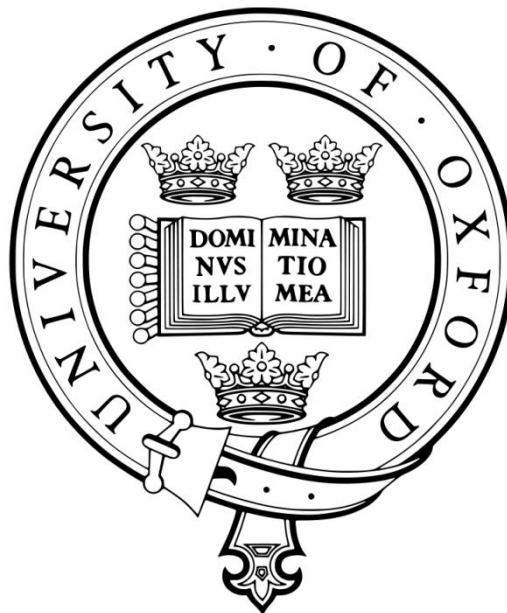


# Writing exile: Fulvio Tomizza

Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages

University of Oxford, St. Hugh's College



Marianna Deganutti

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Hilary Term 2014

## ABSTRACT

### Writing exile: Fulvio Tomizza

Marianna Deganutti  
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages  
University of Oxford, St Hugh's College

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This thesis focuses on the unusual phenomenon of exile from a frontier land, as it is explored by the work of the Istrian writer Fulvio Tomizza. It deals with the diaspora from Istria, a territory at the intersection of different civilizations – the Italian and the Croat-Slovenian – which has historically shaped a mixture of cultures and languages, remarkable for its hybridity. The massive exile which took place at the end of the Second World War, after the redefinition of the Italo-Yugoslav border, presents original features which, by taking advantage of the narrative tool, overturn traditional parameters attributed to exile.

Focusing on Fulvio Tomizza's novels *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *L'albero dei sogni*, and also on some of his most significant essays, I will seek to outline the specific traits that typify the detachment from one's own native country. In particular, I shall suggest that identity and idioms are called into question even before characters have left their homeland. In addition, exile begins with a clarification of characters' sense of belonging, which inevitably leads them to split, making the choice of whether to abandon the home country even more complicated. Once abroad, characters will develop a deep sense of estrangement, dictated by the impossibility of fitting into any other context, which will eventually drive them to a double, parallel, unsuccessful exile.

In order to investigate fully the characteristics of Fulvio Tomizza's exile, I will employ some linguistic postulates to examine the bilingualism and diglossia of the origins. The theoretical approaches of Edward Said, Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva will be used to inform my analysis of the more subtle mechanisms which rule exile, starting with doubleness and examining the dynamics which commonly characterize the exilic experience, including those in relation to the elaboration of the narrative itself.

The novelty of this work lies in its approach to exile without preconceived arguments, which run the risk of limiting the analysis of the topic, and in the exploration of the most crucial aspects of a frontier land shaken by a territorial redefinition. This thesis also aims to reallocate the figure of Fulvio Tomizza, who has as yet not been investigated in any significant manner, most often being neglected or misunderstood. The aim is also to highlight one of the most European writers of the Italian second *Novecento* and his relationship with Eastern European languages and literatures.

## ABSTRACT

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By analysing Fulvio Tomizza's novels *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *L'albero dei sogni*, and some of his most significant essays, articles and interviews, this thesis investigates the phenomenon of a frontier land at the crossroads of different cultures and languages put under pressure by a dramatic exile. Indeed, Tomizza, one of the most exciting and much neglected writers of the Italian second *Novecento*, sheds light on the original features which characterized the Istrian exile, bringing into question some common paradigms, which are usually attributed to those who become detached from their homeland.

The exile taken into account by Tomizza's works concerns Istria, the Adriatic peninsula which lies beyond the Gulf of Trieste, straddling the Italian and the Croat-Slovenian civilizations. Over the last century this land developed a significant form of hybridity, generated by the constant interaction and exchanges between its different strains. This fragile balance was shaken several times by quick changes of dominations. In particular, the Yugoslav annexation of the territory at the end of the Second World War affected it most profoundly, causing the massive exile of the Italian population living in the area.

There are three main innovative concepts introduced by Tomizza's works. The first concerns the nature of the homeland of origin before the departure. Fulvio Tomizza's novels deal with a native land which is already typified by the contamination of different identities and idioms. Before characters leave their homeland, they have already experienced hybridity and bilingualism, coming face to face with some issues that are usually only experienced by the exile. The second innovative element, which questions exilic parameters, is the characters' clarification of their sense of belonging. This clarification, which is necessary in order to make the decision of whether to remain in or to leave the country, may easily cause the inner split of their complex identities. The third point is the strong sense of estrangement which is generated by the impossibility of piecing back together the hybrid origin and causes a double unsuccessful exile.

First of all, Tomizza's novels allow the reader to delve into the varied cosmos of frontier lands, which are explored through fruitful dynamics and discrepancies. Chapter One is dedicated to Istria, a land that needs to be examined in depth due to its complexity. The region presents a stratified civilization, whose mixture is expressed in manifold ways. Understanding Istria, a territory with a high level of hybridity, is necessary in order to provide a context to Tomizza's life and works. Given that the literary production of the author is

strongly linked to the country of origin, I started with a clarification of the Istrian settings. In this chapter, I also highlight the innovative contribution produced by Tomizza's novels and essays within the 'Triestine' context, which corresponds to the literary barycentre of the writer. The Istrian author inherits some specific traits from this tradition. More specifically, he further develops Scipio Slataper's opening to the 'Slav' strain, which forms one of the three identities of the city (the others are the Italian and the German), but has always been the most penalized. Tomizza's contribution is particularly relevant in this sense, because he approaches the Eastern European cosmos during the Cold War, which in Trieste meant a climate of tension and closure towards Yugoslavia. To provide a full picture of Tomizza's contribution, I clarify the three different exilic phases which are clearly separated in his early literary production (respectively, the moment before, during and after exile). By taking *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *L'albero dei sogni*, I offer a diverse perspective on this phenomenon, given that the three works do not share either common characters or a similar plot or style. Their differences add new relevant elements to the analysis.

Chapter Two, which is entitled 'Bilingualism and self-translation in *Materada*', explores Tomizza's first novel in linguistic terms, underlining the coexistence of writing and translation for a writer who comes from a frontier land. This work questions the monolingualism of the origins, which in the majority of cases is accepted as the typical situation of a country before exile. Tomizza's essay *Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa* focuses on the mechanisms which rule Tomizza's homeland. Therefore, it is employed to outline the interaction of bilingualism and diglossia, which characterized Tomizza's Istrian village. Taking advantage of Pieter Muysken's work entitled *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code-Mixing*,<sup>1</sup> I seek to classify some recurrent linguistic dynamics, setting the bases for an understanding of the area. This clarification helps in the examination of *Materada*'s mechanisms, leading towards the analysis of a 'self-translated' novel. The most outstanding features of this work are the linguistic solutions found by the author to underline that the standard Italian language is only the target language, which covers a multilingual chaotic underground. These dynamics can be explained employing Gaetano Berruto's analysis *Situazioni di plurilinguismo, commutazione di codice e mescolanza di sistemi*,<sup>2</sup> where the linguist deals with four linguistic processes: code-switching, code-mixing, hybridization and interference. Indeed, these processes are present in Tomizza's novel, where the Italian narrative is strongly influenced by other idioms. Therefore, I suggest that *Materada*'s Italian is generated by two dialects, the Istro-Veneto and the Čakavian, which are then translated into Italian, the language chosen to write the story. It follows that the writer needs to elaborate some strategies to underline this process, which could potentially be overcome by the Italian narrative. The more conventional solutions are those defined by Berruto, but there are other tools employed by Tomizza; for example, the use of direct speech, indirect speech and a sophisticated system of linguistic indications. Apart from outlining the passages in which Tomizza emphasized a different linguistic background most evidently, I also consider the challenging perspective of a writer whose writing is tightly interwoven with

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<sup>1</sup> Pieter Muysken, *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code-Mixing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Gaetano Berruto, 'Situazioni di plurilinguismo, commutazione di codice e mescolanza di sistemi', *Babylonia*, 1 (1998), pp. 16-21.

the process of translation. A comparison of Tomizza's novel with Giorgio Pressburger's *Il sussurro della grande voce* lets important common traits emerge between the two novels. Despite the fact that Tomizza is a bilingual writer by birth, while Pressburger used Italian in his works without being an Italian native speaker, both authors deal with the difficult task of mediating different linguistic drives.

Chapter Three examines the second work of the *Trilogia istriana*, which is called *La ragazza di Petrovia*. This novel mixes two different stories: the first concerns an Istrian family who have just moved to a Triestine refugee camp. It deals with the difficult process of adapting to a new context, the different reactions of the various members of the family to a new way of living and the sense of loss generated by exile. The second story, from which the novel takes its name, is based on the figure of the exile par excellence. By focusing on the latter, Tomizza draws attention to the actual moment of detachment from one's homeland. In the Istrian case, the decision to leave the country is complicated by the multiple identities of its inhabitants, which lead characters to oscillate between the two poles of their belonging, even though they are eventually forced to pick one side of herself (the change of regime imposed the need to make a quick choice). Giustina is an example of indecision, which is manifested in the character's movements which are frozen to the spot — the character is barely able to walk, given the different trajectories and speeds to which she is subjected. The harsh reality which hinders Giustina is expressed through a metaphorical rain, which is set against an urgent need to move forward. The faster side of herself guides her towards exile, while the slower side is anchored to the home country. These two opposing drives lead to the disjointed path of the character, who starts to live two parallel lives, seeking to preserve at least one side of herself. Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud took into account the self-defence mechanism of doubleness, which can be applied to Giustina's story, as the girl seems to have a better chance at survival when she redoubles. Doubleness is a crucial point of this analysis and represents the core of Giustina's state. Another key moment of the story, which deserves a detailed investigation, is shown through the crossing of the border. The idea of a boundary is perceived as an artificial line here, which has just moved from Rijeka to the so-called Zone B in the Triestine surroundings, following the redefinition of the Italo Yugoslavia border. It appears to the girl when she least expects it, on her trip to and from the Triestine refugee camp, when she goes straight over without stopping at the command of the guard. The girl is finally killed on the borderline, which turns into a place of conflict, where certain identities and idioms seem to be required. Her death brings into question the notion of a line which is experienced in Tomizza principally as a linguistic clash. In other words, the borderline divides two entities which should not have been separated and puts under pressure the harmonic coexistence of languages and civilizations, which were typical in Giustina's area.

Chapter Four investigates the sense of estrangement experienced by Stefano, the main character of *L'albero dei sogni*. This consecutive phase of exile is examined in detail through the most autobiographical novel of Tomizza's literary production. In this work, the Istrian writer considers the unusual phenomenon of a double exile: first to Trieste, a city that corresponds to the Italian side of the character; and second to Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital, that in the character's opinion should have represented the core of his Croatian side. The exile to Trieste is unsuccessful, because after the climate of tension generated by the temporary occupation of Tito's army (in May 1945), Stefano faces the patriotic side of a city whose

destiny is still uncertain. Instead of feeling empathy for the manifestations, the character experiences a strong rejection, as favouring one side of his double identity means overwhelming the other. This fact drives Stefano to Belgrade, where the character finds an even stronger sense of exclusion. In the Yugoslav city, Stefano faces the linguistic difficulty of trying to decipher the Cyrillic alphabet, in which the language was written. The character who is only able to speak the Čakavian dialect struggles to speak and to understand the idiom in use and to adapt to a country, which he had imagined in a completely different way. Here, the paradoxes and contradictions of the multiple identity of the character are doomed to emerge violently. Even though Stefano aims to regain his lost homeland, his second exile is doomed to fail. The mirrors which often appear in the story are put there to testify the dissolution of Stefano's identity, while his return home does not provide any solace to the character, who finds a changed land of the origins. The topic is approached in several of Tomizza's stories, which will be compared in order to give a full account of the theme, even though the result will be the inaccessibility of the lost dimension of the origins.

Chapter Five analyses the relationship between the novels examined in this thesis and the exilic experience of the author. Given that the Istrian writer has experienced exile first hand, one may argue that this dramatic experience has not only played a relevant role in his novels, it was also the inspiration for his literary production. The novels examined in this thesis provide different approaches to the issue. For instance, *Materada* is a work that aims to include as many viewpoints as possible, outlining the perspective of an entire collectivity which is forced to abandon the homeland. In reverse, *L'albero dei sogni* deals only with the troubled exilic path of Tomizza's *alter ego* Stefano, in a more introspective narrative inaugurated with *La ragazza di Petrovia*. It can be said that the Istrian writer seems to elaborate his experience more closely through an autobiographical work. However, far from being two distinctive phases in which the writer is excluded, or rather included, in his stories, I suggest that Tomizza elaborates his personal experience even when he does not create an autobiographical work, and subsequently he may be seen to go beyond his vicissitudes when he writes his autobiographical novel. Writing offers Tomizza the chance to elaborate his exile in manifold expressions, providing the space to rebuild his home country on the page. A detailed analysis of this phenomenon also includes other short stories or passages in which the Istrian writer focuses on Istria and the impossible task of regaining it in real life.

In the Conclusion, I consider Tomizza's innovative approach to exile, drawing some further parallels with other writers and critics who faced the issue and underlining the most original aspects introduced by the Istrian writer's works, also in relation to identity. Exile, which is the centre of Tomizza's early literary production, is taken into account in depth by this author, who has radically overturned some traditional parameters attributed to it. This occurrence, which concerns the writer first-hand, should finally be summarized, in order to outline the specific features of exiles from heterogeneous lands of origin.

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## Introduction

In his *Bosnian Chronicle*, a novel set in the Napoleonic era in the small town of Travnik at the crossroads of different civilizations, Ivo Andrić elaborates a crucial chapter of the troubled Balkan history, drawing a portrait of the region and the innermost traits of its inhabitants. Through the alternation of three viziers and the figures of the French and the Austrian consuls, the writer captures a land on the margins, which emerges in its multicultural dynamics and exchanges. In this environment, Andrić inserts a dialogue between the young French consul Des Fossés and the 'Illyrian' doctor Cologna, in which the latter states the particular condition of being placed in a frontier land, straddling two different cultures:

No one knows what it means to be born and to live on the brink, between two worlds, knowing and understanding both of them, and to be unable to do anything to help explain them to each other and bring them closer. To love and hate both to hesitate and waver all one's life. To have two homelands, and yet have none. To be everywhere at home and to remain forever a stranger. In short, to live torn on a rack, but as both victim and torturer at once.<sup>1</sup>

Doctor Cologna summarizes in a clear formulation the challenging situation of people who belong simultaneously to two strains, possessing most probably two languages, two rules of behaviour and two sets of feelings. In particular, the character seeks to underline the specific position of hybrid identities which lie between two groups, without truly fitting into either, but rather shaping their own particular features.

Ivo Andrić creates a picture of the condition of Bosnian inhabitants who, rather than developing clear identities, demonstrate a more complex formulation of their sense of belonging. Here, at the intersection of diverse religions, languages and cultures, people perceive a lack of definition. As Doctor Cologna points out in the same dialogue, identity may be substituted by more erratic forms, which better define borderland dwellers, as is evident

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<sup>1</sup> Ivo Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle* (London: Harvill, 1996), p. 262.

when he states that he was ‘neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Parsee, nor Muslim [...] neither from the East, nor the West, neither from the land, nor the sea’.<sup>2</sup>

However, Andrić’s contribution would have been less remarkable if he had just stated the condition of living in a peaceful frontier land. By analysing the Bosnian region, the writer pinpoints the elements which capture the essence of his land as they surface under political turmoil, showing the way in which an ambivalent place characterized by multiple identities can be shaken by the imposition of new boundaries and changes of domination. As the Yugoslav novelist noted:

They are people from the frontier, spiritual and physical, from the black and bloody line which was drawn, after absurd misunderstanding, between people, God’s creatures, between whom there should not and must not be any boundaries. They form the narrow edge between the sea and the land, they are condemned to perpetual movement and unrest. They are the ‘third world’, where all malediction settled as a result of the division of the earth into two words. They are...<sup>3</sup>

This condition is shared by Fulvio Tomizza’s life and works, a writer who came from a frontier region called Istria, a place which featured similar aspects to those outlined by Andrić. Tomizza’s life cannot be fully understood without considering his stratified homeland, which was put under pressure by the redefinition of borders at the end of the Second World War (see Appendix). At the same time, his literary production is based upon characters who thoroughly explore the troubled state as expressed by the writer from Travnik. Tomizza’s territory is not a land at the boundary between the Christian and the Muslim spheres; it is the Istrian peninsula, a territory where the ‘Latin’ and ‘Slav’ civilizations historically created mixed identities. In this region, the combination of two heritages led to new linguistic and cultural formulations, creating hybrid belongings. Andrić’s ‘*complessità della vita di frontiera*’<sup>4</sup> is investigated by Tomizza in his novels and essays, where he deals

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>4</sup> Marija Mitrović, ‘Gli stranieri nell’opera di Ivo Andrić’, in *Letterature di Frontiera = Littératures Frontalières*, IX 2 (1999), p. 206.

both with the mechanisms which shape identity in his land – an Italo-Croatian mixture – and with the dramatic exile which overcame the peninsula and its inhabitants after the Second World War. The fulcrum of this thesis is, therefore, the quick change of regime that occurs in Istria, causing a massive move of populations and allowing the complexities and contradictions of a frontier land to emerge, as explored in Tomizza's works.

The specific features taken into consideration by Tomizza place this writer among the Italian authors who have most extensively explored the exilic experience, pushing this theme towards new perspectives, even though Tomizza has been a relatively unconsidered writer within the Italian literary panorama of the *Novecento*. In the Triestine context, his figure is acknowledged by critics, who consider him the successor of Italo Svevo and Scipio Slataper, who as I will explain in Chapter One, are the most representative authors of Triestine literature. Tomizza, in this sense, seems to continue on with the theme of identity and language, which had already been explored by his predecessors. However, apart from the Triestine context and its surroundings, Tomizza should be considered a neglected writer, whose works still struggle to gain the attention they deserve.

Although the Istrian peninsula which corresponds to the barycentre of Tomizza's early production does not cover a wide area, it did offer the chance to examine exile in depth. In a similar way to Andrić's example, a hybrid land shaken by exile – which is not a common starting point for a writer – may lead to new findings and potentially to the overturning of previous parameters which are usually attributed to more traditional exiles. Even though geographically restricted, Tomizza's experience has emerged in works that analyse the characteristics of exile, shedding new light on to a universal phenomenon. Many writers such as Ovid, Dante and Petrarch and in recent times James Joyce, Josip Brodsky and Milan Kundera, have been the protagonists of a forced or a voluntary removal from their home country. They have often included their exilic experience in their works, looking at the

meaning that should be attributed to the detachment from one's own homeland, the impact felt within the new country of destination, the sense of loss and laceration, their experience of writing from a foreign place and many other aspects that typify life abroad.

In Tomizza's case, these aspects played a central role in his initial novels. For this reason, I will analyse the linguistic, stylistic and narratological aspects of three works belonging to the early phase of this prolific writer, which are *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, followed by *L'albero dei sogni* and some of his most significant autobiographical essays and articles, in order to explore Tomizza's account on his land forced into exile. I will also employ a theoretical framework to approach the exilic issue, which from some linguistic considerations concerning the Istrian land will touch the inner split of the exile, estrangement and the relationship between writing and exile.

Although there are differences of plot, style and perspective in the three works mentioned above, they all approach the exilic issue in chronological sequence. To be more specific, Tomizza aims to separate and keep separated the moment before, during and after exile, to give a better idea of the exilic process, which may only superficially appear as a whole. What is generically called exile is here analytically described in these three phases, indicating features that would otherwise have been misplaced. This differentiation enriches the analysis of the exile, underlining that the detachment from a hybrid land involves many different factors that emerge more evidently if the phases are analysed separately. For this reason, I will first consider the three novels mentioned in order to fully understand Tomizza's structuring of the exilic experience and later explain the relationship between writing and exile. Even though this sequence may overturn a more traditional path which initially includes a consideration of Tomizza's writing, in this case the way in which the Istrian author worked on exile should come first in order to understand the sophisticated dynamics put to use by a writer abroad.

The three phases of Tomizza's exile are developed in the following way. *Materada* focuses on the decisive moments before the Istrian exile, putting on the stage a village overwhelmed by the pressing necessity to opt for remaining in the native country or moving to Trieste. This novel shows the increasing climate of violence, the frictions between different points of view and the progressive depopulation of an area, whose abandoned houses and goods are left behind. The second step corresponds to the moment of detachment from the country of origin and is observed in *La ragazza di Petrovia*, a novel which alternates and finally intermingles two stories. One of these concerns a girl from Petrovia, who takes the coach to reach the Triestine refugee camp, still uncertain about her final choice. In this story, the exilic mind is examined in a detailed way, highlighting the idea of the mixed identity of the characters. This element, which does not play a determinant role in more conventional exiles, is pivotal in the Istrian case and surfaces evidently in *L'albero dei sogni*. In this autobiographical novel, which is centred on life abroad, the main character seeks to regain his lost identity, firstly in Trieste and then in Belgrade, the two cities which ideally correspond to the core of his double belonging. This double exile sheds light on the discrepancy of a frontier land, suggesting the impossible task of regaining a lost land of origin.

By separating the three stages, the Istrian writer is able to bring forward the moment in which two parameters, like identity and monolingualism, are put under pressure. Tomizza's characters experience the condition of being placed among different cultures and languages even before crossing the border and reaching a foreign land. In comparison with other exiles, in which the encounter/clash with another country and idiom give birth to a redefinition of the subject, in the Istrian case one may suggest that there is an exile before the exile.

Before exile Tomizza's characters explore an identity which is not only the sum or the subtraction of the Italian and the Croatian components; it transcends certain boundaries, undergoing constant adjustments. Identity cannot correspond to a certain attribution, given by

the territory or the family of origin, the language spoken, behaviours or any parameter which can be attributed to a single culture. It is not even the result of a simple fusion, overlapping or combination of factors. In the Istrian case, any univocal and stable formulation is doomed to collapse. Identity tends to coincide with a reshuffling which needs to be constantly elaborated. As Claudio Magris affirmed in the short essay *Identità ovvero incertezza*: ‘Le rappresentazioni autentiche di un’identità plurima, comunque incerta e contraddittoria, non sono mai definitive’.<sup>5</sup> Also, Ian Chambers, by elaborating on the notion of identity, works on dismantling the idea of completeness and wholeness, which does not correspond to an ongoing process of construction and adaptation faced by the subject:

Our sense of being, of identity and language, is experienced and extrapolated from movement: the “I” does not pre-exist this movement and the go out in the world, the “I” is constantly being formed and reformed in such movement in the world.<sup>6</sup>

The second parameter which is also jeopardized before exile is monolingualism, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two. Tomizza is an outstanding example of a bilingual/polyglot writer by birth, who fully exploited the potential of the multilingual synergies in his novels. His case can be compared to Elias Canetti, another writer whose background was characterized by remarkable forms of multilingualism. In his autobiography, *The tongue set free: remembrance of a European childhood*, the Bulgarian author describes the linguistic richness of his youth in the native town of Ruschuk. The variegated mix of ethnicities which cohabited not only creates the impression of a melting pot – a multicultural port on the Danube – in which several cultures find their place and blend, it also outlines the simultaneous coexistence of idioms. By stating the nationalities present in Ruschuk, Canetti writes that,

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<sup>5</sup> Claudio Magris, ‘Identità ovvero incertezza’ in *Lettere italiane* (2003), p. 522.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Chambers, *Migrancy Culture Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 24.

aside from the Bulgarians [...] there were many Turks who lived in their own neighborhood, and, next to it, was the neighborhood of Sepharads, the Spanish Jews – our neighborhood. There were Greeks, Albanians, Armenians, Gypsies. From the opposite side of the Danube came Romanians [...] There were also some Russians here and there.<sup>7</sup>

The list of people who inhabited the area indicate that there may have been a contamination of languages (of words, expressions and idioms), which were also used by Canetti and his family. For instance, the first children's song which the young Bulgarian writer learnt was Spanish, the language spoken by his parents was German, one of his playmates taught him Bulgarian etc.

Like Canetti, Tomizza comes from a varied zone, shaped by different languages (Italian, Croatian, Slovenian and German words shape the writer's repertoire) – which include some dialects, among which the Istro-Veneto and the Čakavian stand out. Furthermore, the area is also characterized by a linguistic mixture generated by the interaction of these idioms, which constantly intermingle, leading to the formulation of new unique words and expressions. This unpredictable mixture is explained by Tomizza who, in *Alle spalle di Trieste*, refers to children in Materada's village as follows: 'E i loro genitori, nel litigare astratto, usano ancora non la lingua del *sì*, del *da*, né del *ja*, né dello *sta*, né del *ca*, ma dell'esclusivo materadese *zza* che, va un po' a pensarlo, si accosta al boemo e polacco *zzo*'.<sup>8</sup>

The linguistic perspective is, therefore, a privileged one, because it is able to highlight better than any other aspect the dynamics existing in a frontier land. Chapter Two therefore analyses *Materada*, Tomizza's novel in which language plays the most relevant role, showing the linguistically challenging perspective of the Istrian land and the way in which it was transposed into a novel written in Italian. The examination takes advantage of the theoretical framework provided by Pieter Muysken's *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code-Mixing* and Gaetano Berruto's *Situazioni di plurilinguismo, commutazione di codice e mescolanza di*

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<sup>7</sup> Elias Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European childhood* (London: Granta, 2011), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste: scritti 1969-1994* (Milano: Bompiani, 1995), p. 139.

*sistemi*.<sup>9</sup> The former offers an understanding of the linguistic phenomena which rule bilingualism and will be used to integrate Tomizza's essay *Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa* to illustrate the Istrian situation. The writer accounts for the complex linguistic scenario which he observed in his land, while Muysken helps to clarify the dynamics of languages which come into contact.

Gaetano Berruto's analysis of multilingualism in literature offers a most useful tool when approaching *Materada*'s narrative. On these premises, I will pay specific attention to four linguistic processes: code-switching, code-mixing, hybridization and interference, which will be used to explain the most conventional solutions adopted by the writer in his novel to emphasize the multilingual output of this land. By unveiling the inner linguistic structure, the novel calls into question the original language used by the writer. If the four processes mentioned are only the most obvious signs of interference of a foreign idiom into the Italian narrative, there are also other meaningful signals that exhibit the multilingual background. Beyond more canonical processes, there are original solutions, like the use of direct and indirect speech, with which the narrator or the main character declare that the effective language spoken is not the Italian one, but rather an intersection of bilingualism and diglossia.

The Italian of the work is only the 'target' language, as the result of the translation of the Istro-Veneto and Čakavian dialects, which are the idioms spoken by characters and the language that the writer has in mind when he is approaching the page. This phenomenon is considered explicitly by Tomizza, who suggests that his novel is the result of a sophisticated process of 'translation' and the fruitful outcome of linguistic interactions. It is evident that a writer like Tomizza, who employs self-translation, is consistently different from other authors. He puts the monolingual condition to the test, developing the potentiality of the encounter of two or more languages. He is also challenged by different drives, with the result

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<sup>9</sup> Gaetano Berruto, pp. 16-21.

that he may overturn some beliefs which work only for monolingual writers, undermining the idea of fixed spaces in which only one language is spoken and used, without any other interference. In fact, Tomizza tests the monolingual condition of the ‘native speaker’, setting the context for a constant irruption of languages in everyday life. As Giulio Lepschy and Helena Sanson’s statement confirms: ‘It seems unsafe to believe that a condition of strict monolingualism, based on the familiarity with a single variety of a single language, is the norm of the majority of human beings’.<sup>10</sup>

The contaminations which usually take place once the exile is abroad – the impact from interacting with another language, the bilingual issues and the relationships between idioms – in Tomizza are experienced in Materada, the homeland of origin. The linguistic features that are attributed to a writer in exile should be placed in the native context. What George Steiner attributes to Vladimir Nabokov’s English language, in Tomizza is experienced before the exile.

Incest is a trope through which Nabokov dramatizes his abiding devotion to Russian, the dazzling infidelities which exile has forced on him, and the unique intimacy he has achieved with his own writing as begetter, translator, and retranslator. Mirrors, incest, and a constant meshing of languages are the cognate centres of Nabokov’s art.<sup>11</sup>

The complex Istrian background, which emerges in uncertain identities and idioms, influences exile. The departure from the native country which involves a deep sense of laceration is seen in Tomizza as a moment of clarification of the identity of characters. Given their complex belonging, the decision to leave the country also implies a reflection on their innermost condition, which allows for an examination of the state of mind of the one who decides to leave his country of origin.

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<sup>10</sup> Giulio Lepschy and Helena Sanson, ‘Native speaker’ in *Reflexivity, Critical Themes in the Italian Cultural Tradition. Essays by Members of the Italian Department at University College London*, P. Shaw and J. Took (eds.) (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2000), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 19.

Chapter Three deals with a series of issues which concern the exilic mind. In Tomizza, exile corresponds to the specific moment in which one detaches from his own land. This circumscribed phase is experienced by Tomizza's characters as an 'impossible' decision, given that, by favouring one side of a multiple identity to the detriment of the other, the exile is led to an internal split. By taking Giustina, *La ragazza di Petrovia*'s main character, I will investigate this story which describes in detail the moment in which an Istrian girl leaves her country.

It is unusual to have a cross section of this particular moment available, which in exilic narratives is frequently omitted. Apart from Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: a Life in a New Language*, a work that focuses extensively on the American exile of the Polish writer, offering valuable reflections on the fragmented cosmos of the exile, not many other novels explore the actual departure and the progressive removal from the country of origin. As Hoffman writes about her travel from Cracow to Montreal: 'The journey – it takes twelve days altogether – works up to several climaxes that make me feel as if I'm not quite myself, and temporarily existing in a denser, more artificial medium than what I've known as ordinary life'.<sup>12</sup>

The atmosphere that Hoffman is able to recreate – a more suspended and unreal state of being – is developed by Tomizza in *La ragazza di Petrovia*. Here, the Istrian writer takes advantage of a narrative made of layers and without successful dialogues, which aims to mirror the inner development of the girl's thoughts. The lack of interaction of the character with the external world helps to penetrate her controversial choice to leave the village and the problematic approach to the foreign dimension. This path is examined fully in the work, starting from the 'realtà disadorna' – the climate of violence and uncertainty imposed by the new regime – which blocks the character's movements, under a metaphorical rain. One of the

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<sup>12</sup> Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: a Life in a New Language* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 91.

layers of the narrative concerns the recurrent adverse weather conditions, which weigh heavily on the girl.

From the clash with the rain, that inflicts a painful immobility upon the character, and the necessity to move to a different country originates the inner fracture of the girl from Petrovia. The crucial characteristic of Giustina's exile is, therefore, doubleness, which seems to confirm André Aciman's statement: 'exiles see double, feel double, are double'.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon should be clarified. There are several forms of doubleness, depending on the nature of the two components which shape the subject and their interactions. By applying Massimo Fusillo's approach to doubleness, I will narrow my examination to Giustina's disentangled movements in order to pinpoint the original traits of the splitting of the girl.

Doubleness has been widely explored by literary criticism and psychoanalysis. Therefore, by applying Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud's considerations on doubleness, it is possible to analyse this phenomenon, exploring the mechanisms which rule Giustina's parallel lives, going beyond classification. The fact that exile splits the girl into two shows that leaving the native country means preserving at least one side of a double self. Both Rank and Freud, who trace the origins of doubleness, explore this mechanism, suggesting that the fear of nullification drives the subject to redouble, in order to have a greater chance of survival. However, Giustina's doubleness also creates a plurality of vision, which is the typical condition of the exile. As suggested by Edward Said, one of the most relevant critics of the exilic issue, exile leads people to experience a broken life and, at the same time, to have more angles of observation in comparison with people who are just aware of their original context. In his *Reflections on exile*,<sup>14</sup> Said observes the discontinuous state of being, which is characterized by gaps, indecisions and above all a rarefied reality, which typify the exilic path. Giustina's broken cosmos, which comes together with the demolition of the

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<sup>13</sup> André Aciman, *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss* (New York: New Press, 2000), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (London: Granta, 2001).

chronological sequence of events highlights the troubled state of the exile, who progressively approaches a foreign country.

Tomizza's exile is characterized by a double life, which cannot be pieced back together. The blend of contradictions and discrepancies gathered by Giustina emerges when the character crosses the border. Borders in Tomizza are a displacing element, which do not truly divide two different entities and often appear unexpectedly to characters. The Second World War's redefinition of the boundary — the line between Italy and Yugoslavia was moved from Rijeka to the so-called Zone B in the Triestine surroundings — locates the borderline on Giustina's path to Trieste, where the character is unable to identify it. The border in the novel is considered an artificial division, which is placed to separate people who have lived together for centuries. In a hybrid place like Istria, the new border is therefore seen as an imposition, confirming the idea of a line that cuts homogeneous rather than opposing entities.

The following phase of the exilic experience (the moment in which characters leave the country and become strangers) will be investigated in Chapter Four by considering *L'albero dei sogni*'s double exile. In comparison with other exiles, which correspond to the movement from the homeland to a foreign country, in this novel the main character, Stefano, belongs to a hybrid region of origin. This fact inevitably reverberates on the form taken by his exile, which will expand upon Giustina's doubleness. By favouring one side of his double identity rather than the other, the prevailing side generates an immediate form of discontent when Stefano realizes that he will not be able to find another place in which both sides of his complex identity will be satisfied.

The exiles to Trieste and to Belgrade characterize this novel, unveiling a deep sense of estrangement. Stefano is a character who already experiences a constant fluctuation between the two poles of his identity when he is at home, recalling Tonio Kröger, the main character of the homonym short novel by Thomas Mann, who defines himself as the son of two

opposite parents: his father is of a Northern temperament, his mother an exotic, sensuous and passionate woman. His condition may have been affirmed by one of Tomizza's characters. Before describing his bohemian life dedicated to art, Tonio Kröger says: 'There is no doubt that this mixed heredity contained extraordinary possibilities – and extraordinary dangers'.<sup>15</sup>

The choice of the two destinations is not a casual one for the character, as the two cities represent respectively the core of Stefano's double identity. Trieste and Belgrade both constitute an obstacle for the character, who will reveal loneliness and a progressive form of disapproval, with the result that Stefano feels he is completely foreign. Estrangement is the state explored by the Bulgarian psychiatrist and critic Julia Kristeva, whose work *Strangers to Ourselves* describes in depth the dynamics of the stranger. Kristeva takes into account the condition of having lost one's own country and language, as well as the main aspects which emerge from a life 'uprooted'. These issues concern Stefano's exiles, underlining the Istrian man as a stranger twice over.

Kristeva's approach dismantles the idea of a stranger as one who has left his homeland and moved to a new country, where he is considered the 'intruder' in the homogeneous context of destination. Kristeva aims to show that the stranger inhabits the self; or rather, that it is the other side of identity. Tomizza's novel develops a similar formulation through a long and troubled path which drives Stefano to a sense of exclusion, in parallel to a series of mirrors which appear in the plot. Here, Luigi Pirandello's *Uno, nessuno, centomila* and Jacques Lacan's passages on mirrors contained in *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre 10. L'angoisse*, will help in investigating the fragmentation of a character. As suggested by Lacan, the image reflected in the surface of mirrors does not coincide with the identity of the subject, but rather with an estranged component which imposes a foreign unpredictable dimension to it. For this reason, the increasing number of mirrors in *L'albero dei sogni* marks

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Mann, 'Tonio Kröger', in *Death in Venice: Tristan: Tonio Kröger* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Secker & Warburg, 1955), p. 54.

Stefano's progressive form of rejection. However, only by tracing Stefano's double route is it possible to understand fully the variegated layers of Stefano's estrangement, shedding light on the condition of being completely a foreigner. Moreover, being a stranger twice explores the issue further, underlining situations which are usually not touched upon. For instance, Stefano feels that he is attacked from both sides of his double identity, for the same overturned reasons, and he is further displaced, because being in the middle means being a stranger both ways. In this double experience, Stefano fluctuates between the poles of his identity and the countries representing each side, underlining once more that the lost country will never be approached again, as suggested by Vittorio Spinazzola, whose analysis deals with the so-called 'loss of Ithaca'.

Tomizza works on exile in several novels, changing characters and style, but also perspective. Chapter Five enters the complex relationship between the writer and the exile. Tomizza, having experienced exile first hand, also appears to elaborate his exilic condition through writing. By referring to the novels analysed in the previous chapters, I will define the progressive path of the author towards autobiography. In his initial novels, Tomizza seems to be both a simple mouthpiece of the Istrian exile, who describes a plural viewpoint of the occurrence, and at the same time a character involved in the story. Nevertheless, Tomizza also elaborates exile when he is not directly involved in the work transcending autobiography. By formulating some considerations on the complex relationship between writers and their works, including, for example, Margaret Atwood and Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul's analysis, I shall try to demonstrate that Tomizza is always included and simultaneously excluded in his stories, taking advantage of the chance offered by writing to elaborate exile. This fact leads to the consideration of writing as the one space left to rebuild the country of origin, which can no longer be found in real life.

Tomizza's works and life should now be introduced employing Triestine literature, which represents the literary barycentre of the Istrian author. By considering the figures of Scipio Slataper and Italo Svevo, it is possible to introduce a writer who can be considered the successor of these most famous authors, but also the one who further explored the issue of heterogeneous identities and idioms in a frontier land.

## Chapter 1

### Istria: a frontier land

#### 1.1 Trieste and beyond

Despite the fact that Fulvio Tomizza is considered an Istrian writer, who devoted his initial literary production to his homeland and showed a strong attachment to the country of his origin, his literary frame of reference should be considered the Triestine one. Trieste is both the city to which he moved after the Second World War Istrian exile and, above all, the place which played a decisive role in his literary training. In spite of their proximity, Trieste and Istria show neither the same historical and linguistic backgrounds, nor the same features – the most evident discrepancy is probably the city definition of Trieste, which clashes with the rural Istrian hinterland from where Tomizza came. Nevertheless, it is in Trieste – a city that over a period of a couple of centuries played a leading role within the Italian literary tradition – where the Istrian writer started writing his works, carrying on the literary heritage of the city.

In the book interview *Destino di frontiera*, Tomizza illustrates this passage very clearly, devoting an entire chapter to his affinity to Trieste and its literature. By exploring the relationship with the city, he admits that ‘Ora, poi, la mia terra non è più solo l’Istria: lo è diventata anche Trieste’.<sup>16</sup> Along with many others, Tomizza also moved to the Adriatic harbour, which hosted refugees and exiles from Istria, looking for a new settlement and a new place to live. Most importantly for this analysis, Trieste historically attracted writers who belonged to its surroundings and who shared similar ideas and beliefs. Tomizza describes this condition as follows:

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<sup>16</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera: dialogo con Riccardo Ferrante* (Genova: Marietti, 1992), p. 23.

Era naturale che qui si fosse creato un gruppo di scrittori intonati tra loro, la cui esperienza non era quella dei loro colleghi italiani, ma che avevano urgenza di affrontare ed esprimere dei problemi assillanti, come quello della loro nascita diversa o della loro origine addirittura incerta. Erano mezzi boemi come Slataper, mezzi ebrei come Saba o interamente ebrei come Italo Svevo, che si sentiva ugualmente partecipe del mondo italico e di quello germanico.<sup>17</sup>

Tomizza himself was fascinated by Trieste, which gathered together authors from different origins, who explored the condition of a land at the margins always shaken by external drives. This ‘aria comune di reciproco rispetto nella diversità’,<sup>18</sup> which was evident both in terms of language and identity, was what intrigued Tomizza, who had already been exposed in his homeland to a remarkable form of hybridity. This state concerns his works and justifies a full adherence of the writer to the Triestine context, which represents the best way to introduce the Istrian writer.

‘Triestine literature’ has been a successful (but also controversial) definition indicating the works of a number of poets and writers who were based in and around Trieste between the late-nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. It is a complex category which includes figures like Italo Svevo (1861-1928), Umberto Saba (1883-1957), Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910), Scipio Slataper (1888-1915), Giani Stuparich (1891-1961) and others, who were able to connect within their work different cultures and literary and philosophical tendencies, thus transforming Trieste into one of the key spaces of modern Italian Literature. Trieste, which stands at the edge of furthestmost north-Eastern Italy, compressed between the Adriatic Sea and Karst’s rocky plateau, went from being a marginal town without any traditions of culture to a city with unique literary features.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Although the definition of ‘Triestine literature’ should not be considered univocal,<sup>19</sup> Pietro Pancrazi, who was the first critic to identify it, glimpses some traits which these writers appear to have in common:

Esiste oggi una letteratura triestina? Mi pare certo. Non si pecca di retorica o di regionalismo affermando che negli ultimi trent’anni si è rivelata a Trieste una famiglia di scrittori, poeti e prosatori, diversi ma in qualche modo consanguinei, segretamente intonati tra loro.<sup>20</sup>

Among the elements that connect them, the geographic features complicated by the troubled history characterizes this land as a melting pot of three ethno-linguistic groups (Latin, Germanic and Slav), promoting variegated cultural expressions, including a series of intrinsic paradoxes.

A major example of the Triestine ‘essence’ comes from the beginning of Slataper’s *Il mio Carso*.<sup>21</sup> In the evocation of three possible origins (Karst, Croatia and Moravia) that clash with the following declaration of Italianness, the writer implies that his background might not be considered homogeneous, foregrounding the varied Triestine context:

Vorrei dirvi: Sono nato in Carso, in una casupola col tetto di paglia annerita dalle piove e dal fumo. [...] Vorrei dirvi: Sono nato in Croazia, nella grande foresta di roveri. [...] Vorrei dirvi: Sono nato nella pianura morava e corrovo come una lepre per i lunghi solchi, levando le cornacchie crocidanti. [...] Vorrei ingannarvi, ma non mi credereste. Voi siete scaltri e sagaci. Voi capirete subito che sono un povero italiano che cerca d’imbarbarire le sue solitarie preoccupazioni.<sup>22</sup>

Slataper’s wandering among different provenances seems to stop in the final admission that nullifies the three hypothetical ones. However, by referring to the Italian culture, which seems to be the prevailing one, he takes a step back: ‘È meglio ch’io confessi d’esservi fratello,

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<sup>19</sup> A critique on the idea of a ‘Triestine literature’ appears in Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, *Il poeta innamorato* (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1984), p. 166, and also in Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste: scritti 1969-1994*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Pietro Pancrazi, ‘Scrittori triestini’, in *Corriere della Sera*, 16 June 1930, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Scipio Slataper is one of the most famous writers from Trieste. He is considered, alongside Italo Svevo, as the initiator of the ‘Triestine literature’. *Il mio Carso* is the most relevant work of his literary production.

<sup>22</sup> Scipio Slataper, *Il mio Carso* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1970), pp. 11-12.

anche se talvolta io vi guardi trasognato e lontano'.<sup>23</sup> Although the Italian element apparently knocks down the previous ones, different drives push the Triestine subject that cannot easily identify itself with a single culture.

Slataper's controversial belonging reinforces the doubt that the Triestine soul may be a multiple one. In the struggle to find a barycentre, different components flow through the same individual, whose origins may not be uniform. The tensions that constantly distance, and let the subjects get close to, the different sides of its identity in an endless open process are even more evident in Slataper's statement: 'Tu sai che io sono slavo, tedesco e italiano'.<sup>24</sup> This synthetic definition has been explained by Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris – who derives from it the core of the 'Triestine literature' – as follows:

Slataper è slavo d'origine, come dice il suo nome,<sup>25</sup> ma staccato dal mondo slavo; è, per certi versi, tedesco di formazione, ma si sente diverso dai tedeschi, deve apprendere la loro lingua e alla fine se li ritroverà di fronte in guerra; è un italiano, ma in qualche modo un italiano particolare. La sua identità egli la può trovare nella letteratura ossia nell'espressione data al fantasma poetico della sua vita, al suo immaginario [...] Trieste, forse più di altre città, è letteratura, è la sua letteratura.<sup>26</sup>

Triestine writers have questioned identity in depth, highlighting that only the intersection of different cultures, which are usually experienced simultaneously, may correspond to 'origins'. Despite the collision of backgrounds that runs the risk of favouring one part to the detriment of the other, putting the subject in an uncomfortable position, Trieste's double or triple soul has constituted an ideal background for introducing literary innovation. This lack of univocal attribution, or rather the synergy of different contexts, that resist associating themselves too

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Scipio Slataper, *Alle tre amiche* (Milano: Mondadori, 1958), p. 421.

<sup>25</sup> Fulvio Tomizza gives an account of the origins of Slataper's surname: "“Che cosa vuol dire Slataper?” rispose prontamente alla domanda troppo facile “Penna d’oro. Dal boemo *zlato pero*”". Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste: Un'identità di frontiera* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), p. 15.

closely to a single identity, has led some critics to define Trieste as a nation-less place, a small compendium of the universe, a city of contrasts and paradoxes, a ‘nowhere’.<sup>27</sup>

Slataper is not an accidental example when introducing Fulvio Tomizza. As suggested by the poet Biagio Marin, among the Triestine writers, Slataper seems the real predecessor of Tomizza. The latter, who reports the occurrence in his book interview *Destino di frontiera*, observes: ‘Biagio Marin, che era amico suo ed è stato amico mio, non aveva dubbi: ne vedeva in me il continuatore. Diceva: “Scipio finisce dove comincia Fulvio”’.<sup>28</sup> Slataper’s troubled identity, which includes and transcends the Italian spirit, but above all the fact that he was one of the very few Italian writers to open up to the ‘Slav’<sup>29</sup> cosmos, certainly broaches Tomizza’s work.

The three segments of the Triestine cosmos have not developed equally. Under the Austro-Hungarian domination, the ‘German’ component played a crucial role in Triestine culture, establishing relationships that went beyond the economical exchanges. Among the most relevant aspects of this influence, we could mention the introduction of psychoanalysis into the Italian scenario,<sup>30</sup> and the figure of Ettore Schmitz, whose pseudonym Italo Svevo himself aimed to emphasize a double belonging. Several examples show the contaminations of the two cultures that in Trieste constantly swayed one another. However, ‘Triestine literature’ seems to have omitted its ‘Slav’ component. Indeed, as Gilbert Bosetti points out, only a few references can be traced back to it:

Ne *La coscienza di Zeno*, che Svevo scrive mentre i fascisti italiani incendiano la casa della cultura slovena, l’io narrante ignora gli sloveni. Nel ciclo degli *Anni ciechi*,<sup>31</sup> gli unici personaggi sloveni sono la

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<sup>27</sup> See, at least, Claudio Magris, *Microcosmi* (Milano: Garzanti, 1997), Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001) and Katia Pizzi, *A City in Search of an Author* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera: dialogo con Riccardo Ferrante*, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Slav’ is an improper definition that only indicates a vast cosmos connected by a similar ethno-linguistic core (which extends from Russia to Bulgaria), but it may include heterogeneous elements. However, it has widely been used by writers and critics and by Fulvio Tomizza himself.

<sup>30</sup> See Pierluigi Barrotta and Laura Lepschy, *Freud and Italian Culture* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> The book is written by Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini.

serva della gleba di casa e qualche rozzo *zagabrian*. Di slavi, nel mondo poetico di Saba, c'è solo la nutrice Beppa Sabaz.<sup>32</sup>

For a city that has been profoundly influenced by Slovenians, this omission may seem rather striking, given that the position of Trieste should inevitably suggest their incisive presence in the area. Not only is the hinterland of the city surrounded by Slovenians, as well as part of the surrounding coast, Trieste itself has been historically inhabited by them, indicating that they should have played an even more evident role than the 'Germans'. But obstacles of various nature have limited this occurrence:

Con l'elemento slavo, con cui si vive gomito a gomito quotidianamente, i rapporti veri furono pressochè nulli, ostacolati dall'ignoranza della lingua, fenomeno costante, non solo nel periodo prebellico, ma ancora nel secondo dopoguerra, [...] e impediti dalla coscienza di una presunta superiorità non solo economica ma anche culturale.<sup>33</sup>

Slataper can be considered an exception to the situation of the time, having mentioned the 'Slav' side in the Triestine context. In Tomizza's words: 'Lo Slataper (Pennadoro), di lontana origine boema, aveva per primo chiamato fratello il contadino sloveno del Carso'.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Tomizza sketches him as an observer, without truly embodying the 'Slav' spirit:

La differenza sostanziale tra me e lui è che Slataper è un uomo della borghesia triestina. È sempre un cittadino che parla ed il suo è un approccio tutto cerebrale, mentre io appartengo a quel mondo. Nel Carso vede un grande scenario. L'uomo ne *Il mio Carso* si vede poco. È sì invocato: 'Tu, s'ciavo, vieni, ti porterò'. Ma in realtà scompare, non esiste.<sup>35</sup>

In the Triestine literary tradition, Tomizza is a third-generation writer, who breaks down the wall with the East. Coming from the hinterland of the Istrian peninsula, a land beyond

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<sup>32</sup> Gilbert Bosetti, 'La letteratura triestina. Modello di cultura di frontiera', *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 2-3 (2000), p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> Sandra Arosio, *Scrittori di frontiera. Scipio Slataper, Giani e Carlo Stuparich* (Milano: Guerini scientifica, 1996), p. 21. See also Miran Košuta, *Scritture parallele. Dialoghi di frontiera tra letteratura slovena e italiana* (Trieste: Edizione Lint, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera*, p. 26.

Trieste which dealt with the encounter of Italians and Croats,<sup>36</sup> meant being caught in-between two cultures. Slataper only introduced the path that would be explored fully by Tomizza, beginning to fill a gap present in Triestine culture. As stated by the Istrian writer:

Penso infatti di continuare la tradizione triestina senza ripeterla passivamente, ma anzi arricchendola di significati, esperienze e tendenze, che rispecchiano la nuova realtà di Trieste. A differenza dei triestini del passato, ma anche a completamento della loro opera, mi sono aperto al mondo slavo anziché a quello austro-tedesco.<sup>37</sup>

Given that ‘la frontiera triestina è e soprattutto era una frontiera con l’est’,<sup>38</sup> Tomizza’s role should acquire a new meaning, by which for the first time the ‘Slav’ contiguous cosmos is fully included.

Slataper, through his circling around and hinting at the issue of the ‘Slav’ background, led to a further innovation introduced by Tomizza. ‘Triestine literature’ has always questioned identity, putting the diverging synergies of a multicultural city under strain. The ‘completion’ mentioned by Tomizza refers to a development of these dynamics that were outlined but not fully considered by the Triestine tradition. In his *Alle spalle di Trieste*, whose emblematic title sums up Tomizza’s world, he specifies the essence of this ‘completion’:

Il piccolo mondo lasciato alle spalle si ridimensionava, ma ecco che per i suoi conflitti di sempre, l’ambiguità di fondo e gli umori più segreti, esso non differiva molto (o addirittura mi appariva più indicativo nella sua esasperazione) da quello di uno Slataper, di uno Stuparich o di un Quarantotti Gambini [...]. Ma come rappresentarlo se non con la deliberazione di continuare e completare un discorso che sembrava concluso e che fatalmente era rimasto invece sospeso? A distanza di cinquanta anni mi si offrivano, identiche e forse ancora più aspre, le loro ragioni di divisione, di lotta e di scelta.<sup>39</sup>

The Istrian provenance of the author (that incorporates the writer within ‘Triestine literature’, letting him also transcend it) offers him the chance to provide a new perspective on a hybrid land, where identity and language cannot be established clearly. To put it differently, Tomizza

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<sup>36</sup> To be more specific, Tomizza’s home village lies at the intersection of the Italian, the Croatian and the Slovenian civilizations.

<sup>37</sup> Antonio Di Benedetti, ‘Fulvio Tomizza’, in *Corriere della sera*, 7 July 1977, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Claudio Magris, *Utopia e disincanto: saggi, 1974-1998* (Milano: Garzanti, 1999), p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 16.

not only developed the ‘Slav’ cosmos that was omitted by Triestine literature, he also took into account matters related to his land, in which different cultures shaped (even more evidently) mixed identities. Indeed, the Istrian subject is exposed to a series of issues, such as bilingualism and hybrid identities, but also exile and border pressure that spurred Tomizza to explore his homeland in depth.

Tomizza does not consider ‘Triestine literature’ finished but still in progress: ‘Trieste scopre ancora un terreno quasi vergine, uno spazio sostanzialmente inedito, dal quale dunque potrebbe venire qualcosa di nuovo’.<sup>40</sup> These aspects would have been unthinkable if it were not for the fact that the writer himself belonged to that heterogeneous context overwhelmed by dramatic events. As Marco Neirotti points out: ‘Questo dramma è molto più che il motivo dominante della narrativa dell’autore istriano: ne costituisce la ragione stessa, è la radice, la linfa del suo impegno di scrittore’.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, I shall now focus on the peculiar traits of his country, in order to set the premise of this analysis.

## 1.2 A troubled history

Istria is the Adriatic peninsula where Fulvio Tomizza was born and where he based his most important works. When introducing his land, a dry plateau that lies between the gulf of Trieste and the Kvarner area, the writer described it as follows:

La penisola a forma di foglia, che si insinua nel termine dell’Adriatico, si allontana da Trieste riproponendone per un buon tratto i fondali bassi, i fertili promontori gialli, le insenature paludose un tempo tutte occupate dai riquadri delle saline [...] Con la punta di Salvore, fuori del golfo triestino e inserita nella Repubblica di Croazia, la costa rocciosa è premuta da un mare più azzurro e gagliardo. La sormonta un manto di terra rossa propizio alla vite e all’ulivo, là dove la ricomparsa della pietraia non ne limita la vegetazione a stenti roveri, al ginepro e ai cespugli spinosi del Carso.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Marco Neirotti, *Invito alla lettura di Fulvio Tomizza* (Milano: Mursia, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 125.

To begin to understand the peninsula's setting, one needs to consider its troubled history. Istria presents a long complex past that has produced a stratification of civilizations, whose influence is still detectable. Due to its strategic location and its being at the margins of different cultures, the area has attracted several populations, which aimed to conquer it since prehistoric times. Leaving aside the succession of dominations that followed one another in this area, what is relevant here is the fracture that has been progressively created between the coast and the hinterland and was still relevant at the time Tomizza was writing.

Several invasions (including the Romans' conquest of Epulon's kingdom) occurred until the settlement of Venice (1267) that ruled over coastal towns, marking a crucial moment for the zone. The maritime nature of this domination helped exchanges and commerce and freed the sea from pirates, but contributed to accentuating the break between the Istrian coast and the mainland. As the Istrian poet Lina Galli wrote:

Per poter navigare gl'Istrianiani avevano bisogno della protezione di Venezia [...] Ogni città costiera formava ormai quasi una repubblica a sè, per nulla interessata alla sorte delle consorelle [...] L'unità, ch'era esistita con Epulo e s'era rinsaldata con Roma [...] era ormai spezzata.<sup>43</sup>

The other central factor that should be taken into account to give full meaning to the history of the peninsula is the following: the Venetian Republic merely touched upon the oriental Adriatic coast without penetrating inland. As with other Mediterranean settlements, the coastal domination was kept separate and only occasionally met the backcountry culture which from the sixth century had been dominated by 'Slav' populations. The latter started moving from the Carpathians to Eastern Europe, reaching and settling in the Balkans as well.<sup>44</sup> Its presence is also testified by the numerous Glagolitic inscriptions<sup>45</sup> (the first 'Slav'

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<sup>43</sup> Lina Galli, *Il volto dell'Istria attraverso i secoli* (Trieste: Cappelli, 1959), p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> For a perspective on Slavs, see Francis Conte, *The Slavs* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1995).

form of writing, spread by Cyril and Methodius that gave an alphabet to ‘Slav’ people) present in the zone, that coexisted with the Latin ones. This double written heritage has been considered by Tomizza, who draws an episode of his novel *La miglior vita* on the Glagolitic inscription discovered by Don Stipe, which were found next to Venetian tombs in the same church:

Lo lasciai ritirarsi in chiesa per il rosario e, quando mi parve il momento di chiamarlo a cena, lo trovai ginocchioni in mezzo alla navata intento a ricopiare su un foglio non l’iscrizione ben marcata sulla tomba di Ràdovan, bensì gli strani segni semicancellati e racchiusi in un cerchio sulla lapide vicina, somiglianti a una fitta serie di rastrelli e forconi in miniatura. ‘Caccia grossa’ mi salutò alzandosi: ‘un *glagolitico* assai interessante’.<sup>46</sup>

The episode marks the history of a parish church, that allowed two cosmoes to coexist, and two different but complementary cultures to develop, also shaping new mixtures. Tomizza, who often explores the relationships between Venice and the ‘Slavs’,<sup>47</sup> identifies the process of intermingling:

Sommariamente si può asserire che nelle cittadine litoranee e interne della Serenissima, a dispetto delle epidemie, si perpetuava la presenza veneta, e che ai margini di esse s’insediavano sempre più numerosi ed alacri gli immigrati croati. [...] Va però subito aggiunto che la povertà e il rigore ancora feudale di quel territorio, andavano favorendo una continua infiltrazione nell’area veneta, dentro la quale i più intraprendenti coloni balcanici tendevano a venetizzarsi, fino ad accedere all’inurbamento.<sup>48</sup>

The two different cultures and linguistic scenarios, that are the axis around which the history of this land revolves, originated a blended area, which may partially resemble the two, but is determined by a fresh combination of elements. This ‘grey zone’ and its subtle dynamics have been taken into account by Nelida Milani, who argues that living in Istria meant: ‘vivere lungo la linea di unione fra due lingue e due culture che entrano in contatto e si confondono in

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<sup>45</sup> An introduction to the Glagolitic inscriptions can be found in Branko Fučić, *Croatian Glagolitic Epigraphy* (London: Stephen Osborne, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La miglior vita* (Milano: Rizzoli 1977), pp. 40-41.

<sup>47</sup> The Veneto-Slav relationships are taken into account by Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 127.

una fascia grigia stratificata e sovrapposta, un territorio rimosso, quasi onirico nella sua reale irrealtà. [...] Il grigio è la bruma del non-luogo'.<sup>49</sup>

Delving further into Istrian hybridity, far from being only a place shared by different cultures, the peninsula offers a great number of variables. Given that Istria, as suggested by Predgrad Matvejević's paradoxical statement, is 'island, peninsula, and hinterland all in once',<sup>50</sup> many factors can change, like the presence of internal borders, languages and dialects, with greater or subtler forms of interaction. Matvejević's formula presents a place that simultaneously represents uniqueness and independence from any other place, but also irreplaceable synergies. For this reason, Carlo Sgorlon writes that Istria is: 'una terra in cui l'assurdo è una condizione d'origine, per la stessa natura di regione mistilingue, contesa e costretta a cambiare spesso padrone'.<sup>51</sup>

The Italo-Croatian axis that draws the Istrian core represents only the most evident outlook of the peninsula. In fact, Istria was depopulated and land was given to people from abroad several times over. Families from Dalmatia, Friuli, Tuscany, Albania and Greece repopulated the area, developing further contaminations. As Tomizza noted: 'Sulle soglie del Novecento non vi era famiglia in grado di vantare tutta intera una nazionalità'.<sup>52</sup> This situation was faced by the Austrian Empire when it acquired the Istrian territory (Treaty of Campoformio 1797) and had to deal with the difficulties of ruling a country which presented manifold entities within, under the constant risk of disintegration. The centripetal forces that acted on it were explored by Joseph Roth in *The Emperor's Tomb*:

I want to say that only for this crazy Europe of nation, states and nationalism does the obvious appear to be strange. In fact it is the Slovenians, the Polish and Ruthenian Galicians, the Caftan Jews from

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani, *Bora* (Milano: Frassinelli, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>50</sup> Predgrad Matvejević, *Mediterranean: a Cultural Landscape* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Carlo Sgorlon, 'L'albero dei sogni di Fulvio Tomizza', in *La Vita Cattolica*, 6 June 1969, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Il sogno dalmata* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), p. 27.

Boryslav, the horse traders from Bacska, the Sarajevo Muslims, the Maronibraters from Mostar, who sing 'Gott erhalte (Kaiser Franz)'. [...] The essence of Austria is not its centre but its periphery.<sup>53</sup>

Under the Austrian umbrella, different ethnicities fighting for independence created the explosive background that led to the First World War. This moment marked the transition from Austrian domination in Istria to Italian administration, which shortly after, as a result of the rise of the Fascists, led to the souring of the relationship between the Italian and the 'Slav' components. However, the collapse of the Istrian cosmos only occurred when Italy lost the Second World War and was forced to yield the peninsula (as well as some of the Kvarner islands and part of Dalmatia) to Yugoslavia's Tito, resulting in the massive exile of the Italians.

The change, that is the fulcrum around which Tomizza's literary production revolves, was particularly troublesome as it carried an increase of violence and instability. At that time, Trieste and Istria had to face an uncertain future and the supervision of the Allies' troops, who also aimed to impede the Yugoslav conquest of the city (in May 1945 Trieste was put under pressure by the settlement with Yugoslavia). The area was one deeply affected by confrontation in which, as Ara and Magris wrote, one could easily perceive 'la sensazione di essere una pedina nella scacchiera internazionale'.<sup>54</sup> The establishment of new borders and above all the settlement of the iron curtain are, therefore, the context in which Tomizza's works are built, positioning the writer in a wider context. Like Günter Grass, Tomizza also confronted the exiles that followed the new settlements after the Second World War and dealt with the splitting of his world into two spheres.

Being settled at the intersection to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans, Istria is linked to a double destiny. From being part of the former empire, it turns into an Italian peninsula, which finally changed hands to be placed under a federation that still included

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb* (London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste: Un'identità di frontiera*, p. 94.

many different entities. Like Austria, Yugoslavia can be considered a hybrid place par excellence, as Jozo Tomašević demonstrates:

The new kingdom included five different nations: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins. [...] In addition to the five nations, the new state also had many national minorities. Germans, Hungarians, Albanians, and Turks were the most important. Italians, Romanians, Gypsies, and Ruthenes, as well as other minorities, were also present. The new state was also multiconfessional.<sup>55</sup>

The new regime under which Istria was placed implied a series of political changes dictated by the application of so-called Real Socialism. These further added to the breakdown of the Italo-Yugoslav relationship, causing a massive exile, which was the inevitable consequence for the vast majority of Italians from the area. The exile inspired writers like Lina Galli, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, Giani Stuparich and many others to develop the theme of the loss of the homeland and its sense of displacement and laceration. However, the specificity of this exile emerges only in the works of a few writers, among whom Tomizza stands out. The Istrian exile does not correspond to a movement from the homogeneous home country to a foreign land. Its uniqueness was a result of the fact that the homeland was already a mixed place, in which different cultures were part and parcel of daily life for the natives. It follows that the distinction between self and other, as well as that between familiar and foreign, was not so clear cut in the country of the origins. As a consequence, the exile from a hybrid place questions identity in depth, in order to make the decision to leave one's own country. This key passage may be an even more tormented decision than for traditional exiles because it undermines any certainty, putting the presumed integrity of concepts like 'home' under test.

By describing Materada, the village in which Tomizza set his first novel, Biagio Marin unmasked the troubled identity of a population that struggled to clarify its sense of belonging, before opting for a life elsewhere.

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<sup>55</sup> Jozo Tomašević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 1.

Materada: un minuscolo borgo là sul margine delle due civiltà, l'italiana ascendente dal mare, la slava calante dal retroterra. Su quella linea, per molto tempo la pressione penetrativa dei due popoli aveva trovato un qualche equilibrio che neanche l'annessione dell'Istria all'Italia, aveva potuto mutare. [...] Due anime in contrasto erano spesso negli stessi individui, due linguaggi erano sulle loro bocche. E a volte la ingenuità propria degli slavi si scontrava con la maggiore complessità italiana; il senso di giustizia degli uni con l'accortezza degli altri. Ma come si sarebbero potuti separare? Che, in realtà erano una sola vita. Ma la guerra era venuta e aveva separato ciò che pareva inseparabile. Aveva tagliato nella carne viva, nella storia, la più reale e aveva separato gli italiani dagli slavi, la vita italiana dalla vita slava.<sup>56</sup>

Not only did the unique traits that characterized this land prevent an easy clarification of identity; once the decision to leave the country had been made, the balance was broken and the lost origin could not be pieced back together. This condition led to the unlikelihood of fitting into any other place, in which the Istrian blend was no longer available.

The Istrian writer engages with this challenging perspective, focusing on the unusual features of his exile. A hybrid land of origin shaken by political drastic changes calls into question his characters, shedding a new light on the hidden dynamics of the exilic experience. Istrian history shows the complex vicissitudes of a place that was continually shaken by different dominations:

Questa marca di confine, antemurale d'Italia sull'insidioso nord-est, placido sbocco al mare per l'Austria, secolare proiezione ancora litoranea e insieme occidentale del mondo slavo, ha conosciuto governi, amministrazioni e occupazioni militari che hanno fatto la storia d'Europa degli ultimi cinque secoli.<sup>57</sup>

Having outlined the history of the Adriatic peninsula, I shall now focus on the meaning that should be attributed to it.

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<sup>56</sup> Biagio Marin, 'Materada', in *Voce Giuliana*, 16 February 1961, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 127.

### 1.3 A frontier land

The history of Istria is a very controversial one. The region was conquered several times, but also shaped a slow hybridization of Italian and Croatian features. The result is that the Adriatic peninsula has been labelled a frontier land, in which inhabitants were confronted by the constant presence of (shifting) borders. This aspect should now be considered in order to analyse the consequences of the historical facts that affected the country and to set the premises for Tomizza's work.

Many critics have defined Tomizza as a frontier writer: 'Molti mi hanno definito scrittore di frontiera per antonomasia'.<sup>58</sup> Starting from the review which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, in which Quigly notes: 'Fulvio Tomizza is, quite literally, an Italian borderline case',<sup>59</sup> his literary production has been associated with a land at the crossroads between different cultures. But what does being a writer from the frontline mean? Tomizza offered a definition in an essay entitled *Mi identifico con la frontiera*, taken from *Alle spalle di Trieste*:

Dirò dunque che frontiera reale, frontiera 'per antonomasia', è per me quel territorio sempre conteso, e in definitiva sempre estraneo ai contendenti, che alla sommità dell'Adriatico si insinua tra Italia, Austria e Jugoslavia, nel quale si radicano il mio destino di uomo e la mia ricerca di narratore.<sup>60</sup>

Trieste, and above all Istria, should both be considered frontier lands. In effect, within the Italian panorama, they present very different characteristics which are not shared by other zones, such as, for example, the Northern borders with Switzerland. Giorgio Bertone gives a definition of this phenomenon as follows:

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>59</sup> Isabel Quigly, 'On the borderline', in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 15 October 1971, p. 1291.

<sup>60</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 195.

[...] nell'ambito mediterraneo e italiano, restando circoscritti alla cultura letteraria, dell'area del nordest, di cui si potrà cogliere il carattere di 'marca di frontiera', ovvero della Trieste novecentesca e della regione che la circonda dove gli appartenenti a una etnia e a una lingua si scambiano idealità nazionali e linguistiche e mirano sempre a un 'altrove'.<sup>61</sup>

From Slataper onwards, centripetal drives have guided the Triestine subject beyond the Italian border, determining a culture at the margins, constantly turning to the 'elsewhere'. Tomizza gives a definition of writers that face the frontier condition, arguing that they always have one foot outside Italy and stressing the idea of an identity that can only be defined as different from more homogeneous ones:

Tutti gli scrittori che qui sono nati e hanno operato, da Italo Svevo (classe 1861) a Claudio Magris (1939), volenti o nolenti, sono uomini e autori di tale Nord-Est da tenere un piede oltre i confini d'Italia, da mettersi a scrivere per proclamare o scoprire la loro italianità diversa se non esigua.<sup>62</sup>

Tomizza's formulation highlights the idea of a decentred subject, whose barycentre is inclined to other poles and, therefore, distances itself from its 'italianità'. If the frontier, which leads to very specific identities, is the cornerstone around which Tomizza's works rotate, how can it be defined? According to Magris:

La frontiera è una striscia che divide e collega, un taglio aspro come una ferita che stenta a rimarginarsi, una zona di nessuno, un territorio misto, i cui abitanti sentono spesso di non appartenere veramente ad alcuna patria ben definita o almeno di non appartenere con quella ovvia certezza con la quale ci si identifica, di solito, col proprio paese. Il figlio di una terra di confine sente talora incerta la propria nazionalità [...] ma la frontiera, la quale separa e spesso rende nemiche le genti che si mescolano e si scontrano sulla sua linea invisibile, anche unisce quelle stesse genti, che si riconoscono talora affini e vicine proprio in quel loro comune destino – che le madrepatrie non riescono a capire – in quel loro sentimento segreto d'inappartenenza, in quell'incertezza e in quell'indefinibilità della loro identità.<sup>63</sup>

Tomizza lives the double dimension of his frontier land. On the one hand, the latter nullifies any certain attribution, shaping a neutral space characterized by a sense of not belonging that paradoxically unifies people. As in the Istrian case, in these areas people may have created new mixtures that brought them closer together. On the other hand, it could also be a place of

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<sup>61</sup> Giorgio Bertone, *Il confine del paesaggio: lettura di Francesco Biamonti* (Novara: Interlinea, 2006), p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>63</sup> Ara Angelo and Claudio Magris, *Trieste: Un'identità di frontiera*, pp. 192-193.

rivalry and hatred, which sprang from the dispute and the clash of different cultures. Magris summarizes it as follows: ‘La frontiera è duplice, ambigua; talora è un ponte per incontrare l’altro, talora una barriera per respingerlo’.<sup>64</sup>

Tomizza’s works embody these opposing meanings, exploring both the linking and the positive power of the frontier and its controversial side, which could be more specifically attributed to the border. Tomizza and Magris use the words border and frontier almost interchangeably, or at least they do not explicitly pinpoint their difference. However, Tomizza’s literary production is based on the distinction and also the friction between the two, which will now be clarified. A border is the line that marks a fracture between what are meant to be different entities. It conveys detachment, antagonism and division, underlining its power of exclusion; a border can be seen as an obstacle or a barrier. On the contrary, a frontier is a more abstract notion that indicates a mobile zone, which may fluctuate and join more than divide.

In Tomizza this distinction is evident and highlights the troubled destiny of his land. Istria was a frontier land, in which people constantly switched from one culture to another, without the necessity for a stable assignment. Their mixture shaped an indeterminacy that struggled to fit into a specific box. In other words, the vague space of the frontier clashed with the line of demarcation of the border that, in Istria, was perceived as an alien and disturbing component. Tomizza’s characters were constantly displaced by borders that they did not expect or barely recognized and that were in contrast to the fluid (more harmonic) dimension of the frontier.

Apart from Tomizza’s treatment of the border issue, as I will consider later on, ‘fantastic’ Triestine literature has also taken advantage of the irruption of borders in a heterogeneous land. Arrigo Petacco’s association of the new redefinition of the Istrian borders

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<sup>64</sup> Claudio Magris, *Utopia e disincanto: saggi, 1974-1998*, p. 52.

to a ‘questione di giardinaggio’<sup>65</sup> — in which houses were separated by their own farms and the provisional area A and B split Trieste from its eastern surroundings — found a parallel literary development. Stelio Mattioni’s *Dolodi* deals with a border that moved forward every night, reaching and crossing the house into which the main character had just moved. The border was perceived as an unpredictable new dimension that disturbed characters: ‘la linea era stata messa lì per divider formalmente gente che per secoli era vissuta insieme’.<sup>66</sup> Also, as a place that not even ghosts would like to be in, as suggested by Enrico Morovich’s tale *La rete di confine*: ‘Ecco che perfino i fantasmi, gli spettri, gli spiriti vaganti, le anime in pena s’abituano a girare per quella campagna e per quei boschi, sia di giorno che di notte, evitando la rete di confine. La odiano’.<sup>67</sup>

The displacement of borders that set apart a hybrid place like Istria collides with the multiplicity of the place. A frontier is, therefore, the familiar background of a writer like Tomizza, who cannot be reduced to a single context, nor separated by it. Different cultures and languages should only be experienced simultaneously, because only their coexistence can guarantee a space suitable for a hybrid subject. The frontier is the ideal dimension for Tomizza, whose novels sketch out the underground dynamics of a mixed land, not devoid of contradictions.

The hybrid condition of a frontier land breaks down identity as it is commonly understood. In Tomizza’s words, the writer cannot satisfy: ‘né la parte italiana, né la parte slava, e nemmeno quella mia, mista per non dire bastarda, così ardentemente amata per la sua naturale imparzialità, la quale per me si è infine tradotta in inappartenenza’.<sup>68</sup> The complex identity of Tomizza continues the theme of the impossibility of giving a clear form to his identity. A more detailed clarification of this aspect comes from Enzo Bettiza’s *Esilio*, in

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<sup>65</sup> Arrigo Petacco, *L’esodo. La tragedia negata degli italiani d’Istria, Dalmazia e Venezia Giulia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> Stelio Mattioni, *Dolodi* (Rovereto: Zandonai, 2011), p. 105.

<sup>67</sup> Enrico Morovich, *Un italiano a Fiume* (Milano: Rusconi, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 194.

which the Dalmatian writer observes his frontier land, where the ‘Slav’ presence is even more evident than in Istria. Doubtfulness, instability and above all a lack of a certain attribution weigh on a subject, who, even before exile, questions identity:

Io sono infatti un esule nel più completo senso della parola: un esule organico più che anagrafico, uno che si sentiva già in esilio a casa propria, molto prima di affrontare la via dell’esodo effettivo nella scia delle grandi migrazioni che, verso la fine della seconda guerra europea, dovevano stravolgere la carta etnica e geografica dell’Est europeo. Fin dai tempi in cui ero stato costretto a spostarmi di continuo fra il confino scolastico di Zara e l’ambiente nettamente più slavo e più familiare di Spalato, mi sono trascinato addosso il disagio di un ragazzo bilingue, sdoppiato, spesso quasi estraneo a se stesso. Un ragazzo che non sapeva mai bene a chi e a che cosa appartenere; sempre in bilico perplesso e interrogativo fra genitori, nonni, zii, cugini, amici, amiche, nutrici, servi di diversa nazionalità; sempre precario in una terra nella quale, soprattutto dopo il crollo dell’Austria, i risentimenti e i contrasti nazionali erano diventati l’acido pane quotidiano di cui si nutrivano i suoi irrequieti abitanti. Per usare un’efficace immagine di Gide, che al suo *Journal* aveva confidato certi sentimenti quasi analoghi ai miei, anch’io fin da ragazzo avevo avuto l’impressione di vivere come sospeso sul bracciolo di una sedia provvisoria, sempre sul punto di alzarmi e andarmene altrove nella speranza di trovarvi la sedia giusta su cui fermarmi.<sup>69</sup>

A frontier land is a reign of uncertainties and contaminations, which causes subjects to rethink an identity considered as the domain of a homogenous self. Not only is the other the constant presence that lives within the self, as suggested by Kristeva, ‘The foreigner is within me’<sup>70</sup> but this also means that identity would be pulled and shaken by an external component that constantly stresses it. Tomizza’s works are generated by a land in which identity is doomed to collapse under multiplicity and otherness. Therefore, a univocal attribution should not be imposed upon subjects who will constantly slip away from it, under the sign of hybridity. Rather it should be freed from constraints and replaced by a space suitable for changes, mixing and overlapping that a frontier land represents.

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<sup>69</sup> Enzo Bettiza, *Esilio* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996), pp. 17-18.

<sup>70</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 192.

#### 1.4 Fulvio Tomizza: life and early works

Fulvio Tomizza was born in Giurizzani (now Juricani), a small Istrian village a few kilometres from Umag, in 1935. As opposed to Umag, a town where the Venetian influence has prevailed over the centuries, Giurizzani presents a rural scenario, where Italian culture has historically coexisted in the countryside in which the Croatian context prevailed. Tomizza highlights this unexpected context in his autobiographical account, underlining the crucial differences between his hybrid home village and more homogenous areas:

Non è lontana più di sette chilometri dal centro costiero di Umago, nostra sede comunale, eppure conserva tutt'oggi il carattere di un'Istria assai diversa da quella ufficiale - veneta - che il lettore italiano avrà riconosciuto attraverso le pagine di Giani Stuparich e di Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini.<sup>71</sup>

The vicissitudes encountered by his family and the history of the village itself have had a profound influence on the writer's life and work. Originally, Materada, the main village to which Giurizzani is related, was founded by Tomizza's ancestor Zorzi Tomica, who escaped from Dalmatia, which at the time was being put under pressure by the Turks, and claimed lands which had been depopulated by the plague (the same plague that Manzoni described in *I promessi sposi*) from the Venetian Republic. In *Il sogno dalmata*, a novel in which the writer recreates the history of his homeland, he also draws attention to his Dalmatian origin: 'Tutti noi siamo di origine dalmata'.<sup>72</sup> He lingers over the history of the mythical conquests of his ancestor Zorzi Tomica, picturing him as follows:

La tradizione familiare lo vuole bendato ad un occhio, sacrificato in circostanze che potevano essere delle più svariate e controverse. Aveva combattuto a fianco dei veneziani contro i Turchi, oppure con i corsari uscocchi scappati dai Turchi e assoldati dai veneziani? Aveva fatto parte della banda del Giurizza o era lui stesso l'implacabile Giurizza che seminava il terrore lungo le coste dalmate [...]?<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto: uomo e scrittore di frontiera', *Novecento*, (1984), p. 141.

<sup>72</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Il sogno dalmata*, p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The history of Zorzi Tomizza foretells the cultural mixture established in the area, which was also summarized by Tomizza's father, who represented the Italian middle-class, while his mother belonged to the Croatian countryside. The former was a wealthy laird, who was imprisoned by Yugoslav authorities before his exile, and represents an overwhelming presence in Tomizza's works. He is a confrontational presence, and appears to play a prominent role in the writer's life (the son breaks from, betrays, reconciles with his father, who also often resurfaces in dreams). The mother is an almost invisible reference, whose influence is not less relevant. She embodies a different culture and sometimes seems to be used as a model to underline this gap. Coming back to her usually signifies 'un oscuro ritorno alla parte materna, laboriosa e sbrigativa, alla ricerca anche del calore che originariamente doveva accompagnarsi a quei suoni sempre un po' bruschi'.<sup>74</sup> Tomizza and his relationship with his mother is summarized by a statement contained in *I rapporti colpevoli*: 'Chini sul lavoro, quasi ci sfioravamo con le facce, l'uno specchio dell'altra, i due esseri più vicini e più lontani al mondo'.<sup>75</sup>

Tomizza's double belonging is far from being the harmonic sum of two different cultures and is experienced as a contrasted condition generated by the political changes of the Second World War.

Di educazione italiana che mi vedeva dalla parte degli avversari, ma come stordito dal pulsare giovanile di un sangue riscoperto differente, addirittura opposto, [...] mi trovavo tra due fuochi dentro alla nostra stessa frontiera, e questa lacerazione me la portavo dietro in famiglia e nella scuola, come una piaga segreta.<sup>76</sup>

Both in his family and at school Tomizza experienced the troubled condition of being caught between two different cultures and languages, not having the chance to truly fit in with either of them. The writer's youth was determined by different contradictions, which led him to lean

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<sup>74</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni* (Milano: Mondadori, 1969), p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *I rapporti colpevoli* (Milano: Bompiani, 1992), p. 286.

<sup>76</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto', *L'Approdo letterario*, 77-78 (1977), p. 225.

towards his Italian or Croatian sides at different times. This particular situation was touched upon by Stefano Marcovich in the autobiographical novel *L'albero dei sogni*, in which Tomizza's *alter ego* declares his unusual position to live a double existence. However, what may at first appear an advantageous condition runs the risk of turning into one which displaces the subject, as hovering between two different cultures might mean losing both: 'Con due anime da salvare rischia sempre di perderle entrambe'.<sup>77</sup> The risk could be still higher: being in the middle of the Italian and the Croatian cultures may signify being misunderstood by both.

Amavo mio padre, che nel suo cuore aveva sempre optato per l'Italia, e soffrivo di vederlo perseguitato dagli jugoslavi... Andavo a Trieste col lasciapassare e là venivo considerato slavo perché provenivo dall'interno, tornavo a Materada e qui venivo considerato italiano. Era lo sbandamento, era il dramma della frontiera vissuto fino in fondo.<sup>78</sup>

Since the first seminary Tomizza entered in Capodistria (now Koper), he felt he was being pulled by two diverging sides, 'mi sentivo diviso fra un mondo e un altro, fra un'ideologia e un'altra',<sup>79</sup> that could not be reconciled. To that end, the two spheres progressively diverged until the day where the decision to opt to remain in Istria or move away became necessary.

When considering the wider perspective of Tomizza's youth, it is evident that the decision to reduce a double culture to a single one led Tomizza to a sense of crisis. The disintegration of his hybrid cosmos, that came hand in hand with a period of political instability, in which the destiny of his lands was called into question and put in danger, undermined his ability to fluctuate freely, leading him to a confused and cloudy mindset. Once his father was released from prison, the entire family moved to Trieste, where they opened a coffee shop, while at the same time Tomizza was preparing for his high school

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<sup>77</sup> Silvana Castelli, 'L'eterno straniero di Tomizza', in *Avanti*, 2 August 1969, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Grazia Livi, 'Intervista', *Epoca*, 3 August 1969, p. 93.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

diploma. Years of rapid changes and indecision followed, in which his father died (and wanted to die in Istria), marking a series of crucial decisions and moves that the writer had to make.

After a cultural collaboration with radio Koper, Tomizza made the unusual decision to transfer to the Yugoslav capital Belgrade, where he was awarded a grant at the city's Art Academy, and where he also attended the Faculty of Languages and Romance Literature: 'Ottenni una borsa di studio per l'accademia cinematografica di Belgrado. Nella capitale jugoslava vissi i più strani, alieni, ribaldi e tristi quattro mesi della mia vita'.<sup>80</sup> Making the decision to move to the capital of what the Italian side of Istria considered the 'enemy' country summarizes the controversial state of the writer. A series of inextricable matters played a relevant role in his choice:

Contrariamente ai compagni i quali da Capodistria si trasferivano a Trieste governata allora dagli anglo-americani, io decisi di continuare gli studi in Jugoslavia, che da dieci anni amministrava 'provvisoriamente' il nostro territorio. [...] Dirò soltanto che, seppellito quell'estate mio padre che aveva saggiato il carcere del nuovo regime, e in sordo conflitto con gli stessi compagni di scuola per la mia origine contadina e in parte slava, intendevo punirmi e nel contempo farmi ancora più detestare ma anche compiangere.<sup>81</sup>

The sense of displacement experienced by Tomizza in Trieste, a city which in spite of being one of the most cosmopolitan Italian cities, was showing its patriotic side, is developed further in Belgrade. The city seemed to present alien traits in comparison with the Croatian rural culture of Istria and the writer struggled to settle in. Alongside the obstacles he encountered, in particular the linguistic and political barriers, the irruption of extreme winter conditions also discouraged Tomizza from prolonging his stay:

Si sfociava nei giardini e tra i tozzi bastioni della fortezza turca del Kalemegdan, eretta sul punto in cui la Sava sbocca nel Danubio. La lastra di ghiaccio che equiparava i due fiumi m'impediva di precisarne il

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<sup>80</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Il sogno dalmata*, p. 52.

<sup>81</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La casa col mandorlo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), p. 9.

corso, per cui non riuscivo a stabilire nemmeno in quale direzione si situasse la mia terra, sede di quel groviglio di affetti contrastanti che mi ero illuso di lasciare alle spalle.<sup>82</sup>

His stay in the Yugoslav capital did not last long; in a similar way the final decision to definitively attribute Istria (zone B) to Yugoslavia seemed to put further distance between Tomizza and Belgrade. However, the writer had not finished his Yugoslav parenthesis as he moved to Ljubljana, where he worked as assistant director on the production of the film ‘Trenutki odločitve’<sup>83</sup> of František Čap, which was presented at the Venetian Film Festival in 1955. Meanwhile, the vicissitudes experienced in Istria resulted in a second exile which, ten years after the provisional Yugoslav settlement, led more and more people to abandon their homeland. The coastal town of Istria remained empty and people collected their transportable goods to relocate to refugee camps in Trieste. In Tomizza’s early literary production, exile plays a significant role, as the Istrian writer sketches in *La miglior vita*:

Partì dal sessanta al settanta per cento della popolazione, con camion stracarichi di suppellettili e dell’entrata di quell’estate, nei carri tirati dai manzi come uscissero nei campi, semplicemente in corriera come si recassero dal dentista o dovunque il mezzo pubblico li avesse portati. Lasciavano le case spalancate a tutti i venti, oppure con la porta e le finestre sbarrate, quasi che l’ultima pestilenza non avesse rispettato uno solo della famiglia. Erano figli e pronipoti di una gente che soltanto a partire dalla mia giovinezza aveva appreso di essere italiana o di essere slava, e che poi un intrecciarsi di animosità e di istigazioni, apertesi proprio con quella scoperta forzata, con quella scelta ugualmente imposta, aveva obbligato a riconfermare la propria fede oppure a smentirla.<sup>84</sup>

While Tomizza’s mother and brother finally opted for living in Trieste, Tomizza was still hesitant and postponed his decision until the last minute, when he too finally chose the Italian side. Due to his double belonging, which generated uncertainty, this procrastination further highlights Tomizza’s troubles. In the ambivalent declaration made in *Il sogno dalmata*, the hardship of an ‘impossible’ choice was defined as follows:

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> The title of the film can be translated as ‘Moment of decision’.

<sup>84</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La miglior vita*, p. 208.

Allo scadere dei termini dell'esodo feci un ragionamento inverso: l'anima delle cose, dei luoghi, dei ricordi, si era trasferita di là, stava dall'altra parte. E partii, sapendo o soltanto temendo di collocarmi per sempre in uno spazio di mezzo, neutro e impervio, nel quale molte volte mi sarei sentito estraneo anche a me stesso.<sup>85</sup>

The chaotic confusion of the mid-nineteen-fifties became for Tomizza precious material for his writing. In particular, exile seems to have inspired the writer to reflect upon the dramatic events in Istria and transform them into novels. He wrote three stories, winning the Premio Cinque Bettole of Bordighera in 1957, for which the jury was formed by Betocchi, Bo, Calvino, Tecchi and Vigorelli. This event took place one year before he started writing his first novel *Materada*, which was published in 1960 (when Tomizza was only twenty-five) by Mondadori. The book was subjected to supervision by Elio Vittorini, Vittorio Sereni and Niccolò Gallo and it considers the hybrid cosmos before diaspora, in which undefined people from the village of Materada, who for centuries have shaped a mixed Italo-Croat area, are forced to opt for only one side of their double soul. Besides the direct impact on exile, Tomizza approaches topics, such as living in a frontier land shaken by conflicts in an original way, settling the first milestone of the cycle dedicated to the Istrian vicissitudes. This novel, as I will later explain, can be considered a 'self-translated' work, because Tomizza 'transfers' the chaotic linguistic underground of Istria into the Italian narrative.

Tomizza's first work raises interest and sets the foundation for a quick escalation of the writer and his career as a journalist. Although the topic the writer dealt with in the novel had been hidden and neglected over the years, the novel was received favourably by the critics. Paolo Milano in *L'Espresso* compared Tomizza to other writers, who also examined frontier issues:

Le zone di frontiera con la loro popolazione mista, spesso contese e quindi drammatiche, sembrano propizie alla letteratura. Dei due giovani romanzieri tedeschi che si sono affacciati alla fama in anni recenti, l'uno, Günter Grass, è di Danzica, e l'altro, Uwe Johnson, ha dato per sfondo a un suo fortunato romanzo la città bifronte, la Berlino dei nostri giorni. I romanzi di questi due scrittori di confine sono

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<sup>85</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Il sogno dalmata*, p. 56.

sperimentali, nel senso tuttora vivo del termine; mentre ‘Materada’ [...] è il libro di un nuovo narratore italiano, Fulvio Tomizza, nato e vissuto in una regione dell’Istria passata alla Jugoslavia.<sup>86</sup>

In parallel, Tomizza’s interest in theatre led him to write *Vera Verk*, which in 1962 was staged by the Teatro Stabile of Trieste and later on also played in Ljubljana and Zagreb. The director was Fulvio Toluoso and the play was also published in the magazine ‘Sipario’. This theatrical parenthesis did not stop Tomizza from publishing a new book, entitled *La ragazza di Petrovia* (Mondadori 1963), that represented a continuation of the first novel, even though there were two different stories that intermingled. The former was based on the settlement of a family in a refugee camp and continued Materada’s topic and style; the latter focused on the story of the girl from Petrovia, who, while still uncertain of her future, crosses the border and is then killed when she changes her mind and decides to return to Istria. This story investigated Giustina’s inner thoughts and was a follow up to the previous one, while the change of style appears to be related to Tomizza’s father-in-law, the famous musicologist Vito Levi, who introduced the writer to psychoanalysis (or at least they were known to have discussed it). The structure of the work aims to weaken any possible coherent development of space and time, which is the typical condition of the exile. The fact that the second story anticipates the first one chronologically contributes to nullifying the linear progression of the work, such that the second story enhances discontinuity even more.

Apart from being one of the very few books in which the process of exile is taken so closely into account (a sort of x-ray of this condition), *La ragazza di Petrovia* also brings borders to the forefront. The friction between the frontier dimension and the borderline is at the core of the second story, and ends on the border which is not recognized by the girl. In the novel, its presence continues the theme of displacement, but above all it shows an unpredictable side (the girl does not know when the border appears, she does not expect it and the linguistic division is not distinct).

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<sup>86</sup> Paolo Milano, ‘Un lungo addio a Materada’, in *L’Espresso*, 15 January 1961, p. 17.

In a short space of time *La quinta stagione* (Mondadori 1965) also followed, a book that focused on Istria during the Second World War as viewed through the eyes of the young boy Stefano Markovich, an *alter ego* of the writer (present in other Tomizza's works), who echoes Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*. After *Materada* and *La ragazza di Petrovia*, *Il bosco di acacie* (Scheiwiller, 1966) completed the exilic cycle, describing the difficulties encountered by a family who settled in some Friulan fields and the sense of loss and laceration that typifies exile. This work is probably the most conventional part of the entire trilogy. Nevertheless, characters explore in depth their inability to live in the new country: 'Somiglia ma non è. Non è quello di prima, non lo sarà mai. Mi pare una terra di altri, che non sarà mai mia, è come se essa lavorasse me. Non si ha più amore'.<sup>87</sup> The three novels form the *Trilogia istriana*, which was published in 1967 by Mondadori, and constitute the beginning of Tomizza's early literary production.

In Trieste, the city in which the writer finally settled, Tomizza began to elaborate his exile. If in *Materada* Tomizza underlined the complex condition of Istrian inhabitants, sketching their relationships and stories, but also their troubles related to the escalation of violence and political changes in the zone, the same scenario is carried on by the first part of *L'albero dei sogni*, where Stefano Marcovich describes the problematic side of his double belonging. The boy, who struggles with the difficulties of fitting into the Italian group of students or the Croatian group, points out a hybridity which involves the lack of certainties due to the impossibility of fully belonging to a culture, as well as the fluctuations between two linguistic poles. *Materada*'s external world is here experienced internally by a character who endeavours to define himself, someone who can only declare that he is caught in the middle of two diverging cultures. Therefore, the initial position of the character undergoes

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<sup>87</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Il bosco di acacie* (Milano: Mondadori, 1966), p. 150.

clashes, overlapping and mixtures, which could easily turn into uneasiness, fashioning a word that summarizes it: ‘eènza’.<sup>88</sup>

In *L'albero dei sogni* the impressions and stories generated by the direct impact with the Istrian exile begin to leave their mark, while at the same time Tomizza elaborates his own experience. The novel also takes into account the dramatic years of indecision, the months spent in Trieste, Belgrade and Ljubljana, the problematic reconciliation with Istria and, above all, with his father. From beginning to end, the novel is marked by the figure of the father, who seems to be the cause of twisted feelings (which result in a sense of rebellion and at the same time guilt within the character). The final part of the novel recaptures the nightmares that the main character, Stefano Marcovich (the same as in *La quinta stagione*), had in relation to the death of his father until he is able to achieve a sense of peace, which gives full sense to the Virgilian epigraph<sup>89</sup> to the book.

The trip to the Underground world looking for Anchises is Virgil's object in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. In parallel, Tomizza's title and epigraph recall this episode, underlining the deceptive and dreamlike nature of the novel. As Claudio Casoli points out: ‘Il titolo è suggerito da alcuni versi dell'Eneide, là dove è detto che i sogni ingannevoli hanno la loro sede tra gli annosi rami d'un grande e folto olmo. Di sogni e di bruschi risvegli è intessuto tutto il libro’.<sup>90</sup> Tomizza seems to alert the reader that the tree in his dreams might be one of false dreams, those which are hung on the illusionary leaves of an elm and are developed in the narrative through chaotic sequences, made of gaps, openings, fractures, omissions and thresholds, which might recall the Mitteleuropean literary background of Sigmund Freud and

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<sup>88</sup> Without giving a definition of it, Stefano applies the label ‘eènza’ to this state, in an attempt to explain the uncomfortable position of the Istrian subject. ‘Eènza’ (formed by ‘ènza’ which means condition, and the ambivalent ‘e’) describes the sense of estrangement characterizing this condition. For a detailed account of ‘eènza’, see Marianna Deganutti, ‘Fulvio Tomizza's “eènza”: hybridity as origin’, in Bullaro and Benelli (eds.), *Shifting and Shaping a National Identity: Migration Literature Today* (Leicester: Troubador, 2014).

<sup>89</sup> ‘In medio ramos annosaque brachia pandit/ ulmus opaca, ingens, quam sedem Somnia vulgo/ vana tenere ferunt, folisque sub omnibus haerent’. *Aeneid*, VI. 282-285.

<sup>90</sup> Claudio Casoli, ‘L'albero dei sogni di Fulvio Tomizza’, in *Città Nuova*, 10 September 1969, p. 35.

Franz Kafka. The relationship between the unusual narrative and Tomizza's life and his troubles is hinted at by Mario Petrucciani:

Basta notare le interruzioni e le riprese tra un capitolo e l'altro, e, all'interno di uno stesso capitolo, i modi delle pause, degli stacchi tra un brano e l'altro. È sufficiente prestare un minimo di attenzione alla scrittura, contesto insieme di allusioni e di realismo, di lucida razionalità e di turbati sogni, per comprendere che il conflitto non si esaurisce nella sfera topografico-ambientale, o ideologica, o culturale, o politica. Questa, con le sue multiple implicazioni di respiro narrativo, costituisce soltanto il supporto di una antinomia più sotterranea e radicale, ma non districabile con tagli netti, e che quindi solo approssimativamente potrebbe ricondursi al conflitto tra sentimento e ragione, di fronte alle scelte ardue della coscienza.<sup>91</sup>

*L'albero dei sogni* was awarded the Viareggio Prize in 1969 and Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote a review underlining how a 'local' story could turn into a more universal one. For its features, Istria became the representation of a hybrid place par excellence: 'Anche lì c'è un "paesaggio", il paesaggio istriano; ma poiché tale paesaggio è terra di nessuno, né italiano né slavo, ecco che esso perde la sua tranquillità provinciale, e si drammatizza'.<sup>92</sup> *L'albero dei sogni* appears to have generated two further works. On the one hand, the dreamlike atmosphere was carried on by *La torre capovolta* (Mondadori 1971), a book based on fragments that continued to deal with Istrian events, even though the style changed. As Carlo Sgorlon observes:

Ma per lo più è ancora in Istria che Tomizza soggiorna: ma un'Istria veduta dal di sotto, dalle radici, o attraverso lo spessore deformante del sogno. Se la realtà base è sempre la stessa, è cambiato lo strumento d'indagine. Tomizza analizza spesso il suo inconscio, concede libera uscita agli incubi, i terrori, i complessi, i pensieri stravolti, i ricordi infantili, i sogni.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, *L'albero dei sogni* took account of Trieste, a city that received Tomizza as the protagonist of a new novel entitled *La città di Miriam*. At this point a new phase in the life of the writer began, in which Tomizza discovered his relationship with Trieste, which was

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<sup>91</sup> Mario Petrucciani, 'Fulvio Tomizza: la ragione e i sogni', in *Rassegna di cultura e vita scolastica*, 1 (1970), p. 123.

<sup>92</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Il Caos* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1999), p. 190.

<sup>93</sup> Carlo Sgorlon, 'La torre capovolta', in *I quaderni della FACE*, 39 (1971), p. 21.

further tempered by his wife and father-in-law. In this novel, the writer accurately describes these dynamics, as summarized by Enzo Siciliano's statement: 'Con *La città di Miriam* egli ha spostato il fuoco dell'attenzione dalle proprie vicende istriane al diverso che per lui il medesimo profilo di Trieste delinea'.<sup>94</sup> The difference between the city and the countryside (that will be developed further in *L'amicizia*) is not the only issue in the work, as life in exile is also enclosed in the story.

Before the novel *La miglior vita*, which won the Strega Prize in 1977, Tomizza's interest for theatre led the writer to work on an adaptation of Ivan Cankar's play *Martin Kačur*. The play, written by one of the most prominent Slovenian authors, was staged in several Italian cities and also in the main Yugoslav cities, confirming Tomizza's desire to improve the relationship between the two countries through culture.

*La miglior vita* (Rizzoli 1977) seems to conclude Tomizza's early literary production, which was based on the events in Istria. The novel is the story of three hundred years of Istrian history, seen through the eyes of the sacristan Martin Crusich, who described the alternation of dominations of his village and the dynamic of the Italo-Croatian synergy. The main character recounts the events that took place on a daily basis in his parish, including deaths, under the title 'passare a miglior vita', for which the book is named. It can be said that *La miglior vita* summarizes Tomizza's previous works in an epic dimension that is once more related to a frontier land. As suggested by Magris:

L'epica – che è tradizione, racconto orale, cronaca oggettiva di sentimenti e di vicende, 'pietas' e coralità fraterna – è possibile soltanto là dove c'è il senso della frontiera, matrice per eccellenza di quella molteplicità variegata eppure unitaria che è il presupposto del raccontare. [...] Tomizza, scrittore epico e cantore di un mondo contadino di frontiera, contrappone a questa consapevolezza moderna dell'esilio un largo respiro narrativo, che si radica nella tradizione.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Enzo Siciliano, 'Una ladra racconta', in *Il Mondo*, 12 May 1972, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> Claudio Magris, 'Ritorno all'epica della frontiera', in *Corriere della Sera*, 10 April 1977, p. 19.

The historical interest shown by Tomizza in this novel opened up a new period in Tomizza's production. The writer concerned himself with historical figures that had faced the controversial condition typical of frontier lands. Once that exilic experience was concluded, the writer elaborated his state through other situations, sometimes linking his interest for history to religious figures. Also in this case, as wrote Vittorio Spinazzola in the review *Lo scrittore? Diventa biografo*, which refers to the novel *Il male viene dal nord: il romanzo del vescovo Vergerio*, Tomizza's interest for biography reveals frontier matters: 'Il Vergerio si profila come il rappresentante emblematico di una gente di frontiera, da sempre votata a vivere in primissima persona il confronto e lo scontro fra movimenti di civiltà antagonisti'.<sup>96</sup>

Parallel to the historical works, Tomizza also brought together some essays, such as *Alle spalle di Trieste* (Mondadori 1995), *Le mie estati letterarie* (Marsilio 2009) and a book interview, entitled *Destino di frontiera* (Marietti 1992). This part of Tomizza's literary production represents a key component, which can be used to understand the complex dynamic of the background of the writer. In these works, Tomizza seems to have become aware of the need to clarify some cardinal issues, that had been ignored or misunderstood in Italy (but in his area too).

In his final years, Tomizza continued to write works, that often presented a hybrid narrative which lay in-between essay and fiction. His life was lived to the full, a life in which writing coexisted with journalism, and led him to travel quite a lot. The collection of his articles, that includes part of his travels, is published under the title of *Adriatico e altre rotte: viaggi e reportages* (Diabasis 2007). Among the literary prizes he won, there are the Viareggio Prize (1969) and the Strega Prize (1977). He was selected several times for the 'Selezione Campiello' and won the 'Premio del Governo Austriaco per la Letteratura Europea' (1979), becoming an important reference for the cohabitation of populations in the

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<sup>96</sup> Vittorio Spinazzola, 'Lo scrittore? Diventa biografo', in *L'Unità*, 9 June 1984, p. 13.

Germanophone cosmos. He was awarded a *Laurea honoris causa* in 1984 by the University of Trieste and his works are translated into several languages.<sup>97</sup>

Borders, which had remained a key feature throughout Tomizza's life, finally turned into the boundary between life and death, as the writer hinted in *I rapporti colpevoli*: 'Mi trovavo come sempre in una terra di nessuno, adesso allargata a entrambi i territori ricomposti dentro di me e ugualmente non invitanti. Il mio nuovo confine era collocato in verticale e una fitta nebbia ne nascondeva il valico'.<sup>98</sup> Tomizza died on the 21 May 1999 and is now buried in the cemetery in Materada.

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<sup>97</sup> An account of Tomizza's translated novels is given by Elvio Guagnini, Gianni Cimador, Marta Moretto, *Fulvio Tomizza. Destino di frontiera* (Trieste: Comune, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *I rapporti colpevoli*, p. 233.

## Chapter 2

### Bilingualism and self-translation in *Materada*

#### 2.1 The hybrid language on the stage

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Istrian diaspora offers unusual traits, which may undermine the conventional parameters attributed to the exilic experience. Given its composite background, Istria cannot convey the idea of a homeland meant as a uniform place, where people share the same language, culture and background. In Istria, life before exile was already characterized by an Italo-Croatian mixture, in which the clash of different cultures and languages took place on a daily basis.

Among Tomizza's literary works, *Materada* stands out for the composite background in which the novel is set. The Adriatic peninsula, which is examined in the years of increasing tension that took place before the massive exile of the Italians, emerges as a kaleidoscopic land of origin. It is no accident that Tomizza's first novel has been proclaimed a 'romanzo di frontiera' par excellence, as it explores a land on the margins shaken several times by different forms of contamination and border switches, undermining the idea of 'pure' culture. As Elvio Guagnini suggests, '*Materada* è il libro che inaugura e avvalora, in Italia, un discorso moderno sulla letteratura "di frontiera" nel suo senso più pertinente'.<sup>99</sup> Although the novel offers several relevant features which highlight the complex nature of Tomizza's country, *Materada*'s most relevant aspect seems to be its outstanding linguistic dynamics.

Language is the real barycentre of the novel. The idiom that Tomizza employs is a preponderant element which emerges strongly throughout the text, unveiling the sophisticated mechanisms of the Istrian linguistic mix, which is then transferred to the Italian narrative. To

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<sup>99</sup> Elvio Guagnini, *Una città d'autore: Trieste attraverso gli scrittori* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2009), p. 27.

give voice to his homeland, the writer creates a structure, that aims to reproduce subtle dynamics, which are used to rule the relationship between characters, narrator and reader. Indeed, it is through language that characters state their identity, contrast their choices and fluctuate between their double origins, and also how the narrator mediates dialogues and translates idioms, leaving foreign words and sentences in the narrative. This elaborate pattern represents the crucial tool available to a writer, who displays his hybrid microcosm, pervaded by different drives.

In this chapter, I will investigate *Materada*'s linguistic background and the strategies adopted by Tomizza in a text, which is generated by a process of 'self-translation'. Having introduced the central aspects of the novel, I will consider Tomizza's essay *Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa*, which introduces the Istrian intersection of bilingualism and diglossia. This analysis leads to considering the phenomenon of a 'self-translated' novel; or rather, a work that not only intermingles idioms, but is also open to the translation of Croatian and Istro-Veneto dialects into Italian. Several linguistic processes (like code-switching, code-mixing, hybridization and interference) will be taken into account, as well as the original solutions contrived by Tomizza. The strengths and the limits of the novel will conclude the analysis, drawing a parallel with the structure and use of translation through reported speech in Giorgio Pressburger's *Il sussurro della grande voce*, which is an important point of comparison for Tomizza's work.

*Materada* tells the story of an Istrian village progressively shaken by exile. It can be placed in a phase in Tomizza's life in which he was deeply influenced by the Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar (1876-1918), a prominent author who has often been regarded as the greatest writer in the Slovenian language. As Tomizza points out on several occasions, what struck the Istrian writer most was Cankar's ability to recreate a rural cosmos, made up of morals and sensations similar to his own (in particular Tomizza underlines a similar anxiety for justice,

the same religious controversies and sense of destiny). In the Istrian writer's words, the strong impact Cankar had on Tomizza emerges when the former was introduced to him during an hour of Slovenian language in his secondary school, constituting one of the 'punti cardinali della mia giovinezza':<sup>100</sup>

Un giorno il timido, impacciato professore ci lesse una novella di Ivan Cankar [...] Forse nessun'altra pagina di autori ben più grandi mi ha colpito tanto, e nel profondo, facendo quasi una radiografia della mia anima. Sentivo che quel modo di scrivere, quel modo di accostarsi a certi problemi e a certi sussulti della coscienza, era fatto su mia misura.<sup>101</sup>

Cankar certainly represents a source for Tomizza's early literary production. His impact is clearly detectable in *Materada*, a work which takes inspiration from one of the Slovenian author's most famous novels, *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (*The Servant Jernej and His Justice*).<sup>102</sup> The Istrian writer clarifies this influence:

Circolava in lingua italiana, quasi esclusivamente nell'area giuliana, la traduzione di *Il servo Bortolo e il suo diritto* [...] Cankar tornava a incantarmi, e ad agitarmi, per l'estrema adesione al suo mondo, nel quale il mio si rifletteva non poco [...] Per di più riscontravo nel piccolo universo cankariano un'interiorità complessa, violenta e umile insieme, asciutta e nel contempo carica di tensione religiosa ed esistenziale, che imponeva un linguaggio icastico quanto ricco di oscure vibrazioni, di una solennità quasi biblica. Avevo iniziato a scrivere *Materada*.<sup>103</sup>

The work with which Tomizza's *Materada* shares common features focuses on the story of the peasant Jernej, who having worked for his entire life in fields, then fights to gain rights to the land. Jernej is determined to obtain justice, because the owner of the estate profited from his work, without giving him either a decent salary or any form of pension. When Jernej becomes old and is left without anything, he begins to fight hopelessly against the owner, until he decides to meet the Viennese Emperor in person. However, his journey to the Austrian capital unveils a deep sense of exclusion and failure.

<sup>100</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 147.

<sup>101</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera*, p. 55.

<sup>102</sup> Ivan Cankar, *The Bailiff Yernej and his Rights* (London: Rodker, 1930).

<sup>103</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 148.

Although Tomizza's and Cankar's novels do not share the same plot, both works are set in a rural atmosphere, which is strongly typified by attachment to the land — a key principle in *Materada* — to which the fight for justice and the exilic experience should be added. Even though the Slovenian writer's investigation into the peasant's background and perspectives anticipates *Materada*'s time (while Cankar's Slovenia was still under Austrian domination, the Istrian village had switched from Italian to socialist Yugoslav), Tomizza inherits the 'Slav' context from Cankar's novel, the values of which shape the background on which *Materada* is based. In spite of the different contextualization, Tomizza draws a parallel plot that takes place half a century later, after the three successive changes of domination took place.

The relevance attributed to the possession of land is explored in *Materada* through the story of Francesco Coslovich and his family, who struggle to obtain their rights to the estate which they should have inherited from their ageing uncle. The novel begins with Francesco's discovery of the uncle's testament, an event that triggers a long discussion, which flows parallel to the worsening of the political situation (the Second World War annexation of the Adriatic peninsula by Yugoslavia to the detriment of Italy caused the souring of the relationship between the two countries and the massive exile of the Italian population). Francesco initially tries to regain his land, fighting against the testament made by his uncle. However, the testament only conceals another truth – the ongoing change of regime, which is described as follows in the novel:

E pensai che quella era stata la guerra, la guerra per tutti. Ma che dopo c'era stata un'altra guerra, riservata a noi soli, la quale aveva avuto anch'essa i suoi morti, i suoi dolori, ed aveva avuto inizio proprio quando tutto il mondo gridava alla pace e alla liberazione; quando i partigiani erano usciti dai boschi, avevano sfilato per le vie di Buje e di Umago lanciando all'aria i berretti, e si era istituito il nuovo regime.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada* (Milano: Mondadori, 1960), pp. 25-26.

The new regime imposes strict rules in Istria and a drastic political change, which has reduced the land that Francesco was expecting to receive. Although *Materada* portrays the vicissitudes of a specific Istrian village, the novel opens up to a wider perspective, as Francesco's mishaps become the condition that affects many villages and towns. Once Francesco and his family have given up the idea of bringing the ageing uncle to court, the work gives more and more space to dialogues and encounters, which tend to progressively converge on the impossibility of remaining in Istria and the final decision to move. Like Francesco, many countrymen seek to reach Trieste, carrying only transportable goods and abandoning their properties. In an atmosphere of progressive tension, generated by the dramatic situation which people have to face, exile begins to materialize in the community, reaching its climax in the final Mass without a priest.

The story rotates around the issue of land. In a similar way, in Cankar's work, land summarizes the perspectives and the identities of characters, helping them to affirm their sense of belonging, but it also represents the most stable parameter available in a frontier land. Being caught in-between cultures means fluctuating between different backgrounds and languages, among uncertain borders and attributions. Thanks to land, people are able to find an element to which they can always refer, despite the vicissitudes which afflict them, even when Francesco and his family leave their village.

*Materada* carries on the attachment to the land as Cankar did in his work, but Tomizza's novel assumes a plural perspective, which differs from the Slovenian writer's novel. As suggested by the title *Materada*, the work is not based on the experience of a single character, but on a village, which is brought to the stage, showing its multicultural context. For this reason, *Materada* has often been described as a 'choral' novel, in which the plurality of viewpoints set in dialogues represents an entire community gathered together. It has also been underlined that the great number of secondary characters, who sometimes are only

mentioned or partially drawn, shape an entire collectivity. As Geno Pampaloni wrote: ‘I personaggi non sono, come individui, molto rilevati e lavorati psicologicamente, ma si integrano con naturalezza nell’ambiente e nella collettività. Ed è proprio questo il risultato maggiore, e più interessante, del romanzo’.<sup>105</sup> The novel embodies the vicissitudes of a village, which is recreated through the voices of its characters. In this sense, *Materada* seems to inherit Verga’s *Malavoglia*’s famed ‘chorality’, which follows the principle of allowing an entire village to emerge and be the real protagonist of the work.

In *Materada* an entire village takes centre stage and shape the novel, in which a chaotic sequence of characters leads to the presence of several points of view. However, *Materada*’s ‘chorality’ is challenged by the use of the first person in the novel and by the centrifugal forces of the exile, which scatter characters. It follows that the first impression given to the reader may be that of a fragmented chorus, made up of different perspectives which flow through the narrative, creating tension and collision. Indeed, characters surface in the narrative, contrasting with each other, making objections and raising their opinions. For example, when the popular power comes to force Francesco’s uncle to give land to his nephews, several characters interact violently:

‘Buonasera, signori’ disse. ‘Cosa c’è di nuovo?’. Tutti si alzarono in piedi. ‘Scendete’ disse Vanja. ‘Abbiamo qualcosa da dirvi’. Ma lui non si fidava, e guardava in viso uno per uno. ‘Posso ascoltare anche da qui. E poi, tolti questi quattro galantuomini, non so chi voi siate per dovervi rispondere’. ‘Avete troppe arie, zietto’ fece quello degli Affari interni. Intervenne Franjo, gli andò incontro e disse: ‘Niente di male, barba. Siamo venuti per parlare da uomini’. Lo tirò giù in cucina. C’era silenzio e molta tensione. Guardai le donne, i figli che osservavano quella scena a bocca aperta, e aprii la porta del tinello.<sup>106</sup>

Most of the time, dialogues emphasize the frustration of characters, who are overcome by events; their anger shapes quick interactions, as well as longer discussions, which involve friends and relatives. Their microcosm has been lacerated by rifts that cannot be avoided in the story. As Roberto Damiani wrote: ‘Materada respirava un’aria inconsueta di coerenza

<sup>105</sup> Geno Pampaloni, ‘Fuvio Tomizza’, in *L’Approdo, Radio Rai 2*, 4 February 1961, pp. 16-17.

<sup>106</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*, pp. 90-91.

problematica e eccitava una partecipazione viva e sanguigna [...] indicava decisa il contrappunto di un coro d'interessi agitati da un contesto storico e politico avaro di chiarezza. Un coro, appunto'.<sup>107</sup>

However, the fragmentation created by *Materada's* chorus, which also gives space to historical digressions and the rarefied dimension of Francesco's thoughts, is able to achieve a final harmony, thanks to the particular balance between involvement and neutrality found by the writer:

Apposta in questi due romanzi (*Materada* e *La ragazza di Petrovia*) ho voluto impersonificare esclusivamente il ruolo del cantore attento e a volte commosso; del cantastorie, se si vuole, cittadino beninteso di quella terra e quindi parte anonima di un coro. Ricorda i Fratelli Karamazov? Ad un certo punto, al processo di Mitja, stranamente Dostoevskij introduce la prima persona, viene a parlare del 'nostro distretto'. Un accorgimento tecnico di grande efficacia che è bastato a restituire una dimensione reale, partecipe, così prepotentemente russa, alla tragica vicenda dei Karamazov; e proprio dopo aver portato fatti e personaggi ai limiti dell'irrealtà, o addirittura, dell'inverosimiglianza. Io ho voluto mantenere appunto una narrazione obiettiva ma vincolata ai colori e ai sapori particolarissimi del mio 'distretto', che almeno giovanilmente non sentivo molto estraneo all'anonimo 'distretto' della Grande Russia dell'Ottocento.<sup>108</sup>

The novel seems to be orchestrated around dialogues, which show the inclusion of the entire village, while at the same time Francesco's thoughts intermingle with the voice of a narrator, carrying on the story neutrally and allowing a greater variety of secondary characters and points of view to emerge. This technique harks back to Guido Baldi's definition of Verga's *Malavoglia*, the narrator of which is described as a 'narratore camaleontico',<sup>109</sup> independent from the writer (for this reason this process is called 'artificio della regressione'<sup>110</sup> of the author), which, in turn, allows characters to express their behaviours, beliefs, ideologies and ways of thinking.

<sup>107</sup> Roberto Damiani, 'Fulvio Tomizza', in Gianni Grana (ed.), *Letteratura italiana. I contemporanei*, VI (Milano: Marzorati, 1974), p. 1962.

<sup>108</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>109</sup> Guido Baldi, *L'artificio della regressione: tecnica narrativa e ideologia nel Verga verista* (Napoli: Liguori, 1980), p. 81.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The perspective of a multiple microcosm finds its own representation, moving in parallel to Francesco's train of thoughts, as he also mulls over new behaviours assumed by his country fellows, and contemplates the newly-established regime, while the narrator describes situations and characters, interrupting them to provide a context for the reader. Therefore, if the first person seems to distance Francesco from the chorus, on the contrary, the mediation of the narrator allows the character to become part of it: 'Dal coro (non a caso il romanzo si concludeva con una liturgia dal significato straziante) la voce di un testimone'.<sup>111</sup> Francesco manages to draw his space in the chorus, being clearly recognizable among the others, but he also shares the same circumstances to which the chorus is subjected. It follows that *Materada's* secret is its involving power, which is made up of a combination of singular and plural experiences, amalgamating introspections and dialogues, under the pressing dynamics of a collapsing cosmos.

*Materada's* chorus seems to fulfil another aim, as it draws attention to language. From the beginning of the novel, the linguistic component seems to play a crucial role, mainly because the great number of dialogues allows for the possibility of inserting the idiom spoken by characters directly, without mediation, giving space to the Istrian cosmos to feature more prominently. As I will point out in this chapter, *Materada's* languages unveil the complex dynamics of fluctuations and mixtures, underlining the relevance of the linguistic component, as suggested by Guagnini: 'Vanno anche ricordate sia la particolare attenzione alla lingua usata dai personaggi nelle varie circostanze sia le notazioni linguistiche che devono permettere al lettore di ricostruire la complessità del contesto anche da questo punto di vista'.<sup>112</sup>

To give the idea of *Materada's* complexity, the idiom used in the narrative is gradually built up starting from two dialects (the Istro-Veneto and the Čakavian) taken from languages

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<sup>111</sup> Roberto Damiani, 'Fulvio Tomizza', p. 1963.

<sup>112</sup> Elvio Guagnini, 'Materada', in *L'eredità di Tomizza e gli scrittori di frontiera* (Fiume: Edit, 2001), p. 12.

that do not share the same matrix (Italian and Croatian). This linguistic underground is filtered through the Italian language, which is the idiom chosen to recount the story, which is, in turn, deeply contaminated by hidden drives. In other words, although the language chosen by Tomizza is Italian, the linguistic underground (including the structure and the syntax) seems to arise from other idioms. This perspective, which, as I will suggest, amplifies the potentiality of the Istrian blend, may lead to the consideration of *Materada* as a ‘self-translated’ novel, the existence of which would have been unthinkable without its complex Italo-Croatian foundation. I will now take into account the Istrian intersection of bilingualism and dialects, before analysing *Materada*’s linguistic phenomena.

## 2.2 ‘*Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa*’

Although the essay *Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa*, which is included in *Alle spalle di Trieste*,<sup>113</sup> was published more than thirty years after *Materada*,<sup>114</sup> it helps us here to set the basis for a linguistic understanding of the novel. Tomizza’s purpose in this essay is to clarify the Istrian varied background, in order to make the linguistic processes beyond the language(s) used in his novels available to his readers. By investigating these mechanisms, Tomizza explores bilingualism in literature and, above all, he focuses on the unusual phenomenon of the mixture of dialects drawn from two different languages. To be more precise, the writer’s literary production is based on the convergence of idioms that are wedged in the Italian narrative, as I will now show.

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<sup>113</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa’, in *Alle spalle di Trieste*, pp. 183-194. The essay was presented by Tomizza at the University of Klagenfurt, which held the conference ‘Letteratura e plurilinguismo’, organized by Professors Strutz and Zima.

<sup>114</sup> *Materada* was published in 1960; *Alle spalle di Trieste* in 1995.

Let us begin by setting the coordinates on which Tomizza's essay is based. As the title of the essay suggests, a writer who is caught between two dialects taken from languages that do not share the same matrix can be placed within two categories: on the one hand, the phenomenon of dialects in literature; on the other hand, bilingualism (or multilingualism). The first category on which Materada's linguistic dimension is grounded is dialect. Characters express themselves in their Italo-Croatian dialect, while standard languages are considered alien. Therefore, in his initial works, when Tomizza focuses on Istria, he tries to employ (more or less directly) dialects, seeking to mirror the 'real face' of his land. The interaction of dialects within the body of the standard language positions Tomizza in the Italian literary tradition of the *Novecento*, which from Verga onwards started to include dialects in literature. In common with the Sicilian writer, but also with Gadda, Pavese and many others, Tomizza has a leaning towards dialects due to their immediate adherence to a specific background, which standard languages are barely able to touch upon.

The second category that defines Tomizza's work is bilingualism, which refers to writers who use a second language in their works. These languages can be a parallel idiom that a writer has learnt from birth (e.g. George Steiner,<sup>115</sup> Vladimir Nabokov etc.), or a language that is acquired as a foreign one and used for writing (e.g. Eva Hoffman, Milan Kundera, Joseph Brodsky, Joseph Conrad etc.). It is evident that bilingual writers are consistently different from other writers. They put to the test the monolingual condition, undermining the idea of crystallized spaces without alien interferences and developing the potentiality of the encounter of two or more languages.

*Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa* brings to mind Primo Levi's first chapter of *Il sistema periodico*, in which the author from Piedmont gives an account of

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<sup>115</sup> Steiner comments on his three native idioms as follows: 'I have no recollection whatsoever of a first language. So far as I am aware, I possess equal currency in English, French, and German. [...] But I experience my first three tongues as perfectly equivalent centers of myself. I speak and write them with indistinguishable ease'. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 120.

the linguistic interactions between the local dialect and the Jewish language, providing several clarifying examples. Following the same structure, Tomizza offers a detailed explanation of how the idioms are used in *Materada* (and in his initial literary production), starting from a clear geographical reference. The language of the writer is clearly influenced by the context in which he was born and lived before exile and the idiom he uses is not a mixture of languages that one can learn, combine and apply. Rather it is the result of the unique circumstances of the Adriatic peninsula, where the Veneto dialect which typifies the Istrian coast interacts with the Croatian dialect of the hinterland: ‘Questo idioma popolare attinge liberamente dall’italiano (attraverso il familiare dialetto veneto) e, in misura pressoché uguale, dal croato e dallo sloveno’.<sup>116</sup> This scenario is originated from the historical stratifications of the peninsula, which have progressively formed a linguistic blend.

[...] dalla penetrazione della lingua ufficiale della Serenissima, si ebbe un apporto di idioma veneto che alterò l’originaria parlata croato-slovena. Il successivo passaggio del territorio all’impero austroungarico [...] accrebbe la fusione della popolazione eterogenea, fino a sommergere le rispettive origini, e promosse un’ulteriore contaminazione delle lingue nazionali. Per cui all’antica parlata ‘illirica’, sostenuta anche dai riti officiati nella medesima lingua, ma che peraltro già accoglieva numerose voci e forme idiomatiche venete, si affiancò un dialetto alternativo di radice veneta, talmente insufficiente da doversi esso pure appoggiare alle due lingue slave.<sup>117</sup>

The succession of dominations, but also the encounter and overlapping of the Italian and the Croatian spheres, describes a marginal land that has created its own specific linguistic expression. In Tomizza’s words, that population ‘assai spesso premuta dalle conflittualità etniche della frontiera, ha saputo scavarsi nel tempo un alveo proprio di espressione linguistica’.<sup>118</sup> The writer observes that, despite conflicts, migrations and cultural fractures that typified the area, Istria has developed its unique language. In particular, in *Materada*’s village and surroundings, the Italo-Croatian union seems to have found an even more remarkable hybrid form. If the towns of the Istrian coast are imbued by Venetian culture and

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<sup>116</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa’, p. 183.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

dialect, while in the backcountry the Croatian element prevails, Tomizza's village is positioned right in the middle:

L'area in esame ha quale centro la parrocchia di Materada con la sua ventina di frazioni nutrite o ridotte a una sola casa. [...] Al di là di queste borgate ci si scontra col veneto dei centri costieri ed anche interni quali Buje, oppure con lo slavo delle campagne più addentrate che si rivela maggiormente sensibile o al 'čakavo' croato o alla lingua slovena.<sup>119</sup>

This small area straddling two civilizations is characterized by two parallel dialects that are subjected to a constant mix. Materada's inhabitants communicate choosing one dialect or the other, according to the context and the interlocutors. However, the two dialects, in spite of being kept separate, from time to time may converge, showing mixtures. The reason behind this phenomenon can be traced back to the proximity of the two idioms, but also to their 'poverty', which leads them to interact, reciprocally 'borrowing' words and expressions, in order to fill their gaps. As Tomizza points out: 'Pur articolata in due espressioni linguistiche, la parlata di Materada resta povera, ridotta all'osso'.<sup>120</sup> The Istrian writer also gives the coordinates which strongly mark the two different linguistic domains. The Croatian dialect seems to reflect the rural condition of the inhabitants of the countryside, their relationship with hard work in the fields, abandoned goods, plants, herbs and wild animals. However, in comparison to the Croatian or the Slovenian standard languages, the dialect lacks some crucial words; for example 'wood':

La (parlata) slava possiede maggiori riserve per definire le cose dimesse, i lavori più duri [...]; per indicare le piante, le erbe e gli animali selvatici, senza tuttavia mostrare di conoscere lo sloveno *gòzd* né il croato *šuma* [...] Ciò comproverebbe la massiccia provenienza di questa gente dalla deserta Dalmazia, dove l'aspra vegetazione [...] non riesce a infittirsi né ad elevarsi in un bosco.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Far from being a homogeneous linguistic idiom, this dialect presents two standard languages of reference: Croatian, which is prevalent, and Slovenian, the influence of which should not be underestimated. Although Tomizza groups the Croatian and the Slovenian dialects together under the ‘Slav’ category, Materada is a village in which people speak a Croatian-based dialect mixed with Slovenian words. On several occasions the writer underlines this influence, referring to Materada’s population as:

una specie di sottominoranza destinata a rimanere sempre tale, che usava indifferentemente il dialetto veneto e il dialetto slavo, non dico sloveno né croato, perché entrambe le parlate erano da noi mescolate e in quell’area oggi sotto la Repubblica di Croazia si dice *dèlati* in luogo di *ráditi*, *hiša* anziché *kuća*, *das* invece di *kiša*.<sup>122</sup>

The Istro-Veneto dialect can also be defined as ‘poor’, but it mirrors the maritime tradition of coastal Istria, as well as a life made of commerce on the sea, through culture and exchanges. This dialect is more apt to define domestic tools and a maritime and commercial cosmos.

Il veneto, dal canto suo, spadroneggia nella denominazione degli utensili domestici, degli strumenti di lavori più affrancati, nella navigazione e nei commerci: *stagnàda* (dall’italiano *stagnata* per calderone), *bòrca* (per barca), *cariùla* (per carriola), *cazziùla* (per cazzuola, dei muratori), *magasìn* (per magazzino), *sensiàl* (per sensale), *butìga* (per bottega) eccetera. [...] Sorprende la scarsità di verbi nella parlata italiana.<sup>123</sup>

This consideration brings to mind the Slovenian writer Alojz Rebula’s statement: ‘(Qualche traduttore) potrebbe, forse, a esempio, aver trovato il sostantivo e l’aggettivo sloveno meno ricco di quello italiano, il verbo sloveno, invece, forse più espressivo’.<sup>124</sup> Arising from the coexistence of two languages and cultures in the same territory, the two dialects in Materada seem to have found a complementary setting. The rural and the maritime idioms represent the

<sup>122</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Le mie estati letterarie* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2009), p. 155. The verbs *dèlati* and *ráditi* mean ‘to work’ respectively in Slovenian and Croatian; *hiša* and *kuća* stand for ‘house’ in the two languages; and *das* and *kiša* correspond to ‘rain’.

<sup>123</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa’, pp. 188-189.

<sup>124</sup> Alojz Rebula, *Da Nicea a Trieste: saggi, riflessioni, commenti* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2012).

double soul of a land, offering their more representative linguistic features. Taken singularly, each of the two dialects may not be able to fully cover the domain of a standard language. The examples of gaps given by Tomizza show two incomplete dialects, in need of words and verbs. Even though the dialects come from two sophisticated languages, they need to be combined to be as complete as possible.

Tomizza's essay offers several examples which outline the interaction between the two idioms, shaping the framework on which his works are built. This generic overview gives an idea of two languages which are more suitable to deal with one domain rather than another, but there are also other relevant mechanisms explored by Tomizza in his essay, which I shall now examine. The first might be generated by the 'gaps' present in an idiom, which can be filled in with words taken from the other language. By employing Pieter Muysken's analysis, which specifically focuses on the bilingual speech, Tomizza's essay includes 'borrowings', which can be defined as the process of: 'entering alien elements into a lexicon. It is not always the case, however, that borrowing can be seen as a form of simple vocabulary extension'.<sup>125</sup> This is the case with some words from Istro-Veneto that are incorporated in 'Slav' sentences, like '*barèta* (in italiano berrèto e in veneto barèta); *bòzza* (in italiano bòccia e in veneto bòzza-bòssa, per bottiglia)'.<sup>126</sup> Tomizza also shows the opposite mechanism: 'Esempi di termini croati e sloveni che il dialetto di radice veneta annovera come suoi: *òreh* (nelle due lingue slave *òreh* = noce)'.<sup>127</sup>

The Istrian double dialect frequently borrows words from the specular idiom, which sometimes maintains the original pattern, but most of the time it is transformed by the new context. Tomizza lingers over nouns that are taken and adapted from the Istro-Veneto dialect and placed into the Croatian one through 'insertion', the introduction of a constituent into a construction of the leading language:

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<sup>125</sup> Pieter Muysken, p. 69.

<sup>126</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa', p. 186.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Nel dialetto di radice croato-slovena si registrano molto frequentemente delle espressioni venete [...] spesso condotte alla pronuncia e alla contratta costruzione slava, quasi per camuffarne la naturale acquisizione (in realtà per cercare di conformarle alla parlata slava). Esempi presi alla rinfusa: *got* (in italiano *gotto*, nel veneto *goto* = bicchiere); *pirùn* (dal veneto *piròn* = forchetta); *piàt* (italiano *piatto*, veneto *piato*); *luz* (l'italiano *luce* e il veneto *luse* vengono accostati allo sloveno *luč*); *lanzùn* (in italiano *lenzuolo* e in veneto *linziòl*); *cussìn* (*cuscin* e *cussin*) ecc.<sup>128</sup>

The writer also considers the ‘insertion’ of words from the Croatian dialect into the Istro-Veneto:

Esempi di termini croati e sloveni che il dialetto di radice veneta annovera come suoi, più inasprendoli che non addolcendoli: *lèscagn* o la metatesi *lèsgnac* (in croato *lijèska* e in sloveno *lèska* = nocciolo); *sergat* corrisponde a *cicala* (dal croato *škrkut* e dallo sloveno *škrkat* che significano *stridore*, scambio evidente tra causa ed effetto); *pizùrca* (dal croato *pečùrka* = *fungo* in genere); *bràsda* (in croato *bražda* = solco); *còsa* (dal croato *kòza* = capra); *rèbaz* (in croato *vràbac* = passero) ecc.<sup>129</sup>

This process, which usually contemplates the insertion of nouns, leads to the generation of some unique new expressions when it includes examples of adjectives or verbs. For instance, as Tomizza illustrates: ‘Non mancano gli accoppiamenti misti di aggettivo e sostantivo, sia in un dialetto che nell’altro: *brùta svigna* (brutto porco) o l’affettuoso *mio sin* (figlio mio) o il sospirato *dizzna piova* (benedetta pioggia!)’.<sup>130</sup> Verbs undergo the same process. Referring back to the example provided by the writer to show the lack of verbs of the Istro-Veneto dialect, he explains the solution adopted:

Sorprende la scarsità dei verbi nella parlata italiana, per i quali è dunque d’obbligo ricorrere all’infinito slavo, troncato, e facendoli precedere dal servile ‘fare’: *me se fa smilit* (mi impietosisce), *el me ga fato smùtit* (mi ha confuso), *go fato scus* (ho tirato fuori), *i se fa zìmbat* (si lasciano penzolare, dall’albero) [...] In qualche caso il verbo italiano è coniugato nella forma croata: *zza-pensos?* (che cosa pensi?).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

This last consideration seems to recall Muysken's notion of 'congruent lexicalization', which occurs when 'two languages partially share their processing systems'<sup>132</sup> and 'material from different lexical inventories' flow into 'a shared grammatical structure'.<sup>133</sup> In opposition to mere insertion, 'congruent lexicalization' enhances the process of contamination between the two idioms, as some words that share the same root in Istro-Veneto and Čakavian may turn into new combinations. This is the case with the following: '*missiàr* (dall'italiano *mèscere* e dagli slavi *mèšati*) o [...] *ùlika* (dall'italiano *ulivo* e dal croato *ùljika*), *laco* (rispettivamente *lago* e *lòkva*, per stagno), *ciaculàr* (dall'italiano chiacchierare, dal veneto *ciaculàr* e dal croato-dalmata *čakulàt*)'.<sup>134</sup>

The relationship between the two dialects is based on processes that internally shape their lexical, morphosyntactic, semantic and grammatical aspects. The result is that the two parallel idioms may flow alongside one another, but also combine themselves. The interaction between them seems to be as a result of historical events and daily contaminations, but also casual circumstances and needs. Tomizza's account gives an idea of these phenomena, which can be classified in terms of predetermined categories, even though the coexistence of the two dialects has also generated unpredictable situations, as with the following: 'L'enigmatico *sèlin* (= sempre), che non esiste in alcuna altra lingua né in nessun dialetto nemmeno d'Istria, ed è certamente di derivazione albanese, ispirato forse dal lungo regno dei sultani Selim e Solimano che si avvicendarono al trono di Turchia per 150 anni'.<sup>135</sup>

The linguistic mixture described by Tomizza derives from two idioms in contact, which, in the analysis of the writer, are compared to two branches of a river that intermingle. This metaphor suggests the birth of a new idiom generated by the previous two, a sort of hybrid

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<sup>132</sup> Pieter Muysken, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa', p. 187.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

language that summarizes the Italo-Croatian union. Tomizza's wish has not been accomplished, but it still shows the unique linguistic pattern of a mixed land.

Questi due corsi, che quasi di continuo s'intrecciano mescolando le loro povere acque, inducono talvolta a pensare che essi non fungevano da canale di scolo tra le differenti parlate nazionali, bensì venivano a costituire una terza via, la quale, se incoraggiata dall'esterno e divenuta consapevole nel suo interno, avrebbe potuto rappresentare una soluzione linguistica italo-slava.<sup>136</sup>

In his essay, Tomizza describes the language spoken by Materada's inhabitants, which inevitably implies a fragmentation that is not present in more cohesive standard languages. Sudden switches and mixtures may lead to a code that presents approximation and even mistakes, weighing on the linguistic context that Tomizza must cope with. Bearing in mind the series of processes already examined, it is evident that the Istrian writer cannot dismiss a series of problematic issues, such as the choice of language to adopt in his works.

If different languages shape the background of a writer, the writer inevitably comes face to face with the choice of the idiom(s) to employ in his works. The constant fluctuation of languages may 'affect' the writer's environment, but when he comes to terms with the act of writing, a clarification is needed. Writers who are bilingual/multilingual by birth, to a greater extent than those who have acquired a second language at a later stage, must ponder and choose the language that they want to use in their works. As Jane Miller suggests, this becomes a 'deliberate choice, based on the writer's sense that a particular language embodies particular traditions of thought and culture which make it preferable [...] presumably to any other language'.<sup>137</sup>

When faced with a choice of languages, Tomizza reflects on his situation. The story he is planning to write should find a language – albeit a hybrid language – in order to begin. In the writer's words:

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>137</sup> Jane Miller, 'Writing a Second Language', in *Raritan*, 1 (1982), p. 123.

Nell'accingermi a raccontare questa storia [...] avvertivo il desiderio di ricomporre sia pure in extremis la concordia perduta, di denunciare gli affronti subiti, ma anche di far conoscere al mondo il tragico paradosso di una comunità in parte semi-taliana e in maggioranza semi-slava che nello scontro frontale tra i due Paesi da cui aveva avuto origine trovava la sua definitiva dispersione. E scelsi la lingua che conoscevo meglio e che più agevolmente mi sarebbe diventata letteraria.<sup>138</sup>

By picking Italian, Tomizza unveils that for bilingual writers, the relationship between languages is always unbalanced, or at least asymmetrical, and is in danger of overwhelming both dialects. One of the languages always runs the risk of oppressing the other(s), favouring a specific point of view or adapting to one context better, given that the literary barycentre of the bilingual writer is a difficult aim to achieve. As noted by Julien Green, an American writer who used both French and English: 'There cannot be a perfect balance between two languages, two ways of feeling, which is not tipped to one side or another by one's interior being'.<sup>139</sup>

Tomizza's decision to adopt Italian instead of Croatian involves a new linguistic orientation, which reduces the Istrian linguistic perspective in his works. The writer is aware of the daily contamination of languages in his repertoire: 'Su ognuno di noi, e su di me, mistilingue, in particolare, grava la compresenza nel colloquiare quotidiano di un'altra lingua o di più lingue'.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, he is not only concerned about the difficulty in representing his background; in seeking to offer a comprehensive representation of his land, he is at risk of being misinterpreted, because his bilingualism may affect the language that he uses. It might follow a lack of understanding of his condition, as opposed to monolingual writers:

Un errore di grammatica o di sintassi, peccato veniale in altre parti d'Italia, qui diventa un errore [...] da noi invece inducono a temere di appoggiarci inconsapevolmente a un'altra lingua, tedesca o slava, la prima al massimo criticata per la sua pesantezza, la seconda rifiutata con sdegno o messa in ridicolo tutt'oggi.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa', p. 192.

<sup>139</sup> Julien Green, *Le langage et son double* (Paris: La Différence, 1985), p. 404.

<sup>140</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Le mie estati letterarie*, p. 127.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

A tangible acknowledgment of the phenomenon described above is given by Tomizza's correspondence with the editors of Mondadori. The Istrian writer carries on the manifold aspects of his linguistic background that sometimes clashes with the Italian context. For instance, the impressions that *Materada* convey to Elio Vittorini, who read the novel and suggested some advice, are of a work that had to improve linguistically. The Sicilian writer, who enjoyed the story and gave only marginal suggestions to it in relation to historical events was, on the other hand, concerned about the language. As he writes in a letter to Tomizza on the 18 March 1959:

Il compito di questa mia lettera è quello di indicarglieli (difetti di stile e di struttura) con la maggior precisione possibile. Difetti di stile: i più facilmente eliminabili, perché basta che lei sottoponga il testo ad una attenta revisione. [...] Ma, in genere, sono errori di grammatica o di lingua che lei deve correggere. Esempio in italiano non si può dire 'ne metteva fuori un pochi per comprare', ma 'ne metteva fuori pochi' o 'ne metteva fuori un po'; oppure 'feci di motto a mia moglie', riferito ad un gesto, non è esatto (meglio dire 'Feci segno a mia moglie'); né si può dire 'voleva che io andari' ma 'voleva che io andassi'. Come vede, piccoli difetti che lasciano inalterata la sostanza del testo.<sup>142</sup>

In the process of revising the novel, Tomizza had to take into account these considerations and modify a language that presents difficult passages for the Italian reader. Tomizza is aware of the asperities of his context: 'Valendomi dei suggerimenti dell'illustre Vittorini, ho cercato di apportare delle modifiche intese a eliminare gli aspetti negativi, specialmente riferibili a certe espressioni regionalistiche usate in un'area troppo angusta per acquistare validità linguistica'.<sup>143</sup> Tomizza knows that as in Svevo's case, being a 'giuliano' writer means facing this linguistic matter. His effort consists in mediating the context in which *Materada* is set and the requirements of his editor. Although the Italian he uses in his letters, as well as that which he will later employ in his novels, is certainly not distressed by this problem, he doubts the expressions used and seeks to improve his text.

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<sup>142</sup> Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori (FAAM), Milano, Archivio storico Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, *Arnoldo Mondadori*, fasc. Fulvio Tomizza, Elio Vittorini to Fulvio Tomizza, Milano, 18 March 1959, typescript.

<sup>143</sup> (FAAM), fasc. Fulvio Tomizza, Fulvio Tomizza to Segretaria, Milano, 6 May 1959, typescript.

However, Tomizza also seems determined not to lose the uniqueness of his context and the varied richness of his bilingualism. He insists on using what he defines as some ‘unsuppressable’ words, as he writes in a letter to Mondadori: ‘allego un breve elenco di insopprimibili vocaboli regionali dell’uso vivo e di vocaboli importati con la occupazione jugoslava, entrambi corredati da brevi noticine’.<sup>144</sup> The Istrian writer shows that he does not give up, keeping some crucial words without which the Istrian context is at risk of being lost. Even more remarkable, in this sense, seems to be an example of switching from an Italian word to the corresponding Istro-Veneto one, which clearly illustrates the intention of the writer to be faithful to his background. Without considering the hypothetical difficulty encountered by the reader, in *Materada*’s first manuscript, the word ‘zio’ in the sentence ‘Come vi sentite zio?’ is transformed into ‘barba’.<sup>145</sup>

Tomizza’s choice does not completely break away from the Istrian background, which has a bearing on Italian. Far from being a crystalline language, which stands out for its fluid structure and musicality, it runs the risk of corresponding to a form of ‘blemished’ Italian. The aim of the writer is to give voice to the language spoken by *Materada*’s inhabitants, without embellishing it, moving closer to the mentality of peasants. When he feels the Italian language fails, Tomizza employs the dialect without betraying the uniqueness of the area, which is characterized by the ‘nostra doppia parlata materna, che ogni persona dell’area non potrà dentro di sè mai sconfessare, nè ridurre, nè stravolgere a beneficio di una delle lingue nazionali’.<sup>146</sup> If this aim seems to be fulfilled, the most evident effect that a writer like Tomizza cannot avoid is the distortion of the language chosen. This is a double-edged sword:

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<sup>144</sup> (FAAM), fasc. Fulvio Tomizza, Fulvio Tomizza to Mondadori, Milano, 4 February 1960, typescript.

<sup>145</sup> Archivio Prezzolini, Lugano Biblioteca Cantonale. Fondo Tomizza (AP FTom) Materada, manuscript 1:1, 28 July 1958, Chapter 2.

<sup>146</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa’, p. 190.

Lo stesso dialetto, anziché costituire come altrove la base di una sana e risonante parlata italiana, è veicolo spesso inconsapevole di contagi cronici risoltisi ormai in simbiosi, gustosissime e significanti dal punto di vista umano e civile ma insidiose per chi della lingua italiana fa il suo strumento di lavoro'.<sup>147</sup>

The dynamics already exposed sum up Materada's linguistic background and the challenge that Tomizza had to accept by coping with the intermingling of dialects and bilingualism, without which it is impossible to pull together the threads of his novel.

### 2.3 A 'self-translated' novel

The Italo-Croatian blend exposed in the essay *Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa* merely introduces the dynamics which rule bilingualism, anticipating the potential and the issues related to the encounter/clash of languages that are fully explored in *Materada*. Tomizza's first novel implements the theoretical settings of this essay, exploring the potential of 'self-translation', a process which is defined by Anton Popovič as: 'the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself'.<sup>148</sup> The idiom Tomizza chooses is the Italian language, which does not correspond to the submerged grounding of the work, which is able to surface only from time to time in the narrative. Italian, in the majority of cases, is in charge of 'translating' it. The result is an atypical novel, challenged by a language that does not coincide with the 'real' one conceived by the author to portray his cosmos.

I shall now consider the linguistic peculiarity of the novel. By applying Gaetano Berruto's model, I will try to offer an exhaustive framework of *Materada*'s literary bilingualism (showing examples of code-switching, code-mixing, hybridization and interference). I will also illustrate specific devices that typify the novel, such as the system of

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<sup>147</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Le mie estati letterarie*, p. 127.

<sup>148</sup> Anton Popovič, *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (Edmonton: Department of Comparative Literature, University of Alberta, 1976), p. 19.

indicators created by Tomizza to specify the language in use. The most evident phenomenon in *Materada* is code-switching, which refers to the ‘switch’ from one language to another on an inter-phrasal level. In these cases, idioms almost alternate themselves, maintaining their own syntax and grammar. For example, wandering from Croatian to Italian and vice versa characterizes Gelmo’s behaviours and represents the first marked break in the Italian narrative of the novel. Gelmo is the owner of a local bar who adapts himself to the changing times, in which speaking Croatian can be an advantage. Therefore, he receives his guests using a language in which he is not confident, as he was once most probably used to talking prevalently in the Istro-Veneto dialect, while Francesco and his friends stare at him in order to encourage him to speak Italian.

Gelmo correva da un tavolo all’altro, si dava un gran da fare. ‘*Molim ljepo, drugui, izvolite!*’ (Prego tanto, compagni, favorite). Aveva imparato queste quattro parole di croato e le usava con ogni persona foresta che era di passaggio a bersi il quarto; poi cominciò a usarle un po’ con tutti, non so se per burla o perché secondo lui non c’era da fidarsi più di nessuno. [...] Ed ora, come un vecchio grammofoono che non sa più quello che suona, disse anche a noi due che aspettavamo al banco: ‘*Molim, drugui, izvolite!*’. Io gli diedi un’occhiata, ma senza nessuna intenzione (anche se lo slavo che ora parlava lui era una cosa e quello che parlavamo noi in famiglia era un’altra), ed egli cambiò disco. ‘Allora, Franz mio, come va?’ disse in italiano.<sup>149</sup>

This shift is reported by the narrator in Croatian, and represents the first case of code-switching in the work. Another crucial example is given by the Serbian official in charge of controlling transportable goods of people, like Milio, who opted to move to Trieste. In this case, the dialogue does not occur in Italian: ‘Poi gli chiede: “*Hočete i cipele?*” (Volete anche le scarpe?). L’altro lo fissava duro. “*I cipele*” (Anche le scarpe). [...] “*Dosta!*” (Basta!) disse il serbo [...] “*Sad idemo*” disse. “*Žuri me se*” (Adesso andiamo; ho fretta)’.<sup>150</sup>

In the novel, code-switching is not limited to the Croatian (and Slovenian) insertions, as it also concerns the inclusion of sentences in the Istro-Venetian dialect which are placed into the Italian narrative. For instance, Barba Nin, who is a principal character to whom Francesco

<sup>149</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

addresses his doubts about moving away from or remaining in his homecountry, usually employs Slovenian, but he also sings Istro-Venetian songs: ‘E si mise a canterellare “*no la me vol più ben (...) La prega Dio che crepo e inveze stago ben*”’.<sup>151</sup> Songs are mainly reported in this dialect, as are typical expressions or sayings. When Francesco arrives at the village of Buje to meet the judges who could have helped him to obtain his land from his uncle, he is reminded of an old saying that emphasizes the nature of fortification of the place: ‘Vi arrivai che era appena l’alba, sudato, con le gambe rotte, perché il paese è arrampicato in cima a un’altura e giustamente cantavano i nostri vecchi “*sta Buje in sentinela dal monte suo zentil!*”’.<sup>152</sup>

In terms of code-switching, it is evident that the insertions of Croatian, Slovenian and the Istro-Veneto dialects into Italian determine a break in the narrative. In particular, when characters use standard languages, the switch may be perceived as a linguistic rupture, which echoes the intrusion in a context based on dialects. Even more noticeable is that, as in the case of Gelmo and the Serbian officer, who support the new regime, the use of standard Croatian is considered alien because it assumes a political meaning. Language here becomes a flag to assert or to deny identity, as Robert Greenberg considers in the Balkans: ‘These language choices are subjective and politically motivated’.<sup>153</sup> By contrast, the Istro-Veneto insertions help to orientate the reader, adding a folkloristic trait to the work. Songs and sayings underline the peculiarity of the village and its surroundings, without creating friction. In both cases, the narrator faces the impossibility of translating them into Italian, without missing an estranged effect or a colourful touch.

*Materada* is also strongly characterized by code-mixing, which is a similar process working on a smaller scale, because it concerns insertions of foreign syntagms, and not of entire phrases, that are incorporated into a sentence. In the Istrian context, this seems to

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>153</sup> Robert Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9.

happen especially in lexical terms. From the beginning, the novel is crossed by dialogues in which words appear that do not belong to the Italian language. Istro-Veneto dialect words, like *barba*<sup>154</sup> (uncle), *pinze*<sup>155</sup> (a Veneto cake), *piova*<sup>156</sup> (rain), *cavedagna*<sup>157</sup> (chair), *balla*<sup>158</sup> (drunk), *brache*<sup>159</sup> (trousers) and *gnagna*<sup>160</sup> (aunt) are included in the text. These words may require the explanation of the writer (especially for readers who are not familiar with the context), which most of the time are provided by Tomizza in punctual annotations. To give an idea of the use of the Istro-Veneto dialect in the Italian narrative, let me consider the word ‘barba’. When Francesco is concerned about his uncle’s testament, he calls the old man ‘barba’, which in standard Italian means ‘beard’, while in the dialect it signifies ‘uncle’:

Mi avvicinai un poco al letto. ‘Barba’ gli dissi. Apri lentamente gli occhi celesti che adesso erano annebbiati, non più furbi e maligni come altre volte quando lo prendeva la paralisi o diceva di star male e appena sentiva salir qualcuno per le scale respirava con maggior affanno. ‘Barba’ dissi più forte, con voce che tremava. ‘Barba Tio, barba’.<sup>161</sup>

The repetition of the word ‘barba’ (it is repeated four times in the space of a few lines), in addition to the emphasis placed on the term, serves to induce the reader to a determined context. A reader who missed the word once would not miss it four times. Apart from the insistence on the term, the word aims to focus on a determined background – and the dialect is one of the most useful tools available to the writer. In this case, ‘barba’ conveys the sense of authority that ‘zio’ does not possess.

Code-mixing is not only based on the insertion of words taken from the Italian dialect. When the reader begins to familiarize himself with the Istro-Veneto linguistic context that seems to shape the background of characters, the narrative inserts words taken from Croatian,

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<sup>154</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*, p. 8.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

like *skupčina*<sup>162</sup> (assembly), *sudac*<sup>163</sup> (judge), *zdravo*<sup>164</sup> (hi), *zadruga*<sup>165</sup> (collective) and *kolo*<sup>166</sup> (a dance); and from the Croatian dialect, like *colarich*<sup>167</sup> (Istrian popular bandit) etc. Also, in code-mixing it seems that the inclusion of Croatian words involves political consequences, as can be observed in the following passage. Francesco calls the barman ‘gospod’ (meaning ‘sir, lord’, but the word assumes the meaning of ‘owner’, which was against the new rules imposed by the regime) and the barman is irritated by the expression: ‘Posai la birra davanti a lui, battendo forte sul tavolo. “Eccoti la birra, *gospòd*” dissi; e lui prontamente rispose: “*gospòd?* Non ci sono più *gospòdi*; li abbiamo spediti tutti a Trieste. *Gospòd* semmai sei tu che l’hai pagata”’.<sup>168</sup>

The Italian of the narrative is progressively ‘corroded’ by terms characterizing different linguistic contexts, which burst on the scene in the spontaneous dialogues of characters, or as terms indicating specific meanings. The two processes illustrated do not show an effective interaction of idioms, which are outlined by hybridization, a mechanism which deals with elements that can be imported by the opposing idiom, and are then adapted by the target language. This is the case with words like ‘graie’<sup>169</sup> or ‘družī’.<sup>170</sup> The former means fence and refers to streets and dividing fields in the novel, pinpointing the meaning of the context more clearly than the corresponding Italian word could: ‘Le “graie” (dallo sloveno “odgrājati”, cingere) che delimitano le nostre strade di ghiaia, mal sopportano di venir chiamate “siepi”’.<sup>171</sup> A similar phenomenon is also the case with the word *druzi*, which is the name used by Italians to refer to Yugoslav people, but which is not taken from the nominative;

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>171</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Perchè amo vivere rintanato nella mia Istria’, in *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 179.

rather it is the ‘Italianization’ of the vocative: ‘*družī*: termine acconciato all’italiana dal vocativo croato *družē* (o compagno), e applicato per estensione agli occupatori’.<sup>172</sup>

Apart from hybridization, there are also linguistic interferences in the morpho-syntax of the Italian narrative, which clearly underline foreign influences. This occurs when some expressions or sentences seem to be translated from a different idiom, and also in dialogues that present mistakes and odd syntax: ‘Ti hanno insegnato bene, i nostri capi, come è da comportarsi’.<sup>173</sup> Other linguistic contaminations, which derive from the dialect, appear in expressions like ‘una persona veramente studiata’<sup>174</sup> or ‘Più parte impiegati’.<sup>175</sup>

The Italian narrative ‘covers’ the linguistic underground of the novel, which only surfaces occasionally in the analysed processes. Nevertheless, Tomizza creates an even more evident device that testifies to the presence of different idioms within and beyond the Italian language: from time to time the narrator specifies that the idiom used by characters is not the one which appears in the text. The initial conversation between Francesco and his uncle (which involves many other secondary characters) suddenly turns into a dialogue spoken in Croatian dialect, when the former promptly clarifies that they were speaking ‘*po našu*’, ‘in our own’: ‘Come sempre in caso di affari e di cose importanti, parlammo in slavo: *po našu* (alla nostra), come si usa dire dalle nostre parti’.<sup>176</sup>

Francesco draws attention to the fact that characters are talking in Croatian dialect, pointing out that the entire conversation has been translated into Italian. The character here provides an important key of interpretation to the reader. He states that the animated conversation has been spoken in a different tongue compared to that used in the text, but he also argues that serious issues, like business and major topics, are not being discussed in Italian. It follows that, as it is the dialogue related to the inheritance troubles, the entire

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<sup>172</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*, p. 13.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

conversation takes place in Croatian. Moreover, if the use of Istro-Veneto terms warns the reader of a discrepancy, ‘*po našu*’ denounces an even stronger gap, because Italian, the language which supports the dialect, does not even share the same linguistic matrix with the Croatian dialect.

Tant’è vero che il protagonista del romanzo *Materada* a un certo punto della vicenda narra di essersi accostato alla moglie e di averle parlato ‘*po našu*’, alla nostra. Con ciò egli intendeva significare di essere risalito con la consorte, nell’intimità della casa, alla prima e vera fonte del loro esprimersi, che non consentiva reticenze né abbellimenti né infingimenti. Per me autore allora ventitreenne, quel ‘*po našu*’, era stato come un avvertimento col quale dichiaravo che fino a quel momento la narrazione di quei luoghi e di quei personaggi era stata resa attraverso una lingua il più possibile aderente alla nostra parlata, ma che restava ad ogni modo un’espressione esterna, voluta dal di fuori. Segnalavo al lettore che quella trama familiare e collettiva, di problemi e di passioni, aveva un suo svolgimento più interno, dentro un tessuto linguistico immediato che la plasmava e la scandiva con aderenza e ritmo più appropriato e più incalzante di quanto non apparisse dalla mia fervida e scrupolosa traduzione. Non mi restava altro da fare se non denunciare la mia impossibilità di essere maggiormente fedele alla materia narrata, anche perché mi servivo di una sola delle matrici linguistiche che ispiravano quel dialetto e nemmeno assunta nella più familiare versione veneta.<sup>177</sup>

Although ‘*po našu*’ indicates to the reader an evident linguistic fracture, Tomizza fears the difficult task of truly adhering to the context in which the novel is set. The Italian narrative has the potential to submerge a cosmos, which Carlo Sgorlon has described as follows: ‘spesso questa gente di Materada ha nomi croati, linguaggio croato, e sente come proprio il mondo slavo’.<sup>178</sup> For this reason, when the opportunity arises, the Istrian writer seeks to reaffirm the Croatian nature of dialogues, that otherwise would have been constantly at risk of being swamped by the prevalence of Italian. The narrator underlines that characters are talking in the Croatian dialect several times, and includes relevant details, aiming to recreate the missing context. For example, when the judge tries to convince Francesco’s uncle to give land to his nephew: ‘Già si alzava, ci accompagnava alla porta e in un ultimo tentativo diceva allo zio, sforzandosi di parlare nel nostro dialetto: “Pensateci, barba Tio”’;<sup>179</sup> and also when Francesco, facing the changes imposed by the emerging regime, defines his position,

<sup>177</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa’, pp. 190-191.

<sup>178</sup> Carlo Sgorlon, ‘Amore di terra’, in *Il Giornale*, 20 March 1983, p. 4.

<sup>179</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*, p. 73.

reaffirming the tongue spoken: ‘E io invece?... avevo indosso quegli stracci da quattro soldi, tipo sacco, che lo zio aveva comperato alla *zadruga*, e le scarpe grosse che potevano andar bene dieci anni prima. Inoltre a casa mia si parlava lo slavo’.<sup>180</sup>

This linguistic scenario may seem rather chaotic, given the unexpected linguistic specifications introduced by the narrator and the multilingual ability of characters. Applying a general rule, the Croatian dialect is the one which Francesco speaks at home, in the interactions with his uncle and family, in his conversations with friends and when he defines his tongue and deals with important issues. Therefore, standard Croatian is considered a foreign idiom, avoided by the local population, as is standard Italian. On the other hand, the Istro-Veneto dialect is wide spread in daily conversations and is complementary to the Croatian one.

Despite these generic rules, there are cases in which the language in use becomes almost unpredictable. When Rozzan and Milio are discussing the possibility of leaving the country, they alternate between the two idioms to emphasize their different points of view. Once again, the narrator mediates languages, translating them into Italian: “‘Allora solo a te è permesso?’” e parlava in slavo. “Non sei mica il più bello. Scusami tanto, e a me chi mi tiene se voglio andarmene, per esempio?” “Questo lo saprai tu’ disse in italiano”<sup>181</sup> In the same dialogue, Francesco and Rozzan, who have been friends for a long time, continue to discuss the dramatic events which are progressively overcoming the peninsula and the beginning of the massive exile. By recreating the intimacy of their relationship, the narrator underlines Rozzan’s necessity to find a friend to talk to about delicate matters, which are usually addressed in the Croatian dialect. Again, the language employed is revealed in the middle of the dialogue by Francesco and leads the reader, who follows the Italian text, to refocus on to a dialogue which started in a different idiom: ‘Allora, Franz, pare che anche Milio se ne vada’

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

disse, e la sua voce mi parve quella amichevole di dieci anni prima; come se fossimo sempre rimasti al punto in cui ci eravamo lasciati e adesso fosse venuto il momento di tirare le somme. “Pare di sì” gli dissi in slavo anch’io’.<sup>182</sup>

There are also more extreme cases, in which the narrator does not specify the language, and the reader can only venture a hypothesis. He may be able to deduce the language in use from the context, the descriptions and other useful details left in the narrative, while, on other occasions, he may only be able to hazard a guess. For example, when Francesco’s surname is written in Croatian – ‘Kozlović’,<sup>183</sup> instead of ‘Coslovich’,<sup>184</sup> – it fortells that the following phone call between Vanja and the judge will most probably be in Croatian: ‘C’è qui da me uno dei fratelli Kozlović di Materada’.<sup>185</sup> The hypothesis seems to be confirmed at the end of the conversation, which finishes with the greeting ‘zdravo’,<sup>186</sup> and provides some indication to the language of the phone call. However, details may also deceive and *Materada* can also leave some ambiguous passages, where both languages may fit.

The device of specifying the idiom used is clear proof that most dialogues have been translated. How do these processes condition the narrative and, therefore, the reader? The first aspect which strikes the reader is the surfacing of Francesco’s thoughts, which are crossed by dialogues in which words appear that do not belong to the Italian language. The irruption of a dialect (given the space allowed to it by the narrator) should be the first warning to the reader, who may doubt the homogenous context beyond the Italian narrative. However, just as the reader may feel he is used to a dialect, he is suddenly shaken by an unexpected change, which is the introduction of a second dialect that is spoken in parallel by characters. In other words, the reader cannot always establish the language and continue with it throughout the novel. The reason for employing this technique is to overturn the readers’ expectations, leaving them

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

with a sense of confusion about the idioms and identities. The chaotic linguistic undertow, the quick linguistic jumps and the indeterminacies of the novel inevitably undermine the recognition of both. As Pamela Balinger suggested: ‘Tomizza’s protagonist Francesco Koslovic inhabits an impoverished rural world in which distinctions between Italians and Croats (and corresponding cultural spheres) are not at all clear’.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, the reader must accept a rather challenging perspective imposed by the text.

To conclude, I will only touch upon the issue of ‘self-translation’ that will be further developed in the following section. This novel made of linguistic layers defies the reader, but also the writer. Among the complex series of issues faced by the latter, I will focus on the problems created by a language that does not correspond to the context in which the work is set. In this gap lies the ability of a writer, who has to adapt contents and translate the background into a different language.

A writer who has faced a similar problematic issue is Verga, whose *Malavoglia* aims to give voice to a Sicilian village and its language. Although the lexical and morphological aspects of the novel are Italian, the author is able to build the language upon the local dialect. Both Verga’s and Tomizza’s aims seem to converge; however, the limit of a comparison between their works can be found in the genesis of the novels (in particular, in the process followed by the writer’s mind). As Verga explains in a letter to Capuana:

[...] e il bravo poeta Di Giovanni scrivendo *ccu la parrata girgintana* non si fa capire da nessuno *comu si avissi scrittu turcu*; precisamente voi, io, e tutti quanti scriviamo non facciamo che tradurre mentalmente il pensiero in siciliano, se vogliamo scrivere in dialetto; perché il pensiero nasce in italiano nella nostra mente.<sup>188</sup>

Verga underlines that the process he employed was ‘translation’, as did Tomizza in *Materada*. Nevertheless, the Sicilian writer is translating from Italian to dialect, while Tomizza seems to

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<sup>187</sup> Pamela Balinger, ‘History’s “Illegibles”’: National Indeterminacy in Istria’, in *Austrian History Yearbook* (Center for Austrian Studies, University of Minnesota, 2012), p. 121.

<sup>188</sup> Giovanni Verga, *Lettere a Luigi Capuana* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1975), p. 215.

reflect an inverse mechanism. The Istrian writer's Italian is built upon a double dialect, which struggles to fit into the Italian narrative, thereby contaminating it. A similar approach seems to be used by Silone in *Fontamara*:

La seconda avvertenza è questa: in che lingua devo adesso raccontare questa storia? A nessuno venga in mente che i Fontamaresi parlino l'italiano. La lingua è per noi una lingua imparata a scuola, come possono essere il latino, il francese, l'esperanto. La lingua italiana è per noi una lingua straniera, una lingua morta, una lingua il cui dizionario, la cui grammatica si sono formati senza alcun rapporto con noi, col nostro modo di agire, col nostro modo di pensare, col nostro modo di esprimerci. [...] Ma basta osservarci per scoprire la nostra goffaggine. La lingua italiana nel ricevere e formulare i vostri pensieri non può fare a meno di storpiarli, di corromperli, di dare ad essi l'apparenza di una traduzione. Ma, per esprimersi direttamente, l'uomo non dovrebbe tradurre. [...] Ma poiché non ho altro mezzo per farmi intendere (ed esprimermi per me adesso è bisogno assoluto), così voglio sforzarmi di tradurre alla meglio, nella lingua imparata, quello che voglio che tutti sappiano: la verità sui fatti di Fontamara.<sup>189</sup>

*Materada*'s linguistic situation is more complex than *Fontamara*. In an area like Istria, where the Mitteleuropean cosmos crosses the Balkans, the role of a 'self-translator' assumes crucial meanings related to multilingualism, which should now be explored.

## 2.4 Living in translation

*Materada* is the result of a process of 'self-translation', which transfers the variegated Istrian linguistic context into the Italian narrative. Sometimes these subterranean mechanisms come to light, unveiling the richness of idioms of the Adriatic peninsula. Thanks to the processes I have examined in the previous section, Tomizza is able to clearly show a bilingual cosmos, rich in contaminations, interferences and contrasts. The writer often took advantage of direct speech, which allowed him to directly state the idioms used by characters. When Tomizza employs both code-shifting and the system of indicators which clarify the language in use, he is then able to draw upon them in direct speech. However, to fully understand *Materada*'s

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<sup>189</sup> Ignazio Silone, *Romanzi e saggi* (Milano: Mondadori, 2008), pp. 15-16.

sophisticated structure, it is also useful to highlight other tools exploited by the writer, such as indirect speech, which gives him the opportunity to ‘translate’ his background even better.

To start with, I shall focus on indirect speech, which allows the narrator to create the required distance to apply his translations, but also to highlight the linguistic shifts of his characters and to set two opposing languages. I will also consider this aspect in relation to Giorgio Pressburger’s *Il sussurro della grande voce*. By drawing a parallel between the two works, it will be possible to view *Materada*’s process more clearly, before taking into account Tomizza’s position. In *Materada*, direct speech and indirect speech offer the possibility of putting language in the foreground:

In un tipo di narrazione in cui ciò che dice la gente, i vari gruppi e le varie persone della comunità, è la prevalente materia del racconto, il discorso indiretto libero è lo strumento espressivo di gran lunga prevalente, sapientemente alternato con il discorso diretto, ed utilizzato con un’ampia gamma di manifestazioni e sfumature, più o meno vicine al discorso diretto.<sup>190</sup>

When Francesco interrupts his thoughts, he leaves room for a series of secondary characters, who together shape the variegated Istrian background. Therefore, dialogues, which characterize the character’s interaction with the village, may be mediated by both the narrator or by the main character. An example of indirect speech comes from Francesco, who reports the dialogue between Vanja and his daughter:

Vanja intanto parlava con mia figlia in croato e lei era brava a rispondergli perché l’avevano già promossa in seconda. Franjo e Giovanni parlavano a Berto. Poi si rivolsero anche a me e dissero nel nostro dialetto slavo, che gli altri due non capivano, di stare zitto e di lasciar parlare loro.<sup>191</sup>

Francesco mediates the dialogue and also specifies the idiom used. What is relevant here is that, through indirect speech, the narrator is able to translate languages more easily. He can transform and adapt a dialogue which occurred in Croatian into Italian.

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<sup>190</sup> Giovanni Pirodda, *L’eclissi dell’autore: tecnica ed esperimenti verghiani* (Cagliari: Editrice democratica sarda, 1976), p. 92.

<sup>191</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Materada*, p. 91.

A similar phenomenon appears in Giorgio Pressburger's *Il sussurro della grande voce*,<sup>192</sup> where the main character, Andreas, leaves Hungary, crosses a dangerous border and arrives in Italy. The setting is clearly stated from the beginning in the 'viuzze del Settimo Distretto',<sup>193</sup> the centre of Budapest, where the young character describes life in his family, his passion for theatre and his encounter with the actress Violetta, a few days before the Hungarian Revolution. As in *Materada*, from the beginning it is evident that languages will play a crucial role in a novel characterized by linguistic shifts, indirect speech and translations, but also by the indeterminacy which impedes the reader from easily grasping the real language spoken by characters.

In *Il sussurro della grande voce*, the reader realizes that the main character does not know Italian – he will learn it in Italy, but the narrator mediates all dialogues, translating them into Italian. It states that Andreas understands very few words, that people try to talk slowly to him, in order to facilitate his comprehension, and that he is barely able to express himself: 'Egli comprendeva poche parole — padre, madre, giudice (nel pronunciare quest'ultima rovesciò la testa indicando il ritratto) — anche se la signora cercava di parlare — o parlava sempre — molto lentamente'.<sup>194</sup> The character uses the words 'Non lo so' to communicate and to protect himself: 'Andreas rispondeva con l'unica frase che sapeva dire con piena coscienza del significato: "Non lo so!"'.<sup>195</sup>

Both novels deal with different linguistic drives, which flow beneath the surface. In *Materada*, Francesco seems to prefer the Croatian dialects, even if he masters the Italian one, as well as the two standard languages and can be considered a bilingual character. In opposition to Francesco, at home Andreas has only acquired his mother tongue, which

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<sup>192</sup> *Il sussurro della grande voce* is the story of Andreas, a Hungarian young man who decides to escape from his country during the Hungarian Revolution. Andreas' destination is Italy, where he struggles to settle in, mainly because he does not know the Italian language well. The story is therefore also an investigation of the troubled process of linguistic acquisition of a foreign idiom.

<sup>193</sup> Giorgio Pressburger, *Il sussurro della grande voce* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

progressively leaves space for the acquisition of Italian. Therefore, if Andreas struggles to learn Italian until the end of the novel, dialogues are necessarily translated – or rather mediated by the narrator, while indirect speech creates a distance which allows him to translate. On many occasions, the narrator of *Il sussurro della grande voce* focuses on Andreas' process of learning a language, which takes place throughout the novel:

Le parole italiane annotate e tradotte vi si moltiplicano in modo impressionante: a un certo punto i caratteri diventano minuscoli e la scrittura pare prendere d'assalto la pagina e la mente del ragazzo. Dapprima si incontrano termini un po' astratti, che riguardano lo spazio, come 'profondità' 'altezza' 'indietro' 'destra' 'sinistra'. Probabilmente Andreas aveva bisogno di quelle nozioni così elementari ma tanto più significative, per poter ricostruire dentro di sé il Mondo, a cominciare dalle fondamenta. Poi seguono alcune coppie di parole, come 'luce-oscurità' 'pesante-leggero' 'piccolo-grande', insieme a nomi di animali e di parti del corpo umano. Le traduzioni di quelle parole sono semplici, come se Andreas non mirasse a raggiungere la precisione, ma soltanto una possibilità ancora vaga di conoscenza. Soltanto l'espressione 'ci sono' è tradotta con perifrasi e spiegazioni, sia perché non esiste l'equivalente nella lingua di Andreas, sia perché quelle tre sillabe per avere un significato richiedono una certa cognizione dell'universo e di se stessi. Oltre al vocabolario c'è una serie di brevi annotazioni [...] Ma le parole recitate nella sua lingua cominciarono ad avere un suono estraneo, per lui, in quel luogo. La Dottoressa venne verso di lui emergendo quasi dal nulla. Quando furono vicini, si fermò e si dondolò lievemente, guardandolo. 'Come va?' domandò e Andreas non seppe come rispondere. Conosceva le parole 'bene' e 'male' ma non poteva rispondere né con l'una né con l'altra. [...] Cercava di non dare alcun significato ai suoni che udiva.<sup>196</sup>

This extract is a clear example of translation of a different linguistic background. Despite the fact that his notebook is full of new Italian words – that begin to form the basics of his linguistic background – his thoughts are translated from Hungarian, while the transition from one language to the other is already expressed in the new foreign language.

In order to investigate the linguistic background in depth, and draw a further parallel with *Materada* and its languages, I shall recall the beginning of *Il sussurro della grande voce*. Pressburger's novel presents a varied linguistic context, which is filtered in the narrative from time to time. When Andreas is still in Hungary, his dialogues are clearly translated into Italian, but he also employs indirect speech to a considerable extent, as can be seen during his first encounter with the actress:

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<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

Poi prese coraggio, disse il proprio nome e descrisse la circostanza in cui era venuto in possesso di quel numero. [...] Parlarono ancora per qualche minuto. Le guance del ragazzo bruciavano. Attraverso la finestra si vedevano le colline e l'azzurro un po' opaco del cielo. Parlarono della scuola, Andreas accennò anche ai suoi primi versi e all'abbozzo di una tragedia modellata, con un adattamento circa l'epoca dell'azione, sulla storia di Tristano e Isotta.<sup>197</sup>

Thanks to indirect speech, the series of actions which imply a dialogue between characters is translated, inasmuch as Hungarian falls into the background. When Andreas moves from the country taking the exilic path, the linguistic scenario changes. The Hungarian language cannot be taken for granted anymore, as Andreas is submerged by new alien tongues. The rather chaotic experience outside the homeland – his life as a fugitive, who struggles to find money for food and a house – is immediately characterized by difficult encounters, which reveal the linguistic subterranean (ground) layer of the novel, as in the encounter with a priest:

Il vecchio che mescolava le parole di varie lingue e le pronunciava con difficoltà, ora gli ribattè con noncurante arroganza: 'Non domandare mai cosa c'era prima, cosa verrà dopo, cosa c'è davanti e cosa c'è dietro di te. Hai capito?'. Parlava in modo quasi incomprensibile, ma nel suo discorso c'erano vecchi vocaboli che Andreas aveva creduto di esclusivo uso della sua famiglia. A queste isole si aggrappò nel tentativo di afferrare ciò che il frate stava dicendo.<sup>198</sup>

Paradoxically, Andreas does not understand the old priest, even though the narrator mediates the scene in the Italian language. The reader becomes aware of Andreas' linguistic displacement, but the effect it produces is more of a noise, which pushes through the silence of the character, rather than a mixture of languages, which later on will be explained as follows: 'Anche il Vecchio olivastro, come il frate della sera prima, parlava una lingua appena comprensibile fatta di parole tedesche, spagnole, ungheresi, ebraiche'.<sup>199</sup>

There is another phenomenon which goes hand in hand with the appearance of a multilingual underground in the story. The words which Andreas masters in his native tongue will easily lose their power abroad, being transformed into sounds and later on into silence:

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

‘Tutto scompare. Restano soltanto i suoni. Spero che non scompaiano anche quelli’.<sup>200</sup> The familiar linguistic background disappears from the narrative, leaving space for thoughts which elaborate the multi-linguistic new condition. Once the border is crossed and the character begins his troubled exile, the words of other fugitives turn into alien sounds: ‘un centinaio di fuggiaschi parlottavano tra loro, le loro parole, con suo sgomento, cominciarono a suonargli un po’ strane’.<sup>201</sup> From this moment on, Andreas starts a process of translation, which flows parallel to the ambiguity generated by the clash of languages.

In a similar way in *Materada*, Italian covers a great variety of languages, which also intermingle. The narrator plays a crucial role, determining the choices for the reader, who can be excluded from linguistic switches, ignoring the underground channels of the background. Although Tomizza’s novel’s linguistic annotations are detailed, sometimes the narrator omits to specify linguistic changes, and more generally the idiom used. Therefore, the reader may only become aware of them later, based on the context, or he may simply miss the information altogether.

In *Il sussurro della grande voce* languages can also be unpredictable. The most emblematic example of the novel is represented by the switch to Italian at the end of the novel. When Andreas meets Laura in Rome, he still struggles to express his feelings in a foreign language: ‘In quel momento Laura gli prese una mano nella propria, piccola e tranquilla. “Hai mai voluto bene?” domandò. “Voler bene? Che espressione.” Andreas la senti per la prima volta’.<sup>202</sup> After a long elaboration, the character wrote a long letter to Laura, explaining his feelings. Both the letter and the encounter between the two should have used the Italian language. However, this important detail can only be assumed by the reader. Under the surface of the novel flows a linguistic magma, in which the main character’s thoughts undoubtedly are not expressed in Italian.

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

A remarkable difference between the works is that in *Il sussurro della grande voce* the mixture of languages is described and elaborated, but only through the mediation of the narrator. The native tongue of the character is progressively ‘polluted’ by the acquired one: ‘Ebbe la spiacevole impressione che la lingua appresa da sua madre improvvisamente si fosse contaminata’,<sup>203</sup> but the Italian language which carries the narrative is not subjected to any form of crumbling. From the beginning to the end, despite the linguistic observations of Andreas and of the narrator, Italian remains a linear idiom.

In *Materada*, the hybrid linguistic background of Istria is filtered through the narrator and experienced internally by characters, but it also emerges strongly in the novel, in fluctuations from one dialect to the other, foreign words, translations, unpredictable changes and choices. Therefore, the linguistic complexity is shown and not just implied or kept hidden. How can this hybrid language be defined? By letting languages flow together, one of the results is that the hybridization of terms and sentences shape new layers of meaning. In particular, to unveil the nature of these synergies, in the essay *Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa*, Tomizza unmasks some of the Istrian language dynamics, which are present also in his works. For instance, paradoxically, dogs, cats and horses were called in different languages, showing that the familiar background itself was the one which encouraged these fluctuations among idioms. Different functions, bizarre mechanisms of inclusion, which can sometimes be connected to historical motives, shape new words. But above all, three different idioms together pattern a new one, which most of the time eliminates the originals.

Tale ordine mentale viene rispettato per gli animali domestici. Ai cani, che, snelli e sostenuti, accompagnano i cacciatori di città, ci si rivolge generalmente in italiano e l’animale stesso viene chiamato non *pas* bensì *brek*, da bracco; ai gatti si parla in slavo; ai cavalli, poco diffusi da noi e incontrati invece durante il servizio militare nell’esercito austroungarico, si comanda in tedesco: ‘oha!’ e ‘zurik’.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>204</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa’, pp. 188-189.

As in the case of dogs, where *pas* is replaced by the misspelt Italian ‘bracco’, the linguistic hybridity not only combines different idioms, it also fuses them. The dog’s appellation distorts the Italian name of a canine breed, but in more sophisticated examples the same word may be overlapped in different languages and inevitably convey several meanings. The hybrid language undergoes distortions, but also overlapping, which deforms the language, testing the reader’s comprehension. This is the case with *La miglior vita*’s contamination of the word *cuce*, which appears in the description of the landscape of a village:

Le case di Rupa non si elevavano sui macigni, me le trovai improvvisamente davanti come le *cuce* di pietre a secco dove si ripongono gli arnesi e ci si ripara a malapena in caso di cattivo tempo, altri vi trascorrono le notti calde per far la guardia ai meloni.<sup>205</sup>

*Cuce*, which is the result of the combination of the Italian dog kennel, the Croatian *kuca* (‘house’) and the Slovenian *koca* (‘hut’), fuses the three languages, exemplifying the potentiality of the linguistic hybrid space, which on some occasions lets meanings flow together. This new perspective can expand the original attribution to words, opening out the domain of the writer, who can take full advantage of the process of contamination between idioms.

The sophisticated structure of *Materada* leads to a consideration of some final observations, related to the unique condition of being a writer in ‘translation’. What I have tried to show by including *Il sussurro della grande voce* (and its troubled linguistic transitions) in the analysis, is that Tomizza’s and Pressburger’s novels may lead the reader to reconsider the role of the narrator and of the writer himself. The dynamic of mediation of different languages differentiates these works from others, because they break ‘the *primitive*

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<sup>205</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La miglior vita*, p. 13.

*dichotomy* which opposes the two poles, which are the writing of the original and its translation'.<sup>206</sup>

The writer and the translator are usually attributed very different roles. By dismantling this dichotomy (and the one of an original work contrasted to its translation), the writer becomes a translator as well. This new status allows the author to mediate among languages, allowing them to combine freely. As suggested by Andreas, whose native tongue comes with a new acquired one, the presence of a parallel language is not necessarily a painless process:

Del resto Andreas si esprimeva nella nuova lingua con crescente facilità, ma anche con pena sempre maggiore, giacché ora era quella specie di copia di se stesso che parlava, rideva, adulava, mentiva e il suo antico essere si stava ritirando sempre di più: le parole annotate nel suo libriccino, moltiplicandosi come batteri, lo stavano distruggendo.<sup>207</sup>

Like bacteria affecting the body, destroying it, terms originated by the new language flood the writing. The Hungarian author seems also to be bothered by new words which shape a parallel, but contrasting, being which is defined more clearly later: 'dare il proprio fiato a quei suoni che appartenevano a un'altra coscienza, a un altro essere, a un automa che era stato costruito da lui in se stesso. Tutto gli sarebbe sembrato falso'.<sup>208</sup> The 'deceitful' mechanisms of translation are clearly manifested. The constant presence of a subterranean language which takes its space in the narrative puts both languages under pressure, instilling the odd presence of a new being within the self, whose linguistic effects may be unpredictable.

A process of 'self-translation' also takes place in *Materada*, as described by Tomizza, who 'transfers' a multilingual background into the narrative:

Nei romanzi sulle vicende del confine, culminate con l'esodo di quelle popolazioni anche rurali in Italia, mi viene spontaneo di 'tradurre' il nostro particolare dialetto veneto in una lingua italiana quanto più semplice, a costo di riuscire povera: quella per l'appunto diffusa negli strati popolari, e tenendo a modello

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<sup>206</sup> Michaël Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-traduction: Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>207</sup> Giorgio Pressburger, *Il sussurro della grande voce*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

l'operazione già compiuta da Verga e Tozzi, da Pavese e Pratolini. Ma avrei potuto forse trascurare i prestiti contratti dalla tradizione popolare con le lingue delle nostre remote origini balcaniche, o quelli avvenuti durante la lunga dominazione austriaca quando i nostri nonni familiarizzavano coi commilitoni stiriani e romeni, boemi e polacchi?<sup>209</sup>

The inclusion of translation in the process of writing – this is the passage in which Tomizza defines himself as a ‘translator’ of his own novels – reaffirms Pressburger’s statements. Even in *Materada*, the Istrian writer cannot adhere to a certain background without including several languages. This means that he fluctuates in a complex linguistic dimension, made up of words from different origins. Being bilingual from birth, Tomizza is less affected by the convergence of languages that he seeks to mediate, even though other parallel selves may overcome the process of writing.

On the one hand, the writer as ‘self-translator’ struggles to reduce his variegated context into one prevalent language that will never be able to correspond to the full picture available to the writer. The irruption of foreign words and sentences is just a marginal effect of the impossible task of containing them in the narrative. On the other hand, the translation of a foreign context tests the limits, frustrations and the deceptive dynamics to which every translation is subjected. The surfacing of parallel selves or doubles interferes with the linguistic scenario of the writer. Therefore, the linguistic balance of languages is a difficult achievement for a multilingual writer.

The potential and the limits of *Materada* can be summed up in its ‘anti-letterarietà’. Tomizza’s novel runs the risk of falling within the so-called ‘anti-letterarietà’, which have been attributed to Triestine writers on other occasions. The definition is summarized by Magris as follows: ‘L’antiletterarietà viene invece per lo più intesa, non senza nebulose ambiguità, come rifiuto del dettato adorno, delle “false” convenzioni formali, dell’eleganza stilistica priva di impegno umano. Un’esigenza di cose e di sentimenti, di verità, contrapposta

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<sup>209</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Alle spalle di Trieste*, p. 179.

dunque all'esigenza di parole'.<sup>210</sup> The linguistic hybridity of *Materada* is a challenge to the reader for its adherence to the linguistic background, which does not make the reading of the Italian narrative a smooth process. This work may be criticized for not being written in an enjoyable language and even for containing mistakes.

However, *Materada*'s 'anti-letterarietà' offers the rich perspective of a linguistic microcosm, in which language not only reflects the encounter/collision of two or more backgrounds, it also further develops hybridity and linguistic creativity. Therefore, 'anti-letterarietà' should not be compared to the impoverishment of the language: 'il travaglio linguistico, la presunta "antiletterarietà" (che per me è piuttosto altra aspirazione frustrata, quella di poter fare fine letteratura), erano ulteriori prove che mi trovavo nel giusto, e sia pure un giusto faticoso e patetico'.<sup>211</sup> Tomizza seems to overturn the parameter of 'anti-letterarietà', arguing that his novels are not the result of 'bad' Italian, rather the elaboration of a linguistic research. It follows that the writer as 'self-translator' should also be thought of in terms of an opportunity for the reader to cross the inevitable barrier created by monolingual works and enter the linguistic process beyond the novel and its hidden processes.

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<sup>210</sup> Claudio Magris, 'Equivoci e compiacimenti sull'"antiletterarietà" triestina', in *Trieste*, 87 (1969), p. 10.

<sup>211</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Uno scrittore di confine', *Le conferenze dell'Associazione Culturale italiana*, 25 (1969-1970), p. 34.

## Chapter 3

### Exile in *La ragazza di Petrovia*

#### 3.1 The figure of the exile

The Istrian composite background, which emerges strongly from the linguistic dynamics of Tomizza's first novel, foregrounds the dramatic exile that overwhelmed the Adriatic peninsula after the Second World War. This event played a central role in the literary production of this writer, who dedicated several novels to it. In his works, Tomizza seems to truly define the figure of the exile, focusing primarily on the moment in which the latter faces the decision to leave his home country, which is a phase very few writers have dealt with.

Leaving one's own country, or remaining in it, represents only the first step towards the exilic state. The Istrian author investigates this initial moment in order to better define the condition of having lost one's own country. Whatever reasons have caused exile, the departure is the moment in which a new geography of emotions fills the mind, marking the break of the self, as Edward Said's words suggest: '(exile is) the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home'.<sup>212</sup> This break very often weighs heavily on the exile, a person who might be condemned to live a discontinuous state of being due to an inner rupture. The inevitable loss, the sense of laceration and the absence which characterize the exilic condition begin with the choice that the exile is forced to face.

Tomizza is able to identify this initial stage clearly, because Istria offers a multicultural context, which makes the decision of whether to let one self prevail over the other more

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<sup>212</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on exile', p. 173.

arduous. The exile can fluctuate between the two poles of the Istrian identity, but when Yugoslavia annexed the peninsula, he must choose a definitive option in a short lapse of time, which required this sort of clarification. In comparison to more traditional exiles, the Istrian exile may highlight more clearly the loss of one part of the self, leading people to split internally. A mixed native land which imposes a univocal identity demands the dismembering of double belongings, increasing still further the displacement side of diasporas.

It follows that the phase of departure acquires a specific meaning. Given that the etymology of exile (*exilium*) leads both to the act of separation from one's own home country and the state of wandering abroad,<sup>213</sup> Tomizza is inclined to reassess the former, confirming Joseph Brodsky's statement that 'exile covers, at best, the very moment of departure, of expulsion'.<sup>214</sup> The clash with the reality of the new country leads to a profound form of estrangement, which will be considered in the following chapter. In this chapter, I will examine the period of transition from the old to the new country.

In Tomizza's novels, exile comes hand in hand with the condition represented by the metaphor of a ship, which is doomed to sink, despite life continuing: 'E' una situazione in margine, quella del profugo, come quella del passeggero di una nave che affonda, eppure in lui la vita continua. E' un aspetto misterioso del mondo moderno, che Fulvio Tomizza ci aiuta forse a comprendere'.<sup>215</sup> Facing the 'impossible' choice to remain in one's own country or to leave it, the exile is aware that his life may be split and that his future is certainly compromised. As in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in translation*, the exile knows intimately the degrees and nuances of an absence which will forever mark his life and are manifested through the moment in which a person is forced to choose a life of separation from the

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<sup>213</sup> For a detailed analysis of this aspect, see: Robert Edwards, 'Exile, self and society', in Maria-Ines Lagos-Pope (ed.), *Exile in Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988), pp. 15-31; and Mireille Courrent, 'Partir d'ici. A propos de l'étymologie latine de l'exil', in Hyacinthe Carrera, *Exils* (Perignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2010), pp. 15-18.

<sup>214</sup> Joseph Brodsky, 'The Condition we Call Exile', in *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 34 (1991), p. 7.

<sup>215</sup> Alberto Spaini, 'Lo scambio delle popolazioni rimedio peggiore del male', *Il Telegrafo*, 21 June 1963, p. 3.

country left behind and an uncertain forthcoming time. As Hoffman writes: ‘I come across an enormous, cold blankness – a darkening, an erasure of the imagination, as if a camera eye has snapped shut, or as if a heavy curtain has been pulled over the future’.<sup>216</sup>

Among Tomizza’s characters, Giustina from *La ragazza di Petrovia* epitomizes the troubled perspective of the exile. In this novel, which begins with a controversial choice and ends with the impossibility of returning to the lost homeland, an Istrian girl is the subject of the in-depth investigation of the exilic state. The controversial decision taken by the girl is explored in detail, outlining the innermost dynamics of the process. Due to the harsh reality which blocks the character’s movements under a metaphorical intermittent rain, the character splits into two entities and starts living two parallel lives, which seek to preserve at least one side of herself.

Giustina is the exile who experiences two lives simultaneously. The faster, more elusive side of herself drives the character towards exile, in opposition to the slower side, which struggles to move. The same route towards Italy is, therefore, experienced by what are, in the end, two different girls: a more rarefied person, who creates a parallel existence, and a real person, who is stuck under the rain and slowly follows the former. Giustina’s generic immobility, shown through her difficulty in combining these two forces, confirms the strain placed upon the character, which parallels the limited number of events of the narrative (the story develops around an almost deserted village, houses that are left empty and boarded up, and the noise of the lorry which carries the exiles away). The result is that the girl wanders between two conditions, which are usually overlapped in a subdued narrative, destroying any temporal reference: ‘Il lento tessuto d’immagini e di pensieri vien così, per alterne voci, a ricomporre la immagine del profugo sradicato, in un tempo senza movimento’.<sup>217</sup> This

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<sup>216</sup> Eva Hoffman, p. 4.

<sup>217</sup> Teresa Buongiorno, ‘Profughi istriani’, in *Rotosei*, 3 June 1963, p. 7.

disruptive state of being pinpoints the universal condition of the exile, as Giorgio Bergamini outlines:

Plasmandosi in personaggio, ella diventa come l'incarnazione d'una idea platonica del personaggio, una sorta di proiezione ipostatica di quello 'scisma' avvenuto tra l'universo di 'prima' e la nuova realtà irreali, che non le consente di ritrovare la propria dimensione se non nel sogno-incubo, nel gioco sregolato delle associazioni e dissociazioni della coscienza [...] Ci si potrebbe ora domandare se questa Giustina (priva quasi di tratti fisici e chiamata per nome non più di tre o quattro volte lungo l'intero arco del romanzo) condensi anche una condizione allegorica, esemplare e rappresentativa, del dramma generale che si svolge intorno a lei.<sup>218</sup>

Giustina is the girl who experiences exile through a form of dreamlike adventure, in the puzzling associations and incongruities dictated by the pressing situation. Tomizza's novel engages Giustina's double existence, which emerges more clearly when the character crosses the border to reach Trieste and above all when she tries to return to Istria. Here, the boundary itself assumes a particular meaning, because by dividing a frontier land, it is perceived more like an artificial division that the character does not expect and barely recognizes, than as a line that effectively detaches two different entities.

Giustina's story benefits from an investigation into these aspects. Drawing inspiration from Edward Said's *Reflections in Exile* and Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny*, I will seek to analyse the features of the exile in Giustina's story. Thanks to these contributions, exile reveals the paradoxes and inner conflicts of a broken life. Let us start with Giustina's being left soaking wet under an endless rain, which represents the harsh reality which surrounds the character until she is left frozen to the spot.

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<sup>218</sup> Giorgio Bergamini, 'Sotto la cenere cova il primo fuoco', *Il Piccolo*, 12 March 1963, p. 3.

### 3.2 Giustina's rain, or rather the grip of '*realtà disadorna*'

Tomizza's exile is the one who does not take his decision lightly. Facing the doubleness of his soul and the wandering between the two poles of his identity, he struggles for a clear, final choice. When drastic shifts in Istria compel characters to opt between leaving and staying in their country, the sense of indecision makes them feel uneasy. Therefore, the exile begins to rationalize his decision; he takes into account the split between the self and its 'home', shaping the path towards a definitive rupture. The working of his mind blocks his actions – it fashions an irregular state of being – and leads towards an increasingly surreal dimension.

Giustina's story probes into the life of a girl, whose inner conflicts correspond to a narrative arranged in layers, which differs substantially from *Materada's* concreteness. Giustina, the girl from Petrovia who fell pregnant by a boy who had been moved to a refugee camp in Trieste, sought to justify her decision over whether to remain in Istria or to leave the country. On her one-day visit to the refugee camp, where she would still have had both chances, she formulates her introspections in reaction to exile. Her whole story revolves around the decision she must make, in a background of refugees and exiled people. From her initial reticence – which almost prevents her from acting – she unravels her blanket of thoughts on the road to her choice. The result is a character, whose universe, made up of mixed feelings, silences and overlapping gestures, accounts for the rather chaotic exilic experience.

In Giustina's story, the 'new geography of emotion' belonging to exile begins with a state of paralysis of the character. The girl is barely able to walk through her native village, while lorries carry her countrymen to Italy; she stands under the rain while thinking about her departure the following day. This premonition of losing one's own country, added to the increasing harshness of the situation, are experienced here through her difficulty in moving.

In other words, the grim reality gnaws at the girl from Petrovia, who slows down her movements, allowing the reader to penetrate her controversial thoughts. Guido Somnavilla underlines her breaks and gestures, enveloped in a subdued atmosphere: ‘Ma essa si muove come un automa, cerca e non cerca, cammina e non cammina, resta e non resta a Petrovia: tutti movimenti che traspaiono imprecisi come dal fondo d’un acquario’.<sup>219</sup>

The relationship between Giustina’s lack of action and events is conveyed through the vivid image of a permanent rain. Rain, which plays a crucial role in the story, determines the condition of a character, who slowly begins her exilic path. This image brings to mind Gëzim Hajdari’s poem *Piove sempre*, in which rain is also associated with exile and estrangement: ‘Piove sempre/ in questo/ Paese./ Forse perchè sono straniero’.<sup>220</sup> The way in which rain settles on Giustina’s body corresponds to the influence played by reality on the exilic life. Rain, an adverse, but also soothing weather, spurs the character to validate her thoughts. From the beginning of the story, the narrator states that Giustina is fixed to the spot under the rain: ‘Lei è ferma sotto la pioggia’.<sup>221</sup> The opening line explains that the character does not try to avoid the unfavourable weather conditions which afflicted her. In the small village of Petrovia, which is formed by a serpentine road around which are gathered houses and fields, a lonely girl stands under the rain because she is almost incapable of moving. Even when she looks for shelter to protect herself from the raindrops, she is unable to take a step; she simply slumps down the wall nearest to her, where larger drops fall from bramble leaves.

Rain and immobility are interlinked. The former is doomed to slow the character to immobility, as it represents raw reality, without any escape. The parallel between Giustina’s paralysis and her being caught in a vice-like grip immediately leads to a comparison with the chaotic environment which surrounds the girl. However, as the narrator clarifies, the border pass would potentially permit her to return to Istria. Many hesitant people from Petrovia took

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<sup>219</sup> Guido Somnavilla, ‘Trilogia istriana’, in *Lecture*, 2 (1968), p. 96.

<sup>220</sup> Gëzim Hajdari, *Poesie scelte (1990-2007)* (Lecce: Controluce, 2008), p. 66.

<sup>221</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia* (Milano: Mondadori, 1963), p. 43.

advantage of that specific fact, which constantly weighs on Giustina's reflections, flowing into a rarefied narrative and enhancing the impossibility of a clear choice.

Si muove lentamente [...] è sul ciglio della strada, nel fango di polvere di pietre, di nuovo sotto la pioggia minuta che per lei rappresenta la realtà disadorna, senza possibilità di scampo, resa ancora più banale e più inutile, che la tiene dolorosamente attanagliata come in una morsa – un banale ritardo che abbia impedito una importante, decisiva partenza. Sì, l'indomani andrà con la prima corriera a Trieste; approfitterà del lasciapassare di frontiera, come in quei due mesi hanno fatto tanti indecisi, prima, se partire o no, i quali però non sono più potuti tornare.<sup>222</sup>

How is reality conceived and, above all, what is the reality which circles Giustina? The 'realtà disadorna', mentioned in the passage above, leads to Giustina's movements being restricted, despite the fact that an irritating rain filters through her microcosm in a subtle way. The girl does not seem to approach the external world directly; noises flow into her train of thoughts as a distant annoyance. For instance, the loud music coming from the Dom,<sup>223</sup> which implicitly denotes the political change, fades as it reaches her ears: 'Il confuso rumore del Dom mescolato alla musica le giunge attutito'.<sup>224</sup> The same noise is perceived more faintly another time, when those songs are compared to wet wool, which once more softens sounds: 'I suoni del ballabile [...] le giungevano stranamente lontani e stiracchiati, come lana già lavata e asciugata, messa nella rocca per filare'.<sup>225</sup> Despite the nuisance caused by the unusual music, Giustina is hardly aware of it.

The girl from Petrovia stares at the rain, while fleeting images appear with noises. Her dampness, which increases as she is absorbed in her thoughts, allows little space for external reality. She follows the lamenting chorus of her countrymen, who say farewell to exiles, while a lorry from the waterworks moves forward. The latter recurs frequently as an arrogant figure, which seems to force people to move from their land. They are compared to horrible dragons, beyond which neither a flower nor a blade of grass can grow. The strikes of the hammers that

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>223</sup> Tomizza refers to a recreational centre in which people gather together.

<sup>224</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 44.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

seal the exiles' boxes are another noise that penetrates Giustina's world: 'Ciò le era parso chiaro soprattutto con le prime partenze, nel trambusto di quell'estate ch'era iniziata a Pasqua, fra il rumore dominante, via via più inquieto e angoscioso (per altri addirittura ossessivo), dei colpi di martello e il rauco ansimare della pialla sulle assi di legno'.<sup>226</sup> People carried their household belongings in boxes, in order to gather together as much as they could carry. The rhythm dictated by the hammers captures Giustina's attention, as do the daily departures which leave the village almost deserted; houses are empty, only the few people who are unable to move remain.

Exile, or rather the unvarnished reality which froze Giustina, is also transmitted through a third noise. From the seaside, a gale is blowing towards Petrovia, shaking trees, cleaning streets and slamming closed doors and windows. A blast of wind also bursts open a shutter, which symbolically yields, showing how nature overpowers men's destiny. The village reveals desolate houses, which are destined to fall, overcome by events larger than their inhabitants:

Si è levato un vento che fa scuotere più fortemente gli alberi e le passa vicino, corre lungo la strada, piomba spezzandosi sulle case sprangate, preme a ogni porta e a ogni finestra ben chiusa, forza contro una finestrella in alto che sta per cedere, riunisce tutte le sue forze, pressa ancora, e la finestrella cede, un'imposta si spalanca con violenza e sbatte ancor più violentemente sul muro.<sup>227</sup>

The images of abandoned houses and the few poor people left behind occur in short sentences, coming from the workings of Giustina's mind. Reality is progressively disclosed, even though it is to be found nestled in the girl's reflections, which still prevail in the narrative:

Il villaggio è sprofondato in un forzoso silenzio. Sempre più addentrandosi in esso, ora lo guarda con occhi nuovi, come se ogni cosa e ogni stalla che via via incontra li mettesse in relazione con il camion

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

ancora rombante sulla strada. [...] di gente al paese ne rimaneva ben poca, e anche quei pochi o erano dei poveri diavoli anche loro e avevano i loro guai cui badare, o erano già con un piede sulla strada.<sup>228</sup>

These rapid, vivid flashes of reality resurface, bringing to mind an exile which empties an entire region. The environment surrounding people does not flow through the narrative, which smoothes away images and noise. Nevertheless, reality freezes the character to the point of immobility.

I should now focus on the representation of the dramatic reality through the metaphor of rain. From the beginning of the story, rain falls permanently in tiny drops; it foreshadows cloudy weather, which will not clear up easily. The girl, who tries to find shelter under branches, is wet through by an increasingly penetrating rain: ‘Ora è ferma sotto il ramato soffitto di rovi. Il piovere minuto e fastidioso si è trasformato in un inesorabile stillicidio’.<sup>229</sup> Even when the rain falls on houses and she is protected by a pitched roof, the rain goes through her. The feeling of wetness and being constantly in the rain follows the girl when she is in front of the fire, inside Teresa’s house: ‘La pioggia ora la sente guardando nel fuoco che arde a stento, alimentato com’è da rami di ginepro verde e da due pezzi di roverella ancor fresca, sui quali per giunta cade di quando in quando qualche gocciolone anneritosi nel camino’.<sup>230</sup> Rain, therefore, is a presence which has a profound influence on Giustina’s life.

If rain, as the narrator suggests, is a metaphor of reality, it obviously cannot be abandoned by characters. In other words, reality cannot be cut off; it chases after characters, afflicting them. When the rain stops sporadically, drops still fall on houses and people, who are resigned to accept it. The narrator articulates the omnipresent adverse weather conditions in a very detailed way. When the girl protects herself under the brambles, tiny drops turn into an annoying drip. However, she does not perceive them directly, as they soften once they encounter her skin. Although the noise is attenuated and the girl hears only its distant echo,

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

rain slowly filters onto her body, reaching an inner uncontrolled part of her self. Her impermeable layer of skin fails to protect Giustina from the rain, allowing it to profoundly affect the character and reaching ‘una parte incontrollata di se stessa’.<sup>231</sup>

Ma non sente la forza e il rumore con cui le gocce cadono su di lei; avverte piuttosto quella centesima parte di esse che attraverso la pelle le filtrano nella carne e nelle ossa, lentamente, come una medicina necessaria; quanto al rumore, ne percepisce soltanto una strana eco balzellante, che le risuona dentro, come se le gocce cadessero su una parte incontrollata di se stessa.<sup>232</sup>

It immediately becomes clear that reality seeps into Giustina’s life as an incessant rain shower, which leaves sediment in her unconscious. Indeed, the harshness of exile, which overcomes her village’s countrymen, seems to surround the girl, who lets reality (through rain) slip into her soul. Similar to tiny raindrops, splinters of reality, which at times the reader perceives, bother her. Focusing on this process – the external reality which is progressively absorbed by the unconscious – the narrator indicates Giustina’s irritation: ‘Ma non si tratta ora che di una pioggerella che suo malgrado la fa sorridere e contro la quale sente il suo gracile corpo resistere’.<sup>233</sup> These tiny drops dampen her body, fall down her face, gather together at her eyebrows, prickle her nose and neck and shake her nerves. At this point, hope and struggle intermingle, under a rain which does not spare a single part of her.

La pioggia la bagna tutta, con minuta esattezza: le gocce d’acqua le si impigliano tra i capelli e poi ancora si assottigliano per scivolarle lungo la fronte e raccogliersi nelle sopracciglia, darle fastidio agli occhi, un senso di pizzicore al naso e poi al collo, sempre più giù e sempre più dentro, comunicandole come un’intima scossa ai nervi meno avvertibili, un brivido di piacevole dolore, di desiderio di lotta e insieme di disperata volontà di speranza.<sup>234</sup>

The most incisive passage in which reality absorbs Giustina is the description of a very distinctive mechanism. If the beginning of Giustina’s story is characterized by an incessant

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

rain, which soaks the character, later on drops filter through internally. Rain here is transformed into a permeable fluid that passes through Giustina's body in the form of tears: 'Pensa a tutt'altro, ora, e le lacrime continuano a scendere spontaneamente, come stesse solo espellendo le gocce di pioggia che prima le erano filtrate nella pelle e nelle ossa'.<sup>235</sup> The girl expels water from her body, transforming raindrops into tears, which may be used to make her own bread:

Le lacrime continuano a solcare il viso. Per quanto le è possibile cerca di beverle, sono calde e salate, sono il liquido con cui potrebbe impastare della farina e far del pane – un pane tutto per lei, da sgranocchiare in un cantuccio, silenziosamente.<sup>236</sup>

From an external stream, rain is internalized and becomes an intimate product. To render explicit the metaphor, the exilic reality which blocks the character's movements, shapes Giustina, who at the same time acts on it. Reality is assimilated and accepted, but also recreated through a complex process of elaboration.

The metaphor of rain is constantly drawn upon, outlining the path of the exile. At the beginning the girl falls into the rain, which slows down her movements: 'si è lasciata andare a lungo sotto la pioggia'.<sup>237</sup> Although bad weather gets under Giustina's skin, she does not protect herself from it: she walks slowly, exposing her body to raindrops, which filter into her microcosm: 'Cammina piano, come abbandonandosi tutta alla pioggia, deliberatamente'.<sup>238</sup> Later on, the troubled reality which is rooted in Giustina's life puts her in an awkward situation. Her feet represent the action, which is postponed and even when the girl walks, the narrator constantly emphasizes her immobility and her slow movements: 'Quasi senza accorgersene si è messa a camminare, a passi lenti. La pioggia la bagna tutta'.<sup>239</sup> Giustina's thoughts blend with the reality which prevents her from walking and making a final decision

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

as to whether to remain in her village, or to move to Italy. The way in which the choice of the exile is asserted represents a further step towards exile.

### **3.3 Doubleness**

Facing the unexpected events in Istria, which bind Giustina under an incessant metaphorical rain, the character splits, contemplating two distinct entities within herself. One side anchors the girl to her homeland, while the other slowly sets out on the path towards exile. Traits of this internal division emerge when the girl from Petrovia walks through her village and two opposing tensions drive her to an internal break, shaping a character, whose identity will never be pieced back together.

First of all, I shall consider Giustina's fluctuating position in relation to her provisional journey to Trieste. Her indecision leads the character to take into account both the possibility of remaining in Istria (or returning to Istria) or moving definitively to Italy. However, the decision seems to be postponed until the very end of the novel, as Giustina's doubleness prevents her from making her intentions clear. I will now focus in more detail on the genesis of Giustina's split and disjointed dynamic, which is the first strong reaction to exile. Let me start by considering the first time that the girl from Petrovia struggles to maintain her wholeness – while her centrifugal drives crack the subject.

The immobility which denotes the beginning of the novel, leaving the character in a rather peaceful and stable condition, quickly changes. Through the rain which impedes Giustina, letting the reader explore her inner conflicts, her microcosm is upset by uncertain movements, which lack harmony. She stands by a wall, while rain infiltrates her body and the only shelter is a branch of trees, but she also hesitatingly takes a step. Two opposing forces weigh on her body. The vertical one, which flattens her to the ground limiting her actions,

does not allow her to move: ‘Se ne sta immobile, come appiattita al suolo’.<sup>240</sup> She leans on a wall, looks at her soaked shoes and is passively subjected to the rain, incapable of moving. However, an opposing drive pushes her forward. Giustina crosses the village, attracted by disused houses: ‘Camminando, passa in rassegna casa per casa. I suoi occhi inquieti si posano di preferenza sulle case più grandi, tutte ormai vuote, sprangate’.<sup>241</sup> She walks slowly through puddles; sometimes, her slow movements appear to hinder a faster walk or a run.

Moving to a new place or remaining in the current one seems to be the origin of the character’s conflicting tensions and indecisions. The border pass does not help Giustina to come to a quick decision; on the contrary, it gives her the chance to consider several options, while the idea of returning to Istria causes the inner conflicts within her mind. Her indecision reveals itself progressively and takes root in Giustina’s soul, as the exilic reality weighs on her thoughts. The girl from Petrovia admits to being unprepared for her journey to Trieste:

Fuori ha ripreso a piovere e lei non ha molta voglia di affrontare nuovamente la pioggia, né di affrontare la giornata di domani, alzarsi, prendere la corriera, a Trieste è stata solo una volta, che cosa metterà nella valigia? per due o per più giorni?<sup>242</sup>

Far from being the peaceful coexistence of two forces, these incompatible trajectories disrupt Giustina’s existence, leading to the paradoxical situation of a character who combines inactivity and dynamism. The narrator describes this odd contamination as follows: ‘Si muove lentamente della sua pensosa immobilità’.<sup>243</sup> The result is that, although she is walking, she does not feel she is moving forward: ‘pur camminando, le pare di star ferma’.<sup>244</sup> The situation can be reversed, given that the girl is both able to walk standing still, but she can also be unaware of moving: ‘Quasi senza accorgersene si è messa a camminare’.<sup>245</sup> Moving or being

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

blocked under the rain does not represent two contradictory states, as the former does not exclude the latter and vice versa.

The overlapping odd situation does not last long. Giustina splits when she can no longer cope with the pressure imposed by her selves. As I have already considered, an internal division of the subject clearly emerges when she wanders among the streets, the fields and the houses of the village, under the rain. To be more specific, she is dripping wet and her heavy clothes swell her body, magnifying the impression of being overwhelmed by reality, when she realizes she cannot move. Here the character breaks away, as only the elusive part of herself is able to move forward, while the other is held back by her feet sinking in the street. In that specific moment, the disharmonic movements due to the simultaneous coexistence of opposing drives, leads to an inevitable rupture.

Muove il piede, fa un passo, raggiunge un'altra pozzanghera o un'altra pietra provvidenziale che sporge dal selciato, vede i muri grigi delle case che da ambo i lati si lascia via via alle spalle, eppure sente nel medesimo tempo che i suoi piedi pesano quintali e non è possibile sollevarli, e le pare che tutto ciò che la rende sicura del suo vero esistere in quel luogo, in quell'istante, rimanga fermo in un punto, e solo una parte fuggevole e stravagante di lei la preceda nel cammino. Ecco infatti che mentre quella si vede giunta davanti alla casa dei Vesnaver [...] lei in carne e ossa, si trova ancora all'incrocio della strada. Veramente è già sul selciato ruvido della strada dove non passano macchine, e perciò si accorge, nonostante l'immobilità in cui è imprigionata, di aver guadagnato un po' di strada, avendo fatto nel frattempo qualcosa. Di aver superato il breve tratto – non più di quattro metri – che, attraversando la strada maestra, al tortuoso sentiero tra le graie immette direttamente nella stradetta formatasi da sé e diretta al grosso del paese.<sup>246</sup>

The girl should either have been at the entrance of the village (at the first cross), which is subjected to a constant rain, or at the end of it, if she had reached Vesnaver's house, following the route taken by the faster self. However, she is in the two places simultaneously. The split is highlighted by a further clarification, which enhances the impossible reconciliation between the selves. Although the slower self is slowed down heavily by the rain, it is only delayed and not blocked. From this moment on, the same route is taken at different times by that which, in

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<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

the end, is revealed as two different entities, corresponding to Massimo Fusillo's definition of double:

si parla di doppio quando, in un contesto spaziotemporale unico, cioè in un unico mondo possibile creato dalla finzione letteraria, l'identità di un personaggio si duplica: un uno diventa due; il personaggio ha dunque due incarnazioni: due corpi che rispondono alla stessa identità e spesso allo stesso nome.<sup>247</sup>

The girl from Petrovia's two selves are experienced at the same time, giving rather different impressions which create puzzling images, similar to hallucinations. Doubles may present different forms, like the alternation of two different states, the production of a mirroring image, a look-alike person or a metamorphosis. Several definitions can be applied, depending on the interaction and the composition of the two components. Fusillo lists some of these, among which are 'specular characters', to indicate characters whose antagonism is so marked as to obtain an effect of unity, as in Stevenson's *Master of Ballantrae*; 'complementary characters', those who, as in Pirandello's *Pari*, integrate harmonically shaping one identity; and 'apparent doubles' and 'oneiric doubles', like demonic possessions, persecutions and reincarnations etc.

The split of Giustina's self immediately assumes rather unique traits. The girl from Petrovia's scission can be compared to an internal break of the self, whose parts follow the movements of a pendulum. The character fluctuates from a more advanced position to a rearward one, pandering to Giustina's fastest self, which explores the path in front, and chased by the slower part, which stops and even moves back. The rhythm of the fluctuation is dictated by the exilic troubled decision. The girl anticipates herself, but facing the harshness of the external reality, withdraws like a snail until she is able to carry on again: 'Lentamente, come una chiocciola che sporge dapprima le corna, riviene alla luce'.<sup>248</sup> The withdrawal of the subject is highlighted in several forms as, for example, when Giustina wants to occupy as

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<sup>247</sup> Massimo Fusillo, *L'altro e lo stesso. Teoria e storia del doppio* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>248</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 138.

little space as possible: ‘La ragazza è tutta rannicchiata, il mento abbassato sul petto, desiderosa di una sola cosa, di occupare al mondo meno spazio possibile’.<sup>249</sup>

The fluctuation of the subject is elaborated in the sequence of images in which the girl splits and one side of herself tends to step back and hide in the forest at the back of the village: ‘E le verrebbe spontaneo di fare un passo indietro fino a raggiungere l’oscura stradetta tortuosa e poi, sempre retrocedendo a passi lenti, raggiungere il ‘laco’ e il cocuzzolo e il bosco’.<sup>250</sup> Nevertheless, the other part of herself comes on stage moving forward quickly: ‘Qui sente un improvviso impulso di correre da suo padre’.<sup>251</sup> It also feels a compulsion to run and reaches the village in its escape from the lorry:

Raggiunge rapida il successivo tronco di gelso non curandosi d’altro, ora, che di sfuggire all’orribile drago che sempre più guadagna terreno facendo sussultare lievemente la groppa alta di masserizie. E quand’è passato, si trova come per incanto incollata a quel gesto [...] in mezzo al paese.<sup>252</sup>

The wandering between these two poles reflects the random thoughts and memories which stop the character in her tracks, as opposed to the freer part, which anticipates the future. The redoubling of the girl certainly constitutes a further chance to make a comparison between the previous life and that which she will be forced into. Thanks to the double, parallel lives are experienced simultaneously, as confirmed by Freud: ‘All the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will’.<sup>253</sup> If doubling allows the character to experience a different life from its own, it also fragments the self.

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<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>253</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in James Strachey (ed.), *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 211-212.

The girl cannot belong to one place or another, because her double soul does not guarantee a full wholeness. This discrepancy is doomed to make coordination impossible, even when the slower part joins the other. After the collision of Giustina's drives and the consequent split, she fluctuates along the path of her two selves, which sometimes seems to assemble them:

Aguzzando lo sguardo può ora vedere l'incrocio delle strade, laggiù, sgombro d'ogni presenza viva. Anche l'altra parte di lei l'ha dunque raggiunta lentamente, un po' riluttante, in quella specie di riparo dalla pioggia che le procurano le tegole fuoruscenti e sconnesse della stalla degli Stringher.<sup>254</sup>

The gap between the two dimensions widens and narrows, as one side moves faster than the other. The more elusive part reaches the crossroads and waits for the other, which has been slowed down by the rain. They are like two instruments, which at times play harmonically, but at other times are out of tune with one another. This art of combining independent melodies (which, although independent, form a homogeneous texture) is related to exile by Said:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*.<sup>255</sup>

The twisted proceeding of Giustina's split flows like a contrapuntal melody, rather than representing a single viewpoint. The path towards exile is shaped by two voices, which intermingle, weaving together a sophisticated narrative. Although sometimes the self seems to be pieced together, an unfit fragment will always spoil the reconciliation. Also, in the case of a temporary reunion of the two parts, the elusive part immediately moves away from the other, jeopardizing the identity of the self and undermining the complex relationship with its real home. Even though one part cannot be reversed into the other and asymmetry prevails,

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<sup>254</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 70.

<sup>255</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on exile', p. 186.

one self is able to talk to the other: ‘e dice semplicemente alla parte di sè rimasta a letto con i vestiti umidi indosso: “Guarda: sembra di essere alla fabbrica”’.<sup>256</sup>

In another passage the faster side looks for the slower one, which materializes in the figure of a real woman. The constant search for the other self leads Giustina to a misleading identification. Further on in the story, when Giustina reaches the entrance of the refugee camp following her journey through the Karsic plateau, her eyes look at the floor, waiting for the other part of herself to leave. The fugitive self has already crossed the border and is going to visit her countrymen; while waiting for her next coach she looks around fearfully for familiar images:

Ha fatto già un paio di giri su se stessa guardando a terra furtivamente come avesse smarrito un minuscolo oggetto, quando i suoi occhi levatisi improvvisamente al suono di un clacson abbastanza vicino si incontrano con quelli di una donna ferma al limite opposto della strada, la quale ha tutta l’aria di starla a fissare già da un pezzo.<sup>257</sup>

From this moment on, the girl is captured by the eyes of a woman, who is staring at her intensely. Her presence is noticed by chance by Giustina, who arouses the girl’s curiosity. Although she wants to turn away, she is unable to, for the eyes of the woman in front of her mirror a familiar dimension.

Vorrebbe di colpo distogliere lo sguardo, ma qualcosa in fondo a quegli occhi la colpisce nell’anima e l’attrae irresistibilmente, tanto che, pur girata la testa da un lato, continua a guardare con la coda degli occhi rimasti immoti; è in realtà come se avesse davanti allo specchio i propri occhi quando alla stazione le si erano inumiditi di quelle due stille taglienti.<sup>258</sup>

The detailed description of the girl’s eyes when she arrives at the station, to which the passage refers, links the girl and the woman. They seem to share the same pair of lost pupils, which wander around restlessly and in which there emerge the light blue ‘stille taglienti’. The

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<sup>256</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 113.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

identification with the woman who looks intensely at her, including and excluding the girl – Giustina feels she is being followed by the woman before the encounter, but at the same time she seems to be the only one at which the woman does not look – reveals that the girl is attracted to a known dimension. By being magnetically captured by the woman, Giustina is spurred on to consider that she is mirroring the other part of herself. The girl seems to recognize herself in the woman's eyes, in which she perceives something intimate. Looking in the eyes of the mysterious woman, she argues that the latter can constitute 'l'altra parte di se medesima'.<sup>259</sup> Giustina immediately realizes her mistake, warned by the physical difference between the woman and herself. This blend underlines another aspect of Giustina's doubleness, which is the embodiment in another person:

Avverte in qualche modo che lo sdegno e la protesta dell'altra, lungi dall'essere rivolti a lei, sono indirizzati indistintamente a tutti tranne che alla sua persona, per cui distingue subito che ciò che l'ha colpita in fondo a quegli occhi ha da essere qualcosa d'intimamente buono e familiare, che le dà infatti la forza di sostenerne lo sguardo. Ha l'impressione che la donna l'abbia seguita passo per passo alla stazione fino a quell'angolo di strada, o, ancora prima, dalla sera precedente quando aveva vagato a lungo sotto la pioggia; e sarebbe quasi tentata di ravvisare in lei l'altra parte di se medesima, se la ragazza non fosse piuttosto bella e di qualche anno più vecchia, e non avesse dei bei capelli neri come imperlati di rugiada, che spiccano sul pallore del volto, e una fronte alta, come alto è il suo corpo, e le labbra carnose e scure e come gonfie da ripetuti morsi per trattenere il pianto.<sup>260</sup>

One side of Giustina looks for the other, being aware that the faster side may have been waiting for it. If the two selves cover the same route at a different speed, they also know that the other side can be found at any moment. In their constant chase of one another, they can be easily deceived by similar appearances, which do not correspond to the other part. A full reconciliation is denied by a progressive break of the self, which cannot be rebuilt. Attracted by the eyes of the woman, Giustina should ascertain that the latter cannot be her faster side. The plot enhances the difference between the two selves, as from an apparent double (due to an internal redoubling of the self), the other side almost becomes a real external presence.

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<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

Giustina's doubleness seems to fulfil another aim, which points to this phenomenon. Being double may be related to the idea of self-preservation, and means having more chances of survival. By doubling, the girl from Petrovia will be better able to fit into different contexts, increasing the possibility of adapting to the rules of the changing regime and to the new conditions in the country of destination. As underlined by Freud, it will become evident that doubleness is here the first reaction against the 'extinction' of the self and a defense against the threat of death. Giustina's double self emerges when her identity is at risk of being neglected, offering a further change in order to preserve her self.

Both in Otto Rank's *The Double* and Freud's essay, doubleness is considered a necessary condition to preserve the self, in order to have a better chance of being saved. In Freudian terms, 'doubling' is 'preservation against extinction', as 'for the "double" it was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an "energetic denial of the power of death"'.<sup>261</sup> The repetition of the self happens in Giustina's life when her identity is at risk of being nullified. If Giustina remains in Petrovia, or if she moves to Trieste, her original self would inevitably be distorted. Doubling herself would offer a better chance of preserving at least one of her selves, as remarked by Graziella Berto: 'Il gesto del raddoppiamento, della ripetizione avrebbe dunque avuto un ruolo di conferma, di rafforzamento: ciò che si teme di perdere viene moltiplicato'.<sup>262</sup> The actions taken by different parts of the subject lead to overlapping, thoughts and impressions, twisting the plot in a continuous alternation of the two sides.

The exile experiences a double life, showing a transition from the old country to a new uncertain one. This drastic change leads Giustina to split, in order to defend herself against annihilation. The two selves, which flow diachronically, correspond to a blocked side, which is slowed down by reality and to a more unstable part, which plays a more active role. Facing

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<sup>261</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 210.

<sup>262</sup> Gabriella Berto, *Freud, Heidegger: lo spaesamento* (Milano: Bompiani, 1998), p. 64.

the choice to remain in or to leave a country is not an easy decision for the exile. The split of the self prevents the exile from a univocal outcome, being subjected to opposing tensions. The muffled reality of the exile and the inner conflicts of the mind, due to the drastic impact with dramatic changes, will now be considered.

### **3.4 Exile: a discontinuous state of being**

The fragmented nature of Giustina's thoughts cannot be kept at bay. Her controversial state, which is made up of doubts, allusions, uncertainties, shifts and gaps, is defined by Aldo Camerino as an innermost universe that the reader can catch: 'nei suoi scompensi e brividi, nelle sue più rarefatte verità, che ci son fatte note per via di languori e tremori e dubbi e difficili comprensioni'.<sup>263</sup> The wandering of the subject from an anchored position to a slippery one typifies a narrative which is thought to destroy any chronological progression or coherent localization of the events, undermining also the structure of the plot. The reader filters this troubled universe, to discover a metaphysical dimension, in which underground introspections dictate the rhythm, confirming that, as suggested by Said, 'exile [...] is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being'.<sup>264</sup>

I shall analyse another extended episode, in which Giustina's double self is embodied in a human figure, to capture the more sophisticated aspects of her exile. This time the story is the result of intermingled passages, which reflect the constant fluctuation between her two sides. In Teresa's scene, the other woman mirrors how the girl's life could have been different if she had remained in Istria. The use of the 'conditional' mood is instrumental in this

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<sup>263</sup> Aldo Camerino, 'La ragazza di Tomizza', in *Il Gazzettino*, 2 July 1963, p. 3.

<sup>264</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on exile', p. 177.

situation and it shapes a rarefied atmosphere, which corresponds to the series of discrepancies which wrap up Giustina's thoughts.

Giustina seems to be talking to herself when Teresa filters into the plot. Although the dialogue between the girl and the woman is unsuccessful, the latter seems to be familiar with Giustina's troubles. Teresa has been abandoned by the man who made her pregnant and who then moved to a new country. What is relevant here is that Teresa's micro-story rotates around exile. The conversation is imbued with references to life abroad; the dialogue itself springs from Giustina's indecision over whether to move to Italy or to return to Istria. Teresa, as Giustina's double, seems a necessary stop before the girl's departure, as a final moment of confrontation before the farewell to her homeland. For this reason, the adverse weather conditions are even more significant, as reality has moved closer and closer to the character.

The girl is soaking wet, because she has been under incessant rain for such a long time. The metaphor of the rain gains strength here because it is perceived inside Teresa's house, in front of the fire. Giustina emphasizes this when she looks at the fire and she still feels the rain, or rather the drastic reality which has become deeply impressed into her life. Reality weighs heavily on both women and the comfort Teresa can offer to the girl is given indirectly. Silence prevails, while Teresa is knitting and Giustina's thoughts slowly flow together alongside her friend's activity.

La pioggia ora la sente guardando nel fuoco che arde a stento, alimentato com'è da rami di ginepro verde e da due pezzi di roverella ancor fresca, sui quali per giunta cade di quando in quando qualche gocciolone anneritosi nel camino. Ma ugualmente prova un po' di ristoro a sedere sulla panca del vecchio focolare, di fronte alla donna ancora giovane ma ormai per sempre donna e non più ragazza, chiusa in un silenzio di cui lei in cuor suo le è molto grata.<sup>265</sup>

The silent atmosphere in which the episode is set underlines more clearly that Teresa is knitting when Giustina comes to visit her. The woman opens the door, looks at the soaking

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<sup>265</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, pp. 74-75.

wet girl and does not even greet her. For a long half an hour, silence reigns between them. The silent approach of the two women underlines their lack of confidence in language. Words are compared to a long list of tins of sardines, which fall into a bigger box, where they seem even more unsuitable, if not ridiculous:

Uscendo d'un tratto da se stessa s'è sentita la lingua legata dal dubbio che le parole, proposte dalla mente e già confezionate come una ininterrotta fila di scatole di sardine pronte a cadere una alla volta nella cassa comune, non fossero buone, o peggio, fossero inadatte e ridicole.<sup>266</sup>

Teresa seems to be aware of her troubles even without talking explicitly to her, and their silence interrupted only by the crackling of the fire. The only other noise in the room is made by Teresa's knitting needles, around which thoughts are wrapped. The initial scene is described as follows:

Da una buona mezz'ora è nell'identica posizione a seguire per conto suo il filo dei pensieri: un pensiero a ogni punto di maglia; o forse è lo stesso pensiero a formarsi e a riaffiorarle nella mente, come diversi eppure identici sono i punti di maglia.<sup>267</sup>

The chain ('il filo dei pensieri')<sup>268</sup> is the metaphor that the narrator employs to explore Teresa's and, therefore, Giustina's minds. By focusing in detail on the activity of knitting, the reader is introduced to how Giustina's mind is working and how it is overwhelmed by the exilic decision that must be taken. In other words, exile, around which the story rotates, seems to be hinged on an idea, which through repetition develops. The narrator doubts whether thoughts originate in each single stitch, or maybe the same thought is repeated twice, while the reader immediately realizes that a single idea could be pointed out several times. The girl becomes aware that her thoughts can be reduced to one, which is presented and repeated

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<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

several times in different forms. The parallel with knitting leads to how Giustina's mind is working and is expanded later on:

Ma sembra parlare con se stessa, oppure che il suo pensiero giunto a quel punto preciso di maglia, sempre identico nella sostanza ma diverso nel modo di presentarsi alla mente, l'abbia ora macchinalmente portata a quella domanda [...] Ma l'altra è già passata avanti a formare un altro punto.<sup>269</sup>

The narrator is increasingly convinced that the same idea resurfaces in Teresa's mind, also ruling Giustina's thoughts and suggesting that the girl and the woman are now in synch. The act of knitting itself links the women, whose thoughts revolve around the repetition of a single stitch. Teresa's new stitch leads Giustina to move to a new idea, or rather to the same idea reformulated in a different way. Continuity and discontinuity are intrinsically linked. Does Giustina's mind only trace one idea – the progressive break of the self from its home – which is constantly formulated in variegated forms?

The reader gets used to a disjointed reality, in which a single thought is briefly exposed in one of its forms, and then suddenly interrupted, taken back and transformed several times. The encounter of the two women is characterized by a few sentences, after which Teresa seems to give up: 'Ma l'altra ha ripreso a parlare, e ora con un certo accanimento, agucchiando in fretta, come rifacendo velocemente il percorso dei pensieri e dei punti di prima'.<sup>270</sup> Giustina's attention is often distracted, as she contemplates the effects of Teresa's comments on her life. Even if the latter continues her speech, the girl no longer follows her words. The idea sinks under the reality, framing Giustina's labyrinthine path towards exile, which constantly blends with the rhythm imposed by knitting.

Although there are breaks, the same thoughts resurface in another fragmented dialogue between the two women, before becoming upset when a stitch is not perfect: 'si è rimessa a lavorare, senza più lo zelo di prima, ma facendo schioccare le labbra a ogni punto che non le

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

vien bene, infastidita'.<sup>271</sup> The dialogue turns subterranean, while the fire seeks to warm up Giustina. It flows absent-mindedly and rather disconnectedly, until Teresa interrupts the scene another time. She takes both knitting needles in her left hand, rolling out the ball of wool so as not to waste time: 'Ora ha preso entrambi gli aghi nella sinistra e con l'altra mano sta tirando il filo del gomitolo, avvantaggiandosi quanto le è più possibile per la prossima ripresa'.<sup>272</sup> Knitting unravels the girl's blanket of thoughts. The crucial core, which involves the mind of the exile, is slowly disentangled; it runs partly beneath the ground of the surface, like a Karsic river, emerging now and then in different forms.

During the dialogue between the two women, Giustina imagines how her life would have been if she had remained in Istria. This parenthesis completely excludes Teresa, who is marked by her decision to remain. The elusive self of Giustina facing Teresa's condition as a projection of how her life would have been is possibly the moment in which doubleness is emphasized most strongly. Thanks to the use of conditional tenses, a tool which represents hypothesis par excellence and facts that can only be realized to determinate conditions, the episode assumes a stronger sense of elusiveness. In Giustina's case, this tool is clearly adopted to emphasize the girl's split and how she is enveloped in the inner turmoil of her mind.

When Giustina's microcosm rotates around the decision she must make, which becomes a pressing duty, she thinks back to a normal working day. She describes how that day would have been, if she had remained in Istria. The day after she left, Giustina would have worked in the Dragonja's factory, where her daily routine would have again marked her life. The narrator immediately notices that her daily routine has taken on a new significance. The most common gestures are immediately noted down, as they assume a different meaning. The risk of losing her country is reflected in the attachment to her life in that place.

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<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

‘Domani’ pensa, ‘domani’. E, come a farlo apposta, lei che di questo non si è mai interessata, saprebbe benissimo ora come occupare tutte le ore e i minuti di domani, se non ci fosse di mezzo quella decisione sentita da lei ora come un preciso dovere. Sarebbe la prima nel centro del paese, l’indomani mattina, tra i rumori discreti del villaggio che riprende vita [...] ad aspettare il camion delle cinque. Salirebbe come sospinta in alto dagli operai che per tutto il tragitto fumerebbero un po’ acidi prendendosi in giro o guardando stralunati quel tale che ha voglia di raccontarla così presto [...] Il cancello della fabbrica è aperto e loro, ragazze di campagna, sono sempre le prime a entrare. In quel quarto d’ora d’attesa lei andrebbe nei negozi a comperare quanto potrebbe servirle nella giornata per sè e per Teresa, meno il pane che acquisterebbe nel riposo delle dieci, all’ultima sfornata.<sup>273</sup>

The detailed description of the girl’s routine clashes with the use of the conditional, because hypothetical actions are described as familiar ones. The conditional here stresses Giustina’s split and, for the first time, she foresees how her life would have been different. Giustina would have gone to the factory and met her fellow workers – but just as an hypothesis – if she had remained in Istria. Can this condition still be fulfilled? She will never have a future in Istria; only the hypothesis could live under the reign of the conditional. Despite the fact this impossible option clearly presents unreliable traits, the girl is almost deceived by it. The narrator points out that Giustina’s daily routine is described as if she would have gone to the factory that day: ‘come se davvero avesse preso il camion delle tre quel giorno stesso’.<sup>274</sup> The rarefied reality of the conditional tense blends with an atemporal present, which postpones actions as much as possible. The conditional passages are meant to recall that, far from being real, actions are only thoughts. Once more the exile seems to be the one who is pushed into abandoning his country, but at the same time cannot move towards a new one.

Giustina’s sleepiness, which has allowed her a long, detailed digression on her daily routine in the factory, ends when Teresa’s familiar dialogue breaks the girl’s thoughts: ‘Teresa ora le sta parlando, e lei è fissa a guardarla; tuttavia le parole le arrivano distintamente, riuscendo a penetrare quella specie di sonnolenza che l’ha presa. Sono parole

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<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[...] che le pare di aver già udito altre volte'.<sup>275</sup> From vague clues of the exilic experience, which are interrupted and taken up again through knitting, her thoughts become more explicit. Exile has become the real fulcrum around which the women's attention converges. In particular, Teresa points out the insurmountable gap between the one who decided to leave and the one who remained. Teresa emphasizes the changes from one's own country ('tra gente che parla ognuno una lingua diversa'),<sup>276</sup> but she also gives a hint of the feeling which separates them.

It inevitably follows that Giustina expresses her controversial choice, which seems to her almost a condemnation. The decision which the girl cannot make until the end is offered to the reader several times and holds the dialogue with Teresa, leading to the conclusion of it. The first time Giustina mentions it, she doubts the possibility of returning: "Ritorni in giornata?" "No".<sup>277</sup> However, Teresa is not satisfied with her answers and wants to investigate further. Giustina, who fears a more decisive participation of the woman, retreats, taking her time and space in the narrative; she wonders whether her father would have been able to live on, if two days in Trieste would be enough for her. She seems very unmotivated to face reality the following day and she loses herself in another long digression – while Teresa is knitting. Finally the decision is made and, this time, Giustina is inclined towards returning: "Tornerò" risponde lei ed esce, mentre Teresa, la testa china su una spalla, tiene la porta aperta per rischiararle la strada'.<sup>278</sup>

Exile is connected to knitting because it represents the subterranean idea from which everything originates. The rhythm is articulated in the twisted reality, which is formed by partial misunderstandings, blanks, omissions and an indepth investigation of inner conflicts.

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Parallel implied stories experienced in the girl's mind, which reveal themselves in the narrative, add inconsistency to reality.

Per districare le attorcigliate componenti di questo dramma Tomizza ha avuto l'accortezza di non ricorrere ai modi tradizionali del racconto, mettendosi cioè sopra le cose, sovrastandole. Egli ha cercato invece la via più stretta e difficile: quella di penetrare dentro le cose, di catturarle nel loro aurorale e caotico esistere, come in una minuta fotocopia dei momenti della coscienza.<sup>279</sup>

To penetrate the exilic mind, the narrator employs a subject, which is swamped in the narrative. It weaves through the story, wandering amongst two selves and several intermingled passages. As I have already noted, the girl from Petrovia is immersed in rare events, which are sometimes powerful enough to determine her reactions and influence any further development of the story. Little space is left for dialogues and encounters, as 'Nessuno sa bene il dramma della ragazza, neppure lei lo può sondare bene e lo spirito della narrazione non ne può cogliere che qualche monologo e poche situazioni esterne'.<sup>280</sup> For this reason, the encounter with Teresa, the day before her journey to Trieste, represents an important passage in the novel. The situation spurs the narrator to unmask the complex mechanism ruling the girl's mind.

In Giustina's story, the discontinuous state of the girl can be easily identified through her gestures, in particular when considering a silent activity around which both the girl and the woman's life are surrounded. Exile spurs Teresa's knitting in multiple forms and Giustina's contemplation of her movements emerge as a broken state of being. The mind of the exile is led by interrupted passages which correspond to a life which will never be restored, not even by the character itself.

Ideas flow in Giustina's mind, but they cannot be entirely grasped: 'La illumina ora il barlume di un'idea che però non riesce ad afferrare nella sua completezza per poter esserne

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<sup>279</sup> Giorgio Bergamini, 'Sotto la cenere cova il primo fuoco', p. 3

<sup>280</sup> Alberto Bassan, 'La ragazza di Petrovia', in *Lecture*, 3 (1963), p. 344.

intieramente rischiarata'.<sup>281</sup> Light and darkness alternate within the working of her mind, but the total comprehension of ideas remains inaccessible. Along the way of the exile, previous indecisions and discrepancies are doomed to take on a new significance. The narrative receives the girl's thoughts as a lack of clarity determined by the idea of exile in which she is forced. The flowing of thoughts in the exilic mind presents an underground reality, which has impeded the character's movements from the beginning of the story, even though the constant presence of exile in Giustina's mind is finally revealed. This thought has been playing on her mind for a while, and has lasted an eternity. In the long term, Giustina has fluctuated between the innermost part of herself and the outer. When she realizes that she has made a new contact with the external reality, a long annoying sound suddenly disappears:

E percepisce uno strano silenzio tutt'intorno, come se destandosi da un pensiero che l'ha tenuta prigioniera per non più di un attimo durato un'eternità e riaprendo i sensi al noto mondo circostante, lo ritrovasse ora interamente mutato. E solo ora si accorge che lo strano suono rauco che l'ha accompagnata lungo tutto il cammino, giunta lei qui, è improvvisamente cessato.<sup>282</sup>

Giustina's life cannot be fully understood, as discontinuity prevents the reader from following a linear development of her story. The exilic fulcrum which dictates her life and the genesis of this troubled microcosm confirms exile as a disjoined state of being: 'comincia a generarsi via via la netta sensazione di vivere e di esistere solo a irregolari intermittenze del reale affiorare delle cose'.<sup>283</sup> Crossing the border means definitively marking the break between the self and its homeland. Giustina's reactions facing the new reality will now be considered.

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<sup>281</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 143.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

### 3.5 The surreal border

The different sides of Giustina seem to follow the same path towards exile, but at different speeds. Most of the time one self seeks the other; sometimes they meet – as was seen on Petrovia’s crossroads – at other times they are deceived by an embodiment that could have represented their double. Undoubtedly, the more the path extends, the more the selves break away. While Giustina’s more elusive and extravagant side takes leave from Teresa, crossing the border and reaching the refugee camp, the slower part remains in Istria. By analysing Giustina’s path to Trieste, I will consider how she deals with the border, a place which assumes particular traits, for, as I will argue, it does not effectively divide different entities. Nevertheless, the boundary transforms Giustina, whose life and perceptions will change (her feet cannot touch the ground). In the end, the barrier assumes the unconventional meaning of being an estranged line, which will kill Giustina, when she tries to return to Istria.

When Giustina emerges from under her blanket of thoughts, she realizes that the following day has come and that she must take the coach to reach the refugee camp in Trieste, where her fellow countrymen are provisionally located. The first time the border appears, Giustina fails to recognize it. The narrator sets the scene of the border in a usual setting. Although the reader is aware that an exile is taking place, the passage aims to underline the irruption of the border in habitual, daily circumstances. The result is that it is perceived as a foreign and displacing presence, which brings strange feelings:

Per un buon tratto lei si sentì davvero uno dei tanti passeggeri che si recavano a Trieste per far delle compere o incontrarsi col cugino. Ma la sensazione strana di cui è preda soprattutto ora davanti allo sfilare degli identici roveri, aveva cominciato a farsi luce non appena si era trovata a tu per tu con l’ultimo milizionèr, il quale, appoggiato alla sbarra dipinta a tre colori, aveva scherzato parlandole in croato e a lei era parso di trovarsi davanti a Branko.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Tomizza's girl is struck by the sudden appearance of a border on her trip to Trieste. Once she crosses it, she realizes that the landscape that surrounds her in the new country is the same as the one that she left at home. Apart from the reference to Branko, Giustina's head of department, the girl also draws a parallel to the natural elements (the same oaks are present in both countries).

The border irrupts in the life of the girl of Petrovia, insomuch as her trip to Trieste turns into an unreal experience. On the one hand, she barely recognizes the tricoloured bar of the new border, which suddenly appears on her journey to divide a similar territory. On the other hand, these changes shape a new context, where familiar and unfamiliar traits are dangerously mixed, leading the character to an awareness of the drastic and irretrievable transformations. Together with the sense of displacement of the character, an unreal aspect emerges, due to the absurdity of the situation.

Giustina begins to live in a more accentuated suspended dimension, once she crosses the border. As suggested by Joseph Brodsky, exile is a 'metaphysical condition',<sup>285</sup> which corresponds to an impalpable state. Reality and imagination flow together in Giustina's story: 'attraverso questo sconvolgere, ricomporre e intersecare i piani del reale e dell'immaginato, negli scarti, sviluppi o regressioni [...] prendono valore, quasi una dimensione metafisica, i fatti narrati da Tomizza ne *La ragazza di Petrovia*'.<sup>286</sup>

The fluctuation between concrete and illusory elements leads the character to incredulity. For example, when she takes a coach to reach the Italian refugee camp, scepticism dominates her thoughts. She starts considering the possibility of being deceived by the driver, because she is unable to recognize the places to which she has been taken, where there are 'carabinieri' and people dressed in their Sunday best: 'l'avevano lasciata accomodarsi in corriera e, facendole intendere una cosa per l'altra, l'avevano portata in una località diversa da

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<sup>285</sup> Joseph Brodsky, 'The Condition we Call Exile', p. 4.

<sup>286</sup> Giorgio Bergamini, 'Sotto la cenere cova il primo fuoco', p. 3.

quella segnata sul biglietto di corsa, in un luogo dove c'erano i carabinieri [...] e nel quale lei non intendeva assolutamente recarsi'.<sup>287</sup> Through her bewildered eyes – ‘occhi smarriti’<sup>288</sup> – flows a reality which Giustina could not have imagined, in a similar way to the very crowded bus station in Trieste, the strange entrance of the refugee camp, and people asking for dinars at the border. The character looks for an explanation which cannot be found.

This series of images brings to mind Eva Hoffman's passage, in which a line divides her life in two and she can no longer look towards landscapes for the familiar:

From now on, my life will be divided into two parts, with the line drawn by that train. After a while, I subside into a silent indifference, and I don't want to look at the landscape anymore; these are not the friendly fields, the farmyards of Polish countryside; this is vast, dull, and formless.<sup>289</sup>

Resignation overcomes the character, whose blindness hides her eyes. The border not only splits past and future, it also marks a new awareness. In Giustina's story, the sense of incredulity quickly leads to an absence of feelings (which seems to echo Hoffman's 'silent indifference') when the second bus passes the last village. The deception the driver seems to have inflicted on Giustina does not lessen; rather, the character's sense of mistrust increases it. The journey may correspond to an itinerary of inner thoughts, rather than to reality.

Ma se ora guardava oltre, dopo che la corriera, passate le ultime case della città, aveva preso a scalare lentamente l'altipiano, scopriva in se stessa qualche cosa di nuovo, che non era tanto sensazione, quanto assenza piuttosto di ogni sentire. Le pareva che tutto il viaggio compiuto sinora, e quell'ultimo tratto in particolare, fosse immaginazione della mente febbricitante di lei stesa ancora sul letto con gli abiti umidi indosso, costruita nell'attimo in cui si era appisolata e aveva tentato di raffigurarsi il viaggio del giorno dopo, dal confine alla città, della quale non poteva avere che un'immagine superficiale, fino all'ultima località dove doveva arrivare e che, essendo ancora campagna, la sua fantasia non poteva farle apparire se non in una veste familiare, ossia popolata dagli stessi roveri alti e sbandati, le stesse pietre bianche e i cespugli di ginepro, i grebani, i rovi, i pini veduti nell'infanzia quando pascolava le pecore degli Stringher a Vellania e tutto lungo la costiera di Salvore.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 109.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>289</sup> Eva Hoffman, p. 100.

<sup>290</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, pp. 110-111.

The ‘totale smarrimento’<sup>291</sup> caused by the impact with the exilic reality leads Giustina to think about the intervention of her imagination. She doubts her senses, as if she has been under the influence of phantasy. She cannot truly believe that the new landscape, made of oak and stone walls, is similar to the Istrian one. Incredulity is supplanted by a sense of dizziness, above all when faced with the unreality of events; Giustina observes people and places, which she barely recognizes:

Al senso di vuoto si sovrappone ora quello più preciso di stanchezza fisica che le dà le vertigini e da cui comincia a generarsi via via la netta sensazione di vivere e di esistere solo a irregolari intermittenze del reale affiorare delle cose sulla generale assurdità e irrealtà delle cose stesse che le si affollano di dentro e di fuori: gli stessi luoghi, la stessa gente, l’immaginarsi e il vero ritrovarsi di lei lì, nella sua intima e dolorosa essenza. Di modo che non sembra più meravigliarsi di nulla.<sup>292</sup>

Belief takes over Giustina, who seems to accept the absurd reality which surrounds her, even though she is struck by people who change once the border is crossed. When she meets Dele in the refugee camp, she immediately understands that their relationship is different. The woman looks at her in a strange way and, for the first time, Giustina does not confuse the new reality with the previous one. Dele looks different; she has put on weight, seen under the light of the streetlamp:

La guarda in modo nuovo, con altri occhi, e le sembra che il posto in cui la ritrova dopo l’addio tra le case di Petrovia potrebbe essere qualsiasi luogo al mondo fuorchè Petrovia. Le appare anche ingrassata e gialla sotto la luce fioca del lampione.<sup>293</sup>

Also the boys of her village seem to have changed their physiognomy: ‘i nostri giovanotti, passato il confine, avrebbero addirittura cambiato fisionomia’.<sup>294</sup> The girl carefully observes the ‘lui’, who has changed from an arrogant person to someone who is unusually nice: ‘e lui è diventato persino gentile, ha cambiato addirittura faccia e modo di vita [...], rinunciando forse

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<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

alla parte più vera di se stesso'.<sup>295</sup> He also quickly shifts from one attitude to another: 'Ma ciò che maggiormente la sorprende è la facilità con cui passa da un atteggiamento all'altro (da accigliato è ridiventato sereno e si è ancora oscurato)'.<sup>296</sup>

The refugee camp, where people have changed, offers rather bizarre connections, confirming that strange episodes are now considered normal. The initial shock of the girl becomes an incredulous observation of reality. Strange events appear to flow in the life of exiles and are considered normal, and vice versa: 'le cose più comuni diventano strane e quelle più strane appaiono del tutto normali; che non avrebbe mai potuto formarlesi nella mente se si fosse trovata da lui nella casa tra i susini a Petrovia'.<sup>297</sup>

Facing the distorted reality of the exile, Giustina appears to accumulate several discrepancies and oddities until absurdity takes root within herself, so that the character does not touch the ground but is suspended in the air. This sensation of suspension is furthered when a group of people move towards her in the refugee camp and she withdraws until she is under a streetlamp, which is then lit:

Sta considerando tutto ciò e prova una sempre più angosciosa sensazione di vuoto davanti a tutte quelle cose e alla loro absurdità – è un ritrovarsi sospesi nell'aria senza provare malore alcuno, all'infuori di un po' di disagio e di perplessità per non poter toccare terra con i piedi [...] Quando vede il gruppo avanzare deciso verso di lei, si sente come spinta ancora più in alto, dove minima si fa ormai la possibilità di toccare terra coi piedi. E istintivamente arretra di qualche passo verso un palo di ferro su cui è innestato un lampione che s'illumina non appena essa si è appoggiata con la schiena alla base.<sup>298</sup>

The relevance attributed to the ground – through the form of a flying character – constitutes a new relevant element. From the beginning of Giustina's journey, and in particular from the point where she gets off the bus, the girl does not seem to touch the ground. Small flashes – 'sentendosi di nuovo, e questa volta suo malgrado, con i piedi a terra'<sup>299</sup> – represent the girl

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<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

who walks on the ground between the barracks of the refugee camp. The feeling of not being able to touch the ground follows Giustina until she decides to return to Istria: ‘Non avvertendo i piedi a terra, scivola rasente il gruppo, sguscia oltre il cancello, e quand’è sulla strada asfaltata ancora non sente terreno solido sotto le scarpe’.<sup>300</sup> The impossibility of establishing any relationship with a new country and, therefore, to live metaphorically on air, characterizes Giustina’s escape from the refugee camp. The ground constitutes the challenge for the exile: ‘Si avvia, dapprima a lenti passi come misurando il terreno sotto i piedi con un vago sorriso di trionfo o di sfida’.<sup>301</sup> Returning to Istria would represent a triumph – being able to touch the ground again – but would that still be possible?

The ground is the fulcrum around which rotates a wider exilic life. In the refugee camp, exiles look at it and smile, imagining Petrovia. Many times exiles look down, magnetically attracted to the ground. However, the new reality corresponds to the exile’s fondness for his homeland and cannot be traced back to the original country:

Gusto sta intanto chiedendole qualcosa di Petrovia. Con la testa tra le mani, seduto comodamente vicino alla stufetta elettrica, ha gli occhi bassi e sorride, come se per terra, sotto lo sguardo, avesse in piccolo l’intero paese, casa per casa, dal Dom alla corte dei Crisman confinante con il cimitero, e le stradette in mezzo, gli alberi, l’acquedotto, gli orti dietro le stalle che divengono via via campagna.<sup>302</sup>

Giustina, who does not walk on the ground, finds her countrymen’s physiognomies have changed, oddly overlapping Petrovia’s images with new ones, and clashes with the border on the way back to Istria. The new reality rejects her, the person who seeks to return home, as I will suggest for another of Tomizza’s novels, *L’albero dei sogni*. The indecision which unsettled her thoughts throughout the story is suddenly solved: Giustina will never be able to metaphorically set foot on the ground again, because she will never be able to reach her home village again.

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<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

When Giustina decides to return to Istria, she pays no attention to the last woman with whom she comes into contact in the refugee camp, who strongly advises her to renew the border pass if she wants to come back. In the grip of an unexplainable haste, Giustina aims to go back as soon as possible and she does not listen to the guard, who orders her to stop immediately. When she does not stop, the guard kills her on the border. This fact provides a cathartic end to the novel, underlining once again the role played by the border in the story. The dimension of the border should now be further investigated, to explore its full meaning.

The ‘irrational’ line of the border – ‘la irrazionale linea di confine, senza quasi volto per noi’<sup>303</sup> – which is experienced as an estranged component by local people, overwhelms the character from the beginning, marking both the boundary between two territories and that between life and death. It foreshadows the dramatic end, given that the first time the girl notices the border it appears as a dead head, disfigured by an old wound. The deadly image of the hill is described in the following passage: ‘Il colle prima non veduto (o forse quello stesso folto di alberi che la corriera ha poc’anzi fiancheggiato) le si para davanti come un’enorme testa di morto solcata nel mezzo da un’antica terribile ferita’.<sup>304</sup> The border here is perceived out of the corner of her eye and its image leaves its mark on the girl.

On another occasion, the girl notices the deadly image of the border, from which she catches a glimpse of Istria, where the fields are red, dry and divided by dirt roads.

Ma com’è giunta sulla cima del poggio e, volgendosi impaurita alla visione del grande colle nudo e tagliato lungo tutta una striscia nel mezzo (la quale se continuasse a correre lungo i poggi più bassi le striscerebbe ora sotto i piedi come la luce di un faro) scopre davanti a sé, giù a valle, più larghe strisce di rosso tagliate nel mezzo da una bianca strada, e campi percorsi da filari di viti scomposte e secche.<sup>305</sup>

The proximity of the border hangs in a more incisive way. The distant image of the dead head has come closer to the character and has virtually passed through her body. The clash with

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<sup>303</sup> Alberto Bassan, ‘La ragazza di Petrovia’, p. 345.

<sup>304</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La ragazza di Petrovia*, p. 115.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

external reality can also be associated with a border, which progressively threatens the character and is finally doomed to kill her. If the two previous references to the barrier have built powerful images, which cannot be easily forgotten by the reader (they constitute two evident analepsis in the story), the crucial encounter with the physical border seems to take place in an unnoticeable landscape, in which the border is not even mentioned. The death of Giustina itself is described as an enlarging sun which will colour the sky with an intense geranium red which then finally turns purple.

Fu infatti un largo sole quello che la accecò improvvisamente dopo ch'ebbe udito la stessa intimazione a fermarsi – *stòj, stòj* – ripetuta due volte dietro a un lontano cespuglio quasi con la stessa voce gutturale del capo-reparto Branko, e che per lei suonò nell'aria assordata dalle cicale come un caldo invito a proseguire, espresso in una lingua non sua ma ora ancora più familiare della sua. E il sole si allargò smisuratamente fino a comprendere in sé tutta l'aria e a coprire tutto il cielo, che si fece di colpo rosso come un geranio. [...] Ma non fa in tempo a provarne vergogna, perché le gambe vacillano e il cielo diventa viola.<sup>306</sup>

Giustina does not stop at the command '*stòj, stòj*' (which means 'stop'). Crossing the border has been almost a surreal experience, which strengthens the disrupted condition of the exile, but it is also a drastic collision with reality:

I personaggi del romanzo sono [...] essenzialmente degli individui sradicati: non solo per la condizione materiale di profughi in cui si trovano, quanto piuttosto per una sorta di rottura del loro equilibrio psicologico, in conseguenza di eventi di cui non si rendono conto appieno pur subendoli drammaticamente.<sup>307</sup>

A crucial discrepancy takes place on the border, where the narrator meshes together well-known and foreign traits. In particular, the Croatian language (which brings to mind Branko's voice) with which the guard gives the command seems more an invitation to cross the border, rather than an order to stop. The guard intended to stop her, but having unsuccessfully given his command, kills her. At that moment, the linguistic ambiguity plays a decisive role in the

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<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>307</sup> Giuseppe Costanzo, 'La ragazza di Petrovia', in *Avanti*, 9 June 1963, p. 6.

story, unveiling the most displacing side of borders. Giustina understands Croatian better than her native tongue, but does not stop at the command. It follows that in a frontier land, idioms are not sharply divided by the line of the border, whilst hybridity prevails. The two adjacent territories should not be seen as two opposing entities, which end in a line. This also happens in other contexts, as writes Josiah Heyman in his essay *Cultural Theory and the Us-Mexico border*: ‘Many borders in the world split closely related, if not identical, social and cultural groups’.<sup>308</sup>

Borders constitute a real challenge for Tomizza’s characters, on which the familiar and the unfamiliar are twisted and reversed. They represent the most evident form of incommutability between people and the harshness of an artificial split. The border appears when characters are unprepared for it; as in Giustina’s case, it comes rather unexpectedly. The rules of the border are ignored by the character, who clashes with an unrecognizable command. The non-native language, which becomes a familiar tongue, underlines once more the border’s unnaturalness.

A parallel linguistic displacement on the border is confirmed by *L’albero dei sogni*’s episode, in which Stefano and his father are going to their native Istrian village, where the father wants to die. The boundary further emphasizes the lack of comprehension between them and the impossible reconciliation, but it also underlines how Tomizza’s characters accommodate the two languages within themselves, inevitably coming into conflict with an external reality that imposes univocal linguistic identities:

Giungemmo al confine e l’aria rimaneva fuori a sventagliare le cravatte delle guardie popolari. Il padre boccheggiante non nascondeva il proprio sdegno; diceva ‘muoio’ e io gridavo ‘*hitro*, presto’ nell’inavveduto e risibile tentativo, diventato vizio mentale, di promuovere in extremis l’impossibile riconciliazione.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Josiah Heyman, ‘Cultural Theory and the Us-Mexico border’, in Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson (eds.), *A Companion to Border Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 52.

<sup>309</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 166.

Where father and son use different languages on a border, which now separates the homeland from the new country, the character is led to a puzzling feeling. These passages represent a key moment of my analysis, because they confirm that from this moment on, Stefano of *L'albero dei sogni* – and more generally Tomizza's characters – will experience a deep sense of estrangement that will never be eased, as I will consider in the following chapter. Tomizza's borders intrude in characters' lives, shaking their worlds and highlighting a division which is felt to be unnatural. The consequences of a life in exile, and the impossibility of restoring the lost balance, will complete the analysis of the exilic process, which began with the troubled choice to leave the country.

## Chapter 4

### Life abroad: estrangement in *L'albero dei sogni*

#### 4.1 Twice a stranger

In Tomizza's *La ragazza di Petrovia*, the author deals with exile, defined as the moment of departure from one's own home country. The next phase of his writing initiates a new exilic stage. If exile constitutes only the circumstance in which one struggles to make a clear decision whether to remain in or to leave the homeland, then estrangement accomplishes this phenomenon. The act of becoming a stranger — most of Tomizza's characters who cope with life abroad are exemplary in this sense — means being unable to adjust to and fit into a foreign context, which challenges any well-established reference point, increasing a sense of laceration and displacement.

The figure of the stranger indicates the person who does not belong to a specific community. As suggested by Umberto Curi, he is 'straniero proprio perchè non ha né *padre* né *patria*'<sup>310</sup>, and does not share the same origins with natives (finding himself in a different country, he may have 'lost' his country and family, and, in the majority of cases, his tongue too). Being catapulted into a foreign context, where the new life brings frequent misunderstandings, lack of comprehension and troubled relationships, is the challenging dimension faced by the stranger.

The Istrian exile leads Tomizza's characters to experience this condition, with a profound sense of not belonging. Being an Istrian stranger represents an uncharacteristic position, because it automatically means being a stranger in at least two different senses. Due to the stratification of different cultures, the Adriatic peninsula presents the composite reality

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<sup>310</sup> Umberto Curi, *Lo straniero* (Milano: Cortina, 2010), p. 9.

which I have taken into account in detail in the previous chapters. The double identity of its inhabitants presents rather problematic consequences, because once the choice of favouring the Italian or the Croatian side is required, people struggle to find a satisfactory solution. Favouring only one side, they admit that the harmonious union of their distinctive origin cannot be pieced back together. Discontent surfaces immediately when people realize that both in Italy and in Yugoslavia one side tends to oppress the other, preventing the re-establishment of the lost dimension.

*L'albero dei sogni*, which is the novel considered in this chapter, looks at the character's estrangement. The story, which is divided into three parts separated by gaps in the plot, shows the main character's troubles in relation to the implosion of the Istrian peninsula. External events, which from time to time filter through the narrative, are shown alongside Stefano's vicissitudes. The young man, who had already faced the controversial aspects of his double belonging, is forced to leave his country. After a childhood in which he experienced initial tensions, the political changes force him to move permanently, making Stefano twice a stranger.

Two parallel exiles characterize this novel: the first comes unexpectedly to the reader and leads Stefano to Trieste. Here, the reader is compelled to understand one of the most relevant omissions in the plot – the character suddenly moves from the Istrian countryside to the streets of Trieste, which are in turmoil. His life is typified by loneliness, emotional upheaval and the inability to establish fruitful relationships. Stefano also begins to become aware of his differences from the group at large. Only in his encounter with another stranger, a Jewish girl, with whom he should have had something in common, does he find (mirrored) the mark which inevitably 'condemns' the stranger.

The failure of the first exile drives the character to consider the other pole of his identity, which is symbolized by the Yugoslav capital Belgrade. The Triestine parenthesis

leads Stefano to this contrasting choice, in order to investigate the ‘repressed’ side of his double identity. This second, even harsher exile further underlines the Istrian man’s sense of exclusion. After telling a lie to his relatives, and then taking the Orient Express to Belgrade, Stefano accepts the most challenging option. Moved by a hidden force, which characterizes the wandering stranger towards an ideal ‘elsewhere’, the process of ‘Balkanisation’ begins. In the Yugoslav capital, the linguistic difficulties, made even harder due to the incomprehensible alphabet, do not help Stefano to come to terms with his adverse conditions. Being a stranger means continuing to possess a sense of laceration and not belonging, but also being considered an intruder or an enemy, which leads the character to identity collapse.

Only by tracing this double route is it possible to fully understand the varied layers of Stefano’s estrangement. The young man is ‘due volte estraneo’,<sup>311</sup> because both in Italy and in Yugoslavia he is unable to find the hybrid place he left behind, putting himself at risk of being neglected by both sides of his double identity. Whatever decision Stefano makes, he is condemned to unfaithfulness. A double origin inevitably implies a betrayal: his maternal ‘Slav’ side weighs upon him during his stay in Trieste, then the ghost of the Italian father disturbs him in Belgrade, while if he had remained in Istria he would have been condemned to neutrality. But, paradoxically, the character’s betrayal of his origins springs from his fondness for his land (in the name of Istrian complexity, Stefano has left his homeland twice), which will progressively turn into a mirage.

First of all, I shall focus on the Triestine exile, in which the character unconsciously opts for one side of his identity to the detriment of the other. The rejection of this situation turns into a second exile in Belgrade, which further strengthens his estrangement. The use of mirrors within the plot will be analysed after having considered Stefano’s double exile. The

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<sup>311</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 159.

impossibility of regaining the lost dimension will further develop the meaning of Stefano's alienation.

## 4.2 Trieste

*L'albero dei sogni* deals with the double parallel exile of the main character Stefano, who expresses a sense of not belonging and exclusion, which seems also to be indicated by the gaps present in the plot. Indeed, the change of setting may come unexpectedly to the reader, as well as the political environment and the linguistic background, while the logical sequence of events is at risk of being put under strain, causing temporal crashes or overlapping. But above all, the omissions of relevant details in the story characterize the figure of the stranger.

Stefano's move from the Istrian countryside, where the character had lived, to Trieste, which represents his first exile, can be considered one of the most relevant breaks in the narrative. On frequent occasions, the character's contradictory choices bewilder the reader, whose effort consists in rebuilding a coherent sequence of events. However, this omission from the story underlines the surfacing of an 'inexpressible' world, which typifies the life of the character in the new city. In the hole which surrounds his figure, the reasons behind the decision to move, the farewell to the lost homeland, as well as the progressive approach to the new country, are expelled from the narrative, leaving space for some important unsolved questions. As suggested by Mario Lavagetto: 'Lo sconosciuto, lo straniero [...] propone un enigma, lo formula e sollecita una soluzione'.<sup>312</sup>

The Triestine digression comes unexpectedly to the reader. The previous episode of the novel, where Stefano's father is released, having been imprisoned for his Italianism, suddenly comes to an end, leading characters to exile through a quick series of unequivocal images.

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<sup>312</sup> Mario Lavagetto, *Lavorare con piccoli indizi* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), p. 201.

When Stefano's family finally returns home from the Istrian prison in which his father was incarcerated, the relationships between relatives have changed due to a lack of communication; but the landscape of Istria appears to be inhospitable, as well. For instance, the tired face of the father is reflected in the darkness of the night, which hinders the family in their recognition of familiar places:

Faceva tanto buio che non mi accorsi del bivio Tramòn né delle prime case di Giurizzani. La corriera ci lasciò nel fango ghiacciato di una strada, fra due siepi secche sopra le quali brulicava una distesa di stelle fitte e lucenti come carta vetrata.<sup>313</sup>

The inevitable conclusion is that Stefano's mother begins to prepare bags, under the motionless gaze of her husband. Very few elements are given to the reader, who may easily empathize with an unworthy imprisonment and the consequent rush after the release, but cannot fully grasp the chaotic movements of Stefano's family.

The conclusive scenes of the first part of the novel lead the reader to an expectation of a journey, or to be more exact an escape, even though Stefano's mother's suitcase does not give any indication as to the destination of the journey, nor does witnessing this solitary woman pack clarify for how many people she is packing; whether the entire family will be part of the journey or only certain members. The journey towards Trieste itself is completely omitted from the story, as if it has been hidden away in an obscure pocket, unavailable to the reader. The new setting, which, without any premise or explanation, introduces the reader to two very specific locations, *Piazza dell'Unità* and *Corso Italia*, takes for granted an awareness that they are located in Trieste and that Stefano is now living there. Furthermore, the initial description of the city under the Allies' control changes the reader's expectations, and moves far away from the intimate familiar scene which has just been abandoned.

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<sup>313</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 105.

The gap within the text corresponds to a huge omission: the break away from Stefano's home country, as the reader finds the character already settled/unsettled in Trieste. This lack of information, which can also be described as an empty space, a missing link or, in Wolfgang Iser's terms, 'a blank', may be considered a vital step in the narrative. It could be defined as a blank because it is an intentional, carefully crafted suspension of connectivity which forces the reader to provide links for what is disconnected. In the space between the knowable and the unknowable, the reader immediately recognizes that something is missing and, above all, now comes face to face with an estranged Stefano. Not only is the familiar dimension lost and the setting changed, the character also struggles to adapt to the new situation. In other words, Stefano suddenly becomes a stranger and the separation from his native land is marked by the fracture of the plot.

By omitting the description of the journey towards Trieste (which might have included, for example, the reasons which led Stefano to follow his family, the actual departure and the final farewell to his village and countrymen, the crossing of the border, his first impressions of the new city, and how he managed to settle in), the author emphasizes the impact he felt when faced with the new reality, highlighting that something relevant is missing, or rather cannot be told. The reader, who 'fills in the blank in the text, thereby bringing about a referential field',<sup>314</sup> resigns himself to this discrepancy.

As Mario Petrucciani points out, *L'Albero del sogni*'s narrative is striking as much for its exclusions as for what the author chooses to include: 'Basta notare le interruzioni e le riprese tra un capitolo e l'altro [...] i modi delle pause, degli stacchi tra un brano e l'altro'.<sup>315</sup> If the text is a playground in which both the author and the reader play their game, the latter is under pressure, because he should be capable of comprehending the meaning of the new situation and the character affected by troubles, without having enough elements. The lack of

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<sup>314</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 203.

<sup>315</sup> Mario Petrucciani, p. 124.

information provided to the reader emphasizes that it is the stranger who conveys obscurity: ‘(Lo straniero) è un portavoce, un legittimo rappresentante dell’oscurità: non inscrivibile in alcuna anagrafe, costituisce nello stesso tempo una provocazione e una molla narrativa’.<sup>316</sup>

The Trieste in which Stefano arrives is a city in political turmoil. The main streets are crowded, and people are marching in demonstration to show their Italian spirit in front of American and English soldiers, who are supervising the operation. It is a confrontational city in which, as Ara-Magris wrote, one could easily sense the feeling of being part of a vast dispute: ‘la sensazione di essere una pedina nella scacchiera internazionale’.<sup>317</sup> Stefano is catapulted into the midst of this demonstration, which is progressing through the main streets of the city: ‘Dalla piazza dell’Unità d’Italia il corteo saliva lungo il corso Italia, nella città destinata a proclamare sempre e da lontano la propria italianità’.<sup>318</sup> He observes the Italian flags hung on balconies, the fervour which inflames the demonstrators, and the rising agitation which is being kept under control by the Allies.

The Istrian reactions are far from hesitant; having described the crucial elements of the scene, he immediately declares his impatience. Although he seeks to be part of the crowd, a new awareness (‘Una nuova coscienza’)<sup>319</sup> takes up more and more space in his thoughts. The group of demonstrators go forward triumphantly through the streets of the centre, acclamations and whistles overwhelm the noise of the tram, and Stefano becomes aware of a battle within himself: ‘Il cuore in tumulto, per la terza volta nel giro di pochi giorni lottavo con me stesso per unirmi alla fiumana tutto sommato anche festaiola’.<sup>320</sup> In a tumult of mixed feelings and memories, which overlap the present, the man considers his new life and the city in which he has just settled. The opposing factions (Italian students, soldiers and Slovenian

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<sup>316</sup> Mario Lavagetto, *Lavorare con piccoli indizi*, p. 201.

<sup>317</sup> Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste: Un’identità di frontiera*, p. 94.

<sup>318</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 109.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

demonstrators), which are included in the interior monologue, lead to contradictions which Stefano cannot accept.

As in his second Belgradese exile, Stefano's curiosity turns into a progressive form of disapproval and rejection. The restlessness of the young man, which comes hand in hand with his inner dilemmas, gives rise to a sense of uneasiness, soon unveiled as a condition of being unfamiliar with the Triestine context. Stefano does not share the patriotic atmosphere which surrounds him, nor the overbearing attitude of his friends and acquaintances with the intent of imposing the superiority of national values. He also disapproves of the plan to regain the lost lands: 'mi venivano costantemente riproposti i nomi altrove dimenticati delle cittadine della mia terra da redimere di nuovo in una guerra di soli volontari, di riscoperti eroi'.<sup>321</sup> For the same reasons, he is unable to take comfort ('Debole conforto')<sup>322</sup> in the encounters with the intransigent teacher Mauro, in the smoky cafés of the centre. The man's rising as a judge, without contemplating the objective situation of the Oriental border, is highlighted through his lack of tears and steely determination, which prevent any possible negotiation: 'Si esprimeva soprattutto negli occhi acquosi che di colpo si prosciugavano per mettere a nudo il fondo di acciaio non appena il discorso cadeva sui valori nazionali'.<sup>323</sup>

The increasing strain drives the character to distance himself from his peers. The contrasts between the two opposing mentalities are brought to the forefront here. Stefano's initial efforts in terms of integration are doomed to fail, as he cannot adhere to the dominant opinion. On the contrary, when faced with the new context, he feels inadequacy and a state of subjection: 'La soggezione si rivelava spietata'.<sup>324</sup>

For a stranger who has lost his homeland and also his fellow countrymen, the new country represents a central element to tackle. Far from being a conciliatory experience,

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<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

which underlines common traits, the foreign context usually prevents identification. Stefano begins the unsuccessful effort to rebuild a normal life, but the desired destination, on which the young man turns his attention to compensate for his estrangement, discloses an alien trait. A progressive exclusion is the inevitable consequence for a character who rejects, and at the same time is rejected, by the city.

In comparison to his Istrian village, Trieste is a vast city, in which endless streets lead to infinite routes. Not being able to find comfort in human relations, he sets out to discover a city which has always been considered close to his peninsula, but at the same time unfamiliar. The Trieste which Stefano observes is a big commercial harbour, rather different from the Istrian countryside, with which the same history is not shared. Distances are longer, buildings larger, and there are magnificent and elegant palaces, symbols of richness, which overlook squares and channels. The contrast between urban space and countryside seems to accentuate Stefano's exclusion, especially when he realizes that the new life is also based on economical hierarchies, which include or exclude people from society.

Nelle ore libere andavo alla scoperta della città, l'interminabile agglomerato di case solcato da vie in cui, conforme la propria tasca, uno può sentirsi del tutto escluso o incurantemente partecipe. [...] Se non ero riuscito a conquistare il favore dei compagni cittadini succedutisi nei collegi, potevo finalmente ripercorrere in lungo e in largo la grande città intravista sempre, al di là delle loro apparenze, come un miraggio.<sup>325</sup>

Stefano's seemingly aimless wandering through the city in his spare time increases his taciturn life. Not being able to take advantage of his freedom, he turns it into a sense of abandonment and isolation from others. As Julia Kristeva underlines: 'Free of ties with his own people, the foreigner feels "completely free". Nevertheless, the consummate name of such a freedom is solitude'.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>326</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 12.

Stefano struggles to overcome the obstacles he encounters in the new city, while the complicated relationships he has with people increase his difficulties in familiarizing himself with his surroundings. After the long digression, in which the city and the political demonstration carry unsolved past conflicts (the urban collision brings to mind the controversies of his background), the passage reaches its climax when Stefano feels his non-involvement: ‘Gli occhi brucianti per il gas che riduceva la piazza, me ne tornai al lavoro di nuovo assurdamente estraneo, con la speranza magari di trovare nel bar l’ex aviatore istriano’.<sup>327</sup>

The ‘assurdamente estraneo’,<sup>328</sup> which summarizes Stefano’s difference from the others, highlights a key moment in the novel, as from this moment on the man realizes he is a stranger. Looking more carefully at the figure of the stranger, the first striking aspect is that it embodies a ‘difference’, which cannot be traced back to the homogeneity of the prevailing group. In other words, the stranger can be considered an intruder, who breaks the conventions established by a specific context: ‘A volte l’inconnu è lo straniero che, all’interno di una comunità ristretta, determina una sorta di rottura di equilibrio, di scompenso’.<sup>329</sup>

Stefano tries to adapt to the new reality, but he actually develops a growing opposition instead. Nevertheless, he is not a stranger until he realizes and admits his differences. The crucial passage in which he declares that he is ‘assurdamente estraneo’<sup>330</sup> underlines the man’s own difference. The new life is characterized by the awareness of a label, which affects Stefano’s perception of himself. In that moment, the young man starts rethinking the road that he has chosen and the precariousness of his situation.

Before giving up, the young man looks for a new approach to the foreign city. Having faced several obstacles (such as the adverse triumphant ideology), and above all the

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<sup>327</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 111.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>329</sup> Mario Lavagetto, *Lavorare con piccoli indizi*, p. 204.

<sup>330</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 111.

impossibility of sharing his condition, Stefano's last effort is determined to smooth his suspended condition. The attainable solution comes unexpectedly: a possible approach to a different context may be favoured by a dialogue with another stranger. When Stefano meets a young Jewish girl for the first time, who is coming down a staircase, his immediate reaction is to stop and to approach her. Although this initiative fails (the girl wants to avoid him), the young Istrian man is attracted to her 'differences' – the colour of her skin, her language, the Jewish neighborhood in which she lives, and where she attends the synagogue. The stranger offers the stranger a common background, in which alterity for both nullifies, leaving space for reciprocal comprehension.

This episode focuses on Stefano's desperate need of human contact. The Istrian man, who wanders through the Triestine labyrinthine centre, is attracted to a pair of eyes, from which he is unable to tear away his gaze.

Ne uscì in un tramonto una ragazza il cui sguardo nello scendere i gradini mi penetrò così a fondo da lasciarmi bloccato in un mezzo sorriso e subito dopo, nonostante la fisica riluttanza a imprese del genere, trascinarli a seguirla lungo la stretta via che immetteva in quella più vasta, dove convogliavano tutti i tram della città.<sup>331</sup>

Stefano seeks to emerge from his solitude and tries to convince the girl to pass the time of day with him, or to at least stop. The presence of the young woman attracts him overwhelmingly, to the point that the intensity of her eyes, as well as her features, eliminates from his sights the indistinct mass of people, who surround them in the scene.

La sua personcina contemplata di tergo, dalla vita strettissima e le gambe sottili, i lisci capelli neri sulle spalle, il passo sostenuto che ridivenne calmo e sicuro nella strada centrale, si accordavano perfettamente all'intensità degli occhi. Più che un essere vivo, inseguivo un'apparizione che ora più vicina, ora meno, resisteva avanzando tra la gente divenuta un'indistinta marea senza volto.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Stefano admits his insistence which, far from encouraging a real encounter, frightens the girl away (she was like a scared animal: ‘bestiola impaurita’).<sup>333</sup> The man does not give up, becoming aware that his behaviour is counter-productive. The ‘pathological’ attraction drives Stefano to think about the real reasons why the girl appeals to him: ‘Mi urgeva soprattutto definire il sentimento che mi agitava e grazie al quale non mi sarei ritrovato del tutto solo neppure se mi avesse interdetto di accompagnarla’.<sup>334</sup>

Stefano’s concerns about his attraction to the girl find an immediate answer. The girl is Jewish, she has just left the synagogue and her being ‘different’ fascinates him – he chooses her to start a dialogue. Despite the unsuccessfulness of the dialogue (which consists of unanswered questions, quick shifts in topic, incomprehension and a lack of coherence), it represents the first break in his interior monologue, meaning that Stefano regards her as a person capable of understanding his situation. When one is rootless, he cannot talk to deeply rooted people, because they seem more unapproachable and unable to understand: ‘So, when one is oneself uprooted, what is the point of talking to those who think they have their own feet on their own soil?’<sup>335</sup>

The Jewish girl is also a stranger, as Stefano explains: ‘Consideravo gli ebrei gente straniera’.<sup>336</sup> Her ‘differences’ provide Stefano with the courage to talk to her; he remembers Jesus’ cry when he was being crucified and he asks her words in Hebrew: ‘Come voi dire pane vostra lingua, madre, papà, ragazza?’<sup>337</sup> Although he is unable to reduce the distance between himself and the girl, because she continues to withdraw, the key element of the story is the strange girl, who favours an approach. Her not being rooted helps Stefano, who believes that they share a common background of estrangement. For this reason the Istrian young man

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>335</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 17.

<sup>336</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 129.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

is magnetically attracted to and absorbed by the female figure: “Voglio rivederla, non le chiedo niente” le sussurravo nei capelli che si agitavano al passo sostenuto’.<sup>338</sup>

The failure of the first approach does not put off Stefano and he is determined to follow the girl as far as the building where she lives. Further investigations in her neighborhood, in order to gain a better understanding of the girl’s background, emphasize his interest in the culture of the girl.

Sostai davanti alla casa che doveva averla assorbita [...] Salendo lentamente l’erta incavata tra le case e un’alta muraglia distinsi un cartello sul quale facevano spicco gli ignoti caratteri della loro lingua, fitti e imprevedibili come spaccature in uno stagno prosciugato. [...] Quante volte non avrei sceso quei gradini, sempre con la coscienza indugiante della vittima che senza speranza si accosta al pubblico mercato, di ritorno dall’identico percorso alla ricerca disperata e d’improvviso affannosa della ragazza che mi aveva taciuto il nome e i cui lineamenti appena intravisti si confondevano nella memoria per lasciar posto a due occhi spalancati di bestia braccata?<sup>339</sup>

The different alphabet, which is compared to the unpredictable breaking lines of a dry pond, steers him along his path. He returns in vain several times to the same place to find the Jewish girl, and he becomes absorbed by a different culture, which mirrors his own estrangement. In other words, this stranger makes it acceptable to be different, a stranger himself (or at least less of a stranger), as Edmond Jabès maintains: ‘The stranger permits you to be yourself, while transforming you into a stranger’.<sup>340</sup> The differences which Stefano and the girl have in common, which exclude them from the homogeneous dominant group, put them on common ground. In fact, rooted people seem to push away any possible approach. This other stranger allows the stranger to reveal his condition, helping him to focus on a new dialogue within himself. Stefano declares the real significance of his encounter with the Jewish girl; he seeks to find the girl because she may encourage something to blossom within himself: ‘la mania di non poter ripercorrere il tragitto che mi avrebbe riportato ad Anna

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<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>340</sup> Edmond Jabès, *A Stranger Carrying in the Crook of his Arm a Tiny Book* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993) p. 9.

Frank o soltanto a un sordo e pur ripagante dialogo con me stesso'.<sup>341</sup> The presence and absence of the girl have become so relevant to Stefano that he admits he cannot give her up: 'A una cosa sola mi pareva non avrei rinunciato, alla ragazza ebrea'.<sup>342</sup> Especially in her absence, the character points out that the girl simply lets him re-establish a dialogue with himself.

The stranger becomes more approachable, leading to a dialogue based on a common background, but also underlining the differences within one's self. When Stefano faces the girl for the first time, he immediately realizes that his skin carries the Istrian mark, which is the red base of bauxite, typifying his home country. The pale face of the Jewish girl and her features, which betray her origins inevitably lead to a comparison.

Proseguivamo vicini senza scambiarsi uno sguardo aperto, ma sentivo che l'intravista pelle verdognola cosparsa di efelidi, come di persona cresciuta nella penombra di muri cittadini, si scontrava con il rossore del mio viso sul quale e sole e pulviscolo di terra rossa avevano lasciato tracce indelebili.<sup>343</sup>

The indelible traces of Stefano's skin are only mentioned in *L'albero dei sogni*. To fully understand the implications of the red base as a permanent mark on the face of a stranger, it is useful to consider another passage taken from *Il sogno dalmata*, in which Tomizza's character analyses his red marks. Here, the indelible sign left by the mother country on the skin corresponds to the evident symbol of the troubled condition of the stranger.

Mi fisso a osservare i rettangoli di terra, un tempo molto più numerosi ed estesi. Com'è il suo colore che tanto mi richiama a sé e di cui non trovo l'uguale? L'accostamento più calzante rimanda alla ruggine del ferro, con tonalità diverse, più cupe o più tenui a seconda delle posizioni, della maggior presenza di bauxite (da cui assume un che di violaceo), dal fatto se è arata da poco, da molto, se piove, se è secco. Una cosa è certa: chi vi è nato si porta addosso questa tinta come un marchio che ne segna il corpo e ne imprime il carattere, dandogli larghezza e insicurezza perché simile terra non si misura né ha prezzo, tanto essa è dura da lavorare, non possiede molto humus, frutta purché piova con costante regolarità, il che avviene un anno su dieci. Normalmente si affonda in un fango magro o ci si screpola la pelle contro le zolle sode come sasso. E la ruggine invade tutto, le strade, le case; tinte ogni pietra di quel suo colore inconfondibile, i ciottoli, la ghiaia, le siepi, la biancheria intima, l'asciugamano, le lenzuola. Non si tratta

<sup>341</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 132.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

di uno sporco leccio bensì povero e inesorabile, del quale ci si vergogna. Umago, per non dire Pola, sarebbero cittadine rispettabili se non avessero questa ruggine sui loro palazzi, le pozze di acqua rossastra nelle piazze, quale umiliazione quando vi transita un pullman straniero e vi si inzacchera e ne rimarrà a lungo schizzato! Il suo equivalente di rozzezza e zoticità in campo sonoro lo trovo nella lettera zeta, della quale del resto qui si fa largo uso convertendovi quasi tutte le 'ci' dolci, e io ben due 'z' porto nel mio cognome: predestinazione? Se dovessi scegliere un simbolo per i miei luoghi indicherei una zolla, che noi chiamiamo zzòpa.<sup>344</sup>

Being a stranger means showing a mark which cannot be removed and which will differentiate Stefano wherever he moves. The unmistakable colour clearly carries several references (to the way of living and thinking of a specific place, to people's behaviour and linguistic background) and cannot be washed away. The red, like rust, sticks everywhere, making native people stand out. The mark of the stranger, which denotes Stefano in Trieste, as well as Tomizza's other characters abroad, constitutes the original core which cannot be modified. The essence of the stranger is, therefore, his awareness of his differences.

### 4.3 Belgrade

The city in which Stefano had initially tried to make a new home and settle in, strengthens the character's displacement. In parallel, the Italian pole of Stefano's identity seems gradually to reject him, so much so that he decides to regain his missing Croatian side. Feeling excluded by the city, Stefano turns his attention to Yugoslavia's capital Belgrade, which corresponds to an extension of his maternal side and ideally represents the core of his 'Slav' identity. I shall begin with an analysis of Stefano's approach to the Balkans, before considering the difficult decision to move to Belgrade.

Far from being a painless choice, Stefano's decision to take the Orient Express and move to Belgrade coincides with the troubled events on the Oriental border of Italy. Until the very last moments before his departure, when he packs, still undecided about his destination,

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<sup>344</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Il sogno dalmata*, p. 12.

Stefano is tormented by indecision: ‘Di corsa andai a fare la valigia non sapendo ancora se mi avrebbe accompagnato oltre il blocco o se l’avrei issata sulla rete dell’Orient Express, quando nella mia camera di disordini irrupero la madre e il fratello’.<sup>345</sup> The urgency with which Stefano packs his suitcase reveals the pressure he feels to move, in a sort of gesture of liberation. Moving somewhere becomes a necessity, due to an unidentifiable pull which encourages the stranger. As Kristeva suggests, errancy is the feature which typifies the condition of non-belonging: ‘A secret wound, often unknown to himself, drives the foreigner to wandering’.<sup>346</sup>

Despite his indecision, Stefano deceives his relatives and decides to get to the bottom of the choice he must make, leaving no stone unturned: ‘Tanto valeva condurre la mia esperienza fino in fondo, e decisi’.<sup>347</sup> Therefore, Stefano’s second exile to Belgrade begins with a lie. If the Triestine parenthesis was characterized by a huge omission, aimed to define the mysterious and troubled condition of the stranger, a series of lies leads Stefano to the decision to move to Belgrade. Once more, the reader is forced to grasp the intentions meant by the stranger and struggles to understand the discrepancies of an unreliable character.

In the empty room from which Stefano’s family is trying to move away, the main character intentionally deceives his mother and brother. He promises them he will follow them to Trieste, but he already knows that he will go in the opposite direction: ‘assicurai di seguirli fra qualche giorno e fui costretto a contenere il mio primo abbraccio disperato e sincero. Li guardai allontanarsi dalla finestra, vittime ora inconsapevoli della mia aperta malafede’.<sup>348</sup> Stefano blurs the lines between honesty and dishonesty, admitting that the only true embrace he has given was the one with which he cheated his family. The character also betrays Marcella, promising her that he will not move from the Istrian village, despite the fact

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<sup>345</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 187.

<sup>346</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 13.

<sup>347</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 188.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

that he has already packed his bags. He comforts the girl, promising to marry her eventually: ‘La consolai, le avrei scritto; nella lontananza avrei anche preso una decisione; ma sì, ci saremmo sposati, che cosa poteva impedircelo? [...] Attesi che si calmasse per giurare anche a lei che non mi sarei mosso’.<sup>349</sup> The character deceives his family and Marcella; he seems also to warn the reader that the person leaving on the Orient Express to Belgrade might not be him: ‘Ero proprio io?’.<sup>350</sup> Lies and incongruities typify a narrative in which linearity and coherence are, for the second time, ‘broken’. The behaviours of Tomizza’s characters bring to mind Svevo: ‘mente sempre un po’ quando dice la verità, è anche vero che dice sempre un po’ la verità quando mente’.<sup>351</sup>

On the following day, contrary to the expectations of the reader, Stefano takes the train to Belgrade. The character looks for a clearer understanding of his Croatian side and embraces his new faith, disregarding the widespread foreboding of his countrymen. In Stefano’s mind, the city starts to materialize as an exotic place where East meets West; a bizarre mix of associations, in which Oriental traits emerge:

Mi ero ormai fatto un’immagine tutta mia del Paese suddiviso in repubbliche che da oltre dieci anni allungava fin qui le sue propaggini: una terra diversamente assolata rispetto all’Italia e nella quale tra passioni sudamericane ed evangelici conturbamenti dostoevskiani s’insinuava il languore orientale che ritmava il passo della ragazza ebrea di Trieste.<sup>352</sup>

Taking the train to Belgrade means approaching the typical dimension of the stranger, which is the time suspension characteristic of the traveller.<sup>353</sup> Leaving behind his country, his family and any visceral link with his origins, Stefano approaches the new reality by train (‘Ammaccato dal legno della terza classe’),<sup>354</sup> which corresponds to a transition dictated by

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<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>351</sup> Elio Gioanola, *Un killer dolcissimo. Indagine psicanalitica sull’opera di Italo Svevo* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1979), p. 81.

<sup>352</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 178.

<sup>353</sup> This condition is expressed by Marc Augé in *Non-places* (London: Verso, 2008).

<sup>354</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 190.

his wanderings. Being a stranger means coping with a constant wandering, a constant search for an ‘elsewhere’, as suggested by Kristeva:

A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping. [...] merely the feeling of a reprieve, of having gotten away.<sup>355</sup>

More than Trieste, the Balkan city represents the ‘elsewhere’: the impulse to go away in search of a better awareness of Stefano’s estranged self, or rather simply following the extreme consequence of his exile. The unusual journey to Belgrade itself reveals unexpected features. The clothes of peasants and their darker faces anticipate the ‘estraneità’<sup>356</sup> which Stefano will encounter in the Yugoslav capital, described as a Turkish fortress on the confluence of two rivers: ‘Apparivano all’orizzonte le gialle acque del Danubio incrociantisi con quelle della Sava nell’abisso di una fortezza turca, e via via tutta intera mi si svelava davanti la bianca città’.<sup>357</sup>

From the first impression of the ‘white city’,<sup>358</sup> the reader is dazed by the amount of elements with which Stefano finds himself unable to cope. The young man has barely arrived at the station when he is overcome by the unexpected comments of passengers, who boast about the city, which is, in fact, much bigger than Stefano expected; or rather, ‘una città vera e propria, a tutto avevo pensato fuorchè di andare incontro a una capitale che contava oltre il doppio degli abitanti di Trieste’.<sup>359</sup> Alone and confused, as he has never been before, the character feels at a loss. This new perspective appears so unreal that he wanders through the city for an indefinite amount of time, unable to gain a sense of orientation.

These initial forays into the Balkan city immediately reveal the first obstacle: the language. Despite having knowledge of Greek, the character finds it difficult to read the

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<sup>355</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>356</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 191.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>358</sup> Belgrade literally means ‘white city’.

<sup>359</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, pp. 192-193.

Cyrillic alphabet which, although similar to Greek, presents different characters.<sup>360</sup> Signs which appear throughout the city are an unreadable forest without meaning, which prevent the visitor from getting his bearings. As a result of the linguistic barrier, Stefano is only able to express himself in a Croatian dialect, hampering any possibility of becoming familiar with the new reality. When confronted with Belgrade, the character is forced to abandon the conventional way of communicating, as foreign language and signs do not constitute a useful tool.

Giravo da ore perfettamente estraneo, e quindi con un'accresciuta coscienza di me stesso, entro la prospettiva più irrealistica. Privato anche dell'ausilio della scuola che mi aveva insegnato il greco ma non l'alfabeto cirillico, per orientarmi [...] dovevo prestare attenzione ai suoni e agli odori come un cane dallo sguardo abbassato. Negli alberghi non c'era posto ed ero guardato con diffidenza. Balbettavo un croato fortemente dialettale, affermavo di essere italiano mentre i documenti che esibivo erano identici a quelli delle altre persone e dei diciotto milioni di cittadini assunti a un ruolo che imponeva reciproco sospetto. In nome di Dio, chi ero?<sup>361</sup>

The distrust of the staff in the hotels, the rush of city dwellers, who turn their nose up at him when Stefano asks for information prevent fruitful approaches. Initially, the linguistic problems seem to be an insurmountable hurdle, which hinder any possible encounter. The Istrian man's life is characterized by increasing difficulties and misunderstandings, a lack of comprehension, and the impossibility of expressing himself or obtaining what he wants. Losing one's own language — or at least as in Stefano's case, not being able to master the other language sufficiently — means a withdrawal into an uncomfortable position. In Anna Arendt's words, among the linguistic implications of being a stranger, there are also the more

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<sup>360</sup> In the short story called *Inverno iniziatico*, taken from *La casa col mandorlo*, Tomizza admits not having expected the Cyrillic alphabet in the Yugoslavian capital. Croatian uses the Latin alphabet and the use of Cyrillic is limited to the Serbian language: 'Ne fui consapevole dal senso di estraneità e di rifiuto che mi investì non appena penetrai nella città sconosciuta. Il disorientamento era accresciuto dalle scritte in cirillico a cui non ero preparato, dall'impazienza perfino pungente dei passanti nel cercare di decifrare il mio modesto serbocroato'. Fulvio Tomizza, *La casa col mandorlo*, p. 9.

<sup>361</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 193.

subtle aspects: ‘We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of our feelings’.<sup>362</sup>

Stefano’s Belgrade is a city of solitude and loneliness, in which occasional encounters occur as mishaps. Among the people who cross Stefano’s path, there are thieves, students and occasional passersby, whom he accidentally bumps into, and then profiteer landladies and an old Istrian servant who has moved to the capital. The difficulty in communicating with them is better outlined in the encounter with an old man. By ordering a *šljivovica*, the popular alcoholic drink made from plums, in order to gain enough courage to face the new situation, the barman gives Stefano an undrinkable liquid. Stefano’s complaints attract the attention of an old man, who wants to explain to him the ambiguity. However, the man and the boy struggle to understand each other, endeavouring to find a language which they have in common.

L’equivoco e in più lo scontro destarono l’attenzione dei tavoli vicini. Se ne staccò un anziano appoggiandosi al bastone, gli occhi fissi nei miei, i lisci capelli scuri del padre, l’alto labbro a cuore del vecchio servo di casa Eustachio. Domandò se parlavo l’inglese, poi il tedesco. Conoscevo un po’ di francese e lui allargò le braccia ascrivendo a mio debito il rammarico. [...] M’indirizzò uno sguardo vacuo e sedutosi mi percosse leggermente con l’impugnatura del bastone. ‘So io il giovane merlo che siete; vi ho osservato’.<sup>363</sup>

This difficulty in finding a common language to communicate more easily proves itself to be one of Stefano’s most fruitful encounters, as in other cases the boy does not even have the chance to attempt a sentence, and is compelled to be subjected to another’s decisions. Stefano’s stay in Belgrade, a city in which he plans to undertake his university education, increases failed relationships.

The stranger is condemned to live in a bubble, which cannot be burst. When he was in Trieste, the Jewish girl encouraged Stefano, unsuccessfully, to form relationships; then when

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<sup>362</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘We refugee’ in Marc Robinson (ed.), *Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile* (Boston-London: Faber and Faber, 1996) p. 110.

<sup>363</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 195.

he was in Belgrade the character found he needed those human relationships even more. Stefano admits that an encounter with a girl might be the only way to break the estrangement: ‘Vuotato a mia volta il bicchiere, la prospettiva mi galvanizzò: una donna, con la quale magari solo accompagnarli, ma che subisse sia pure un mio gesto, un’innocente preferenza, per rompere l’estraneità che mi si rivela sempre più avversa e persino provocatoria’.<sup>364</sup>

The girl in Belgrade materializes in the figure of the landlady’s moody daughter, who corresponds to the Triestine Jewish girl, shaping a parallel within the story. Stefano and the mysterious Belgradese girl’s life flow parallel to one another, divided only by thin walls, which allow Stefano to hear the girl reading until late every night. Two activities come together, despite the lack of communication between the two characters. The girl turns the pages of books, making a subtle noise ‘il rumore delle pagine mosse’, while the young man composes verses: ‘Rincasavo e, dopo aver ripercorso decine di volte il corridoio tra i due letti, mi sedevo al tavolino per annotare versi fortemente lugubri e scolastici’.<sup>365</sup> However, the failed approach seems also to be reflected by Stefano’s lack of inspiration: ‘Avevo messo da parte il quaderno di poesie per concentrarmi su un foglio bianco, che riempivo di astratte figure geometriche o semplici scarabocchi’.<sup>366</sup>

Stefano not only confines himself to his room; on the contrary, as in his Triestine exile, he wanders through the city, developing a special form of *flânerie*. In Stefano’s case, the ability to wander aimlessly and in a more subtle way, gaining a sense of orientation based on a different set of skills compared to the conventional ones, is the result of his losing himself in the city as an intruder. Having lost his language and feeling rejected by a foreign alphabet, the character is not able to read the signs and so forms a different strategy, by following various smells:

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<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

Mi ricolse l'afrore dei peperoni bruciacchiati che contraddistingueva l'inimmaginata metropoli e dentro al quale si rimescolava una folla avida di traffici e di chiasso, il passo scandito dalle grida degli strilloni e dei rivenditori di semi di zucca imitanti il verso del gallo.<sup>367</sup>

The more concrete reference remains, therefore, the architecture of buildings, which forges a fascinating Oriental atmosphere, but which also make the young man feel excluded.

L'atmosfera balcanico-orientale rimarcata dall'architettura in parte absburgica e in parte turchesca, illanguidita dall'ultimo sole ottobrino, la singolarità dei volti antichi e severi che incontravo, un mercanteggiare generale e indolente tra nenie musulmane e strappi di musica tzigana, tutto ciò che aveva agito da oscuro richiamo tendeva ora a isolarmi nella condizione di intruso.<sup>368</sup>

In *L'albero dei sogni*, Stefano reaches the most profound stage as a stranger, as underlined by the words used. The character finds himself in a strange city, 'città straniera',<sup>369</sup> he gets lost, without being able to read the Cyrillic alphabet, nor being able to fully master the language. Stefano is also excluded from human relationships and, from his belongings: 'avulso da tutto ciò che mi apparteneva'.<sup>370</sup> But he also feels he is among enemies: 'Entrato in una delle mille case che nemiche mi si paravano davanti',<sup>371</sup> and unable to blend in: 'Sperduto nella folla, non riuscivo ad amalgamarmi'.<sup>372</sup> Far from home, abroad for a second time, his hopes dashed, the Istrian man begins to worry about his situation. The choice he has made reveals the risks related to being alone in a foreign country.

Le ore scorrevano lentissime e d'un tratto sbiadiva anche la garanzia che ai giorni nostri non si muore di fame, per cedere a un'agitazione convulsa in combutta col terrore di trovarmi in terra straniera, fuori da una qualsiasi rete di conoscenze, col pericolo di dimenticare i pochi elementi della lingua corrente.<sup>373</sup>

The increase in a sense of disorientation seems to move him away from the idea of home even more,<sup>374</sup> leading the process of 'Balkanization' to an end. The force which has spurred the

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<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194. The character is struck by the unusual call, which in Serbian means peanuts.

<sup>368</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La casa col mandorlo*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>369</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 196.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

character to reach the ‘elsewhere’ embodied by the Yugoslav capital has revealed an extreme form of not belonging. The difficulty in settling in a foreign context, deprived of the familiarity of a language and stable relationships, shape a stranger. Mirrors give full meaning to Stefano’s condition, as I shall now point out.

#### 4.4 Mirrors

In the novel there is a process which further elaborates Stefano’s fragmentation. Mirrors, which form reflective surfaces, turn into obsessive multiple presence and play an integral role within the story. Although they would appear to play a minor role, mirrors are found in key moments of the plot, underlining the character’s drift into estrangement. Stefano appears to employ them for confirmation of his identity, which is already under pressure. However, far from providing a solution, mirrors supply an image that the character does not recognize. They foretell the inevitable breaking up of the young man’s self, but they also underline Stefano’s indecision, trapping the character in confusing reflections. The final laceration shows how this reflecting object returns an image which is the emblem of the otherness embodied by the stranger.

*L’albero dei sogni*’s narrative is marked by the constant presence of mirroring surfaces, which are placed in crucial moments of the story, where the character seeks an answer to ease his troubles. This non-dialectic process — Stefano cannot establish a dialogue with reflecting surfaces, he is only subjected to their response — is offered by a sequence of mirrors, which intensify the sense of not belonging which the character experiences. Let me now focus on the

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<sup>374</sup> In *La casa col mandorlo*, the idea is expressed noticing that the confluence of the two Serbian rivers further disorientates the narrator, who loses even the direction of his home: ‘La lastra di ghiaccio che equiparava i due fiumi m’impediva di precisarne il corso, per cui non riuscivo a stabilire nemmeno in quale direzione si situasse la mia terra’. Fulvio Tomizza, *La casa col mandorlo*, p. 11.

bizarre association of temporal discontinuity and mirrors, before considering the effects of reflections.

The passages in which Stefano's image is reflected onto a variety of surfaces, which soon become mirrors, constitute a parallel iterative story within the novel. Each time that Stefano faces his image, it seems to link the episode to the previous one, confusing a progressive temporal articulation. Mirroring surfaces recall one another in a chasing of prolepsis and flashbacks, which typifies *L'albero dei sogni*'s style and disruptive narrative. Stefano's story can only register images and facts, without being able to give them perfect coherence. Memories come back in new episodes, filling previous gaps and opening others in a liminal threshold. Functions attributed to mirrors cannot transcend their position within the text, nor any relationship with previous episodes and their context.

Stefano seems to be attracted to reflecting surfaces even before the encounter with the first mirror. The root of his estrangement is already set when he looks at the glass of a window in the second college that he attends, which reflects his appearance. Alone in the room, the Istrian man seems to look for confirmation of his facial features, or rather of his identity. Even if the glass does not fully correspond to a mirror, it dismisses the man's eyes, which turn towards the ceiling, while Stefano contemplates his image:

Ero proprio solo, e all'inizio di ogni ora di studio, ritto in piedi durante la preghiera, fissavo le mie sembianze nel vetro della finestra, socchiudevo gli occhi, buttavo la testa quanto più possibile all'indietro rimanendo un istante immobile a contemplare l'immagine della mia morte.<sup>375</sup>

These scenes forewarn the reader of Stefano's reactions in front of mirrors, given that the reflection of his own profile forces him to turn his gaze to other surfaces. The power of the reflections begins to play a relevant role in Stefano's life, but at this stage the character is still able to escape from its full strength, which it will acquire later on.

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<sup>375</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 28.

The first real mirror that Stefano meets in *L'albero dei sogni* is the one which marks the end of his stay at the first college of G\*\*\* and in the following chapter, in which Stefano is alone with his suitcase because his father is in jail. Although the Istrian young man is not yet in exile, the passage underlines the meaning of the mirror in the story and constitutes a useful tool in order to analyse Stefano's condition. The episode can be summarized as follows: the man looks in the mirror and struggles to recognize his own image. In turn, he is watched by a pair of uncompromising eyes, which judge him. An inner rupture which comes unexpectedly is immediately linked to an external world change, which drives Stefano to look for confirmation in the mirror.

Two parallel words — the inner and the outer — flow together towards an inevitable fracture. Stefano's changed aspect (he discovers he is no longer a child) seems to worry and to annihilate him, because the 'presenza ferma e asciutta di due aculei feroci negli occhi sfuggenti', which continues a 'severa estraneità',<sup>376</sup> is directed at him.

Qualcosa si rompe dentro di me, qualche cosa doveva essere accaduto nel mondo di fuori. Corsi allo specchio e stentai a riconoscere il mio viso nell'immagine riflessa: i baffi cresciuti, qualche pelo lungo sul mento e soprattutto la presenza ferma e asciutta di due aculei feroci negli occhi sfuggenti che per la prima volta mi giudicavano. [...] La vista si annebbiò di colpo e, sconvolto dalla nausea, feci appena in tempo a piegarmi sul lavabo.<sup>377</sup>

When Stefano comes face to face with the mirror, he finds a strange face reflected there, which shows limited resemblance to his features: the image reflected does not seem to correspond to the idea that he has of his traits. The character begins to realize that he has an 'outside', which is beyond his control. Even by splitting the self and his image, Stefano fails to rid himself of the latter. The stranger reflected in the mirror becomes inseparable from him,

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<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

recalling Pirandello's Moscarda of *Uno nessuno e centomila*, who explicitly evokes 'l'estraneo inseparabile da me'.<sup>378</sup>

The figure of a stranger in the mirror recalls Pirandello's character for several reasons. Moscarda becomes aware of the stranger reflected in the mirror who cannot be avoided: 'Ma una maledetta voce mi diceva dentro che era là anche lui, l'*estraneo*, di fronte a me, nello specchio'.<sup>379</sup> Facing the mirroring surface, the character discovers his condemnation. The impossibility of becoming familiar with the image reflected, which transcends his power, comes together with the awareness of being freed from it: 'Come sopportare in me quest'estraneo? quest'estraneo che ero io stesso per me? come non vederlo? come non conoscerlo? come restare per sempre condannato a portarmelo con me, in me, alla vista degli altri e fuori intanto della mia?'.<sup>380</sup>

In parallel, Stefano's disillusionment at finding himself in the mirror immediately clashes with an unrecognisable image, meant to attack the boy, forcing him to turn away his eyes. The judgement imposed on him by these uncontrollable eyes sounds like an accusation, towards which he cannot prepare himself. The mirror's gaze blinds him; the young man's sight remains darkened, forcing him to arch over the sink. Stefano pays for his ingenuity believing that the mirror is able to confirm his identity, while in fact in the mirror he will only find the stranger, which is meant to be rooted in a new more decisive form. The fluctuation between identity and otherness, which was previously allowed becomes a unidirectional strict imposition to which the self is subjected.

What is relevant in Stefano's story is the link between the mirror and the foreign, especially for people who do not belong to their home country. The parallel drawn by Stefano associates the scrutiny imposed by the mirror to that imposed by strangers towards him: 'Con la stessa severa estraneità mi ero sentito fino ad allora guardare da tutte le persone non

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<sup>378</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila* (Milano: Mondadori, 1980), p. 20.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

strettamente del mio luogo'.<sup>381</sup> Gazes from estranged people warn Stefano of his 'difference', which is then underlined and will widen still further through mirrors. The reflecting tool represents, therefore, a disturbing presence which emphasizes the character's displacement. When Stefano checks his image in mirrors, the only confirmation found will be that he is a stranger. The reflecting figure troubles the character, placing the antagonism between the self and the mirrored image: 'specchiante e specchiato sono due, nati a uno stesso parto (gemelli) ma separati e nemici uno all'altro'.<sup>382</sup>

The first approach to a mirror will remain in Stefano's mind for a while, originally as a non-dialectic process. The first mirror is recalled years later, just after he has moved to Trieste: 'la mente volata ora spontaneamente allo specchio e al lavabo di G\*\*\*'.<sup>383</sup> Past and present intermingle and the flowing of memories mixes in rather chaotic associations. The mirror appears again to Stefano, who is searching for confirmation of his identity, to remind the character that he is among strangers. The approach to real mirrors marks a step, which will be forever present in Stefano's mind, whose disillusionment leads to a drastic point — what in his opinion was meant to be considered a helpful, reassuring tool has now assumed a sense of affliction. It can be said that identification and alienation tend to coincide.

This issue is transposed to the most significant mirror of the novel: the one towards which Stefano's face is reflected, in order to make a decision whether to move to Italy following his mother and brother, or to move to Belgrade, taking the Orient Express: 'Solo nella stanza svuotata di quanto mi apparteneva e subito estranea, mi guardai allo specchio. Ero proprio io? Presi la corriera diretta a Sesana, dove il treno Parigi-Istanbul fermava per l'ispezione doganale'.<sup>384</sup> The empty room contains different characters, who present as many points of view as actors on a stage. Opposing feelings drive Stefano towards the decision

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<sup>381</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>382</sup> Elio Gioanola, *Pirandello: la follia* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1983), p. 109.

<sup>383</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 122.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

which he will soon have to make. The relevance which should be attributed to this passage must include how the character addresses the question about his identity to the mirror. Despite the fact that Stefano seems to be aware of the estrangement produced by mirrors, his question implicitly offers the possibility of being someone other than himself. He seems to doubt that the image mirrored may correspond to himself. At another time, Stefano seems to follow Moscarda's reflections. When Pirandello's character is challenged by mirrors, he challenges the image he sees, raising doubts about the correspondence: 'Chi era? Ero io? Ma poteva anche essere un altro!'<sup>385</sup>

In *L'albero dei sogni*, another Stefano might have possibly taken that train, as the specular image, which transcends its domain, does not confirm his identity. In one of the crucial moments of the novel, in which the character opts for his second exile, the mirror is required to help the character to make his decision. However, the Istrian man's expectations are frustrated, because what he sees is an image created by the mirror's reflection, as suggested by Jacques Lacan's passage dedicated to the loss of identity in front of mirrors and the new fragmented image. In the French psychoanalyst's words:

In the experience of mirrors, a moment occurs in which the image we think to have is modified. If the specular image that we have in front of us, which is our statue, our face, our pair of eyes, allows to surface the dimension of our gaze, the value of the image begins to change – above all there is a moment in which that gaze which appears in the mirror begins to look no longer at ourselves. *Initium, aura*, the dawn of a feeling of estrangement which opens to anxiety.<sup>386</sup>

Stefano's possession of his own image is lost and his identity captured by the mirror's gaze is now beyond his control. The gap between the idea of the self and the image of it reflected through the mirror's gaze troubles the young man, who no longer entirely trusts the mirror. Its gaze determines a situation which destroys previously established certainties. If Stefano starts

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<sup>385</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, p. 30.

<sup>386</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre 10, L'angoisse* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 104

doubting the image reflected in the mirror before moving to Belgrade, ‘Ero proprio io?’<sup>387</sup> his second exile continues his deep identity crisis. In the Yugoslavian capital, the impact with the foreign leaves an impression on his life, leading to a fundamental question: ‘In nome di Dio, chi ero?’<sup>388</sup> This key passage is also emphasized by Gaetano De Leo, who attributes it to the cause from which the novel itself originated: ‘Penso infatti che *L’albero dei sogni* sia stato scritto essenzialmente per rispondere a questa domanda che lo stesso protagonista a un certo punto si pone: “In nome di Dio, chi ero?”’<sup>389</sup>.

Lucid moments alternate with rather chaotic ones, leading to doubts. Stefano is not able to recognize himself, being shunted from one pole to the other of his identity, till the final mirror scene, which is made up of dozens of mirrors. Feeling under strain in the foreign city and its estranged elements, Stefano looks for a café, in which his sense of not belonging culminates. In the Oriental atmosphere of the place, animated by groups of smoking people, Stefano struggles to find the waiter because he is bombarded by the infinite reflections of dozens of mirrors. The only real aspect of the young man’s image is the reflections which intermingle in a maze of images, eyes and gazes, without escape. The impossibility of ridding himself of mirrors, which trap him, is due to the fact that Stefano cannot find his way to the waiter.

Seduto, incontravo la mia immagine riflessa in decine di specchi a sottolineare l’unico dato reale sul quale avrei potuto sempre contare. Mi spostavo sulla poltrona, la figura seguiva il movimento, e cercando del cameriere, mi imbattevo solo nei miei occhi interroganti. Il gioco di rifrazioni mi restituiva, sardonicamente come non mai, l’inconfessata realtà per cui tutto ciò che avevo finora potuto imporre o pretendere era stato eseguito, a proprio discapito, dalla medesima persona.<sup>390</sup>

The game of mirrors, which duplicate his eyes to infinity reflects the impalpable weakness of identity, but the only element that Stefano can find in the oppressive game of

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<sup>387</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 189.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>389</sup> Gaetano De Leo, ‘La coerenza interna di Fulvio Tomizza’, in *Messaggero Veneto*, 13 July 1969, p. 3.

<sup>390</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, pp. 194-195.

reflections which blinds him is the fragmentation of the reflected image. In other words, he can only rely on the reflected image, which is the emblem of the stranger. Here, the reflecting surface has brought to the forefront all its power. From an uncanny presence, which cannot correspond to Stefano's identity, the mirror has marked the narrative, challenging the character, whose self is more and more trapped. The comparison with the foreign image makes a deep impression on the Istrian man. When the mirror is put on the stage, whatever context is set, the result will not change: Tomizza's characters will be strangers, confirming that the function which the mirror plays is one of the most decisive roles, in terms of estrangement and splitting of the self. As Carmelina Sicari points out, the mirror represents the deepest degree of estrangement: 'Lo specchio è il mito dell'estraniamento [...] Qui c'è al grado massimo rappresentato il processo di estraneità e l'altro della scissione dell'io'.<sup>391</sup> The real meaning of Stefano's estrangement should also contemplate the relationship with the mother country lost.

#### **4.5 Ithaca lost**

Very often the stranger alters the relationship with his origin and returning home may constitute a bewildering experience. The image of the motherland appears further away and is doomed to change in the mind, as the place itself does not retain the same features that the exile remembers and he has only his memory upon which to rely. It follows that the homeland risks becoming a lost dimension, which does not resemble the expectations of the stranger. Confrontation with the home country leaves a gap that cannot be filled and a sense of bitter disappointment.

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<sup>391</sup> Carmelina Sicari, *Lo specchio e lo stigma* (Ravenna: Longo 1979) pp. 40-41.

*L'albero dei sogni* ends with a diary of dreams linked to Stefano's father. The previous section deals with Stefano's return to Istria and shows the character's effort to adapt to the Istrian drastic changes. To widen Tomizza's perspective and offer a better understanding of the impossible return to the home country, I shall also include passages from *Il ritorno arbitrario*, *La casa in campagna* and *Ritorni*, taken from *Ieri un secolo fa*, *Dove tornare* and *I rapporti colpevoli* respectively. The development of the characters' feelings are investigated through these parallel stories, which share a common path to the lost dimension. The agitation which gnaws at the characters represents only the first step of a series of intertwined feelings, which manifest themselves in relation to the home country.

The titles of the stories which have been considered seem to explicitly reveal a desired dimension which cannot be regained. For example, *Il ritorno arbitrario* questions the reader, who is warned from the very beginning about a hypothetical deceit. The 'arbitrario' of the title clearly emphasizes the lack of objectivity regarding the return to Istria. The uncertainty of the trip (a trip which the character is not entirely sure he made) is confirmed by the title *Ritorni*, in which the use of the plural seems to further underline an equivocal, precarious situation, while the title of the last collection of stories, *Dove tornare*, is even more explicit. The impossibility of a return is predicted by the ambiguity of the aim itself. The narrator states in advance that he does not know to where to return (not to where to go, because, as Sanja Roić comments, 'dopo non molte pagine diventava pure evidente che la particella interrogativa e il verbo all'infinito indicassero un sinonimo per Materada').<sup>392</sup>

The concept of not having a place to where one can return highlights Tomizza's characters' impatience. His characters can no longer tolerate their daily lives abroad and are suddenly overwhelmed by a quite bizarre agitation. They give up their routine, cancelling any commitment and the escape begins. The urban noise repels the character of *Il ritorno*

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<sup>392</sup> Sanja Roić, 'Tornare dove? In margine a Dove tornare di Fulvio Tomizza', in *Tomizza i mi: susreti uz granicu: zbornik* (Umag: Pucko otvoreno uciliste, 2002), p. 93.

*arbitrario*, who is irresistibly attracted to nature, or rather to the vegetation, which resembles the Istrian flora more and more:

Partivo subito, saltando la colazione, in preda a una smania [...] Il turbamento si manifestava nello scontro con suoni e immagini feriali della città che andavo attraversando; si placava nella strada bordata di verde sotto la volta dei platani, per svaporare del tutto quando ai fruscianti pioppi si erano sostituiti olmi possenti, e gli orti, i vigneti, i terrazzi avevano ceduto da ambo i lati al bosco di quercioli secchi.<sup>393</sup>

The pressing necessity to move somewhere surfaces unexpectedly in the monotony of days which flow one after the other, and which threaten to progressively trap the character. The accumulation of dull days reaches the moment where the straw breaks the camel's back: 'Mi premeva una smania di fuga. I giorni, i mesi scorrevano piatti, uguali, con me ripiegato sulla solitudine e il deserto interiore; ed ero giunto a un'età nella quale bisogna scegliere tra la rassegnazione definitiva e il caparbio non arrendersi'.<sup>394</sup>

The anxiety which precipitates the escape is not explicitly traced back to Istria. The narrator of *La casa in campagna* opens a long digression on his (apparent) inability to find the right place to go to. His question, 'Ma dove andare?',<sup>395</sup> seems to prompt several hypotheses, which include the rocky plateau beyond Trieste. The character seems to be familiar with this area: 'È un paesaggio familiare pure a me [...] ma soltanto in superficie'.<sup>396</sup> The dry land, consisting of stone and bushes, with a few sporadic windblown houses, cannot be compared to the Istrian past or its culture. The narrator gives a diverse list of features which contrast with his homeland (the Karsic lifestyle, the lack of urban development, the different farming system etc.) and seem to inevitably narrow the investigation. Istria is not a 'naked' corridor exposed to the winds coming from Eastern Europe; it is sheltered from adverse weather conditions, and exposed to southern regions: 'mentre l'Istria accenna di rimando a volersi

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<sup>393</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Ieri un secolo fa* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1985), p. 219.

<sup>394</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Dove tornare* (Milano: Mondadori, 1974), p. 135.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

riparare ancora più a meridione'.<sup>397</sup> Not even somewhere very similar to Istria can take the place of the home country which he has lost.

Looking for a similar place does not help the stranger. Paradoxically, it can be said that the more he seeks a new 'home' (especially in an area with similar features), the more he rejects the possibility of establishing a tangible equivalent. Here, the stranger looks for every manner of difference, and tends to exaggerate each one found. It seems that in failing to reach a fruitful comparison between Istria and similar areas, the only possible answer to the opening question 'where to go?' automatically leads him back to the home country. The question itself is doomed to be rephrased and turns into: 'Dove altrove potevo andare e dove soprattutto tornare? Decidemmo per l'Istria'.<sup>398</sup> There can be only one place to which Tomizza's stranger might return.

In spite of having found his goal, the stranger's anxiety does not diminish. As Vittorio Spinazzola points out, a strange agitation overwhelms the foreigner who contemplates the idea of returning home: 'L'acquisto di una consapevolezza critica evoluta lo ha reso insomma inquietamente pensoso. Ed eccolo, sull'onda di questi assilli, tornare in visita ai luoghi natali'.<sup>399</sup> Eagerness turns into a feeling of turmoil, which accompanies the return home of the narrator of *Il ritorno arbitrario*. The yearning for the home country dominates his mind and the village that he has lost starts appearing as a suspended dimension, which lies beyond an invisible fire. The heat of the fire distorts the image and increases the stranger's concerns that he will be unable to recover what he has lost: 'Ogni volta, da oltre trent'anni, l'immagine di quell'angolo di terra differente da ogni altro, e ormai prossimo, tremolava nella mente che tutto voleva abbracciarlo, come si stendesse al di là di un fuoco invisibile'.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>399</sup> Vittorio Spinazzola, *Itaca addio* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>400</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Ieri un secolo fa*, p. 219.

The return to Istria is marked by a slow journey. The stranger fears the sudden reunion with his home village and drives his car in second gear, travelling in easy stages: ‘Procedo in terza, spesso in seconda, tra stradine ghiaiose corrette da muretti a secco’.<sup>401</sup> The anxiety seems to increase when he recognizes his village, and especially when he reaches the beginning of the street in which his old house is located. In this moment, the stranger expects that time has ruined his neglected home and destroyed his memories. He begins an exploration of the village and its surroundings: ‘L’occhio tornava a isolare, valutare; fino all’ingresso nel villaggio che mi ritrasmetteva un’impazienza ansiosa, quasi dovesse informarmi spiacevolmente sullo stato della casetta e del campo lasciati incustoditi – e perciò alla mercè di tutti, precari – entro il triangolo di siepi’.<sup>402</sup>

It is only when the character reaches his home that his anxiety ceases and his escape ends, but this raises a plethora of questions. The impact caused by the rift between the two dimensions drives the character to doubt himself. Several questions echo in his mind as he enters the old house, dressed in the finery of the city: ‘Mi siedevo. Ed ecco: la fuga era finita. Con gli abiti di città mi trovavo ancora fra quattro mura. Chi ero? Che volevo? Cosa mi richiamava là?’.<sup>403</sup> The deeper reasons, which have led the stranger to return to his home country, are initially lost and he is unaware of them. He is troubled by his conflicting sense of belonging (his urban life in Trieste and the part which originates from the old Istrian property), but he also tries to understand the final objective of his escape and the insuppressible call of his land.

In *Ritorni*, the same scene is set, but from the beginning the narrator admits that his Istrian homecoming assumes a specific meaning. When the black car slides into the tiny, stone streets and stops in front of his home’s entrance, he knows that his old house represents the centre of a microcosm in which everything originates and ends. Nostalgic elements do not

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<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

appear in the story, as the character stipulates that he does not play the role of Don Quixote, nor that of the survivor. On the contrary, he profits from the chance offered by destiny to face the unexpected implication of the return home, which has both positive and negative implications.

Quando il mio macchinone nero, incipriato di polvere, infangato fino al tetto, lasciava anche le stradine pietrose per infilarsi nella nostra di terra battuta [...] Approdavo al centro del mondo, dove tutto trovava fine e riaveva principio. Non recitavo una parte come quasi sempre era accaduto nelle diverse fasi precedenti del mio stare tra gli uomini. Non mi sentivo un Don Chisciotte né un nostalgico accontentato, non un feudale o un romantico superstite, e neppure un inurbato restitutosi alla natura. Assecondavo la buona sorte che aveva invertito il mio corso rimettendomi nei primi luoghi della memoria, nella meta verso cui vagano i sogni spesso lambendola ma mai centrandola.<sup>404</sup>

Only in his old house, where the character is ‘naked’ and does not act like a player on a stage, is he able to look for the missing significance. In the emptiness of the old house, where silence dominates the daily routine, he cannot lie, because everything has its own significance and any mask is forbidden. His attitude to the old reality rekindles the lost element which the character has forgotten: ‘Nel silenzio di quel luogo che mi rendeva più crudele che severo con me stesso, là dove il significato ultimo di ogni cosa risiedeva nel suo peso esatto, non sfuggivano scappatoie né abili travestimenti’.<sup>405</sup>

The stranger is aware of the gap that exists between his idea of the country lost and that of reality. The trepidation he feels regarding his return confirms that he does not expect to find what he left behind. During the passing of the years he has dreamt of his land, without being able to attain it (‘nella meta verso cui vagano i sogni spesso lambendola e mai centrandola’).<sup>406</sup> This illustrates that there is a constant search for the mother country, which materializes in several forms, such as the meeting with fellow countrymen prior to his return. However, the stranger is aware that he can only court his homeland in his dreams, and those dreams are merely a rough approximation of reality.

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<sup>404</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *I rapporti colpevoli*, pp. 172-173.

<sup>405</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Ieri un secolo fa*, p. 223.

<sup>406</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *I rapporti colpevoli*, pp. 172-173.

Spinazzola suggests that the gap between the past and the present often lacks coherence and is burdened with pain, causing a trauma which represents a crucial aspect of the return to the homeland. Discrepancies, gaps and missing connections populate the stranger's mind, and he can barely attribute a coherent meaning to his life. The shattering of the stranger's existence weighs heavily on his return, which runs the risk of turning into an oniric-unreal adventure. Returning home challenges the character, who must face a lost world which has itself changed in the interim: 'Tornare però significava confrontarsi con il mondo rimasto, quel mondo di cui non si poteva determinare con certezza se fosse mai esistito o se fosse definitivamente cambiato dopo la partenza dei più'.<sup>407</sup>

The full meaning of the return takes place when the characters overlap temporal fragments. The first image that the character of *La casa in campagna* encounters when he reaches the Istrian village already seems to predict a sense of complete change. The increase in traffic which now flows through the village is in contrast to the quiet, rustic village which he left decades ago. Traces of abandonment and neglect (the broken water fountains and damaged houses) highlight a changed microcosm and possibly a parallel sense of desolation, which the character will soon perceive:

Ancora un centinaio di metri ed ecco Giurizzani, annunciato da un pericoloso sfrecciare e incrociarsi di camion e automobili [...] con l'abbeveratoio sfondato, le vasche per le lavandaie asciutte e ostruite da foglie secche [...] Oltre la strada si raccoglievano le case, alcune rovinare altre rattoppate.<sup>408</sup>

The old house, worn away by time, is another image which introduces the character to the previous reality which has now been lost. The memory of the Istrian village, full of workers and surrounded by fertile countryside, is doomed to falter. Returning to the abandoned house, the character doubts that he ever lived there with his family, because he can no longer trust his memory, admitting that those images have become unthinkable.

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<sup>407</sup> Sanja Roić, 'Tornare dove? In margine a Dove tornare di Fulvio Tomizza', p. 97.

<sup>408</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Dove tornare*, p. 140.

Proprio nel mezzo spiccava la mia (casa), troppo grande e rossa ma annerita in un lato da anni di pioggia che scrosciava dalla grondaia sconnessa: un dente guasto al centro della bocca. Percorrendone le scale, i corridoi, mi riusciva impossibile che avesse accolto gli anni nostri più tremendi e lieti, il fantasticare col fratello nella stanza attigua a quella dei genitori, le incursioni al tempo della guerra, le perquisizioni dopo, i buoni odori che salendo dalla cucina e dalla bottega s'incontravano con quelli campestri del solario.<sup>409</sup>

It is not only familiar factors which inhabit the character's mind like ghosts, but even subtler aspects, like the landscape and agriculture, come to the fore. It seems that the character has noted in minute detail the colours and scents of his land, but also the arrangement of plants and tiny details related to farming. These are all features that characterized his Istrian life before exile. Walking through Saràjo's fields and looking around present another bewildering experience: the fields of wild radicchio now cover the old rows of vines. A question immediately surfaces in the character's mind: how can the inhospitable ground welcome the flourishing cultivation of his memory?

Attraversando il cortile retrostante, invaso da irte ortiche quasi senza foglie e in seme, tra aie deserte intorno ai nudi pali dei pagliai, giungemmo ai campi del Saràjo. Dove si allineavano filari con viti rare di zibibbo e uva regina [...] noccioli e girasoli nei quali conficcare le panie per lucherini e cardelli, ciliegi che fruttavano ai primi di maggio o tardi in luglio per lo sciroppo [...] si stendeva una terra uniforme appena velata da radicchi selvatici, troppo angusta per aver potuto ospitare tanti miracoli.<sup>410</sup>

Verbs demonstrate the clash between past and present, through the use of two different tenses. Past tenses can be used to explain a return or memory (the character remembers 'ricordavo'),<sup>411</sup> providing the dimension of the passing of the years, while gerunds are used to indicate movement. To exemplify the latter, when the character returns, he does not limit himself to a single place; he moves from his garden to the interior of his old house, and wanders through the village and the surroundings. The idea of movement, denoting the anxiety of a man coming back to the dimension lost, shows his desire to discover in greater depth any change which has taken place in his home country. This is predominantly

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<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

illustrated by gerunds. The restlessness of the character turns into action: he climbs the staircase of the house, ‘Percorrendone le strade’;<sup>412</sup> he crosses the courtyard, ‘Attraversando il cortile retrostante’;<sup>413</sup> and goes along the gravel road, ‘Proseguendo per la strada bianca’.<sup>414</sup>

When the character comes back to his home village changed by a life abroad, the use of past tenses, which dominates the stories of returns, marks a distant time that cannot be recovered. The narrator remembers where he attended primary school, ‘Qui avevo frequentato le elementari’;<sup>415</sup> the local shop and tavern; local families, most of which moved to Italy after the Second World War; the bus stop; and the public weighing machine. A short trip to Momichia, a small village close to Giurizzani, reminds him of the railwayman Matteo, who travelled all over the Astro-Hungarian empire. Countless memories flow thorough the narrative, troubling the character, who cannot find what he expected:

Il personaggio si presenta all'appuntamento con il suo io infantile munito del patrimonio di idee accumulato nell'emigrazione: e lo sottopone alla prova determinata dalla risorgenza dei ricordi. Il lungo periodo intercorso prima del rientro drammatizza il confronto tra io narrante e io narrato.<sup>416</sup>

The gap inevitably leads the character to face diverging experiences. Having lived for years in a different environment, the return home is marked by memories which clash with unexpected changes. Consequently, his point of view cannot be univocal and becomes a double point of view. By supporting both viewpoints (internal and external), the story reaches a compromise, which sometimes leans towards empathy, and other times towards estrangement: ‘Il punto di vista narrativo ha infatti una duplicità netta: è interno ma assieme esterno al mondo narrato. Partecipazione empatica e straniamento critico si contendono senza sosta il dominio della pagina’.<sup>417</sup> The confrontation with the new transformed reality means that a series of doubts

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<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>416</sup> Vittorio Spinazzola, *Itaca addio*, p. 19.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

follows, which questions the existence of the lost past. This paradoxical situation represents the inevitable consequence of the strange overlapping situation:

Che cosa restava del mio mondo e della mia gente, cui avevo dedicato pensieri e sentimenti tra i più generosi e alti che mi avessero visitato? Erano definitivamente cambiati dopo il vuoto apertosi con la partenza dei più, o erano davvero esistiti come io me li ero impressi nella mente e nel cuore? I vecchi, arteriosclerotici o diabetici o semialcolizzati che incontravo, mi scambiavano per mio padre morto vent'anni prima o per un prozio che non avevo mai conosciuto, sapendomi di quella razza e basta. I più giovani credevano d'intravedere nel mio rimpatrio segreti e audaci scopi che [...] dovevano aver a che fare con lo spionaggio.<sup>418</sup>

The idea of the microcosm that the character has secretly preserved over the decades does not correspond to the place of his youth. The drastic changes perceived by him lead him to question his memory and to doubt the existence of the familiar dimension. In parallel, the Istrian village left behind has been radically transformed into a reality, which does not fit in with the requirements of the character. After his first return home, he starts doubting if that place could still be considered his home: 'La macchina infilava l'ultima stradina percorribile, si avvicinava alla casa annunciata dal tetto rilucente tra le acacie e i prugni e che non sapevo in quale misura e fino a quando potevo considerare mio'.<sup>419</sup>

In the character's mind, the Istrian village which he left becomes a distant place, which cannot comfort the stranger. Claudio Marabini points out that the ghostly presence of the home country marks the narrative, turning it into a painful experience.

La patria non è in un luogo preciso, forse non è in alcun luogo. Sta solo in un piccolo lembo di terra sbriciolato dalla discordia, ormai proiettato lontano nello spazio e nel tempo, trasformato in tormento di coscienza, ricordo macerato e pullulante, sorgente continua di pena: una patria fatta di nulla, un fantasma, ma immenso e alto come lombi di una divinità domestica, tradita dalla sorte e incombente.<sup>420</sup>

Looking at the character's troubles in depth shows that it is not the changed dimension which causes his disorientation, but rather the blend of familiar and unfamiliar traits, which in

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<sup>418</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Dove tornare*, p. 174.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>420</sup> Claudio Marabini, 'Tomizza apolide', in *La Nazione*, 29 August 1970, p. 3.

Freudian term is called *Unheimliche*, or uncanny, and is defined as follows: ‘for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old’.<sup>421</sup> In appearance, the unfamiliar elements prevent characters from fully recognizing places, but it is the hidden familiar traits which torment them.

A further puzzling step is experienced by the character, who not being able to fully recognize the environment of his past life, underlines the schism which happened within itself: ‘Ecco, ero tornato per rimettere il dito nella piaga: dirmi e ripetermi a voce che qualcosa si era per sempre rotto dentro di me’.<sup>422</sup> The return to Istria increases the sense of estrangement that the character has already experienced abroad. Therefore, the stranger seems to be the one who lives in a third dimension, which does not entirely correspond either to the home country or to the new one, but rather to a suspended in-between position.

Not being entirely satisfied by the drastic gap encountered, the narrator of *Dove tornare* visits Umag, the main town of the northern Istrian coast district, in order to resolve his doubts. Wandering through the small centre, he can barely recognize the place where he attended the seminary. The Istrian town is crowded by tourists, who speak in their own languages, adding a cosmopolitan atmosphere to the maritime place: ‘Vagai per le stradine di Umago, mescolato a turisti occupati in piccole faccende, a donne seminude che parlavano tutte le lingue e vari dialetti italiani, non sentendomi nessuno: né del luogo né estraneo’.<sup>423</sup> The character argues that he does not belong either to Istria or to a foreign country; rather he feels an emptiness, which leads him towards a sense of not belonging.

When the narrator of *Il ritorno arbitrario* reflects on his return to Istria, he feels a collision between the two dimensions: ‘Le atmosfere opposte delle due case, i due diversi modi di essere cozzavano così violentemente da cancellarsi a vicenda e tenermi sospeso in un

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<sup>421</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 212.

<sup>422</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Ieri un secolo fa*, p. 223.

<sup>423</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Dove tornare*, p. 185.

vuoto spaventoso'.<sup>424</sup> The impossibility of belonging to a place (the idea of a dreamt Ithaca has just failed) prevents the character from fully adhering to a reality. Having failed to regain the lost homeland, the stranger does not know where to put his trust. The title of the collection of stories, *Dove tornare*, prophetically foretells the impossible goal. For the stranger the most important question is doomed, irritatingly, to remain unanswered: 'Sarebbe stato facile sottrarsi, mandare tutto al diavolo anche questa volta, ma dove andare, dove tornare, in attesa del ritorno definitivo che cancella tutto e che solo si usa rispettare?'.<sup>425</sup>

The anxiety which typifies the stranger, who has lost the comfort of his home country and does not know how to replace it, brings to mind the condition of not being at home. Here, Tomizza's sense of the uncanny also seems to recall Martin Heidegger's definition of the term: 'uncanniness means at the same time not-being-at-home'.<sup>426</sup> The impossibility of being at home, but also the inability to find one's own home, threatens the stranger, underlining how exile (and in this case a double exile) can be a displacing experience which may shake up an entire life.

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<sup>424</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Ieri un secolo fa*, p. 230.

<sup>425</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Dove tornare*, p. 187.

<sup>426</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 176.

## Chapter 5

### By way of a Conclusion

#### 5.1 Towards autobiography

In this chapter, I will focus on the relationship between writing and exile. The exilic experience should be considered a fundamental one for a writer, because it usually conditions the themes and plots chosen by an author, but it also plays a covert role, influencing in depth the act of writing itself. Being a writer in exile, Tomizza cannot be truly included or excluded from his stories and his characters. What I will try to demonstrate here is the fluctuating figure of a writer who takes advantage of the chances offered by writing. Indeed, in the controversial relationship between the writer and his literary self, the exilic experience always finds its outlet, offering the chance for the writer to elaborate his story. It follows that Tomizza's novels are projections which develop new scenarios for his exile, aiming also to rebuild a new 'home' on the page.

By focusing on exilic writers, the first issue that comes to light concerns the influence played by exile on the writer's narrative. One can assume that the remarkable experience of exile would have left its mark, addressing the complex relationship between the writer and his works. But in what forms does exile take its space and how is it filtered through the text? I will first outline how Tomizza composed his works. An investigation into how the Istrian writer approached his initial works may unveil some hidden dynamics that lie behind the author and his production. Undoubtedly, as suggested by Roger Whitehouse, 'If exile shapes writing, providing it with subjects and themes, writing also shapes exile'.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Roger Whitehouse, *Literary Expressions of Exile* (Lewiston; Lampeter: Mellen Press, 2000), p. 3.

Tomizza's first works are all pervaded with the reality of Istrian exile. They deal with the growing pressure of the Yugoslav regime, which leads people to move to a new country. The controversial choice of departure, that links the hybrid country of the origins to the mutilated condition of the arrival, characterizes the background of the novels from *Materada* to *La miglior vita*. Nevertheless, sometimes exile is only touched upon or implied; in other cases it is investigated in depth and constitutes the real barycentre of the story. It seems evident, therefore, that Tomizza's works are connected to the writer's exilic experience, if not directly generated by it.

Tomizza provides a detailed account of the composition of his works. From his interviews, it is possible to trace the decisions that would later determine his exile. In parallel, the writer underlines the genesis of his most representative novels, his involvement in the stories and his birth as a writer. What immediately becomes clear is that exile seems to strongly influence Tomizza's decision to begin the draft of his first novel *Materada*. The pressing situation of his homeland – that almost crippled his country fellows – spurs him to draw parallels with some stories that blend together in the novel.

Al termine ritornai puntuale alla mia estate di *Materada*, che trovai sconvolta dalla difficile scelta aperta dall'intesa londinese tra i due paesi, se restare definitivamente nella terra degli avi sottoposta a un comunismo sciovinista o invece optare per l'Italia poco conosciuta ma compresa nell'emisfero occidentale. Successe che in quei tre mesi, in cui i paesani di solito si ammazzavano di fatica, ogni attività rimanesse paralizzata per lasciar posto a febbrili interrogativi e severi bilanci sul decennio trascorso, i quali nella maggior parte dei casi si risolsero con l'abbandono delle cose più care e sicure. Forse il solo a lavorare, quasi di nascosto, fui io, che presto presi a registrare quanto avveniva sotto i miei occhi. Penso con autocompatimento e un pizzico di franco rimpianto a quel mio disinvolto spreco di fogli di carta protocollo, riempiti da una scrittura spavalda e frettolosa. Elaborai una serie di bozzetti sulle vicissitudini presenti e passate di un gruppo di famiglie che avevano mostrato un differente atteggiamento verso il regime e si erano ugualmente decise alla partenza.<sup>428</sup>

The author lives firsthand the troubles to which his village is subjected. Like the families he describes in *Materada*, Tomizza experiences the Istrian dramatic conditions, participating in the story that he begins to write, even though in his first novel he merely reports second hand

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<sup>428</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Le mie estati letterarie*, p. 121.

the difficult choice of leaving one's own country. Tomizza's vicissitudes do not surface in the novel and Francesco, the main character, cannot be considered the writer's alter ego. Rather he is a voice borrowed from *Materada's* chorus, in order to increase his involvement and make the story plausible. As Tomizza underlines, *Materada* (and *La ragazza di Petrovia*) cannot be considered autobiographical:

I miei primi due romanzi non sono affatto autobiografici come qualcuno, legittimamente, era stato indotto a sottolineare. Posso anzi dire che non è lasciato uno spiraglio in essi non solo alla vita privata dell'autore, ma anche a quelli che sono i suoi problemi, le finalità che più gli stanno a cuore.<sup>429</sup>

A possible misunderstanding may originate from the fact that Tomizza himself experiences exile, which plays a decisive role in his first works. *Materada's* genesis nonetheless undermines the idea of an autobiographical novel, because the writer's aim is to give voice to the troubled story of his home village, drawing sketches of some families, without including his own experience. At the same time, *Materada* takes advantage of its writer's involvement in exile. The speed that characterizes the writing of his first novel seems to be related to a pressing necessity. As soon as he settles in Trieste, Tomizza reviews his notes and transforms them into a novel: 'avevo annotato degli episodi che mi avevano particolarmente colpito e mi avevano anche straziato. Per cui, passato anche io a Trieste, nell'ottobre del '55, mi misi a tavolino'.<sup>430</sup> The impulse in composing his first work, and also his 'improvisation' in becoming a writer ('m'improvvisai scrittore'),<sup>431</sup> reinforces the idea of the creative power of the exile. *Materada* is not an autobiographical novel, but it is generated by the exile faced by the writer. The opportunity, or rather the series of unexpected events encountered by the writer and his country fellows, has led him towards the act of writing.

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<sup>429</sup> Bruno De Marchi, 'La letteratura ha bisogno di uomini', in *Relazioni sociali*, 17-18 (1965), p. 14.

<sup>430</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera*, p. 39.

<sup>431</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto', p. 227.

Several times Tomizza repeats that *Materada* is the result of a long process of elaboration, in which he gathers stories to give voice to the vicissitudes of his unrecognizable land. Once more, the writer seems to confirm the advantage given to the plurality over the individual and personal experience.

Il mio romanzo *Materada* ha avuto una gestazione altrettanto lunga, quanto è stata breve la stesura, per la quale non mi occorre più di un mese di tempo. Credo di poter asserire, senza timore di esagerare, che in questa mia prima opera narrativa di più largo respiro si sia accumulata un'esperienza di vita non solo mia, ma della mia gente, degli abitanti di quel territorio mistilingue – poco conosciuto dagli stessi istriani della costa – cui fa capo Materada, un gruppo di villaggi e una terra tutta ulivi, boschi, vigneti e campi di grano, quasi nascosta fra i piccoli centri di Umago e di Buje.<sup>432</sup>

The material gathered in the Istrian village during the summer is the basis upon which the author builds *Materada* and the subsequent novels. In fact, the experience of exile plays a crucial role in Tomizza's first two novels, but it influenced his later literary production still further. *L'albero dei sogni* was written when the *Trilogia istriana* (which included *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *Il bosco di acacie*) was already finished. Although the latter deals extensively with exile, Tomizza had not completed his exilic inspiration. He gives voice to a village before the exodus, to the puzzling experience of abandoning one's own place, to refugee camps and new alien backgrounds, but he has not yet elaborated his story. *L'albero dei sogni* investigates this step, turning a collective story into an internal account and putting autobiography on the stage: 'è seguito un altro momento della mia narrativa, nel quale mi rivedo più autobiografico'.<sup>433</sup>

Tomizza is aware of the transition that implies a closer relationship between identity and writing. He feels that his personal experience has not been included in his novels and that the role played by exile and the troubled vicissitudes of a frontier land should be experienced in the first person on the page.

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<sup>432</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Intervista', *Radio Trieste*, 28 September 1960, p. 1.

<sup>433</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Incontro', in *Annali del Circolo Culturale Istro-Veneto Istria* (2001), p. 44.

Sino a quel momento, era stata per me una specie di prova o prestito di voce, un assaggio delle mie possibilità e insieme il sondaggio di una materia, in attesa che dentro si sciogliessero i nodi di una vicenda vissuta con incredulità e spasimo fino all'ultima goccia. Perché, infatti, dopo aver prestato la voce agli altri e dibattendomi ancora in quei problemi, ignorare un'esperienza di vita che nelle ore di maggior sconforto aveva valutato per la prima volta il soccorso di un foglio bianco e di una penna? perché non tentare di tracciare nella sua intierezza la condizione di essere uomo e scrittore di confine?<sup>434</sup>

In *L'albero dei sogni*, Stefano's mishaps flow parallel to Tomizza's path. The character's childhood in seminaries, the double exiles in Trieste and Belgrade, the impossibility of returning to Istria and the final diary full of nightmares remembering the dead father, are the output of the writer's elaboration of his experiences. This is Tomizza's attempt to put his life into the novel: 'volli tentare l'autobiografia, l'autoritratto, fermando le diverse tappe di quel doloroso itinerario giovanile che ho qui ricordato'.<sup>435</sup>

If exile typifies *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *L'albero dei sogni*, only in the latter is the writer's life put under strain. This can be observed in the structure of the novel, as well as in its narrative. If *Materada* reports the hybrid background of an Istrian village before the exile, *L'albero dei sogni* completely overturns the concise style of the first novel, consisting of rapid dialogues, a changing point of view and interactions between characters. On the contrary, the latter is the discovery of the chaotic knot of the self — and the hardships and contradictions to which it is subjected — which would require a sophisticated elaboration. The nonlinear structure of the novel allows the self to move backward and forward, omitting relevant details, to focus on obsessions and unsolved matters, indulging the labyrinthine thoughts of the character.

Il protagonista è sempre un certo Stefano Marcovich (nel quale mi riconosco largamente) sballottato da un confine all'altro, che ha provato una lunga serie di lacerazioni non soltanto di carattere etnico, ma anche sociale e ideologico. Povertà, benessere, servitù, patronato, richiamo cristiano, suggestione marxista, sembrano inconciliabili eppure erano stati vissuti così spasmodicamente da sentirmi sempre di doverli conciliare in un certo modo, di dovere, se non altro, renderli meno stridenti, perché coabitavano, convivevano in me. Sentivo di appartenere all'uno e all'altro, così come mi sentivo di essere italiano e di essere in parte slavo. Naturalmente tutto questo generava un groviglio interiore che doveva essere chiarito. Anche il modo di scrivere non poteva più essere, come in *Materada*, immediato, ma doveva

<sup>434</sup> Claudio Toscani, 'Incontro con Fulvio Tomizza', in *Il ragguaglio librario*, 41 (1974), p. 13.

<sup>435</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto', p. 227.

seguire un complicato processo interiore, per cui necessitavo anche di una prosa più ricca, più sinuosa, fatta di lunghi periodi, per cercare di cogliere gli stati d'animo contrastanti, quell'affiorare di sempre nuove percezioni e di nuove intuizioni.<sup>436</sup>

The fragmented nature of *L'albero dei sogni* goes hand in hand with Tomizza's troubled youth, which consisted of moves, changes, decisions and second thoughts. This disruptive dynamic needs a space in which the inevitable break of the exile can freely surface, putting under pressure the coherent sequence of events and their linear development. As suggested by Said: 'Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us'.<sup>437</sup>

The autobiographical nature of Tomizza's novel reveals a twisted narrative, which mirrors the complex dynamic of the main character: 'La scrittura che mi necessitava per questo itinerario tutto interiore era da conquistare riga per riga'.<sup>438</sup> By writing *L'albero dei sogni* the writer begins to draw his autobiography, starting to locate his self on the paper and to give an account of his life; consequently, the investigation of the inner maze is formed bit by bit. The self does not pre-exist the novel, it is a work-in-progress, constantly shaped by the process of writing. Indeed, the mechanism which lies beyond the autobiographical work is a self that moves outside itself to tell the story. As Adriana Cavarero underlines, to be a 'narratable self', the self needs to meet the page, accepting the challenge to be exposed and elaborated. It requires turning into someone else to tell its story: 'the strange pretense of a self which makes himself an other in order to be able to tell his own story [...] The other,

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<sup>436</sup> Tomizza, 'Incontro', p. 44.

<sup>437</sup> Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 6.

<sup>438</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Le mie estati letterarie*, p. 134.

therefore, is here the fantasmatic product of a doubling, the supplement of an absence, the parody of a relation'.<sup>439</sup>

In the novel, the self is transformed into another, thanks to its desire for the narration: 'I will tell you my story in order to make you capable of telling it to me. The narratable self's desire for narration manifests itself in autobiographical exercises'.<sup>440</sup> The desire to divulge is the drive that rules *L'albero dei sogni*'s narrative. At the end of the story, where the diary of nightmares begins, the writer has already recounted his mishaps. The double estrangement experienced in Trieste and Belgrade gives space to a fluid narrative, consisting of obsessive dreams which lack coherence. This unsettled structure, which is marked only by the dates of the diary, allows the author to consider the act of writing itself, finding a space to analyse his inspiration.

The reader may be struck by the image of a writer who expresses his need to tell the story: 'Ed eccomi solo, davanti alla nuda tavola e un foglio bianco. Non vi sono ricorso per confessarmi vergogne brucianti, ma stando come stanno le cose lo avrei fatto anche se non mi fossi mai mosso da Mat., usando magari una foglia di granoturco'.<sup>441</sup> If he had not become a writer, he would still have had the same urgent need to express himself in some way. The sweet corn leaf would have helped him to turn his self into a 'narratable self', becoming the 'other' that allows the self to give his account. A few lines later, the writer reaffirms that he seeks to tell his story: 'Proviamo a raccontare'.<sup>442</sup>

Tomizza continues investigating his relationship with writing and reaffirms once more his compulsion to tell the story, underlining his duty to free the narration. It follows that the process of writing an autobiographical novel comes from the drive to transform the self into a 'narratable self'. Tomizza talks about an intense and pressing desire, that cannot be contained:

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<sup>439</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 84.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>441</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L'albero dei sogni*, p. 261.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

‘Chi aveva mai pensato di scrivere qualcosa di me, per me, un giorno? E’ così che si diventa scrittori: una cosa non la si tiene più dentro?’.<sup>443</sup>

Bearing in mind the intrinsic nature of the ‘narratable self’, the compulsion to tell his story leads the writer to put pen to paper. However, his impulse cannot be contained within the page. Tomizza’s desire to write surpasses autobiography. In Tomizza’s words, his novel is an ‘autobiografia esasperata’,<sup>444</sup> in which he cannot forget the controversial condition of his border land.

Non è stata peraltro la singolarità di un destino privato a invogliarmi a questa specie di autobiografia esasperata, quanto la consapevolezza che questo cammino solitario aveva dovuto far sempre i conti (fino ad esserne intimamente condizionato) con la recente storia di una città al confine, contesa da due Paesi di formazione e di ideologia diverse, che fungevano a loro volta da avamposti di due emisferi antitetici, l’occidentale e quello dell’Est europeo.<sup>445</sup>

*L’albero dei sogni* marks Tomizza’s autobiographical moment. From *Materada*’s chorus, the writer progressively feels the need to tell his story, finding a larger space for the elaboration of his self. However, he also writes the story of many lives with whom he shares hybridity and exile. By going beyond autobiography, Tomizza transforms it. His novel concerns the troubled life of the hybrid self, who struggles to define itself and is put under pressure by the fragile balance of its complex identity. Therefore, Tomizza’s experience incorporates many parallel lives in a frontier land shaken by political turmoil.

## 5.2 Writing from exile

The relationship between the writer and his works outlines the need for the self to take up more space in the story. The observer of the hometown and the vicissitudes of his country

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<sup>443</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *L’albero dei sogni*, p. 261.

<sup>444</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Fulvio Tomizza spiega se stesso’, *Il Gazzettino*, 6 May 1969, p. 3.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

fellows before exile turns into the protagonist of a puzzling double exile. In other words, the writer not only wants to tell a story; he progressively aims to elaborate his self in the narrative, telling his *own* story. If *Materada* and *L'albero dei sogni* can be considered the two poles in which the writer is respectively less and more involved in the story, it is impossible to separate the novels clearly according to this parameter. What I am suggesting here, is that when the writer gives voice to Francesco and his country fellows in *Materada*, he is not completely excluded from the story; while when he shapes Stefano's experience from his life, he goes beyond autobiography, giving an account of a wider viewpoint. The writer and his works lie on unsteady ground, where exilic experience is the common denominator, which generates new stories and perspectives. If the writer lends his voice, or rather, if he embodies his characters, all his works should be considered 'experiments' in which he tests exile.

Exile not only characterizes Tomizza's works, it is also, in turn, constantly elaborated by the writer. By dealing with exile, the writer cannot be excluded from his characters' perspectives, but neither can he focus only on his experience. I shall now take into account the condition of a writer who is subjected to exile. In particular, I will consider the limit of being 'condemned' to write about the experience he underwent, but also the chance to experience it through writing.

First of all, Tomizza is aware of the influence on him which Istria has. For its peculiarity, the country of origin plays a decisive role in his novels. In his words: 'Ciò che mi ha condizionato e forse definito per sempre è il luogo, secondo me particolarissimo, nel quale sono nato'.<sup>446</sup> But exile itself plays a relevant role in the need to write. As I have already analysed, in *Materada* it seems to act as a catalyst to begin Tomizza's novel.

Non saprei dire quanto veramente entrasse in me il proposito di scrivere; ma certo esisteva in me un latente desiderio, già sui banchi del Liceo, di narrare della mia Matteredada<sup>447</sup>, così umile, così disadorna e

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<sup>446</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto', p. 224.

<sup>447</sup> Here Tomizza uses the Italian version of the village's name.

stramba e quasi nascosta alla vista degli altri. E questa mia esigenza, coincidendo con la stagione dell'esodo, andò lentamente prendendo corpo.<sup>448</sup>

Although the Istrian writer had previously developed a passion for writing, the events that drastically overcome the history of his homecountry compel him to write. Tomizza underlines that the exilic perspective weighs heavily on him on many occasions: 'mi ero portato dietro le stimmate di un'esperienza'.<sup>449</sup> He also admits that it was his experience of exile which has actualized his need to write — it is through the unpredictable historical events that his village has been depopulated and he has observed his country fellows abandoning their homes. In exile, he started to write about his lost land, and it is where he also continues elaborating his experience. Further proof of the relevance that should be attributed to exile comes from the writer himself. If the initial period is clearly marked by exile, Tomizza declares that it is also present in later works, when strong impressions generated by the exodus from his homeland fade, but the theme still persists in other forms. Characters embody distinctive features that are typical of his home country, or at least of a multi-cultural land.

Ho scritto anche libri che esulano da questo territorio; però ho sempre cercato, anche quando ho abbandonato l'ispirazione diretta dalla realtà che accadeva sotto i miei occhi e mi rivolgevo agli archivi, delle storie dove c'erano dei perdenti, che avevano avuto scarsa giustizia oppure scarso riconoscimento o nessuno, che avevano avuto dei processi nei quali erano imputati innocenti, magari morti senza giustizia. Io sentivo questo dovere di rendere, *post mortem*, giustizia oltreché riportare alla luce una storia vera di uomini, personaggi, ambienti, paesaggi che essendo antichi mi ricordavano il mio paese, com'era prima della deflagrazione ideologica e politica.<sup>450</sup>

If exile spurs Tomizza to write his novels, the experience gained by the author is ever-present in his works and, at the same time, transcends them. Although some novels can be considered autobiographical, while others tend to exclude the presence of the writer, writing mediates the constant struggle between the writer as the person who lived regardless of his

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<sup>448</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Intervista', p. 3.

<sup>449</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto: uomo e scrittore di frontiera', p. 146.

<sup>450</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Intervista', in 'Annali del Liceo scientifico Albert Einstein Rimini', 17 February 1998, pp. 70-71.

work and the one who wrote the novels. To clarify the two components that together shape the figure of the writer, let me quote Margaret Atwood:

What is the relationship between the two entities we lump under one name, that of ‘the writer’? The particular writer. By *two*, I mean the person who exists when no writing is going forward – the one who walks the dog, eats bran for regularity, takes the car in to be washed, and so forth – and that other, more shadowy and altogether more equivocal personage who shares the same body, and who, when no one is looking, takes it over and uses it to commit the actual writing.<sup>451</sup>

In Tomizza’s case, the writer as the person who moved from his home village, experiencing the indelible mark of the move, is certainly different from the person who collected his notes in order to develop them. However, exile is the transversal glue that binds the two figures, given that it is from the experience gained by the former that the second figure is encouraged to write his novels. The two conditions are bound together and possibly shape the usual state of a writer whose works are inevitably imbued with exile.

In his essay *Reading and Writing: a Personal Account*, Naipaul confirms that the condition of a writer in exile is a unique one. Being abroad means undergoing an experience which taints the writer profoundly: ‘Nearly all my adult life had been spent in countries where I was a stranger. I couldn’t as a writer go beyond that experience. To be true to that experience I had to write about people in that kind of position’.<sup>452</sup> If going beyond exile is not possible, exile is the threshold which the writer cannot cross. The person who physically writes the novel cannot get rid of the person who left his country, and he carries the inevitable fracture within himself. Naipaul intertwines the two figures, underlining that his specific condition had flown in the narrative. If the unique state of the exile holds the writer, it follows that novels are imbued with characters who live parallel exiles: ‘The experience I had had was particular to me. To do a novel about it, it would have been necessary to create someone like

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<sup>451</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: a Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 30.

<sup>452</sup> Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, *Reading and Writing: a Personal Account* (New York: New York Review, 2000), pp. 28-29.

me [...] it would have been necessary more or less to duplicate the original experience and it would have added nothing'.<sup>453</sup>

Tomizza's characters seem to follow the same process. They are often generated by the writer's life, and they 'double' his experience, as confirmed by Tomizza's words: 'Direi che in ogni libro ci sono elementi autobiografici, certi libri lo sono dichiaratamente; io ne ho parecchi di questo tipo, mi ispiro alla mia vita, cerco di fare di me un personaggio che rappresenta altri di quell'ambiente, di quella generazione'.<sup>454</sup> Life filters into the work when the writer seeks to make himself a character. He also draws upon characters from his personal vicissitudes; starting from his life, the writer conveys the experience of people from his background. Like Naipaul, Tomizza does not transcend his life abroad.

Bearing in mind that exile originates characters and plots, linking the experience of the writer with his literary embodiment, I will now clarify how Tomizza's works balance the writer's experience and the centripetal strength that eludes his control. Although in *Materada*, Tomizza gives voice to a village without making himself a character, the story he tells is generated by the situation that he shares with his country fellows. If Francesco is not Tomizza's projection and, therefore, if the novel cannot be considered an autobiographical one, the writer underlines that he identifies himself with the character, or even with the characters of the chorus.

Per esempio ho cominciato a scrivere *Materada* a ventitré anni e mi calavo nella mentalità di un contadino molto più vecchio di me, che deve decidere se andare o restare. Naturalmente non si trattava di me, però portavo con me tutta l'ottica di quel mondo, le tradizioni di quel mondo, il modo di parlare, i problemi via via vissuti anche da me.<sup>455</sup>

The verb 'calare', employed by Tomizza to describe his identification with Francesco, pinpoints the complex relationship between the writer and his work. By belonging to a

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<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>454</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Intervista*, Liceo scientifico Albert Einstein Rimini, p. 71.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

specific culture and territory, the writer shapes characters who take advantage of his experience. In other words, Tomizza does not draw his vicissitudes to create a character who embodies his self; rather, he accomplishes a man who belongs to his land and interprets his troubles. That man allows the author to set a distance, but also to step in and to develop the writer's perspective.

Mi sono calato nella fisionomia di un uomo maturo di quel popolo, che non era del tutto né italiano, né slavo, era un misto, non era né una cosa né l'altra ma aveva l'esperienza e le tensioni dell'uno e dell'altro, premeva perché questi paesi si mettessero in pace, cercava la soluzione migliore.<sup>456</sup>

Tomizza's background is elaborated through Francesco, who explores the paradoxes of his land when exile comes close. But the writer's voice also breaks into the complex reality of his frontier land, generating a multiplicity of voices that interpret the postwar collapse. In this ambiguous position lies the writer. On the one hand, he admits that the peasant who is betrayed by the ageing uncle's testament does not correspond to him; the person who writes *Materada* distances himself from the character and from the story. On the other hand, the choice to remain in or to leave his homeland challenges Tomizza in the first person.

The novel in which Tomizza most clearly indicates that he is only the observer of events, without corresponding to the main character, still offers the involvement of the writer in the story. In alliance with the story, the author develops a variety of topics, such as the relationship with his homeland and country fellows, and the urgent unmistakable decision he must make, which outlines how he cannot completely separate himself from the story. His experience is fated to be ever-present in the narrative, pulling the strings of its underground channels.

By taking into account the most autobiographical novel of his literary production, it is evident that Tomizza identifies himself with Stefano, transposing his life into the work.

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<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

*L'albero dei sogni* is, therefore, the playground in which the writer makes himself a character and can finally write his story. However, if the identification with Stefano is clear, autobiography may also allow the writer to go beyond it. Tomizza's 'biografia esasperata' crosses the threshold of his own experience and turns into a novel, the perspective of which links the experience of people from a frontier land, who cannot disentangle the chaotic maze of their unique identities. Autobiography loses its precise meaning and falls under the wider category of a novel, where characters are freed from the faithful story of the writer.

L'urgenza di dire cose mie, di raccontare la storia di un intellettuale quale ero, mi porta a vivere la mia autobiografia, ferocemente, assai più di molto illustri scrittori triestini pieni di patemi e conflitti. [...] finì che l'autobiografia si deformò in diario non rispettoso dei fatti, in possibilità di romanzo: un romanzo scritto sulla mia vita, ispirato alla mia vita, ma orientato alla più vasta categoria del romanzo.<sup>457</sup>

This time, the writer creates a young man who interprets his vicissitudes without limiting the novel to his life. Tomizza is able to set the basis for a work that is inspired by his troubles, and goes beyond them. This leads to a paradoxical situation: exile is the power and the limit that many writers have experienced through their narrative. It is a fluid component that constantly evolves, shaping characters that are affected by the peculiar condition of having lost their home country. Therefore, an autobiographical novel might turn into a work that takes inspiration from the exile of his author, conveying and transcending the exilic perspective.

Writing gives the author the chance to use his novels to metabolize exile. Indeed, for an exilic writer, a new work is a chance to elaborate his story. As suggested by Tomizza: 'Da cronista o cantastorie disinteressato, mi spoglio man mano di questo canto ed entro nell'animo dei miei personaggi, entro nell'animo mio, e comincia per me una nuova possibilità'.<sup>458</sup> The chance provided by new stories shapes 'tentacular' writing, which can be defined as the

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<sup>457</sup> Claudio Toscani, 'Incontro con Fulvio Tomizza', p. 10.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

opportunity for Tomizza to extend and to develop his experience, building up new scenarios. Tomizza's 'tentacles' correspond, therefore, to his chances to live multiple parallel existences through new episodes and accounts, approaching exile from different perspectives. This creates a great variety of prospects: sometimes characters face the decision to remain in or to leave their country; at other times they cross the border, or exile is omitted and only its consequences are evident.

The work which better exemplifies Tomizza's 'tentacular' writing is probably *La miglior vita*. In this novel, Tomizza does not avoid his characters and chorus as in *Materada*, nor does he create an autobiographical novel such as *L'albero dei sogni*; he does, however, exploit the chance to draw a projection. The protagonist, Martin Crusich, who does not correspond to the writer, is the sacristan who retraces the story of his parish church through the sequence of Italian and 'Slav' priests, embodying a new possibility for the writer.

La lunga e tortuosa circumnavigazione di un piccolo mondo di asperità, iniziata da Materada, si conclude a Materada con *La miglior vita* di prossima pubblicazione. Ma il protagonista non sono più io, o forse sono io quale potrò essere a ottant'anni, tant'è vero che ho creduto opportuno di prestare la mia voce al sagrestano del luogo, il quale narra e insieme canta le 'gesta' di una comunità nei suoi trecent'anni di vita.<sup>459</sup>

Writing a novel offers an opportunity for the writer to elaborate his exile; he may be present in the first person, or he can only use his experience to the advantage of his characters. The novel is a place of struggle, in which the writer and the written dispute the space available. Sometimes the former is able to guarantee a wider space and make himself a character; at other times he retreats in favour of other characters, who continue the writer's experience. A similar mechanism is described by Gadda:

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<sup>459</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Autoritratto', p. 227.

L'attore del giudizio e la cosa giudicata, lo scrittore e la scritta, il narratore e la narrata stanno fra loro come combattenti in duello [...] Il giudizio, la rappresentazione, la *Vorstellung* (il duello) non può celebrarsi, è ovvio, senza il coesistere e il convenire dei due.<sup>460</sup>

In any case, the experience of the writer filters into the narrative and leaves a certain degree of indeterminacy. Exile is both the weakness and the strength of an author, who cannot rid himself of his experience because his works are doomed to rotate around his vicissitudes, which, in turn, enable the writer to elaborate his condition. In any case, exile encourages creativity, transforming a dramatic experience into a source of inspiration and opportunity. As Claudio Magris underlined: 'L'esilio è necessario alla vita e alla creazione'.<sup>461</sup> The creative dynamic of exile can be described as an impulse to thought, which has led several writers to choose a life abroad. Indeed, writing creates possibilities that in real life are neglected, elaborating other paths that would be unthinkable in a familiar context. Among the advantages of being in exile, Eva Hoffman develops further the power of imagination spurred by the exilic experience.

Being deframed, so to speak, from everything familiar, makes for a certain fertile detachment and gives one new ways of observing and seeing. It brings you up against certain questions that otherwise could easily remain unasked and quiescent, and brings to the fore fundamental problems that might otherwise simmer inaudibly in the background. This perhaps is the great advantage, for a writer, of exile, the compensation for the loss and the formal bonus – that it gives you a perspective, a vantage point.<sup>462</sup>

Exile gives the writer another chance, which indirectly derives from creativity and which is a sort of compensation for the country lost.

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<sup>460</sup> Carlo Emilio Gadda, 'Come lavoro', in *I viaggi e la morte* (Milano: Garzanti, 2001), p. 23.

<sup>461</sup> Claudio Magris, 'Norman Manea. Il dolore dell'esilio che nutre la vita', *Corriere della Sera*, 12 May 2012, p. 42.

<sup>462</sup> André Aciman, p. 50.

### 5.3 The house of writing

Exile plays a relevant role in the process of writing. The overwhelming experience of having lost the homeland shapes Tomizza's novels, which take advantage more or less directly of the writer's experience. The Istrian author elaborates his exile through a series of characters and stories that are always drawn upon, or at least expanded, from the separation from his country. The act of writing itself allows him to describe the shifts that his land and country fellows underwent, but it may also lead to recreating a familiar environment.

In this final part, I will develop further the meaning of being a writer in exile. In particular, I will focus on the possibilities for the writer when he faces a new story. If the sense of displacement created by exile is elaborated through writing, this means that in the narrative lies the chance to rebuild a home, letting hybridity flow again. I should start by mentioning a brief consideration of Tomizza's displacement, in order to fully grasp the writer's reconstruction of his home on the page.

There is an illustrative passage in which the author declares his estrangement. On many occasions, the Istrian writer has exemplified his sense of loss and laceration, underlining the differences between his homeland and the other countries to which he has moved. He has also explored the impossibility of coming back in many hypothetical returns. It is in a specific passage taken from *Adriatico e altre rotte: viaggi e reportages*, that the writer manifests his unlikelihood of fitting into any context: 'Sono stato italiano a Belgrado, istro-italiano a Zagabria, croato-italiano a Lubiana, slavo-istrianiano a Trieste, triestino-italiano in Istria'.<sup>463</sup> In this statement, Tomizza not only underlines his sense of not belonging, he also points out the state of alienation related to his being considered a stranger everywhere: 'Sulla mia fronte vi deve essere tuttavia scritta la parola "estraneo"'.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Adriatico e altre rotte: viaggi e reportages* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2007), p. 238.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

When Tomizza describes how and where he started to write his first novel, he also includes the drives that have most probably guided him to approach the blank page, linking estrangement to writing. Once he has reached Trieste, he recollects his notes typing the beginning of *Materada*, as he explains in a tale taken from *La casa del mandorlo*, where he reconstructs his initial years:

Istintivamente afferravo un foglio, svitavo la penna stilografica, mi mettevo a tracciare figure geometriche e a ricalcarle, dando così ordine alla folla di pensieri e sentimenti che mi premevano da ogni lato. In quella stanzetta, di cui mi sono rimasti nella memoria il colore verde tenero di certi interni di moschea e un vago odore di mele cotte, forse si compì il mio destino. Incominciai a scrivere, ossia a cercare di colmare l'improvviso vuoto prodottosi tra me e quanto viveva fuori.<sup>465</sup>

Tomizza says that he is overpowered by chaotic feelings and thoughts and his attempt to write seems to help him to order these. However, the main drive that pushes him to begin *Materada* is the necessity to fill in the unattainability of fitting into any context. The fracture between the inner and the outer self, due to the collapse of the home country, opens up the possibility to write. If exile means having lost one home, writing represents a new chance to find another home.

By rebuilding his home in the novel, Tomizza can give voice again to his village, which has been depopulated by exile, underlining the complex background of a multicultural and a multilingual land. Here, he is still allowed to intertwine his double dialect, fluctuating between hybrid identities. The prospect of new projections means expanding the domain of the writer. How is Tomizza's home country built? The Istrian writer seems to provide an answer, which unveils how his home country has been approached through dreams, writing, imagination and memory: 'La Jugoslavia, l'Istria intanto sono cambiate; non c'è più quel terrore o quella diffidenza; rimane la terra di sempre, la terra che ho accarezzato nel sogno,

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<sup>465</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *La casa col mandorlo*, pp. 11-12.

che ho rivisitato scrivendo, che ho ripercorso mille volte con l'immaginazione e col ricordo'.<sup>466</sup>

The negative feelings that exile evokes spurs the writer to regain the familiar dimension lost through the page. Given that the ambiguous presence of the writer in the text, who may shorten or increase his distance within the story, unveils the rift between the figure of the writer and his works, being in exile means having acquired a more or less rooted form of estrangement, which weighs on the self. Writing offers the chance to set the foundation for the recovery of the home dimension. As suggested by Paul Celan, in the speech entitled *The Meridian*, going outside the self and setting a new project may help the writer to find the coordinates to return home: 'Among many other paths, there are also paths of a voice to a perceiving You, creaturely paths, perhaps projects of existence, a sending oneself out towards oneself, in the search of oneself on... a kind of homecoming'.<sup>467</sup> If the separation from the home country has created the necessity to find a new familiar place, and the real attempts to return home are doomed to fail quickly, the only way to approach home can be experienced through writing. Theodor Adorno sums up this phenomenon: 'In his text, the writer sets up house. Just as he trundles papers, books, pencils, documents... for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live'.<sup>468</sup>

For Tomizza writing becomes the only way to come close to the home which he has lost. It is not only a place where he collects and orders his overwhelming feelings; it is also a place where he can finally clarify his identity. When the writer approaches the blank page, the complex background of a hybrid subject requires clarification. The awareness of his complex belonging should be explored. Among the series of issues that cannot be hidden in the process of writing, there is the linguistic choice, the sense of belonging and the difficult balance

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<sup>466</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Incontro', p. 46.

<sup>467</sup> Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden*, Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert and Rudolf Bücher (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 3, p. 201.

<sup>468</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), p. 87.

between the Italian and Croatian groups that shaped the peninsula, which trouble an author who defines himself as follows: ‘non mi considero, né sono purtroppo, uno scrittore interamente e disinvoltamente italiano’.<sup>469</sup> Tomizza knows that his double identity can be restored in his works and that he will not be able to build up his ‘home for writing’ without this step: ‘Sentivo di appartenere all’uno e all’altro, così come mi sentivo di essere italiano e di essere in parte slavo. Naturalmente tutto questo generava un groviglio interiore che doveva essere chiarito’.<sup>470</sup>

This aspect is particularly relevant in order to understand the meaning that should be attributed to Tomizza’s literary production. The writer’s belonging both to the Italian and to the Croatian components is the necessary condition required to restore his land. The repression of one side in favour of the other that has characterized Tomizza’s exile can finally stop. However, this step is not as easy as it seems. The subtle Istrian balance has been strongly shaken by exile, leaving a knot in the soul of the writer. The external flight has been interiorized by Tomizza, who needs to elaborate and to transform it.

Mi sono impegnato a scrivere per l’avvicinamento tra due popoli che la storia ha posto adiacenti. Questo mio impegno è anche frutto di una tragica esperienza vissuta dalla mia famiglia. Uscito dalla prova, ho scoperto che i conflitti tra la componente slava e la componente italiana erano anche dentro me stesso; e allora compresi che avrei avuto tregua solo quando le due tensioni opposte di fossero calmate.<sup>471</sup>

Only the act of writing can smooth out his problems, allowing him to rebuild his blend of origin. Nevertheless, Tomizza’s aim transcends a personal achievement. The mechanism that spurs the writer to rebuild his home on the page opens out to a wider perspective. The writer is aware of having the chance to observe his country fellows moving abroad from their homes, to create a chorus that interprets different viewpoints of exile, and to make himself a character and so experience in the first person the mishaps of the exilic condition. In other

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<sup>469</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, ‘Incontro’, p. 37.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>471</sup> *Ivi*, p. 46.

words, the writer has the opportunity to elaborate his condition thanks to a new home: its writing. This privilege is not granted to other people in exile. What matters to Tomizza – and what he underlines several times in articles and interviews – is that the broken balance of Istrian complex identities has led to hatred and to grudges. The writer has been aware of the tension existing between the two entities, which has arisen quickly in the postwar environment that he has experienced personally since childhood.

Io invece mi consideravo quasi una persona compromessa, perché fin da bambino avevo cercato di fare da mediatore tra i due gruppi opposti, appunto perché sentivo di appartenere e all'uno e all'altro e sentivo che nelle mie vene scorreva un sangue che era misto e scatenava dei contrasti tali che, per avere una certa serenità, non poteva che aspirare a una composizione di questa spietata vertenza secolare.<sup>472</sup>

Tomizza's wish is to rebuild the old balance for the Italian and the Croatian components that have been separated by force. For a practical reconciliation between the two entities, the writer uses his novels to restore the broken balance: 'E' in quel periodo che ho cominciato a scrivere, raccogliendo le testimonianze degli altri esuli. Intendevo, attraverso la mia scrittura ricreare quell'unità che era andata perduta'.<sup>473</sup> Writing, therefore, becomes the tool that allows the writer to show new possible solutions for this blend: 'Il voler riscoprire questi luoghi, vessati dai fascisti prima e dai comunisti poi, ha favorito quell'ansia di conciliazione che è sempre stata la mia bussola'.<sup>474</sup>

The Istrian writer seems to be guided by the need for reconciliation. His aim appears to be the role to which he is committed: 'A tutto questo ho cercato di adempiere in solitudine e in raccoglimento, con onestà e sincerità d'animo, come si cerca di adempiere ad un incarico che ci è stato affidato'.<sup>475</sup> In Tomizza's case, it seems that the conciliation of his double souls, and more widely of the two contrasting ethnic groups, dictates his need to write – here, Tomizza's mission becomes evident: 'Credo che questi due mondi un giorno si possano

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<sup>472</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Incontro', p. 44.

<sup>473</sup> Carmelo Aliberti, *Fulvio Tomizza e la frontiera dell'anima* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>474</sup> Roberto Morelli, 'Tomizza: "Si smetta di vivere alla giornata"', in *Il Piccolo*, 22 August 1996, p. 3.

<sup>475</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, 'Intervista', p. 2.

incontrare. E' per questo che scrivo'.<sup>476</sup> Given that cold war and its dramatic consequences have deeply influenced life in Istria and in the surrounding areas, the two ethnic groups have enhanced hostility and created a barrier that has shattered hybridity. One faction was set against the other, undermining Tomizza's purpose. Nevertheless, the writer has continued to fight, dreaming that one day his microcosm would be freed from borders.

Mia nonna, con mia madre in braccio, partì a piedi per andare a trovare mio nonno che giaceva ammalato in un ospedale da campo in Galizia, non so se nella parte che oggi è in Russia o quella in Polonia. E sapendo solo il nostro dialetto arrivò senza problemi fin lassù, senza mai passare un confine. Ecco, se io ho un sogno è questo: che arrivi un giorno in cui non si debbano più passare confini.<sup>477</sup>

The writer pulled together the threads of a microcosm, where characters were challenged by a fragile balance of a frontier land and in linguistic and cultural terms. Writing, therefore, allowed the author to return to his country without facing the estrangement that he perceives every time he takes his car from Trieste to reach his Istrian hometown. In crossing one border to come back home, which history later made into two (the border between Italy, and Slovenia and the one between Slovenia and Croatia that was generated by Yugoslavia's disgregation), the writer feels his mission more strongly, as well as his frustration.

Io mi sento un missionario. Questo è il senso della mia opera. Un missionario di pace, un esorcizzatore di questa maledizione del confine. Di qua e di là dei paletti siamo gli stessi. Questa è la verità - questo confine è assurdo [...] Forse per questo adesso mi sento svuotato del tutto: forse ho finito di scrivere. Certamente di queste cose non scriverò più.<sup>478</sup>

The meaning of Tomizza's entire literary production cannot be grasped without acknowledging his aim to restore the broken balance of his land. His mission could only be found on paper, however, because Tomizza could experience a world without borders only in his works; by reproducing the lost soul of a hybrid land, which clashes against a rather

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<sup>476</sup> Paola Di Pace, 'Per me scrivere è come fare l'amore', in *Secolo XIX*, 8 July 1977, p. 3.

<sup>477</sup> Fulvio Tomizza, *Destino di frontiera*, p. 34.

<sup>478</sup> Paolo Berti, 'Con Fulvio Tomizza a passeggio per Trieste', in *L'Europeo*, 22 July 1977, p. 70.

different reality. The act of writing itself, therefore, sheds light on the condition of writers in exile, who use their works to rebuild their home for themselves and for their fellow countrymen.

## Conclusion

Exile plays a fundamental role in Tomizza's literary production, in particular in *Materada*, *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *L'albero dei sogni*, the novels analysed in this thesis. Undeniably, the Istrian writer, who experienced exile first hand, elaborating it in his works, offers an innovative approach to the topic. As I have demonstrated in my analysis, there are several original traits that emerge from an analysis of Tomizza's novels related to exile.

The first striking aspect is the hybrid nature of the country of the origins, where identity and monolingualism are brought into question. In *Materada*, I took into account the variegated linguistic nature of the Istrian territory, and the solutions adopted by Tomizza, in order to 'transpose' the Istro-Veneto and Čakavian dialects into an Italian narrative. In the Italian literary tradition of the *Novecento*, this process would be considered an unusual one. Several writers employed dialects in their works, or transferred their dialectal background into an Italian narrative. However, Tomizza's novel, which includes diglossia and bilingualism, should be considered a remarkable innovation. In this sense, the linguistic solutions adopted by Tomizza may inspire a new investigation of 'self-translated' works, which are present in the Italian panorama, but have not as yet been investigated in depth. In these terms, Tomizza's considerations may provide a useful starting point in the way that the topic is approached. For example, among the issues faced by the writer, there is the choice of the languages used in his works, the unbalanced relationships between the languages available to the writer, the solutions employed to let the underground idioms surface in the narrative, and many other aspects which locate Tomizza among the authors who, to a greater extent, deal with these topics in the Italian scenario.

The linguistic aspects which emerge in Tomizza's first novel also shed light on the varied Istrian nature, placing Tomizza in the original position of a writer who dealt with exile

from a hybrid land. The linguistic perspective of Tomizza's homeland had already called into question their identities even before exile. Here, Tomizza's characters show the impossible task of fully adhering to a single identity, and also highlight the fact that in Istria, identity and language may not correspond. To be more specific, in this bilingual territory, the alternation of two languages, or even the hypothetical prevalence of one idiom over another, may not determine the identity of the individual. Identity in Istria is more a choice; a way of feeling one nationality more than the other, rather than a univocal attribution dictated by certain parameters. In many cases, identity cannot be established once and for all and undergoes constant shifts, which undermine the possibility of its identification. Tomizza's case brings us back to the beginning of Zygmunt Bauman's book interview on identity, where the Polish sociologist elaborated the notion of identity nowadays. In his anecdote, Bauman states the impossible task of pinpointing a specific attribution for his identity:

According to the old custom of Charles University of Prague, the national anthem of the country to which the person receiving an honorary doctorate belongs is played during the conferment ceremony. When my turn to be so honoured came I was asked to choose between the British and the Polish anthems... Well, I did not find an answer easy.<sup>479</sup>

Bauman finally picked the European anthem, in order to avoid his inner clash. However, this solution was not available to Tomizza's characters, who were overwhelmed by an unexpected further change of domination of their homeland and a subsequent exile.

Exile, which, as I have explained, is usually considered the breaking of a familiar dimension, acquires in Tomizza a different meaning. For example, it does not correspond to the sudden irruption of a foreign language, as can be seen in more traditional exiles. It involves a (most of the time, impossible) clarification of identity, before making the decision whether to remain in one's own home country or to move abroad. This fact delays the moment of departure, allowing the writer to explore more deeply the inner fracture that from

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<sup>479</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), p. 9.

this moment on the exile will sustain. What is innovative here is that Tomizza focuses on the most elusive state of the exile, which is the moment in which the exile detaches from his homeland. Not only is the Istrian writer able to capture a fleeting phase, which is usually omitted in exilic narratives, he is able to grasp the inner fracture of the exile and its causes at the very beginning of the phenomenon. The problematic phase of the move from the country of origin shapes a rarefied reality, which is the condition of the broken life of the exile. Although very different in style and plot, Tomizza's *La ragazza di Petrovia* may recall Vladimir Nabokov's suspended reality expressed in *The Eye*, where Smurov, a Russian émigré living in prewar Berlin, still lives within his mental self after (an almost metaphorical) suicide. The connection between exile and a reality created by imagination is suggested indirectly by Nabokov in this story, where the character begins to live 'at dream's disposal',<sup>480</sup> (the life of) another man, who observes his actions and describes the situation thus: 'I grew heavy, surrounded again by the gnawing of gravity, donned anew my former flesh, as if indeed all this life around me was not the play of my imagination, but was real'.<sup>481</sup> The dissolution of the soul in exile in Tomizza is formed by mediation between reality and a more abstract layer, which may coincide with the work of the characters' minds. The description of this innermost world of the exile in Tomizza shows a condition which deals with rupture, fragmentation, puzzlement and the disruption of characters, whose lives have suddenly been changed and will change still further once abroad.

The collision with the foreign dimension is marked by the clash with new contexts. The subject is pushed by different drives once abroad, where it begins to realize the impossible task of fitting in successfully to any context. The harmonious cohesion of a hybrid self cannot be rebuilt; for example, Stefano of *L'albero dei sogni* is condemned to a double exile. Very rarely has this phenomenon appeared in exilic narratives, which usually contemplate only one

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<sup>480</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *The Eye* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965), p. 29.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

final destination. Given that in Tomizza, the main character comes to terms with the paradoxes of his country of origin, once he finds himself in the two places which may correspond to the two different poles of his identity, he realizes that only the combination of the two elements may give him back the Istria that he lost. A double exile better defines the condition of being a foreigner in a different country because it involves several aspects, providing a more complete picture of the occurrence and investigating a deep sense of estrangement which may dismantle any certainty. Contrary to traditional exiles, in which people abandon their lands and move to a different country, Tomizza's double exile seems also to overturn the parameters of the familiar and the foreign. As expressed in *La ragazza di Petrovia* and *L'albero dei sogni*'s stories, where on the border, identities and languages clash, the foreign and the familiar components cannot be easily separated. The definition of exile, therefore, can no longer be associated with a clear divisional line between an existence devoid of foreign traits at home and a life abroad, where alien components begin to emerge.

Tomizza's writing takes advantage of a more fluid definition of these parameters, especially when he elaborates his exilic condition, including and excluding himself in his works. Given that both in his 'choral' novels and his autobiographical works, his presence can be neither totally taken for granted nor avoided, Tomizza explores the complex condition of a writer of exile. On the one hand, he cannot truly escape this situation and exile can be seen as a sort of 'condemnation'; on the other hand, as suggested by Norman Manea in *The Fifth Impossibility: Essays on Exile and Language*, leaving aside the incommensurable loss and pain caused to the exiles, this figure should also be considered a 'privileged' one.

Five years have passed since I felt that burning, and I must confess now I feel not only the curse, but also the privilege, of being an exile. I have finally accepted this honor, doing so in the name of all that is suffering and epiphany, in the name of loneliness and challenge, of all the doubts and never-ending apprenticeship it implies, for its emptiness and richness, for the unfettering of myself and clash within

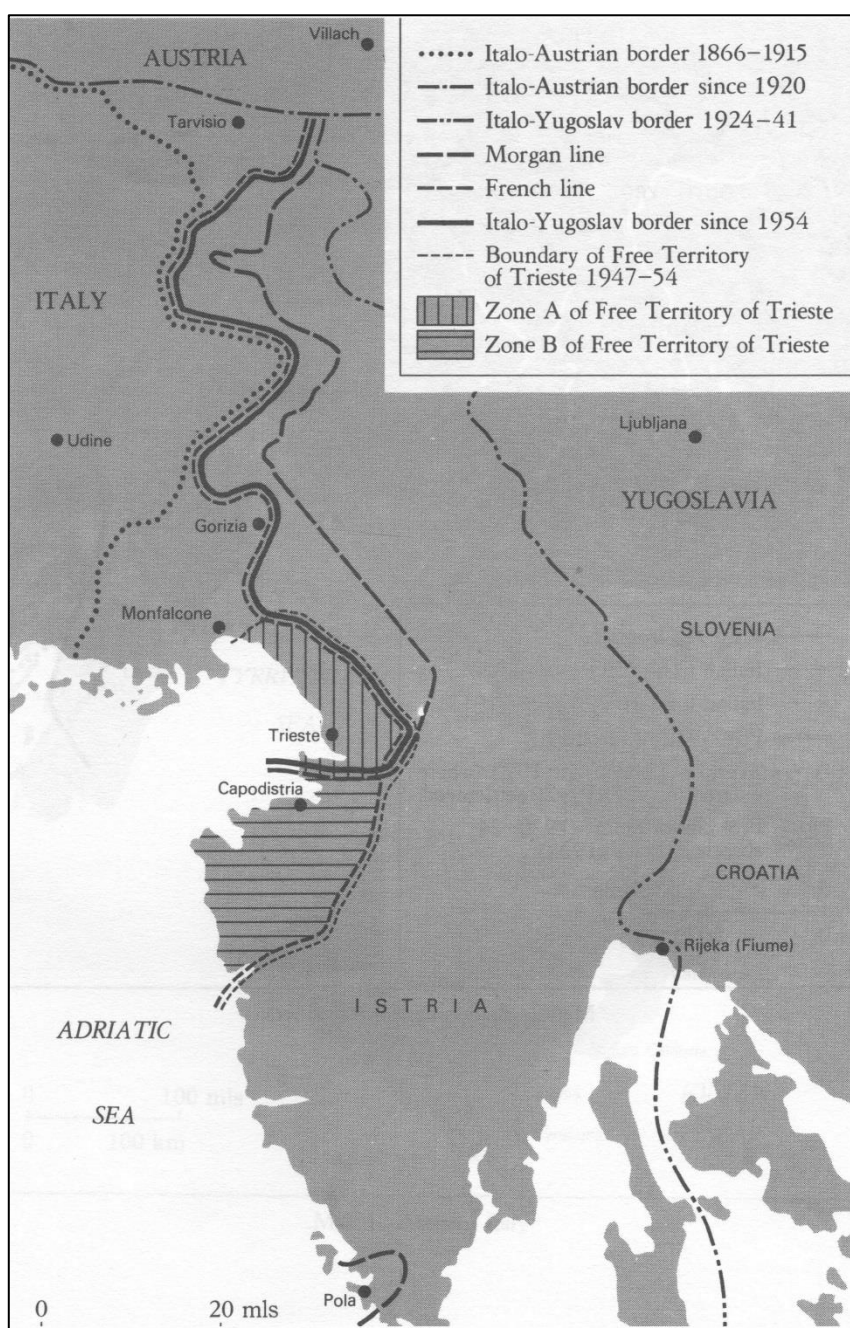
myself. [...] If I have the strength to repeat Dante, '*L'esilio, che m'e dato, onor mi tengo*' (I hold in honor the exile I was given), I am probably in sympathy with our centrifugal century<sup>482</sup>.

In the 'honour' of the exile, Manea includes a favourable access to creativity, because exile provides a profound experience which should be elaborated through writing. Tomizza's literary production would certainly have been different if the Istrian exile had not happened. Exile motivated the Istrian writer to begin his novels, in which he aimed to examine the most controversial aspects of a hybrid land of origin shaken by an unexpected change of domination. In the end, Tomizza accepted the challenge formulated by Ivo Andrić, who underlined that a life spent in a frontier land put under pressure by unexpected events cannot be truly understood by people who have not experienced these conditions. In his works, Tomizza has tried to open up a passage into this hidden universe, freeing traditional attributions, which ran the risk of limiting the analysis of exile.

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<sup>482</sup> Norman Manea, *The Fifth Impossibility: Essays on Exile and Language* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 22.

## Appendix



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### WORKS BY FULVIO TOMIZZA

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