

**Vincenzo Consolo**, *L'olivo e l'olivastro*, Milano: Mondadori, 1994.

Written in a limpid, fluent style, *L'olivo* is a beautiful, if somewhat puzzling text. It consists of 17 chapters, subdivided into brief sections. There is no continuous narrative, no identifiable plot; and no set of "characters" common to all the chapters. The text interweaves narrative fragments, historical, fictional and mythological, all connected to Sicily. The first chapter opens in third, then switches to first person narration, introducing the figure of the anonymous *viaggiatore*, who recurs throughout the text. In the opening chapter, he refers to his departure from Gibellina; in the final chapter, he returns to his native town, "Viaggiatore solitario per un itinerario di conoscenza e amore, lungo sentieri di storia" (143). The narrative voice of the *viaggiatore*, heard in the opening chapter, returns at the end, but now, the reader's expectations of receiving a linear account of a voyage have been abandoned; only the awareness of history as a network of narratives remains. In so far as the concept is at all relevant to this text, the *viaggiatore* can be seen as the main protagonist. Various historical and fictional travellers, most notably Ulysses, but also, amongst others, "il poeta fuggitivo da Weimar, il Goethe della misura dorica e della pianta originaria" (42) form a parallel to the *viaggiatore*, echoing the theme of a voyage to Sicily.

In effect, the real "protagonist" is the Sicilian landscape. This is already suggested by the title. On pages 24-26, various encyclopaedic and dictionary entries on the jasmine family are quoted. The cities and towns of Sicily are central to the text, even in the passages on Verga, where the focus of attention is the *ambiente* reflected in his work. Yet

the text does not propose a systematic representation of the Sicilian landscape or a discourse on Sicilian history.

I stated at the outset that *L'olivo* is a puzzling text. One reason is that it is impossible to classify. Although it contains both narrative and essayistic elements, it cannot even be described as an essayistic novel. A second reason is that it is difficult to answer the question, "What is it about?" At a basic level, it is about Sicily as a *locus* traversed by a multiplicity of (his)stories. It offers the textualization, as opposed to the straightforward narration or representation of the landscape and the (his)stories embedded in it. In this sense, it resembles an archaeological exercise, in which scattered fragments are brought to light, with the important difference that *L'olivo* is not concerned with chronological order or systematization. In the final analysis, however, the text cannot be reduced to any single theme or set of themes. The reader has to join the *viaggiatori* in their fragmented journey through time and space, has to accept the undertaking of a fragmented readerly journey, and find his own meanings in the text.

**Gerhard van der Linde**  
(University of South Africa)