LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Intratextual Dialogues or Intertextual Bridgings?
Exploring the Intertextual Geographies of Gabriella Genisi's Detective Fictions through Crossover Conversations

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'Hello,' I muttered groggily, without even glancing at the display. 'Lolita, it's Montalbano. Am I bothering you?' I squinted and tried to concentrate, staring at the mosaic on the wall in front of me. 'Hey, dear Salvo, what a surprise. Bothering? Don't even mention it; I'm working as always, you know that. Tell me everything' (Genisi 2010: 105; author's translation).

This text is the start of a significant conversation between two literary figures, Lolita Lobosco, created by Gabriella Genisi, and Salvo Montalbano, the main character of Andrea Camilleri's crime novels. The phone call takes place during Lobosco's investigations as a police commissioner in the city of Bari, narrated within the book *La circonferenza delle arance* (Genisi 2010). Therefore, this event is not just a dialogue between two characters but represents an intertextual meeting between the main characters of two distinct novel series. In this essay, I want to emphasize how this narrative strategy represents a specific form of *crossover* between

different literary universes, founded on the device of 'borrowing characters from another text' (Kundu 2008: 11), and how such conversations represent intertextual bridges with deliberate and specific objectives.

The author often uses this narrative technique. Born in Bari in 1965, she has achieved success as a writer of detective novels, particularly through a series of ten books focused on the character of Police Commissioner Lobosco, set within the very city of the author. Her celebrity has further amplified through the adaptation of her novels into a TV series produced by RAI broadcasting.

Gabriella Genisi is regarded by critics as one of the most innovative and dynamic representatives of the new generation of Italian crime novelists (Carosella 2012). She adeptly aligns herself with the literary tradition of the so-called Mediterranean Noir, a subgenre introduced in Italy notably by Andrea Camilleri (Pezzotti 2012). This new generation of writers incorporates into their works Mediterranean Noir themes and narrative strategies, emphasizing the cultural roots of characters, the local settings, and the political engagement (Gabellieri 2022b). The character of Lolita Lobosco has also been highly regarded as an intriguing attempt to establish a new model of a female main character diverging from the male police officer dominant archetype in this tradition (Novelli 2019).

A habitual narrative strategy within the ten books of the Lobosco series involves the Commissioner's encounters with characters and protagonists from other books and series, primarily within the detective fiction genre (Romano Martin 2018). One notable recurring character is the Camilleri's Montalbano. In Genisi's fictional world, Montalbano was her mentor during the early stages of her career (paralleling Camilleri's stature as a reference point for contemporary Italian detective fiction writers). The two often engage in phone conversations, seeking each other's opinions on ongoing investigations or simply venting their frustrations. However, the references to other crime series do not end there: in the third volume of the series, Lobosco receives an unexpected visit from the Catalan investigator Pepe Carvalho, the main character of the novels by Spanish author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. They dine together, talking about crime, cuisine, and happiness. Moreover, in the fifth novel Lobosco has a date with the Marseillais Fabio Montale, a character from the books by Jean-Claude Izzo. She takes him on a tour of Bari. The narrative focuses on their conversation, with occasional interruptions to describe the city's most evocative spots: 'In front of the simple magnificence of San Nicola [the Bari cathedral], it's impossible to speak. Even if you've seen it a hundred, a thousand times. Fabio falls silent, struck by such beauty. And my embarrassment slips away, giving way to emotion' (Genisi 2015: 63).

In Rome, Lobosco indulges in revelry alongside Alicia Giménez Bartlet's Spanish policewoman Petra Delicado and Massimo Carlotto's Commissioner Bernardette Bourdet. The dialogue and information exchange between the three are pivotal in resolving a highly intricate investigation concerning international illicit trafficking. Engaging in conversation with her friends and reflecting upon their origins, Bari, Barcelona, and Marseille, Lobosco remarks 'our cities share much in common, they are places of excess, more Mediterranean than European and, in some ways, beyond control' (Genisi 2014: 49). In other books, she

encounters the detective Marco Buratti, also by Massimo Carlotto, or the forensic pathologist Alice Allevi, created by Alessia Gazzola.

According to Sheila Hones' interpretation (2008), each literary work can be construed as a *spatial event* in constant evolution, shaped by the relationships among writers, spaces, and readers. Hones' suggestion relies on an analytical model that dissects a literary work into three distinct spatial levels: the *intra-textual geographies*, signifying the spaces portrayed and their role in the progression of the plot; the *extra-textual geographies*, referring to the impacts that a text can generate in the material world; and finally, the *inter-textual geographies*, pertaining to the references through which a book can connect to other stories and narratives (Hones 2014; Anderson 2015). This heuristic framework has been followed, fostering new spatial and relational approaches to literary works. However, the intertextual level, encompassing the methods, motivations, and objectives by which an author and a text construct their own geography of literary references to other works, remains less explored. Questions such as Anderson's inquiry, 'what intra-textual and inter-textual spatial realms are created by a book, and how might these be mapped?' (Anderson 2015: 129), continue to remain unanswered.

In this context, Gabriella Genisi's recurrent dialogues between characters from different authors can be interpreted as a successful attempt to showcase what Julia Kristeva (2010) defines as 'vertical intertextuality,' indicating how the text situates itself within a literary *corpus* (Schlosser 2018: 24). Through conversations among detectives, Genisi engages in dialogue with other detective novels, highlighting her own models and references, including esteemed figures in the tradition like Camilleri, Izzo, Montalban, as well as other contemporary writers. The outcome is prominently geographical: through these dialogues, Genisi constructs her own mapping of the Mediterranean Noir that serves as her reference point. The sole exception is represented by Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, a Mexican investigator created by Paco Ignacio Taibo II.

The typical possibility in many contemporary crime novels of associating the main detective with a specific place (Gabellieri 2022a) allows for the delineation of a map, akin to that in Figure 1, enabling the demarcation of boundaries within the intertextual territory crafted by Genisi.

In general, Genisi's novels are replete with references to other works, some more direct and overt than others (notably the name of the protagonist, Lolita, which unavoidably evokes Vladimir Nabokov). Among these, such crossover technique of hosting, through which the author brings her protagonist into dialogue with characters from other fictions (Kundu 2008), stands out as the most conspicuous narrative tool capable of captivating the reader. The conversation between characters becomes a bridge between texts, places, and authors, showcasing the author's concerted effort not only to represent literary references and models but also to assert her belonging to that literary genre and to construct an intertextual geography of Mediterranean Noir for readers.

However, based on the presented case study, I would argue that conversation can be more than just an intra-textual narrative mechanism to advance the plot or expose the author's or character's thoughts. It can also serve as an agent for designing and mapping intertextual geographies, facilitated through the direct comparison of *guests* borrowed from other books.
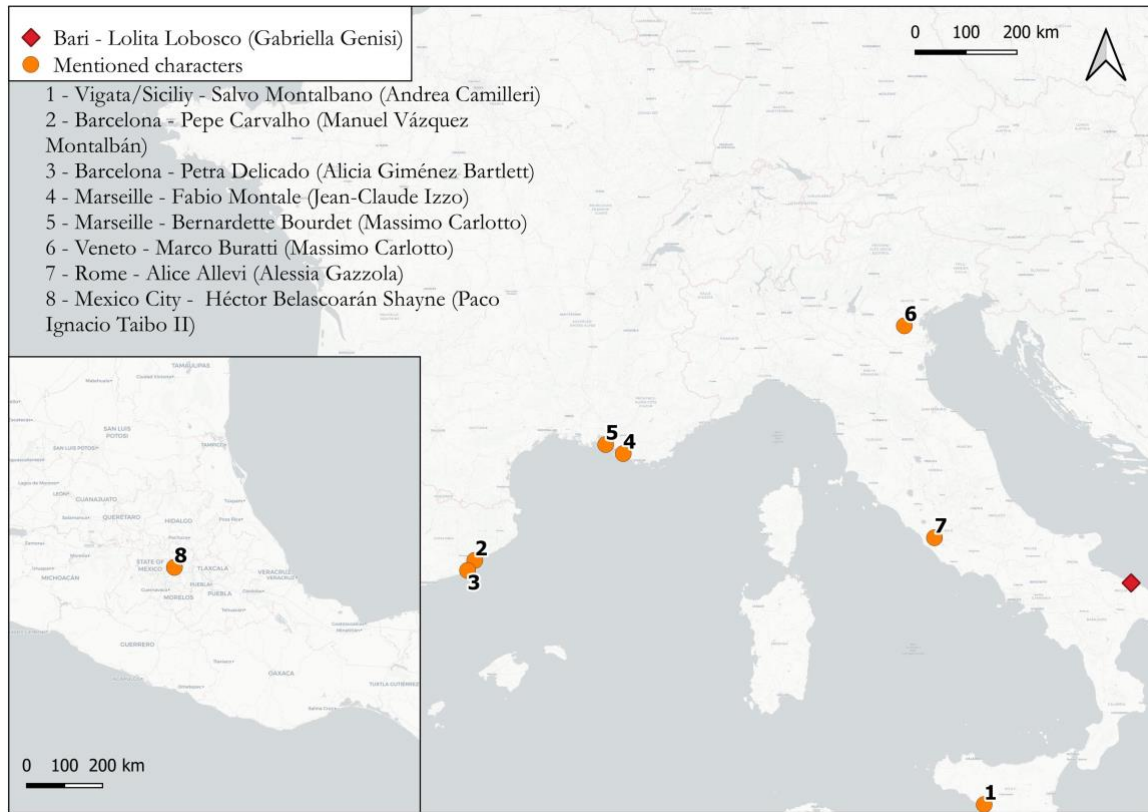
Fig. 1. Mapping of intertextual references to other mystery novels appearing within the Lolita Lobosco series by Gabriella Genisi through the technique of crossover and dialogue between intertextual characters. For each reference, the city of origin, the character's name, and the author (in bracket) are provided.

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