some level of authority in the village by targeting one of the characters he finds most responsible for its demise. From this grisly murder, Olmiccia spirals out of control in a stunning degeneration of truth, ideals, and community covered in the blood of Stéphane Campana, Dominique Guerrini, and the departure of Hayet.⁴⁰⁵

In a bout of discursive gymnastics and manipulation of the details, Stéphane justifies his openly admitted execution of Khaled and Ryad as a necessary means to combat a wave of drug trafficking in the region. Out of others in the social group, including Dominique Guerrini and Vincent Léandri, Stéphane Campana is the most outraged by the attack on Tony: "Il croyait

⁴⁰⁵ Hayet's departure from Olmiccia is confirmed at the beginning of *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (2012), "Au milieu de la nuit, en prenant soin de ne faire aucun bruit quoique personne ne pût l'entendre, Hayet referma la porte du petit appartement qu'elle avait occupé pendant huit ans au-dessus du bar dans lequel elle travaillait comme serveuse et puis elle disparut" (p. 25).

pouvoir compter sur les siens et, apparemment, ce n'était pas le cas, le premier Arabe venu pouvait faire n'importe quoi, et tout le monde trouvait ça normal" (*Balco*, p. 127). Few of the others question Tony's behavior and involvement in the situation and express little interest in the event, despite the humiliation of their friend: "Ni Dominique ni Vincent ne furent particulièrement émus par son aventure" (*ibid.*). The unresponsive ambivalence of those present in the bar is understood as a silent, tacit acceptance of Tony's assault on the port, for which Stéphane has no patience. This situation rapidly degenerates towards a claim that community values have been affronted by "le premier Arabe venu faire n'importe quoi" and action must be taken, "ce n'était que justice" (*ibid.*). The "justice" that Stéphane Campana calls for is predicated on the racially charged suggestion that the entire problem is the result of the deleterious effects of immigration, that combined with drug trafficking presents a threat to the viability of the political aspirations of the FLNC, to which each character is affiliated, in one way or another: "D'après ce que Stéphane savait, le frère de Hayet vendait de la drogue et c'était une activité contre laquelle, dans le passé, le mouvement avait pris des mesures radicales qui pourraient être remises au goût du jour" (*ibid.*). Following Khaled's death, Stéphane replies that the act was the result of his "devoir impérieux de sauver notre identité [...] Et, donc, c'est une initiative qu'il fallait prendre. Surtout maintenant" (*Balco*, p. 130-1).

Both Tony's harassment of Hayet and Stéphane's form of retributive justice are grounded in racial relations and tensions between different ethnic communities. The phrase "(Un/une) Arabe" becomes anaphora. The label is often used to identify certain individuals through direct discourse and narrative perspective: Tony is speaking directly about Hayet in the bar, but prefers to say "une Arabe" rather than the indirect object pronoun "lui" (in English, "her"); the narrator describes the Tony's assailant at the port of Ajaccio as "un Arabe"; the final victim in the apartment

shooting, “un autre Arabe.”⁴⁰⁶ These turns of phrase and shifts in perspective reveal the persistent rifts that continue to divide the community along ethnic and racial lines. Contemporary sociologists Marie Mathie and Rachid Aloui have studied these specific circumstances in Corsican communities from a uniquely sociolinguistic perspective and observe that:

Les immigrés marocains sont la figure de l’Autre, irréductible et non intégrable [...] En réponse à une autre question, les sondés précisait également que le Maghrébin était ‘plus immigré’ que l’Italien ou le Sarde. Étranger devient ainsi synonyme d’altérité culturelle, voire raciale. Au-delà du racisme dit ‘ordinaire’, car banalisé et ‘autorisé’ par une conspiration du silence, le rejet de l’autre se manifeste parfois de manière très violente.⁴⁰⁷

Mathieu’s and Aloui’s conclusion that the figure of the immigrant defined as “l’Autre” serves to define both an individual and a group of individuals is a perspective that underscores how Tony and Stéphane relate to Hayet and Khaled. The violent rejection of “l’Autre” takes shape in *Balco Atlantico* as perceived segregation of ethnicities, as sexual harassment, and through the brutal assassination of Khaled and his roommate. Marie Peretti-Ndiaye further nuances the sociolinguistic discursive function of the term “Arabe” in modern Corsican communities as a tool of social repression:

Ce sont ces émigrés ainsi que leurs enfants, indistinctement nommés “Arabes”, ou parfois, “Maghrébins”, qui constituent ici l’altérité la plus extérieure: dans l’échelle qui va de soi à l’autre, l’Arabe est celui que l’on tient au plus loin. Il s’agit de termes qui ne se réfèrent que vaguement à une attache territoriale ou nationale et induisent une vision uniformisante de l’autre.⁴⁰⁸

What is very engaging in these remarks is that “l’altérité la plus extérieure” is contained within the island. As a result, Stéphane resorts to discursively detaching Hayet from the insular space through the use of the term “Arabe” that “qui ne se réfère[] que vaguement à une attache territoriale.” This

⁴⁰⁶ One could also assert that the narrative shifts perspective briefly into a *focalization interne* that replicates the voice and thought of Tony Versini when *he* sees these two individuals.

⁴⁰⁷ Marie Mathieu and Rachid Alaoui, “L’immigration marocaine en Corse: une force de travail silencieuse,” *op. cit.*, p. 58-9; DOI <https://doi.org/10.3406/homig.2003.3973>.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

term is used to untie whatever connections she might have or will have made with the island itself, to whatever claim to *insularité* she might lay. The proximity of the Other within the physical confines of the island will raise tensions and pose a serious challenge to the social dynamics of insular identity at the core of Stéphane's nationalistic politics.

Hayet's presence in the narrative opens space for discussion about the social importance of *Balco Atlantico* as a portrayal of contemporary Corsican communities faced with the realities of immigration. She and her brother Khaled expose the conflicted and contentious dynamics between communities, while at the same time raising the question of whether these relationships between Insider-and-Outsider are not indeed inherent to Corsican culture itself. As outsiders to the insular community, are Hayet, Khaled, Théodore Moracchini, Matthieu Antonetti, among others, not emblematic of Corsican history and culture? Emigration and immigration have been integral components of Corsican history and culture for several generations to the extent that the imposing monolith is more of a cultural crossroads than what is normally understood:

Sous la III^e République: des départs massifs, parfois de villages entiers, ont lieu vers le Marco, la Tunisie, l'Indochine et toujours l'Algérie. Une part importante de l'administration coloniale a ainsi des origines insulaires [...] Toutefois, durant les soixante premières années du XX^e siècle, les Corses se dirigent prioritairement vers la France métropolitaine, essentiellement vers ses régions méridionales et parisiennes. Près de la moitié de la population de l'île s'exile durant cette période.⁴⁰⁹

The story of Hayet and Khaled's arrival in Corsica, of Khaled's assassination, and of Hayet's acceptance at the very heart of the village all point to the importance of immigration for the broader community. The presence of different cycles of characters and different familial generations from one work to the next allows Ferrari to assert a new vision of Corsican insularity that is defined less

⁴⁰⁹ Marie Mathieu and Rachid Alaoui, "L'immigration marocaine en Corse: une force de travail silencieuse," *op. cit.*, p. 53. For more on immigration, see also: Janine Renucci, *Corse traditionnelle et Corse nouvelle, la géographie d'une île*, Avolin, Lyon, 1974; and, Fanny Colonna, *La vie ailleurs: des "Arabes" en Corse à la fin du XIX^e siècle*, Arles, Actes Sud, coll. "Sinbad", 2015.

by its borders and frontiers, and instead more by the mosaic of its dynamic history and its expansive reach across generations and across boundaries. More importantly, that the trajectories of numerous characters cross paths in Corsica, and more specifically Olmiccia, suggests the vital role of the island as well as both a transitory zone as well as a sort of terminus where an individual can *finally* reconnect with their past to understand their present.

II. *Poétiques temporelles: History, Memory, and Temporality in Balco Atlantico and Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*

In Jérôme Ferrari's novels, the passage of time weighs heavily on the minds of his characters as well as on the structural frameworks of individual narratives. Fluctuations in narrative perspective and temporal order mirror the characters' constant attraction to and aversion towards the past, present, and future. In her analysis of various narratological elements of Ferrari's work, Marine Miquel observes that "les romans de Jérôme Ferrari sont ancrés dans le chaos du monde"⁴¹⁰ to such an extent that "[la catastrophe] épouse la structure même du récit, qui résulte d'écarts spatiaux et temporels faisant éclater toute unité et démultipliant le sentiment de perte."⁴¹¹ Combined with the recycling of numerous characters that ultimately bridge *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, the frenetic disorientation caused by the novels' elaborate structures results in "une myriade de points de vue et donne à entendre maintes tessitures."⁴¹² These numerous voices and perspectives do not, however, always exist on the same temporal plane.

⁴¹⁰ Marine Miquel, "Histoire, espace et structure dans les romans de Jérôme Ferrari. Entre perte et discontinuité," *Chutes, ruptures, et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari, op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² Mathilde Zbaeren, *Les mondes possibles, les romans de Jérôme Ferrari, op. cit.*, p. 25.

At the center of the narrative “chaos” found in both *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* is a conflictual relationship with the present moment. While each character advances through linear time, they often exist entirely in the past where they find the energy and inspiration needed to apprehend and mourn their present. For Hayet and Marcel Antonetti, their engagement with the past allows them to grieve their respective losses and to move on and away from Corsica. Théodore Moracchini’s challenging relationship with his own ability to remember anything real or material finds its solace in the end with Marie-Angèle Susini’s quiet love and compassion. Alternatively, some characters remain fixated on the future for want of an escape of their present. Libero Pintus chases the promise of a future at the expense of his ability to apprehend his present while his friend Matthieu Antonetti locks himself into the indeterminant stasis of the status quo, incapable of action. Stéphane Campana remains fixated on the possibilities and potentials for a *new* Corsica. What does this temporal variability reveal about Ferrari’s vision or understanding of the importance of time within the rural village? What does variable narrative temporality reflect? The sustained manipulation of temporal order with narrative tools such as *anticipation* and *anachronie* portrays the contemporary Corsican community as one at odds with its present in both temporal and cultural terms: Stéphane Campana seeks to evolve insular politics in the direction of full autonomy; the murder of Hayet’s brother will suspend time to bring attention to the continued struggles faced by immigrant communities; Marcel Antonetti will struggle with the present because upon his death, his past too will be forgotten and yet another generation of Corsicans lost in the dust of the archive.

These social and community challenges are enacted most often through the narrative tool known as an *analepse*. More than simply a vehicle for anachronous storytelling, the *analepse* is a structural feature of the narrative that often elucidates a period of time or events not covered by

the central narrative itself: “Toute anachronie constitue par rapport au récit dans lequel elle s’insère – sur lequel elle se greffe – un récit temporellement second, subordonné au premier [...] Nous appellerons désormais ‘récit premier’ le niveau temporel de récit par rapport auquel une anachronie se définit comme telle.”⁴¹³ In other words, the *analepse* is a conduit through which *other* stories can be told, those that bring the past into the forefront of the narrative present. Genette’s powerful visual evocation of the *analepse* as a vine that grafts itself onto another story (“sur lequel elle se greffe”) is instructive for our purposes here as a metaphor for the intricate connections amongst generations of Corsican families and communities. The story of one community is not singular and suspended in one time. It is plural and timeless. An anachronistic structure supports the numerous underlying threads of identity, history, and community used to stitch together not only the lives of different characters but also the different works themselves. In this section of the chapter, we will explore the textual variety of the *analepse* as well as the extent to which it portrays various individuals in Olmiccia, Ferrari’s point of entry into wider contemporary Corsican society, in bitter conflict with their present moment for whom history is not an easy remedy.

1. *Restoring the Past to Assert the Present: Stéphane Campana and the Università di Corsica*

Traditionally, the narrative *analepse* offers the reader more information about the character’s past or events related to the central narrative itself. In *Balco Atlantico* there are numerous analeptic episodes that connect to the past of Stéphane Campana, whose death begins and ends the novel itself. He is an important character in so far as his actions warp the trajectories of others: Virginie Susini, with whom he begins a messy and entangled sexless, but very erotic,

⁴¹³ Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

love affair before she becomes a teenager; Hayet and Khaled, who both fall victim to his attachments to cultural and ethnic purity; and, his friends and fellow militants such as Dominique Guerrini and Vincent Léandri, both of whom eventually turn on their *de facto* leader and participate in his murder. Further, Stéphane Campana is a character for whom the insufficiency of his past (sexually inexperienced, not *Corsican* enough because of his *French* military service) serves as fuel to propel himself towards a glorious and illusory future – however at the expense of his own life and those of many others. The *analepse* used frequently to detail this character’s background serves three purposes: first, to show the progression of events that leads to his death (with which the novel begins and ends); second, to go beyond the present of the anachronistic narrative to allow the reader to explore the individual’s *character*; finally, to relive the period of the 1980s during which a cultural reawakening contributed in one way or another to a new outlook for the future of Corsica, culturally and politically. It is through the *analepse* that we learn of the character’s inability to remain in his present moment and the reasons for his projections towards an illusory future constructed with unattainable political aspirations and ideals.

Stéphane’s introduction to village life takes place in Marie-Angèle Susini’s bar in Olmiccia, where he meets prominent political militants Dominique Guerrini, Vincent Léandri, and Tony Versini: “Ils se serrèrent la main. Dominique Guerrini tendit la sienne à son tour au-dessus des verres de pastis cristallisé” (*Balco*, p. 51). Stéphane is originally from Corsica and emigrates to the Continent: “après son bac, il était parti en fac d’histoire à Nice, convaincu qu’il y accumulerait les aventures amoureuses” (*Balco*, p. 53); however, his plans go awry during a bar fight that leaves him with a bloody nose and two black eyes: “Dans le milieu des étudiantes corses, il était grillé” (*ibid.*). Fleeing his shame and perceptions of insufficiency, he registers for his military service, that sends him back to Corsica, to Corte “à l’établissement régional du matériel,

à Corte, où il se rendit vite compte qu'une vie sexuelle épanouie était incompatible avec le port du treillis [...] il regrettait presque qu'on ne l'eût pas envoyé dans les Vosges" (*ibid.*).

The return to Corsica is indeed a crucial turning point for the character because of the proximity to the *Università di Corsica*, which during the 1980s had become the epicenter of political activism and of the *Riacquistu*, a cultural movement grounded in new-found connections to *la corsité* that reclaim Corsican cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heritages, in particular through the arts, literature, archeology.⁴¹⁴ However, the fervor of the cultural moment runs at odds with the composition of the student population itself, according to Stéphane, who perceives the wave of cultural affinity as nothing but an unfortunate coincidence of cultural tourism and appropriation:

L'université de Corse avait rouvert ses portes depuis deux ans dans une atmosphère de ferveur politique intense et les étudiants considéraient tous les porteurs d'uniforme comme des suppôts de l'État français. Ils n'étaient absolument pas disposés à faire une différence entre les militaires de carrière et les appelés, quoique ces derniers fussent manifestement des victimes de l'État, et non ses soutiens. Stéphane avait donc dû supporter les regards de mépris et les soupirs d'exaspération auxquels il lui était impossible d'échapper. Même quand il sortait en civil, il était trahi par son crâne rasé et il était donc condamné à la solitude et ou à la fréquentation des parias de son espèce. Pourtant, il était corse, et il était né en Corse et parlait corse, contrairement à beaucoup d'étudiants qui avaient grandi à Sarcelles ou Dieu sait où, s'étaient inscrits à Corte par militantisme, parlaient avec un épouvantable accent parisien et collectionnaient cependant des conquêtes (*Balco*, p. 53-4).

Wherever he lands, his deeply engrained personal insecurities follow quickly behind. Stéphane Campana cannot bear his present. The constant "soupirs d'exaspération" that surround him, the conflation of his uniform with his identity, his inability to express himself sexually all becomes too much for him to handle. His frustration transforms into contempt for those who have come to

⁴¹⁴ For more about the cultural aspects of the *Riacquistu*, cf. Jean-Guy Talamoni, *Ciò che no simu (Ce que nous sommes)*, Ajaccio, DCL Éditions, 2001, p. 103-120. We also catch a glimpse of these academic pursuits and connections in Ferrari's "Ethnologues" (*Variétés de la mort*, 2001). Newly arrived at the university, Théodore takes a few minutes to meet with his future graduate students and learn of their research plans: "Je travaille sur le mazzèrisme et ses prolongations modernes" (p. 219); "Je veux faire une maîtrise sur le développement du mouvement nationaliste et ses racines culturelles" (p. 220).

Corsica under false pretenses. The analepse here also opens the discussion to what, during this period, it means to be “Corsican”? Is *corsité* passed through families or is it adopted?

This passage is illustrative of the three-fold function of the *analepse* used to portray Stéphane Campana throughout *Balco Atlantico*: first, because we understand more about the character himself such as some elements of his back story, his military training, and his arrival in Corte (that will incidentally overlap with Théodore Moracchini, also a new arrival to Corte); Secondly, the analepse is introspective in that we learn more of Stéphane Campana’s *character* via fragments of indirect discourse that we can imagine as of his own voice: the segment, “il était corse, et il était né en Corse et parlait corse” reads as though Stéphane Campana observes a group of students in the city plaza, flaunting their disingenuously adopted *corsité*, all the while he is ridiculed for his uniform, a marker of his own political subjugation.

The frequent use of the analepse is essential to the construction of Stéphane Campana’s character in *Balco Atlantico*. Without any background information, it would have otherwise been impossible to understand and appreciate the slow simmer of his militant fervor that culminates in the violence of the narrative present: “C’était l’époque de la guerre entre les mouvements clandestins et la guerre était finie depuis longtemps. Le capitaine [de la gendarmerie] espérait que cet assassinat n’était pas le signe d’une reprise des hostilités” (*Balco*, p. 17). Additionally, the analeptic presentation of Stéphane’s experiences in the University points to the origin of his ideological thoughts and perspectives related to Corsican purity, of which Ferrari’s work is deeply critical in its demonstration of the extremes to which the quest for purity can lead. Following the murder of Khaled, Campana returns to the bar and surrounded by the others, he justifies his acts as culturally salubrious: “Stéphane se leva et commença un discours où il était justement question d’héritage incontestable et de légitimité, de propreté morale et de salut identitaire” (*Balco*, p. 129-

30). He continues to drive the point that Khaled's physical altercation pits one community against another, and the local community is to be protected at all costs: "Il faut que tout le monde sache qu'on ne touche pas aux nôtres [...] Et, donc, c'est une initiative qu'il fallait prendre. Surtout maintenant" (*Balco*, p. 130-1). From this perspective the analepses used to portray Stéphane Campana surpass their ability to convey information relevant to the narrative present, to benefit from a character's momentary introspection, and to experience a tumultuous period in the reassertion of cultural and community identities. Ferrari's critical eye can then be seen to land on the transformation of the cherished *sol natal* into a zone of radical violence, distrust, and hatred that fuels its own demise. Stéphane's conception of *corsité*, even though he does not use the term, is nothing but an individual's assertion of identity constructed around his own weaknesses and discomfort with the plurality and diversity experienced at the Università and in Olmiccia. Through Ferrari's heavily conflicted character, we glean the author's vision of openness and variety of insular culture, both original and the result of successive (and successful) grafting, to return to Genette's expression of the *analepse*.

2. *Suspending Time: The Event of Khaled's Assassination in Balco Atlantico*

The murder of Khaled is foundational to *Balco Atlantico* and continues the representation of the challenges of immigrant communities, and the important questions immigration poses to Corsican insularity. He is the brother of Hayet (who works at Marie-Susini's bar in Olmiccia) and a known drug supplier in the region, as his sister recalls: "Quand les gens ont su qu'il en avait rapporté directement du Maroc, il a été submergé sous les demandes" (*Balco*, p. 110). Khaled's death is recounted both anachronistically and chronologically: the first mention of his death occurs *after* its occurrence; by the conclusion of the novel, the reader learns of the series of events that

led to his death as well as those that follow and propel the narrative towards *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. However, what complicates the narration of this event are conflicting perspectives from several characters about Khaled's murder: from those not present, from those who learned of the murder from a newspaper, and from the murderers themselves. What becomes complicated is that few seem to agree on *when* this event occurs. The tension that results from often contradictory narrative perspectives frames the murder of Khaled as a timeless event, one whose significance is disconnected from time, and that will exact disastrous consequences for several characters and for the dynamics of the village. While the suspension of time itself is not a common element of the internal *poétique* of *Balco Atlantico*, my argument here will be that it results from Ferrari's continual and conflicting use of the analepse to frame certain events. The outcome is however neither narratively nor thematically incoherent, instead, the overlap of numerous analepses brings further attention to the contours of Corsican insularity in a world confronted with human migration and permeable borders.

Reference to Khaled's death first occurs at the end of the chapter entitled, "Un rêve de jeune fille (1985-1991)" and presumably takes place during or near 1991. In this scene, we encounter two secondary characters, Vincent Léandri and Dominique Guerrini, in the moments following news of the murder:

[Vincent Léandri] – Personnellement, j'aurais préféré que ça ne se passe pas. Mais c'est fait et nous devons tous l'assumer. Ces dealers sont morts et c'est comme ça.

[Dominique Guerrini] – Ces dealers? Explique-moi... C'était qui? Des parrains de la mafia? Des responsables de milieu? C'étaient...

[VL] – Non, Dumè, non, je le sais aussi bien que toi...

[DG] – Non! hurla Dominique. C'étaient des putains de vendeurs de shit au détail. Et ils sont morts, bordel de merde! Ils méritaient de mourir? (*Balco*, p. 63)

At its initial presentation in the novel, the reference to the death of the "vendeurs de shit au détail" has no clear antecedent – the reader is entirely unaware of the identity of the deceased. From what

we can gather from this passage in isolation is that the individuals were only low-level street dealers, hardly higher value targets such as kingpins or high-level cartel operatives (“Des parrains de la mafia? Des responsables de milieu?”). It is clear from what follows that the death of these two individuals was no accident: the tone of Dominique Guerrini’s (Dumè) barrage of questions suggests a premeditated plan to eliminate the dealers from the street, dealers who had little consequence to begin with. His deep surprise and rejection of the murder suggests that he was aware of not only the dealers, but also the culprits. Vincent Léandri’s attempt to calm the situation further underscores this perspective as he claims that the act is one for which everyone in their circle will need to take responsibility: “Nous devons tous l’assumer.”

As the scene ends, we still are unaware of several important elements: who was killed and by whom? Leafing through a personal notebook, Théodore Moracchini happens upon a page marking the date 1994, “très peu de temps après [son] hospitalisation” (*Balco*, p. 91), for which he memorialized the news of the execution of “Deux dealers maghrébins [...] dans la chambre qu’ils avaient partagée” (*ibid.*). Théodore rereads his own commentary on the news report, recalling that the article “semblait réprover plus sévèrement la vente de haschich que l’assassinat et le ton était très moral” (*ibid.*). This observation eerily echoes Stéphane Campana’s own justifications along the lines of cultural purity and cleanliness. While we might be wary of Théodore’s own ability to recollect and recall information because of his personal struggles with memory and time, the date is established as a clear way point around which this character orients himself: for him, this event took place in 1994. Finally, in the chapter entitled, “Un rêve de jeune fille (1991-1996),” the third-person omniscient narrator marks the day of Khaled’s execution as “l’ascension victorieuse de Stéphane [...] ce jour de 1996” (*Balco*, p. 137).

When considering the impact of a specific moment in time to alter or recalibrate personal relations, we are invited to consider the works of Edgar Morin, Pierre Nora, and Paul Ricœur, among many others to be sure, whose work in and around the social significance of *l'événement* proves useful to unpacking the importance of Khaled's death within the structure of the narrative. The etymology of the term "événement" reveals a spatial connotation: associated with the verb "advenir," we are able to envision the sudden arrival of an element (an object, a person, or even a situation) into a specific space that is left fundamentally altered as a result.⁴¹⁵ In his article, "Le retour de l'événement" (1972), Edgar Morin insists on the singular interplay between "space" and "time" as defining features of what constitutes an *événement*:

La notion d'*élément* relève d'une ontologie spatiale. La notion d'*événement* relève d'une ontologie temporelle. Or, tout élément peut être considéré comme événement dans la mesure où on le considère situé dans une irréversibilité temporelle, comme une manifestation ou actualisation, c'est-à-dire en fonction de son apparition et de sa disparition, comme en fonction de sa singularité.⁴¹⁶

What is most striking in Morin's argument and framing above is of the irreversible nature and consequences of the event ("une irréversibilité temporelle") that results from "son apparition."⁴¹⁷ Morin later qualifies this "apparition" with three characteristics: "actualisation, improbabilité, discontinuité."⁴¹⁸ These three descriptors frame *L'événement* as a one-time, unexpected occurrence. However, despite its limited duration, Paul Ricœur argues, *l'événement* has the power to alter the balance of power within a system of discourse: "Il permettra d'appeler révolution les

⁴¹⁵ "Événement," *Le Grand Robert numérique*, Fourth Edition, 2017

⁴¹⁶ Edgar Morin, "Le retour de l'événement" in *Communications*, "L'Événement" (ed. Edgar Morin), No. 18, 1972, p. 17 (emphasis in the original).

⁴¹⁷ In a recent return to the larger concept of *L'événement*, Philippe Lacour addresses the long-debated importance of causality and coincidence as underlying components of *l'événement*. It is beyond the scope of our work here to manage this debate that has a long history of philosophical debate. Cf. Philippe Lacour, "Pourquoi cela est-il arrivé? L'explication causale de l'événement chez Paul Ricœur," *Methodos* [En ligne], Vol. 17, 2017; Available online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/methodos.4810>

⁴¹⁸ Edgar Morin, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

changements soudains de structure.”⁴¹⁹ Still insisting on the circumstance of discontinuity, Pierre Nora remarks that the disruption caused by an *événement* is always cataclysmic: “Il n’y a pas d’événement heureux, ce sont toujours des catastrophes.”⁴²⁰

These contextual remarks help us to better understand Khaled’s death as a cataclysmic temporal and narrative disruption in *Balco Atlantico*, an *événement* of the narrative from which no character will escape unscathed. The “catastrophe” of Khaled’s death is the disaggregation of numerous worlds, including his own. For Théodore Moracchini, the already thread-bare strings holding together his experience of the world begin to unravel even more to the extent that he accepts that his memories might be contrived: regarding his physician’s assistance at restoring him from his despair, “Dans mon carnet, à la date de la veille, il y avait l’article du journal, des remarques désobligeantes sur la qualité de la nourriture et le physique des infirmières, et rien d’autre. Il ne mentait pas. Je ne l’avais pas vu la veille” (*Balco*, p. 92). Hayet returns spiritually to *Balco Atlantico*, the peninsula in Larache, Morocco that juts out into the sea, with her brother, “nous regardions le coucher de soleil le plus somptueux que Dieu ait fait descendre sur la terre depuis la création du monde. Et c’était une telle merveille que tu cessais de voir des murs partout” (*Balco*, p. 159). A furious escalation of violence takes the lives of Dominique Guerrini, whose protestations against Khaled’s execution are perceived by Stéphane Campana as a breach of loyalty: “On va tuer Dominique Guerrini,” Stéphane says, “on va tuer ce traître” (*Balco*, p. 135). Stéphane’s decision is also for his own life, taken by Vincent Léandri, to avenge the loss of his close friend Dominique. Recalling this moment, Virginie Susini says, “Je connais bien la mort. Je suis née veuve” (*Sermon*, p. 114). Khaled’s death and the chain reaction it causes does however

⁴¹⁹ Paul Ricœur, “Retour de l’événement,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée*, Vol. 104, Issue 1, 1992, p. 31; Available online: https://www.persee.fr/doc/mefr_1123-9891_1992_num_104_1_4195

⁴²⁰ Pierre Nora, “L’événement monstre” in *Communications*, “L’Événement” (ed. Edgar Morin), No. 18, 1972, p. 167.

result in a positive outcome for Marie-Angèle Susini, for whom the presence of Stéphane Campana was tortuous: the night of his execution in front of her apartment: “Dans le calme de la nuit, Marie-Angèle Susini s’endormait, apaisée” (*Balco*, p. 185).

Three competing time stamps have been applied to this event: 1991, 1994, and 1996. In each instance, the *analepse* is unreliable. This situation poses an important question for the internal structure of Ferrari’s work: if such a significant event is unreliably narrated, how then do we understand multiple competing relationships to the event itself? While the date is of interest to the narratological desire to (re)construct an accurate and detailed timeline of the events that occur in the space of the novel, perhaps a larger question ought to be raised in this moment: How do we engage with an event that numerous witnesses can attest to, but just cannot seem to agree on *when* it occurred? This problem in the narrative is emblematic of Ferrari’s narrative strategies to disorient and unsettle his characters with their relationship to time, with the relationship between past and present. The tensions between competing temporal perspectives, I argue, results in the suspension of time itself. The murder itself rests in stasis. The suspended event and moment will alter the narrative trajectories of many characters, if not all, in *Balco Atlantico* and therefore represents the most significant imposition of “character space” in the novel. Our attention is not fixed necessarily on narrative chronology, but on the singular importance and weight of this event for Hayet, Khaled’s sister, and for how this occurrence will alter the trajectory of every other character in Hayet’s orbit.

The significance and reach of experience and *l’événement* of Khaled’s death, while destructive for several characters in *Balco Atlantico*, goes beyond the confines of the novel itself. First, it creates a bridge between *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, which picks up right where the former ends, with Hayet’s departure from Olmiccia. Her quick departure raises

numerous concerns for her well-being, “Vincent répétait que maintenant il allait défoncer la porte pour de bon” (*Sermon*, p. 26) while others fetch Marie-Angèle Susini who “prit les doubles des clés du bar et de l’appartement [...], elle aussi de plus en plus inquiète, et elle monta ouvrir l’appartement de Hayet” (*ibid.*). The event that brings them together is now unspeakable, *indicible*:

— On devrait quand même appeler les flics, mais [Marie-Angèle] secoua tristement la tête et personne n’insista parce qu’il était clair que la tragédie silencieuse qui s’était jouée ici, à un moment indéterminé de la nuit, ne concernait qu’une seule personne, égarée dans les abîmes de son cœur solitaire auquel la société des hommes ne pouvait plus rendre justice (*Sermon*, p. 27).

We never learn where Hayet goes, only that her departure leaves a significant void in the community, one that rejected her brother but accepted her. In addition to the intertextual links, the significance of this event can also be understood as a continuation of Ferrari’s critical gaze on the notion of “corsité” grounded in presumptions of an individual’s supposed origin (premised here in racial terms). Arresting the passage of time, I argue, draws attention to the senselessness of the event itself, as well as its underlying motivations. As though under a spotlight, Khaled’s brutal assassination, and that of his roommate as well, is a demonstration of Ferrari’s biting criticism of the depravity of contemporary Corsican society where the codes of honor long regulating the *vendetta* are no longer and where the extremes of nationalism cast aside the cultural and ethnic diversity born of immigration that has for generations marked insular communities.

3. *Marcel Antonetti, the Photograph, and the Analepse in Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*

Of the many threads that intertwine in *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, Marcel Antonetti’s stands out from the rest as the character benefits from two distinct narrative tracks that detail his personal past as well as his present engagement in the narrative (*temps du récit*). What is most interesting is that the character’s past is recounted in the present tense all the while the character’s

present is narrated in the past tense. These textually challenging formal relationships speak to the complex interplay between temporal order, perspective, and narration in Ferrari's novel and continue to underscore the intricate connections between past and present that are at the core of both *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* and *Balco Atlantico*. Here, our analysis will turn around the collision of the past and present as seen through the medium of photography, an artistic form that lets the past linger, materially and emotionally, for as long as the present exists for the viewer.⁴²¹ The photograph, and the analepse that structures much of the narration of Marcel Antonetti's past, will allow us to explore Corsica as a site of creation, a site of possibilities for the world, but also a place of significant destruction and loss. Additionally, Ferrari continues to pursue the notion of the *sol natal* through the depiction of Marcel Antonetti, a figure who longs to flee from the island but never manages to fully escape its hold on him, and so he returns. The analysis here will continue to build on the narratological focus as seen in earlier sections while advancing the argument for the island as a unique space for personal transformation and transition, but in this case, one that first requires its own destruction.

Unfolding over a series of analeptic episodes, the story of Marcel Antonetti's life transports the reader from his childhood in Olmiccia, to his departure from the island in hopes of better opportunity following World War II, to his dashed hopes for improved prosperity within the ranks of colonial administration, and finally back to Olmiccia where he returns amidst failing health.⁴²²

⁴²¹ Photography is an important element of Ferrari's wider corpus, as he describes in an interview with Pascaline David where he discusses the origin of his 2018 novel *À son image* (Actes sud): "L'idée m'est venue du travail que j'ai fait avec Oliver [Rohe] sur le reportage de Gaston Chéreau en Libye pour *À fendre le cœur le plus dur* [Paris, Éditions Inculte, 2015]. On a beaucoup parlé d'image, de photo. J'ai pris conscience que, dans tous mes romans, sans exception, je pense, les photographies jouent un rôle, plus ou moins périphérique. Quand nous avons enfin réussi à terminer *À fendre le cœur le plus dur*, je savais que je placerais la photographie au centre d'une fiction littéraire" (Pascaline David, *Les mondes possibles de Jérôme Ferrari*, op. cit., 2020, p. 159).

⁴²² Marcel Antonetti appears in Ferrari's earlier novel, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (Actes Sud, 2010) that recounts the horrors of the Algerian War, but his administrative roles in other French colonial possessions is explored in *Le Sermon*. Cf. Lena Seauve, "Du point de vue des bourreaux. Regards sur la torture et émotions du lecteur dans *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* de Jérôme Ferrari" in *Chutes, ruptures et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari*, op. cit., p. 63-79.

Life in the Metropole at first seems to offer Marcel Antonetti a new lease on life in the mid-1940s: “Ce qui fait battre le cœur de Marcel, c’est la pensée concrète et délicieuse de son prochain service militaire, son niveau d’études lui permettra d’être officier” (*Sermon*, p. 73). However, all does not go as planned: “Marcel entend enfin, sans réussir à y croire, le chef de corps annoncer aux hommes de son peloton qu’ils ne seront jamais officiers et qu’ils sont tous affectés aux chantiers de jeunesse” (*Sermon*, p. 74). His body viscerally responds to the disappointment with “une brûlure acide lui déchire le ventre et la poitrine et le jette à genoux au milieu de ses camarades [...] qui le regard[ent] vomir du sang dans la poussière” (*ibid.*).

The conclusion of World War II required the reconstruction of power and of systems at the expense of colonized communities: “Le monde nouveau recrutait ses commis pour les envoyer puiser dans le colonies la matière nécessaire à l’érection de son corps avide et glorieux, et ils extrayaient des mines, des jungles et des hauts plateaux tout ce que réclamait son insatiable voracité” (*Sermon*, p. 132). Colonial administration offered a new path for social mobility at the expense of his own personal story and of his *corsité*: “Il travaillait à la préparation des concours en même temps qu’à se débarrasser des stigmates hideux de son passé, sa posture, sa démarche, son accent surtout, et il s’astreignait à rendre sa parole atone et limpide, comme s’il avait été élevé dans le parc d’un manoir de Touraine” (*Sermon*, p. 135). After a series of lackluster positions scattered across the African continent, he understands that his upwards trajectory is hopeless because the era of colonial dominance has ended: “car Rome n’existait plus, elle avait été détruite depuis bien longtemps” (*Sermon*, p. 138). His life further degenerates with the death of his wife Jeanne-Marie following complications with the birth of their son, Jacques Antonetti: “Les caresses de sa jeune épouse avaient extrait de ses veines les dernières gouttes du venin qui l’infectait et il n’avait plus peur de rien” (*Sermon*, p. 134). At the beginning of the novel, where this series of life

events leads, Marcel Antonetti is alone and dying, but heads towards that dark abyss with his attention fixed on a peculiar family photograph.

Each of these events surge to the forefront of Marcel Antonetti's thoughts as he contemplates a particular photograph, one of his closest family members, each of whom has preceded him in death as in life: "Comme témoignage des origines – comme témoignage de la fin, il y aurait donc cette photo, prise pendant l'été 1918, que Marcel Antonetti s'est obstiné à regarder en vain toute sa vie pour y déchiffrer l'énigme de l'absence" (*Sermon*, p. 13). "L'énigme de l'absence" of the photograph itself is Marcel's own: he was not yet alive when this photograph was taken yet manages to feel his own presence and that of others captured within the frame: "Et à chaque fois qu'il croise le regard de sa mère, Marcel a l'irrépressible certitude qu'il lui est destiné et qu'elle cherchait déjà [...] les yeux de son fils encore à naître, et qu'elle ne connaît pas" (*Sermon*, p. 13-14). This photograph serves as a lifeline not only for Marcel to connect with his family, but for their memory to persist beyond their own deaths: he longingly stares into this photo "parce que s'il néglige un jour de le faire, il ne restera plus rien d'eux, la photo redeviendra un agencement inerte de taches noires et grises" (*Sermon*, p. 15). These episodes frame a character whose life abuts a series of obstacles, failures, and the eventual acceptance of a world's life cycle. With creation comes destruction: "pour qu'un monde nouveau surgisse, il faut d'abord que meure un monde ancien" (*Sermon*, p. 22). While the narrative analepse allows the reader to engage with the enigmatic Marcel Antonetti more deeply, retrospection itself is a form of lamentation, an element of the mourning process that will accompany Marcel Antonetti's return to Olmiccia, the site of his birth and of his death: "les lignes de fuite sont des cercles secrets dont la trajectoire se referme inexorablement et qui le ramènent vers le village détesté de son enfance" (*Sermon*, p. 148).

The photograph is a material support for Marcel to remember and reflect on his past, even if the only photo he possesses is one from which he is absent. The photograph serves as the springboard for the larger narrative itself as it too is composed of a series of memories, experiences, and perspectives shared in chronological order. Writing of the power of photography and in particular its intersection with literature, Érik Dupont argues that “La photographie offre la possibilité de mécaniser le souvenir de tous les objets pertinents d’une époque, une personne ou un groupe. Plus exactement, la photographie permet de tout représenter et de rendre le matériel du passé accessible.”⁴²³ It is in this sense of access Susan Sontag argues that this past moment (Dupont’s “matériel du passé accessible”) is relic of the moment captured: “Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world as much as pieces of it.”⁴²⁴ These “pieces” are retained by the viewer who is now able to position his/herself as a participant of what occurred in the frame, as Susan Sontag describes: “Photography has become one of the principal devices for experiencing something for giving an appearance of participation.”⁴²⁵ What is most intriguing in Sontag’s comments here is the existence of the photograph as a form of living remnant⁴²⁶, a material piece of a world from a different time, one with which Marcel Antonetti can still engage, and as a result give life *back* to those represented:

Et pourtant, par le sortilège d’une incompréhensible symétrie, maintenant qu’il les a portés en terre l’un après l’autre, ils n’existent plus que grâce à lui et à l’obstination de son regard fidèle, lui auquel ils ne pensaient même pas en retenant leur respiration au moment où le

⁴²³ Érik Dupont, “L’image photographique et l’oubli dans la création littéraire: l’exemple de Marguerite Duras et de Christoph Hein,” *Études littéraires*, Vol. 28, Iss. 3, “Dire l’indicible: Une écriture moderne de la vision” (eds. Mieke Bal and Monique Moser-Verrey), Winter 1996, p. 58. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.7202/501133ar>

⁴²⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 8.

⁴²⁵ *Idem*, p. 10. Cf. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 1980, p. 14-20.

⁴²⁶ In this regard, Roland Barthes writes that the photograph, “c’est l’image vivante d’une chose morte” (*La chambre claire, op. cit.*, p. 123). Furthermore, Barthes too adopts the discourse of the relic as a physical reminder of the past in his description, and criticism, of the role of photography in modern society: “Mais en faisant de la Photographie, mortelle, le témoin général et comme naturel de “ce qui a été”, la société moderne a renoncé au Monument” (*idem.*, p. 146).

photographe déclenchait l'obturateur de son appareil, lui qui est maintenant leur unique et fragile rempart contre le néant (*Sermon*, p. 15).

Marcel resists the victory of “le néant” with each passing moment he spends with the photograph of his loved ones for it is because of his gaze that they continue to exist: “ils n'existent plus que grâce à lui.” At the same time, however, the photograph reveals his own mortality as the only one capable of saving them, and not for much longer.

Through the extended *analepses* that relate the collapse of different worlds, Marcel Antonetti can mourn the conclusion of his time in *this* world, at the advent of another – his grandson Matthieu Antonetti's decision to create his own world in Corsica forged of the tattered remnants of the village of Olmiccia: “Mais Dieu ne méritait aucune louange, car Matthieu et Libero étaient les seuls démiurges de ce petit monde” (*Sermon*, p. 101). It is at this moment that the previously described *analepse* recounting different stages of Marcel's life begins. Despite the series of complications, missed opportunities, and burials, Marcel Antonetti finds a glimmer of hope in his grandson's ambition to return to Corsica and offers his financial support: “Je vais payer la gérance cette année et je la paierai encore l'année prochaine.” (*Sermon*, p. 65). That the bar opens in Olmiccia is essential because it brings Marcel Antonetti to the place where his beginning will meet his end – back to Corsica. The island is a cradle of life and death, a place of creation and destruction, a place where Marcel Antonetti must return to reunite with those already lost:

À présent qu'il a porté les siens en terre, l'un après l'autre, la mission harassante qu'il a accomplie doit échoir à un autre, et il attend que sa santé toujours chancelante et inaltérable soit finalement vaincue, car, dans l'ordre fixé par l'état civil, son tour est maintenant de marcher seul au tombeau (*Sermon*, p. 148).

Marcel's preparation for his own death closes the *analepse* and returns the narrative to its present – the reopening of Marie-Susini's ill-fated bar in the center of Olmiccia, now in firm possession

of Matthieu Antonetti and Libero Pintus, who will take the significant risk of creating a world for themselves, in Corsica.

III. Poétiques de l'espace – Mountains, Village Taverns, Islands

Over the course of much of our discussion so far in this chapter, we have approached Ferrari's novels largely in spatial terms. A narratological focus on temporal order in Ferrari's works frames the Past-Present-Future continuum as a precise location on a timeline, one that we can pinpoint (as with a timestamp). The past is *back there* and the future is *up here*. We have also used spatial rhetoric and framing to describe how "character space" informs relationships between different casts of characters that flow in-and-out of Olmiccia and that upend its social dynamics: for example, in the hierarchy of characters, Hayet is *above* Stéphane Campana. We have yet to explore the *space* of Corsica itself. The zones where different trajectories of characters' lives and narrative threads intersect is as important as *what* comes of their collisions in time and space. In this final section of the chapter, we will turn our focus to Olmiccia, the mountains, the sea, and the village tavern as the final elements of Ferrari's *poétique corse* that will paint equally as somber and morose a vision of contemporary society and culture. The mountains and the sea are seen more for their roles as obstacles or hinderances rather than for their natural splendor. The Mediterranean Sea is reduced to a meaningless void that inhibits, for some, connection with the continental mainland (while at the same time facilitating immigration for others). Corsica as a space of creation in which the corner bar at the center of Olmiccia will serve as a laboratory, will reveal that ambition and initiative are impossible without first paying attention to the social and cultural ills that continue to plague contemporary insular society.

How do characters interact *within* the spaces that surround them? How do they engage *with* these same spaces? How does literature represent and portray these complex interactions? These questions flow a conceptual shift in literary and cultural studies that Edward Soja coins as “The Spatial Turn.” This trend marks a renewed focus on the natural environment, spatial awareness of urban and rural environments, and of the relationships of humans to their surroundings.⁴²⁷ Within these discursive spaces, terms such “Place” and “Space” often anchor the critical idiolect. Human geographers delineate these terms along the threshold of a space’s ability to be meaningful for an individual: “Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning.”⁴²⁸ In this regard, Tuan insists on the transformation of Space(s) into meaningful Place(s) is as much a function of time as it is personal experience; over time and through experiences, the space morphs into a place into which experiences of the world are anchored. As a matter of cartography this shift in perspective allows an individual to anchor their world in the use of the prepositions “Here” and “There.” As time passes, the “Here” of an individual’s life becomes the center of their experience, according to Tuan, their “homeland”:

Homeland is an important type of place at the medium scale. It is a region (city or countryside) large enough to support a people’s livelihood [...] Human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the center of the world [...] Home is at the center of an astronomically determined spatial system. A vertical axis, linking heaven to the underworld, passes through it. The stars are perceived to move around one’s abode; home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. Such a conception of place ought to give it supreme value; to abandon it would be hard to imagine.⁴²⁹

Tuan’s framing of this example of “Place” as a cosmic system allows us to return to Anne Meistersheim’s foundational work in the critical discourse of insularity as both a spatial

⁴²⁷ Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London, Verso, 1989.

⁴²⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, coll. “Geography,” 8th edition, 2014 [1977], p. 136.

⁴²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 149.

phenomenon and as an experiential singularity. In *Figures de l'île* (2001), Meistersheim examines the different ways in which to conceive of the space of the island, and of most importance for our purposes here, as a cosmic system unto itself: “Ce monde qui s’autodéfinit et s’affirme dans sa totale autonomie, ce monde est évidemment à lui-même son propre centre: le microcosme insulaire est donc aussi ‘centre du monde’.”⁴³⁰ This perspective further illuminates our earlier analysis of Théodore Moracchini’s reply to the call of the island as one of return to his familial homeland. While his teaching career flounders both in Paris and Corte, his personal research and of historical archives lead him into a deeper understanding and connection with his ancestral heritage that make Corsica a new “centre de [son] monde.” Constituting a new center of the world, or universe, is also a fundamental act of displacement of what was previously held at center; in this case, placing the island at center evicts the continent as the cartographical anchor – the peripheral island becomes the center of the cosmos: “Loin de reconnaître leur marginalité par rapport au continent, [les îles] satellisent le monde autour d’elles, s’inscrivant alors en résistance contre ce contexte qui leur semble exercer une pression.”⁴³¹ The insular “space” is then not simply a world that exists on its own (“un monde en soi”) but one that actively positions itself in opposition (“en résistance”) to the continental forces that exert themselves upon it. These notions of homeland and of the insular cosmos are ever present in Ferrari’s novels because of the distinct ways in which the environment, broadly speaking, and the natural spaces of Corsica heavily impact the lives of numerous characters. Constructed spaces, such as the corner bar, are so impactful on the trajectories of various characters that they too must be considered as dynamic, forceful spaces in their own right.

⁴³⁰ Anne Meistersheim, *Figures de l'île*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

1. *The Natural Environment – Mountains, Oceans, and Frontiers*

In *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, the natural environment of Corsica is framed by its two most visible, and inevitable, features: the mountains and the sea. Both features are inseparable, after all, Corsica is itself a mountain that arises from the sea. For Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire, the rugged terrain mirrored the experience with uncanny funerary rites. Gustave Flaubert submitted to the ethereal power of light that passed along mountain ridges and through the forests of Vico. Ange Colomba and Vénérande witness the systematic devastation of the mountains and forests in which Marie Ferranti brings her readers to face the supernatural powers that lie within.

Jérôme Ferrari adopts an opposing perspective in *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*: the mountains and the sea are on the one hand seen as impediments and on the other, entirely irrelevant. This particular stance will question the fundamental principles of Corsican insularity itself, a notion grounded in the geographical collision of mountain and sea, as Marina Casula argues: “L’identité repose également sur une *éco-définition*, c’est à dire quelque chose qui se définit en fonction d’un environnement au sens large.”⁴³² If Corsican identity is deeply rooted in its natural environments and landscapes, including the maritime frontier that surrounds the island, what happens when these natural features and conditions of insularity are discarded and more seriously even, rendered obsolete? Jérôme Ferrari explores the conditions of insularity in his novels with particular attention paid to the ways in which an island’s natural features are construed as obstacles of different sorts that must be crossed and surmounted to achieve personal

⁴³² Marina Casula, “La Corse: une île-projet au coeur de la Méditerranée,” *La Méditerranée à l’heure de la mondialisation* (eds. Sylvie Chioussé and Brahim Labiri), Aix-Marseille Université (Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l’homme), 2010, p. 109.

transformation. At play in these situations is the ability to arrive in, to leave from, and to resist the call to return to a *sol natal*.

Our continued analysis of Ferrari's novels will investigate the relationships between the description of the landscapes in and around Corsica, focusing specifically on the mountains and the sea, and the ways in which these natural features impact the lives of Ferrari's characters. With this goal in mind, we will draw inspiration from what Michel Collot articulates in his essay *Pour une géographie littéraire* (2014) as the more apt literary critical perspective of "la géopoétique," an approach to close reading that considers both form and function of natural landscapes in literary narrative:

Je propose donc de revenir à une définition plus strictement littéraire de l'approche géopoétique comme l'étude des rapports entre l'espace et les formes et genres littéraires. Cette démarche se situe à un niveau supérieur d'abstraction: il ne s'agit plus de repérer des référents géographiques, mais des structures spatiales, voire des schèmes assez abstraits, qui informant les thèmes mais aussi la composition et l'écriture d'une œuvre. C'est une *topologie* plutôt qu'une *topographie*.⁴³³

As Collot suggests, the interest in a methodology oriented around *la géopoétique* is to see the ways in which the natural environment impacts both the substance of the literary works (e.g., "les thèmes") but also the syntactical structure of a text itself ("la composition et l'écriture").

A. *The Mountains*

The mountain is a deeply troubling sight. Hayet recalls seeing the island for the first time from the bridge of the ferry bringing her and Khaled from Marseille:

Le lendemain, dans l'aube pluvieuse, nous voyons depuis le pont, la grande masse sombre de l'île percer la brume. Je me sens emplie de crainte, pas même de curiosité, en découvrant

⁴³³ Michel Collot, *Pour une géographie littéraire*, Paris, Éditions Corti, coll. "Les Essais," 2014, p. 121 (emphasis in the original).

de loin la terre sur laquelle je devrai vivre. Notre oncle nous a dit qu'elle était très belle. Mais, sous les nuages bas, elle ne fait que rendre ma tristesse plus poignante. (*Balco*, p. 78).

This entry into the insular space echoes the *Robinsonnade* we first discussed with Gustave Flaubert's travel narrative *Voyage aux Pyrénées et en Corse* (1840). While Flaubert might have been grateful to have survived the stormy seas and finally reach *terra firma*, Hayet remains wary of the future and of what the island might offer ("Je me sens emplie de crainte"), which is described here in dark terms of "une masse sombre" that stabs through the fog ("percer la brume"). Further still, her arrival is not a celebratory affair, but a more important struggle that amplifies her already deeply emotional response to leaving Morocco ("elle ne fait que rendre ma tristesse plus poignante").

The mountains are equally as troubling and dark for Marcel Antonetti. Certain memories of his childhood in Sartène are mired by the mountain's constant obstruction of his view of the sea: "les montagnes dissimulent le grand large et dressent toute leur masse inerte contre Marcel et ses rêves inlassables" (*Sermon*, p. 69). The echoes between Marcel and Hayet are of note: in both instances the mountains are aggregated into a "masse" that imposes itself in one way or another. For Marcel, the imposition is that of an obstacle as the view of the sea is "bouchée par la barricade des montagnes" (*Sermon*, p. 70). The "masse inerte" of the "barricade" is not simply a physical obstruction, but also a carcinogen that drains the vitality of the rural village that is "accroché comme une tumeur au sol d'une île dans laquelle rien ne change car, en vérité, rien ne change ni ne changera jamais" (*ibid.*). Submitting to the supremacy of the mountain, Marcel is forced to acknowledge the interminable stasis of insular life: "Il ne veut pas quitter son village pour aller s'enterrer dans un autre village désespérément semblable" (*ibid.*). Marcel's anger is attributed directly to the mountains as a both physical impediment to his view of the sea and as a wall of cancerous rock that slowly transforms villages into graveyards, as the use of the term "s'enterrer"

would suggest.⁴³⁴ The initial rejection and aversion to the confinement of the mountains further prepares the narrative of Marcel Antonetti's voyages across the world, to the theatres of World War II, to colonial outposts in Africa, to Paris, and ultimately, back to Olmiccia.

The mountains, this "masse" that both Hayet and Marcel lament, exact a controlling presence on most characters in both *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. As though a center of gravity onto itself, the island pulls the characters towards it. Marcel Antonetti cannot escape the pull of the mountain from which he will flee but inevitable return. His life is defined by his continued orbit around the mountain, now the central mass of his personal universe, and of the novel itself. Its weight warps the trajectories of all characters towards its shores. Every character's life is altered by their contact with the physical and cultural space of the island.

From this perspective, an important question to ask is what role this landscape plays in the narrative itself? It is far beyond a simple backdrop, but what then? Just as it was the case in Biancarelli's *Orphelins de Dieu*, I propose to frame the mountain as a "chronotope," to reapply Bakhtin's notion to this new narrative situation. If we extend Bakhtin's logic, our center of investigation is indeed how the island of Corsica, as a singular physical space and as a particular place of tradition and culture, exerts significant influence on both the substance and structure of *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. The significance of the mountain as a chronotope is not solely

⁴³⁴ It is worth noting that the novel's narrator adopts an opposing perspective or inhabits Matthieu's through a shift in point of view (towards *focalisation interne*) which appreciates the warmth and protection of the mountain, as we see in the following example from one of Matthieu's summer vacations in Corsica when he meets Virgile Ordoni for the first time. While eating with Libero, Virgile and Libero's brother, Sauveur: "un grand vent poussait les nuages vers la montagne, au-dessus d'une petite chapelle consacrée à la Vierge, une chapelle toute blanche au pied de laquelle brûlaient les bougies écarlates que Sauveur et Virgile allumaient parfois pour honorer leur campagne de solitude, et les mains qui avaient bâti cette chapelle avaient été depuis longtemps balayées par le vent, mais elles avaient laissé ici les traces de leur existence, et plus haut, le long d'une pente abrupte, on apercevait les vestiges de murs écroulés, presque invisibles parce qu'ils avaient la même couleur rouge que la roche granitique d'où ils avaient surgi avant que la montagne ne les reprenne en les absorbant lentement dans son sein recouvert de pierres et de chardons, comme pour manifester, non pas sa puissance, mais sa tendresse"(p. 39-40).

limited to its narrative utility but serves as a crossroads of sorts for the narrative and cultural significance emanating from the artistic project of Ferrari's literary works.

The chronotope [...] emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All of the novel's abstract elements—philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect—gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.⁴³⁵

Reading the setting of the novel as a chronotope as one of the “structures spatiales [...] qui informent les thèmes,” to put Collot and Bakhtin together, encourages us to conceive of the insular landscape as far beyond a setting, but as an active element within Ferrari's narrative itself, just as it was in Biancarelli's novel, although with different points of emphasis. If we can accept the premise that an individual's identity is fluid, it stands to reason that Marina Casula's articulation of insular identity as intimately associated with the environment would result in a reading of the landscape as a vital, animate aspect of the insular experience.

B. *The Sea*

Surrounding the Corsican mountains is a storied body of water, the Mediterranean Sea. It is a constant and unavoidable presence. This aquatic frontier is a crucial element in both *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* because of the ways in which it is perceived as an obstacle, a conduit for personal transition, and as an entirely irrelevant component of the insular experience. How different characters relate to the sea will further nuance our discussion of the insular experience as one that is sought after, or forcefully rejected.

The maritime frontier is problematic. Its presence serves as a contact reminder to Khaled of the constricted and limited life he and his sister live in Larache, Morocco. Strolling along the

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

eponymous “Balco Atlantico,” Khaled asks Hayet to consider the vast horizon unfolding before them and to question whether indeed its allure is for them:

Regarde autour de toi, et dis-moi, Hayet, que vois-tu? Les gens aiment venir se promener ici parce que l’horizon y est immense. Mais que vois-tu en réalité? L’océan est un mur, nous sommes entourés de murs. Il y a des murs liquides, des murs de sable. Nous sommes toujours du mauvais côté (*Balco*, p. 40).

Khaled’s perceives their misfortune as a matter of destiny determined many, many generations before during the expansion of the Umayyad caliphate into Northern Africa and onto the Iberian peninsula, whose conquest was driven by the legendary Tariq ibn Ziyad, who later crossed the Pyrénées. The spirit of conquest and prosperity found afar fuels Khaled’s desire to overcome “des murs liquides, des murs de sable.” He finds his inspiration in his sense of unyielding optimism and freedom: “Mais il n’est écrit nulle part que nous devons y rester toujours. Ne crois pas que c’est une chose écrite, Dieu seul sait ce qui est écrit. Nous, nous devons le découvrir” (*ibid.*). Khaled is willing to take on the challenge of the physical barrier presented by the Mediterranean Sea in hopes that his wager pays off on the other side of prosperity: “Il économise tout l’argent qu’il gagne. Il est déterminé.” (*Balco*, p. 42). For Khaled, the sea is an obstacle worth overcoming regardless of the risk.

Hayet on the other hand “n’[a] jamais réussi à y voir un mur. [Ses] yeux ne voient pas ce que voient ceux de Khaled” (*Balco*, p. 77). The sea insulates her, protects her from the unknown. We can hear her skeptical tone as she contemplates Khaled’s excitement: “Il ne songe pas à ce qu’il va laisser ici. Ni même à ce qui l’attend là-bas” (*Balco*, p. 42). Hayet’s words here are prophetic: little will await the pair as they arrive in Corsica to work menial jobs and fall victim to racial and sexual violence. The unknown of what lies beyond the horizon of the Mediterranean is not worth picking up roots and leaving one place for another.

The sea poses similar problems to Marcel Antonetti who laments the mountains that block his view from what he desires the most: the *au-delà*, the mainland. He recalls as well what little of the sea he was able to view “la mer [qui] ressemble à un grand lac paisible et dérisoire” (*Sermon*, p. 69). The sea “et même l’eau des fleuves [sont] trouble[s]” because of their constancy, their cyclical nature that appears to remain in stasis, an inertia that Marcel fights hard to resist: “Sur les rivages déserts, le clapotis des vagues exhale une odeur écoeurante parfum de marais, il faut lutter pour ne pas devenir inerte soi-même et se laisser engloutir comme par des sables mouvants” (*ibid.*). To break this inertia, one must “effacer la mer” (*Sermon*, p. 22) to finally achieve the *au-delà*: “un monde palpitant de vie dans lequel les hommes savaient encore faire quelque chose que prolonger leur existence dans la souffrance et le désarroi” (*ibid.*). Figuratively, the desire to erase the sea (“effacer la mer”) is a powerful sentiment that clearly communicates Marcel’s miserable frustration and sense of captivity on the island. *Effacer la mer* is to eliminate the sea as both an obstacle and a source for the stasis or inertia that plagues his community. And yet there is something still very curious about this expression because it also raises questions of insularity as well. *Effacer la mer* is to eliminate the one feature that defines an island: the body of water that surrounds it on all sides, separating it from other landmasses (physically and culturally). Joël Bonnemaison frames this separation in terms of physical discontinuity: “L’insularité caractérise une forme géographique résultant d’une discontinuité physique majeure qui entraîne l’isolement par rapport aux grandes terres ou aux continents.”⁴³⁶ The figurative erasure of the sea would end the island’s isolation “par rapport aux grandes terres ou aux continents,” but would that also eliminate its status as an island? Or is the sea an entirely irrelevant feature from the beginning?

⁴³⁶ Joël Bonnemaison, “Vivre dans l’île: une approche de l’iléité océanienne” (p.6), *L’Espace géographique*, Vol. 19-20, No. 2, 1991, p. 120.

The central protagonists of *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, Matthieu Antonetti and Libero Pintus, newly minted with degrees in philosophy, also believe in the promise of what awaits them “là-bas” in Corsica and for whom the Mediterranean Sea plays an inconsequential role because of the ease with which they fly over it. *Là-bas* is the opportunity to take on the management of the corner bar in Olmiccia, Marie-Angèle’s storied bar featured prominently in *Balco Atlantico*. To take on these responsibilities, Matthieu must finally emigrate to the island, Libero must return to his *sol natal*. For Matthieu, the decision to settle in Corsica is an important one because for much of his life, his time has been split between “deux mondes absolument séparés, hiérarchisés, sans frontières communes et il voulait faire sien celui qui lui était le plus étranger” (*Sermon*, p. 37). While I acknowledge Matthieu’s cultural comparisons in this remark, the differences drawn between these “deux mondes” are presented in spatial terms: they are physically separated and vertically organized (which one is atop the other in the hierarchy is an interesting question yet to be resolved by Matthieu at this point). While Matthieu does suggest that the differences between one and the other are indeed stark, as understood by the expression, “sans frontières communes,” this particular phrase is quite curious because of the importance of the “frontières” in the context of insularity. Is the Mediterranean Sea not a common border between mainland France and Corsica? This question and its response are immediately relevant in *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* precisely because that boundary, the Mediterranean Sea, is indeed a substantial one and one that Matthieu and Libero easily traverse.

The ease of travel experienced by Matthieu and Libero stands in stark contrast to the challenges of Khaled and Hayet who risk life and limb to arrive in Gibraltar to weave their way through to Marseille to then secure passage on a ferry to Ajaccio. If the ominous encounter with the “masse sombre” of the island echoed the literary tradition of the *Robinsonnade* and foretold

the possibility of a transformative experience, the ease of travel for Matthieu and Libero suggests the banality and staleness of the place itself (or of what it has become and will become) because it is a destination easily accessed and escaped. Crossing the skies from Paris to Ajaccio could also be understood then as the *anti-Robinsonnade*: there is no longer any challenge, peril, or rite required to enter the insular space, a plane's wheels need only land on the tarmac and taxi to the gate to let off its passengers. The transformative experience of entering the insular space is minimized, or even erased.

How characters relate to the sea is at the center of the discussion of insularity in Ferrari's works. As we have already seen, Stéphane Campana reels at the permeability of the border itself as it permits immigration. Khaled welcomes these cracks in the "murs liquides" for the opportunity they present for a shot at a better life (although interrupted by Stéphane). For Théodore Morrachini, crossing the permeable border remains a transformative experience, even if difficult and tolling for him personally. However, for Matthieu and Libero, there is little value in the end, as they both come to realize at the novel's conclusion, to (re)entering the insular space: where 19th-century travelers dreamt whilst overlooking the ruins of antiquity in Aléria, or where the young Gustave Flaubert experienced an electric connection with the natural landscapes surrounding Vico, 21st-century travelers see regression, a dismal outlook, an experience of hopelessness. And yet, there is still a beacon to which each individual character responds, the call of the island, however faint, however feeble, can still be heard.

2. *A Space of Cosmic Creation and Destruction: The Corner Bar*

At the center of both *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* is a bar at the center of Olmiccia that has passed through numerous hands over many decades. In the 1980s, Marie-Angèle Susini returns to Olmiccia from Calvi following the death of her husband and “avec ce qu’il lui restait d’argent, elle reprit le bar du village, fermé depuis des lustres [...] Les militants nationalistes fréquentaient assidûment le bar dont ils ont très vite fait leur quartier général” (*Balco*, p. 23). More than just a simple gathering spot on a warm day for “une tournée de pastis dans des verres si pleins qu’il n’y restait plus de place pour de l’eau” (*Sermon*, p. 29), the corner bar is also a refuge from the world where individual characters can finally exist, escaping the pressures that exist beyond its threshold, as Eva Pich-Ponte argues: “[Les bars] semblent constituer un univers à part, un seuil particulier capable d’abolir et de réduire les distances sociales, linguistiques et culturelles. Tout en demeurant des miroirs de la société, ils constituent des endroits de rencontre où l’on peut trouver une liberté inexistante ailleurs.”⁴³⁷ Pich-Ponte offers an optimistic and wholesome view of the social nature of the bar while also highlighting its singularity as “un univers à part.” In Ferrari’s *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, the corner bar will serve as a space for social interaction, certainly, but more importantly, the narrative setting of the bar is used by Ferrari to demonstrate the impossibility of creation, of the illusory promises of the future. As Daniela Kuschel has recently argued, the corner bar found in these novels is “un microcosme qui reflète le mode de fonctionnement du monde et ses conditions extrêmement hétérogènes et ambivalentes.”⁴³⁸ More than just an exploration of the ways in which individuals interact with one another, Ferrari purses a more profound question: How are worlds created and subsequently

⁴³⁷ Eva Pich-Ponce, “De la Taverne du Chat Dansant et l’‘Underground’: l’importance du bar comme espace de socialisation dans les romans de Marie-Claire Blais”, *Bars, cafés, buvettes*, no. 15, 2015, p. 30.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

destroyed by their own creators? In *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, Ferrari raises the question of creation and disaggregation of worlds in numerous ways that often consider larger theological questions: “Le démiurge n’est pas le Dieu créateur. Il ne sait même pas qu’il construit un monde, il fait une œuvre d’homme, pierre après pierre, et bientôt, sa création lui échappe et le dépasse et s’il ne la détruit pas, c’est elle qui le détruit” (*Sermon*, p. 101). Recent scholarship dedicated to Ferrari’s works has focused on the influences of the continental philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz⁴³⁹ and Arthur Schopenhauer⁴⁴⁰ alongside quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg⁴⁴¹ (whose work inspired Ferrari’s novel *Le Principe* [Actes sud, 2015]). Here, I propose to recenter the focus of the discussion on contemporary Corsica itself as a potential space for the creation and disaggregation of an individual’s sense of the world and of the world itself through the extended metaphor of the corner bar, itself an insular space, unique for its replication of the social dynamics of the Corsican village itself. As we have seen previously, the appearance of oft-recycled characters in the corner bar of Olmiccia further strengthens the connections between the novels *Balco Atlantico* and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*: “Ces réapparitions mettent en évidence la durabilité des structures et des valeurs qui entourent le bar (*i.e.*, le monde), lui imposant dans le temps une dimension générationnelle qui assure leur transmission.”⁴⁴² These perspectives of the bar as a “microcosme” and as a “miroir[] de la société” echo Anne Meistersheim’s hypothesis of the island as a laboratory⁴⁴³ where the concentrated forces of (human) nature can be observed firsthand and even manipulated. Ferrari’s deeply morose vision of the present world and of its

⁴³⁹ Pascaline David, *op. cit.*, p. 37-54.

⁴⁴⁰ Mathilde Zbaeren, “Les mondes possibles: philosophie tragique et physique quantique, métaphores de stratégies de dévoilement,” *Des mondes possible, des romans de Jérôme Ferrari*, *op. cit.*, p. 83-110.

⁴⁴¹ Isabelle Bernard, “Éthique et mystique scientifique dans *Le Principe* (2015) de Jérôme Ferrari,” *Itinéraires: Littérature, cultures, textes*, 2017-1 [en ligne: <https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.3704>]; also, Ursula Henningfeld, “La principe de l’incertitude chez Houellebecq, Volpi, et Ferrari” in *Chutes, ruptures et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari*, *op. cit.*, 197-214.

⁴⁴² Daniela Kuschel, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁴⁴³ Anne Meistersheim, “Île laboratoire: de l’utopie à la complexité,” *Figures de l’île*, *op. cit.*, p. 127-139.

possibilities for the future will center around whether Corsica itself has any possibility as a site of creation itself. To this end, we will build on our previous discussions of character distribution and fluctuations in temporal modes to examine the village bar as a dynamic, vibrant space of exchange, transition, and most importantly, collision, the remnants of which will raise the following question: Is this it for Corsica? Or, is there more?

From the outset of its appearance, the corner bar has been a space of creation. The resurgence of sociability and generational connections nourished through frequent contact in the bar begins anew in the 1980s (*temps de l'histoire*) when Marie-Angèle Susini “revint dans la maison familiale” (*Balco*, p. 22) in the center of Olmiccia after an extended absence in Calvi where she raised her young daughter, Virginie, following the death of her husband, “un excellent père, aimant et présent, quand ses obligations militaires le lui permettaient” (*ibid.*). With what savings she managed to accrue, she purchases the village tavern, “fermé depuis des lustres” (*Balco*, p. 23).

Over time, the bar becomes the *de facto* headquarters for many characters affiliated with nationalist political aspirations (i.e., FLNC), that envision the creation of a new nation, the *Corsican* nation. Secondary characters Vincent Léandri and Dominique Guerrini anchor the vibrant episodes of the reunions and meetings of these political advocates:

[Vincent Léandri] était heureux de retrouver le village qu’il avait fui avec tant de passion. Il était prêt à accepter d’être ce qu’il était. Il rejoignit Dominique Guerrini, son ami d’enfance, qui venait d’achever son deuxième séjour en prison, et l’aida à organiser dans la région le mouvement nationaliste en pleine expansion (*Balco*, p. 49).

Tony Versini enters the space of the bar alongside Stéphane Campana, a fledgling nationalist who has yet to be fully introduced to the rest of the group: “Vincent avait remarqué, ce soir-là, accoudé au comptoir à côté de Tony Versini, un jeune homme qu’il n’avait jamais vu. Il avait la tête rasée et l’air timide” (*Balco*, p. 50). Le bar becomes a place of celebration for political victories (particularly being released from jail) and the collisions of different characters’ trajectories that

will prove fatal in the end: “Ils étaient tous au bar pour fêter la libération de Stéphane. Virginie avait demandé à sa mère si elle pouvait venir lui dire bonjour elle aussi et quand il arriva, rayonnant de joie, elle lui sauta au cou en lui demandant où il était pendant tout ce temps” (*Balco*, p. 65).

For Hayet too, the bar in Olmiccia serves as an avenue to create a new life in Corsica. She begins as a waitress under the watchful eye of Marie-Angèle Susini and Vincent Léandri, her de facto protector from the malicious behavior of regulars like Tony Versini “[qui] trouvait Hayet de plus en plus attirante. En même temps, elle l’agaçait d’une manière incroyable” (*Balco*, p. 121). As we discussed earlier, his frustration results from his sexual attraction confronted with his deep-seeded racial prejudice: “Ce n’était pas la question que la fille soit belle ou pas, ni qu’elle lui plaise, c’était juste qu’il ne pouvait baiser une Arabe, et une Noire non plus” (*Balco*, p. 122).

The hopes for creating something new are mired by the ethnic, racist behaviors that flow between the bar’s tables. The murder of Khaled followed by that of Stéphane Campana rids the corner bar of much of its former glory and charm, the sudden departure of Hayet is its death knell: “Le départ de Hayet marqua contre toute attente le début d’une série de calamités qui s’abattirent sur le bar du village comme la malédiction divine sur l’Égypte” (*Sermon*, p. 42). Hayet’s departure marks the beginning of the end, the disaggregation of the bar that will form a central narrative arc in *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. The clientele quickly becomes a group of reprobates and degenerates. Marie-Angèle decides to sell her stake in the management of the bar:

Elle regarda Virgile Ordoni se diriger en titubant vers les toilettes, elle songea avec fatalisme au triste sort qui attendait l’abattant impeccablement javellisé, sans parler du sol et des murs, elle se vit passer toute l’après-midi du dimanche l’éponge à la main, à pester contre ces sauvages, et elle décida de passer une annonce pour donner le bar en gérance (*Sermon*, p. 30).

Her disappointments accumulate with a series of failed partnerships: outrageous renovations transform the bar into a new spot curiously named, “El Commandante, sound, food, lounge”

(*Sermon*, p. 43) that is doomed from the outset because “le gérant avait décidé de ne pas vendre de pastis, pour une question de standing” (*Sermon*, p. 44). Other failures include substantial embezzlement and fraud committed by Bernard Gratas. These new bar owners are unable to create anything meaningful, successful, persistent with the bar that Hayet left in tatters.

Perhaps unknowingly, Matthieu Antonetti and Libero Pintus dream of a successful venture in bar ownership and the future pathways it could afford them. They acquire the capital necessary to stake their claim, thanks to Matthieu’s grandfather, Marcel Antonetti, with whom he maintains an emotionally complicated relationship: “Je vais payer la gérance cette année et je la paierai encore l’année prochaine. Après tu n’auras plus rien, rien du tout, plus un centime. En deux ans, tu auras le temps de prouver de quoi tu es capable, mon garçon” (*Sermon*, p. 65). And so, it begins.

Libero sees tourism as a possible cash windfall but also an opportunity to exploit those who have rendered his community dependent on the high and low seasons for economic survival: “[Matthieu et Libero] allaient les saigner, tous ces connards, les pauvres, les riches, sans distinction d’âge ni de nationalité, mais les saigner honnêtement” (*Sermon*, p. 96). In addition to offering local food, meats, and cheeses, Libero gives into the sexually exploitive and homophobic suggestion of hiring female waitstaff to increase the number of men that come to the bar, “Le soir, il faut des filles. Deux mecs, c’est pas bon pour le commerce. Je sais qu’au jour d’aujourd’hui, c’est pas les pédés qui manquent mais vous comptez pas ouvrir un gay club, non?” (*Sermon*, p. 98). The progressive success of the bar begins to wedge apart its owners who see the influx of cash as a symbol of success or an unwanted consequence of a bad decision: “[Matthieu] regarda la nuit avec mélancolie en songeant pour la première fois que ses yeux ne voyaient peut-être pas la même chose que ceux de son ami d’enfance” (*Sermon*, p. 166). Libero continues to spiral out of control until he reaches the darkest of nights, “la nuit de la fin du monde était calme” (*Sermon*, p. 190). A fight

breaks out between Virgile Ordoni and Pierre-Emmanuel for the latter's long-term mistreatment and disrespect of the bar's servers. Virgile drags him out of the bar to take the fight to the parking lot. Libero withdraws a pistol from below the counter, leaves the bar, confronts Virgile Ordoni who has, in the meantime, begun to manually castrate Pierre-Emmanuel on the street itself. Libero raises the pistol "vaguement", points it at Pierre-Emmanuel, and then "la voix du sang montait vers Dieu depuis le sol, dans la jubilation des os brisés" (*Sermon*, p. 193).⁴⁴⁴ It is Virginie Susini's turn to take over the management of the bar.

We are not just dealing with a bar as a place for an *apéro*, table games, flirtation, solitude, and forgotten memories. As Daniela Kuschel argued earlier, its social dynamics are a mirror of those beyond its threshold. The bar then is a spatial metaphor for the insular cosmos itself: one where long gone are the practices of honor-bound *vendetta*, where funerals are only meaningful if heavily intoxicated, where the fear of immigrant communities is an open topic of concern. Its daily activity coincides with the *va-et-vient* of village life: "Le bar n'est pas un lieu clos, mais au contraire un lieu qui permet et favorise des passages dès lors que son seuil est franchi."⁴⁴⁵ While characters can enter and leave as they please, the bar is a fabricated space (socially and physically) that lends to what Edward Casey theorizes as a "dwelling": the physical spaces that provide "not just bare shelter but the possibility of sojourns of upbringing, of education, of contemplation, of conviviality, lingerings of many kinds and durations."⁴⁴⁶ We see this relationship between space and character development with personages such as Virginie Susini who grows into adolescence

⁴⁴⁴ Virgile Ordoni is a curious character in *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*. Matthieu Antonetti first meets Virgile while he manually castrates his pigs, "Mais Matthieu ne songeait pas à dire quoi que ce soit d'autant que l'enclos était maintenant le théâtre d'une intéressante péripétie" (*Sermon*, p. 38). This scene and its twin at the end of the novel are elements of a more substantial demonstration and critique of extreme (toxic) masculinity that runs through both *Balco Atlantico* (Théodore M. and Stéphane C. frame their worth and success in terms of sex) and *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* where sexuality is most exploited in the setting of the bar, especially by Libero who seeks to turn as much profit as possible.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

from behind the bar counter with her mother, who is unaware of the erotic “conviviality” secretly shared between her daughter and Stéphane Campana, who sees himself as the one responsible for the “upbringing” of his community as he further fans the flames of Corsican nationalism. Casey’s remarks about the “lingerings of many kinds and durations” recalls the impact of recycling numerous characters across narrative spaces to represent complex social dynamics in interconnected narrative spaces.

The bar is also a place where an individual (character) can establish personal and generational roots while cultivating a sense of continuity despite the transitory nature of the bar itself. French anthropologist Marc Augé proposes the concept of “le lieu” to identify these spaces and locations where personal and generational identities can develop: “un lieu peut se définir comme identitaire, relationnel et historique.”⁴⁴⁷ “Le lieu” is similar to Casey’s conceptualization of the “dwelling” because of its social components and can be used to further nuance Ferrari’s bar as an anchor for different characters, for example Libero Pintus, for whom the success of the bar is truly a matter of life and death. These different aspects of the instantiation of “un lieu” are “des pratiques collectives et individuelles”⁴⁴⁸ that result in shared culture and history. Reading Augé alongside Casey, we can conceive of the bar in Ferrari’s novels as an important space for the individual as well as for the community. The notion of “le lieu” better concretizes the bar as a cosmic center, a space where “l’individu se veut un monde.”⁴⁴⁹ In her magnificent study of the “pôles de construction de destruction” that give structure to Ferrari’s bar, Daneila Kuschel identifies the cyclical collision of antithetical values, ideals, and visions for *le meilleur des mondes possibles* that fuel a cycle of creation and destruction: “Le bar est la scène sur laquelle les deux

⁴⁴⁷ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. “La Librairie du XXI^e siècle” p. 100.

⁴⁴⁸ *Idem.*, p. 67.

⁴⁴⁹ Marc Augé, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

romans nous présentent cette évanescence de mondes qui se répètent éternellement.”⁴⁵⁰ In addition to the interactions of characters that Kuschel details at great length in her analysis, I would like to emphasize the importance of the bar itself as the setting for these collisions, intersections, and expulsions.

The bar as “monde” is not open to everyone. If the bar is where one can develop roots, what about those who are not able to? Or that fail despite their best intentions and efforts? Hayet falls victim to sexual harassment and racism and her brother is gruesomely murdered; Matthieu’s vision for the village as “un lieu d’exil idyllique”⁴⁵¹ is slowly torn to pieces by Libero’s own degeneration; Stéphane Campana’s attempts to establish a new trajectory for Corsican society, towards liberation, do not go beyond the threshold of the bar itself and out into the community. How do these failures alter our understanding of the bar itself? The bar is a void. A place where social implantation is impossible; a place where individuals cannot say that they are “chez moi”: “Le personnage est chez lui lorsqu’il est à son aise dans la rhétorique des gens dont il partage la vie.”⁴⁵² The bar is a dangerous abyss for Hayet who falls victim to “la rhétorique des gens” who see her only for her ethnicity. The bar vacuous for Stéphane Campana because “la rhétorique des gens dont il partage la vie” is not one that meets his political aspirations and ambitions. Matthieu who never manages to insert himself into the community he long aspired to adopt (or that would adopt him) and that he ultimately rejects. At the conclusion of *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, Matthieu’s disenchantment and avoidance suggests his rejection of the insular *space* where he confronted the horrors of human nature: “En huit ans, il n’est revenu en Corse qu’une seule fois,

⁴⁵⁰ *Idem.*, p. 150.

⁴⁵¹ Daniela Kuschel, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴⁵² *Idem.*, p. 136.

pour témoigner au procès de Libero, à la cour d'assises d'Ajaccio, mais il n'a jamais remis les pieds au village [...] Il croit toujours que ce qu'on ne voit pas cesse d'exister" (*Sermon*, p. 197-8).

If we accept the hypothesis of the bar as a metaphor for insular society in Corsica, where do we stand currently with the conflicting notions of "dwelling" and "void"? The fluctuating relationship between the insular setting and the individuals that live there is one that persists throughout the novel. At times, the island is understood as a beacon of hope. At others, a void. The vision that Ferrari shares for the outlook of Corsican communities is deeply conflicted and morose, but not entirely without promise. The insular world never ceases to exist, it lives to return in a different form, molded from different hands, perhaps this time, of a new generation:

Regardez autour de vous, vous qui m'êtes chers. Rome est tombée mais n'est-ce pas, en vérité, comme s'il ne s'était rien passé? La course des astres n'est pas troublée, la nuit succède au jour qui succède à la nuit, à chaque instant, le présent surgit du néant, vous êtes là, devant moi, et le monde marche encore vers sa fin mais il ne l'a pas encore atteinte, et nous ne savons pas quand il l'atteindra, car Dieu ne nous révèle pas tout (*Sermon*, p. 202).

The question now becomes, what is the next "course des astres" for Corsica.

This study has insisted on various individual components of literary narrative to uncover Jérôme Ferrari's strategies for *writing* modern Corsica. Anchoring these stories within the village center, recycling characters over numerous diegetic spaces, and foregrounding their reliance on the past contribute to a vast portrayal of the realities and struggles of contemporary Corsican communities. Both as strategies of writing and objects of representation themselves, Ferrari's textually reconstructs the spaces and conflicts of the village center as a dynamic space of intersection and collision. While often morose, Ferrari revitalizes the discussion of the nature of Corsican insularity by integrating its own obstacles into the architectural framework of his novels. A lingering question is whether a stable future is possible in Corsica or if the cycle of creation/destruction will be an interminable one? While the dreams and aspirations of his

characters do not always materialize, what matters most is that Corsica continues to exist as both a site of creation and an object of fascination, for both wayward traveler and the accomplished writer.

CONCLUSION

Qu'est-ce que la Corse? What Corsica has been, what it currently is, and its future, although left open, have been the focus of the search for expression(s) of insular identity through modern French literature. The trans-secular approach to this dissertation has brought the insular voice to the forefront as contemporary Corsican authors seek to express their own insular identity that has long been determined and written by narratives of the past and from far beyond the boundaries of the island itself. As modern Corsican identity is brought back into question, and into prominence, it seeks new relationships with the stories that have long been told all the while new stories are told.

Travel narratives of the early-19th-century established the borders of an island that was later filled in with a variety of colors, shades, and hues. These texts connected Metropolitan readers with a portion of France that was little known beyond the stories of its most famous and legendary citizen, Napoléon Bonaparte. As we have seen, this legendary figure was deeply polarizing and critically altered the perspective of those writing about Corsica to portray and deprecate the whole of Corsican culture for the simple reason of his birth. The anti-Napoleonic rhetoric of the early-19th-century latched on to tales of vengeance which served as evidence of a brutish and uncivilized society with little appreciation for Metropolitan norms, even more reason to tighten political grip around the Cap Corse and squeeze tightly. During this time, external perspectives controlled the conversation: the Metropole dominated the discourse about Corsican politics, culture, environment, and economics. Its past, present, and future were spoken for and written about by others, those foreign to the island itself. Stories of Corsica were first generated beyond its own horizon, without any insular perspective to be had. Historical fiction set the foundation for a long

series of *vendetta*, passing from one generation to another, to another, to another, until the ground itself is turned red.

While a *vendetta* is a gruesome reality what is more troubling is the lack of understanding of what is a *vendetta*. Early-19th century authors saw only the bloodshed and the stories of familial lines slowly being wiped out. Few sought to explore beneath the surface to understand the cultural motivations and the principles that dictated the ways in which vengeance can be enacted. Eugène Rosseeuw Saint-Hilaire is the first author to probe insular culture from within and to give voice its complexity. The *Lettres sur la Corse* (1826-1827) demonstrate the curiosity of the observer, and his many frustrations, as well as his willingness to listen to the stories told *within* the island, from its own communities. His letters transmit the sights, sounds, smells, and flavors of the mountainous interior for what they were – the evidence of life. Saint-Hilaire acknowledges the difference between Metropolitan and insular customs without necessarily drawing an explicit conclusion as those before him were apt to do. The *Souvenirs de Corse* return to the stories told from within—of marriage, of starting families, of the legendary powers of red coral (still valued today), of the humanity of bandits—stories that were not as popular or explosive as those of fugitive bandits, of the enraged patriarch. What else was lost in the Metropolitan thirst for vengeance?

This question is also one that Gustave Flaubert raised of his own perceptions and exposure to Corsican culture through various travel narratives and fictions of the time. In the *Dossier Corse*, we witness Flaubert's engagement with the pillars of the Romantic period's dramatic representation of Corsica. He surpasses repetition and explores the possibilities of his characters – a bandit who might have been able to flee, a mother killed by her own grief, a heroic warrior brought to his knees from his own fear. Corsica was not simply a backdrop for these early narratives and explorations of literature, but a deep fascination. Like many others, Flaubert too

heard the beacon emanating from the island, bringing him over its horizon. Much like Saint-Hilaire, Flaubert encounters difference, alterity. The importance for Flaubert was not so much the dissimilarity with the Metropole as the confrontation with his own expectations and visions for insular culture, born of literature. Travel narratives and stories generated false expectations, unreal images, absent heroes. He was also unprepared for the landscape itself. The experience with the mountain surging out of the sea is deeply transformative for the young traveler and encourages him to continue seek out the limits of the horizon, a feat he will accomplish many years later. For Flaubert, Corsica is itself the site of transformation.

Marc Biancarelli would likely agree with this assessment but would remind his readers of the devastating destruction suffered by the island, at its own hands and those of the Metropole as we saw in his caustic and incendiary novel *Orphelins de Dieu*. Biancarelli's Corsica is a mountain that bleeds into the sea. Its natural splendors have been exploited for the enjoyment and profit of those that pass through. Its communities have turned against one another as attachment to traditional codes of honor and respect wither away. It is a society that will eventually drown in its own blood and in the ocean of its own forgotten memories. His brutal assessment of the future of Corsica is echoed in a series of novels by Antoine Albertini, long-time correspondent in Corsica for *Le Monde*, who has shifted professional focus to literature. In his novel *Banditi*, Albertini portrays *le grand banditisme* that plagues modern Corsica and writes of its degeneration from the perspective of an anonymous police detective using a tone that mirrors Biancarelli's *Santa Lucia*:

Nous avons accepté que cette île devienne ce qu'elle était en train de devenir, un cul-de-basse fosse, un cloaque à ciel ouvert, nous ne pouvions nous en prendre qu'à nous-mêmes et à l'État, aussi qui n'y avait jamais rien compris, ne voulait rien y comprendre et n'avait longtemps espéré qu'une chose: que cesse le fracas de bombes et que son autorité ne soit plus remise en question, puisque seuls comptaient les symboles et que la vie humaine, aux yeux de cinquante gouvernements successifs, valait moins qu'un peu de plâtre sur un buste de Marianne après un attentat. Pendant des années, l'État avait promis: plus de plasticages

et on pourrait voir venir. On avait vu. La région croulait sous les déchets, le crime organisé n'avait jamais été aussi puissant et un habitant sur cinq vivait sous le seuil de pauvreté. Sur cette île, le simple fait de garder les yeux ouverts revenait à accepter le désenchantement comme un prix à payer pour pouvoir simplement respirer.⁴⁵³

What is most interesting in this excerpt from Albertini's novel is its insistence on multiple actors and their numerous missteps. Biancarelli would agree that the reliance on those from outside of insular communities is a dangerous proposition because of the risk (and reality) of abandonment. To restore Corsica, one must look within.

But where? Into which recesses of cultural memory would anyone find this inspiration? For Marie Ferranti, the strength and conviction to assert the contemporary insular voice is found in the stories of the past and in the celebration of death. Funerary rites and rituals along with stories of the supernatural that long intrigued travelers of the 19th century are where Ferranti directs her attention. The experience with death is an integral aspect of insular culture and at the heart of her work is the question of what it would mean to forget how to die in Corsica. If the *voceri* disappear, how do you celebrate a life lived? If the *mazzeri* are no longer, how do you take advantage of the present? From this regard *La Chasse* of Marie Ferranti is of *la nuit*, of the shadows, of the abyss, because it is there that contemporary Corsica culture will reconnect with its roots and its memories. It is there that the insular voice will be and must be found.

This voice one found, is there any substance to it? Jérôme Ferrari's sustained presentation of contemporary Corsican communities depicts a society on the verge of collapse. Ferrari's Corsica is a void, a place of unkept promise. It is a place entirely detached from the values of honor, the codes of the *vendetta*, and the reverence for death that elsewhere and otherwise set Corsica apart. Ferrari's Corsica is no longer connected to its own origins. Many of his characters suffer from the

⁴⁵³ Antoine Albertini, *Banditi*, Paris, Éditions JC Lattès, 2020, p. 103-4

same disenchantment and disillusionment as Albertini's detective above: Khaled's hope for a better future is met with the barrel of a gun; Stéphane Campana's dreams for a politically autonomous Corsica end in his own blood flowing down the street; Matthieu Antonetti's excitement to finally settle where he has long felt most comfortable ends in his own escape and refusal to return to the island. For all the pain and suffering Ferrari ascribes to contemporary Corsica, the island still emits a strong beacon pulling many into its orbit, including Ferrari. Through his works we see the tense struggles with memory, with the landscape, and with a world rapidly transforming on its own. The insular voice expressed in Ferrari's works is a troubled one indeed, but it is through the expression of these challenges that his work charts a pathway forward.

Each individual author contributes an answer, in one form or another, to the question *Qu'est-ce que la Corse?*, but what distills from the pairing of narratives from different generations? What comes from these trans-secular dialogues around banditry, vengeance, the natural environment, and death? More than just a comparative perspective that reveals similarities and differences (A vs. B), the dialogic relationships explored in this dissertation unearth the dynamic, polyvalent forces connecting literature, cultural identity, and the experience with *Place*. Literature has been the space where Corsican identity has been imposed, contested, and reasserted through the manipulation and reappropriation of cultural stereotypes, assumptions, and original stories themselves. The dialogic pairs pursued also frame the relationship between narratives of different generations as an iterative one: never erasing and replacing (to supplant), each narrative builds off another, adding nuance, new vision, and new voice to the widening and deepening polyphony emanating from Corsica, creating new experiences and opportunities to return to the island that has long attracted travelers and readers alike.

In recent years, contemporary Corsican authors have continued their explorations of insular communities in deeply introspective and probative points of view. Marie Ferranti has continued to explore the shadows and recesses of cultural memory in the play entitled *La Passion de Maria Gentile* (Gallimard, 2017) and novel *Histoire d'un assassin* (Gallimard, 2018). Jérôme Ferrari's *À son image* (Actes sud, 2018) offers a sustained reflection on the difficulty of the return to the island. Other contemporary authors pursue their vision of contemporary Corsica through a lens similar to the one through which the island's communities were viewed in the early-19th century: Antoine Albertini draws on his background as a journalist to portray the depravity and ills of organized crime that plagues Bastia in his pair of novels *Malamorte* (2019) and *Banditi* (2020), both published with Éditions JC Lattès. He also explores the hidden stories of immigrants to the region in *Les Invisibles* (2020), continuing the discussions broached in Ferrari's *Balco Atlantico*. In the same vein, Laure Limongi explores the intersections of criminality and emigration to the Metropole in *On ne peut pas tenir la mer dans ses mains* (Grasset, 2019). The works of these two particular authors, Albertini and Limongi, merit further consideration again for their engagement with the bandit-like intrigue to construct their narratives of contemporary Corsica. Authors of graphic novels have also appeared prominently and focused on crime-driven plots in their craft. In addition to the beautiful album *Mazzeru* by Jules Stromboni (Éditions Castermann, 2017), Patrice Camberou, a former *juge d'instruction en Corse*, returns to his first case in *Sous le feu corse. L'enquête du juge des paillotes* (Futuropolis, 2016) to tell the story of the arson of a beachside café (a "paillote") outside of Ajaccio at the hands of a clandestine paramilitary group directed and covered up by military officials in Paris.

As some of these recent publications suggest, Corsica remains an object of fascination and is further developing as a site of contemporary literary production. This dissertation has explored

sites of original creation and expression of Corsican insularity from both within the island and far from its frontiers. Investigating the earliest depictions of insular culture has revealed a network of specific terms, expressions, and representations around which Corsican identity was condensed and simplified. Reading the works of the 19th century in conversation with those of the 21st has resulted in a dynamic exchange between generations and between authors that resist a reductive vision of insular culture and opens space for new conversations, new discourses, and most importantly, for literature.

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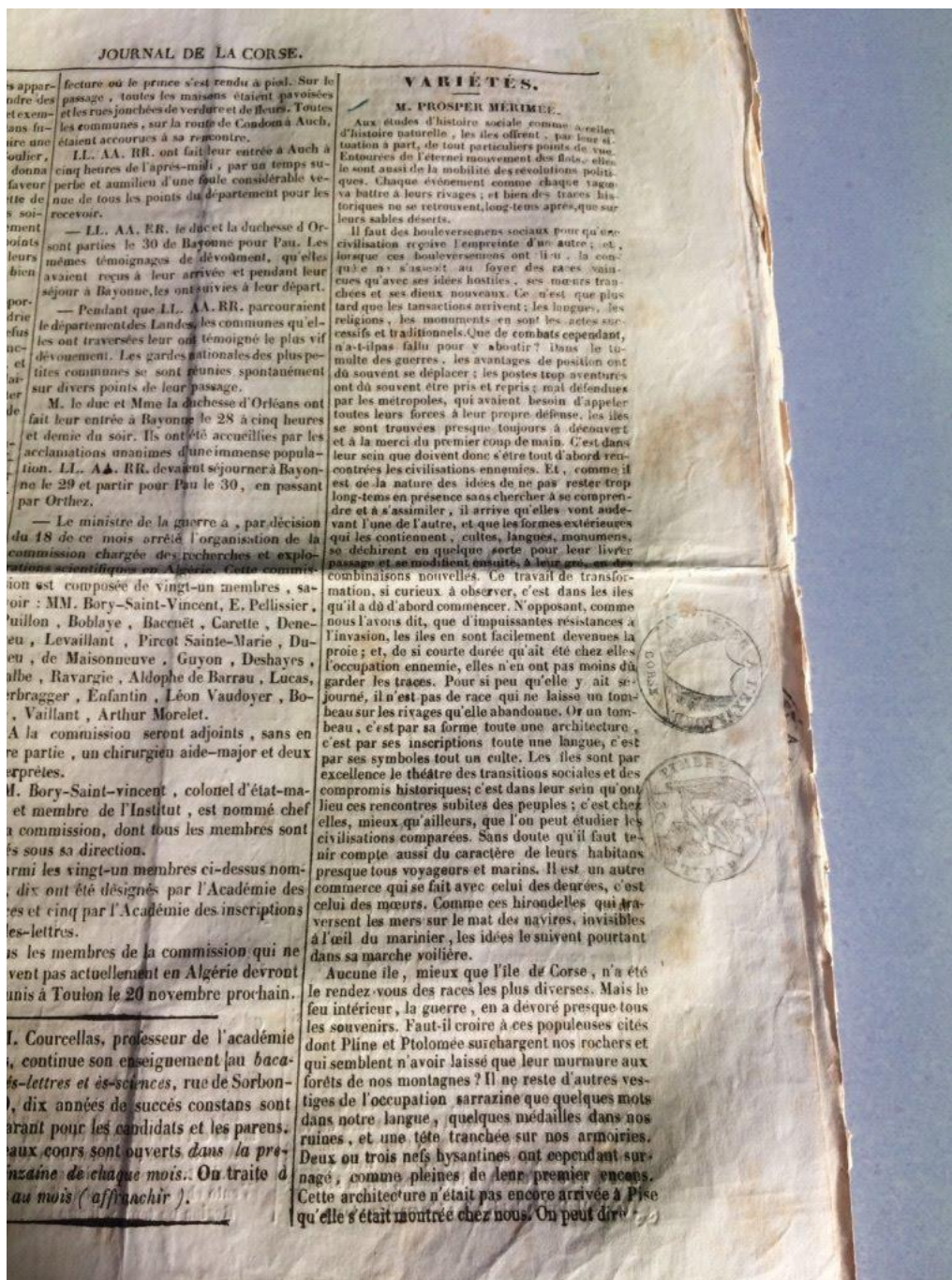
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ANNEX 1: Excerpts from *Journal de la Corse*, September-October 1840
Archives régionales de la Corse-du-Sud (Ajaccio), my personal photographs

1PER Le Journal de la Corse 1817 Hebdomadaire, en cours Hebdomadaire puis quotidien à partir du 30 décembre 1891 puis hebdomadaire à partir du 10 janvier 1997 Ajaccio, de 28 x 22 à 53 x 38 cm 1^{er} nov. 1817 (1^{re} année)

Excerpt of Colomba



JOURNAL DE LA CORSE.

...s appar- fecture où le prince s'est rendu à pied. Sur le
ndre des passage, toutes les maisons étaient pavées
et exam- et les rues jonchées de verdure et de fleurs. Toutes
ins l'... communes, sur la route de Condom à Auch,
ire que... étaient accourues à sa rencontre.

...oulier, L.L. AA. RR. ont fait leur entrée à Auch à
onna cinq heures de l'après-midi, par un temps su-
faveur perbe et amouliné d'une pluie considérable vé-
ite de nue de tous les points du département pour les
s. soim- recevoir.

...ment LL. AA. RR. le duc et la duchesse d'Or-
oints sont parties le 30 de Bayonne pour Pau. Les
leurs mêmes témoignages de dévouement, qu'elles
bien avaient reçus à leur arrivée et pendant leur
séjour à Bayonne, les ont suivies à leur départ.

...por- Pendant que LL. AA. RR. parcouraient
drie le département des Landes, les communes qu'el-
des les ont traversées leur ont témoigné le plus vif
ac- dévouement. Les gardes nationales des plus pe-
ait- tites communes se sont réunies spontanément
de sur divers points de leur passage.

...M. le duc et Mme la duchesse d'Orléans ont
fait leur entrée à Bayonne le 28 à cinq heures
et demie du soir. Ils ont été accueillis par les
acclamations unanimes d'une immense popula-
tion. LL. AA. RR. devaient séjourner à Bayon-
ne le 29 et partir pour Pau le 30, en passant
par Orthez.

...Le ministre de la guerre a, par décision
du 18 de ce mois arrêté l'organisation de la
commission chargée des recherches et exploi-
tations scientifiques en Algérie. Cette commis-
sion est composée de vingt-un membres, sa-
voir: MM. Bory-Saint-Vincent, E. Pellissier,
Guillon, Boblaye, Baccot, Carotte, Deneu-
eu, Levailant, Pircot Sainte-Marie, Du-
eu, de Maisonneuve, Guyon, Deshayes,
albe, Ravargie, Adolphe de Barrau, Lucas,
rbragger, Enfantin, Léon Vaudoyer, Bo-
y, Vaillant, Arthur Morelet.

À la commission seront adjoints, sans en-
tre partie, un chirurgien aide-major et deux
médecins.

M. Bory-Saint-Vincent, colonel d'état-ma-
jet membre de l'Institut, est nommé chef
de la commission, dont tous les membres sont
sous sa direction.

Parmi les vingt-un membres ci-dessus nom-
més dix ont été désignés par l'Académie des
sciences et cinq par l'Académie des inscriptions
et belles-lettres.

Les membres de la commission qui ne
sont pas actuellement en Algérie devront
être réunis à Toulon le 20 novembre prochain.

M. Courcellas, professeur de l'académie
de Corse, continue son enseignement [au baccalaureat]
en lettres et sciences, rue de Sorbon-
ne, dix années de succès constans sont
arrivés pour les candidats et les parents.
Les cours sont ouverts dans la pre-
mière semaine de chaque mois. On traite
de la Corse au mois (affinancier).

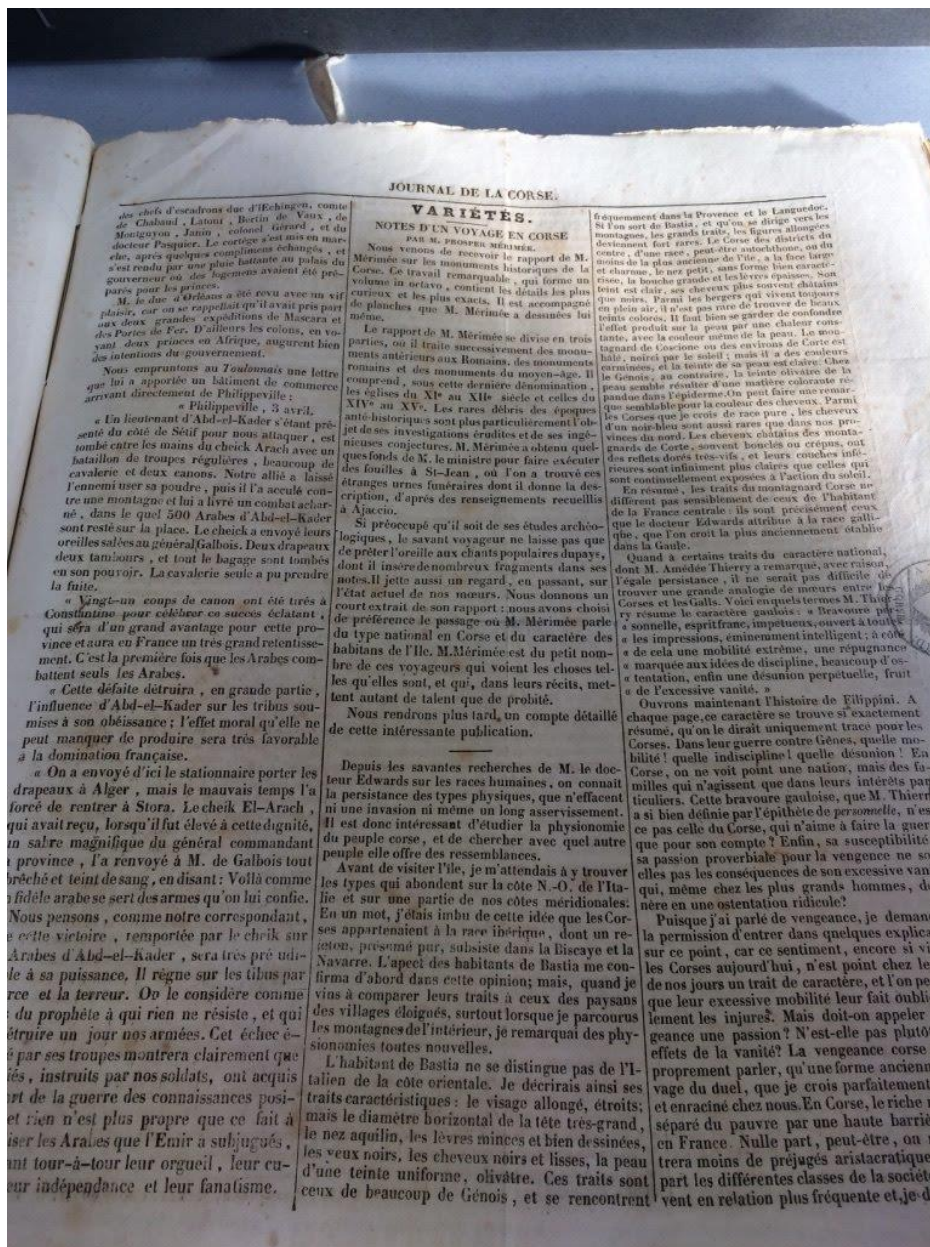
VARIÉTÉS.

M. PROSPER MÉRIMÉE.

Aux études d'histoire sociale comme à celles
d'histoire naturelle, les îles offrent, par leur si-
tuation à part, de tout particuliers points de vue.
Entourées de l'éternel mouvement des flots, elles
sont aussi de la mobilité des révolutions politi-
ques. Chaque événement comme chaque vague
va battre à leurs rivages; et bien des traces his-
toriques ne se retrouvent, long-tems après, que sur
leurs sables déserts.

Il faut des bouleversements sociaux pour qu'une
civilisation reçoive l'impression d'une autre; et,
lorsque ces bouleversements ont lieu, la con-
science se réveille au foyer des races sou-
mises qu'avec ses idées hostiles, ses mœurs tran-
chées et ses dieux nouveaux. Ce n'est que plus
tard que les transactions arrivent; les langues, les
religions, les monuments en sont les actes suc-
cessifs et traditionnels. Que de combats cependant,
n'a-t-il pas fallu pour y aboutir? Dans le tur-
multe des guerres, les avantages de position ont
du souvent se déplacer; les postes trop aventurés
ont dû souvent être pris et repris; mal défendus
par les métropoles, qui avaient besoin d'appeler
toutes leurs forces à leur propre défense, les îles
se sont trouvées presque toujours à découvert
et à la merci du premier coup de main. C'est dans
leur sein que doivent donc s'être tout d'abord ren-
contrées les civilisations ennemies. Et, comme il
est de la nature des idées de ne pas rester trop
long-tems en présence sans chercher à se compren-
dre et à s'assimiler, il arrive qu'elles vont aude-
vant l'une de l'autre, et que les formes extérieures
qui les contiennent, cultes, langues, monuments,
se déchirent en quelque sorte pour leur livrer
passage et se modifient ensuite, à leur gré, en des
combinaisons nouvelles. Ce travail de transfor-
mation, si curieux à observer, c'est dans les îles
qu'il a dû d'abord commencer. N'opposant, comme
nous l'avons dit, que d'impuissantes résistances à
l'invasion, les îles en sont facilement devenues la
proie; et, de si courte durée qu'il ait été chez elles
l'occupation ennemie, elles n'en ont pas moins dû
garder les traces. Pour si peu qu'elle y ait sé-
journé, il n'est pas de race qui ne laisse un tom-
beau sur les rivages qu'elle abandonne. Or un tom-
beau, c'est par sa forme toute une architecture,
c'est par ses inscriptions toute une langue, c'est
par ses symboles tout un culte. Les îles sont par
excellence le théâtre des transitions sociales et des
compromis historiques; c'est dans leur sein qu'on
lieu ces rencontres subites des peuples; c'est chez
elles, mieux qu'ailleurs, que l'on peut étudier les
civilisations comparées. Sans doute qu'il faut ten-
ir compte aussi du caractère de leurs habitans,
presque tous voyageurs et marins. Il est un autre
commerce qui se fait avec celui des terres, c'est
celui des mœurs. Comme ces hirondelles qui tra-
versent les mers sur le mat des navires, invisibles
à l'œil du marinier, les idées les suivent pourtant
dans sa marche voilière.

Aucune île, mieux que l'île de Corse, n'a été
le rendez-vous des races les plus diverses. Mais le
feu intérieur, la guerre, en a dévoré presque tous
les souvenirs. Faut-il croire à ces peuplées cités
dont Plin et Ptolomée surchargent nos rochers et
qui semblent n'avoir laissé que leur murmure aux
forêts de nos montagnes? Il ne reste d'autres ves-
tiges de l'occupation sarrazine que quelques mots
dans notre langue, quelques médailles dans nos
ruines, et une tête tranchée sur nos armoiries.
Deux ou trois nefs bysantines ont cependant sur-
nagé, comme plaines de leur premier enfon-
nement. Cette architecture n'était pas encore arrivée à Pise
qu'elle s'était montrée chez nous. On peut dire

Excerpt of Prosper Mérimée's travel narrative *Notes d'un voyage en Corse* (1839)

JOURNAL DE LA CORSE.

VARIÉTÉS.

NOTES D'UN VOYAGE EN CORSE

PAR M. PROSPER MÉRIMÉE.

Nous venons de recevoir le rapport de M. Mérimée sur les monuments historiques de la Corse. Ce travail remarquable, qui forme un volume in octavo, contient les détails les plus curieux et les plus exacts. Il est accompagné même.

Le rapport de M. Mérimée se divise en trois parties, où il traite successivement des monuments antérieurs aux Romains, des monuments romains et des monuments du moyen-âge. Il comprend, sous cette dernière dénomination, les églises du XI^e au XIII^e siècle et celles du XIV^e au XV^e. Les rares débris des époques antérieures sont plus particulièrement l'objet de ses investigations érudites et de ses ingénieuses conjectures. M. Mérimée a obtenu quelques fonds de M. le ministre pour faire excaver des fouilles à St-Jean, où l'on a trouvé ces étranges urnes funéraires dont il donne la description, d'après des renseignements recueillis à Ajaccio.

Si préoccupé qu'il soit de ses études archéologiques, le savant voyageur ne laisse pas que de prêter l'oreille aux chants populaires du pays; dont il insère de nombreux fragments dans ses notes. Il jette aussi un regard, en passant, sur l'état actuel de nos mœurs. Nous donnons un court extrait de son rapport; nous avons choisi de préférence le passage où M. Mérimée parle du type national en Corse et du caractère des habitants de l'île. M. Mérimée est du petit nombre de ces voyageurs qui voient les choses telles qu'elles sont, et qui, dans leurs récits, mettent autant de talent que de probité.

Nous rendrons plus tard, un compte détaillé de cette intéressante publication.

Depuis les savantes recherches de M. le docteur Edwards sur les races humaines, on connaît la persistance des types physiques, que n'effacent ni une invasion ni même un long asservissement. Il est donc intéressant d'étudier la physionomie du peuple corse, et de chercher avec quel autre peuple elle offre des ressemblances.

Avant de visiter l'île, je m'attendais à y trouver les types qui abondent sur la côte N.-O. de l'Italie et sur une partie de nos côtes méridionales. En un mot, j'étais imbu de cette idée que les Corses appartenaient à la race ibérique, dont un restait, préservé pur, subsistait dans la Biscaye et la Navarre. L'aspect des habitants de Bastia me confirma d'abord dans cette opinion; mais, quand je vins à comparer leurs traits à ceux des paysans des villages éloignés, surtout lorsque je parcourus les montagnes de l'intérieur, je remarquai des physionomies toutes nouvelles.

L'habitant de Bastia ne se distingue pas de l'Italien de la côte orientale. Je décrirais ainsi ses traits caractéristiques: le visage allongé, étroit; mais le diamètre horizontal de la tête très-grand, le nez aquilin, les lèvres minces et bien dessinées, les yeux noirs, les cheveux noirs et lisses, la peau d'une teinte uniforme, olivâtre. Ces traits sont ceux de beaucoup de Génois, et se rencontrent

fréquemment dans la Provence et le Languedoc. Si l'on sort de Bastia, et qu'on se dirige vers les montagnes, les grands traits, les figures allongées deviennent fort rares. Le Corse des districts du département fort rare, peut-être autochtone, ou du moins de la plus ancienne de l'île, a la face large et élargie, le nez petit, sans forme bien caractérisée, la bouche grande et les lèvres épaisses. Son teint est clair; ses cheveux plus souvent châtains en plein air, il n'est pas rare de trouver de beaux teints solaires. Il faut bien se garder de confondre l'effet produit sur la peau par une chaleur constante, avec la couleur même de la peau. Le montagnard de l'occident ou des environs de Corte est blanc, noyé par le soleil; mais il a des couleurs carminées, et la teinte de sa peau est claire. Chez le Génois, au contraire, la teinte olivâtre de la peau semble résulter d'une matière colorante résistante dans l'épiderme. On peut faire une remarque semblable pour la couleur des cheveux. Parmi les Corses que je vois de race pure, les cheveux d'un noir-bleu sont aussi rares que dans nos provinces du nord. Les cheveux châtains des montagnards de Corse, souvent bouclés ou crépus, ont des reflets dorés très-vifs, et leurs couches inférieures sont infiniment plus claires que celles qui sont continuellement exposées à l'action du soleil.

En résumé, les traits du montagnard Corse ne diffèrent pas sensiblement de ceux de l'habitant de la France centrale; ils sont précisément ceux que le docteur Edwards attribue à la race gauloise, que l'on croit la plus anciennement établie dans la Gaule.

Quant à certains traits du caractère national, dont M. Amédée Thierry a remarqué, avec raison, l'égalie persistance, il ne serait pas difficile de trouver une grande analogie de mœurs entre les Corses et les Gaulois. Voici en quelques termes M. Thierry résume le caractère gaulois: « Devenue plus sonnelle, espiègle, impétueuse, convert à tout, à de cela une mobilité extrême, une répugnance à marquer aux idées de discipline, beaucoup d'ostentation, enfin une désunion perpétuelle, fruit de l'excessive vanité. »

Ouvrons maintenant l'histoire de Filippini. A chaque page, ce caractère se trouve si exactement résumé, qu'on le dirait uniquement tracé pour les Corses. Dans leur guerre contre Gènes, quelle mobilité! quelle indiscipline! quelle désunion! En Corse, on ne voit point une nation, mais des familles qui n'agissent que dans leurs intérêts particuliers. Cette bravoure gauloise, que M. Thierry a si bien définie par l'épithète de *personnelle*, n'est ce pas celle du Corse, qui n'aime à faire la guerre que pour son compte? Enfin, sa susceptibilité et sa passion proverbiale pour la vengeance ne sont-elles pas les conséquences de son excessive vanité qui, même chez les plus grands hommes, dénature en une ostentation ridicule?

Puisque j'ai parlé de vengeance, je demande la permission d'entrer dans quelques explications sur ce point, car ce sentiment, encore si vif les Corses aujourd'hui, n'est point chez les de nos jours un trait de caractère, et l'on peut que leur excessive mobilité leur fait oublier lement les injures. Mais doit-on appeler la vengeance une passion? N'est-elle pas plutôt l'effet de la vanité? La vengeance corse n'est proprement parler, qu'une forme ancienne vage du duel, que je crois parfaitement et enracinée chez nous. En Corse, le riche n'est séparé du pauvre par une haute barrière en France. Nulle part, peut-être, on n'aura moins de préjugés aristocratiques part les différentes classes de la société vent en relation plus fréquente et, je di-