

Paper

Altered Spaces: Calvino, Fenoglio and the Odyssey of the Italian Partisan

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Abstract

The central argument of Italo Calvino's brief 1946 essay "Omero antimilitarista"¹ is "the Marxist line that the *Iliad* represents the criticism of the troops against the officers' arrogant quarrels, and the *Odyssey* portrays the problematic return that awaits all soldiers and partisans" (McLaughlin 30). Of equal interest, however, especially when read in terms of Calvino's own Resistance literature, are his attempts to place the partisan war that had just finished in the context of his reading of Homer, and in particular, the *Odyssey*. He describes the *Odyssey* as "la storia degli otto settembre, [...] la storia di tutti gli otto settembre della Storia" (Calvino, *Saggi* 2118). It is, Calvino explains, "il mito del ritorno a casa nato nei lunghi anni di «naja» dai soldati portati a combattere lontano" (2118), and he highlights in particular the difficulty of returning home "su mezzi di fortuna, per paesi irti di nemici" (2118), "la preoccupazione per la fedeltà della moglie" (2118) and "il problema del reduce che torna stracciato e dimenticato da tutti" (2118). ...

The central argument of Italo Calvino's brief 1946 essay "Omero antimilitarista"¹ is "the Marxist line that the *Iliad* represents the criticism of the troops against the officers' arrogant quarrels, and the *Odyssey* portrays the problematic return that awaits all soldiers and partisans" (McLaughlin 30). Of equal interest, however, especially when read in terms of Calvino's own Resistance literature, are his attempts to place the partisan war that had just finished in the context of his reading of Homer, and in particular, the *Odyssey*. He describes the *Odyssey* as "la storia degli otto settembre, [...] la storia di tutti gli otto settembre della Storia" (Calvino, *Saggi* 2118). It is, Calvino explains, "il mito del ritorno a casa nato nei lunghi anni di «naja» dai soldati portati a combattere lontano" (2118), and he highlights in particular the difficulty of returning home "su mezzi di fortuna, per paesi irti di nemici" (2118), "la preoccupazione per la fedeltà della moglie" (2118) and "il problema del reduce che torna stracciato e dimenticato da tutti" (2118).

In this paper, therefore, I discuss the way in which Calvino (1923-1985) and his contemporary Beppe Fenoglio (1922-1963) present the theme of the return home from war to a changed dwelling space in their Resistance writing and assess how it compares to the Homeric version of the same trope found in the *Odyssey*.²

The comparison I wish to draw between the *Odyssey* and Italian Resistance literature is a rather straightforward one. A particular feature of Odysseus' return is the way in which his home at Ithaca has changed in his absence, as an array of suitors wait there, petitioning for his wife Penelope's hand. He encounters a dwelling space that is physically the same as the one he left behind twenty years earlier, yet psychologically, he now experiences it in a different way. His perception is altered by time, absence and the vagaries of memory; this experience of the return from war to a dwelling that has been transformed (either physically or psychologically) is a theme re-

peated in the novels of Calvino and Fenoglio, albeit perhaps not as an intentional reference to Homer. Unlike Calvino's use of Ariosto as a model or Fenoglio's evocation of the Yorkshire of *Wuthering Heights*, the overtones of the *Odyssey* in the texts are not quite as explicit, but rather are perhaps an example of Kristeva's vision of intertextuality, namely the idea that intertextuality is "[the] transposition of one (or several) sign-systems into another" (Kristeva 111). In this context, the "sign-system" of the Odyssean return, and in particular, the phenomenon of the altered dwelling space, is transposed into the context of the *Resistenza*. Thus, the focus of this paper is not so much on identifying precise and intentional allusion to specific lines from Homer in the Resistance texts, but rather on investigating how a spatial paradigm from the dawn of martial literature comes to be depicted and altered in the neorealist period. To this end, I begin by analysing Pin's return in Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947), before offering a reading of the returns of Fenoglio's partisan protagonists Johnny and Milton in *Il partigiano Johnny* (1968) and *Una questione privata* (1964) respectively, examining how each author depicts his characters' "failed" Odysseys. Jurij Lotman writes that "the structure of the space of a text becomes the model of the structure of the space of the universe" (Lotman 217), and so in this particular context, the fluctuating spaces of the partisans' home are perhaps emblematic of the altered social and political circumstances triggered by the *Resistenza*.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of his underlining of the importance of the *otto settembre*, this event does not feature in Calvino's literature. His focus is instead on the return of the partisan, rather than the return of troops conscripted to the Italian Army following the Armistice of September 8th, 1943. Indeed, his child hero Pin was never a soldier, nor even a bona fide *partigiano*, but nonetheless, his return to his home in San Remo³ bears many Homeric overtones. In his 1964

preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Calvino explains that he began writing without a precise plot in mind, but that the story itself “imponere soluzioni quasi obbligatorie” (*Romanzi e racconti I* 1194). Indeed, there is a sense of inevitability about Pin’s return to his original dwelling in the novel’s finale, and this trope of the ineluctable return is something Calvino notes in his own reading of the *Odyssey* in the essay “Le Odissee nell’Odissea”,⁴ saying that “[q]uesto ritorno-racconto è qualcosa che c’è già, prima d’essere compiuto” (*Saggi* 889), and so, in this context, it is worthwhile to compare the two characters’ homecomings.

There is, of course, an immediate and obvious difference between the figures awaiting the returning hero in each of the texts – Penelope is Odysseus’ wife, while Rina is Pin’s older sister. In Odysseus’ prolonged absence, while Penelope is besieged by an array of suitors who feast at her home in Ithaca, waiting for her to choose one of them as her husband, her steadfast refusal to yield to their request denotes her as a paragon of fidelity, while in contrast, Rina is a prostitute who sleeps with German soldiers. Their respective dwelling spaces indeed reflect the differences between them. As Penelope awaits Odysseus’ return, she seems to domesticate her space by undertaking the rather “feminine” task of weaving a shroud for her father-in-law Laertes (albeit as a ruse to delay her response to the suitors (*Odyssey* II 103-109)). Meanwhile, the prostitute Rina lives in squalor in the alleys of San Remo, and on entering her room, one is struck by “quell’odore di maschio e femmina che dà subito alle narici” (*Romanzi e racconti I* 17), for the creaking floorboards and bed (18) have strong connotations of decay, and the darkness of the room (16) lends it a certain sense of foreboding. It seems as though Calvino uses the open and accessible nature of Rina’s dwelling to depict her as something of an exhibitionist; hence, at the beginning of the novel, she is depicted shouting from her window into the alley below (9) and is viewed through cracks in the partition by Pin (15).

In short, the squalid nature of her home is used to show her in as undignified a light as possible and thus her dwelling is what Mieke Bal would term a “thematized” space; that is to say, the dwelling space is “an object of presentation in itself, for its own sake” (Bal 95). It is “an ‘acting space’ rather than the place of action” (95), reiterating its occupant’s profession. Thus, even on Pin’s return to the house at the novel’s end, when Rina treats him kindly in an attempt to curry favour, the narrator ironically comments that “[l]a Nera fa la materna” (*Romanzi e racconti I* 142), strongly implying that she cannot evade the archetype of the “whore” that he has bestowed upon her, thanks largely to his very specific and deliberate spatialising of her room as a brothel rather than as a home.

In spite of these differences between Penelope and Rina, however, it is interesting to note that each character solicits gifts from her male admirers, and the discrepancy between the reactions of the returning male protagonists to these gifts illustrates how *Il sentiero* can be read as presenting a “failed” *Odyssey*. Penelope tells the suitors that it is expected of them to prepare “a banquet for the friends of the bride, and give to her glorious gifts” (XVIII 279-280), and similarly, the prostitute Rina has received gifts from her German “suitors”, as she offers Pin “una cioccolata tedesca fatta di noccioline” (142) and “marmellata tedesca” (142), tokens of her collaboration with the occupiers. However, Pin’s pointed comment of “[t]i trattano bene, vedo” (142) contrasts with Odysseus being “glad” (XVIII 281) to see his wife trick her suitors, since “he values the economic gains, which will help replenish the household. As a tactician himself, he respects her tactics” (Felson-Rubin 174). This is not the case in the Resistance Italy of Calvino’s novel, in which items received from an enemy, however valuable the economic gain to be derived from them, are symbolic of treachery to the Resistance cause. Thus, while each dwelling space has been transformed by the presence of unwanted guests in the hero’s

absence, it seems from Odysseus' obvious trust in Penelope's motives that his will be an altogether more successful homecoming than that of Pin.

Other crucial stages of the Odyssean return are the hero's disguise and subsequent revelation, and both of these features are found in *Il sentiero*. Like Odysseus, who is transfigured by the goddess Athena and disguised as an aged beggar, Pin is similarly unkempt. He is "infagottato in strani vestiti, con un cespuglio di capelli più grande delle spalle, sporco, stracciato, scalcagnato, con guance impastate di polvere e lacrime" (142), just as Odysseus' eyes are "dimmed" (XIII 433) and he wears "a vile ragged cloak" (434). Unlike the wily Odysseus, however, Pin's appearance is not a deliberate ruse, but rather a consequence of the realities of the war that he has experienced. Similarly, while Odysseus' homecoming is almost like a game, marked by a series of feats of cunning on his part, such as his decision to reveal his identity in stages, first to his son Telemachus (XVI 213-215), then to the suitors (XXII 35-41) and finally to Penelope (XXIV 205-209), Pin's revelation is rather less carefully construed, as he simply demands of his sister to open the door – "Aprì, Rina, sono tuo fratello Pin" (Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti I* 142).

The fact that Odysseus must exercise his full repertoire of subterfuge and wiliness in order to enter his own home suggests that his domestic space is a protective one, made up of a number of layers that even he must penetrate before gaining full access, and again this is in contrast with Pin's rather more open and less shielded dwelling space, which he can enter and leave freely. Furthermore, -- and again unlike Odysseus -- Pin's return home is not so much a chance to exhibit his cunning, or any sort of newfound maturity, but rather is an act of desperation, as he despairingly seeks shelter in the dwelling of his childhood, both from the demands of the war and from his miscomprehension of the adult world. Unlike the Homeric hero, who avenges the changes

inflicted on his home in his absence by slaying the suitors using his "great bow" (XXI 314), Pin avenges his changed dwelling by inadvertently facilitating the killing of his sister, by first taking the prized P. 38 pistol (which itself has passed from character to character in the text, more or less following Pin's circular journey) from her and threatening her with it (*Romanzi e racconti I* 143), before passing it on to her eventual killer Cugino (146). In short, Pin's is a completely failed readjustment to his original home after his time at war. This is a break from the template of Odysseus.

The Odyssean return is similarly in evidence in Beppe Fenoglio's writing. Unlike Calvino, Fenoglio offers brief descriptions of the *otto settembre* itself, as his older protagonists desert the Italian Army to join the *Resistenza*. In both *Il partigiano Johnny* and *Una questione privata*, for instance, both Johnny and Milton recall their returns home from Rome in September 1943, and in *Primavera di bellezza*, Johnny's travails in reaching Piedmont unscathed are detailed. However, the protagonist's actual return to his house is not described in any of the three texts and instead, in Fenoglio, as in Calvino, it is the return of the partisan to his dwelling space after his time in combat that provides us with a point of comparison with the Homeric rendering of the trope. In *Il partigiano Johnny*, the protagonist makes one brief return home during his time in the *Resistenza*, and once again, it is fascinating to observe the relative "failure" of the Odyssean homecoming in the Resistance context. Johnny's return occurs during the partisan occupation of Alba in October 1944, and the inauspicious nature of his arrival is sign-posted by the way in which he is scolded by a neighbour for not having visited sooner: "[o]re ed ore la tua povera madre è stata al balcone, chiamando giù i partigiani per chiedere di te" (Fenoglio, *Romanzi e racconti* 1560). This contrasts with the welcome the disguised Odysseus receives from the swineherd Eumaeus on his arrival at Ithaca (*Odyssey* XIV), who gives him food and shelter.

Similarly, the returned Johnny seems somewhat unfamiliar with his dwelling space on a physical level, reflecting the great change that he has experienced in his absence. In the darkness of the evening, he attempts to climb the steps towards his house by memory, “tentando il suo vecchio passo di pace di allora” (Fenoglio, *Romanzi e racconti* 1560), but finds that “gli scalini parevano rimbombare con un alieno passo” (1560). At this point Johnny has been away for less than a year, yet his sense of alienation from his own childhood home is striking, and this suggests that the hills of the Langhe that he inhabits as a partisan are now his natural locus (rather than the town of Alba in which he grew up). This failure to remember his home space in turn illustrates the change that Johnny has undertaken over the course of the novel, from the passive to the active life, from the urban student he was before the outbreak of war to the hilltop partisan he is now.

In any case, Johnny’s return compares unfavourably with the way in which Odysseus, after a much longer absence, is still able to use his memory of the physical layout of his home to his advantage, such as when he hides the arms of the suitors “inside the store-room” (*Odyssey* XIX 17), or when he convinces Penelope of his identity by recalling how he built their bedroom around a tree – “Round about this I built my chamber, till I had finished it, with close-set stones” (XXIII 192-193). Johnny’s unsteady progress up the steps to his home also goes against the thrust of Bachelard’s argument that

over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the “first stairway”, we would not stumble on that rather high step” (14-15).

In effect, it is as if Johnny, during his time in the Resistance, has not only been transformed but indeed reborn as a partisan. The house in which the student Johnny was born

is now unfamiliar to him, the space is no longer inscribed in his psyche after an absence of under a year, and the episode appears to illustrate Giorgio Bocca’s point on the relationship between the partisans and the hill, which he describes as “casa e madre del ribelle” (Bocca 83). The hills of the Langhe now provide the partisan Johnny with his familiar space, and his unease in his own family home is proof of this conversion from callow youth to hardened partisan.

Inside the house itself, the unsuccessful nature of Johnny’s homecoming, in contrast to the ultimately glorious return of Odysseus, is confirmed. Although Johnny is able to sit calmly in his parents’ kitchen, untroubled by their new dog that “ha conosciuto il sangue” (Fenoglio, *Romanzi e racconti* 1561), and although he is reunited with his father, just as Odysseus and Laertes are at the end of the *Odyssey*, his is only a fleeting visit (in spite of his mother’s hopes to the contrary). Johnny explains that the partisans will not hold Alba for much more than two weeks and refuses to spend even one night at home in his bed as “poi sarebbe una dannosissima riabitudine” (1561), suggesting that the acting space of the home still carries considerable agency, even if it has been altered in his absence. After taking some jumpers to wear while on patrol outside Alba, Johnny disappears into the “sovrannaturale immobilità e desertità della città” (1563), rather than finding, as Odysseus does, a lasting “refuge from tribulation” (XXIII 284).

The short-lived homecoming of Johnny, therefore, is in contrast to the more definite return of Odysseus. Although the character of Johnny can be said to constitute “una sorta di Ulisse cristiano” (Beccaria, 2001 149), who is “in lotta con la natura ostile” (149) and “vaga sulle colline in lungo viaggio irto di ostacoli, verso una salvezza” (150), unlike the Homeric hero he is incapable of a definitive homecoming as his town, if not his house, has been seemingly irrevocably changed in his absence. While Odysseus travelled to distant Troy to

fight his war before returning home, Johnny is not only already fighting on home territory, but the Nazi-fascist enemy has displaced him from his town and occupied it. So it is perhaps inevitable that it will have changed in a more dramatic way than Odysseus' Ithaca.

Fenoglio's Milton of *Una questione privata* is another character whose return to the initial dwelling space of his text offers a "failed" version of the *Odyssey*, although in his case he is not returning to his own home, but to the villa of his beloved, Fulvia. In any case, it is worth noting that in each of the three Resistance texts, as in the *Odyssey*, the domestic dwelling to which the hero returns is strongly linked to a female character, be she a wife, sister, mother or -- in Milton's case -- object of unrequited love. This is in keeping with much of the spatial configuration of Resistance literature at large, wherein the archetype of private space being a female preserve and public space a male one is reinforced.⁵ The marine imagery prevalent in the novel only emphasises the Odyssean undertones to Milton's journey⁶ back towards his pre-war life. He undertakes an epic voyage from his public duty of Resistance "homewards" across the Langhe to his private concern of his love for Fulvia, just as Odysseus sails from his duty at the walls of Troy home to Ithaca. However, while Odysseus returns to Ithaca to his faithful wife Penelope, there is no such neat conclusion to *Una questione privata*. Unlike Penelope, Fulvia is not waiting for Milton at her villa, nor, would it seem, has she forsaken all other suitors. Milton's return to the villa is unsuccessful, and, as has been noted by Saccone (1988 140), this is sign-posted by the trembling cherry trees, the considerable ageing of the housekeeper and the way Fulvia leaves the books given to her by Milton behind, as well as by the housekeeper comparing the villa to a tomb: "Non sembra d'entrare in una tomba?" (Fenoglio *Romanzi e racconti* 1019). In the novel's closing chapter, when Milton returns once again to the villa in order to discover the truth about Fulvia and his friend Giorgio's li-

aision, the difference between his experience and that of Odysseus is emphasised. While Odysseus, with the aid of Telemachus and Eumaeus, kills the suitors in Book XXII of the *Odyssey*, Milton is instead pursued and ultimately killed by "una cinquantina" (1124) of soldiers who are spread across the hill below Fulvia's villa.

In both Calvino and Fenoglio's narrative, therefore, the return of the partisan to his original dwelling space seems to be considerably less successful than that of Odysseus. The house, while physically the same as before, has typically undergone some sort of transformation in the absence of the protagonist and, thus, it appears that the works cited seem to present failed versions of the model of the Odyssean return. In Calvino and Fenoglio's novels, while the physical spaces of the house are the same, it is configured differently in the recesses of the hero's mind, and thus becomes somehow inaccessible. The reasons for this are manifold, but perhaps the most obvious and simplistic difference between the return to the dwelling space in Fenoglio and Calvino's writing and the return of the Homeric hero is that unlike the Trojan War, the *Resistenza* is still ongoing when Pin, Johnny and Milton seek out their original homes. Thus, it is to be expected that their attempts to return to their private lives from their public duty will be unsuccessful. This is encapsulated in *Una questione privata* by the partisan Ivan's statement on observing Milton return to Fulvia's villa – "è sicuro che era una cosa della vita di prima, e tornare su queste cose fa più male che bene [...] Le cose di prima a dopo, a dopo!" (Fenoglio *Romanzi e racconti* 1028).

The difficulty partisans faced in readapting to civilian life after the war is hinted at by their ambiguous re-entry into their homes and hometowns in these texts, and indeed Fenoglio explicitly tackles this issue elsewhere, such as in the short story "Ettore va al lavoro", in which the former partisan Ettore cannot bring himself to take up a mundane job as a clerk, and instead opts to make a living

threatening and blackmailing ex-facists for his former colleague Bianco. In effect, these partisans' failures to readapt to their own home space predicts a failure to readjust to civilian life after their time in the *Resistenza*.

This in turn is characteristic of Lotman's theory on space in literature. I have already alluded to the way in which he relates textual space to the "space of the universe" (217), and continues to reiterate this stance when he writes that "the spatial order of the world [in a text] becomes an organizing element around which its non-spatial features are also constructed" (220). In effect, Lotman suggests that the way in which a writer orders his or her space tells the reader much about the text as a whole, and so it is in Calvino and Fenoglio's Resistance writing, where the uneasiness of the partisan in what ought to be a welcoming domestic space prefigures a reintegration into post-war society that will prove to be problematic, in spite of the fact that he is supposedly on the victorious side of the conflict.

By extension, the incomplete or unsuccessful homecomings of Pin, Johnny and Milton also carry with them an implicit commentary on the state of Italy as a whole at the conclusion of the *Resistenza*. The "failure" of the Odyssean return in the Resistance novel (due to the fact that the war is not yet over) is perhaps emblematic of the cultural context in which the texts were written, a post-war Italy in which the political fault lines etched out by the partisan struggle became ever more distinct, and would go on to define the political landscape of the country for the following half-century. In short, the ambiguous homecomings of the partisans of Fenoglio and Calvino's texts reflect the ambiguous nature of their takes on the Resistance, which is very different from the "romanticismo rivoluzionario" (Pedullà 263) of an author such as Renata Viganò; their objective is clearly not to glorify the conflict, but rather, as Calvino puts it in his 1964 preface "lanciare una sfida ai detrattori della Resistenza e nello stesso tem-

po ai sacerdoti d'una Resistenza agiografica ed edulcorata" (*Romanzi e racconti I* 1202).

It seems to be the case, therefore, that the return of the partisan as outlined in Calvino and Fenoglio's writing is something of a "failed" *Odyssey*, certainly when read in comparison to Homer. However, as important as the return of Odysseus himself are the episodes he experiences along the way, and this is something Calvino notes in his reading of the *Odyssey*. If, having overcome numerous obstacles and learnt many lessons between Troy and Ithaca, Odysseus had forgotten everything, it would be worse than if he had never reached home at all – "la sua perdita sarebbe stata ben più grave: non trarre alcuna esperienza da quanto ha sofferto, alcun senso da quel che ha vissuto" (Calvino, *Saggi* 889) – and one can certainly say the same of the Resistance experiences of Pin, Johnny and Milton. Similarly important is the structure that the possibility of return lends to Homer's poem. Odysseus' desire for Ithaca underpins the entire *Odyssey*, much like in Fenoglio's writing, wherein Alba becomes "una immagine assoluta, precostruita, l'immagine di Itaca per Ulisse" (Falaschi 10).⁷ The journey across the "oceano pauroso della guerra" (Fenoglio, *Romanzi e racconti* 1038), with its possibility of return just as Odysseus returned to Ithaca, therefore, defines the structure of both the spaces of Fenoglio's novels and of the texts themselves, just as Pin's journey in *Il sentiero* is, like that of Odysseus, circular. Thus, even though the homecoming of the Resistance hero in Calvino and Fenoglio's writing is incomplete, the authors' reworking of the paradigm of the partisan returning to his original dwelling space is nonetheless hugely significant. Meanwhile, the ultimate failure of the return itself suggests that tropes hewn from legend do not transfer readily to the realities of World War II. Thus, through the personal odysseys of their protagonists, and their ultimate discomfort in ostensibly familiar spaces, Calvino and Fenoglio subtly question some of the myths of the *Resistenza*.

Notes

- 1 Omero antimilitarista” was first published in *L’Unità* on 15 September 1946, and is reproduced in Calvino’s *Saggi*, 2118-2119.
- 2 The case has been convincingly made for the advent of the twentieth century marking a “shift from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*” (Zajko 313) as the quintessential Homeric text, testified by its influence on modernist writers such as Joyce and T.S. Eliot.
- 3 The urban centre of *Il sentiero* is “already an ambiguous place, with its familiar maze of alleys and streets, the (precarious) safety of homes, and the (treacherous) warmth to be found in the havens of small-time vice, the bar and a young prostitute’s hovel” (Jeannot 138).
- 4 The essay “Sarà sempre Odissea” was first published in *La Repubblica* on 21 October 1981, and is now reproduced as “Le Odissee nell’Odissea” in Calvino’s *Saggi*, 888-896.
- 5 Sarti notes this archetype when she writes of “i confini tra sfera privata (femminile) e sfera pubblica (maschile)” (Sarti 25).
- 6 Similarities can also be drawn between Milton’s experiences in the ocean of the Resistance and Dante’s conception of Odysseus/Ulysses. Unlike the Homeric version, in which the hero is reunited with his family at Ithaca, the ambitions of Dante’s Ulysses “a divenir del mondo esperto” (Dante, *Inferno*, XXVI, 98) cannot be sated by the love of his family, and instead he sets off for “l’alto mare aperto” (100), travelling beyond the known world “per seguir virtute e canoscenza” (120). His “folle volo” (125) eventually brings him to the shores of Purgatory, where “un turbo nacque” (137), and Ulysses and his remaining companions are drowned. Rather than accept that he cannot find out the truth regarding Fulvia while he is partaking in the Resistance, Milton instead neglects what should be his principal duty and goes in search of knowledge, just as Ulysses does. Like Ulysses, Milton’s impossible search, his muddling of his *questione privata* with his *questione pubblica*, leads to his eventual demise, metaphorically drowning in the stormy waters of the war.
- 7 The epic overtones of Fenoglio’s work are not drawn only from the *Odyssey*, however. For instance, in *Il partigiano Johnny* Fenoglio describes the partisans’ envy of the communist commissioner Némega’s English-manufactured sten gun in terms of the *Iliad*, imagining that on his death “ci sarebbe stato un omerico carosello intorno al suo cadavere nient’affatto achilleo, a giudicare dalla visiva cupidigia di tutti per quello sten” (Fenoglio, *Romanzi e racconti*, 491). Similarly, the dead Tito is likened to “un greco ucciso dai Persiani due millenni avanti” (526), while Johnny compares seeing a German flare to “veder pendere la bilancia di Giove” (545). Meanwhile, for Jacomuzzi the immutability of the Milton of *Una questione privata* serves to align him “con gli eroi del poema epica” (Jacomuzzi 162), while comparisons have also been drawn between the tragic, entwined destinies of Milton and Giorgio and those of Nissus and Euryalus in Book IX of the *Aeneid* (Guglielminetti 156). In any case, “l’epica classica e i suoi eroi rivivono sulle colline grazie a Fenoglio” (Vaccaneo 105).

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