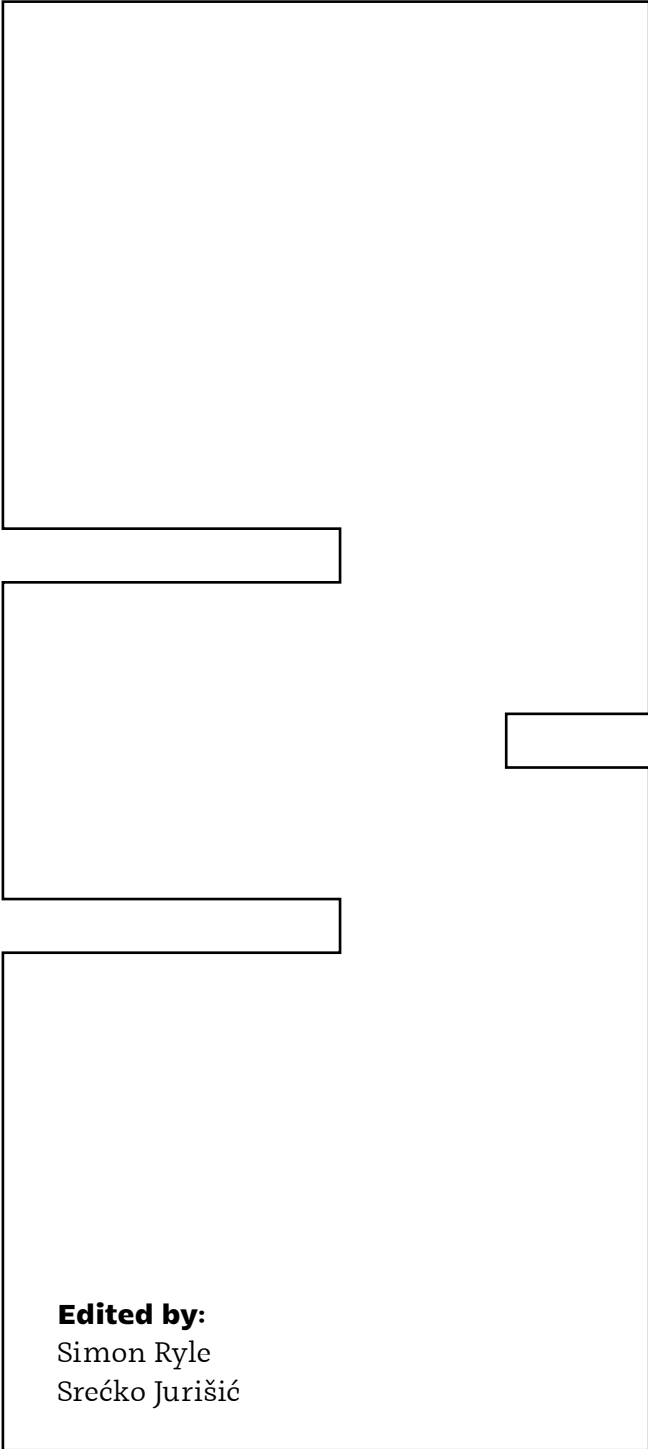


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Bora Chung, *Cursed Bunny*. Translated from the Korean by Anton Hur. Honford Star, 2021.

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Bora Chung's short story collection *Cursed Bunny* (2017, English translation, 2021) is full of strange events. A head pops out of a toilet. A woman become pregnant by taking birth control pills. A sorcerer curses a kingdom with blindness, but out of kindness. Yet what is most strange about these stories are not these odd events, but rather the way the characters react to them. Take the first lines of the opening story, "The Head," for example:

She was about to flush the toilet.

"Mother?"

She looked back. There was a head popping out of the toilet, calling for her.

"Mother?"

The woman looked at it for a moment. Then, she flushed the toilet. The head disappeared in a rush of water.

She left the bathroom.

At first it seems that the most unexpected element of the story is the head coming out of a toilet. Yet the head is not the strangest thing about this passage. The strangest thing is how the woman reacts. She looks at the head for a moment, flushes the toilet, and leaves the bathroom. She does not do any of the things that could be expected, such as scream, call the police, or whack the head with a hair dryer. A head popping out of the toilet is an unexpected event, yet her reaction to this event is even more unexpected. In order to approach what the stories in this collection are trying to say, it is the reactions, or lack thereof, of the characters to such events that prove to be most important.

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The next time the head pops up in this story, the woman initially has a more understandable reaction. “The woman became furious.” That makes sense when compared to the world the reader lives in. If a head appears in a toilet (and for a second time, no less), one possible reaction is to be furious. Yet the reason for her anger once again distances her from the world the reader might know: “I never gave the likes of you any permission to live in my toilet,” she says. The reason she is angry is because of... private property? The woman is not shocked at the appearance of the head, but at the fact that the head is living on the woman’s property without permission. If the head had the proper paperwork, well, that would be a different matter. But just taking up residency in someone else’s toilet without even asking could make someone really angry.

This is one strategy of how these stories work: the reactions in the story world are odd, yet treated as normal in the story. This means that there is something different about the story world which accounts for this lack of reaction. Figuring out this difference then leads back to truths about the reader’s world. For example, in the quote above from “The Head,” there is an irrational attachment to private property, which is surely something relatable. It is in this way that the strangeness of the stories leads to their truths, which is what George Saunders means by “the door to truth might be strangeness” in his discussion of Gogol’s short story “The Nose,” found in *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* (2021). The strangeness of Gogol’s story is not just in the appearance of the nose, but in the way that the different characters (and narrator) accept a nose going about in the world. It is not much of a stretch to compare the strange truth of the Russian writer and Chung’s work. Chung is professor of Russian language and literature at Yonsei University, as well as being a translator of Russian and Polish literature into Korean.

Another important aspect of the stories is that they have multiple endings. This does not mean that the stories have alternative endings, but rather that the “core” of a story is resolved, but then the story continues on, complicating the narrative with additional endings in order to bring out an unexpected truth.

The endings of “The Ruler of Winds and Sands” are a good example of this. The story is a twist on a fairy tale. A princess travels to another country to marry a prince. The catch is that his kingdom has been put under a curse of blindness. The princess goes on a quest to meet the man who enacted the curse, the king-sorcerer of the desert. Yet once the curse is lifted, happiness does not ensue, since there was a reason for the curse in the first place, and the princess would have done best to have left things alone.

This seems like the proper ending to the story. A tale of the blindness of greed filtered through the lens of a fairy tale. However, the story goes

on. The desert king has destroyed the prince's kingdom and the princess is riding above it in the king's floating ship made of golden gears. The princess then makes a strange request. "I wish to live as a mortal," she says, "I wish to meet a man who is like me, who will cherish and love me as I do him, to have children, to see them grow up and find their own mates and have their own children...That is the life I wish for." The desert king then tells her that he cannot give her mortality, but can give her a peace and eternity that mortals will never know. In this sense the resolution of the story is now unresolved, since a story of blind greed has been turned into something else, perhaps into a story about the danger of expectations and the peace that comes from knowing they can never be fulfilled. Yet the meaning is not as clear as it was before.

This is not the only story to function in this way. Chung's stories have a way of providing an answer and then taking that answer away at the last moment. The second story in the collection, "The Embodiment," is a good example. At first it seems like a tale about the pressures of women in South Korea to fit into a strict, patriarchal structure. Yet at the end, when the main character seems to have avoided this fate, she is said to have "tears of relief, sadness, or of something else entirely, she herself couldn't tell." The "something else entirely," placed in the final sentence of the story, opens the meaning up when it seemed locked in.

These are strange, unresolved stories that speak truths about the real world and then counteract those truths through complications, ambiguity, and confounding expectations. So perhaps the wrong questions are being asked of these stories, or the wrong exceptions are being put on them as a whole. Their point is not in their resolution, but their anger. They are not about their solutions, or their meaning, but the problems they are addressing. This relates to a quote from a recent interview the book's translator gave in *The Bookseller*, in which he says that "Koreans do not believe revenge is a dish served cold, we serve it on fire and spinning through the air. Maybe that's what the world really needs right now, not bullshit Christian forgiveness." Chung's stories do not offer forgiveness, neither to their characters, nor to their readers. And they are all the stronger for it.

Alan Ford. Bolje izdati knjigu nego prijatelja, Marjan Matić (a cura di), Novi Beograd, Dom kulture Studentski grad, 2019

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Anche se si tratta di un fumetto italiano, *Alan Ford* è più radicato nell'immaginario collettivo dei paesi dell'ex-Jugoslavia che nella sua terra d'origine. È logico, dunque, che la maggioranza dei libri che ne trattano dal punto di vista critico sia pubblicata fuori d'Italia. Ciononostante visto che ci troviamo di fronte di un fenomeno culturale che dura ormai da più di mezzo secolo, si sente tutt'ora una certa mancanza di testi dedicati all'esplorazione dettagliata dell'opera. Il libro di Lazar Džamić *Cvjećarnica u Kući cveća* (2012, significativamente ampliato per la seconda edizione) è stato il primo tentativo di esaminare seriamente il fumetto del duo Magnus / Bunker come un'opera d'arte focalizzandosi in particolare sulla sua importanza e il suo lascito nei paesi della sua più grande notorietà.

Negli anni più recenti il canone critico incentrato sulla serie è aumentato, per lo più grazie alla recente commemorazione del cinquantesimo anniversario della pubblicazione del primo volume, *Il gruppo T.N.T* (1969). Sono state organizzate diverse mostre nei paesi ex-Yu e pubblicati libri come *Halo, Bing* (2019) e *Alan Ford. Bolje izdati knjigu nego prijatelja* (2019).¹

Quest'ultimo è una raccolta di saggi critici, discussioni e interviste che girano attorno all'universo del fumetto in questione offrendo una panoramica raramente vista negli anni precedenti. Il volume è accompagnato dal ricco apparato iconografico con alcune tra le scene più iconiche tratte dagli episodi della serie. Sono particolarmente interessanti le piantine del negozio di fiori e del nascondiglio segreto di Numero Uno (quello originale e quello rinnovato dei numeri recenti).

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1 Nel 2021 l'editore croato Sandorf ha pubblicato persino il romanzo di Max Bunker, lo sceneggiatore di *Alan Ford*, dal titolo *Nel nome della mafia (U ime mafije)* a dimostrazione della popolarità di cui Bunker, al secolo Luciano Secchi ancora gode.

Alcuni dei contributi, per esempio quelli scritti da Vladimir Jakovljević, offrono per la prima volta delle sistematizzazioni esaurienti, resesi negli anni oltremodo necessarie, circa le varie edizioni, albi speciali e ristampe della serie in Italia, ma anche all'estero. Vengono enumerate le varie edizioni del primo numero nella regione balcanica (ce ne sono state ben tredici) e in Italia (oltre venti) e sono specificate le edizioni da collezione. Jakovljević mette insieme anche un percorso nelle origini del nome di Alan Ford nel saggio "Alan Ford pre Alana Forda". Sembra che l'Editoriale Corno avesse pubblicato un fumetto di fantascienza spagnolo di nome *Johnny Galaxia* (1961-62) sotto il titolo *Alan Ford* per non creare confusione con *Gionni Galassia* di Benito Jacovitti. L'editore principale della serie era Max Bunker e il nome gli piacque così tanto che, otto anni dopo, decise di darlo all'eroe del proprio fumetto.

Tra gli altri testi inclusi si trova un'intervista con Lazar Džamić, rilevante perché Džamić è una delle figure più rilevanti nel ancora lacunoso panorama critico dedicato all'*Alan Ford*, ma in realtà l'intervista non va oltre al sunto dei contenuti del suo libro di fatto perdendo l'occasione di aggiungervi qualche spunto interessante.

Dalle sempre presenti lodi, oramai ripetitive, a Nenad Brixy in questo libro si passa a un'analisi più sostanziosa del suo lavoro di traduttore: il saggio dal titolo "Tajni jezik 'Brixy'" di Mario Reljanović, è un testo ricco di esempi di analisi comparata tra l'edizione originale italiana, una traduzione letterale e poi quella di Brixy, portando alla luce alcune delle tendenze più o meno conosciute degli interventi di Brixy sulla sceneggiatura. Esse spaziano tra localizzazioni (la sostituzione di 'pizza' con 'burek'), cambiamenti che conservano il senso ma cambiano la forma (risultano talvolta più comici dell'originale) e perfino modifiche dove cambia anche il senso della nuvoletta (anche qui solitamente per sfruttare l'opportunità per fare una battuta).

Il volume non perde l'occasione di esaminare l'influsso della serie sul fumetto croato della serie attraverso un'intervista con Pavle Zelić, l'autore del fumetto *Lana Tafi*, un omaggio educativo ad *Alan Ford* dove la protagonista combatte contro farmaci falsi. Esso rappresenta un'ispirazione diretta rispetto a *Alan Ford* che è risultata in un'opera che ha avuto risonanza internazionale e ha avvicinato molti giovani fuori d'Italia ad *Alan Ford* e al fumetto in genere. Pavle Zelić è stato anche uno dei partecipanti alla tavola rotonda "Alan Ford: prvih 50 godina" che ha toccato tutti i temi di rilievo legati ad *Alan Ford*: le esperienze dei partecipanti col fumetto, il suo successo in Jugoslavia, la traduzione, la censura, lo stato della serie oggi. Si è cercato, però, di guardare anche al futuro, speculando su come avvicinare il fumetto alle nuove generazioni e su come mantenere *Alan Ford* in vita e parte della cultura per anni che seguono. Gani Sunduri ha parlato dei tentativi di introdurre *Alan Ford* in Albania,

mentre Lazar Džamić ha ipotizzato su come si potrebbe adeguarlo alla sensibilità anglosassone, così diversa da quella balcanica o mediterranea. Il saggio “Zašto je Alan Ford vanvremenska kritika društva” di Mario Reljanović esplora i temi del fumetto, ossia la sua satira dei vari problemi sociali, tra le quali la povertà, la corruzione, la disfunzionalità delle istituzioni, la guerra e la crisi ecologica concludendo che *Alan Ford* è diventato un fumetto un po' assurdo perché gli albi di 50 anni fa sono ancora rilevanti, mentre quelli più moderni si sono allontanati dai temi di origine e sono soltanto un “[...] osrednji kriminalistički strip u kojem tek ponekad možemo vidjeti odbljeske satire koja je ranije dominirala, a čitamo ga i dalje po inerciji, sećajući se nekih starijih, vanvremenskih epizoda koje će ostati aktuelne još mnogo godina” (102). Alla fine del volume il lettore trova una guida agli eventi organizzati per l'occasione del cinquantesimo anniversario compilata dal collezionista Rok Glavan. Vi vengono elencate e brevemente descritte le mostre e le fiere a partire da Belgrado, Zagabria e Lubiana fino a Milano, la città di nascita della serie. Glavan è stato l'organizzatore della mostra *Alan Ford* a Lubiana e racconta il proprio rapporto col fumetto e l'evoluzione della mostra che si è amalgamata con tutti gli altri modi in cui la gente ha potuto festeggiare *Alan Ford* nel 2019.

Sebbene è in parte un ripercorso di temi già ben conosciuti, *Alan Ford. Bolje izdati knjigu nego prijatelja* aggiunge anche alcune novità interessanti e utili a chi si interessa di *Alan Ford*. Il libro è di natura quasi erratica, contiene un po' di tutto, ma non va molto in profondo anche quando potrebbe. Tuttavia, si tratta di un altro piccolo passo verso la legittimazione di *Alan Ford* all'interno del canone della critica del fumetto.

David Farrier. Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

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The term 'Anthropocene' has recently become extensively used in literary criticism, but not in its original meaning where it defines humans as being superior to other living beings, but as a term used to encapsulate the effect humanity has had on deep time, the time of different geological events that are vastly greater and more significant for the Earth than the short human lives. Therefore, in his book *Anthropocene Poetics. Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction* David Farrier uses this term "as a reappraisal of what it means to be human in a time of political, ethical, and ecological crisis" (17). He regards humans as 'geological agents', a term coined by Dipesh Chakrabarty, responsible for the ecological crisis that is looming while simultaneously exploring our reaction to these changes and the ways in which they manifest in poetry and art. Throughout *Anthropocene Poetics* Farrier relies on the philosophy of "Kathryn Yusoff in approaching the Anthropocene as a "provocation," a spur to the imagination to rethink and reconfigure relations in (deep) time" (17). He provides the readers with various points of view of different poets and artists that have decided to centre their work around the ways in which our actions affect the planet we live on in order to bring light to the most pressing issues with which we are faced today.

While Farrier acknowledges the division of the Anthropocene studies into multiple diverse sections based on the subject of research, i.e.

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Holocene, Plantationocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Homogocene, and Plasticene, at times they may seem overwhelming, so in his book he “addresses the three main rubrics for understanding environmental crisis within the humanities – the Anthropocene and the “material turn” in environmental philosophy, the “Plantationocene” and the role of global capitalism in environmental crisis, and the emergence of multispecies ethics and extinction studies – to provide a more rounded perspective on this diverse, at times conflicted field” (8). Since “the Anthropocene is an event that challenges our sense of what an event might even mean” (ibid., 7), these different viewpoints all contribute to our understanding of the complexity of the era we live in. In the first chapter Farrier writes about thick time, in the second chapter he focuses on sacrifice zones, while in the third chapter he focuses on Donna Haraway’s theory of kin-making. As a bridge between poetry and the awareness of the time we live in Farrier uses art, starting each chapter with an analysis of an art piece focused on an environmental issue which he then further explores in poetry.

In the first chapter of *Anthropocene Poetics*, titled “Intimacy: The Poetics of Thick Time”, Farrier “explores the intimacy that inheres within the deep time of geologic and evolutionary processes” (9). We are closely related to these processes by the mere fact of our existence, the same processes that shape the Earth shape us as well, just like our every action that influences the environment sooner rather than later influences our lives as well. The subtitle “Thick Time” in the title of the first chapter “refers to the lyric’s capacity to put multiple temporalities and scales within a single frame, to “thicken” the present with an awareness of the other times and places” (ibid., 9). In other words, the time we live in is simultaneously aware of our past and our future, creating an uncanny and viscous timeline “devolved across species and objects” (Farrier, 19), and poetry is one of the few ways of expression that can bring forth all temporalities that make up thick time. Here, Farrier discusses the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and Seamus Heaney, focusing on their exploration of our experiences of time, of the in-between spaces and boundaries between objects. For him, Bishop’s interplay of geological features, as well as the notion of time as “a force that both gives shape to and receives the impress of life” (ibid., 23) in her poetry, provides an extensive area for the study of the particular kind of poetics emerging in the Anthropocene. Similarly, Seamus Heaney deals with geological features, putting them opposite the organic life, showing the undeniable connections that tie every aspect of our existence together. Farrier explains that “if Bishop’s poems help to engage a form of geologic imagination, in which the body is enfolded in deep time, Heaney’s work allows us to approach the Anthropocentric dimensions of this” (47) which is why for him their poetry presents a great introduction into the Anthropocene, even though it is not usually

regarded in this manner.

In the second chapter, titled “Entangled: The Poetics of Sacrifice Zones”, Farrer discusses the role experimental poetry has in shaping our understanding of the world we live in. ‘Sacrifice zones’ is the term coined by Naomi Klain that refers to the “places, such as oil fields or opencut mines, that are sufficiently out of the way of consumer experience or where the rights of inhabitants (typically indigenous or nonhuman) are held sufficiently lightly that they can be considered expendable” (ibid., 52). Regardless of our awareness of sacrifice zones and the space which they take up, sooner or later we feel the impact they have not just on a local, but on a global scale. Farrer has, in the poetics of Peter Larkin and Evelyn Reilly found the poetics which encapsulates these problems we are faced with, showing how the directness of experimental poetry in dealing with everyday problems can be instrumental in connecting diverse areas of human study. In his own terms, Farrer says that he “argue[s] that Peter Larkin’s investigations of English plantation forests and Evelyn Reilly’s examination of the liveliness of plastic in her collection *Styrofoam* offer a kind of distraction-based poetics that renders visible the dense entanglements underlying the simplified world” (54).

The third chapter of *Anthropocene Poetics*, “Swerve: The Poetics of Kin-Making”, centres around the work of Donna Haraway, for whom “cultivating a sense of kinship with multispecies familiars is the most pressing obligation in an era of haemorrhaging diversity” (ibid., 89). All lifeforms since the beginning of time give and take from each other, and, in that interplay, knots are formed that entangle them completely resulting in kin-like connections which are proved to be crucial in our understanding of the processes of evolution. Farrer describes the poetics of kin-making as “collaborative, lovelorn, and unpredictable, thick with encounters both sensual and uncanny and fraught with risk” (93). It reveals the quintessential truth: while we are separate from others, we are also “fundamentally constituted through others” (ibid., 94) and our existence is, just like theirs, the product of thousands of years of genetic interchange. The authors whose work Farrer discusses the most in this chapter are Mark Doty, Sean Borodale, and Christian Bök. In their works, these authors are concerned with the visible and invisible bonds that bind all species in the world. From the growing population of jellyfish to the declining biodiversity, Farrer explores the influence humans have on other life forms as well as the turn towards the nonhuman that is apparent in recent years. As the pinnacle of human exploitation of other life forms Farrer writes about Christian Bök’s ongoing *Xenotext* experiment in which he attempts “to write an “eternal” poem in the genome of an extremophile bacterium” (110). As Farrer further explains, “both Doty and Borodale are haunted by futures of ecological collapse; in response to this, they incline toward

collaboration with their animal subjects,” while “Bök shows how we can discover connection, the furtherance of life and meaning, in the most constrained circumstances” (122).

David Farrier’s *Anthropocene Poetics. Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction* provides a fresh outlook on the poetics of the period we live in. By starting each chapter with an analysis of an art piece or an experiment, he shows the indivisible bond between art, literature, and sciences which has always existed. Art and literature are presented as being the ones that seem to recognize the subtle changes in the ways in which humanity perceives the world most clearly and are the ones that allow people to communicate their thoughts deeply as well as concisely. In his book, Farrier deals with questions that are prevailing in our time that are primarily concerned with the ecological crisis and shows the mechanisms poets and artists apply in their works to bring them to light. He successfully condenses all major concerns that arise in the Anthropocene studies and shows how the complex interplays and relations between the humanity, other species, and the world as a whole function as well as the traces which these occurrences leave in our environment. In this sense, he achieved his goal in providing a wonderful and inspiring insight not only into the theories humanities develop in order to understand the transitional time we live in but also the ways in which humans express their understanding of the unstoppable changes that are happening through art and poetry.

Sabiha Nabooat. *Yaadoñ Main Safar*. Lahore: Batool, 2020.

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Journey Through Memories ('Yaadoñ Main Safar', 2020), is a striking and remarkable book (published in Urdu language) by Sabiha Nabooat, a Lahore based Pakistani writer. When we compare the literary stature of Sabiha (born 1944, Darya Abad, India) with the great female prose writers whose works dominate the horizon of the print and the electronic media of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries (Khadeeja Mastoor, Bano Qudsiya, Bushra Rehman, Razia Butt, Noor Ul Huda Shah, Sarwat Nazeer are only a few names to mention), she appears to be a writer of lower rank. *Journey Through Memories*, however, forces us to reevaluate our impressions as this book can easily be ranked among the most emphatic statements ever registered by a female voice in the Sub-continent.

This, 263 pages, hardbound book is a collection of 44 short stories, 7 columns, 5 personality sketches, 5 travel memoirs and 1 interview. The book is adorned by a sensational foreword, composed by one of the most appreciated columnist and prose writer of contemporary Urdu literature, the recipient of the highest civilian award in Pakistan, 'Pride of Performance', Masood Ashar. Ashar writes in his foreword, 'Sabiha knows the art of literary formulations. Most noticeably, the way she makes a simple subject an artful experience, determines the unique value of this book.' (p.15)

Feelings dominate thoughts throughout the book; whatever is subjectively simple in the life of a typical Sub-continental housewife, becomes an experience of cosmic scale. Ashar's observations carry weight; it is the depth found within a particular happening not the width of it which gives *Journey Through Memories*' an atmosphere of mystical serenity and pensive joy.

There is no need to say that Sabiha is primarily a short story writer

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whose works have attracted a wide range of audiences in the last two decades. The Lahore based quarterly, literary and social study's journal in Urdu language, *Batool*, takes the credit for printing her works regularly throughout the last two decades and thus enabling her to explore her own potential to write about issues which matter to all the middleclass Pakistani-Indian women of our age. The selected short stories in the book reflect upon the variety of subjects of a chaotic nature that she has been pondering upon over the years as a woman living in a gender biased society, but she pens them with calm deliberateness of a mother. These stories are a journey through time; time that corresponds with her personal life and the time lost in the wilderness of the history of Pakistan and India.

Recurrent images in these stories, immigration and the plight of the immigrant, are dramatically universal and globally relevant themes of our contemporary world. We see the memories of the place that her family migrated from after the partition of India in 1947, dominating the stories of poignant note like, *My Granny*, *The Loyalist*, *The Shawl of Memories* and *These Sixty Years*. The sense of a bewildered heart, lurking beyond the international boundaries, haunts the readers' imagination. However, it is the growing insecurity of an aging person which comes to replace the thematic pattern in her later writings.

Dwelling of the Elderly, *Apple of the Eye*, *My Partners*, *Unfinished Writings*, *Even That Moment Passed*, *To my Daughter*, *Mothers' Day*, *Hum Drum* and *Out of Date* are the specimen of that parent thought in which her writing-decorum excels; she could probably have not made this choice but the habit of mind of dotage, the fear of being vulnerable and the feeling of running down a precipitous declivity bounced back on the paper as her strongest feeling when she was at her weakest. She portrays her own images in the personae of the old characters of her stories but she never leaves them isolated or defeated. In these stories we see an astonishing evolution, within the total space of two or three pages, when a character rises above the tides of time and begins to live with sense of 'inward' dignity. The sense of dignity emerges from the sense of appreciation for the world of that truth where all the desired shapes only are perceived and all the accessories, including the concepts of social success, love and recognition by children, desire for physical strength, become invisible. Old age is made here a battleground of spiritual awakening and the slumber of worldly expectations. The way an old person emerges as hero to its own self in her stories, is unprecedented. She shuffles the entire value system of our societies and creates a world of her own where distinctions of old and young, woman and man, successful and unsuccessful do not exist. The only distinction is the soul that remains vibrant even while facing death and the listless soul that never encounters life even

at the prime of youth.

Her travel memoirs are surprisingly quite different in texture. As curious readers we expect the insights of a housewife into another culture but what we see instead is an amazing blend of politically well informed, culturally observant and socially hyperactive mind merging with the housewife's eyes exploring the new kind of kitchen utensils, interior décor, fine tapestry and housing schemes of the local people. The most charming and informative of these writing are, *In an American Party*, *In America-the Land of Red Indians*, *A Few Days in Bosnia*.

The longest of all the travelogues is the one about Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian experience is portrayed here as literary expression of sentiment which mythologically unites the apparently distanced nations of South Asia and South-East Europe. The writer demonstrates outstanding knowledge of history of Medieval Bosnia, its ancient rituals and traditions, and linguistic-cultural heritage, and puts all into contrast with her own community. This particular piece has been recently translated into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BHS) by Zerina Maksumic and is well appreciated in local literary circles.

Journey Through Memories is a milestone as it sets new boundaries for the female writers of the Sub-continent. This book is 'idealism' at its best.

Samuel Jay Keyser. *The Mental Life of Modernism: Why Poetry, Painting, and Music Changed at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. The MIT Press, 2020.

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An aesthetic of inaccessibility, meanings disassembled and divorced from their previously settled upon significations, the impossibility of arriving at meaning, the logic of indeterminacy, the disintegration of mimetic representation in painting, stretching the limits of tonality in music, all these inhabit the essence of modernism. In his work “The Mental Life of Modernism: Why Poetry, Painting, and Music Changed at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” Samuel Jay Keyser sets out to determine and establish the grounds upon which modernism’s aesthetic of defamiliarization came to be formulated.

Keyser attributes the generative and primal impetus of modernism in the sister arts of poetry, music, and painting, to a cognitive shift. Modernism, if defined as a primarily cognitive phenomenon, is, in historical terms, not exactly modern, nor is it an unseen anomaly, for, as Keyser goes on to point out, the Newtonian revolution of the 17th century can be seen as modernism’s precursor in terms of its abandoning ideas of the intelligible world for the intelligible ideas about the world.

In the opening chapter of the book, Keyser relates a dinner conversation he had with Noam Chomsky several years ago during which Chomsky rekindled the theory he had first advanced over fifty years ago about modernism and Newtonianism having been the result of a cognitive

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change, of the brain reaching its natural limits, which forced it to look for answers and creative concepts beyond the bounds of ordinary understanding, its natural predilections, commonsensical intuitions, and, finally, ready-made conclusions.

The Newtonian revolution, along with its reversing of the contact-mechanical propositions, meant a parting of ways with the dogmatism of empirical bias. However, the absorption of science in its modern sense into the orbit of public consciousness was slower than gradual. The world posited in purely mechanistic terms was only gradually supplanted by the world which came to be defined by the attraction-repulsion natural laws, essentially contactless and connatural to their unintelligible foundations. Science, for as long as it had been understood as natural philosophy, was not unfathomable to most who were formally educated. In the 19th century, however, science, doubtlessly under the sway of Newtonian revolution, underwent rapid and profound changes, so much so that the common core of an educated individual's knowledge base no longer sufficed in helping him or her get beyond the superficial strata of science's basic principles. The reduced level of intelligibility and accessibility can, thus, be defined as the intersecting point between Newtonianism and modernism, the former serving as the latter's blueprint.

Keyser early on explicitly mentions that cultural factors play a secondary role in the birth of modernism and establishes that modernism's aesthetic of inaccessibility gained its foundational propulsion in the form of a unified abandonment of shared rules. The shared rules having been abandoned, modernists moved into the private sphere, overturning the dominancy of extrinsic factors in the creative process. The moving principle of the cognitive leap was directed from our hardwired proclivities and predispositions, from our natural intelligence, towards general intelligence and, in this way, towards what could be described as a post-natural aesthetic. The impulse of creative fervour was by modernists located in a different part of the brain than the one predominantly used by their predecessors, which inevitably and largely contributed to art becoming stranger, more abstruse, given to the uncanny incursions into the recursive modes of expression, which brought the traditional sense of meaning to a breaking point and in the process created the dialectics of creation that were impervious to the overly facile resolution of contradictions inherent in any imaginative narrative.

Art becoming the offspring of general intelligence, Keyser contends, it put heavier, in many ways unprecedented, demands on the audience which had been accustomed to the unvariegated pattern of constancies. The new

art form required more effort to be fully appreciated. The main reason for this lies in the fact that general intelligence belongs to that region of the brain that is usually reserved for processing systems of thought that are congeneric with, for instance, algebra. In other words, modernist art fell or was subsumed under the same systems of cognition which are responsible for processing algebra-like operations. The brain's hardwired proclivities were no longer sufficient in confronting the innovative landscape of private formats regnant in the modernist artform.

Each private format, a highly individual yet ex-centric contrivance of an artist, comprised of its own secret structure which Keyser names the Easter Egg. The term can be traced back to the 1970s, when software developers started encoding secret messages into their programmes. Easter Eggs or hidden structures within a work of art were already made use of as far back as the time of Chaucer but their use which had until the early 20th century been sporadic became widespread with the advent of modernism. The law of indeterminacy being inherent to a modernist work of art, it must be stressed that a discovery of the Easter Egg does not always correlate with a full understanding or aesthetic appreciation of an artwork. In fact, it could be argued that the work of art could be enjoyed to a higher degree insofar as the Easter Egg remains unfound, for a modernist work of art does neither instruct nor point towards meaning. Its role is to suggest, to insinuate, by means of instinctive appreciation. To put it differently, the central meaning of a modernist artwork is at one with the law of indeterminacy. The more and more abstract, less defined, formats are meant to recall rather than point out or profess, that is, to re-call, as in call anew the observer to re-observe the already observed. Nevertheless, modernists were wary of undue repetition and recursion as creative methods due to their being inimical to the inner value of a private format and due to their introducing a format of recurrence out of which predictability and a lost sense of intimation are born.

When a work of art does tap into our hardwired space, a region of the brain called fusiform gyrus is activated. Its function is to recognize the recursive forms of the world which surrounds us, the metrical units in poetry, the contours of a human face in a painting, and the reproducing tonal sequences in music. Such art, however, veers towards the category of premodern art, for it persists in being dutiful, to an extent at least, to the pre-modernist logic of mimetic depiction. On the other hand, rather than rendering the world experience predictable, modernist art foregrounds the defamiliarized aspects of being, thus rendering the hardwired part of the brain inadequate in recognizing the newly-formed and always shifting categories. Expressed differently, the image is no longer the

substructure of permanence. Arriving at meaning becomes a secondary objective. The primary focus shifts towards the experience of the object as the dismembered fragment within which the indeterminate laws of reality converge.

There are two important aspects of analysis which Keyser does not include in his work and could further fortify his underlying thesis. First, Keyser imputes the cognitive shift from the shared rules system towards the private formats to a belief that the natural aesthetic had been exhausted. He is convinced that the shift had nothing to do with either historical or cultural events preceding modernism. Despite the fact that Keyser highlights the exhaustion of the shared rules as the reason for the birth of the new aesthetic, his reasoning does not in fact take into consideration the teleological nature of the modernist shift. He takes the exhaustion of the rules as the starting point but does not delve into the reasons for that very exhaustion, and, in light of the events that had preceded modernism in its final form, it can hardly be hypothesized that modernism was completely divorced from the cultural or historical contexts which predated it and created the conditions in which the natural aesthetic was made redundant and no longer formally original. Second, Keyser defines modernism as a European phenomenon and, hence, as a phenomenon which was, in his view, confined mainly to the Western world. The Eurocentric approach refuses to consider the various forms of modernism in, for instance, East Asia where literary movements in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Japanese futurism, surrealism, new sensationism, etc., were no less suspicious of the privileged forms of expression, occasionally drawing the lines of expression in imitation of the Western art but not infrequently independently of it. While the originality of Keyser's principal argument contributes a lot to a fresh understanding of modernism and expands the field of its analysis, the parallel analysis of cognitive, historical, cultural, and aesthetic aspects of modernism in Europe and beyond would doubtlessly create even wider contexts in which the not yet, or poorly, explored features of modernism could be brought to light.

Bernardo Bertolucci, *Il conformista*, 1970, Mars Film / Marianne Productions / Maran Film, 112’.

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Il conformista, il film del 1970 diretto da Bernardo Bertolucci, racconta la vita di Marcello Clerici (Jean-Louis Trintignant), il personaggio tratto dall'omonimo romanzo di Alberto Moravia. Il film tenta di offrire una sorta di rappresentazione del destino del personaggio moraviano che porta con sé un passato quasi tragico. La tragedia della sua vita comincia con l'infanzia vissuta senza vero amore - la madre (Carolina Francesca Giuseppina Mignone) tossicodipendente, è incapace di mostrargli alcuna emozione, e il padre (Giuseppe Addobbati), quasi assente, è impazzito, malato di sifilide e fascista - lo vediamo in un'unica scena in cui si trova rinchiuso in manicomio (00:23:04). La figura paterna nella sua vita è del tutto mancante e questo rappresenta il punto della partenza della fragilità caratteriale di Marcello, una sorta malattia interna senza limiti. Suo padre è una persona debole che viene completamente emarginata dalla società fascista a causa della malattia, sia fisica che psichica. Anche in manicomio, egli spicca fuori - è unico che indossa la camicia e che scrive e recita poemi fascisti in pubblico. In quel periodo, le persone con simili malattie, mentali o veneree, venivano escluse dalla società e maltrattate a causa degli stereotipi legati, ad esempio, alla sifilide; si credeva che si trasmettessero geneticamente (e ciò si vede anche nel film). Tranne i problemi familiari, un'altra cosa che definisce la sua vita è l'abuso sessuale subito. Questo evento rappresenta uno scisma, una cesura nella sua vita e da quel giorno egli diventa un'altra persona, diventa l'assassino del suo violentatore, di Pasqualino (Pierre Clémenti) (00:30:51). La persona che è stato prima era una persona triste, ma in seguito a quel incidente, diventa

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un uomo che cerca, per tutta la sua vita, di conformarsi, di far parte della società mimetizzandovisi, di essere come gli altri, comunque essi siano, ma ciò che lo ostacola è la sua identità d'assassino, la macchia morale che, d'ora in poi, diventa il suo unico tratto personale. Da assassino si sente isolato da tutti anche se l'unico scopo della sua vita è di vivere una vita normale. Già dall'inizio del film, è chiaro che gli altri lo vedano come la persona che cerca di adeguarsi. Anche nelle scene iniziali, che non sono rappresentate cronologicamente, ancor prima di commettere il crimine, egli dice una frase in latino: "animula vagula, blandula, Hospes comes-que corporis" (10:26) - la frase tratta da *Historia Augusta* dell'imperatore Adriano con cui indica che il suo scopo, quest'agognata normalità, non è ancora raggiunto, che la sua anima è ancora vagante in uno stato di confusione, e di tormento. Una delle tappe verso la vita normale è il suo matrimonio con Giulia (Stefania Sandrelli). Dall'inizio è ovvio che non la ama, descrivendola come una donna mediocre. Il personaggio di Giulia rappresenta tutte le persone ignoranti di media borghesia, il futuro 'uomo medio, pasoliniano, che seguono la massa, obliterando il pensiero critico. Durante la loro confessione congiunta, in chiesa, prima delle nozze, viene confermata la tesi che le vittime degli abusi sessuali non vengono mai ascoltate, né confortate, le loro emozioni vengono sovente negate (00:31:32):

Marcello: Sembra quasi che un peccato di sodomia per la chiesa sia più grande dell'uccisione dell'uomo.

Prete: Come ti permetti, insolente? Ricordati che io sono prete e tu sei un peccatore. E dopo quella volta, hai avuto altri rapporti con uomini?

L'unica cosa che interessa il prete, le cui logiche sono evidentemente pervertite, è se l'atto omosessuale si fosse ripetuto nel tempo. Quindi, la chiesa, nella religione, per lui non esiste alcuna consolazione. Questo approfondisce il suo senso di non appartenere, di un uomo escluso, diverso, quasi pervertito. L'altra tappa verso il conformarsi è il suo diventare l'agente del regime fascista, dell'OVRA, attraverso l'amico Italo Montanara (José Quaglio), il non vedente annunciatore radiofonico che lo introduce con il Colonnello (Fosco Giachetti): "Vi siete mai domandato, Clerici, perché la gente chiede di collaborare con noi? Per paura, qualcuno. Per soldi, quasi tutti. Per fede fascista, pochissimi. Voi, no. Voi non siete spinto da nessuno di questi motivi [...] E mi domando qual è il vostro obiettivo." (00:08:08) Il Colonnello lo presenta al ministro e, come la prova della sua fedeltà a regime, Marcello gli propone di uccidere il suo ex professore di filosofia, Luca Quadri (Enzo Tarascio), di idee antifasciste, quindi il potenziale nemico del regime (09:56). Il professore si trova in esilio a Parigi. Nello studio di professor Quadri Bertolucci crea un'atmosfera di suspense, giocando con la luce (00:55:36), confondendoli nel buio e nella

penombra della stanza, prima uno e poi l'altro, per enfatizzare "le antitetiche convinzioni politiche, due diverse visioni della realtà."¹ È il gioco dei due mondi contrastanti - uno con la passione che crede in proprie idee, mentre l'altro è totalmente indifferente. Sebbene Marcello sia sostenitore dell'idea fascista, in realtà, lui non lo è se non per mero opportunismo conformista. Egli non ha nessuna passione genuina, nessuna soddisfazione nella vita. Durante la missione egli finisce con innamorarsi della moglie di Quadri, Anna Quadri (Dominique Sanda), che a sua volta si invaghisce di Giulia. Entrambi, Marcello e Giulia, sono quasi deliranti - non vedono che ella è innamorata di Giulia. Anna è tutto l'opposto di ciò che Giulia è. Anna rappresenta la donna moderna, autocosciente, indipendente e sessualmente liberata - proprio questa è la ragione per cui Marcello non potrebbe mai realizzare il suo desiderio di lei. La donna di cui egli ha bisogno è proprio Giulia - quella che si può "possedere" completamente, che non pone le domande. Bertolucci dà molta importanza al tempo e allo spazio nei suoi film. Ne *Il conformista*, egli sceglie gli anni Trenta e Quaranta, *entre deux guerres*, per poter illustrare il tempo a lui coevo, cioè gli anni Settanta, alle prese "con il terrorismo e la strategia della tensione."² La guerra, l'ansia e la depressione, nell'Italia sotto il regime fascista, mentre a Parigi vive come l'epicentro del modernismo. Le nuove idee e la mente aperta descrivono l'atmosfera parigina. Proprio qui, ci viene mostrata la libertà sessuale in tutta la sua opulenza, un "touch" moraviano, con ballo di Giulia ed Anna (01:22:09). La parte finale del film è la parte in cui il protagonista scopre che per lui non poteva mai esserci una normalità. Alla fine Mussolini viene destituito (01:37:36) e di conseguenza Marcello perde il suo posto, il ruolo che si è costruito nella società. Contemporaneamente scopre che ha vissuto tutta la vita in un inganno perché vede che il suo abusatore che è ancora vivo. Questo accresce il suo dissidio interiore, impossibile da superare, insanabile. Moravia conclude il romanzo con la morte di Marcello, Giulia e loro figlia che vengono uccisi da un aereo che mitraglia l'automobile. Bertolucci sceglie una fine diversa e va a fondo della questione sociale, quella di volersi conformare a tutti i costi dicendo della finale moraviana: "non ci ho creduto, non mi convinceva."³ In Moravia, prima di morire, durante la fuga dal paese, Marcello riflette sull'incontro con Pasqualino e sulla vita che trascorre cercando la normalità:

L'incontro con Lino, pensò ancora, era stato molto utile; e non tanto perché l'avesse liberato del rimorso di un delitto che non aveva commesso, quanto

1 Stefano Soggi, *Bernardo Bertolucci*, Milano, Il Castoro, 2008, p. 63.

2 *Ivi*, p. 24.

3 *Ibid.*

perché con quelle poche parole dette per caso sull'inevitabilità e normalità della perdita dell'innocenza, Lino gli aveva fatto capire che per vent'anni egli si era ostinato in una strada sbagliata dalla quale doveva ora uscire decisamente. Questa volta non ci sarebbe stato bisogno di giustificazione e di comunicazione, pensò ancora, ed egli era risoluto a non permettere che il delitto commesso davvero, quello di Quadri, lo avvelenasse con i tormenti di una vana ricerca di purificazione e di normalità.⁴

Dopo le dimissioni di Mussolini, quando incontra “la figura intorno a cui ha costruito tutta la sua vita, l'origine del senso di colpa da cui è scaturito il suo bisogno di conformismo, la ragione profonda della sua diversità”⁵, cioè Pasqualino, egli continua la sua ricerca di normalità. Marcello lo accusa di far parte della polizia segreta fascista l'uccisore di Quadri (01:46:03):

Lino! Vi chiamate Lino, voi? [...] Non facevate l'autista? No? [...] Avevate una pistola, vero? [...] Sei ancora vivo [...] E cosa è quella cicatrice, eh? [...] Dove eri? Che facevi il 25 marzo 1917? [...] Cosa facevi il 25 marzo 1917? [...] E il 15 ottobre 1938, dove eri? Che facevi, eh? Cosa facevi alle 4 del pomeriggio, il 15 ottobre 1938? [...] Io devo sapere! Assassino! Assassino! Ha assassinato un uomo, un esiliato politico, il 15 ottobre 1938, il professor Quadri. Luca Quadri. E sua moglie, Anna Quadri. È un pederasta, fascista, il suo nome è Pasqualino Semirama.

Ma, accusa anche Italo di essere stato fascista e così egli continua verso il suo obiettivo di conformarsi - alla caduta del fascismo - nella nuova società; Marcello si rinnova, rinasce, e, conformandosi, diventa sostenitore delle nuove idee politiche. Bertolucci sceglie una scrittura tipicamente moraviana - coi genitori emozionalmente assenti, altro motivo tipicamente moraviano, getta le fondamenta per le conseguenze freudiane, un altro tema caratteristico di Moravia. Il personaggio senza identità, senza il proprio io, che vive una vita piena di illusioni e delusioni è il personaggio moraviano destinato a fallire. Questa figura sempre solitaria, isolata e mai contenta, senza legami con i genitori, la figura in ricerca di salvezza è il personaggio basato sulle teorie freudiane di cui Moravia si ispirava. Mediante i *flashback* il film mostra come l'inconscio guida il comportamento del protagonista. La sua fragilità, il risultato dei rapporti familiari e dell'abuso, lo accompagna per tutta la vita e si manifesta nella sua ribellione contro i genitori in cui diventa chiara quella componente edipica di cui Freud parla. Bertolucci dà molta attenzione ai dettagli che,

4 Alberto Moravia, *Il conformista*, Milano, Bompiani, 2011, pp. 329-330.

5 *Ivi*, pp. 24-25.

in forma simbolica, indicano il desiderio di Marcello di allontanarsi dalla vita "anormale" che aveva vissuto durante l'infanzia. Così, verso la fine del film, viene mostrata la casa in cui vive, che è completamente opposta alla casa in cui è cresciuto. A paragone di quel disordine che c'è nella casa di sua madre (00:17:50), la casa di Marcello è in armonia ottenuta attraverso la geometria (le linee pulite o simmetriche su mobili, pareti, finestre ed abiti) - un altro tentativo verso la normalità (01:41:04). La storia italiana sotto il regime fascista viene rappresentata nei suoi aspetti più banali, cioè attraverso Marcello, l'uomo della piccola borghesia, ma proprio ciò la rende mostruosa - è una persona qualunque, guidata esclusivamente dal lato oscuro della sua psiche, che, date le circostanze, decide di seguire ciecamente quello che è attuale e ad esso si piega. Quella cecità percorre per tutto il film, sia letteralmente sia metaforicamente. Tramite le malattie dei fascisti, Italo con la cecità e padre di Marcello con la sifilide e la malattia mentale, la madre con la tossicodipendenza, il regime viene rappresentato come una malattia di stato che domina per tutta l'Italia.

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Vincenzo (2021) and the Korean Comedy Series Style

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1.

During the recent pandemic-induced events, many people were forced to stay in their homes, creating a sort of binge fidelity towards streaming services. Given that cinemas and theaters were shut down and movies were not being shot or entire productions were postponed, most people watched various TV shows on *Netflix* or elsewhere. With the Hallyu Wave in progress and the public's constant demand for new and refreshing content on their screens, Korean dramas created a strong niche. After *Netflix* started airing K-dramas, even those who were never interested in Korean culture or, in this case, Korean cinematography, decided to give it a chance. K-dramas were previously available for viewing only on third-party streaming platforms known to few people who were already acquainted with them (Ju 173). According to *Netflix*, the streaming of Korean dramas in 2020 quadrupled compared to the previous year. While the genre has been widespread across Asia for years, it has now gained viewership ground in other parts of the world, including Canada, Europe, and the United States, all due to the Hallyu Wave,¹ as stated previously.

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1 The Hallyu Wave (or Korean Wave) is a Korean cultural phenomenon that gained popularity in China in the late 1990s. The start of the phenomenon is marked by Korean dramas being recognized outside of Korea (i.e. China and other East Asian countries). Following that, Korean pop music became popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The members of a K-pop group Super Junior are known as the "Kings of the Hallyu Wave" because of their contribution to the Hallyu Wave. They were also the first idol group to promote Hallyu Wave in China. The first Hallyu Wave continued until late 2007 when the second Hallyu Wave began thanks to South Korean digital technology growth and social networking. During the second Hallyu Wave (or Hallyu Wave 2.0) that is still in motion, K-pop group BTS has broken world records and is the first Korean artist nominated for a Grammy award, while the movie *Parasite* is the first non-English movie to win an Oscar (Kim; Ryoo 118-123).

The new audience found Korean dramas intriguing as they were not conceptualized like most Western TV shows or they were but in a different way. At first glance, it can be noticed that Korean TV shows have fewer episodes (max 20), the episodes are longer, and they rarely have more than one season. At second glance, the themes and the plots of K-dramas differ a lot from Western TV shows. K-dramas are filled with Korean *realia*, such as cultural references that include family values, cuisine, history, formal and informal relationships, and various forms of love that is not oversexualized, unlike in Western TV shows (Ju 174). While all dramas contain the elements mentioned above, they are not thematically repetitive, and that is partly what attracted the non-Asian audience.

Korean romantic crime-comedy drama *Vincenzo*, with the original title 빈센조 (romanised: *Binsenjo*), is one of the first Asian dramas to grasp international attention. The drama premiered on *tvN* on February 20, 2021, and soon after followed the worldwide premiere on *Netflix*. On February 22, 2021, *Vincenzo* ranked ninth most popular TV show on *Netflix* in the world according to *Flixpatrol's* data (Laure). The most important contributor to that is the fact the premise of the series itself is overtly international. One of its most interesting aspects lies in the comedic element implemented through the references to the Italian culture. When *Vincenzo* aired on *tvN* (Korean television network) and on *Netflix* in the first half of 2021, it almost instantly became a hit thanks to its interesting concept that has kept love and romance in the background while stressing its European dimension. The drama gives us insight into the way Korean people see Italian people, often through stereotyping the Italian culture.

Vincenzo is not the first Korean drama to take place outside Korea. Furthermore, it is not the first drama to mention Italy. *Only You*,² broadcasted in 2005, is the only Korean drama almost entirely filmed in Vicenza, in Northern Italy. Much to viewers' surprise, *Vincenzo* was not filmed in Italy because of the COVID restrictions at the time. The directors decided it was safer for the actors not to travel to Italy and to use CGI instead to create the scenes that would take place in Europe. Even some Italian viewers were surprised when *tvN* released behind-the-scenes videos showing comparisons of the visuals before rendering the computer graphics and the actual scenes that were filmed.

The drama follows the criminal Vincenzo Cassano, played by the actor

2 *Only You* is a South Korean drama broadcast by SBS in 2005. In the drama, a young girl runs off to Italy after winning a contest. Following her dreams, she enrolls in a cooking school. The plot is set in South Korea, Venice, Vicenza, and Rome. She is doing well in her studies, but due to an unexpected turn of events, she has to return to Korea and face the truth that she will not be able to become a professional cook (IMDb).

Song Joon-Ki, a Korean-Italian mafia lawyer³ who decides to side with justice against a conglomerate during the visit to his native country (*Vincenzo – Rotten Tomatoes*). Alongside Vincenzo, the most important support characters are Hong Cha-young played by Jeon Yeo-been, Jang Jun-woo, who later reveals his identity as Jang Han-seok, portrayed by Ok Teac-yeon, and at last Jang Han-seo played by Kwak Dong-yeon. The plot of the drama follows a turbulent life of a 36-year-old Vincenzo, who was taken to Italy at the age of eight only to be adopted by Don Fabio, the head of an Italian mafia clan, and raised to be his right-hand man, his adviser (It. *consigliere*). After Fabio dies, his biological son Paolo becomes the new leader and asks Vincenzo for his loyalty, which he refuses. Paolo then sends his men to kill Vincenzo, but they do not return. Vincenzo leaves Italy with a plan: first, he will go to Korea, take the gold that belonged to a recently deceased Chinese tycoon, and within a month, he will be on Malta, away from his brother and his past. Things do not go as planned. The gold is difficult to retrieve because it is hidden under the hardwood floors of the Nanyak Temple, a Buddhist temple located in Geumga Plaza, a building whose true owner is Vincenzo. Moreover, it is the only residential commercial building that does not belong to the Babel Group. Destroying Geumga Plaza is part of Vincenzo's plan, but after realizing it will take much longer than a month because of Babel Group's pursuit to buy the building, he joins hands with Hong Cha-young and decides to confront Babel Group. Not only that, but he also grows closer to the tenants living there who trust Vincenzo even after finding out who he really is. The drama has a lot of twists and turns as well as a lot of unexpected events. One of them is Vincenzo finding Jang Han-seo was never the CEO of Babel Group but just his brother's marionette. The real owner of Babel Group Jang Han-seok disguised himself as an intern at Wusang Law Firm to be able to keep an eye on what is going on and influence decisions regarding the Babel Group. Throughout the drama, Vincenzo fights Jang Han-seok's and Choi Myung-hee's evil schemes in what the creators refer to as a mafia-like manner.

One of the most interesting aspects of the show is definitely its comedic dimension since, from the western observer's point of view, Koreans were thought not to possess the virtue of irony or humor. At some point, historically speaking, that was partially true, but eventually Koreans

3 It is important to differentiate between the mafia depicted in the movies and TV shows and the real mafia. In cinematography, honour, respect, and loyalty are all associated with the mafia but are portrayed as positive qualities, including romantic and nostalgic elements. This could lead to an inaccurate perception of these criminals that do not possess said virtues. The members of the mafia do not usually accept outsiders and therefore it is a bit far-fetched that a mafia boss would take in a Korean boy.

developed their own type of humor. Until the late 1980s, there was not even a word for irony or parody in South Korea, which is exactly why the Korean press used English words to describe something that did not exist in their language. For example, the word “parody” was used to describe “Gangnam Style” (Hong 13-14).

With his music video for *Gangnam Style* getting more than four billion views on YouTube, Park Jae-Sang, commonly known as PSY, has played a major role in the emergence of Korean humor on a global scale. To a non-Korean, *Gangnam Style* is just a funny song accompanied by an even funnier music video with no deeper meaning in its choreography. In reality, the singer is actually mocking, in a non-harmful way, the Korean elites who live around the Gangnam district and the so-called ladies who pretend to be noble during the day but love to party during the night. Gangnam is famous for its clubs and parties, especially to the tourists visiting the city (Hong 16-19).

As seen in *Vincenzo*, Korean comedy is very different from Western comedy. There is not much sarcasm or even irony in Korean culture, and if saying something sarcastic in Korea that could be funny in Europe, a Korean person may not understand the sarcasm and/or may perceive it as offensive. In Korean comedy, there are usually no dark or umbratile characters, and one actor will frequently play more than one role in a movie or show, which is something Koreans find funny. While Western comedy is based on sarcasm, insult comedy, stand-up comedy, occasional situational irony etc., Korean comedy is based on wordplay, puns, slapstick comedy,⁴ cultural and historical comedy, and some mild insult comedy. In Western comedy, there is a lack of jokes that involve status and hierarchy because they are not as important as they are in Korean culture where they cause reactions. On the other hand, while Westerners consider joking about sensitive topics (religion, politics) funny, to a Korean that would be disrespectful.

As said by Martin and Ford in *Psychology of humor* (2018):

Humor is a universal human activity that most people experience many times over the course of a typical day and in all sorts of social contexts. At the same time, there are obviously important cultural influences on the way humor is used and the situations that are considered appropriate for laughter. From a psychological perspective, humor is fundamentally a social phenomenon; it is a form of social play comprised of the perception of playful incongruity that induces the positive emotional response of mirth

4 Slapstick comedy is a physical kind of comedy based around pratfalls and mild comic violence, such as smacks in the head, people falling down. To understand this type of comedy, at least in Korea, it is important to understand the day-to-day life of every Korean, including family life, work life, and dating life.

and the vocal-behavioral expression of laughter. In social interactions, humor takes on many different forms, including canned jokes, spontaneous witticisms, and unintentionally funny utterances and actions. (Martin and Ford 2018: 37).

Comedy can be found in its different declinations in almost all Korean dramas, regardless of the subgenre of the drama. It is common for serious characters like Vincenzo to possess the virtue of humor, which is, of course, different from what we are used to seeing in Western TV shows and movies.

One of the characteristics of Korean comedy in this drama is the portrayal of tenants. The actors portray their characters as easy-going or overly dramatic neighbors. For example, in one of the scenes in *Vincenzo*, Lee Cheol-uk plays with a lighter to imitate Vincenzo flicking his lighter when making difficult decisions. As someone who is extremely clumsy, he almost burns his face in the process.

Korean comedy consists mainly of facial expressions and body movements, pushing verbal humor into the background. To understand verbal humor, one must also understand the language because most of the jokes are so-called puns and dad jokes. “Dad jokes” in Korean is “아재개그” (ajaegag).

“Gag” in English slang roughly means a joke or a funny story. The word is used even more frequently by Koreans than native English speakers – they even have gag concerts and a South Korean sketch-comedy television show that aired on KBS until May 2020. “Ajae” is an abbreviation of the word “ajeossi” which translates to “middle-aged man” in Korean. By combining the two words, the word “ajae-gag” was formed. The jokes told by dads (middle-aged men) are not always funny, and that is the reason why they got this name (“Korean Dad Jokes (Only the Most Funniest Ever”).

From the beginning of *Vincenzo*, comedic elements can be seen: from Vincenzo’s exaggerated reaction to being robbed and shouting in a typically Italian way cursing Korea, to Lee Cheol-uk following the new tenant and the owner of Geumga Plaza in a spy-like manner. In the next shot, when Vincenzo officially moves into Geumga Plaza and Cho Young-woon shows him where he will be staying, he leans on the railing in the hallway outside the apartment to look down, not noticing that there is a piece of chewing gum on the railing where he placed his hand, thus developing a scene in a way the physical comedian would. Young-woon then shows him to the bathroom. An ordinary situation that could happen to anyone would not be this funny if Vincenzo did not react to it – with a disgusted face, he pulls his hand away very slowly while suspenseful music can be heard in the background. That is one trait of Korean comedy – overexaggerated reactions followed by (ill-)fitting background music and funny,

somewhat cartoonish, sound effects. Moreover, Korean filmmakers use peculiar camera angles and zooms to make the scene even funnier. The same music is heard in the next scene when Vincenzo sees the condition of the apartment he will live in. As someone who has lived in fancy apartments and houses in Italy most of his life, he is left appalled. He proceeds to examine the place and takes comfort in the fact that he would not have to spend much time there.

Another characteristic of Korean comedy is making it seem as if something more is going to happen in a certain situation, only to have another action take place, thus surprising the viewer. For example, in episode 9 (38:30), Vincenzo drops Cha-young off in front of a hotel. The directors made it look like Vincenzo was going to kiss Cha-young because he was leaning toward her, but in reality, he was just opening the car door for her. The scene was scored with romantic music that stopped abruptly after he opened the car door. The same thing happened in one of the previous episodes when Hong Cha-young lost a bet, so Vincenzo wanted to give her a flick on the forehead. Not wanting to do that, he stared at her lovingly while slow music played in the background making embarrassing situations funny. Moreover, the creators of *Vincenzo* do not miss the opportunity to use the terms “social distancing” and “quarantine” that have become popular in recent years. To put that into context, Toto serves Vincenzo a pizza, which he then tastes and makes a disgusted face every time Toto serves him food, spitting the food into the napkin. Then he looks at Toto and tells him: “I guess the basil and cheese are practicing social distancing, they don’t mix at all, and are the tomatoes quarantined or something?” *Vincenzo* seems to be the first drama to acknowledge the existence of COVID-19.

2.

What is not common in Western TV production is the number of out-of-the-drama references. While this might be a way for the directors to push viewers into checking out other projects in which the actors have participated during their careers, such scenes often have a ludicrous undertone. *Vincenzo* is full of such allusions, starting with Vincenzo’s adopted plants in the Jipuragi Law Firm, which are named after Song Joong-ki’s previous roles in K-dramas including *Descendants of the Sun*, *Arthdal Chronicles*, *The Innocent Man*, etc. Vincenzo introduced himself as Tae-ho when he went undercover, which is the name of his role in *Space Sweepers*, and as Yeo-rim when he took on the role of a shaman, which is the name of his role in *Sungkyunkwan Scandal*. The writer and the director, on the other hand, mention themselves as part of *International Security*

Intelligence Agency's higherups. When the tenants play a mafia game, Lee Cheol-wook calls Jeon Seo-Nam "a Park Saeroyi wannabe" to which the latter barks back and says he looks like "a North Korean soldier." To explain, Seo-Nam indorses a hairstyle that Park Saeroyi from *Itaewon class* has – the hairstyle has influenced many Asian young men. Also, in *Descendants of the Sun*, Yang Kyung-won (Lee Cheol-wook) played the role of a North Korean soldier. Assuming that everyone knows who Ok Taec-yeon is, there have been many references of his group's song *Heartbeat*, in the scenes followed by an imitation of a beating heart with his hand (part of the choreography). Even without knowing the origin of "Can you feel my heartbeat?", the actor's performance is amusing in itself because it looks unprompted, unexpected, and not befitting the atmosphere of the scene. In episode 13, there is a scene where Hong Cha-young, Vincenzo, and Mr. Nam look at the picture of Han-seok (Ok Taec-yeon) in an online newspaper and Cha-young comments: "He must think he's a K-pop idol. This is so ridiculous," which is a clear allusion to the actor actually being a K-pop idol.

Viewers unfamiliar with K-dramas and the actors' other projects would not find this particularly funny, but K-dramas are made primarily for the Korean audience, assuming they know the context enough to recognize the necessary references.

Nam Joo-sung, who works for Jipuragi Law Firm, and Ahn Gi-seok are particularly interesting characters when it comes to comedy. All the tenants seem to mispronounce Italian words, calling Vincenzo "Corn Salad" or "Quasano," but the two mentioned characters take the comedy in *Vincenzo* to another level. When talking about Ahn Gi-seok, it is important that we put the character in the context of the drama. He is an International Intelligence agent, and it would only be fitting to portray him as a serious, mature, and capable person. Even though he is skilled in his own way, he is clearly someone with a less serious side. He is pretty determined in what he does but he is also a bit over the top when it comes to the way he carries himself – his movements are choreographed in a way it makes the character look like an unprofessional trying to imitate a real agent: imitating people, as already mentioned, is considered to be one of the most popular comedic devices within the Korean culture.

3.

The cast did a great job of portraying various characters. The award-winning Song Joong-ki, who portrayed Vincenzo, is one of Korea's most loved actors. According to *Netflix*, two of his dramas, *Descendants of the Sun* and *Arthdal Chronicles*, were among the first K-dramas for wider audiences. The

lead actress Jeon Yeo-been (Hong Cha-young) starred in a few very popular K-dramas and she is quite recognized in Korea, but not internationally, so *Vincenzo* was her breakthrough role. Ok Taec-yeon (Jang Joon-woo / Jang Han-seok) did not start his career as an actor but as a member of a K-pop group 2PM. He had his acting debut two years after becoming a K-pop idol and has acted in numerous K-dramas since then. The role of Jang Han-Seok in *Vincenzo* was his first role as an antagonist. Having spent 7 years abroad, he was perfect for the role since his character had to speak fluent English. Interestingly, most of his English lines were ad-libs, previously discussed by the director. For example, the line “Can you feel my heartbeat?” that Ok Taec-yeon’s character repeats several times throughout the drama and the dance move he does are, as said, a part of the choreography and the lyrics of 2PM’s song *Heartbeat* released in 2009. Another antagonist who has kept the viewers intrigued is Kim Yeo-jin’s character Choi Myung-hee, a fraudulent attorney of Babel Group who would go to great lengths to help Jang Han-seok. According to Han-seok, she deserves to be called his *consigliere*.⁵ The supporting cast includes names such as Kwak Dong-yeon (Jang Han-seo), Yoo Jae-myung (Hong Yoo-chan), Salvatore Alfano (Paolo Cassano), and Luca Vaquer (Luca).

All the characters are engaging and intriguing in their own way, and each character in the drama has something that makes them unique. The drama is crowded with amoral attorneys, the most important ones being Hong Cha-young and Choi Myung-hee. At the beginning of the drama, Hong Cha-young is on the side of the Babel Group, assisting them in avoiding a lawsuit for killing test subjects for a new drug they were developing. She inherits her father’s law firm after he dies. She finally understands that what Babel Group is doing is not right and decides to take them down. While she continues to use amoral techniques in order to win trials, she is helping the residents of Geumga Plaza. One of the reasons she is such a likable character is because she is portrayed as someone who jokes a lot and is not always serious unless she has to be. It is evident that her friendly feelings for Vincenzo have developed into something more, but she is aware that she and Vincenzo will never be able to work out their differences because they live very different lives. At the end of the drama, they share a goodbye kiss, silently agreeing that this will be the last time they see each other.

The residents of the Geumga Plaza are initially depicted as a group of people who oppose the Babel Group’s plan to take over their home. At first, all of them are weary of Vincenzo, but they end up accepting his

⁵ This is an allusion to Francis Ford Coppola’s trilogy *The Godfather* (1972, 1973, 1990), which tells the story of the Corleone mafia family in New York. Like Vincenzo (Song Joong-ki), Thomas “Tom” Hagen (Robert Duvall) was taken in by the head of the mafia and became their *consigliere*, despite not being of Italian descent.

help. At the beginning of episode nineteen, the viewers find out that the residents of the Plaza were not who they seemed to be at the beginning – owners of various shops. Among the residents were award-winning wrestlers, weightlifters, boxers, and street fighters. When Hong Cha-young asks them why they have been holding back, they answer that they do not have a good reason to fight. The filmmakers made a good decision not to disclose the Geumga Plaza residents' full identities because it gave a whole different atmosphere and changed the way viewers viewed the humorous characters.

Jang Joon-woo and Jang Han-seok are the same individual, yet their attitudes, goals, and appearances are different. To start with, Jang Joon-woo (Jang Han-seok) is introduced to the viewers as a bubbly and overly friendly intern who enjoys joking around and hanging out with his co-worker Hong Cha-young. In an interview for *tvN*, Ok Taecyeon describes Jang Joon-woo as “sloppy, stupid, someone who speaks in short and unfamiliar sentences.” Joon-woo always sports ruffled, perm hair and various suits accompanied with a blue striped tie that “is supposed to give a smart feeling fitting of an intern attorney,” as the stylist Lee Han-wook reveals for *Zapzee*. Until episode four in which Jang Joon-woo reveals he is the older son of the late chairman through a mean PowerPoint presentation, his blue striped regimental tie is his signature accessory. After that, Jang Han-seok wears a different tie in every episode, symbolizing the shift in his character (*Zapzee*). From this moment until episode eleven, the only people who know Joon-woo's real identity are the viewers, Choi Myung-hee, the CEO of Wusang Law Firm Han Seung-hyeok, and Han-seok's stepbrother Han-seo. He studied in New York, which is why he swears and speaks in English when agitated, the same way Vincenzo speaks Italian. Han-seok is the drama's true villain and he is portrayed as Vincenzo's polar opposite. Vincenzo is portrayed as an anti-hero, who does not harm people unless it is absolutely necessary, and who only kills those who deserve to be killed, an aspect stressed through the way he helped the Geumga Plaza residents. On the other hand, Jang Han-seok gives no indication of morality, and all his actions are driven by his immediate desires and demands, without regard for repercussions or consequences. As a matter of fact, he does not need to be concerned about the possible consequences because his stepbrother Han-seo would be the one dealing with them. Moreover, when things are not going Han-seok's way, he resorts to murder. Through his agency *51K*, Ok Taecyeon described Jang Han-seok as “a character who does anything, even atrocious acts, to get what he wants. I wanted to make him seem like a child who is throwing tantrums until he gets what he wants and will only be happy if he gets things his way” (Sophie-Ha). Even before the viewers learn about Han-seok's past through

the Guillotine file,⁶ it is clear that he has been physically and emotionally abusive towards his younger stepbrother Han-seo who was suffering from depression and PTSD as a result of the abuse he had been subjected to since childhood. Han-seok turned his brother into his marionette to the point where his life had to revolve entirely around him, and when he was upset, he beat him up to release his anger. In an interview for *Elle*, Ok Taec-yeon reveals that he was not allowed to say anything about his character during the filming and the promotions for *Vincenzo*, except that he was “an intern with a crush on his mentor, Hong Cha-young” (Yaptangco). As a result, viewers were surprised when they learned that Han-seok is a manipulative, unpredictable, sadistic, and calculating psychopath whose hobbies were blackmail, corruption, and torture, among other things (*VillainsWiki*). Han-seok killed six of his classmates because of a misunderstanding during a gym class and showed no remorse, he even took their watches as a souvenir. Knowing Vincenzo was aware of that, during one of Vincenzo’s visits to him in prison, he mentions how his watch might end up in his collection too. Vincenzo openly shows himself as a member of the mafia, but Han-seok, thinking of himself as *the almighty*, continues to underestimate him. Vincenzo goes on to say when he was in Italy he was nicknamed “gatto sazio” (Eng. “a cat that’s full”) and explains that “a cat that’s full toys with a mouse all day before eating it” (Ep. 18, 50:24). That is what Han-seok was to him all this time – a mouse he can play with until he decides to kill him. Rather than being scared, the only thing that can be seen in Han-seok’s eyes is anger. In one of the previous episodes, Vincenzo declares he will be playing a game of chess with Han-seok and now the viewers are aware of what he meant by playing. During the symbolic game of chess, Vincenzo starts getting rid of people who could help Han-seok so in the end he is left alone. The only person from Han-seok’s clan he did not get rid of was his stepbrother Han-seo who helped him defeat his brother but suffered a tragic fate whilst doing so. The reason why it took so long for Han-seo to join hands with Vincenzo is that Vincenzo did not want to promote betrayal between families because his own family might turn against him one day. That does happen when, in one of the attempts to get rid of Vincenzo, Choi Myung-hee strikes a deal with Paolo Cassano – the enemy of her enemy. Finally, when Vincenzo visits Han-seok the second time, he calls himself “gatto afamatto” (Eng. “a hungry cat”), letting him know he does not have a lot of time left. Vincenzo stays true to his words and each character receives the *merciless justice* they deserve. Symbolically, the backstabbing

6 The Guillotine file, hidden in one of the gold bars underneath the Nanyak Temple, is a file that contains dirty deeds perpetrated by the most powerful members of politics, economics, sports, and culture. Vincenzo takes it out of the basement after opening it for the first time.

chairman of Wusang Law Firm is stabbed in the front and the back, Choi Myung-hee, who loved dancing Zumba and messing with other people's lives, is given a fiery dance, and Jung Han-seok's brutal fate was to have a hole drilled into his heart because he did not have one to begin with.

Considering Vincenzo is from Italy, the drama is packed with Italian references. Some of them are more accurate than others. To start with, in the first episode, Vincenzo visits Emilio, who is guilty of Fabio's death, and wars between the families are mentioned. While wars between the clans do happen in Italy, it is important to mention that nowadays it cannot be said with certainty what the cause of the war was because the reasons are not disclosed. In the same scene, Emilio tells Vincenzo to return to his country and calls him *cinese di merda* (Eng. "Chinese piece of shit") and *cinesino* (Eng. "Small Chinese boy") as an allusion to the fact that a lot of Europeans call all Asian people *Chinese* either to insult them or they just do not pay enough attention to acknowledge that Chinese are not the only people living in Asia. After Vincenzo told him why he is visiting him, he thanks him saying *Arigato* (Jap. "Thank you"), disrespecting him once again. This could also be an allusion to the fact that he is familiar with the Yakuza, the Japanese mafia. Vincenzo burns Emilio's vineyard – he always carries a lighter with him, possibly a symbol of destruction and decision-making since he always fiddles with it while coming up with a plan or thinking hard about something. The scene cuts to Vincenzo going to his stepfathers' funeral. He is a Roman Catholic, as he was raised in Italy, and this is proven later in the drama when he mentions the Biblical account of the Tower of Babel collapsing due to human greed. The Tower of Babel also serves as a reference for the Babel Group and its CEO's plan to construct a Babel Tower. In the Bible, the Tower fell as the one in *Vincenzo* did. In episode seventeen, the destruction of the miniature model is mentioned, but it does not happen. Instead of it, Vincenzo kills one of Choi Myung-hee's ex-henchmen. That way he kept the promise of killing the ones responsible for the death of Cha-young's father. The Tower was never built, and Vincenzo destroyed its miniature model that Jung Han-seok kept in his penthouse, as a way of letting him know of his impending defeat. To Han-seok the *Babel Tower* project meant a lot and he wanted to build it no matter the cost. According to Genesis, the Babylonians wanted to make a name for themselves by building a mighty city and a tower "with its top in the heavens." This can explain Jung Han-seok's God complex.

At the funeral, we see Paolo for the first time. He receives condolences for his father's death – a man kisses his hand as a sign of respect. These tropes can also be seen in *The Godfather*, and mafia bosses are known for the gesture. Not long after, as the new *capo di mafia*, Paolo asks Vincenzo for his loyalty. As briefly mentioned before, Vincenzo does not agree with Paolo's ways and refuses, stating that he will only show his loyalty

to him when he deserves it. In the past, Paolo went against his father's orders not to harm women and children. Italian mafia does indeed have rules about not involving families and civilians in retaliation between the clans. However, women and children have always been among the innocent victims of the mafia, which can be seen in Vincenzo's flashbacks. The way the mafia is portrayed in *Vincenzo* is a bit different than the way it is portrayed in some American or Italian movies. Vincenzo is portrayed as someone who thinks thoroughly about all the possible outcomes and understands that murdering someone might not solve the ongoing situation. He is aware he is not a hero even if he helps people because that will not wash away all his past sins. He confirms it at the very end, saying: "I'm still a villain and couldn't care less about justice. Justice is weak and empty. One cannot win against any villains with justice alone. If merciless justice exists, I am willing to yield to it. Even villains long to live in a peaceful world" (Ep. 20, 83:27). His befriending a gay person in episode eight wanting to get information out of him is also symptomatic of his character. He did not want to consent to it at first because it made him uncomfortable. Being homosexual or engaging in homosexual acts as a mafia member was, until recently, punishable by death. Korean characters in the show see the corrupt Korean politicians and entrepreneurs to be more dangerous than the Italian mafia, as portrayed in the drama proving they are not as familiar with the subject. As a result, they underestimate Vincenzo, who has received professional training from a former member of the Italian special forces that included not only physical but mental training as well.

Given that Lombardy is not the actual heart of the Italian mafia,⁷ it is a little unusual that the Cassano family lives there. The drama features the Milan districts of Brera and Porta Venezia. However, places outside of Milan can be seen in the drama too. In one of the first scenes, we can see Vincenzo exiting Palazzo Baldoca-Mucciolo (Rome) and going to the province Viterbo (Lazio) where Emilio's vineyard is located. The funeral was held at Villa Mondragone, around 20 kilometers outside of Rome.

Vincenzo plans to move to Malta. At first, it seems like he wants to distance himself from all the mafia business, but Malta is said to be a corrupt mafia state and a center of crime. Also, Vincenzo wants to stay close to his roots and away from his stepbrother. In one of the episodes, he asks the monk from Nanyak Temple whether all the anger he has inside him will disappear if he moves somewhere in the middle of the sea - Malta. The anger he talks about could be the anger towards Paolo, towards his mother who left him, or even towards the people who wrongly accused his mother of murder. Following the Cassano Family's resettlement to

7 Except for the so-called "la mafia del Brenta."

Malta, Vincenzo becomes the head of the Cassano clan.

It is known that Italians cherish their cuisine, so it is not surprising that Vincenzo throughout the drama judges the food passed off as Italian and is not afraid to say something bad about it. When he goes to an Italian restaurant, run by Toto who supposedly studied in Italy, and is served different Italian food like pizza and pasta, he does not hesitate to insult the food. He is also against putting ketchup in his food and would rather take it all out of a sandwich than eat it: to Italians ketchup is a culinary sin and has very little to do with actual tomato sauce. There is a stereotype about Italian people disliking spicy food. Korean people, on the other hand, love everything spicy. So, it is no surprise that in episode five, Jang Han-seok challenges Vincenzo to eat *jjamppong* (Korean spicy seafood noodle soup). Vincenzo agrees, saying that “Italian people love spicy chilis. They even carry pepperoncini with them. And I do, too” (Ep. 5, 43:53). Calabria, for example, is well-known for its chilies and that might be why Vincenzo mentions them. Along with cuisine, there comes Italian coffee culture. To some extent, it is present in the drama. When relaxing, Vincenzo and Hong Cha-young go to a coffee shop where Vincenzo enjoys an espresso. He is confused by the coffee cup sizes and insults ice americano saying it has very little to do with actual coffee, another European commonplace. However, we can see him trying South Korea’s instant coffee – perhaps a sign of him adapting to the culture.

Vincenzo comes from Milan, the fashion capital, so it is only natural that he dresses stylishly. He wears tailor-made suits designed by Burarolo. Korean screenwriter Park Jae-bum could not incorporate the names of the actual brands because the drama was not sponsored by them, and Koreans are very strict as far as copyright is concerned. In episode six, Jang Han-seok and Choi Myung-hee get information about Vincenzo from Ahn Gi-seok, team leader of the Italian Organized Crime Division of the International Security Intelligence Service. Because he was concerned that a mafia member had entered South Korea, Ahn Gi-seok went undercover at Geumga Plaza to learn more about Vincenzo. In Vincenzo’s portfolio, we can see he attended the fashion magazine *Vogo’s* charity event, clearly based on Milan’s *Vogue Italia*.

We find out Vincenzo loves football and is even friends with the coach of Milan’s football team. In addition, he names his pet pigeon Inzaghi, which is the surname of former football player Filippo Inzaghi.⁸ Vincenzo

8 Filippo Inzaghi is a former Italian striker, currently a head coach of Brescia Calcio. He was extremely fast with excellent reactions. He is known for his great skill in taking advantage of the carelessness of his opponents, making a name for himself as a “goal poacher” due to his style of play and tendency to operate mainly in the penalty box. In 2006, the Italian national team won the global championship. Vincenzo’s surname is Cassano, an allusion to the renowned football player Antonio Cassano.

goes undercover as a news host at some point, and he disguises himself as a pigeon to avoid getting caught. “Hello, I’m Inzaghi, a whistleblower” (Ep. 10, 46:15), he introduces himself. A Mafia member being a whistleblower is a direct insult to the *Omertà*, the old school mobsters’ code of silence and honor.

Italian art history is shown to the viewer through Vincenzo’s knowledge of art. In episode seven, for example, he discusses a painting by Eugène Delacroix *Liberty Leading the People*. Delacroix was not an Italian painter, but Venetian painters were among his influences. The same painting is shown in the following episode together with the mention of *The Seven Works of Mercy* by Caravaggio, but the most emblematic work of art appearing in the show is *Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy* by Artemisia Gentileschi, Caravaggio’s follower. Gentileschi was a victim of sexual assault and, eventually, she won her trial in court. Vincenzo’s mother, Oh Gyeong-ja, was falsely accused of murder when it was her who was being sexually assaulted. With the help of Cha-young, she won her retrial.

Another form of art through which Italian culture is brought to the viewer is opera, another trope from mafia movies. Vincenzo mentions how opera gives him the biggest comfort in his life. Throughout the drama, we can hear some of the greatest Italian pieces. For example, *Nessun Dorma*, the closing aria of Puccini’s opera *Turandot*, as well as *Ombra mai fu* and *Lascia ch’io pianga*, composed by Handel (the latter is uncredited in OST). In episode nineteen (64:40), Choi Myung-hee helps Jang Han-seok get out of prison by putting all the blame on herself. Her first moments in prison are marked by her singing *Lascia ch’io pianga* (Eng. “Leave me so that I may cry”), a song that talks about a woman begging for freedom and mercy after suffering a cruel fate.

Italian people gesticulate a lot when they talk and that is constantly shown in *Vincenzo*. However, Vincenzo uses the so-called Italian hand in the wrong way. The gesture he uses means only two things – “What do you want?” / “What do you mean?” and it is not to be used frequently. Vincenzo uses the gesture when he curses and when he is mad. The residents of Geumga Plaza also use it in various situations, thinking of the gesture as something that Vincenzo (who they mimic) and Italian people in general are recognizable by. His way of cursing is stereotypical because Italians are known to have very creative curse words. When speaking, he uses a lot of words that are not incorrect, but a native Italian speaker would not use them in that very context. For example, when he wants the dog to stay quiet, he yells at him: “Taci. Taci” (Ep. 1, 35:16). A native Italian would probably opt for “Stai zitto” because it sounds more natural, less stiff. What is correctly portrayed is Italians speaking in proverbs of sorts. For example, “Regret is the most painful thing you can experience in life.” (It. “Il rimorso è la peggior punizione

in vita." Ep. 1, 7:17), "It takes a devil to drive out another devil." (It. "Un diavolo scaccia l'altro." Ep. 5, 74:13), "To find a true friend is like finding treasure." (It. "Chi trova un amico trova un tesoro." Ep. 12, 9:31), "Catch a big fish with a small fish." (It. "Pesca un pesce grande con l'esca piccola." Ep. 16, 45:42), and many more.

In the first episodes of the drama, Vincenzo hosts a Traditional Sicilian Wine Party. This could relate to the mafioso's Sicilian roots, but on the other hand, neither is Vincenzo from Sicily nor is Sicily as famous for its wine as Tuscany. The music that plays at the party reminds of a group of Italian folk dances *Tarantella*, not typically Sicilian. The way the people are dancing and are dressed is nothing like they would be in Italy.

As far as the architecture is concerned, there are some similarities between Geumga Plaza and Duomo di Milano. Firstly, the words "plaza" and "piazza" have the same meaning but the language they derive from is different. Inside the Geumga Plaza, there are a lot of shops and a law firm which represent those existing around the city of Milan. Inside Geumga Plaza, there is also an Italian restaurant. Secondly, the Nanyak Temple is the holy place in the Plaza, meanwhile, Duomo di Milano is the holy place situated in the mentioned square. In fact, the cathedral is dressed in gold and that reminds of the gold found in the Plaza's basement. The golden statue of Buddha on top of the gold in Geumga Plaza reminds of the golden Madonna on the Milan cathedral. Thirdly, during the first episode, we can see Vincenzo standing in front of Geumga Plaza with a banner in the background saying: "Congratulations on passing the architectural review." This may be a subtle jab at the *Duomo*, which took hundreds of years to finish. Lastly, pigeons are a common sight in Italy. As mentioned before, Vincenzo befriends a pigeon even though he finds it annoying at first because pigeons plague Italian cities. There is a scene in the drama that includes the pigeon Inzaghi saving Vincenzo from henchmen sent by Paolo, the only scene in the drama that could be described as fantastical or magical.

In many East Asian cultures, including China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, the number four is an unlucky number, while for Italians the unlucky number is seventeen. Number four to Asians sounds like a Chinese word for death. Because of that, the number four is avoided. For Italians, the number seventeen is unlucky because if we write seventeen in roman numerals, XVII, and then rearrange the letters, we get a Latin word *vixi* meaning "I have lived." In episode four, the death of a lawyer Hong Yoo-Chan is devastating for his daughter, Hong Cha-young. In episode seventeen, Vincenzo's mother dies (this is shown again at the beginning of the episode), which is a big misfortune for the Italian-raised character. From the beginning of the seventeenth episode, we can see a more brutal Vincenzo. The question *why?* is answered by Vincenzo himself: "Do you

know why I didn't kill you? Because it was a hassle. I had a job to do. So, if I'd killed you, it would've inconvenienced me a lot. Killing these small flies wouldn't, though. Anyway, you have to die now." (Ep.17, 3:35). The "small flies" he talks about include both Choi Myung-hee's henchmen and his mother's killer. At that moment, Vincenzo is so devastated and enraged at everyone who had anything to do with his mother's death that he does not hold back and kills his mother's killer in front of the people who gave the order.

4.

The mentioned characters undergo character development at some point in the series, starting with Hong Cha-young.

In the beginning, Hong Cha-young can be described as "a determined yet selfish lawyer who only cares for herself" (Tamondong), which can clearly be seen even in the very first episode during the trial in which she represents Babel Pharmaceuticals as a part of her job at Wusang Law Firm. In this episode, the viewers find out lawyer Hong Yoo-chan, a representative of innocent drug testers in the previously mentioned trial, is Hong Cha-young's father. Their relationship is extraordinary because they are both lawyers but do not share the same morals and they follow different ethics. On the one hand, there is Cha-young, who is willing to offer bribes and threaten witnesses while, on the other hand, there is Yoo-chan, who lacks "aggressiveness" but uses truth and justice as his weapons. According to *The Monash Gazette* review, "The female lead does not have a soul. No character development, no backstory, no opinions, no agency" (*What's Wrong with Vincenzo. the trivialization of female characters*). But her morals and sense of justice become visible only after the fourth episode when her father is assassinated by Babel Pharmaceuticals. She decides to resign from Wusang Law Firm and start fighting for Geumga Plaza. Her first step is taking care of Vincenzo, who was also a victim of the assault. After he wakes up, they reopen the Jipuragi Law Firm with the mission of bringing down Babel Pharmaceuticals. She then becomes driven by a sense of injustice, spite, and desire for revenge. Although she does not completely change her *modus operandi*, she does change the purpose she is using it for. Additionally, her strength is visible in her relationship with Jang Han-seok; rather than trying to justify the pure evil he embodies, she decides to take on a strong attitude towards someone who manipulated and used her. A small detail that might have missed the viewer's eye is the fact she does not undergo the denial phase after Jun-woo's identity is revealed and confirmed with proof - he is the Babo they have been looking for, and she is ready to stay true to her intentions

of making him pay for everything he has done. Cha-young is a memorable female character because she is at the same time independent but is not afraid of asking for help when needed. The only downside might be writer's decision to make her and Vincenzo fall in love because even though there were small hints of their mutual sympathy, the conclusion of the series gave off the feeling of rushing things and wrapping up quickly. The ending could have felt much more natural if they had remained friends.

Jang Han-seok is not necessarily a character who underwent a clearly stated character development, but he did transform in front of the eyes of unsuspecting viewers. In the beginning, he is just a confused and joyous assistant named Jang Jun-woo, quite a flat character. On the surface, he looks like a basic comedy-relief side character with a quasi-hidden crush on Hong Cha-young. That is, until the fourth episode, when the viewers find out he is the real CEO of Babel Pharmaceuticals.

The revelation was made in an extremely dramatic way right after Vincenzo and his accomplices set the Babel warehouse on fire. To understand the scene better, one must know something about aria of famous opera *Turandot*. Right before the aria *Nessun dorma* starts, the main character Calef correctly answers princess Turandot's three riddles, but he still does not know the princess' name. He is given one more opportunity to find it out before sunrise. In *Vincenzo*, the viewer gets the answer to three questions: who planned, ordered, and executed the murders of the lawyer and scientists who were witnessing against Babel, but the viewers still do not know who the real owner of Babel is, and they have an opportunity to find it out until the end of the episode. In the moment the viewer finds out Babo's real identity, there is yet another explosion and we hear the lyrics "Sulla tua bocca lo dirò quando la luce splenderà!" (which translates as "On your mouth I will say it when the light shines!"). In the background we also hear the "Ma il mio mistero è chiuso in me; il nome mio nessun saprà!" (which translates as "But my secret is hidden within me; none will know my name!"). After that, Vincenzo quotes Calef's words "Tramontate, stelle! Tramontate, stelle! All'alba vincerò! Vincerò! Vincerò!" with the preceding part "Dilegua, o notte!" left out. Translated to English it means "Set, stars! Set, stars! At dawn, I will win! I will win! I will win!" and "Vanish, o night!," which could refer to Babel's warehouse and the fact it was a place where the RDU-90 chemical was stored. After the dramatic revelation for the audience, there follows an equally dramatic revelation for the Wusang Law Firm leaders in the sixth episode when Jang Han-seok decides to have a presentation revealing his true identity and the identity of Jang Han-seo who is nothing more than his half-brother and a marionette. After the revelation, we start noticing cracks in Han-seok's behaviour while he is pretending to be Jun-woo. That is when the viewers get introduced to him as "a sociopathic man of greed, rage, and violence

who will threaten and hurt anyone that stands in his way” (*Vincenzo. Babel Group Shadow Chairman - Netflix Fandom*). He gets easily agitated and, for the viewers, the character of the assistant is not funny anymore, but gradually becomes increasingly eerie, especially after finding out killing people is not just a recent activity he started because he wanted to build *Babel* empire, but a habit he has had ever since his teenage days. But there is something even more disturbing than his behaviour, and that is the fact that he has never been properly punished for anything. Therefore, a question arises – Could he have become a functioning member of society if the people surrounding him had reacted properly and on time? By on time is meant as soon as he showed signs of violence. Han-seok’s first sign of violence was not killing his father or murdering teenagers. His first sign of violence was abusing his half-brother. In one of the episodes, Han-seok says to Han-seo that he promised his mother to take care of him, and it is painfully obvious he did not take care of him. He systematically abused him since an early age, which is visible in the way Han-seo acts; he barely flinches when his half-brother tries to hit him or throw an object at him and obediently listens to his every word. That is, until Han-seo starts growing as a character.

Jang Han-seo’s character development is the most intense and visible one. Starting off as a *tsundere* character, by the end of the series he transforms into a tragic hero. To clarify, *tsundere* is an anime stereotype where a character is violent and defensive at first but sweet and affectionate later (Paradoxmi_st). The viewers are introduced to the character in the first episode when Hong Cha-young and her assistant Jang Jun-woo have a brief encounter with him. Just like Jang Han-seok’s personality starts to shift as we learn his true identity, the revelation in the fifth episode serves as an important event after which the viewers start to notice Han-seo’s shift in personality. The change begins slowly with giving the character more than a simple one-dimensional personality. We find out he is at the complete mercy of his half-brother and actively used as a marionette who will take on the fall in case *Babel* kingdom gets completely destroyed. Undoubtedly, a catalyst in this change is Vincenzo himself, who by the end takes on the role of Han-seo’s friend and brother. Even if Han-seo’s development was at first driven by pure revenge on his brother, it soon becomes one of the less relevant motives on the list because Vincenzo uses it to make Han-seo learn more about lawful business leading. This can clearly be seen in the fifteenth episode when Han-seo comes to Jipuragi Law Firm, claiming he wants to help them bring down his half-brother because his dream is to “run the company the right way.” Vincenzo and Hong Cha-young then proceed to ask him the following questions:

In the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith says this hand brings order to a

market economy? What is it? As economy grows, government expenditures in gross national product also increase. Name this law. And to improve the company's competitiveness, you learn something from another company. What is this term that originated from an iron rod?

To all these questions, he answers wrong, which should not be the case because The Theory of the Invisible Hand, Wagner's Law of State and Competitive Benchmarking are considered the basics of Business Management. In the sixteenth episode, he visits Jipuragi Law Firm once again. This time he arrives wearing a disguise and with the information about who saved Geunga Plaza from destruction. In that moment, he proves his intentions and loyalty using the wound his brother caused him as evidence. From that episode until the end of the series, Han-seo is perceived as an evil-turned-good character who constantly proves his worth by continuously cooperating with Vincenzo. There are two instances in which he additionally proves he is *not* in fact simple-minded marionette. The first one is seen in the eighteenth episode in the form of Vincenzo's flashback. When asked why he had not betrayed Vincenzo in exchange for chairman's position, Han-seo answers: "He would never make me the chairman. I'm just his puppet." With that, he proves he is aware of the situation and wise enough to avoid the trap. Additionally, he expresses concern about the plan and asks Vincenzo to shoot him to make the story more believable, saying: "They'll be suspicious. Can you shoot me in the arm so that the bullet doesn't, like, really hurt me?" The second instance in which he proves his intelligence is yet another Vincenzo's flashback, but this time in the twentieth episode when Han-seok asks how Vincenzo found him. It is revealed that Han-seo dismantled the watch his brother gave him the morning of inauguration and found a tracker. Then he put trackers in all of the Han-seok's watches and monitored his movements via mobile app. When asked why he decided to track his half-brother, Han-seo answers: "I'm certain that he'll do something horrible again soon. Then he'll run away like always. Even when he killed his friends in middle school, my father sent him away so no one could find him. Had he been punished then; he may not have turned out this way." When the flashback ends, Vincenzo comments to Han-seok: "In the end, he was right." The death of this villain-turned-hero character is more than dramatic. After getting kidnapped by his half-brother, Han-seo regains his consciousness in Han-seok's apartment and tries to help Hong Cha-young, who is restrained, but soon retreats behind a cover when Han-seok climbs down the stairs. After Vincenzo arrives at the scene, Han-seo is faced with an offer: kill Vincenzo with a hockey stick in exchange for life. Even though Vincenzo himself allows Han-seo to kill him, Han-seo says: "I'll make a decision I won't regret." At that

moment, the tension rises even more because the viewers are unsure if Han-seo will fall under the abuser's pressure, intimidation, and extortion. He then bravely attacks Han-seok and does not give up even after getting shot in his arm. The moment perfectly depicts the completed process of Han-seo's growth because after many years of active and brutal abuse, he finds the courage to stand up against his perpetrator, risking his life. While shielding Vincenzo and Cha-young, Han-seo gets shot one more time. Maritess Garcia Reyes wonderfully described the final scenes with the following words: "Have you noticed how happy and at ease Jang Han-seo is when he is with Vincenzo as compared to when he is with her real half-brother Jang Han-seok? With the latter, his hair is always perfectly groomed, his suit so crisp and his moves always calculated. He has always been treated like a puppet, never a brother. With Vincenzo, he can genuinely have fun and just be himself. He's been asking Vincenzo if he can call him his brother, which finally happened in the heart-breaking finale, a few seconds before he breathed his last breath" (Reyes).

Vincenzo Cassano is the only character whose background viewers constantly learn about, even though the story is torn into smaller pieces scattered throughout the episodes. When pieced together, chronologically his story begins in Korea in the 1990s when he is still known as Park Joo-Hyeong, the son of the single mother Oh Gyeong-Ja who worked as a housekeeper for the CEO Mr. Hwang of Shinkwang Bank. After the sexual assault in which Gyeong-Ja fights off assaulter Hwang by pushing him away, she is convicted as a murderer. Later in the series, the viewers find out there was a witness to the incident who decided not to help but take advantage of the situation, and that is no less than Mrs. Hwang. To become the new chairman of the company, Mrs. Hwang decided to frame Gyeong-Ja, who initially fought against the injustice, but gave up due to her lung cancer and lack of hope. Later, she decided to give up guardianship over her son, who ended up being adopted by an Italian couple. Unfortunately, they were killed and Joo-Hyeong joined the Cassano mafia family to get revenge. Because don Fabio Cassano adopted him, Joo-Hyeong was given a new name - Vincenzo Cassano. Even though in the series he is described as a lawyer and, like Tom Hagen, as *consigliere*, it is impossible not to notice the difference between what is usually considered *consigliere* and what is depicted in the series. Since the concept of the mafia for this series was clearly derived from the perception of the American-Italian mafias, the reference for the analysis will be based on the latter. In the typical mafia tree, there are two most powerful figures - the boss, who is usually very well-hidden, and the underboss who is usually the one who presents the boss' orders to the subordinates and takes the fall in case the organisation is prosecuted. On a sidenote, this is the exact way Babel Group functions with Han-seok being the boss from the shadow

and Han-seo being the boss in the public eye. The next important figure in the typical mafia tree is the *consigliere* who is “in-between the boss and underboss with a role of an advisor to the boss. The *consigliere* as they are more commonly called are there to make impartial decisions based upon fairness and for the good of the Mafia. The *consigliere* never really gets involved in the business and criminal operations, but they still get respected as if they were a boss” (The National Crime Syndicate). Therefore, it is visible that *consigliere* is not a suitable term for Vincenzo’s role, especially considering the scenes from his dreams and memories where it is visible that he was actively included in illegal activities, which also continues during his stay in Korea. The term more suitable for what Vincenzo is doing is *caporegime*, especially considering the relationship between him and the Geumga Plaza residents. To clarify, *caporegime* is “sometimes referred to as the *captain* or the *capo* of a crime family. (...) The role of a *capo* is to manage their own crew within the crime family, they will be given a designated geographical location to operate within” (The National Crime Syndicate). With time, Geumga Plaza becomes the location protected by the residents led by Vincenzo, and Jipuragi Law firm becomes the place where the leaders of the family plan, share information, and decide on the next steps in the fight against the rival mafia Babel. The mafia background is an essential part of who Vincenzo is as a character. Even though he *is* on the “good side,” he is still using cruel mafia strategies when dealing with enemies, and even if the stay in Korea did seem to soften him, all is annulled in the last episode when he shows no mercy towards the enemies. His strong sense of justice is shown multiple times throughout the series and the key principle that he is driven by is not to harm innocent, women, and children. The viewers might question the quality of his principle after they find out he harmed a child and killed a woman. But for both of these cases, there is a further explanation needed. First of all, the viewers know he harmed a child only because of the fact he is haunted by the memory of seeing a child after executing her parents, which brings to the conclusion he is tormented by the image of opening car’s doors and finding a child huddled on the back seat between her now dead parents. In his defence *per se*, he was probably unaware that the child would be present on the execution day. As for the second case of bending his principle, he said he does not consider Choi Myung-hee a woman but rather a monster due to her obedience to Han-seok, the ease with which she orders murders, and her lack of guilty conscience. The ways in which Myung-hee and Han-seok were murdered by Vincenzo can be perceived as a karmic manifestation of a sort. Choi Myung-hee dies trying to escape the fire, but she is unable to do so because Vincenzo mutilated her legs. The detail that shows just how calculated Vincenzo is relates to the fact that he plays record player

with Zumba music she likes so much. Throughout the entire series, the viewers witness Myung-hee dancing Zumba, and just like that she dies – the last frames of her indeed resemble her dancing in the fire. Han-seok receives the most special treatment of all Vincenzo's enemies as he is tortured and killed by a torture device *The Spear of Atonement*. With its original name копье искупления (romanised: kop'ye iskupleniya), this device functions by piercing by 5 mm every 5 minutes, causing the victim to feel lightheaded from the blood loss and ultimately experiencing excruciating pain. When Han-seok is finally pierced by the device, a black bird flies over and starts poking his abdomen. The bird is probably a crow especially taking into consideration the fact that throughout the entire series Buddhism takes on the role of a leitmotif and in the twentieth episode its importance becomes the most prominent. According to *Mysticurious*, "The crow enjoys sacred status in Buddhism, especially in its Tibetan branch, the Vajrayana, the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt. Here, the bird is regarded as the earthly manifestation of Mahakala, the protector and sustainer of righteousness on Earth. In Japanese and Korean mythologies, there is a tripedal raven or jungle crow, known as Yatagarasu and Samjokgo, respectively. The creature is known to be associated with the Sun, and represents divine intervention in earthly, human affairs" (*What Do Crows and Ravens Symbolize? Know What Myth Narrates*). Considering that during Myung-hee's torture Vincenzo says: "I am Vaisravana who leads yakshas and rakshasas," the crow could be interpreted as a sign of a divine entity approving of Vincenzo's actions. Furthermore, entire Vincenzo's character could have been inspired by the story of Vaisravana. In Buddhism, Vaisravana is the Guardian King of the North and leader of yakshas. He wears golden armour and protects gods from demi-gods. Due to the harmfulness of his breath, he keeps his mouth tightly closed and shares the spiritual and material wealth with practitioners of the Dharma. His symbol is mongoose, an enemy of the snake which represents greed and hatred (Vaisravana). The connection with Vincenzo's character is more than visible. Vincenzo wears expensive suits and is in pursuit of gold. At the same time, he is kind and protective of innocent people. Vaisravana's enemy is the greedy snake, and Vincenzo's enemy is evil Babel. Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhists consider Vaisravana's sentiment regarding wealth to be providing freedom by way of bestowing prosperity, so that one may focus on the path or spirituality rather than on the materiality and temporality of that wealth, and throughout the series Vincenzo manages to, intentionally or not, guide the residents of Geumga Plaza towards mutual unity which he in the end rewards with gold. Another important detail to explain are *yakshas* and *rakshasas* – *yakshas* are benevolent, good spirits and *rakshasas* are evil spirits. Vaisravana's true power lies in the fact he can be offered help from both

for his goals. Just like Vaisravana, throughout the series, Vincenzo uses bad people and good people to help him bring down Babel and in the eleventh episode agent Ahn says: “I would’ve arrested you if you’ve violated the law, but Vincenzo Cassano fought for justice, the weak and Buddha,” thus additionally confirming that the detective was aware of what Vincenzo was doing but decided to side with him because of his goal. As stated before, Babel is Vincenzo’s snake and “the killing of the snake can symbolise acquiring treasures, becoming immortal and letting go of old karma to become anew” (*A Brief Analysis on the Parallels between Vincenzo & Vaisravana (Kubera) Lord of Wealth*). There are a few instances in which events in Vincenzo’s life can be interpreted as his karma and the first one is Vincenzo’s relationship with pigeon Inzaghi. “Vincenzo’s inner conflict is symbolized by Inzaghi, the pigeon who shows up on his roof one day and decides to be his pet, much to Vincenzo’s chagrin. Inzaghi is a kind of karma barometer for Vincenzo. Every time Vincenzo is rude to the pigeon, his luck turns bad. And vice versa. Eventually, Vincenzo decides to be nice to Inzaghi. The bird rewards him by gathering a flock of his bird brethren and saving Vincenzo from three assassins” (Rowley). The second instance in which we can see Vincenzo being punished by his karma is his relationship with his mother Oh Gyeong-Ja. After many episodes in which the viewers are unsure if Vincenzo and Gyeong-Ja are aware they are mother and son, the viewers get the confirmation in the sixteenth episode when Vincenzo and his mother share a heart-to-heart moment admitting they are aware of their relationship without directly saying it. But soon after his mother is murdered by the order of Jang Han-seok. This event could be seen as karmic because Vincenzo killed the little girl’s parents in front of her back in Italy. After avenging mother’s death and murdering Han-seok and Myung-hee, Vincenzo is finally liberated from his old karma, which can be supported by the fact that in the twentieth episode, he says he finally found his true purpose in life and is at peace with the decision. The series ends with his monologue:

I’m still a villain and couldn’t care less about justice. Justice is weak and empty. One cannot win against any villains with justice alone. If merciless justice exists, I am willing to yield to it. Even villains long to live in a peaceful world. However, since that’s impossible, I’ve taken up a new hobby. Getting rid of garbage. If I don’t do that, people will die buried underneath the garbage. There’s one last thing I’d like to say from a villain’s perspective. Evil is prevalent and vehement.

in which he confirms he is aware he is not a good person, but he is ready to accept his calling as someone who is able to stop powerful people from harming innocent people. Therefore, he also underwent mild character

development, becoming more of a rebel with a cause than a pure-blooded villain.

Given the complexity of the series, it is no wonder the public's reception was overall good. But the most interesting information is that even the Italian public had little to no complaints about the Italian motives in *Vincenzo*. Most remarks were made about mispronunciation and overemphasis on some words, yet native speakers said they were pleasantly surprised to be able to understand the series without subtitles. Considering Korean and Italian are from different language groups, it was not in the first place expected the pronunciation would be perfect. Furthermore, even the series itself was aware of the cultural differences between Korea and Italy, which is confirmed early in the second episode when one of the support characters, Toto, says: "[Italian men] distract people with their hand gestures" referring to the fact that in Korea overusing hand gestures is considered rude, meanwhile in Italy it is a crucial part of communication. The most tiresome part of the series is the fact that the inspiration was mostly derived from the American view of the Italians and the quite folkloristic stereotypical perception Americans have of the Italian Cosa Nostra rather than the Italian culture itself. This can be seen through how many times the movie *The Godfather* was referenced. In the seventh episode, Hong Cha-young asks Vincenzo: "You gave her an offer she could not resist?" and in the eighteenth episode Park Seok-do states: "There was a man who dreamed of living like Michael Corleone from *The Godfather*. Then he met a real Corleone." Unarguably, the series would have gained in quality if the directors had decided to do more thorough research on the topic of Italy and Mafia and not just copy-paste it from American TV, but considering it was shot during the pandemic, their work and success are more than admirable.

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