

Deċeduti's supernatural comedy 'work of genius'

Philip Leone-Ganado

When the phrase "work of genius" is applied to a TV series, it's usually in the context of *Breaking Bad* or *Mad Men*. But one American professor has recently proposed an unlikely addition to that list – the Maltese series *Deċeduti*.

"It is an exemplary distillation of the problems that surround taking the sacred out of history and bringing the secular periphery into the European mainstream," said Michael Cooperson, a professor of Arabic at the University of California.

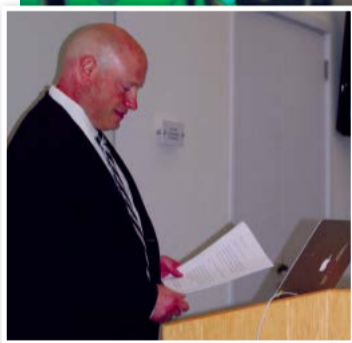
Speaking during a public lecture last Thursday, Prof. Cooperson said the supernatural comedy perfectly encapsulated Malta's attempts at making sense of its own identity and history. Moreover, he argued, it is the best place to look for the "low-level theological rumination" of a society rapidly changing its relationship with religion.

He's completely serious too, as he stressed when it was suggested that most people wouldn't really consider *Deċeduti* a fit subject for such rigorous academic analysis. "Maybe it's worth studying precisely because people dismiss it."

"The good stuff is often in what people consider to be the trash. If we're trying to understand our



A scene from *Deċeduti*.
Inset: Prof. Michael Cooperson



own culture as anthropologists, then we have to look at how it works, whether it's good or bad."

Deċeduti, which became one of the most popular Maltese series in history during its two-year run, tells the story of a group of ghosts from all eras of Maltese history

who find themselves trapped in an apartment block.

Prof. Cooperson, who has also written academic papers in Maltese on Malta's history, believes it is most notable for the way it presents an essentially secular worldview, couched in the language of the sacred and the spiritual.

"Even though it's about the afterlife, it's not a particularly Christian world," he said.

"There's no god, no devil and it's not particularly clear whether Christian teaching actually holds

true. This is not what you get in Church on Sundays."

The series, Prof. Cooperson argued, also used its historical premise to implicitly critique our existing historical narratives.

He gave the example of a scene where a ghost from 1565 discusses the "excitement" of barbaric public executions with a shocked ghost from the present. "It refers to a memory tradition where Malta is defined by the Crusader period, and the idea of repelling Islam. But the scene is built on an Enlighten-

ment-era critique of religion. It challenges the notion of the Crusader as hero, making European-ness dependent on Enlightenment values, not Crusader strength."

In this context, Prof. Cooperson said, it was telling that the series avoided depicting any Turkish or Arabic characters, despite their prominence in our history.

Doing so would have forced it to make a decision on which moral order – if any – was correct, which would fly in the face of what Prof. Cooperson sees as an "overt message of harmony".

"The good stuff is often in what people consider to be the trash"

"In a sense, it resembles Malta, and the EU, as a whole, in that its commitment to pluralism ties itself in knots when faced with communities who reject or are thought to reject those same values."

Prof. Cooperson is currently in Malta for an interdisciplinary conference organised by the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

Are business and environment compatible?

The compatibility between business development and heritage and environment protection is to be the focus of a round table debate on Wednesday.

Leaders in both sectors will focus on the several issues surrounding business development and environment protection.

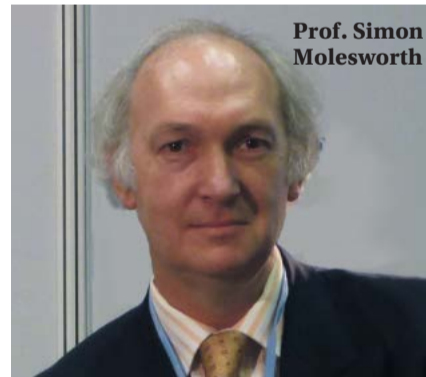
The event is organised by *Din l-Art Helwa* and the Malta Chamber of Commerce with the support of the *Times of Malta*. The debate will be held at the Sir Agostino Portelli Hall of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Republic Street at 5.30pm.

Taking part will be Prof. Simon Molesworth, executive chairman and founder president of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO), who was invited by *Din l-Art Helwa* as part of its 50th anniversary outreach programme.

During his stay in Malta, between today and Friday, Prof. Molesworth will meet with environmental NGOs, academics and planners involved in environmental management and sustainable development.

Wednesday's panel is made up of Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association president Tony Zahra, Malta Developers Association president Sandro Chetcuti and Ivan Cachia, who will speak for business development. Prof. Molesworth, Petra Caruana Dingli and Prof. Alan Deidun will speak for environment and heritage and the importance of their protection for sustainability.

Also on Wednesday, at 11am Prof. Molesworth will be presenting a public talk organised by *Din l-Art Helwa* entitled 'Yesterday's inheritance and today's responsibility firmly focused on tomorrow's benefit'.



Prof. Simon Molesworth

This will focus on heritage and environment management and balanced land use planning, two of the fundamental pillars underpinning a community's future and wellbe-

ing particularly in a densely populated area such as Malta.

The presentation will be at the University of Malta, Valetta Campus, in St Paul Street. As seating is limited, attendance is by invitation by e-mailing info@dinlarthelwa.org.

Prof. Molesworth, an Australian, specialised as a barrister in environmental, planning, heritage, natural resource and climate change law. He is a Certified Environmental Practitioner and a fellow of five professional institutes covering diverse disciplines including law, environmental management, planning and management.

The INTO brings together national trusts and heritage and environment organisations worldwide with combined memberships of more than seven million people and a support base across the world of many more.



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