

Reading the Transformation:

The Relationship between Literature and Territory in

Contemporary Veneto

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INTRODUCTION

Literature and territory represent two amongst the several dimensions in which the history of human civilization has unfolded through time. The necessity to express and that of relating to the external environment, an inherent yearning for passing on a material testimony of one's existence, as well as the desire to belong somewhere, are ingrained in human nature. The study of each has evolved throughout centuries across a range of disciplines and a multitude of different approaches. The broad aim of the research presented here is to combine some of these approaches to study those areas where literature and territory overlap.

If asked to think about literature and territory, one would probably let the imagination run towards descriptions of marine or mountainous landscapes, cities, towns, villages, or countryside encountered as a plot unfolds through the pages of a novel or as rhymes chase each other in the verses of a poem. As much as such visualization is indeed deeply entangled with the function and role that territory plays within the realm of literature, the relation between the two elements is a much more complex one, which articulates in a structure that includes artistic representation as much as the innermost processes that govern our relation with the world surrounding us and the way we see it. If the gearings of such structure represent the ample premise onto which this research is based, the more specific

interest that this project subsequently focuses on is one particular aspect of the relation between literature and territory which, due to its nature, offers an advantageous point of view on how literature and territory interact: a transformation occurring on one of the two sides of the equation, territory. This research thus intends to question in particular if and how literature reflects on and represents socio-economic transformations that can reshape the cultural and geographical landscape of a region. The basic presupposition that will be argued as a foundation to this research is that a substantial modification in the landscape of a region almost always reflects a transformation of its territory at a deeper, structural level. Following such premise, the focus of the investigation will shift to the plane of the relation between the elements of landscape and territory on one side, and that of literature on the other side, and will move on to explore how these represent different aspects of the cultural structure that informs social constructions in human societies and therefore can and do act on each other with regards to the formation of people's consciousness of their surrounding and of the artistic representation of a specific geographic context.

As is often the case for an analysis that interrogates a fairly wide matter, the model of the case study provides a rather beneficial perspective to adopt. Referring a research project to a case study indeed allows us to confront the functioning of a theoretical background with its actual realisation in more concrete terms, while at the same time enabling a closer and deeper reading of a specific phenomenon. This model has been chosen for the research presented here, as the possibility of analysing in greater detail the mechanisms of the interaction between literature and

territory with relation to one specific region offered the advantage of putting side by side the theoretical reflection concerning the ideas forming the basis of this work (territory, landscape, landscape consciousness, the artistic representation of landscape, and literary reflections on territory) and the actual realisation of their mutual interaction within a specific geographic and time framework.

From this perspective, the case of contemporary Veneto represents a significant case study. Looking closely at the recent literary production from the north-eastern region of Italy, it is indeed possible to identify a range of works whose concern with issues regarding the territory is evident. Although a long-standing curiosity towards the depiction of the local context is evident in the region's literary tradition, a renewed attention towards urgent and immediate matters specifically related the regional territory has emerged in recent decades. This constitutes an interesting phenomenon for two reasons: on the one side, because of the very presence of territory as a literary subject in the regional production; on the other side, more importantly, because an investigation into the roots of this renewed interest reveals an interconnection between the perception of territory and forms of literary expressions that incarnates precisely the mechanisms ruling the interaction between literature and territory as exposed by the theoretical reflection that provides the foundation of this research.

The interpretation presented in this study thus identifies in the peculiar socio-economic circumstances that shaped the recent history of the region the reason why the case of Veneto constitutes a very significant one on which to analyse the theoretical matters in question. At quite a late stage during the post-war

reconstruction phase, the region underwent an unusually fast-paced economic growth that brought it from being a rural area, one of the most depressed in the country, to one of the most important hubs at the head of Italian economy. Whereas in other regions of the country the same progression was achieved over a much wider period of time, the extremely fast-paced transformation happened in Veneto only in the space of a couple of decades. Industrialisation diffused swiftly in a 'nebulised' pattern, making Veneto known as the region that went 'from plough to internet in the space of one generation'.[1] This upturn in economy set in motion major consequences on two levels: in one respect, the coming of a new metropolitan culture introduced elements of crisis that the community was unprepared to respond to. A whole generation suddenly lost its long-established cultural references and was abruptly eradicated from an age-old farming civilization, its rhythms and dynamics, without a new adequate back-culture formed to help decode a different reality. On the other side, a rural territory, structured on an ancient farming tradition, rapidly turned into an area of diffused industrialization, its nature irreversibly changed by the appearance of thousands of private enterprises, factories, sheds and warehouses.

As will be argued in the theoretical premise of this research, the transformation of a territory, and consequently of its landscape, can determine the necessity for reflection in the literary production of a specific territory. Accepting this premise, it becomes clear how a territory which underwent a rapid transition in

[1] The expression was coined by Paolo Rumiz in his *La secessione leggera* when referring to Veneto as a society «passata in una generazione dall'aratro a Internet» (37).

its economic, social and cultural fabric can provide a favourable ground on which to analyse the general dynamics of such processes on a smaller and more manageable scale. Furthermore, if the region that is to be taken into consideration also bears a strong tradition of writing and, within it, a tendency to dedicate attention to the matter of territory, then the picture surely represents a significant case study, which allows us to approach the exploration of a wide subject from the beneficial perspective of a close-up look.

Among those who lived through this epochal shift in Veneto, some began to dedicate their attention to issues concerning its relevance to the cultural and geographical landscape of the region through literary means. A wide reading of such production first highlighted what appeared to be a potentially significant phenomenon worth addressing within the context of this research: indeed, different perspectives emerge when considering territory-related works by authors from the region, but one element to arise as particularly interesting is what appeared to be a generational shift in the approach taken by authors who in their works reflect on Veneto's territory. Another equally important aspect to emerge from this initial survey also set a divide in terms of literary forms: most of the works in question were works of narrative or theatre, whereas poetry – despite the precedent set by the fundamental oeuvre of Andrea Zanzotto – did not seem to feature in any significant way within the time limits set by the generational gap that has been identified. Hence the preliminary consideration that identifies Veneto as a most relevant case study on which to base a research on the relation between literature and territory. Following a radical transformation of the region's landscape which

originated in a deep-rooted social-economic transition, local authors of prose, who had witnessed the transformation as it was happening, but were too young to have a first-hand comprehension of the local reality before it, have turned their attention to the subject of territory adopting a perspective that is substantially different from that of the previous generation.

Following and deepening this observation, the attention of this study focuses specifically on the production by what can roughly be defined a 'younger generation' which includes authors of prose – hereby to be intended as authors of narrative and theatre – who, being born in the 1950s and '60s had no experience of World War II nor any direct recollection of the rural civilization that was the core and shape of their territory before the war broke out. Still very young at the time of the post-war reconstruction, these authors grew up in a region that was an economically depressed area until the economic upturn of the 1970s revolutionised the local landscape as well as the traditional social structure of their territory: writers like Massimo Carlotto, Gianfranco Bettin, Tiziano Scarpa, Romolo Bugaro, Vitaliano Trevisan, to name a few, and theatre author/actor Marco Paolini belong to this younger generation. What makes the analysis of their work particularly relevant within the frame of this research is the fact that the approach they adopt when representing their own territory seems to have evolved into an essentially different perspective from the one that was proper to 'older' authors like, among others, Luigi Meneghello, Giovanni Comisso, Andrea Zanzotto, this resulting into a shift from a memory-based angle to a denouncement-centred one in the literary depiction of territory. An examination of the details and modes of this shift will

form one of the cores of the analysis in the chapter titled 'Why Veneto? The Literary Context'; on the side the 'younger generation', during the course of the analysis preceding this work, two authors in particular emerged as those whose works represent the most significant field onto which to scrutinize the questions posed here: Massimo Carlotto and Marco Paolini. Their territory-related production will constitute the subject of a specific in-depth examination forming a substantial part of this research.

Based on the grounds just outlined, the research presented here takes the shape of a twofold analysis that puts side by side a theoretical premise and its actual realisation in a case study. Due to the nature of the analysis, the interdisciplinary element plays a key role in the structure of this project. On the one hand, the theoretical framework necessarily implies the inclusion of concepts derived from different disciplines like cultural anthropology, geography, and landscape theory. Furthermore, as it assumes a regional perspective, and as it is conducted in the context of contemporary Italian literature, this research also interrogates some aspects of the recent developments and directions taken by national narrative: the idea of regional trends, as well as a 'reborn' tension towards *impegno*, commitment, and engagement with reality will be discussed as part of the context in which some authors operate, while space will also be given to the debate around the reconsideration of the notion of 'realism' and the overlap between different genres – which also constitutes a matter of topical interest, as the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction in contemporary literature progressively seem to be questioned, for example in works like Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra*.

It is clear from the outline of the thesis subject just provided that the research presented here, despite being ultimately concerned with the investigation of literary texts and topics, also embraces a multidisciplinary perspective. In a wider context, this study then needs to be situated at the crossroads between the fields of literature, geography, anthropology, and socio-economic history: drawing from each of these areas with the intent to create a more varied and functional set of research instruments, the aim of the work presented here is to use such instruments to gain a new perspective on various aspects of contemporary literary texts. In the case of contemporary Italian literature specifically, as the boundaries between different genres seems to fade and the divide between fiction and non-fiction blurs, adopting a multidisciplinary approach allows us to investigate the nature of texts in ways that the sole traditional textual analysis would not allow. For instance, understanding the dynamics that bond humans to their natural environment from an anthropological point of view becomes crucial when trying to establish if and how the environment itself acts on any form of artistic expression, including the written word. The possibility to fuse together principles and methodologies that belong to different disciplines therefore represents the possibility of opening a bridge connecting different subjects which can mutually benefit from a closer relation.

Furthermore, while investigating the areas of overlap between literature and territory, the phase of research preceding the drafting of this study has highlighted, within the wider field of studies on geography and literature to which this research relates,[2] the presence of an ample selection of studies on the kindred matter of

[2] Reference to specific studies in this field will be given in chapter 1.2.

landscape from a variety of perspectives: suffice it remember, just to mention a few, the cultural anthropology angle in Barbara Bender's *Landscape: Politics and Perspective*; the geographic approach of Denis Cosgrove's *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; the historical take in Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*; or the overarching gaze of John B. Jackson in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, not to name the critical works assessing the role of landscape in architecture and in the figurative arts. Amongst the vast theoretical reflection available on the subject of landscape, some is dedicated to the idea of landscape in literary terms – Stephen Siddall provides a critical introduction to the representation of landscape in literature in his *Landscape and Literature*, while on the Italian side one can refer to *Lo sguardo escluso. L'idea di paesaggio nella letteratura occidentale* by Giorgio Bertone. What seems to emerge from a survey of the available criticism is that, while landscape theory in general provides a deep insight into how human beings relate to landscape, works that directly relate landscape to literature tend focus on the development of landscape as a literary topos. A reflection based on both the consideration of the available criticism and on readings of contemporary narrative texts led to the conclusion that shifting the attention to the element of territory could represent a fruitful way of integrating the variety of approaches that have been applied to the study of landscape with the close reading of literary texts. Indeed the premise backing this research, which aims to introduce an adjourned perspective on the subject, is the consideration of landscape as the visible side of territory and one of its fundamental components. Establishing the bond between landscape and territory as a research foundation allows us to take two

fundamental steps: on the one hand to achieve a better understanding of the relation between human communities and their territory, as the way people relate to landscape reflects, as we will see, the historic and economic developments that determined the shape and appearance of a specific territory. On the other hand, by stressing the close interdependence of territory and landscape, it is possible to recognise that, if indeed landscape has gained substantial literary attention throughout the centuries, is it also plausible to conceive that, given the proximity of the two elements, an observation of landscape in literary terms might have led to a wider consideration of its relative territory too. Adopting this approach proves particularly constructive when applied to some of the texts analysed in this research, as it allows us to merge two separate perspectives: on one side is the contemplation and representation of landscape in traditional artistic terms; on the other side is a reflection that starts from landscape but expands to investigate topical issues that are related to a specific territory. In the context of this particular study this implies for example that, besides being able to assess the presence and relevance of the theme of landscape in contemporary Veneto literature, one also acquires a new perspective on the roots of some authors' *impegno*, that is, their engagement with contemporary reality originating within the Italian tradition of a politically and ethically committed literature.

Another facet of the predominant vision of landscape as topos in the general literary criticism is the occurrence of a certain use of the term 'landscape' which does not necessarily distinguish between landscape and other related concepts like space and place. The multidisciplinary take chosen for this research therefore aims

at setting out a clear distinction of terms to avoid overstretching a concept that, while bearing a profound cultural significance in human societies, needs to be neatly defined in order be interpreted and employed as a valuable instrument of analysis.

Having established what this study is about and how it situates itself within a wider field of research, it will be worth spending a few words on how the research phase evolved and on the actual structure that the thesis acquired in its final version presented here. My curiosity towards the subject of territory in literature was born within a deep-rooted interest for the contemporary literary production of Veneto stemmed both from personal enthusiasm and previous research projects on the writings of Luigi Meneghello and the poetry of Fernando Bandini. Within the context of such research, the discussion about the existence of a so-called 'linea Veneta' emerged, providing a fertile ground for reflections on the idea of a regional literature. Despite the relevance assumed by some regional elements – such as language – in the local tradition, such reflections resulted in the conclusion that the basis to identify a clearly defined and structured geographical grouping were too vague and difficult to sustain. Nonteheless, the scrutiny of this subject led to the observation that some other regional phenomenon, different in nature, was indeed taking place, involving mainly its narrative and theatre, and constituted a singular case in the contemporary Italian scenario. Once established that the core of such phenomenon was to be identified in a shared preoccupation towards the local territory and the use of literary forms to talk about it directly or about issues relating to it specifically, the research evolved into the articulation of a framework that

would allow to best investigate the occurrence, dynamics, and roots of what had been observed. Set apart from other, more introspective, trends in contemporary literature and rather aligned with a literary line built around the backbone of the poetics of *impegno*, the peculiarity in the contemporary production from Veneto is precisely that the attention dedicated to territory constitutes the preoccupation of not one, but a number of authors, is specifically dedicated to the local reality, and approaches a range of themes that are mainly connected with the recent economic history of the region.

The first step to be taken once set that the premises of this research would revolve around literature, territory, and Veneto, was then to identify a range of authors that would be particularly relevant to the subject, chosen with particular regard to their approach towards the theme of territory and the representation of contemporary reality. The early stages of the research therefore chiefly involved considering primary literature as widely as possible, and the subsequent choice of significant works in which the narration entangles with a distinctive propensity to tackle topical issues concerning the territory of Veneto. This led to the final choice of focusing mainly on the works of a writer of fiction and a theatre actor and author: Massimo Carlotto and Marco Paolini, who both put a very strong stress on social engagement and the territorial element in their work, as well as showing, although in different ways, a particular awareness of the possibilities originated by the hybridization of different genres and narrative modes. The research then progressed into the study of critique materials including general studies on contemporary Italian literature and on the history of post-war Veneto, interviews, reviews and

academic articles regarding the chosen authors specifically as well as the broader subject, kindred and related studies,[3] with a particular attention towards anthropological and geographical studies focused on the concepts of landscape and other related concepts belonging to the category of 'space'.

Following the twofold interest of this research project, this thesis is divided into two main parts: part I 'Theory, History, Literature' and part II 'The Authors'. The chief function of part I one is to set a general frame of reference for the subsequent analysis, both in terms of outlining the anthropological and geographical discourse on the relation between literature and territory and of delineating the boundaries of the historical and literary background against which the following analysis is set. The primary aim of part II is to analyse more in depth the work of the two authors identified as the most significant examples of literature's engagement with territory in contemporary Veneto: Marco Paolini and Massimo Carlotto. Both parts of the thesis are then sub-divided into chapters, each dedicated to a specific aspect or topic in the general context of that section.

Part I comprises two chapters: chapter 1, 'Defining a Theoretical and Historical Framework', and chapter 2, 'Why Veneto? The Literary Context'. Introducing a definition of the main terms of reference, chapter 1 opens with an outline of the theoretical frame of reference and terminology that will be used throughout the thesis, principally distinguishing between the ideas of space, place,

[3] Among these, I should mention *Atlante delle derive. geografie da un'Emilia postmoderna: Gianni Celati e Pier Vittorio Tondelli* by Giulio Iacoli: following Franco Moretti in his «studio dello spazio nella letteratura», Iacoli explores the literary geographies within the texts of Celati and Tondelli. While embracing a kindred perspective and also focusing on one region, Emilia Romagna, Iacoli's starting point differs substantially from the one adopted here, which intends to use Veneto as a case study to examine the relation between the written word and the specific spatial entity of territory.

landscape, and territory. Once set the boundaries of the main terms of reference and established the prominence of the ideas of landscape and territory in the theoretical premise, the chapter moves on to explore the idea of landscape, a concept that has been scrutinized from a variety of disciplines and angles. This initial section of the chapter argues that, due to the inherent inextricability of landscape and territory, referring to the wider theoretical reflection available for the former provides an invaluable tool to understand territory and the mechanisms that rule its interaction with literature. The chapter thus defines landscape, establishes its conceptual nature and its role in the formation of people's identity, evaluates its historical relevance, and retraces the development of the idea of landscape. Subsequently, this element is compared with that of territory: how it defines the nature of the bond between the two, and explores how ideas such as 'social formation' and 'landscape consciousness', which are drawn from the fields of geography and landscape theory, constitute an invaluable tool in the analysis of the origin and construction of literary reflections on the subject of territory. As this wide-ranging but fundamental premise is set, the discourse moves towards a brief introduction concerning the modes through which a necessity to reflect on territory can emerge in the literary production of a specific geographical area. This is precisely the phenomenon that will be examined through the 'magnifying glass' of Carlotto's and Paolini's territory-related production and textual analysis in Part II. The conclusion of chapter 1 is one further necessary premise of historical and economic nature, which outlines more into detail the phase of development that brought Veneto from being a depressed, rural area to a highly industrialised region. This last

section of the chapter aims to complete the theoretical background set with a brief historical overview, which also constitutes a preamble to the literary-based discussion and analysis that will follow both in chapter 2 and in part II of the thesis.

Thus, while chapter 1 is mainly dedicated on one side to the outline of principles taken from the fields of cultural anthropology and geography, on the other side to the delineation of an historical frame of reference, chapter 2 aims at presenting the literary context within which the subsequent textual analysis is set. 'Why Veneto? The Literary Context' opens with some considerations on the choice of adopting a regional perspective in a context such as that of contemporary Italian literature. While sustaining the inherently regional character of Italian national literature as well as the enduring relevance of different vernacular traditions in the contemporary Italian context, the chapter argues that the idea of a 'linea veneta' based on the recurrence of specific topics in the local production only identifies frail bonds between authors whose voices are rather varied and independent. Harking back to the previous historical premise, the chapter then moves on to correlate the dynamics of the transformation brought about by the economic upturn with the development followed by the region's literary production in terms of its awareness of territory-related issues. In order to better understand the specific focus of this research project, what follows is an outline of the reasons backing the choice of establishing a line of division between authors who were born before and after World War II. By observing a shift in perspective that runs parallel to a generational divide, the chapter subsequently identifies in the authors born during the 1950s and

’60s its primary focus, and proceeds to outline the general background against which their literary production is set at a national level.

Part I of this thesis was conceived as a platform setting out all the notions that form a network of points of reference onto which part II is constructed. Thus, the theoretical principles and general framework that were defined in the first half of this research will constitute the instruments through which the exploration of the authors’ work and of some their texts will be conducted in part II. Works by Marco Paolini and Massimo Carlotto were chosen as the most significant examples of the actual realisation of the interaction between literature and territory as seen and analysed in section I. Both born in the late 1950s, these authors are acute observers of the impact of the economic transition on Veneto’s landscape and of the social and cultural restructuring that the region underwent as a consequence of such shift. Being among those in the region’s cultural establishment who have called for the necessity to acknowledge that a radical shift had taken place and voicing an urgent need to understand it, Paolini and Carlotto employed two very different media to reflect on the effects of such a profound transformation as well as on the roots of the change. Nonetheless, these two authors stand out together for their consistent and far-reaching commitment to tackle the matter in the context of contemporary literature in the region. Whilst Veneto appears in the writings of authors such as, for example, Gianfranco Bettin, Romolo Bugaro, or Vitaliano Trevisan, who have also touched upon the transformation of territory in the region, Paolini’s and Carlotto’s perspective on the question represents a more complex, multifaceted construction, articulated across a number of works and taking the shape, in both

authors' production, of a proper 'Veneto cycle'. It is precisely due to the consistency of their reflection on the matter that their work has been chosen here as the most apt ground on which to analyse how territory enters the literary space in the context of contemporary Veneto.

Part II is therefore dedicated to a more in-depth analysis of their work and to a closer reading of those among their works which most clearly exemplify a range of phenomena ruling the relation between literature and territory: the idea that the observation of the transformation of a landscape can trigger a need to reflect on the nature of a specific territory and the cultural roots of its society; the notion that times in which a territory undergoes transformations are prone to inspire a deeper sense of awareness of the landscape; the idea that the way people relate to territory – and the way they perceive landscape – are deeply engrained in the formation of their identity. The two chapters comprised in this second part are dedicated respectively to the above-mentioned authors; each is formed of an introductory part where the author's work is introduced, followed by the analysis of some texts chosen for the particularly relevant role that the element of territory plays in them. In each chapter, the general preamble on the authors' oeuvre intends to provide the reader with an idea of how their production relates to the national framework outlined in part I, offering more details on the specific literary context within which their work is situated as well as highlighting some specific features of their work whose examination is functional to the following textual analysis. Marco Paolini is the subject of the analysis in chapter 3: here the context is provided by the Italian 'teatro di narrazione', which to some extents feeds on the same general sentiment

that inspired authors of *impegno* to direct their attention towards contemporary reality and recent history. His productions often indicated amongst the most prominent and influential work in this branch of Italian theatre, Paolini's oeuvre mainly unfolds on the plane of collective memory, of its consolidation, transmission, and the use of testimony. It is through these techniques that the author/actor also approaches the theme of the transformation of Veneto's territory, whose roots and impact Paolini questions in works like *Il Milione* and *Bestiario veneto – Parole mate*; following a structure that will mirror that of chapter 4 on Carlotto, these works will be closely analysed in the second part of chapter 3. Chapter 4, in which the attention is focused on Massimo Carlotto, highlights the importance of genre as a basis to the author's work and examines his idea of *impegno*. Rooted in traditional crime fiction and developed in the context of the heated debate about the return of 'realism' in Italian literature, Carlotto's writing shapes into an instrument of investigation intended by the author to shed light on factual current issues that remain unresolved in contemporary Italian society. Territory, and particularly that of Veneto, becomes in Carlotto's crime writing one of such issues, a case of criminal exploitation of a favourable economic shift whose most evident result was the ungoverned defacement of a region's landscape, but which also entailed a much deeper crisis in the social and cultural structure of the region of Veneto.

To conclude, by setting an extensive body of references to form the theoretical structure of this study, and by introducing an interdisciplinary approach to obtain new perspectives on a selection of contemporary literary texts, the research

presented here intends to question how different spheres of human life – people's integration within their environment and their expression through cultural works – overlap and interact with each other. At the same time, by focusing the analysis on a single specific case, this study's aim is also that of investigating closely some of the contemporary literary production coming from the region of Veneto. As the reading of the relation between literature and territory given here can be employed to analyse the case of Veneto, but is in no way restricted to the interpretation of this or any single case study, by juxtaposing the two objectives just mentioned, the hope is surely to provide an insight into the general context and into the particular case, but also to offer a potential model for studies wishing to ask similar questions.

PART I

THEORY, HISTORY, LITERATURE

CHAPTER 1

DEFINING A THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Territory, landscape, and landscape theory

The main research objective of the work presented here is to question the matter of the relationship between literature and territory by focusing on a place and a time in which, due to particular economic and historical circumstances, the specificities of such relation become more apparent. Thus, whilst analysing the case of contemporary Veneto and the extent to which the region's literary production has engaged with the transformation of its territory in recent decades, one of the broader issues that this study investigates is the relationship between the socio-economic evolution of a defined territory and the literary representation of the processes that such evolution entails and originates. In order to build a solid basis on which to develop further considerations on the subject, I wish to begin from an observation that might seem rather evident at first, but nonetheless constitutes a most valuable starting point for my discourse: when one thinks about territory it is fairly natural to visualize it in terms of landscape. If we take a step backward to consider the terms 'territory' and 'landscape' we will see that the former is commonly defined 'an area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state', whereas the latter is

delineated as ‘all the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal’.[4] Although the aesthetic element plays a rather substantial role in our perception of landscape, the essential aspects to stress at this point are the definitions of territory as ‘an area of land’ and of landscape as ‘all the visible features of an area of land’. Based on these rather rudimental definitions, a basic assumption to follow is that if we place ourselves in a specific territory and look around us, what we see is a landscape. Therefore, if territory is land defined by a number of specific features, and landscape is constituted by those among such features which are visible, then it is possible to define and think of landscape as the visible side of territory as well as the most immediate perception we have of it.

Although these might seem rather obvious considerations, the significance of highlighting this point lies in the fact that the presupposition just outlined constitutes the necessary foundation on which to base any further questioning of the relation between territory and landscape. In the context of this work, whose broader aim is to investigate instances of literature’s interaction with territory, the introduction of the element of landscape − and the analysis of its relation to that of territory − opens up the possibility of adopting a remarkably fruitful perspective. In addition to the theoretical proximity of the two elements, referring to landscape indeed proves to be a proficient tool in the consideration of matters related to territory because it allows us to refer to concepts that are peculiar to landscape theory, but can also be applied to the analysis of literary reflections on territory and

[4] The quoted definitions of ‘territory’ and ‘landscape’ are taken from the *Oxford Dictionary of English*.

its transformation. The study of the presence of landscape in art and literature, as well as of its development through history as an artistic theme have developed along a growing interest in the analysis of the subject of landscape from an interdisciplinary perspective. In particular, landscape theory has addressed issues like, for example, the artistic depiction of landscape and its influence over people's perception of it, or how the historical development of a society relates to people's awareness of landscape. As the scope of this work is to establish if and how, at a certain given time and space, literary production engages with territory, and as all the following analysis is founded on the acknowledgment of the interdependence of territory and landscape, and specifically on the above postulated definition of landscape as the visible layer of territory, it is easy to understand how some of the questions posed in the context of landscape studies overlap with and can be asked when referring to territory too. Therefore, the present research borrows concepts that primarily belong to landscape theory and transfers them to the analysis of territory, as these indeed represent an effective theoretical instrument to investigate the social and cultural impact of localised processes of territorial transformation whose nature is mainly economic and topographical.

While investigating the issue of the relation between territory and literature within the frame of contemporary Veneto, there are a few key questions that the research presented here intends to address as a premise to its literary analysis: once established what key historical processes take part in the general definition of landscape and of humans' relation to it, is it possible to recognize similar modes of interaction on a smaller scale, specifically with regard to our concern here, i.e. the

case of contemporary Veneto? And if so, how does the analysis of these general mechanisms help us understand the specific case, especially with regard to the transformation of the region's territory in the decades after World War II? Secondly, how do the principles that underpin the processes of artistic representation of landscape relate to the literary depiction of a territory, particularly when the territory in question has undergone radical socio-economic transformations? In other words, does landscape play any role in the literary representation of socio-economic transformations in a territory? By focusing on the idea of landscape first – both in terms of its relationship to the territory of which it is part and in terms of people's awareness of it – and subsequently moving on to analyse the concept of territory, the following sections of this chapter are aimed at preparing the ground to put forward potential answers to these questions.

1.2 On the framework and terminology: literature and geography; landscape and space

When talking about territory and landscape, the broader and most immediate frame of reference is the conceptual sphere of space. If surely concepts like space, territory, and landscape are related by a close bond, it is nonetheless fundamental to rule out any straightforward equivalence between them; on the contrary, one should begin precisely from some terminology-related elucidations and distinctions. While the rough divergence between the elements of landscape and

territory has already been introduced, in order to analyse the interaction between literature and the latter it will be necessary to take a step back and firstly locate this research within the wider field of studies on literature and spatial concepts and secondly introduce some key terminology distinctions, especially in relation to landscape. Subsequently, it will be possible to identify the theoretical cruxes that are transferable to the study of territory, which will constitute the basis for the investigation of the case of contemporary Veneto.

When thinking about the theorization of the category of 'space' in chronological terms, one should picture a history that unfolds from Plato, Aristotle, and Euclid up to the present day. Along with our idea of time, our notion of space has evolved throughout human history around the backbone of scientific discovery and philosophical reflection. Fundamentally revolutionised by general relativity, spatial concepts have been the subject of deep scrutiny and an issue open to intense questioning up to and through postmodern thinking. Building on this heritage, the past few decades have offered a fertile ground for the ideas of space and other related concepts to be increasingly tackled by many different disciplines: philosophers, as well as anthropologists, and sociologists have disputed on the meaning of space and on its relation to notions like that of place and landscape. However, despite allowing for the development of multiple research perspectives, space is the key domain of geographers. Thus, before moving on to specifically consider the terminology used here and to define the terms of reference for this study, it will be helpful to take a step back and locate this research within the field of studies on geography and literature. As emerges from key texts addressing the

main issues in the field, such as *Geography and Literature: a Meeting of the Disciplines* edited by William Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley or *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on the Experience of Place* by Douglas Pocock, much of the critical interest in the interaction between the two disciplines originates in the idea of the artist's 'heightened perception' of the environment surrounding them. As Mallory points out in his introduction,

> «places are more than the sum of their physical components, they take on a deeper significance which cannot be easily quantified. They may well be associated with attitudes and values which are best captured by novelists and poets who […] bring about a "more creative description of landscape … than could be researched by a more objective orientation"» (xi).

Identifying the artist's perceptive insight as a vehicle for further investigation of those facets of 'places' which cannot be explored by physical means, geographers established the critical importance of literature as a source for the study of spatial concepts. Attempting to give an almost scientific justification to such stance, Pocock acknowledges the notion that literature indeed constitutes an appropriate ground for the geographer's research: «if philosophers, psychologists and others acknowledge the perspicuity of novelists and poets concerning the human condition», he says «then, since the latter cannot be divorced from the environmental experience, literature would seem an appropriate field for the enquiring geographer» (12). Based in an interest that encompasses both landscape depiction and the reflection on human condition, the geographer's engagement with the written word can then take a variety of shapes: it materialise in the analysis of word painting, in the study of the topography behind literature (i.e. the influence of geology on writing), in the search for geography in literature (meaning the reconstruction of a place based on literature), in the use of literary landscape

depiction as source of knowledge (Pocock 12-13). If this view seems to privilege the perspective of the geographer drawing from the literary word, others also emerge, which differ from the prevalent approach of the 'heightened perception' of the individual artist. For instance, Kenneth Mitchell points out that geography can be a strong defining force in the development of national literatures (Mallory, 23), while Kenneth Robert Olwig, while analysing the case of the Jutland heath, reminds us of «literature's social function in envisioning reality as it *is not* but *ought to be*» and of «its potential, thereby, for stimulating change»[5] (Pocock, 47).

While to a certain extent consenting to the idea of 'heightened perception' of the writer (both Paolini and Carlotto have indeed been chosen for this study due to their particular attention to matters relating to territory in their works), the research presented here intends to adopt a substantially different approach to the ones that emerge as prevalent in studies that focus on literature and geography such as the ones briefly mentioned above. From the point of view of the geographer – which appears to be the most commonly adopted in the field – literature often becomes a source or a tool to understand how humans interact with their environement, as indeed the questions asked address matters such as the role of literature in our actual experience and anticipation of place; the meaning of symbolic and metaphoric landscapes; the relation between literature and national environmental differences; the interpretations of historical landscapes. In brief, studies on geography and literature seem to mostly extrapolate spacial concepts – places, spaces, landscapes

[5] In his chapter "Literature and 'Reality': the Transforamtion of the Jutland Heath", Olwig analyses the role played by literature in the transformation of the Danish region of the Jutalnd from heaths to forests. As will become clear, a drive in some ways similar to the one Olwig describes shapes in part the works of Carlotto and Paolini.

– from literature in order to gain a deeper insight on how people relate to them. While such approach brings the focus outside the text as it is ultimately centred around the study of space in geographical terms, the nucleus of this research remains within the literaty text, its aim being to scrutinize the interaction between literature and one specific spatial concept, that of territory. Where examples like Olwig's analysis of the Jutland case outline the ways in which literature can influence territorial and landscape planning, this study looks at how the transformation of a territory can have an impact on its literary production: the objective here is not to scrutinize the presence and meaning of spatial concepts within literary texts, but to employ one specific geographical entity to analyse a particular reality as it is portrayed in literature.

When engaging with studies on literature and geography, the number of space-related terms one comes across is vast: space, place, landscape, region, territory, environment are only a few of them and the matter of their definitions is a complex and debated one. In this terminological maze, the idea of territory stands out as a particularly apt one to address the questions raised here for three closely related reasons. First, territory is defined as an inclusive entity: as outlined earlier, it encompasses within itself landscape, intended as its visible aspect, and the human element, both in an diachronic and syncronic dimension (i.e. territory as determined by the historical development of human societies living in it on one side and by society's current relation to it on the other). This quality of territory implies the possibility of including a number of references pertaining to the field of landscape studies which will greatly benefit the understanding of the relation beween humans

– and their artistic production – and their environment. Secondly, territory identifies a localised entity. The very characteristics defining it imply that when we talk about territory, we talk of a specific object delineated by its geographic location, history, and social construction. Thus, using territory allows this research to focus on a specific reality in the first place while proving at the same time an invaluable tool when considering a particular case study. Thirdly, the concept of territory includes an historical dimension. Although this has already been mentioned, stressing this point is crucial as this trait sets territory apart from other spatial concepts, such as place, space, and landscape, which can instead be considered outside of time frames, in an a-chronological way. The historic nature of the concept of territory on the other hand, becomes fundamental to this study as it allows to contextualise the literary reflection on territory within the framework of the social and economic forces that drove its transformation through time. In order to further contextualise this point, it will be worth referring here to some reflection carried out by Edwad Soja in his *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Taking Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as his starting point, Soja joins the French philospher's in his critique of the excessive focus on *historicality* and *sociality* as an «all-inclusive ontological and epistemological dyad» (72) and embraces the introduction of a third perspective in the approach to critical intellectual enquiry: *spatiality*.[6] Building off Lefevbre's ontological restructuring, Soja coins the idea of *thirdspace* with the intent to overcome a similar dualism in the approach to spatial thinking, which, he argues, has been confined to

[6] Lefevbre outlines his *trialectics* in *The Production of Space* (1974).

only two interpretations of spatiality: space as a physical entity made of concrete forms to be mapped, i.e. *perceived* space or *firstspace* in Soja's terms, and *conceived* space, i.e. ideas of space and its representation, which Soja calls *secondspace*. The idea of *thirdspace* is meant to combine these two approaches to put forward one based on *lived* spatiality, in which the perception and conception of space are inherently merged. This theoretical approach is particularly interesting if referred to territory in that, while being a spatial concept rather than an all-encompassing ontological structure, the idea of territory, like Lefebvre's trialectics, also inherently includes an historical, social, and spatial dimension: it is precisely this feature of territory that determined the choice of employing it as the key subject of this scrutiny. To draw a further parallel and rephrase the scope of this survey in Soja's terms, one could also note that what is being pursued here is an analysis of the interaction between *first* and *secondspace* in a defined literary context. While pointing out this correspondence aids the theoretical definition of the concept of territory as it is defined here, the structure of the argument here is inherently binary, therefore adopting a thridspace perspective would not be functional to the analysis of the relation between literature and territory. However, precisely for the reasons outlined above, the focus on territory among other spatial concepts, besides aiming at filling a gap in the critical theory available on the subject, can provide a more precise and deeper insight into the ways of the interaction between the fields of literature and geography.

Having established and located this research within a theoretical context, the next step will consist in a definition of the terms that will be used in this study.

Often considered in relation to each other, the definition of these two ideas finds a most fruitful instrument of analysis in the comparison of their respective features. Although the matter of a definition of these two concepts has been approached from different perspectives, there is one idea that seems to have emerged as commonly accepted. As we are about to see, once established that both entail a human presence, a distinction seems to appear that sets landscape apart from place based on the kind of relation that such human presence establishes with them. If the human element is generally intended to be a part of place – an insider – in most definitions of landscape instead, the implication is that the human viewer is placed outside. Thus, while both ideas imply the existence of someone relating to them in one way or another, the nature of the relation established with the human component seems to differ substantially when it comes to landscape. Some further considerations on the nature of such relation will help us understand why.

The assumption underlying most definitions of the concept of place is that it encompasses a human presence as one of its essential constituents. Undoubtedly the presence of an observing human being plays a crucial role in the definition of such idea: in their introduction to human geography entitled *People and place. The extraordinary geographies of everyday life* (2001), one principle that authors Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard set out as a fundamental premise to the subject is that «we cannot study people and places independently of each other [...] it is the relationality of people and places that is so important to geographical understanding» (7). However, such statement is indeed true when considering landscape as well. The fact that an observing human presence is implied in the

definition of landscape as 'all the visible features of an area of land' stands out as obvious, as it would be impossible to conceive landscape as 'visible' if a viewer was not part of the equation. Therefore, the importance of the element of visibility, the idea that landscape is by definition something that needs to be viewed, implies necessarily that its very existence is inseparable from the presence of an observer; hence the prominence of the human element in the notion of place as well as in that of landscape. The consequence of such conclusion is that the disjunction between the idea of landscape and the related one of place must lie elsewhere.

Drawing on some considerations made by human geographer Tim Cresswell's in his *Place: a short introduction* (2004), once more we come across the element of visibility as one of the key components of the idea of landscape. In his volume, Cresswell compares the concept of place with that of landscape, first referring to landscape as «a portion of the earth's surface that can be viewed from one spot» (10), and then expanding his definition to say that:

> «landscape refers to the shape – the material topography – of a piece of land. This may be apparently natural [...] landscape or it might be obviously human, or cultural, landscape of a city. We do not live in landscapes – we look at them» (11).[7]

The remark that «we do not live in landscapes», which Cresswell employs to stress the difference between landscape and place, brings forward the subsequent point that the viewer of a landscape is someone that not only sees it from the outside, but also recognises it as something different from him/herself. According to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, to whom Cresswell himself makes reference, «space becomes place as

[7] It is interesting to note how, generally speaking, when thinking of landscape, people's imaginary tends to resort to visions of a natural one. However, as will be explained shortly, it is crucial to consider that human activities play a role of primary importance in the formation of landscapes.

we get to know it better and endow it with value» (Cresswell, 8). In general geographical terms, space is intended as a neutral frame, as what surrounds us, devoid of any special meaning. Although expanding further on the relation between space and place would surpass the scope of this theoretical premise[8], there is one reason why referring to Tuan's observation in this context is relevant. What emerges from the geographer's words is the idea that place is generally considered as an entity that means something to the viewer, somewhere with which an observer can identify him/herself. Despite the fact that – as will be explained shortly – a deep and complex relation can indeed form to bond a landscape with its viewer, the kind of identification that is implied in the concept of place does not appear to be generally inferred in definitions of landscape. Maintaining that landscape is 'the visible surface of a piece of land' and that the very idea of it is inextricable from the presence of an observing human being, what marks its difference from place then, is the quality of the viewer's relation to it: to paraphrase Creswell's words, while people *live* in a place, they will instead *see* a landscape. The crucial element in this distinction is the viewer's perception of the latter as a distinctly separate object, an object that the viewer can define in terms of its standing outside of him/herself and therefore identify as 'other than self'. To help the visualisation of this distinction, one could imagine two different figures: the dweller and the viewer. On one side, the dweller lives a place as somewhere well-known, that has acquired a particular value either to the dweller individually or to his/her community. Most

[8] For further reference, see Creswell's volume, especially chapter 1, 'Introduction: Defining Place' (pp. 1-14).

importantly, the connection of the dweller with place is of such nature that he/she feels both part of that place and that that place is part of them, so much so that the distinction between inner space and outside space becomes negligible.[9] On the other hand, the viewer sees a landscape, probably admires its aesthetic qualities, and primarily perceives it as something that is placed outside, an object to observe and onto which it is possible to project inner feelings and establish a relation, yet still distinct from the self.

1.3 The role of landscape in the formation of identity

The crucial focus of such definition is that it interposes some distance between landscape and viewer. Nonetheless, the existence of a relationship of interdependence between the two elements remains indisputable and a fundamental matter. With regards to this, three aspects are worth considering: the impossibility to expunge the human element from the definition landscape; the role of art in the attribution of meaning to landscape; the impact of people on landscape and vice versa.

The fact that a landscape can be seen exclusively if someone is there to watch and all that ensues has been extensively analysed while outlining the definition of landscape in relation to place. As for the second point, it has been briefly mentioned

[9] See for example Denis Cosgrove, whose *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* will also be referred to later on: «To apply the term landscape to their surroundings seems inappropriate to those who occupy and work in a place as insiders. [...] For the insider there is no clear separation of self from scene, subject from object» (19).

before that the development of the idea of landscape is entangled with its artistic representation. The etymology of the word itself is indeed connected to its artistic representations, as early definition of the word 'landscape' and of its Romance counterparts, like the French 'paysage' or the Italian 'paesaggio' all at least include a pictorial element.[10] As the representation of landscape in art shaped itself into an independent genre – suffice it to think of the great Dutch and Italian schools in the 15th century – landscape as an artistic subject began to acquire a particular meaning, which was different in nature from the meaning attached to a place, but rather originated in its artistic use. What this implies is that historically, in people's perception, the idea of landscape has been deeply connected with the meaning that comes from its representation in art and therefore linked to its aesthetic qualities. As we will see, such perception complements, but does not exhaust a complex construction as the modern idea of landscape that this research intends to refer to.

As for the third aspect mentioned above, a point worth stressing is that people have a great impact on landscapes insofar as the activities that they carry out on a specific territory contribute to the shaping of its landscape. The other, less evident, side of this process is that the transformation that landscapes undergo plays in turn a crucial role in the formation of people's identity. In order to understand the mechanism behind this process, it will be necessary to reflect on a number of

[10] Denis Cosgrove quotes the following 1603 definition for the English 'landscape': «a picture representing natural inland scenery as distinct from a sea picture, a portrait etc.» (17); Pierpaolo Antonello refers to Svetlana Alpers in observing that the nordic word 'landschaps' «veniva usata in riferimento sia a ciò che l'agrimensore doveva misurare sia a quello che il pittore doveva dipingere» (2005, 6); Giorgio Bertone notes that the origin of the Italian 'paesaggio' shares the same root as 'paese', which was used with the meaning of 'painted landscape' as in a 15th century example he draws from Lorenzo Ghiberti: «Dipingeva [Ludione] paesi, marine, pescatori, navigli, lidi, verdure» (73).

properties that are inherent to landscape, at first considering an anthropological perspective and subsequently referring to notions that pertain the geographical field.

Anthropologist Barbara Bender collected a range of views on the emergence and evolution of the concept of landscape in the volume *Landscape. Politics and Perspectives* (2010); in her introduction to the volume she states:

> «landscapes are created by people – through their experience and engagement with the world around them [...]. The landscape is never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate and contest it. It is part of the way in which identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group or nation-state» (3).

Leaving aside for a moment the discussion on how landscape enters the process of identity formation and focusing instead on the role played by people in the formation of landscape, it is important to note that Bender's statement is true in two complementary ways: on the one hand, people actively take part in the creation of landscape through, for example, agriculture and architecture; on the other hand, the human element is crucial in the formation of the very idea of landscape. As has been extensively analysed, landscape's property of being 'visible' implies the gaze of a contemplating subject in the definition of landscape. However, such definition does not account for what happens when the contemplating subject stops looking. One might be tempted to just assume that the landscape that was there for the viewer to watch would still stand there, regardless of someone looking at it at some specific time. Yet this is not true: the very fact that, placed in front of a sight and observing it, we perceive and think of it as landscape is precisely what makes of that sight a landscape. In other words, the presence of a contemplating human being is a necessary condition for the existence of landscape, but it is not sufficient alone: it is the human perception of it as landscape that constitutes an essential component

of its definition as such. A rather simple yet revealing passage that neatly elucidates this concept is included in one of the three dialogues written by French poet Joachim Gasquet and titled *Ce qu'il m'a dit...*, where the poet recalls some of his conversations with Paul Cézanne. Here the painter reflects on his most iconic subject, the mount Sainte-Victoire:

> «And yet, I don't know. With the farmers, you see, I doubted at times if they knew what a landscape or a tree was, yes, I did. You find that strange. Sometimes I have taken walks, I have followed the cart of a farmer who was going to sell his potatoes at the market. He had never seen Sainte-Victoire. They know what they have sown here and there, the distance of the route, what the weather will be tomorrow, if Sainte-Victoire has its hat on or not, they can smell it like beasts or like a dog knows what a piece of bread is, according to their needs. But that the trees are green, and that this green is a tree, that this earth is red, and that these crumbling reds are hills, I really don't believe that most of them feel it, that they know it, apart from their utilitarian unconsciousness» (Cézanne, 120).

Recalling the visualization used above, to the farmers mount Sainte-Victoire is a place, to the painter it is a landscape; the former lives in it, the latter sees it. Besided illustrating such fundamental distinction, the mechanisms exposed in this passage also perfectly epitomise the theorisations of Bruno Latour in his essay *Nous n'avon jamais été modernes*. The concept of 'hybrid' is pivotal in Latour's conception of modernity as exposed in this essay as he argues that the distinction between nature and society that appears to be the defining factor of our modern society in opposition to pre-modern ones, is in fact a blurry one. In our 'modern' world, human constructions such as politics, technology, science, and nature often merge into 'hybrid' systems, which eliminate by their very existence a previously theorised clear boundary between pre-modern and modern societies. As exposed in Gasquet's quote, a pre-modern and a modern way of engaging with landscape can indeed coexist, the farmer's material relation to the mountain – in theory a pre-

modern one – and the painter's detached and contemplating one are alive and present within the same social frame. Consequent to these assumptions is the non-existence of landscape as a physical and objective entity itself, but rather as something that depends on human perception and human consciousness. Thus it becomes clear that talking about landscape as a subjectively sensed phenomenon necessarily implies referring to the complex relationship between man and nature.

With reference to such relation, there is one further clarification that needs to be highlighted. So far we have been assuming landscape as a set of visible features, without making any distinction as to what the nature of such features might be. Generally speaking, one could argue that the idea of landscape is very often associated with that of nature, and that when people think about landscape, they usually intend this idea in terms of 'natural landscape'.[11] However, as emerges clearly from the reflections conducted so far, accepting the above-given definition of landscape as a visible entity implies the necessity to consider it as a combination of both the geographical elements that constitute a specific section of the earth's surface and the overlay of human activities being carried out on it.

Although reflection on the subject of landscape has developed across a range of disciplines, in terms of the anthropological study of it, most of the above presented reflections have been systematized in relatively recent times. According to *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, for a long period of time, landscape has been mainly thought of in terms of 'landform' –

[11] This constitutes a reflection of the general association of the idea of landscape with its artistic representation.

something already in place – or 'land-use', whereby something is done to the land' (Bender 409). It was only in the 1980s that this conception begun to be revisited and anthropologists started recognizing that landscape plays a fundamental role in the way people perceive the world around them and engage with it. A combination of interplaying topographical, historical and social elements «[o]perating at the juncture of history and politics, social relations and cultural perceptions» (410), landscape appears to then elude, by its own nature, any definition that glosses over its constant interchange with humankind.

Drawing on the points that have been outlined so far, the next step will be to consider how landscape can influence people's perception of themselves in a particular environment and therefore the process of identity formation, especially at community level. In particular, one logical assumption to ensue from the principle of 'non-inertness' of landscape – and one of the main reasons why this concept is particularly crucial in the context of this research – is that, due to the constant interchange it entertains with the human element, any transformation occurring in landscape could potentially produce a modification in how people perceive themselves in the geographical context they belong to. In his short essay *Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination*, David Harvey reflects on this interrelation by discussing the specific example of how the capitalism-driven reorganisation of space modifies humans' perception of the surrounding environment:

> «The radical reorganization of space relations and of spatial representations have had an extraordinarily powerful effect. The turnpikes and canals, the railways, steamships and telegraph […] have altered space and time relations and forced us to new material practices as well as to new modes of representation of space». (424-425)

While Harvey's words refer to a specific turning point in history, they indeed describe a mechanism that can and does reproduce itself through time. Moreover, the gearings of this interaction would be even more noticeable if structural alterations in the anatomy and functioning of a specific territory were to result into its landscape being profoundly modified over a relatively short period of time.

Over the course of history, human beings have interacted with the nature surrounding them, they inhabited land, worked it, built on it, and organized it into territories. Consequently, the structure of inhabited territories has been intensely shaped by the kind of economic activities and relations that human beings have performed and developed on the land. If, in the light of these considerations, the fact that landscapes are 'created by people' is in itself quite obvious, nevertheless, despite the fact that witnessing the material outcome of such relation might be fairly simple, the tangible results of the interaction between land and human activity only constitute one facet of a rather complex question. The agricultural and industrial revolutions that came about throughout history surely implied multiple reorganizations of the environment and of society's relation to it. On a more abstract level however, what is equally implied in such transformations is a change in the way people reflect upon their own identity and on their relation to the environment surrounding them.

Backed by the fundamental work of human geographer Denis Cosgrove in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984), this argument subsumes the idea that landscape represents «a way of seeing the world» (13); a brief overview of his argument will help understand what this means and why it is relevant to the research

presented here. In his volume, Cosgrove defines landscape as «a form of consciousness» (46) and places the origin of the modern idea of landscape in the Western world within the framework of the long transition from feudalism to capitalism.[12] The fact that landscape can be interpreted as a form of human consciousness is evident on the basis of the reflections conducted above: the very distinction between the idea of place and that of landscape implies that, in order for the latter to exist, the human element must not only be present, but also perceive a given portion of land as landscape by recognizing it as something external to which some meaning is attached. In historical terms, the transition between the two modes of production mentioned above, feudalism and capitalism, implied a lengthy conversion of human beings' relation to the land based on the transition from an idea of land intended as a non-saleable means for production – land as use – to an idea of land as an exchange good on the same level as any other material object – land as property. Cosgrove's argument is that the modern idea of landscape originates precisely in the process of redefinition of such relation: «[t]he origin of the landscape idea in the West and its artistic expressions have served in part to promote ideologically an acceptance of the property relationship while sustaining the image of an unalienated one, of land as use» (64).

[12] Cosgrove's words elucidate his perspective on the use of the words 'feudalism' and 'capitalism' and on the necessity to account for the existing divergence between theoretical models and actual historical realities: «Feudalism and capitalism are both very general terms. [...] In Marxist thinking each denotes a mode of production [...]. A mode of production is above all a theoretical description of a set of economic and social relations. It is in effect a model or ideal type [...]. So in concrete historical terms we need to recognise that while the broad relations of a given society may be dominated by a particular mode of production whose theoretical model is a valuable descriptor, there will always exist both the remnants of formerly dominant modes and the anticipation of future ones» (39-40).

Whilst it should be stressed that the interpretation provided by Cosgrove does not necessarily describe a linear process, what is interesting to note and particularly relevant to the scope of this analysis is that, by establishing a bond between economic history and the idea of landscape, Cosgrove puts forward the idea that a relationship exists between changes in productive relations and changes in human consciousness, of which landscape is precisely a form. Furthermore, Cosgrove's consideration adds on to Bender's remarks, corroborating the thesis that not only does landscape enter processes of identity formation, but a change in its perception can also reflect a substantial transformation in the social and economic fabric of a society. The relevance of both these ideas in the context of this research lies in the fact that where these mechanisms apply to transitions on smaller scales, the observation of general phenomena such as the ones in question guides the understanding of more localised and specific cases like the one of contemporary Veneto.

1.4 'Landscape consciousness', the historical dimension, and the role of crisis

If the ones outlined so far are principles that generally govern the interaction between people and landscapes, for the purpose of the research presented here it will be worth spending a few considerations regarding specifically the occurrence of transformations in landscapes, as this will provide the precise theoretical coordinates to analyse the work of contemporary authors from Veneto such as

Marco Paolini and Massimo Carlotto. For this reason, the reflections conducted here will be focused on the community dimension that Barbara Bender introduced in her outline of the relation between humans and landscapes and on the connected notion of 'landscape consciousness'.[13]

It has been noted before how, in accordance to Cosgrove's interpretation, landscape can be seen as a form of consciousness. Similarly worded and also linked to the idea of the inextricability of landscape and the human element is the concept of 'landscape consciousness'. Inherently ingrained in the idea that landscape plays a role in processes of identity formation, this formulation intends to identify people's perception and awareness of landscape, thereby reaffirming its nature of inner phenomenon rather than empirical fact. As Bender points out in her description, landscape enters the process of identity definition both at an individual and at a group and nation-state level. Consequently, the idea of 'landscape consciousness' not only denotes the single subject's perception and acknowledgement of landscape, but should also be applied when considering the idea of landscape as it develops in a specific society or group of people. In addition, if we were to analyse the history of art, of literature, and their expressions in a particular civilization or time in search for representations of landscape, that would certainly gain us some knowledge of that civilization's perception of itself in its context. Indeed, even the sole presence or absence of such representations could tell us something about how people relate to the environment surrounding them at a

[13] The expression is moulded on that of 'coscienza del paesaggio' introduced by Michael Jakob in his *Letteratura e paesaggio*, which will be analysed later on.

given space and time. The tight bond interlacing the experience of 'real' landscape and its artistic and literary representation is therefore clear: not only does it consist of landscape being somehow represented, such connection also represents a two-way relation, as the perception of landscape itself can be influenced by artistic means insofar as trends and conceptions in art can surely shape the aesthetic conscience of people, and therefore determine or influence what people perceive as beautiful. In substance then, landscape is a shared concept which is elaborated over a certain period of time, producing in people a 'landscape consciousness' which is inevitably influenced by the cultural and artistic expressions that characterize a specific civilization. The observation that follows is that what people see and perceive as landscape is the result of the historical development of human activities on territory – indeed a rather tangible outcome of economic transformations. If it is indeed true that the development and diversity of such activities and the variety of visible effects they produce over space and time have generated constantly transforming landscapes, what is interesting to note is that some landscape theory seems to endorse the idea that certain historical ages allow more than others for the formation of a 'landscape consciousness'. With regards to this perspective, one concept in particular that I will appropriate and apply to my research comes from a volume *Letteratura e paesaggio* by landscape theorist and comparative literature professor Michael Jakob.[14]

[14] Jakob is professor of History and Theory of Landscape in Geneva and Lausanne, and of Comparative Literature at Grenoble; this study was originally published in Italian and has not been translated in other languages to date.

In his systematization of the development of literary representations of landscape, Jakob introduces the concept of landscape as a phenomenon that is defined by three key features: it is essentially artificial, in the sense that is not an independently existing natural object, but is rather created by human beings' perception of it; it is subjective, as its perception is dependent on a single individual's gaze on it; it is the result of a process of historical development. This last feature is connected with the idea that, as landscape is subject to transformation through time, certain periods of time in history provide a more fertile ground for the development in the population of forms of 'landscape consciousness'. The interesting point to note here is that, alongside the representation and conceptualization of landscape, the historical presupposition that Jakob identifies as necessary for the formation of 'landscape consciousness' is an element of crisis, a sense of detachment from nature and loss of continuity between human beings and their natural environment. Tracing back the origins of the artistic representation of landscape[15] to the period of transition from the Greek antiquity to Hellenism in which the development of the *polis* civilization determined the distantiation of people from nature – which is to be intended as the element of crisis –, Jakob affirms that:

> «[s]olo nell'epigonale e tarda cultura dell'ellenismo si manifestano per la prima volta i segni di una nascente rappresentazione del paesaggio; analogamente, anche la coscienza del paesaggio della modernità si accompagna sempre con epoche di crisi, di perdita di orientamenti filosofici, teologici, sociali» (15-16).

[15] At this stage, the reference is of course to a pre-modern concept of landscape, based on the idea of land as use; the appearance of landscape representation evidently does not correspond to the manifestation of a modern idea of landscape.

Whilst the author does not subsequently conduct an analysis of the development of landscape consciousness parallel to the historical and sociological evolution of Western civilization,[16] the idea that periods of historical crisis – being associated with people's perception of the intrinsic *otherness* that defines the environment within which they live –, might foster the formation of landscape consciousness entails an underlying concept that proves particularly useful in the context of this study.

The idea underpinning the process in question is that the existing distance between human beings and natural environment increases as the sense of disorientation and absence of stable cultural references in periods of crisis and transition fosters the questioning of what is perceived as *alterity*. This of course includes natural environment, and, as a result, it is during these periods that a 'landscape consciousness' is more likely to take shape. With this premise, if we acknowledge the previously introduced notion that people appropriate landscape to the extent that it enters the process of identity formation, it is then fairly legitimate to assume that the modification of landscape, which in the perspective of the present research is to be intended as the visible exterior of deeper transformations entailed by historical transitions occurring in a specific territory, plays a crucial role in the recognition of crisis and loss of cultural identity. In short: landscape is to be conceived as a subjectively experienced phenomenon which is influenced by the artistic and cultural experiences proper to a specific time and space; periods of

[16] Jakob rather outlines the processes through which the concept of landscape was shaped in European literature through centuries.

historical transition and crisis favour the formation of a ‘landscape consciousness’; as landscape itself is the result of the historical evolution of human activities on territory, transformations in the landscape can be considered as the evident side of such evolution.

1.5 For a definition of territory

Aimed at sketching a general definition of landscape, the reflections so far proposed are also intended to highlight some crucial points in the theoretical discussion around this concept that can also be referred to the element of territory, whose relation to literature constitutes the focus of this research. A definition of territory as ‘an area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state’ has been introduced at the beginning of this chapter; however, at this stage, it will be key to dwell on an ampler definition of territory, on its relation to the idea of landscape, and on how the analysis of the mechanisms ruling the relation between landscape and people can be employed as an instrument for the study of the relation between territory and literature.

Firstly, when we think of territory, the term itself mainly recalls a geographical frame. However, that of territory is a vast concept and, even when considering its simplest definition, there are many different elements that need to be taken into consideration. Territory is indeed determined by its geographical features, but it is the combination of a number of interlocking components that

contribute to shape it and ultimately define its identity. From history to economy, to architecture, culture and traditions, the items that assemble together to compose the picture of territory are various in number and kind and geography can be seen as the bottom layer on which they are installed. Besides articulating into a complex structure, territory is also subject to evolution through time and therefore shaped into progressively developing patterns that result from the constant mutation of social, economic and historical circumstances. At the basis of the unfolding, throughout the centuries, of new arrangements in the organization of a defined territory is the development of human activities on it. Along the course of history, human beings have interacted with the nature surrounding them, choosing areas of land to settle in, using natural resources for their subsistence and gradually adapting the natural environment to the needs of growing communities and civilizations. Consequently, the structure, organization, and shape of inhabited territories has been profoundly influenced, if not entirely formed, throughout history, by the kind of activities that human beings carried out on the land. A rather fruitful way of considering the concept of territory can be to visualise it as a series of overlapping layers: if the geographical layer stands at the bottom, providing the physical environment, the foundation on which human civilizations can install and develop, a second layer could indeed be the anthropological one, comprised of human beings settling in a defined area of land, forming communities which in turn start producing, consuming and exchanging goods between themselves and with other communities, thereby bringing in a third layer, the economical one. Given that all human interactions and activities as well as the natural environment are subject,

with the passing of time, to a certain degree of evolution and transformation, we could also identify the historical dimension as a fourth layer. The introduction of the historical element represents a crucial step as it allows us, when dealing with the concept of territory, to make a further distinction between a diachronic dimension and a synchronic one. If considering the former involves analysing the way in which the different layers that compose territory have progressively overlapped and integrated with each other through time, assuming the viewpoint of the latter means to regard a defined territory and the features that characterize it at a certain given time in history, therefore investigating how the various components that identify that specific territory interact and determine its configuration, gearings, and functioning.

As previously introduced, landscape constitutes the visible form taken by the combination of the interacting elements that constitute and organize territory as a stratification of different layers at a precise moment in the course of history. As a consequence, if we take landscape to act as a 'coat' for territory, it is clear that one of the characteristics that most essentially define it is that of being a constantly modifying and adapting element. Given the solid interdependence between territory and landscape, thinking of territory without interlacing this concept with that of landscape is almost impossible. Besides being a valid perspective, drawing ideas that chiefly belong to the field of landscape theory in order to transfer them to the conceptual frame of a reflection on territory also provides an advantageous point of view to understand phenomena that unfold and rule the relation between human beings and the territories they inhabit. As the analysis of the specific case of

contemporary Veneto will demonstrate, this becomes particularly clear when considering the transformation that a territory and its landscape can undergo, for example with the occurrence of economic transitions from a form of production or of land use to another.

In order to clarify how the series of principles drawn from the anthropological and geographical study of landscape identified above interlocks with the definition of territory presented here it will be worth providing more detailed considerations on the subject. With this scope in mind, if comparing the idea of landscape with that of territory, it is fairly straightforward to understand how the two share some defining characteristics in terms of their relation to people as well as the role played in identity formation processes. On the one hand, if the basic definition of territory identifies it as land under the jurisdiction of a particular ruler, the implication that such jurisdiction has been set according to human presence and organization of a specific area of land is evident. On the other hand, when thinking about identity formation processes, the role of landscape outlined above is complemented by the presence of territory as, if we accept a definition of territory as a combination of overlapping layers of which landscape is the most superficial and visible one, territory proves to be the element that materially shapes landscape. On the basis of such consideration, it is evident that the role played by landscape in the formation of identity, both at individual and community level, is inextricably bound to the historical development of the territory of which it is part.

Where the main difference between the two entities of landscape and territory arises – a point which also brings up a crucial aspect of the research presented here

– is in the materiality of their nature. The idea of landscape as a non-material phenomenon, a 'form of consciousness', has been explored extensively above. However, the considerations backing this perspective clearly do not apply to territory: territory is indeed a material entity, as proven by the very fact that it is defined as portion of land – not its visible features – and that its definition refers to a precise jurisdiction. If landscape and territory share some qualities in terms of how they relate to the human presence, and if, as a consequence, referring the theoretical discourse on landscape to the element of territory is undoubtedly beneficial to the understanding of the relation between territory and artistic – especially literary – reflections on it, the fact that these two entities are also inherently different is also a key factor. The material nature of territory implies by necessity that territory cannot be seen as a concept, but is in effect an object. Therefore, while individuals and populations can and do acquire to some extent a 'landscape consciousness', the same does not happen with territory: territory is the land we inhabit, we are indeed aware of its existence, but we do not form a consciousness of it in the same as we (can) do with landscape, precisely because it is not a concept. It is exactly for this reason that landscape plays a fundamental role in the development of literary reflections on the subject of territory, as it can represent the key through which it becomes possible to access territory as an artistic subject. In order to assess this, suffice it to think, for example, that artistic representations of landscape can – even if they might not necessarily do so – trigger a necessity to engage with issues related to the territory they relate to, or that, when literary production deals with territory-specific matters, the element of landscape is

very often present in the reflection, even in cases in which it does not become a subject of representation. Instances of such process will be the focus of this research's analysis: as will become clear, the work of authors like Marco Paolini and Massimo Carlotto exemplify the existence and development of reflections on territory-related issues in narrative and theatre in which the element of landscape proves to be a key player, be it overtly or as a concealed activator of observations.

1.6 The literary question

The reflection conducted so far leads us directly into the wider context of the research presented here, whose main concern is to investigate the relationship between literature and territory. In doing so, the core issue to be scrutinized pertains to the occurrence and modes of literary reflections upon the transformation of a territory, especially in cases when a mutation in the social and economic structure of a region also reshapes its landscape. When posing such questions, the considerations made above become the coordinates delineating the theoretical framework within which to advance any proposed interpretation. As introduced above, referring to the functioning of society's interaction with landscape turns crucial insofar as the literary production that refers to a specific territory might register its transformation by reflecting on the modification of its landscape. The mechanisms activating this process will become clear when analysing specific examples; however, one general principle is worth highlighting here. Due to the

relative distance that the idea of landscape implies between the observer and the object of the observation, this concept possesses the advantageous quality to act as a touchstone, as an object that is recognized as 'other than self' and against which general perception, and intellectual reflection in particular, can realize and measure the changing of a territory that accompanies the economic and social transformation of its fabric. The functioning of such relation has a twofold effect which is particularly relevant in the present framework, as we will see examples of both processes in the literary production of Veneto: on one side, as pointed out above, changes in landscape can become the trigger of intellectual and literary reflection regarding the territory of which such landscape is an expression; on the other side the radical transformation of a landscape can also constitute the covert root for the development of different modes of narration in territory-related literary production.

A further consideration needs to be emphasized at this point: if it is true that landscape enters the process of identity formation and influences intellectual and literary reflection as identified above, it is nonetheless fundamental to note that such considerations may not necessarily involve a portrayal of landscape itself. In fact, since landscape is to be considered as the visible fraction of a more complex entity which is territory, a drastic alteration of its essence may lead towards an observation and analysis of the process that caused such alteration precisely because it indicates the presence of an ongoing metamorphosis involving the whole structure of a specific territory. In other words, landscape can act as a trigger for literary production to direct attention towards territory, however this may not result into literary portrayals or analysis of the landscape itself.

What this entails is the idea that landscape is a way of seeing the world, and similarly, literature is a way of portraying the world. Harking back to Denis Cosgrove's research will help clarifying this point: in his work, Cosgrove uses the concept of 'social formation' to convey the idea that in historically existing societies, people do not perceive categories such as economy, social relations, politics, religion, and culture as separated. Such spheres, which are normally conceptualized in the frame of the theoretical discourse, are in fact unified in people's consciousness.[17] This argument is key in recognizing that landscape, as a form of consciousness, can be qualified as an entity that belongs to the cultural structure of a society in the same way as literature and other forms of artistic production do, so the fact that the two are mutually influenced is easy to understand: if we place landscape within the sphere of cultural constructions, it is easy to see that it constitutes part of the social formation whose various facets evolve and impact on each other. This phenomenon recalls exactly the point made earlier, i.e. that material transformations might affect the way people see and interpret the world surrounding them, but also suggests that the way people perceive the environment in which they live can have an influence on the way such environment is subsequently analysed and portrayed through various artistic means, including literary media.

Choosing a privileged vantage point and a smaller scale is a fruitful approach to adopt when considering and trying to elucidate such vast matter: the case of

[17] The concept of 'social formation' is meant precisely to convey this idea: «a social formation is intended to denote the unity among the aspects of social existence» (Cosgrove, 46).

contemporary Veneto offers both. Examining at this point the conditions under which the economic structure of the region was radically transformed will beneficial to understand why the specific case of this region provides a fertile ground for the analysis of the interaction of literature and territory.

1.7 A socio-economic premise: the economic development of Veneto after World War II

Since the beginning of the post-war period and until the late 1960s, the economy in Veneto suffered a strong delay compared to development in the northwest of the country, where very consistent migratory flows originating from the northeast directed towards it. In order to have a more precise idea of the situation, suffice it to say that still in 1967 the number of towns in Veneto that were officially considered depressed amounted to 489 out of 583,[18] more than 80% of the territory affected by economic downturn, which people fled in masses. This phase of otherwise general growth in the country was mainly due to the transition from rural activities to a different model of industrial development based on the presence of big industries with high capital investments in the northwest of the country, particularly in the so called 'economic triangle' of Turin, Milan and Genoa. The persistently rural character of Veneto's economy prevented the region from fully

[18] Data taken from Francesco Jori, "Il Veneto e la classe dirigente. Nani e giganti tra Schopenhauer, Einstein e il miraggio di un'Ikea delle teste", included in issue 16/2007 of *Venetica* (Riccamboni, 69).

entering the phase of post-war overhaul, thus resulting in the industrial hub of Porto Marghera being the one and almost only settlement in Veneto where development could be ascribable to this model and stage. It was in the 1970s however, that the economic progress of the region saw a turning point in its trajectory: consequent to the 1973 oil crisis and the necessity of finding new principles to lead economic progress, the region's response was shaped around the reorganization of its economic assets on smaller activities and business, usually built over the core of individual initiative and the structure of the family, a model that then definitely moulded the region's character during the 1980s. It is in this period that Veneto encountered a massive transformation that radically altered its territory, its socio-economic background and its cultural references: in the period between 1973 and 1995, the region generated more than a tenth of the growth in national per capita income.[19] New factories spread over the territory triggering a peculiar phenomenon that is often referred to as 'diffused industrialization' or 'urbanized countryside', an industrial base characterized by many factories of restrained dimensions, sprawled over a vast area and integrated in the landscape rather than a few clear agglomerations of productive activities, boosting economy and creating a state of diffused wealth that people had never known before.

At this stage in the history of Veneto, the major changes brought about by the shift to a new phase of economic development also run parallel to important transitions in the political life of the region. Ilvo Diamanti, one of the most engaged, perceptive and accurate observers of the political and social dynamics ruling

[19] Data taken from Bonavoglia, 8.

contemporary Veneto, due to his particular interest in the phenomenon of the Northern League and the reasons for the growing consensus the party has gained since its birth, has conducted wide in-depth studies on local politics and society over the years of the economic twist. That of the course taken by politics in Veneto after the inquiry Mani Pulite caused the collapsing of the Christian Democracy in the early 1990s is a recurrent topic in Diamanti's work: in his essay, *Il male del Nord* (1996), he dedicates some reflections to the subject, bringing to the surface some elements that are also crucial when investigating the impact of economic transformations on culture. Traditionally considered one of the major strongholds of mass moderatism, after Mani Pulite Veneto underwent a transition from 'white' to 'green' (green being the chosen colour of the Northern League party), as the vast majority of votes in the provinces of Veneto was won by Northern League candidates in the 1996 elections. By observing the milieus of the widening consensus to the League, Diamanti notices that the party steadily became dominant «nelle zone caratterizzate da un elevatissimo sviluppo di piccola impresa, fra i ceti produttivi autonomi e operai; negli stessi contesti che un tempo costituivano il cuore della zona bianca, le roccaforti della DC» (21). The evidence of the fact is also enhanced by a very effective visual support: putting side by side two maps showing the result of vote in northern Italy in 1948 and in 1996, Diamanti shows how those areas where the DC was particularly strong in 1948 create a pattern that almost perfectly overlaps with that drawn by the areas where the Northern League prevailed in 1996. Despite the obvious differences between the two political forces, the geography of the vote to the League and to the DC coincide and Diamanti

identifies in «la coesistenza e la convergenza di uno specifico tipo di struttura economica e sociale con uno specifico tipo di rappresentanza politica» (24) the feature that white area and green area have in common. When describing this kind of reality where a particular economic framework corresponds to a particular political representation, experts refer to the concept of «localismo», the term meaning, in one of its acceptations and according to Diamanti, a phenomenon taking place when the specificity of a local context constitutes the premise or the reference to identity and political claim.[20] Defining localism is useful on two different levels: on the one hand the general notion represents a starting point for the explanation of the Northern League case, whose identity claims are indeed founded on the conception of local specificity in northern Italy being politically misrepresented therefore requiring a redefinition in the national context. On the other hand, the persistence of a 'localist' trend in politics emphasizes the fact that what is really connate to Veneto society is the existence of a primeval cultural and anthropologic substratum hinged on family and local community. This same substratum also acts as the backbone of the 1970s upturn and the success of small businesses structured around the family unit, upturn which represents a crux in Diamanti's search for the matrix of the affirmation of the Northern League. The sociologist in fact reflects on the effects of economic growth on society and notes how the abrupt transition into a phase of development results into the loss of traditional references and therefore an identity crisis:

> «La crescita economica accelera la complessità sociale, la secolarizzazione, indebolisce le basi dell'identità e dell'integrazione in ambito locale,

[20] For a wider definition of the concept of 'localismo' a useful reference is Ilvo Diamanti's entry in «Rassegna italiana di sociologia» (3).

> accentuando i fattori di insicurezza e di degrado dell'ambiente. Il che provoca scollamento dai riferimenti tradizionali, incertezza, ricerca di nuove identità e forme di rappresentanza» (37).

The general state of disorientation caused by the sudden transformation of an environment that had remained unaltered for centuries produced a very fertile soil for identity myths to grow, the ideology and language of the Northern League promptly responding to this new necessity of self-definition. In a space where traditional benchmarks had gone missing, confusion enhanced the seeking of strong, recognizable and reassuring symbols.[21] Among non-academic observers of such phenomena, Paolo Rumiz, who tackled the matter from a more general perspective in his *La secessione leggera* (1998), pointed out how «nel nostro contesto di imbarbarimento culturale, lo "spaesato" non chiede risposte razionali ma simboli. Ne ha bisogno per placare le sue paure e radicarsi a uno spazio vitale in cui non si riconosce più» (195). The feeling of being lost triggered the need for a lifebuoy and the League provided people with an easily reachable one: the myth of ethnicity. Hence the conclusion that both Diamanti and Rumiz seem to reach: the broad consensus gained by the League can be explained with its ability to offer a clear and simple response to the lack of solid identity grounds brought about by the abrupt transition from a traditionally rural context to a diffusedly urbanized and industrialized, that was no longer recognizable to people.

[21] While these reflections refer specifically to the context of Veneto, it is interesting to notice how Harvey himself point out, in broader terms that: «the more global interrelations become, the more internationalized our dinner ingredients and our money flows, and the more spatial barrier disintegrate, so more rather than less of the world's population clings to place and neighbourhood or to nation, region, ethnic grouping, or religious belief as specific marks of identity» (1990, 427).

This transitional phase in the economy thus started a complex process of mutation of which political consequences were probably the most evident side, especially since the tones and language used by the League were often brought to the attention of the national media. However, the shift to a new economic era had effects at a much greater depth too, affecting the cultural substrata that shape the innermost nature of the region and creating a short-circuit due to which the foundations of an old-age civilization were eroded in the space of only a few decades. The generation who lived through the upturn got caught up in the situation where the cultural references in its possession belonged to a period in time that did not exist anymore. The incredibly fast pace of renovation in the economic tissue did not allow society to adjust to the different dynamics of a reality that was no longer founded on farming culture, on its rhythms and cycles, on the existence of traditional social classes. Veneto is known as the region that went «from plough to internet in the space of one generation» (Rumiz, 17). One generation was insufficient time for an equally radical cultural revolution to happen in parallel, especially in a region where a cultural hub with the means and ability to provide people with the intellectual tools they need to understand the world surrounding them would be profoundly needed. It is indeed true, as Paolo Rumiz says, that:

> «Fino agli anni Settanta il quadro era impressionante: contadini che non erano mai stati a Padova in vita loro. Di Venezia, neanche parlare: un altro pianeta. Padri-padroni, famiglie di nove, dieci fratelli; continue assenze da scuola per lavorare la campagna. Terre talvolta rosse o anarchiche; una povertà terribile, vissuta con rabbia. Un mondo del Quarto Stato, fatto di fame, bestemmie e fatica da spezzare la schiena, una carica eversiva sommersa e solitaria» (22).

It is easy to understand how, in such a context, the effects of an economic renovation so deep and drastic would trigger a sense of disorientation, putting a

whole generation in the condition of having to adapt to a new reality and its whole new range of social mechanisms with no time for the mindset to evolve at the same speed and therefore remaining anchored to social structures, conventions and dynamics that belong to a different age. This sudden jump into a new phase of economic development introduced elements of cultural and identity crisis that the society in the region was unprepared to respond, as it lacked the tools to decipher the new reality surrounding it. The fast pace at which reality was transforming prevented the formation of a new set of benchmarks, adequate cultural guidance failed to shape and lead Veneto society through the transition from one stage to another in the economic evolution of its territory, resulting into the period of cultural blackout that dominated the years of the economic rise in Veneto. Later on, the sense of disorientation would unfailingly transfer to younger generations too; the absence of a consolidated set of values and a strong cultural tradition to support fathers will undoubtedly translate into their inability to transmit a firm background to their sons. Hence the stalemate reached when new generations fail to gather a legacy and integrate into the socio-economic tissue, despite the institution of family being of capital importance to the emergence and consolidation of a successful economic model.

The incapacity to oversee the process of transformation of the region also produced strong impact on its territory: once lost the contact with traditional local values imposed by the ruling structure of the farming culture, Veneto society became «una sfruttatrice di se stessa, una cannibale-divoratrice del proprio territorio» (Rumiz, 17). Kilometres over kilometres of land were progressively

swamped with concrete; factories, sheds and warehouses diffusedly started to rise in the countryside, swallowing up inch by inch a landscape that had maintained its rural features unaltered over the centuries; industrialisation overcame a whole region following no development plan or pre-designed project. The anxious swiftness in the proliferation of industrial areas utterly reshaped Veneto in the almost furious attempt to cancel the traces of a past of poverty, to erase memories of misery and a past as 'terroni del Nord'.

The aim of this chapter was to delineate the confines of the theoretical and historical background that sustains the literary and textual analysis that will follow. Having determined what is to be intended by territory in the context of this study – how territory relates to landscape, why it is important to refer to landscape theory in order to fully understand how human communities interact with their territory and how this enters the space of literary creation, what the economic and historic circumstances are that made of Veneto a valuable case study exemplifying the functioning of a general structure on a reduced scale – the 'theoretical vocabulary' for this study has been set and it is possible to proceed to consider the finer details of the literary context to which this research refers.

«Che le sue geografie fossero composte dal fiume Piave, da Treviso, da Venezia e Chioggia nelle prime opera [...] non prova che fosse scrittore 'veneto' più di quanto acque di fiume o di mare possano provare lo status regionale di un salmone»
(Comisso, X)

CHAPTER 2

WHY VENETO? THE LITERARY CONTEXT

2.1 On the choice of a regional perspective

As one can easily deduce from the previous section of this thesis, the present work addresses matters whose analysis could potentially stretch beyond the boundaries of the study of a single national literature, and indeed beyond the boundaries of literary studies themselves, calling into question matters of anthropological, sociological, economic and historical nature. There could be, in theory, many cases, both in Italian and in other literatures, where questions regarding the existence of a conspicuous literary interest in the territorial element would constitute a relevant matter. However, in order to set the grounds for a clearer understanding of the dynamics driving the interaction between literature and territory, the framework of

a single case-study seemed to be the most fruitful perspective to adopt. Indeed, in opposition to a more extensive study, the case-study angle allows a closer and more detailed observation of the many different factors that are involved in the creative literary process as well as in the appearance and fostering of authors' interest in the investigation and depiction of their own territory and of matters that strictly relate to it. It is precisely for this reason that the focus of this research has been directed to a confined territory and a defined period of time, i.e. that of the region of Veneto and of its literary production over the last couple of decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. However, because the broad context of this study is that of Italian literature, and the development of Italian literary production unfolded through history in rather peculiar territorial circumstances, the adoption of a regional perspective implies the necessity of acknowledging and referring to the discourse on national and regional literature in the Italian context. Therefore the analysis I intend to carry out needs to be accompanied by some introductory reflections on the significance of the regional dimension in contemporary Italian literature.

It is well known that the question of the cultural and linguistic unification of Italy has been widely and fiercely debated over the centuries, and it still remains an open question today. The tension between vernacular diversity on one side, a reality made of day-to-day spoken idioms and in many cases of more or less flourishing and autonomous literary traditions, and the quest for a unified and unifying Italian literary language has been entangled with the development of a national literary tradition from the times of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* until today. If, in the early

14th century, Dante was the first to 'chase the panther' of an ideal Italian language and, in his attempt to delineate a model for a common Italian language, he defined it as «illustre, cardinale, regale e curiale quel volgare d'Italia che è di ogni città italiana ma non sembra appartenere a nessuna e sulla cui base tutti i volgari locali degli Italiani sono misurati, valutati e confrontati» (45), it was only seven centuries later that, «con qualche titubanza», Pier Paolo Pasolini felt ready to announce that «è nato l'italiano come lingua nazionale».[22] Still, *la questione della lingua* is far from being resolved. The question of language has been central to Pasolini throughout his career: his use of Friulian dialect in *Poesie a Casarsa* and of Romanesque in *Ragazzi di vita* is only the major example of his effort to define a literary ideal that would combine both the national and local linguistic traditions. The event that, in Pasolini's eyes, took shape as a threat to both was the coming modern technology: in the phase of post-war intensive industrialization, with consumer goods beginning to be mass produced for the first time and television becoming more and more popular, the Italian literary language was suddenly asked to provide for the necessities of the new modern technological world, i.e. velocity of communication and technical vocabulary. Under such pressure, Pasolini foresaw that the Italian language would be pushed towards a more functional model, giving up its elegance and variety to succumb to homologation. Furthermore, dialects would progressively withdraw to a marginal position and then quickly become extinct. At the time, Pasolini's view, expressed in a series of speeches subsequently

[22] Pasolini expressed this position during a conference, the proceeding were subsequently published in the issue of «Rinascita» dated 26th December 1964.

collected in «Rinascita», did not encounter unanimous consent: his position generated, among others, the reaction of Italo Calvino, who entered the debate to oppose Pasolini's hostility towards technology and to identify the real enemy of the Italian language in «la tendenza degli italiani a usare espressioni *astratte* e *generiche*» (147), whereas «chi scrive per comunicazione dovrebbe (...) rendersi conto del grado di traducibilità, cioè di comunicabilità, delle espressioni che usa» (145), not relying on «questi dialetti decaduti, stracchi, bolsi, corrotti» (147).[23] Again, *la questione della lingua* was still open. An analysis of the unfolding of the debate here briefly outlined in its two chronological extremes would outreach the aim of this premise, but quoting Dante and the 1960s diatribe between Pasolini and Calvino as the opposite ends of a question whose discussion has stretched over the course of several centuries, remarks the idea that, despite a strong tension towards unity that characterized its history, the crucial role played by the pursuit of an 'ideal Italian language' together with the contemporaneously existing vernacular traditions, are fundamental to the understanding of the development of Italian as a literary language.

The fact alone that Italian literary tradition evolved under the influence of multiple centres dotted around its territory, which were the expression of the cultural life of the different region-states and which originated specific traditions and variations on the unitary national model, could probably be rightly claimed as a sufficient ground on which to base an approach that takes into account a single

[23] Calvino's reflection come from his 1965 essay *L'italiano, una lingua tra le altre lingue*, first published in *Rinascita* and later collected in the volume *Una pietra sopra*, from which the quotes are taken.

localized reality and its written tradition. However, in order to build even more solid foundations for a study that adopts a regional perspective and to further strengthen the legitimacy of taking a position of this kind, reference should be made to the fact that in relatively recent years a number of important critical works have been produced reconsidering the geography of Italian literature and recognizing the weight of regional traditions.

A first fundamental work to mention is Alberto Asor Rosa's *Letteratura italiana. Storia e geografia*, edited and published in three volumes in 1989. The third volume, *L'età contemporanea* includes the chapter "Centralismo e policentrismo nella letteratura italiana unitaria" by Asor Rosa himself, in which the author tackles the matter of the diversity of Italian literary traditions and of what he calls «le varianti del modello unitario», recognizing (and almost echoing Dante's word on the 'volgare illustre') that «al di fuori di quelle varianti, non è "visibile" *una* letteratura italiana: *la* letteratura italiana coincide con l'insieme di quelle varianti e al tempo stesso con ciascuna di esse» (7). This statement becomes even more powerful in the light of the fact that in 1861, at the moment of Italy's unification, the number of Italian speakers only amounted to around 5% of the population,[24] the process of linguistic unification only nearing completion almost a century later, with the coming of mass communication and the diffusion of television. It is indeed true, Asor Rosa concludes, that «(n)el corso del Novecento in Italia si fa pratica di una lingua letteraria nazionale unitaria, tuttavia il dato

[24] The figure reported by Asor Rosa is 2.5%, but its precise definition is still a matter of much debate amongst linguists.

unitario è solo uno degli elementi dell'insieme, reticolo di forme espressive estremamente diverse tra loro» (56). By organizing his history upon a geographical structure, the editor does not mean to come to a «"storia *regionale*" della "letteratura *italiana*", bensì a una "storia *non unitaria*" della letteratura nazionale» (6), stressing once again the importance of looking at Italian literature as a tradition that integrates within itself different variants and lines, rather than constituting a patchwork of juxtaposed tassels.

Furthermore, before Asor Rosa, Carlo Dionisotti had also recognized the importance of the diversifying elements that compose Italian literary tradition by using a similar perspective in his *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, published in 1967, and later on, in 2004, Romano Luperini addressed the matter of the dismissal, during the course of the 20th century, of an ideal national literature as an instrument for the cultural unification of the country in the volume *Letteratura e identità nazionale nel Novecento*. Here he observed how, in the postmodern era, «lo scrittore (...) avvert(a) come cancellati o annebbiati i confini nazionali e si sent(a) insieme locale e globale» (25), assigning once again a prominent position to the territorial element in the analysis on contemporary literature. The existence of such studies represents a significant fact on the one hand implying that literary criticism has, over time, moved on from the unitary model that underpinned traditional histories of Italian literature such as, for example, Francesco De Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana*, and on the other demonstrating that a geographically based approach to the study of Italian national literature, besides rendering a more truthful picture of its historical evolution, can also be employed

when considering its most recent developments. As we will see later on in this chapter, the question of the influence of local realities and regional traditions on national literature is still open and relevant, therefore, far from representing an outdated practice that can only have a retrospective significance, the adoption of a perspective that takes into account the diversity of Italian tradition by analysing literary phenomena and trends from the viewpoint of their development within a localized territory constitutes indeed a worthy framework.

Just to make one final reference to the language question, one can note that the pinnacle of a standardized Italian language, unanimously recognized to have been reached with Calvino's opus, appears to be conquered at the moment when literary trends seem to start moving towards a different direction, a fact that is indeed symptomatic of the intrinsically dual nature of Italian literary tradition, at once unified and fragmented. Indeed, if Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* comes out in 1979, only one year later Pier Vittorio Tondelli publishes his collection *Altri libertini*, marking a new breakthrough of regional language and slang in narrative, as well as a definite turning point for a vast part of the subsequent Italian literary production, especially in terms of how the language question is intended and addressed:[25] a further sign that the territorial and local element constantly intersects the plane of national, unified literature, connate as it is to Italian tradition, and indeed still represents a vast and vital source for authors.

[25] Tondelli's work and the question of its influence on young authors in the '80s will be taken into consideration further on in this chapter with the aim to contextualize the work of those authors this study is focused on.

To conclude this premise, we can borrow an observation by Zygmunt Bauman about modern Italy, where he suggests that «(a) un secolo e mezzo dalla vittoria del Risorgimento, l'Italia a malapena può dirsi un paese con una lingua unica e una piena integrazione degli interessi locali» (23). Despite being made in the context of a sociological discussion on identity,[26] and besides being true on a political and social level, such remark is certainly valid with reference to Italy's literature as well: indeed, whereas it might not be the case that single local realities or regions develop a proper literary tradition based on the Italian language but with its own distinctive features to characterize it in comparison or in opposition to the literary production of other areas or regions, it is nonetheless undeniable that the territorial element plays a fundamental role in the global definition of Italian national literature.

2.2 Considerations upon the idea of a 'linea veneta'

Once outlined the reasons behind the adoption of a regional perspective in general terms, it becomes necessary to also explain why the choice of focusing the present study fell on Veneto rather than any other region in Italy. In order to properly contextualise this argument, one important premise to make relates to the debate

[26] In *Intervista sull'identità*, a conversation with Benedetto Vecchi, Bauman reflects on the concept of identity and on how crucial a matter it has become over the last few decades. In Bauman's view, identity, and national identity in particular, is something that is *invented* rather than *discovered* and, as he points out, «In Italia dovreste saperlo fin troppo bene... » (23).

around the existence of a so-called 'linea veneta' in Italian literature[27] and the appropriateness of referring to such line as a fully developed and rather autonomous trend in the national literary tradition. Bearing in mind that a separate space for discussion should be reserved to the literary production in dialect,[28] it will be here worth remarking that, when considering literature in the Italian language in Veneto, whereas the regional focus, as seen above, can constitute a worthwhile viewpoint, talking about a regional literature or even a regional stream does not necessarily constitute a thoroughly convincing stance.

A first aspect to take into consideration concerns the cultural history of Veneto and consists in the fact that it can be seen, so to speak, as an acephalous region. While tracing a brief literary history of the region for *Letteratura italiana. Storia e geografia*,[29] Mario Allegri notes how, since the decline of the Republic of Venice, whose fall was sanctioned by the Campoformio Treaty in 1797, the Veneto area becomes deprived of a cultural capital, as «nessun altro centro veneto consegue un'egemonia culturale capace di consentirgli definizioni di ampio respiro o di elaborare orientamenti comuni» (317). [30] In 1983, in his chapter "Gli scrittori veneti

[27] For the sake of coherence this chapter will only refer to the period of time that goes from the second half of the 20th century to the present day.

[28] The topic is vast and complex and its discussion would require a separate and dedicated space which outstretches the limits of this thesis. Besides, it should be considered that, although dialect does appear in some works by the 'young' Veneto authors considered during the research phase of this thesis, major narrative works written solely or mainly in dialect do not appear have been published over the years that this survey spans.

[29] The chapter is titled "Venezia e il Veneto".

[30] When considering the status of Venice as a cultural capital in the region, specifically with regards to the literary sphere, it is important to note that, while the city played a primary role in the development of Italy's publishing history, such centrality did not automatically turn Venice into one of the national nuclei attracting the most vivacious literary debates. While the likes of printmakers Giorgio Rusconi and Aldo Manuzio – widely regarded as the first modern publisher – were operating in Venice during the 16th century, while various *salotti letterari* sprang in the XVII and XVIII centuries around figures like Giustina Renier Michiel or Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi, after the decline of the Republic, Venice ceased to be at the forefront of the national literary debate, which instead

di questi anni ed il loro rapporto con la realtà regionale", included in *Veneto contemporaneo*, Fernando Bandini also observes how the region lacks «una città che per ruolo primario, per presenza di case editrici, riviste, giornali, ecc., raduni gli intellettuali e gli scrittori» (Arslan, 47). Indeed, if we were to sketch a literary map of contemporary Veneto, we would find ourselves dotting a number of small circles scattered around the territory: Padova, Vicenza, Venezia, Treviso, Asiago, Rovigo, Belluno would all rightly claim their place on our map. This represents a crucial factor to consider on two different but superimposed planes: one one side the geographical collocation of authors delineates a rather fragmented space in which literature has developed since the downfall of the Serenissima up until recent years; on the other side, the presence of many small literary centres with no clearly visible cultural guidance and direction, naturally creates a particularly favourable environment for a variety of different voices to take shape, each with their identity and rather distinct features. Furthermore, the previously mentioned lack of a cultural centre to host journals, reviews and cultural circles also implied, besides the inability for authors to participate in a shared cultural feeling or atmosphere, that the potential constitution of self-determined groups with common views and intents was probably also prevented by the absence of an environment that would foster communication and exchange between writers, artists, and intellectuals.

The situation outlined above seems to translate into a scenario where the definition of literary streams or groupings based on a sense of regional belonging

began to revolve around the literary reviews founded in cities such as Rome, Milan, Florence, and Turin.

or rootedness into the reality of Veneto would represent quite a remote possibility. Nonetheless the question of the existence of a 'linea veneta' has been debated and critics have argued its legitimacy based on the presence of a range of features that writers from this region could appear to share. Critical analyses on the subject have been produced mainly in the form of chapters for cultural histories of the region, anthologies and collections of essays and include, in chronological order: *Narratori del Veneto*, edited by Alberto Frasson and Guido Piovene (1973); "Gli scrittori veneti di questi anni ed il loro rapporto con la realtà regionale" by Fernando Bandini (1983); "I luoghi della cultura" by Mario Isnenghi (1984); "Venezia e il Veneto" by Mario Allegri (1989); "La letteratura nel Veneto dal 1945 ad oggi" by Antonia Arslan (1989); *Il «limes» e la casa degli specchi* (1999) and *La terra in tasca* by Saveria Chemotti (2003). If considering the time frame to which we have been referring to so far (i.e. from the end of World War II to the present day), a non-comprehensive list of writers whose work is included in these analyses would comprise authors like Giovanni Comisso, Goffredo Parise, Guido Piovene, Dino Buzzati, Luigi Meneghello, Ferdinando Camon, Mario Rigoni Stern, Giuseppe Berto, Gian Antonio Cibotto, as well as Massimo Carlotto, Tiziano Scarpa, Gianfranco Bettin, Vitaliano Trevisan, Giulio Mozzi and Marco Franzoso. Although expressing different positions, ranging from «Il Veneto è anche un sogno letterario, un'accumulazione narrativa opera dei suoi scrittori. E di poche aree regionali italiane si potrebbe dire, quanto di questa, che possiedono una 'linea' letteraria'» (Isnenghi 396) to a more cautious «data l'ampia gamma di voci e di interpreti, proporre l'esistenza di una *linea* o una *scuola* veneta nella letteratura

italiana contemporanea significa azzardare una definizione critica non sempre sostenibile in senso generale» (Chemotti 1999, 43), these works seem to generally assert the presence of some common features and common motives in the written production from the region that would at least define «una "somiglianza di famiglia", tratti comuni» (Chemotti 1999, 43) that bring together individual voices into a circle of more or less loosely related literary experiences.

Moving on to consider specifically which features are referred to as defining such 'family', the overall impression one could gain is that, when the above critical works delineate common characteristics for the Veneto authors they take into consideration, these generally seem to be rather vast and overly inclusive. Some of these features in fact, could be applied to a range of literary expressions that definitely expands beyond the boundaries of the regional production and some of them, far from outlining specificities that define a specific and local literary identity, can instead be seen as more general trends whose origin should rather be traced in the wider development of national literature. I will here give an example referring to one of Saveria Chemotti's work, as her collections of essays also include relatively young authors who, because of chronological reasons, are excluded from other critical works. In *La terra in tasca*, Chemotti says:

> «Per questo radicato lascito antropologico e culturale,[31] pur costituendo, dal punto di vista del loro insediamento, una singolare "galassia dispersa" (una pluralità di scenari dentro un unico orizzonte), gli scrittori veneti rivelano, nella frastagliata gamma di voci, sorprendenti tratti comuni. Nella varietà dei percorsi individuali, alcuni intrecci, alcune riprese tematiche, alcune coincidenze tipologiche o ricorrenze linguistiche non si possono considerare

[31] Chemotti here refers to a quote she reports in her text of Paolo Barbaro's depiction of Veneto as a land with a strong identity and a multifaceted nature: a countryside land, as well as a urban land, a land of isles, of farmers, of workers, of mothers and a land of rivers; Veneto seen as representing the world itself as well as a world to discover and be part of.

> aspetti marginali o accessori: un sensibilissimo senso del passato autobiografico e del suo lascito antropologico, storico, sociale e politico; la cultura del lavoro; un sentimento poetico dell'interno, degli affetti e dei valori fondamentali dell'uomo (la famiglia, la casa, il paese, il paesaggio); un gusto avventuroso del vivere e del viaggiare (il desiderio del fuori); un profondo attaccamento alle tradizioni e alla religiosità pagana, nativa; un rapporto di amore-odio inestricabile con la fede e la religione; un'irrequieta predilezione per il soprannaturale, il fantastico visionario, l'allegorico, surreale e onirico; una tangibile fiducia nella scrittura come terapia, come conoscenza critica della storia, come denuncia dei soprusi commessi contro l'uomo e la natura, della violenza della Guerra o dello scontro sociale e politico» (17).

Although the features listed here all define to some extent the work of some of the authors Chemotti then moves on to analyse, in some cases revealing shared motives, it is also true that such classification seems to leave quite a large space for a wide variety of substantially different experiences to fit in and does not seem to delineate a precise picture that one could define as the literary identity of Veneto. «(U)n gusto avventuroso del vivere e del viaggiare» for instance, despite certainly being a defining feature of Comisso's writing, as well as Parise's and Piovene's, does not necessarily define a dimension that is proper to Veneto writers, suffice to think, for examples to the travel writing by authors like Alberto Moravia or Pier Paolo Pasolini. Furthermore, whereas one could certainly agree with Chemotti's immediately subsequent argument that in Veneto «la periferia, la città o il piccolo centro [...] diventano un osservatorio privilegiato per cogliere i riflessi (gli echi, gli esiti) delle trasformazioni, delle aberrazioni, delle inquietudini della società odierna» (17), this as well is not only true of the region we are considering and, on the contrary, can be said of many other local or peripheral realities being represented as exemplary of more generalized situations in contemporary Italy.

Analysing the work of the authors included in each of the above mentioned critical works in order to determine which ones share which features and motives

among those listed in Chemotti's and in other critical works would exceed the limits and the intent of this study.[32] Nonetheless what has been said so far should at least have clarified the difficulties of defining the varied and multifaceted production of authors from Veneto as a specific line or a family. As we will see from examples in this section, a picture of the region does come out of the opus of some authors from Veneto, a picture that represents a specific reality and regional identity. However, this does not appear to be enough to assert that these authors can be defined as a group or have some degree of autonomy if compared to the rest of the national tradition. In fact, it can be said that literature from this region participates in the variety and many-sided reality that composes Italian literature throughout its history that has been recapitulated in the previous section.

2.3 Why Veneto? Economic development and literary trends

Having clarified the choice not to endorse a perspective that accepts the existence of a 'linea veneta' in Italian literature, it is now possible to proceed to expose the reasons why, within the framework of a study that aims to determine if and how literature reflects on territory and on its transformations on a defined local level, the case of Veneto is particularly interesting when compared with those of other regions in Italy.

[32] A few examples will be introduced later on in the chapter in the context of an overview on the different narrative mode that seems to characterize the work by authors who debut in the '90s as opposed to that of older authors.

The recent history of Veneto, specifically for what concerns its economic development, represents a rather atypical case in the general context of contemporary Italy: the substantial social and economic transformation the region underwent during the 1970s and 1980s constitutes a peculiar phenomenon for which similar cases to use as a comparison are difficult to find. The specific analysis of the features that characterized this relatively recent phase of economic upturn in the region has been outlined in the previous chapter. For the purpose of the current discourse, it will be worth recalling here that this model of industrialization drove the region to economic growth on a scale that had never been known before, turning Veneto into the lead of Italian economy in the space of less than two decades. A process that had unfolded in other areas over a much wider period of time invested this region with rather unusual swiftness, on one side improving the economic condition of the area, but on the other side meaning that Veneto was radically transformed by the emergence of a diffusedly industrialized pattern that rapidly swallowed its once rural territory. In the space of a lifetime, Veneto's landscape had become almost unrecognizable, due to the uncurbed economic development whose consequences on the social and cultural patterns of the region generated a fracture between people and their environment. The fracture was so deep that someone born in the context of a rural and agricultural-based civilization can find him/herself aging in what has probably become the widest metropolitan area of the nation, an endless sweep of stacks and concrete, an unceasing succession of built-up areas where discerning one village from the other can be near impossible.

Harking back to the initial premises of this study,[33] if the presumption that the shaping of 'landscape consciousness' is accompanied by periods of crisis can be confirmed, then the case of contemporary Veneto constitutes one of its clearest paradigms. It is needless to say that such changes in the landscape certainly did not go unnoticed, but, in order to gather an idea of the extent to which the perceptible signs of a structural transformation have affected the cultural backbone of the region, a reflection on the role played by literature in this context can constitute quite a useful tool. It should first be clarified, however, that the process of economic development in the region, as well as its cultural consequences, besides having been the focus of economic studies, have also been extensively examined from a sociological point of view in works like the above-mentioned ones by Ilvo Diamanti and Paolo Rumiz or like *Schei. Dal boom alla rivolta: il mitico nordest* by writer and journalist Gian Antonio Stella. In this regard, quoting one of Gian Antonio Stella's considerations about the phase of economic development in Veneto allows us to approach the matter from a multiple perspective:

> «La campagna descritta da Luigi Meneghello in *Libera Nos a Malo*, dove il Mino andava a confessarsi tirandosi dietro la Bisa, la vacca cicciona da cui non si staccava mai, non c'è più. Addio. Sono rimaste solo le soppresse e i cotechini e i bigoli delle trattorie finte rustiche che però servono il salame col Brunello di Montalcino» (87).

The particular interest of Stella's observation here lies in its relating both to a literary plane and to the actual territorial evolution of the region. Stella in fact observes that the rural civilization that has been peculiar to Veneto for hundreds of years has vanished, its few remains subject to some sort of pseudo-chic artificial

[33] See chapter 1.4 on 'landscape consciousness'.

rebranding. The world depicted in Meneghello's book does not exist anymore, its life and landscapes washed away in the space of a few decades. What is particularly worth noting though, is that not only has that reality vanished, its representation has also undergone significant changes and referring to Meneghello's work does not only mean picking a touchstone to measure the metamorphosis territory has gone through, it also allows us to consider how the literary portrayal of that territory has evolved.

As the following section of the work presented here will be dedicated to the analysis of specific examples, I will for the moment confine myself to making reference to a line of development that seems to have emerged in the region's recent literary production. Albeit avoiding any kind of generalization, and far from implying that the following is a feature that only pertains to Veneto literature, it remains legitimate to say that there is some sort of continuity in the attention that authors from this region dedicate to the literary depiction of their own land.[34] Where a major gap appears to widen instead, is in the mode of the narration, especially since the 1990s. These are the debut years for those authors who were born after World War II and who are therefore too young to have directly or wholly experienced the rural civilization that used to define Veneto up until the years of the miraculous economic upturn of the 1970s, but old enough to have seen the

[34] Meneghello has already been mentioned, but many authors like Mario Rigoni Stern, Ferdinando Camon, Guido Piovene and Goffredo Parise as well as younger authors have been dedicating some attention to matters connected with the specific reality of the Veneto region.

transformation unfold before their eyes.[35] Along with this younger generation[36] of writers, the approach to portraying territory seems to shift from memory-based[37] narrative to what can be defined as a factually-based account of topical issues embedded in a fictional frame. Although it would be misleading to define this phenomenon as a characteristic that only applies to authors from this region,[38] the different take of younger authors on the representation of Veneto territory is surely noticeable; besides, the investigation of the regional contemporary reality is not an interest that all these 'younger' Veneto authors share, but it seems to be the case that those who do tend to favour intertwining fiction and non-fiction in hybrid forms of literature when tackling matters that concern the factual reality of their territory. I am here referring to authors like Massimo Carlotto, Gianfranco Bettin, Romolo Bugaro, Marco Franzoso, Vitaliano Trevisan as well as the theatre of Marco Paolini, who, despite their very dissimilar literary voices, share to some extent an inclination to include factual reality in the fictional frame of their works, which in some cases takes the shape of an urge to conduct inquiry-like investigations on the world surrounding them through their writing.

[35] It will be interesting to note how it is precisely this process that triggers a sense of 'spaesamento' in an author like Marco Paolini, who feels like he was born before the transformation, which is consequently not native to him. Further considerations on this matter will be the subject of deeper analysis in the chapter dedicated to the author.

[36] As, for obvious reasons, it can be problematic to define these authors as 'young', from here on, I will refer to them as the 'younger generation', with specific reference to the 'older generation' of writers from Veneto that has been defined here.

[37] When thinking of works by authors like Meneghello, Camon and Rigoni Stern, it is easy to note how memory plays a fundamental role in the definition of these writers' perspective on the depiction of their territory.

[38] This discourse should be included in the wider frame of a general re-emergence of elements of realism in contemporary Italian narrative. The matter of the debate around a 'new realism' and a renewed attention to factual reality in contemporary Italian literature will be subject of analysis in chapter 4.

In brief, the emergence of this shift in the narrative modes, combined with the peculiarity of the economic development started in the ’70s that make Veneto a privileged observatory for the analysis of the social and cultural effects of radical transformations in the territory, make the region a distinctly interesting field on which to investigate the relationship between literature and territory in the context of contemporary Italy, hence the choice of directing the focus of the present study specifically on the area of Veneto.

2.4 Which Veneto? The fundamental divide of World War II and 1980

At this point in our analysis, a question arises concerning the concept of ‘contemporary’ and what we mean by it. In short, what period and what authors are we looking at? In order to answer this question I will refer again to Alberto Asor Rosa, and to the group of ‘eredi’ he identifies in the context of his considerations on the contemporary literary scenario in Italy. Recalling such definition here is not meant so much as to embrace the critic’s classification, but rather to assert the importance of establishing a clear time divide and identify a precise ‘generation’ of authors to the purpose of the research presented here.

When in 2009 he wrote his *Storia europea della letteratura italiana*, Asor Rosa dedicated the final chapter of the third volume, “Oltre le certezze. Dagli anni ’90 in poi”, to the arduous task of examining the most recent literary production in Italy in the attempt to delineate what he defines as a ‘route’, rather than a ‘map’,

across the Italian literary scenario after the decline of the 'modern' in the 20th century. In general terms, the task of analysing a particular historical or cultural phase while its development is still unfolding can lead into rather intricate skeins of questions, most of which will probably be better addressed from the privileged viewpoint of historical distance. The last decade of the 20th century represents by no means an exception. Hence, based on the consideration that «(u)n conto è giudicare uno scrittore morto da secoli, altro conto è giudicare uno con cui si è convissuto nel tempo, con cui si sono letti gli stessi libri» (585), Asor Rosa dismisses the possibility of putting forward any evaluation of unquestionably objective value and rather proposes a more personal 'criterio di lettura', according to which he reads the most recent Italian literary production.

Besides dedicating a brief separate reflection to poetry specifically,[39] the critic thus delineates two groups, or rather lines, into which contemporary narrators can fall into: the 'eredi' and the 'esploratori del magma'. The former are defined as «quegli scrittori che, in prosa e in poesia, hanno più rapporti con l'immediato passato» (602), to be intended as the final phase of what he previously identified as 'modern'; the latter as the expression of a line of narrative that «si misura in un corpo a corpo con questa assenza di coordinate, con questa mancanza di punti di riferimento» (602)[40] and for which he identifies a forefather in Pier Vittorio Tondelli.[41] Despite contributing to the definition of the literary scenario straddling

[39] "La «resistenza della poesia»", pp. 596 – 602.
[40] In this context, the author identifies disorientation and lack of solid references as a typical condition of the post-modern age.
[41] Asor Rosa's definition of 'esploratori del magma' and his reference to Tondelli as their forefather can be found at pp. 602-609 of his work.

the end of the 20th and beginning of 21st century, the main reason why such distinction has been referred to here has more to do with a further specification that Asor Rosa introduces to his definition of 'eredi' rather than with the identification of the category itself:

> «Chiamiamo "eredi" quegli scrittori che, in prosa o in poesia, hanno più rapporto con l'immediato passato [...]. Limite invalicabile della descrizione è che essi, per la data in cui nascono, non abbiano conosciuto la Guerra, la seconda Grande Guerra, oppure non siano in grado di ricordarsene: perché chi ha conosciuto la Guerra o è in grado di ricordarsene, sta in un'altra dimensione, vede il mondo con altri occhi» (586).

Asor Rosa's definition is particularly relevant in this context because what the critic does here is introducing a time distinction that poses a clear fracture between authors that were born before and after World War II. In Asor Rosa's classification, this feature generally applies to a 'younger' generation of writers on a national level. However, when concentrating on the case of contemporary Veneto, and specifically on the literary production from the region that deals with the topic of territory, the fracture becomes particularly clear: as anticipated in the previous section, the line of divide between writers who were born after the war and those who instead belong to the previous generation realises particularly in the different take authors seem to adopt when observing their own territory. The case becomes clear when referring, for instance, to some of Matteo Giancotti's observations around the poetry of Andrea Zanzotto: indeed, speaking of this poet, «bisognerà almeno accennare a una distinzione anagrafica rudimentale: chi è nato in Italia negli anni Venti avrà avuto una percezione ben più traumatica del cambiamento rispetto a chi è nato […] negli anni Sessanta e Settanta» (Zanzotto, 19-20). Authors from Zanzotto's generation and geographical context not only witnessed the coming of the post-war society,

but also lived through the additional transition that overcame Veneto in later decades: for them «le quinte paesaggistiche dei quadri di Tiziano e Giorgione rappresentavano ancora dei luoghi verosimili, poiché potevano trovare una rispondenza quasi effettiva nel Veneto di allora [the pre-war period], poco mutato nei secoli» (20). But the transformations of the landscape due to the uncurbed economic development in the region «per usare una sua [Zanzotto's] metafora, gli hanno portato via la terra sotto i piedi» (20).

The specific differences in the approach to territory that, as a consequence, characterise the two generations of writers will be outlined later in the chapter. Here, the experience of World War II is introduced as a time limit to identify a range of authors to take into consideration and among which to single out a few whose work is particularly relevant in the perspective of researching the relationship between literature and territory. As the aim of this study is to question how a localised territory is connected to its literary representation by looking at the rather crucial moment of the economic upturn in the region during the 1970s and 1980s, the two generations will be looked at as distinct and the main focus will be directed to the work of what has been delineated as the 'younger generation' of authors in Veneto literature. Nonetheless, in the same way as it proved necessary to briefly outline above the unfolding of an evolution in authors' attitudes towards the depiction of their local reality, it will be later on to explore more in depth what this evolution consists in; the last section of this chapter will thus be dedicated to the analysis of some passages where authors from both generations describe and relate

to their territory in order to gain a clear understanding of the shift in interest that appears to happen with the younger writers.

Before moving on to considering the texts, one brief mention should be made of the general context in which the work of the authors considered here first appears, a context defined by the landmark year 1980. In 1980 Italo Calvino publishes his collection of non-fictional pieces *Una pietra sopra*, the work of «uno che crede(va) di lavorare alla costruzione d'una società attraverso il lavoro di costruzione d'una letteratura» (VII), but whose ideal then reshapes into a «senso del relativo e dello sfaccettato che determina un'attitudine di perplessità sistematica» (4); Umberto Eco publishes *Il nome della rosa*, indeed an «allegoria del nostro tempo, fatta con i materiali e la cultura di un tempo passato» (Asor Rosa 550); Pier Vittorio Tondelli steps onto the scene of contemporary Italian narrative with the collection of short stories *Altri libertini*.[42] Whereas the first two works can be considered as representative of the culmination of a cultural experience – *Una pietra sopra* through its acknowledgment of the necessity to mould new tools for the interpretation of an incessantly evolving world *Il nome della rosa* by composing a mosaic of references and genres that renders the complexity and fragmentation of that world – Tondelli's debut retrospectively marks a turning point, inspiring and at the same time representing the first manifestation of a new line of development in the subsequent Italian narrative. Far from abdicating the idea of literature as a cognitive tool and of reading as an exercise of deciphering the world, Tondelli's

[42] The decision of referring here to *Una pietra sopra*, a non-fiction work, originates from the coincidence of its publication date with that of *Il nome della rosa* and *Altri libertini*. However, it should be remembered that just one year earlier Calvino had also published *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, whose significance in terms of meta-literary reflection is equally fundamental.

work nonetheless represents the shift from a theoretical reflection on literature towards the observation of reality, an observation conducted mainly in generational and geographical terms, establishing his role as an innovator and as the founder of a line in narrative that will expand and develop well into the 1990s and 2000s.

Harking back to the language question we outlined earlier on, one of Tondelli's 'guidelines' for a new literature, «scrivere come si parla» (337), aptly epitomizes a change of route for some contemporary Italian narrative, as indeed many writers in the 1990s and 2000s begin following this line. To quote just one example from Veneto, suffice to think of Marco Franzoso's *Westwood dee-jay*, where a standardized Italian, flattened on the language of television and commercials blends with dialect and slang. Tondelli's words in his presentation of the 'Under 25' project[43] summarise and define the new practice: «Se il nostro scopo è, e rimane, quello di far raccontare i giovani, l'esito che sta avendo il progetto si situa a metà strada fra un'inchiesta di sociologia culturale e un discorso specificamente letterario» (1990, 337-338). Besides being true for the three anthologies he edited, this statement, in its long-sightedness, can be assumed as defining a general trend that appears to characterize not only some contemporary developments in the national literature, but also the approach of those authors that have previously been identified as the 'younger generation' of writers from Veneto. Briefly outlining here the context in which they move constitutes the springboard to a more accurate analysis of their work.

[43] Started in 1985, 'Under 25' was a project that aimed at the publication of short stories by writers under the age of twenty-five; the first anthology, Giovani blues came out in 1986 and was followed by Belli e perversi in 1987 and Papergang in 1990.

2.5 From memory to enquiry: a 'younger' generation of authors

In the light of such contextualisation, it is now possible to shift the focus back to Veneto and move on to consider some passages by writers that belong to the 'younger generation' to compare their production to that of 'older writers'. It has been previously mentioned that a gap seems to appear and draw a divide between the two generations, determining a shift in the mode of narration, especially when it comes to the depiction of the authors' own territory. Besides being linked to the rise of later developments in national literary trends, such shift also owes to the specific significance that territory assumes in the context of Veneto: if it is true that the production of 'younger authors' also reflects a more general direction in the national literature, it is also true that the perception of the modification of territory for these authors is substantially different from that of authors belonging to a previous generation, which implies the necessity of renewed instruments to express an uncurbed concern. Considering this aspect is fundamental to the purpose of this search as it allows us to establish a relationship between a territorial transformation triggered by economic development, therefore a change in the landscape of a region, and the adoption of new literary tools to reflect on the processes that underlie such a radical mutation.

A separate set of considerations should also be outlined with reference to the inclusion of theatrical production in the textual analysis that will follow this chapter.

For the purpose of the discourse presented here the theatrical form is to be considered as part of the literary outputs of the region and enclosed fully in the discussion around the generation of authors from Veneto that was born after World War II and their perspective on the subject of territory. The reason why this constitutes a valuable and fruitful outlook becomes evident when considering that this allows us to integrate the work of Marco Paolini within the context of the proposed analysis: while indeed the medium chosen by the theatre author and actor is not primarily the written word, the inherently narrative structure of his oeuvre, the capital importance of the written text for his production, and the proximity of his poetics with that of predecessors like Zanzotto, Rigoni Stern, and Meneghello, make it impossible to take into consideration the literary production of contemporary Veneto without incorporating this author's work. While a line of demarcation between different generations might not be visible if relating Paolini's production to previous theatrical traditions, the authors' oeuvre harmoniously joins the voices of the 'younger generation' of authors from Veneto when it comes to questioning the transformation of the region's territory through the vehicle of a literary instrument. Thereby the following pages should be intended as describing the perspective of the identified generation of writers and of Paolini at the same time; henceforth the term 'authors' should be intended as including authors of narrative as well as of theatrical texts.

As previously mentioned, the fact that authors from Veneto have shaped, over the course of the 20th century, various literary representations of and reflections on their own territory does not necessarily constitute a unique trend in Italian literature.

Besides, it is also true that not all authors from this region, especially among the younger generation, feel the same rootedness or the necessity to talk about their land in their work. The rather interesting phenomenon that we will observe here is in fact only pertinent to the production of those authors who do, each in their own peculiar way, dedicate part of their work to the depiction of the contemporary reality of the territory of Veneto. I will refer here refer to a few passages where authors describe or reflect on their territory, in order to bring attention to the existence of a substantial difference in the way they perceive territory and narrate it. Whereas those authors who have directly experienced the war and reality of the rural civilization that characterized Veneto before the economic upturn seem to predominantly move in the dimension of memory, those who were born after World War II seem to adopt a radically different approach and move instead towards the denouncement of the desecration of the landscape that went parallel with the coming of mass industrialization. In brief, the evolution of the depiction of territory by Veneto authors seems to follow two different directions: on one side authors in the 'older generation', when talking about territory, move in the space of past memories, for instance by rediscovering the roots of a civilization that is fading (Meneghello and Camon); on the other side, younger authors look at the present condition their territory languishes in and rather expose the malfunctions and contradictions of a society that has grown out of a blind and unregulated race towards the myth of economic growth. Considering examples from such works will give a clearer idea of how these two lines realize; although many others could also have been included, the passages I selected for my analysis here are taken from

Libera nos a Malo by Luigi Meneghello (1963), *Il bosco degli urogalli* by Mario Rigoni Stern (1962), *I quindicimila passi* by Vitaliano Trevisan (2002) and *Nordest* by Massimo Carlotto (2005).

The excerpt from *Libera nos a Malo* I decided to reproduce here is rather long, but perfectly encapsulates the idea of Veneto as the rural land made of fields and country roads, farmers, carts and beasts whose memory Meneghello recalls in the attempt to repossess and fix the origins of a civilization that does not exist anymore, almost using the language as a shovel to dig out the tassels once composing a reality now extinct:

> «Il paese è attraversato da sud a nord dalla strada che va da Vicenza a Schio e al passo della Streva; ora c'è un nuovo raccordo che taglia fuori l'abitato. […] Lo stradone di Vicenza era già "spalto", quello di Schio lo divenne ai miei tempi; a Priabona e a Thiene s'andava su una superficie di terra battuta già rovinata dal traffico. Le strade minori erano una parte importante del mondo del paese; lo sono ancora, ma assai meno ora che si viaggia con le cose a motore, e si ha più spiccato il senso di voler solo spostarsi in modo pratico e insipido da qui a là. Erano fatte principalmente per camminarci, passarci coi carri e con le bestie, al massimo in bicicletta. Serpeggiavano per i campi, o lungo il piede dei colli, erano strettine, con un buon fondo di terra e ghiaietta chiara e compatta, non ancora sciupata dalle rare automobili.
> C'erano inoltre le caviàgne, o stradicciole rurali, che non vanno in un paese, ma quasi in visita ai casolari e alle famiglie dei contadini ("dai" tali o talaltri), o anche vanno semplicemente a finire in mezzo alla spagna e allo strafòglio, ai margini di una landa sconfinata di campi e fossati e colture. […]
> La Proa ci separava da questa landa: come quando si arriva a un confine, e di là è Belgio, Olanda; così dalla stradella che comincia vicino a casa nostra, raggiunto in un minuto il vaso greto interrato e sterposo e sassoso, subito di là cominciava la *no-man's land* che s'estende verso i paesi a oriente, la campagna fitta, fuori dalla geografia e dalla storia. Proseguendo per le stradicciole che non si fermano in mezzo ai campi, e che non pare siano dirette in alcun luogo in particolare (ce n'è), si sentiva crescere il senso dell'ignoto; nell'estate piena occorreva quasi un senso di coraggio per avventurarsi avanti e avanti tra i sorghi, aspettando come esploratori che un argine camuffato tra le acacie ci scoprisse all'improvviso la grande corrente di sassi della Jólgora, che sega la campagna ed è bianca, immobile, fatta di ciottoli e pietre smussate. […]
> C'erano luoghi inesprimibilmente ameni lungo il torrente: boschetti di acacie, praticelli come quello in fondo al Prà, oltre il doppio anello dei platani, un margine d'erba più basso del prato comunale, quasi a livello del torrente. Il dirupo del Castello lo chiude scendendo con uno speronino di roccia aggirato

> da una traccia di sentiero nel sasso. Sopra la roccia un aspro recinto di spine rinserra il brolo antico del prete, aggrappato alla costa che spiove, e da questa parte affatto inaccessibile. Era uno di quei luoghi perfetti che trovano nei romanzi di cavalleria […]. Invece appena al di là del torrente c'erano i muri e gli orti del paese, le schiene rozze delle case (lì di fronte è quella dov'è nato mio nonno), le viottole dove non passava nessuno, tranne un bambino con la capra. […]
> I dossi dietro al Castello erano tutta una rete di sentierini-stròsi, e stròso è avventura. Stròso rimonta contrafforte, scala gobbetta, adduce a pino in cresta; penetra, infrasca disinfrasca; punge con rùsse, consola con primule. Da stròso si rubano pere pome ùe» (101-102).

Intimately connected to the reality of life in a place as well as to the personal experience of the author, in this passage, the elements of territory acquire a special significance as not only they provided a background to life 'in paese', but because they were a fundamental part of that life and evoking them means to evoke a personal and collective memory. Set on a different tone, but collocating itself in the same dimension of memory and recollection is the following passage by Mario Rigoni Stern:

> «Prima di iniziare la caccia ci sedevamo ai piedi di un grosso abete dai rami larghi e fitti; lì sotto, durante i temporali, si riparavano le vitelle della malga e il terreno era tutto scoperto e asciutto. […] Intanto che si aspettava l'arrivo del sole parlavamo di varie cose e, come sempre, con poche parole. Di come i residuati di guerra incominciassero a scarseggiare e del prezzo che era ribassato; dei conoscenti che avevano preso la strada dell'estero; del prezzo alto del legname; dei ghiri che rosicchiavano i giovani abeti e di cose del genere. Qualche volta il discorso cadeva sulla guerra e allora succedevano delle lunghe pause e ognuno seguiva i propri ricordi» (18).

In Rigoni Stern's perspective, territory acts more like an intermediary for the author to reconnect with his inner self and the element of nature in particular assumes a greater relevance as it represents the background against which the process of remembering takes place. With Rigoni Stern we do not witness, as was the case with Meneghello, a process of re-appropriation of a past landscape as an instrument for the exploration of one's own roots, but rather to the functioning of landscape as

an activator of memory, an element that belongs to the present that allows one to reconnect with his/her past. However, despite this divergence in the use of the territorial element, the two authors undoubtedly project their perception of territory into a past and memory-based dimension.

Such direction is not taken by younger authors like Trevisan and Carlotto, who instead move in a space that is firmly embedded in their present reality. The following passage is from *I quindicimila passi*:

> «Ero arrivato ormai alla fine della Marosticana. Quasi senza accorgermene, come sempre, ero arrivato alla circonvallazione di viale Cricoli, uno dei punti più pericolosi da attraversare a piedi. Ecco un posto in cui non c'è alcuno spazio per un pedone, pensavo, un posto pericolosissimo, se si è a piedi. Sempre pieno di traffico, quasi sempre ingorgato di macchine e camion e moto e motorini e qualche bicicletta. Passo io, passi tu, no passo io, d'accordo passa tu. Fermo sto passando io. Cazzo, pensavo che lasciassi passare me, e avanti indietro così. Come si fa a stare in una di queste case, pensavo passando sotto quelle case del rondò di viale Cricoli. Le finestre sempre chiuse, altrimenti le macchine sembra di averle in casa. La biancheria non si può stendere, altrimenti diventa subito nera. Addirittura le terrazze avevano fatto a quelle case, con vista proprio sul rondò si viale Cricoli. Solo un demente, pensavo, può aver avuto l'idea di fare delle terrazze da questa parte. […] La gente del resto si adatta a tutto, è incredibile, ma è così. La gente si adatta a vivere in posti assolutamente invivibili, come del resto si adatta a respirare un'aria irrespirabile e a mangiare del cibo immangiabile. Questi nuovi quartieri, questi cosiddetti quartieri di edilizia popolare, la cui costruzione dura a volte degli anni, ma che quando sono finiti ci appaiono come spuntati dal nulla, dall'oggi al domani, così, senza alcun preavviso, sono spesso, per non dire sempre, quartieri squallidi e tristi. Spuntano sì come funghi, come si dice, ma restano funghi solo per il tempo che dura la sorpresa. […] Eppure, malgrado la bruttezza di questi edifici, malgrado a volte essi siano non solo un'offesa per i nostri occhi e il nostro equilibrio estetico, ma siano anche oggettivamente malfatti e poco adatti a essere abitati, la gente, pensavo, malgrado tutto questo si abitua e ci vive per anni» (83-85).

The difference is remarkable: not only has the landscape changed, the mode of its representation has also mutated. No space is left for memory, the perspective is now addressed towards the present. Furthermore, whereas it played a central role in the

previous examples, the natural element has here completely disappeared. The situation does not change if we turn our attention to *Nordest*:

> «Era stato un mercoledì come tanti. Un mercoledì d'inverno del Nordest. Nel corso della giornata le strade si erano riempite di pendolari e Tir. Lunghe file avevano intasato le autostrade, statali e provinciali. A Padova e Vicenza, per l'ennesima volta, l'inquinamento aveva superato i limiti di legge. Il cavalcavia di Mestre, in piena notte, era ancora un serpentone di mezzi pesanti che avanzavano lentamente nei due sensi di marcia. Merci legali e illegali che andavano e venivano dai paesi dell'est. Quel giorno avevano chiuso i battenti altre quattro aziende, la più grossa aveva cinquantuno dipendenti. Altri quattro capannoni vuoti con la scritta affittasi, tradotta anche in cinese. Di capannoni aveva parlato nella mattina un docente di urbanistica della Facoltà di architettura di Venezia. Ai suoi studenti aveva spiegato che, a forza di costruire 2.500 capannoni l'anno, erano stati sottratti al paesaggio agrario ben 3.500 chilometri quadrati e che nella sola provincia di Treviso c'erano 279 aree industriali, una media di quattro per comune. Il docente era preoccupato, aveva affermato che la devastazione del territorio era ampia e profonda. Forse irreparabile. Ormai nel Nordest i capannoni avevano cancellato memoria alla terra e identità degli abitanti» (7-8).

A reality made of traffic and wild urbanization seems to have taken over the world of 'caviàgne (che) vanno semplicemente a finire in mezzo alla spagna e allo strafòglio' and 'viottole dove non passava nessuno, tranne un bambino con la capra', and indeed it has. For these authors there is no past to look back to, the territorial element in their production is projected in the dimension of the present and towards the denouncement of the consequences brought by the uncontrolled growth that devastated the territory of region.

Surely works by Trevisan and Carlotto are to be situated in the context of the previously mentioned renewed attention to present reality that features in contemporary Italian narrative. Yet, it is impossible to overlook the fact that the mutation in narrative style that occurs in the 'younger generation' of Veneto authors appears at a time when it had become clear that the impact of an economic development that unfolded under rather peculiar circumstances had transformed the

landscape of a region as well as its deeper social structures. The presence of this discrepancy in the literary representation of territory, besides indicating the likeliness of a relationship between the mutation of landscape and that of its written depiction, also indicates that, when aiming to understand and evaluate the significance of the territorial element in the context of contemporary Veneto literature and its importance as a symptom of the radical alteration of the cultural and social fabric of the region, the most profitable perspective to adopt is probably the analysis of those authors from the region that were born after World War II.

What has been overall observed in the first part of this research serves the aim of setting a theoretical framework as well as outlining a general historical and literary context within which to situate the analysis of the core matters addressed by the present study. The next steps to be taken entail a closer examination of relevant primary literature to be carried out employing the instruments that the above reflections have moulded.

PART II

THE AUTHORS

CHAPTER 3

MARCO PAOLINI: QUESTIONING THE ROOTS

3.1 'TEATRO DI NARRAZIONE' AS A LITERARY METHOD

Through this and the following chapter the focus of this study will be directed specifically at looking more closely at two prime examples of literary reflections on the transformation of a territory within the context of contemporary Veneto. By referring to the theoretical, historical, and literary framework built in part I of this thesis, the vocabulary that has been sketched in the previous sections will be employed to talk about the work of Marco Paolini and Massimo Carlotto. With this purpose in mind, it will be necessary to introduce both Paolini's 'teatro di narrazione' and Carlotto's crime fiction by connecting the authors' work to the national scenario backing their artistic production.

At this point, it becomes necessary to spend a few words on the idea of 'reality', which while functioning as an introduction to the analysis of Paolini's and Carlotto's work will also elucidate further the choice of referring to these two authors specifically. As will become clear in chapter 4, studying Carlotto's work brings up by necessity the question of an alleged 'return to reality' in contemporary

Italian literature. While the critical discussion around this issue pertains mainly the sphere of narrative, some of the subjects around which the debate revolves can include the theatrical practice too.[44] The need to expand on the question of 'reality' here ultimately reflects the cardinal consideration that, to recall Calvino's words, literature always deals with the complexity of reality. Re-evaluating the presuppositions of the debate about the role of 'realism' and the long-standing tradition of *impegno* in chapter 4 will be functional to understanding the zeitgeist in which both authors operate. However, introducing the subject here will further highlight the fact that, as they offer two complementary and invaluable perspectives, the work of these authors constitutes the richest ground on which to examine the question of contemporary Veneto. In his important essay of 1962, *La sfida al labirinto*,[45] Calvino adds to the discussion on literature and industry a hermeneutic perspective whereby literature becomes a map to navigate the complexity of contemporaneity. In the second part of the essay, Calvino focuses on the book *Dans le labyrinthe* by Alain Robbe-Grillet to make some considerations that appear particularly apt to elucidate the point just made. In introducing the concept of 'forma del labirinto', Calvino notes that, by reducing the human presence to the function of *regard*,

> «[l]o spazio non antropocentrico che Robbe-Grillet configura, ci appare come un labirinto spaziale di oggetti al quale si sovrappone il labirinto temporale dei dati di una storia umana. Questa forma del labirinto è oggi quasi l'archetipo delle immagini letterarie del mondo […]» (95).

[44] As will become clear in this chapter, similarly to what is generally observed within Italian prose from starting from the 1990s, the 'teatro di narrazione' also seems to reach to the modes of narration and to themes related to social and political issues.
[45] The essay first appeared in issue 5 of *Il menabò* and was then republished by Calvino in 1980, as part of his collection *Una pietra sopra*.

If we adopt Calvino's premise and establish a parallel with the study conducted here, we can suggest that if an author like Carlotto, who in places lowers his characters into a non-fictional reality to observe it through an internal point of view, walks the branches of a «labirinto della conoscenza fenomenologica», Paolini's linguistic fusions indeed move in the aisles of a «labirinto della concrezione e stratificazione linguistica».[46] According to Calvino, it is precisely the use of this form, of the 'letteratura del labirinto' that provides «l'attitudine oggi necessaria per affrontare la complessità del reale». In exploring the contemporary reality of Veneto, a non-fictional reality that makes its way into literary production, if what we need is «la mappa del labirinto la più particolareggiata possibile», Carlotto's and Paolini's work provide us with the most detailed map to navigate the complexity of such reality.

3.1.1 Definition of a 'quasi-genere': 'teatro di narrazione' and the poetics of testimony

Marco Paolini is unanimously indicated as one of the authors at the forefront of the Italian tradition of 'teatro di narrazione'. Generally intended as a label to group a variety of theatrical practices which share the presence of one actor who narrates a story as their structural core, the 'teatro di narrazione' is often referred to as a 'quasi-genre', due to the range of specific approaches that authors have adopted in

[46] Calvino places Gadda in this labyrinth.

using it. As its name suggests, this mode of contemporary Italian dramaturgy is centred around the act of narration and the figure of the narrator. To this end, Simone Soriani offers a wide-ranging definition of 'teatro di narrazione', which poses the precise coordinates within which the mode places itself, as well as enunciating the principal features that authors using this mode share:

> «Si tratta di una modalità drammaturgica 'diegetica' in cui il *performer* – generalmente solo e circondato da pochissimi o nessun oggetto di scena, attraverso una performatività anticonvenzionale ed uno stile attoriale in cui la 'gestica' ed il dinamismo tendono a ridursi ai minimi termini – rievoca storie e vicende per mezzo di un racconto 'epico' e non attraverso la tradizionale mimesi drammatica» (Soriani, 620).

By putting forward the idea of a 'diegetic dramaturgy' and of the presence of an 'epic' element, Soriani identifies the dimension onto which the 'teatro di narrazione' needs to be situated. The plane is that of narration, intended as centred around the existence of a story that is being told, and as opposed to meta-narratives and self-reflecting practices.[47]

In its archetypal dimension, the narrative function can be considered an inherently universal feature of human communication: on one side, narration revolves around the transmission of cultural memory, on the other side it employs means of mass communication, therefore turning, at the same time, into an archaic and modern practice. Nevertheless, the universality of the function corresponds to a strong individuality in the myriad specific experiences centred around narrative,

[47] Such feature is common in postmodernist theatrical practices during the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, it is important to notice the implications of Soriani's use of the term 'performer' rather than actor: on one hand, as will be further clarified, the term is intended to integrate different functions, as in the 'teatro di narrazione' the figure of the actor merges with of that of the author to fulfil the role of narrator; on the other hand, avoiding the term 'actor' is in line with the exclusion of the traditional technique of mimesis, which aims to achieve the identification of the actor with the character, an approach that the 'teatro di narrazione' deliberately avoids.

of which the 'teatro di narrazione' is one. In Italy, the theatrical phenomenon characterized by the features and poetics described so far took shape around the mid-1980s and initially developed around the experience of Laboratorio Teatro Settimo. Founded among others by director Gabriele Vacis in 1981, this theatre group based in Settimo Torinese was brought to international fame with *Esercizi sulla tavola di Mendeleev* in 1984. Cooperating with Laboratio Teatro Settimo was a fundamental experience for authors like Laura Curino and Marco Paolini, whose work, together with Marco Baliani's personal research, form what is generally defined as the core of the first generation of the 'teatro di narrazione'. Having evolved under different circumstances, these authors' separate paths converge in the idea of a theatre centred around narration. For the generation of Baliani, Curino, and Paolini, narrating represents a reaction to the 'non-narrative' structure that dominated the theatrical practices of the 'post-avanguardie' during the 1970s, which instead tended to employ «metalinguaggi per cui l'opera parlava di se stessa negando la referenzialità del racconto».[48] Backed by an idea of the public as voyeur, as a presence that could be disregarded, this postmodern vision was progressively rejected during the 1980s by theatrical practices that, based on a renewed urgency to establish a relational dimension with the public, rediscovered the narrative structure in theatre, following the development of parallel literary trends, and drawing from the realm of the written word.[49]

[48] Gerardo Guccini, as quoted in Soriani 633. Guccini's own *La bottega dei narratori* is a fundamental reference for the 'teatro di narrazione'.

[49] The fundamental precursor to the development of a new idea of narrative function in Italian theatre is Dario Fo's 'monologo affabulativo'. Originating in the author's cardinal work *Mistero Buffo* (1969), Fo's narrative monologue brings down the fourth wall to create a theatrical experience whereby the author amalgamates characters and self to tell a story and interact with the audience:

Among the elements that contribute to determining the essence of the 'teatro di narrazione', its distantiating traditional dramatic mimesis can be seen as the most defining one. The idea of not recurring to this technique has its roots in the dramaturgic theories elaborated by Berthold Brecht in the early 20th century. Abiding by the principles of his epic theatre, Brecht postulated that the role of the actor should be limited to 'show' the character, as the actor's feelings should not be those of the character he/she is impersonating.[50] As the ideal of Brecht's epic theatre is to stimulate the audience's critical response and the formulation of an independent judgement around the facts that are being represented, making the audience aware of the fact that they are watching a play, and thus breaking the illusion, becomes crucial. In his theorization, Brecht posited the necessity for the actor to create a 'Verfremdungseffekt',[51] an effect of alienation, whereby the public would be kept from excessively empathising with the characters on the stage and consequently maintain the necessary distance to form a critical and unemotional

«Il monologo di Fo, infatti, non è più – come nel teatro drammatico tradizionale – uno strumento di analisi psicologica o caratteriale di un personaggio, ma è piuttosto un 'discorso' che l'istanza enunciante – senza nascondere la propria identità sotto la 'maschera' di una dramatis persona – rivolge direttamente ad un pubblico cui conferisce il ruolo di proprio interlocutore scenico» (Soriani, 622). The importance of Fo's work in establishing and legitimizing the use of a technique that subsumes the involvement of the public within the theatrical performance is openly recognised by both authors like Baliani, Curino, and Paolini, and those in the so-called second generation of the 'teatro di narrazione'. Numbering, among others Ascanio Celestini and Davide Enia (both born in 1974), authors related to this second wave appropriate and renew a practice based on the presence of a single actor/author on stage, whose identity functions as a filter in the interaction with the public.

[50] If the actor was to wholly identify with the character, the audience, by means of empathy, would be transported onto the fictional realm of the play and be overwhelmed by the theatrical illusion: «It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from [epic theatre]: the engendering of illusion» (Brecht 176).

[51] Brecht coined the term in 1935 to define an approach to theatrical practices, whose aim is to discourage an overwhelming emotional involvement of the public with the fictional world recreated on stage which would imply a suspension of judgement. Although the term is often translated by Italian critics with 'alienazione', the original German term implies a more complex notion that, including both the ideas of 'strange' and 'foreign', combines a sense of estrangement as well as one of distance.

judgment. Besides adopting a number of stylistic and scenic devices,[52] in order to obtain such effect, the actor needs to break the 'fourth wall', acknowledge the presence of a public and address it directly, encouraging it to recognise the fictional nature of the representation and urging it to engage with the theatrical action by responding to its intellectual stimuli and reject the idea of theatre as mere escapist entertainment.

On the blueprint of Brecht's epic theatre, contemporary Italian 'teatro di narrazione' makes extensive use of the technique of estrangement by avoiding dramatic mimesis, and knocks down the fourth wall in order to directly speak to the public. Highlighting the influence of the Brechtian model helps contextualisation by establishing an historic precedent, however the mode of the 'teatro di narrazione' delineates itself as something substantially distinct from its archetype. One fundamental difference that the 'teatro di narrazione' introduces is inherent to the key figure of this theatrical practice: the actor/narrator. Firstly, in this branch of contemporary Italian theatre, the actor is alone on stage. In their impersonation of the events narrated, the actors of 'teatro di narrazione' may interpret more than one character, in which case they constantly move in and out of several roles, swiftly switching from one to the other. Aimed at stimulating the public's imagination, such technique requires an effort on the side of the viewer, who needs to fill in the gaps created by the physical absence of actors impersonating different roles. In doing this, the main objective of the actor/narrator is to prompt a critical response

[52] Just to quote one example of such devices, suffice it to refer to the use of lights to illuminate the stalls and circle as well as the stage.

from the public by multiplying the points of view in the story, rather than proposing a single one. However, even when the actor plays the part of only one character, he/she addresses the public to establish a direct relation with it, thus making the collapse of the fourth wall evident: «il narratore racconta con la luce accesa, non c'è la quarta parete, il narratore può parlare direttamente con il pubblico. Lo 'vede' e dunque parla proprio a lui».[53]

At this point, the crucial element to take into consideration – which also sets the 'teatro di narrazione' apart from the Brechtian model – is that the actor/narrator that the viewer sees on the stage is also the author of the theatrical work. As is true for those authors who are considered the founders of this theatrical mode (Marco Baliani, Laura Curino, Marco Paolini), narrators do not act out a script written by a playwright who remains behind the scene, but narrate stories they have composed by interlacing contemporary historical facts with their own or some witnesses' experience of them. It thus becomes clear how two different planes merge together: as mentioned above, the actor assumes the function of author and the two figures coincide as they fuse into that of the narrator on the stage. As the narrators relate to factual experience, as they bring their own selves up on the stage, they are no longer speaking on someone's behalf, nor interpreting a story that doesn't belong to them: the narrator actively becomes the author of the performance as well as of the story he/she is narrating. The experience that the narrators refer to can be their own personal one, or it can be experience that has been reported to them and they

[53] Here, Laura Curino (as quoted in Soriani 624-625) talks about her own performances but this can apply to most production within the 'teatro di narrazione'.

appropriated. In either case, experience is the source for the narration, the narrator takes the story into his/her hands and transforms it into something that the audience will perceive, absorb, and turn into its own experience in turn. Furthermore, in doing this, the actor does not simulate the presence of dramatic references, as sceneries or objects, that are in fact not there, but rather evokes them through the words of the narration.

Understanding such processes is crucial when analysing Paolini's work as the role of the narrator and his relation to the public constitute the first major element defining his theatrical practice. The second element relates to the contents of the narration and brings on the table the idea of testimony. As Gerardo Guccini notes, «le realtà trattate dal 'teatro narrazione' ora hanno carattere autobiografico, ora riguardano i drammi del sociale» (2005, 7). With the exception of *Kolhaas* by Marco Baliani (1987), which is the adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist's novella about a 16th century German merchant,[54] those which are generally regarded as the major works of the Italian 'teatro di narrazione' indeed draw their themes from recent historical facts: *Corpo di stato* by Baliani (1998) revolves around the assassination of Aldo Moro and Peppino Impastato, both killed on 9th May 1978, *Olivetti* (1996) and *Adriano Olivetti* (1998) by Laura Curino present the progressive idea of labour at the Olivetti factory as well as the lives of Adriano and Camillo Olivetti, Marco Paolini's *Il racconto del Vajont* (1993) reconstructs the tragedy of

[54] Hans Kohlhase, a horse merchant in 16th century Germany, was unable to obtain justice after a local nobleman stole two of his best horses. An historical figure himself, the story of his misfortune belongs to the German oral tradition; Heinrich Von Kleist turned it into the novella *Michael Kohlhaas* in 1810. Despite being inspired by this chronicle rather than contemporary events, Baliani's version questions very topical issues concerning the value of justice – especially at a time that was soon to become that of Tangentopoli and of the Mani Pulite enquiry.

the Vajont dam, occurred on 9th October 1963. On a parallel plane, narrators also use their personal experience as a source of inspiration for their performances: this is the case of *Passione* by Laura Curino, for instance, where the author enacts the origins and evolution of her passion and work for the theatre; or of the first chapter in the *Album series, Adriatic*o, where Paolini sketches a social and historical profile of Italy during the 1960s from the point of view of young Nicola, a character based on René Goscinny's *Petit Nicolas*,[55] but at the same time partly an alter ego of Paolini himself.[56]

Just as in the same years Italian narrative saw a renewed attention to *impegno*, the 'teatro di narrazione' is also backed by a strong idea of theatre as a socially committed art. The aforementioned autobiographical dimension that emerges in authors of the 'teatro di narrazione' interlaces with this dimension of social commitment on a dual level. On one side, life experience provides narratives and perspectives for narrators to tell stories that are both personal and common: if a work like Laura Curino's *Passione* is the tale of an individual evolution to which the viewer can relate to, others like Paolini's *Adriatico*, whilst encompassing a autobiographical element, represent the shared biography of a generation, benefitting from an insider point of view. On the other side, narrators often become the spokespersons of a memory that is a combination of their own personal one

[55] Petit Nicolas is the protagonist of a series of children's books created by French writer René Goscinny and illustrated by Jean-Jacques Sempé. The books portray life in France during the 1950s through the eyes and humorous perspective of young Nicolas.

[56] Although it wouldn't be accurate to identify a precise correspondence between characters in the *Album* series and real-life people, including the author, the events and experiences that inspired this work originate from Paolini's and others' personal lives. Combining his own memory with others', rather than an autobiographical work, the author achieves the representation of a 'collective memory'.

intertwined with others', generally people who witnessed events that the authors may have not lived themselves, but belong to them as a part of their own history. With regards to this process, Paolini makes a powerful remark related to his experience of creating *Il racconto del Vajont*:

> «A me viene da pensare che nella vicenda del Vajont c'è qualcosa che è la rabbia profonda di questo popolo, come piazza Fontana: cose provate sulla propria pelle. Nel momento in cui scopri che ti appartengono come popolo, non riguardano più soltanto chi le ha subite fisicamente, ma anche te, e tutta la tua famiglia» (Paolini, Ponte di Pino, 21).

As the narrator fuses his subjectivity with a number of other subjectivities to create a collection of shared testimonies, he/she moulds a collective memory. The final stage of the creation of such collective memory coincides with the performance, since the transmission of the testimonies to the public through the narration grants the perpetuation of the memory. Nonetheless, this process tends to be accompanied by a constant awareness of the subjectivity of memory. When narrators go up on stage and make of themselves the instrument through which collective memories are shared, their intent is not to impose one point of view. Ascanio Celestini, a narrator generally ascribed to the so-called 'second generation'[57] of the 'teatro di narrazione' as his first theatrical works date back to the mid-2000s, is quite adamant in his stance on the idea of testimony as objective account:

> «La storia che una persona racconta non è semplicemente un resoconto degli avvenimenti […]. Io non accetto più l'idea che si possa raccontare la verità […]: normalmente tutti decontestualizziamo e non riportiamo l'oggettività. Allora tanto vale condurre quest'operazione agli estremi, dandola per scontata, però farlo da una prospettiva precisa, cioè quella dell'identità della persona. Allora c'è un punto di vista palesemente soggettivo, un'idea della

[57] As mentioned earlier, what is indicated as the 'second generation' of narrators includes authors who were born around the 1970s and whose work started to appear between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium.

> storia che è dichiarata e un senso presente della memoria come sguardo sul mondo» (Soriani, 625).

Such cognizance adds a layer of complexity to the relation between the performance and the inclusion of the authors' own individualities in it: the explicit recognition of the singular and individual nature of memory, common to most authors of the 'teatro di narrazione', effectively coincides with an undertaking of responsibility. Due to the absence of the traditional character, the narrator can no longer transfer the responsibility of his/her words to the character, hence authors of the 'teatro di narrazione' have to take such responsibility upon themselves. With generally no presumption or desire to be considered as a rightful source of objective truth, nonetheless narrators face the need to acquire legitimacy and credibility in front of the public in order for their stories to be held into account. It is precisely at this stage that actors put on the stage their own personal and individual identities. Since it is up to the performer to assume the responsibility of what is being said on the scene, the trustworthiness of the account is founded precisely on the individual who lives behind the actor, the performer stripped of all roles he/she could potentially impersonate. In order for the story to gain credibility, the narrator needs to acquire a form of authority in the eyes of the public, he/she has to be perceived as a reliable and honest source. Hence the necessity of incorporating the performer's own experience within the story: by linking individual first-hand knowledge of facts, personal feelings and perspectives, the story told obtains an otherwise implausible authenticity. Besides enabling the audience to relate more deeply to the narration,

activating such integration is consciously intended not to guarantee objectivity, but to convey a truthful and reliable testimony.[58]

Such is the functioning of the poetics of testimony: a memory based structure, whose aim is to convey a testimony of events from the narrator to the public in order to build awareness and create the ground for a collective memory to form. The shift occurs through the articulation of a narrative based on the archetypal idea of story as a combination of elements that takes shape from a beginning, defines through a development, to finally conclude in an end, a structure that profoundly relates to the inherently human dimension of the tale.[59] The elements that concur to shaping the story act on the public's own experience by a process of 'activation of the self':[60] if, at a particular point of the narration, a connection is established between what is being represented and something that is deeply rooted into the viewer's consciousness, the single factor that triggered such connection will activate a process of appropriation whereby the viewer will associate a specific meaning with something intrinsically personal, which will constitute the seed of a collective memory. In order to activate this process, the performer needs to establish a direct connection with the public, which will become stronger and more efficient

[58] It is thus clear how linking the story to the narrator's personal identity becomes crucial in order for the audience to accept it as credible. However, it is equally important to stress that the function acquired by testimony in the 'teatro di narrazione' does not necessarily imply the testimony of an objective truth but, rather the presentation of truthful testimonies, which reflect the narrator's experience. As Guccini notes, «il profilo del narratore presenta significative analogie con quello del testimone, con l'essenziale differenza che il narratore, invece di testimoniare in senso proprio, mira a suscitare l'effetto della testimonianza» (2005, 13).

[59] As Oliviero Ponte di Pino notes with specific reference to the narrative function in the 'teatro di narrazione', «quella dell'oralità e del racconto è una dimensione antichissima della comunicazione umana, quasi una costante antropologica» (Paolini, Ponte di Pino, 24).

[60] Guccini identifies the 'attivazione dell'io' as one of the fundamental elements of which the poetics of testimony is composed (2005, 13-14).

inasmuch as the narrator puts his/her own identity into play and becomes part of the content too.

3.1.2 Testimony between biography and *teatro civile*, *trasporti* and language: Paolini's theatrical production

Paolini's first experiences on stage date back to the 1970s. Born in Belluno in 1956, the author cooperated with a number of local theatre groups, among which Circolo I° Maggio, Teatro degli Stracci, Studio 900 in Treviso, TAG Teatro in Mestre, and Moby Dick – Teatri della Riviera, his work mainly pertaining children and political theatre. Attending the first Italian session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA)[61] in Volterra in 1981, Paolini met for the first time Gabiele Vacis, an encounter which will be among the most significant ones for the author's career. The relation with Vacis – one of the founders of Teatro Settimo – first led to Paolini's cooperation with the theatre group[62] to later develop into a fruitful association of which two chapters of *Gli album* will be the result: *Adriatico* and *Liberi tutti*, the latter based on Luigi Meneghello's writings. It was clear to Paolini that the cooperation with Teatro Settimo would open new possibilities both in terms of acting techniques and in ways of conceiving theatre: «[d]al loro modo di presentarsi, persino dai manifesti, dalla grafica, quelli di Settimo erano la cosa più

[61] Founded in 1979 by Eugenio Barba and based in Holstebro, Denmark, ISTA was conceived as an itinerant network running periodical sessions around the world centred on the theoretical and practical study of theatre anthropology.
[62] The first work by the theatre company to which Paolini took part was *Riso amaro* (1988).

lontana dal teatro *arcaico*, di ricerca delle tradizioni, che rappresentava Pontedera» (Marchiori, 84).[63] Specifically, working closely with Vacis was one of the experiences that brought Paolini to define his specific mode of acting, particularly in the case of *Libera nos* (1989).[64] Nonetheless, whilst working with Teatro Settimo had represented a crucial step for the development of Paolini's style, the actor, who soon became averse to the idea of a theatre based on traditional characters, came to the decision of moving on and performing as a narrator as soon as 1987, with *Adriatico*. Unexpectedly turning into the first segment of a cross-section of a certain phase in the history of Italy, and despite the fact that, for a number of years, Paolini was indeed working on both fronts, this work marked the beginning of an independent path for the author. Comprising five chapters composed between 1987 and 1999,[65] comprehensively *Gli album* represents Paolini's first work as an author of the 'teatro di narrazione' as in each of them the actor, sometimes accompanied by musicians, performs alone on the stage impersonating Nicola[66] as well as a number of other characters in a collection of monologues that fuse together elements from an autobiographic dimension with others engrained in the cultural baggage of a whole generation.

A second crucial milestone in Paolini's career is *Il racconto del Vajont* (1994). Born as a story to tell outside of theatres and evolved into an 'orazione

[63] In Pontedera since 1979, in 1980 Paolini had taken part to the project "L'eresia del teatro: Stanislavskij", which had been a rare occasion for participants to practice the techniques of acting, rather than preparing and rehearsing for the production a specific performance.
[64] Based on Meneghello's *Libera nos a malo*, Paolini says of this work that «[è] il lavoro nel quale Gabriele lavorò meglio con me, perché mi cavò fuori delle cose che non sapevo di avere» (quoted in Marchiori 91).
[65] Gli album are: Adriatico (1987), Tiri in porta (1990), Liberi tutti (1992), Aprile '74 e 5 (1995), and Stazioni di transito (1999).
[66] See section 3.1.1.

civile', the show was broadcasted live on TV from the Vajont dam on 9th October 1997, thirty-four years after a landslide on Mount Toc, at the border between Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, caused the overflow of an enormous mass of water which hit the villages of Longarone, Erto, and Casso, killing almost 2000 people. *Il racconto del Vajont* established Paolini, somehow unwillingly, as a 'narratore civile', a teller of stories that need to be restored in the collective memory of people, that have to be told «per la vergogna di non aver saputo» (Ponte di Pino 91). On presenting *Il racconto del Vajont* on Jolefilm's[67] website, Paolini defines its role of rupture:

> «Vajont è stato uno spartiacque, ho imparato da quel lavoro che c'è un ruolo da attore che non può più esser scrollato di dosso come un personaggio qualunque. […] Dopo Vajont sono diventato narratore civile […]. Ho cercato di ribellarmi al ruolo, ho provato altre strade, altre chiavi di racconto, altri soggetti, ma dentro di me il ruolo vive» (Jolefilm).

It is indeed with *Vajont* that the author's work fully enters the dimension of testimony,[68] his performances assuming the defining features of the 'teatro di narrazione', as outlined earlier in this chapter. *Il racconto del Vajont* clearly opens a different perspective in the author's work: on one side Paolini pursues a line of work initiated with *Adriatico* and centred around an autobiographic element combined with specific cultural references, while on the other side his strong civil commitment emerges putting him at the forefront of the latest research in the Italian

[67] Named after one of the characters in *Gli album*, Jolefilm is the production company for Paolini's theatrical work, as well as for other projects including film, documentary, and music.

[68] With regard to this specific aspect the author says: «Nel caso di *Vajont* autorevolezza significa acquisire la legittimità di testimoniare. Era nato come 'racconto', è diventato 'orazione civile' nell'arco di quattro anni. Perché questo processo si compia, perché il tono con cui le cose vengono raccontate acquisti la responsabilità di essere, quando occorre, requisitoria, non solo è necessaria una presa di coscienza, ma bisogna anche trasformare il racconto in testimonianza» (Ponte di Pino 64).

theatrical scene. The difference is acknowledged by the author himself and recognised as inevitable, a point of no return following which his career will necessarily evolve along two intertwining paths:

> «*Vajont* mi ha imposto di agire come un intellettuale. [...] Negli *Album* questo non c'è: lì c'è una soggettività assoluta. Emerge una componente epica, ma la chiave è comunque l'autobiografia. In *Vajont* c'è una piccolissima parte autobiografica, all'inizio, ma quando si scopre la vicenda, quando si comincia ad occuparsene, non si può più tornare indietro» (Paolini, Ponte di Pino, 65).

While *Vajont* realises the poetics of testimony, it is important to note that, as is true for many of the works in the 'teatro di narrazione' which deal with unresolved events in recent history which often include criminal responsibilities and official trials, the aim of the narrator is not to point the finger towards someone to be held responsible for wrongdoing. On the contrary, the narration tends to avoid the *topos* of the punishment of the culprit and rather progresses as the evocation of the various phases of the story, the figures involved, the context within which it took place, and the dynamics of any wrongdoing that may have occurred. Sustained by the ideal of creating a collective memory, the intent of the narration is to convey the testimony of the events to the public and, by doing so, to stimulate it to form its own opinion. Therefore, what is asked of the viewers of *Vajont* and in general of the 'teatro di narrazione' is not a judgment, but the ability to listen and acquire a critical awareness of events. It is by being the vehicle of such *prise de conscience* that the narrator becomes entrusted with the testimonial function:

> «Così, raccontando storie come questa (del Vajont), pian piano diventi testimone. Il lavoro dell'attore per me è questo: un processo di scoperta. All'inizio non puoi essere un testimone di queste cose, sei solo uno studente. Chi ti dà la patente di testimone? Nessuno. Non la puoi chiedere a nessuno. E nessuno studia per questo, non esiste un corso di formazione professionale per intellettuali. Tuttavia è proprio questa la funzione dell'intellettuale: testimoniare» (Paolini, Ponte di Pino, 21).

After *Vajont*, Paolini's work develops along a path where the autobiographical dimension and the testimonial function intertwine: almost a continuation of the story of *Gli album*, *Miserabili – Io e Margaret Thatcher* (2006) and *La macchina del cap*o (2009) see the return of Nicola on the scene, the previous a ballad-like tale enacting an imaginary dialogue with Margaret Thatcher, the latter an exploration of the realm of childhood. On the other hand, his work as a 'narratore civile' continues in works like *I-TIGI – Canto per Ustica* (2000), dedicated to the tragedy of the Itavia DC9 that crashed in the Tyrrhenian sea on 27th June 1980 killing all on board, and *Parlamento chimico – Storie di plastica* (2002), which instead is a reconstruction of the public enquiry into the use of the carcinogenic vinyl chloride at Marghera's Petrolchimico.[69]

As will become clearer from the in-depth analysis of those works by Paolini that are more closely related to the theme of territory, one of the more distinctive features of the author's work is his mode of absorbing and interweaving a bond with his testimonial sources, both oral and written, but especially with the literary and historical ones. This is particularly evident in works like *Il sergente* (2004) based on *Il sergente nella neve* by Mario Rigoni Stern (1953), *ITIS Galileo* (2010), inspired by the author of the *Dialogo dei due massimi sistemi del mondo*, and *Ballata di uomini e cani* (2013) based on three short stories by Jack London. Placing themselves on a plane that results from the overlapping of the cultural and

[69] Reference to this particular work will be made in the analysis of *Il Milione*. It would indeed be interesting to analyse *Parlamento chimico* in relation to the industrialisation of Veneto. However, since this work is essentially an enquiry into a very specific case and this research intends to address the question of territory in broader terms, the analysis here will focus on works that tackle the idea of Veneto more generally.

autobiographic dimension with that of the author's civic engagement are two other works, which most evidently include a survey of the idea of territory and will therefore in parts be the subject of deeper scrutiny in this chapter: *Il Milione – Quaderno Veneziano* and the series of *Bestiario veneto – Parole Mate* (1998), *Bestiario veneto – L'orto* (1998), and *Bestiario italiano – I cani del gas* (1999).

A re-elaboration applied on different levels of the theatrical creation and performance and a constant research conducted on the language constitute the common denominator to Paolini's oeuvre. As emerges from the brief survey of the author's work just outlined, if, to simplify a complex matter, we were to compare the whole of Paolini's theatrical work to a building, the bricks would be constituted by a mixture of autobiographic, cultural, historical, and literary materials, cemented together by the shared testimonial function assigned to them. However, the image of the bricks is rather useful to visualise a structure that not only informs the composition of each work, but also shapes the complex of the author's work as a whole. On the one hand, as Fernando Marchiori notes analysing Paolini's theatrical style, «[l]a sua tecnica compositiva, elaborata per anni in stretto rapporto con Vacis, assorbe e riusa, decontestualizza e reinventa i materiali biografici quanto quelli culturali e persino storici» (60). These materials form the various subject matter included in the many notebooks that Paolini keeps, which constitute the core from which his theatre develops. On the other hand, it is also possible to observe a kindred phenomenon that has taken shape throughout the development of the author's production: the transposition to a different theatrical work of materials that come from the notebooks and have been elaborated to be included in a specific

work, a process whereby passages, scenes, and ideas are transferred into and re-enacted in a different context within a different performance. Thus, using a technique that the author defines with a term borrowed from Luigi Meneghello, these materials also become the bricks constructing an inter-textual network of references that extends to the whole fabric of Paolini's theatre:

> «Lavorando a *Storie di plastica* ho maturato la consapevolezza che io sono sempre più un *repertorio*. […] Mi sono reso conto di praticare in teatro la stessa tecnica che Meneghello chiama dei "trasporti". Per lui si tratta di spostare e dire in una lingua (il dialetto) concetti o ragionamenti appartenenti a un'altra (l'inglese) altrimenti indicibili nella lingua d'arrivo. Per me invece i materiali dei *trasporti* sono come i fonemi, i *fondamenta*, le parti del mio pensiero e della mia pratica teatrale a cui sono più affezionato. [Ma] questi elementi non costituiscono solo un meccanismo di economia teatrale, sono come una lingua che attraversa i singoli spettacoli, un sistema di divisione interna, di organizzazione e riorganizzazione di materiali. Formano un repertorio» (Marchiori, 71-72).

The materials that constitute the complex of Paolini's oeuvre work as a language on multiple levels: notes are refined and moulded into the sequence of passages that constitute the performance; some of these passages are adjusted, combined, interlocked, and travel from a work to another; works are performed and re-performed and the narration is constantly adjourned and adapted, based on impressions and reflections inspired by a specific experience and in order to establish a dialogue with the audience.

In a similar way, the language itself that the author uses in his performances is the fruit of a close relation with literary sources that accompanied and developed through the author's career. Abiding to rules of contamination and re-elaboration that are very similar to the ones guiding the combination of the materials and their arrangement within Paolini's production, the language used by the author sits at the same time on the fence between Italian and dialect and on that between written and

oral. In Paolini, everyday speech surfaces as a Veneto-like way of speaking where Italian is also made of dialect and does not necessarily prevail over it, but on the contrary fuses with it to create a language that is richer than its two components taken separately.[70] Dialect is the language of the poets and novelists that Paolini chooses to establish the foundation of his research on language: the works of Biagio Marin, Ernestro Calzavara, Giacomo Noventa, Andrea Zanzotto, Luigi Meneghello, among others, provide the instruments of an operation on language that goes beyond the dimension of simple linguistic choice and expands into a more profound investigation into the cultural fabric of a region.

The literary points of reference just mentioned can be seen as the keepers of the local community's collective memory and Paolini draws from it making it one of the primary sources for his theatrical operation. Discussing the author's use of language and the relation to such sources naturally leads us to consider *Ritratti*, a collection of works on which it will be worth spending a few words. The series is a project that Paolini carried out in collaboration with director Carlo Mazzacurati between 1999 and 2002, when the two shot three film-interviews with Mario Rigoni Stern, Andrea Zanzotto and Luigi Meneghello.[71] Each 'portrait' is in the form of a profoundly insightful dialogue where the three authors from Veneto reflect on the most fundamental moments of their lives and work, consigning a testimony of a

[70] Suffice to think of the example of 'oseleto', which Paolini takes on the stage reformulating a conversation with Meneghello featured in his *Ritratti*: as Meneghello explains, «*oseleto* non si scriveva, c'era. Ma l'uccellino invece si poteva scrivere in tanti modi – dodici», twelve versions «di cui una sola è legale». However, he continues «restava la questione se l'uccellino, anche se scritto giusto, è o non è l'*oseleto*».

[71] The three works are: Ritratti. Mario Rigoni Stern (1999); Ritratti. Andrea Zanzotto (2000); Ritratti. Luigi Meneghello (2002).

world that once was and in turn waving themselves a portrait, a collective one of the region. The project is at the same time a crucial development and a natural consequence of Paolini's long-term commitment to shaping and perpetuating a collective memory. In these interviews he steps out of his teathrical persona and rather than incorporating the testimony within his own self on the stage, almost turns into a spool, travelling from the source to the addressee, carrying the message with each passage.

The themes of the three interviews talk of a common history: the conversation with Zanzotto is centred on language and on nature, specifically on Veneto's natural landscape and on how this has been transformed by human activities; Meneghello reconstructs a piece of Italian history by retracing his childhood in Malo, the relation between his native dialect and the Italian language learnt in school, his experience fighting as a partisan in World War II and his brief political career, the disillusionment and his departure to Reading; Rigoni Stern remembers life on the Altipiano di Asiago before the call-up, his role as sergeant major during the war and the retreat from Russia, the difficulties of fitting back in and the responsibility of bringin testimony of the events he lived.[72] These authors' legacy clearly surfaces in the context of Paolini's work on Veneto's territory as one of its most fundamental sources: Zanzotto, Meneghello and Rigoni Stern embody the memory of Veneto that Paolini re-enacts on the stage; while he, as actor, becomes the spokeperson of a collective memory and brings a testimony to the audience, these authors represent

[72] As mentioned earlier these events are the subject matter of Rigoni Stern's *Il sergente nella neve* (1953) and of Paolini subsequent theatre adaptation, *Il sergente*.

the memory itself. The *Ritratti* series follows chronologically the first representations of works like *Il Milione* (1997) and *Bestiario veneto* (1998), almost offering some hindsight into the reflections that stand at the roots of Paolini's theatrical work on the transformation of territory in Veneto. If, as we know from the *diari*, Paolini's metaphorical dialogue with his sources begins during the preparation of his theatrical works, these three interviews show excerpts of the actual conversation, memory being passed on from the older authors to the younger author-actor, who had moulded it into a new form of testimony on the stage. While these works are indeed related to Paolini's work on territory as they encapsulate the region's collective memory, my research here will focus mainly on the staged works *Il Milione* and *Bestiario veneto*. The necessity to give more space to these works is dictated on one side by the same reasons that imposed the choice of focusing on the so-called younger generation of authors from Veneto: the *Ritratti* were realised a posteriori and aim to portray Paolini's literary sources, who bear the collective memory that he enacts on the stage. The focal centre here is on Veneto as it was, a world of which the older authors are direct witnesses. On the other side, as the aim of this research is to investigate how literature and territory interact, especially when the latter is transformed, works like *Il Milione* and *Bestiario* represent a more proficuous field of investigation, as in them the memory of the past and the awareness of the transformation coexist – as happens in *Ritratti* – but the perspective is directed on a present that the public can recognize because it portrays their world, a condition that enables the author-actor to transfer on the testimony by 'activating the self'.

3.2 THE ROLE OF TERRITORY IN *IL MILIONE* AND *BESTIARIO VENETO – PAROLE MATE*

3.2.1 Notes on the idea of landscape and territory in Paolini's work and his *paesaggire*

It has been noted that sooner or later during their careers, a large number of writers from Veneto come to deal with the subject of the region's landscape (Antonello 2005). Paolini is certainly no exception and, on the contrary, has often been identified as an author of landscape, especially in consequence of the extensive work he dedicated to portraying many aspects of his home region of Veneto in his theatrical productions. Whilst this is undoubtedly a fair judgement, the present research will shift the focus slightly to concentrate on the idea of territory. As has been established through the previous clarifications on terminology, within the context of this research, territory is to be intended as inclusive of the element of landscape. Although further elucidations will be given, stressing the attention on the previous concept rather than the latter is meant to highlight the idea, crucial to this work, that in Paolini's oeuvre, the territorial element is bond to and includes a complexity of cultural and social facets that define the identity of a region. Therefore territory bears a particularly strong significance, especially in terms of the author's engagement to that of Veneto.

During the late 1990s, Paolini came to divert his attention towards the exploration of stories that are essentially *venete*, a process resulted in the composition of *Il milione. Quaderno veneziano* (1997) and *Bestiario veneto – Parole mate* (1998), which will be the subject of deeper analysis in this chapter. In these two works Paolini approaches a discourse on the region that includes its history, its geography, its cultural and social background, starting from the fundamental divide between Venice and the countryside, Venezia and «campagne». As has been mentioned, this stage does not necessarily represent a starting point for Paolini, but rather the fruit of a development that brought him a long way from cooperating with Teatro Settimo to establish himself as an author of the 'teatro di narrazione' and subsequently, but in parallel, to direct his attention to the element of territory with specific connection to the region of Veneto. As synthesized by Fernando Marchiori, Paolini «[d]a attore navigato si è convertito in narratore di storie. Dentro le storie ha cominciato a moltiplicare il punto di vista […]. Infine è giunto a dare voce al paesaggio» (40). Besides including the two works on Veneto already cited, Paolini's interest in territory developed into a broader research on the theme which also includes *Bestiario italiano – I cani del gas* (1999). Defined by the author as «un paesaggio di parole per cantare, raccontare il paese dove vivo» (Paolini 2000, 3) this *Bestiario* is a collection of the author's notes on his travels – mainly long drives – all across the Italian peninsula, of voices and poems that describe the geography and the identity of the country. Paolini's way of telling the geography of a place, of narrating landscapes, is peculiar to all of his work on territory and is based on a technique that the author shaped throughout his career.

The multiplication of viewpoints and voices that Paolini adopted in his early works expanded to include the places alongside the people. As the gaze of the actor on stage began to point towards the landscape surrounding his stories, the geographical elements defining the landscape and their relation to the people in the story, territory progressively started to gain a stronger voice for itself until it finally became a well-rounded character in its own right, and eventually the protagonist of works like *Il milione* and the *Bestiari*. In the context of the development of this technique, once more Vajont represents a milestone in the definition of the author's work:

> «Vajont mi è servito a sviluppare una tecnica per raccontare i paesaggi, e non soltanto le storie. […] Ho imparato a usare l'obiettivo come un fotografo, come al cinema, a mettere in movimento la camera, ad assumere punti di vista non solo dei personaggi in carne e ossa ma anche della materia, non necessariamente in modo animistico ma semplicemente spostando il punto d'osservazione: per esempio seguire un'onda che si sposta» (Paolini, Ponte di Pino, 29).

In a production like *Vajont*, where the geography of a place is indissolubly bond to the story of the people, the element of territory emerged with a vigour that was unprecedented in Paolini's work. The subsequent shift in perspective, the surfacing of territory as a whole and its transposition onto a new and more complex plane, were the factors that brought the development of Paolini's work from *Vajont* to *Il milione*.

The development that brought Paolini to gradually include territory in his work, as well as the technique he uses to incorporate it within the structure of a performance, subsume a conception of territory to which it is important to dedicate some attention. Despite the idea of territory being predominant in the perspective adopted in this analysis, in order to define the foundations for Paolini's idea of it, it is important to relate to previous reflections around the concept of landscape. First

of all, especially when it comes *Bestiario veneto,* Paolini often refers to landscapes and indeed he states that the objective of his performance is to 'tell a landscape'. Secondly, theatre inherently belongs to the realm of representation: as the etymology of 'landscape' interweaves firmly with the idea of representation, referring to notions that pertain to the conceptualisation of landscape provides a broader perspective, necessary to understand the origin and function of the territorial element in Paolini's work. Harking back to a distinction introduced in the theoretical premise of this research,[73] the twofold dimension of landscape will be the starting point for the following considerations. On one side, the idea of landscape first originated in the human necessity of relating to the surrounding natural environment, implying a blurry distinction between its natural and cultural aspects. On the other side, as the human viewer progressively grew detached from it, landscape developed into a subject of representation, acquiring a new dimension in which the continuity between its natural and cultural qualities was in ways interrupted. Hence the theoretical separation between a pre-modern and a modern conception of landscape: if the previous is centred on the natural dimension of landscape,[74] the latter approaches landscape essentially as a way of representing the surrounding world. Despite the fact that these two visions could be accepted as subsequent developments in people's relation to the visible territory around them, it is important to note that neatly distinguishing between two phases can be misleading, as proven by the previously quoted example of the Sainte-Victoire. If

[73] See chapter 1.1 to 1.5.
[74] This becomes clear when considering that the etymology of the word instein e il miraggio *landschaps* could be used in both an agricultural and a pictorial plane (see footnote 5 in chapter 1).

it is indeed true that throughout history landscape gradually became an object of observation, separated from the viewing subject, it is also true that human interrelation with it has not strictly developed according to this perspective, but has been rather sustained by a hybridization of the pre-modern and modern views, as defined by Bruno Latour. Thus, although at times one might prevail over the other, the integration of the human element within landscape as an environment that combines natural and artificial features on one side, and its existence as an image to represent on the other side, coexist in contemporary Western societies.

On the basis of these premises, referring to this hybrid idea of landscape is crucial as this is the vision Paolini embraces in his work on territory. Unlike authors like Comisso or Piovene, who observe landscape from afar, placing themselves outside the space they portray and reflect on, Paolini refuses to relate to landscape as a panorama to paint with words. Just as in *Il milione* he walks onto the lagoon, his steps accompanied by the *shaquack* noise of crushed slugs in the water, the author walks into the landscape, he enters the panorama, turns it into territory. The result of Paolini's theatrical action is an exploration that begins with landscape but then embraces the deeper geographical, historical, social, and cultural layers that compose the complex construction that is territory. Starting from the surface, from the visible layer of territory, i.e. landscape, the author delves deeper into the underlying structure, analysing the roots of a particular economical and cultural configuration of which landscape is the perceivable, tangible face.

With the exception of *Bestiario italiano*, the context within which Paolini conducts such operation is that of contemporary Veneto. As previously outlined,

the current appearance of Veneto's landscape is the result of a process of industrialisation that radically transformed the region within the turn of a decade. The dispersive growth of industrial settlements in the region, observable in the diffused presence of factories and warehouses across its territory, was based on the organisation of the land typical of Veneto's agricultural past and led to the urbanised countryside which characterises the region today. With natural resources also swallowed in by the fast-paced remodelling of the region, the opportunity to formulate a rational long-term development plan which would take into account the impact of industrialisation on territory and landscape was missed. On the cultural plane, this translated into the lack of territory's conceptualisation. In the perception of most people who inhabit the region, territory is a functional resource to profit, landscape does not exist in terms of its modern conception as outlined above, but just in terms of the use people make of it.[75]

Set against this backdrop, Paolini's theatre on Veneto essentially addresses one question, which Pier Paolo Antonello formulates in clear terms: «è possibile restituire una coscienza del proprio paesaggio ai veneti, come spazio storico-geografico di una memoria collettiva?» (2005, 21). In order to answer this question, the author conducts a theatrical operation whose definition, scope, and technique can be condensed into a single term, coined by Andrea Zanzotto: *paesaggire*. «Leggere i segni del cambiamento in quello che vediamo» (BV 93) is the sense of

[75] «Il paesaggio per i veneti "tavernicoli" continua a non esistere: esiste la terra per i contadini, esiste la montagna per i montanari, la laguna per i veneziani, ma *non esiste il paesaggio* veneto» (Antonello 17).

Zanzotto's neologism[76] and the objective of Paolini's exploration. As would be true in any other context, but is particularly evident in the one of Veneto, such exercise is impossible to carry out without the human element being included in the equation. Thus, if reading the landscape means reading its transformation, and if landscape is the outer shell of the specific geographical, economical, and historical structure resulting from its interaction with human activity, then what Paolini reads through works like *Il milione* and *Bestiario veneto* is territory. What the author achieves while performing these works is to conceptualise the mutation of a territory by observing the mutation of its landscape. Indeed, both in the productions dedicated to Veneto and in *Bestiario italiano*, the contemplation of the impact that historical developments and economic activities had on landscape leads to a profound analysis of the roots and effects of such changes on a broader scale. Reading the landscape does not solely imply that what is visible is under scrutiny, but also that the more complex and less manifest social and cultural implications of the observable transformation are objects of enquiry. In light of these considerations, it comes to no surprise that Paolini refers to and adopts the modes of Zanzotto's *paesaggire*, as the poet's idea precisely indicates a process that is conducted on the landscape as a way to articulate a discourse on the territory of which such landscape is the expression.

[76] Referring to his coin, during a conversation with Paolini, Zanzotto says: «Ho detto paesaggire a un certo punto, ironicamente, nella *Beltà*, dove compio una critica generale […] a quello che era stato il mio atteggiamento precedente, che voleva essere estatico nei confronti del paesaggio […]. Invece paesaggire mette a fuoco la presenza umana e le lacerazioni della storia» (Paolini 1999, 105-106). The author also discusses the term in *Ritratti* where he explains that landscape absorbs transformations within itself, hence the necessity to read it and read the transformation *through* it.

3.2.2 Territory, language, and memory: the role of dialect in territory-related performances

Once defined Paolini's approach to landscape, the next step into understanding this branch of his oeuvre is to analyse the sources and instruments used by the author in his work. As is true for most of the author's production, Paolini's theatre on territory also places itself on the dimension of collective memory. If works like *Gli album* use biographic elements and shared history to trigger the mechanism by which experience is transferred from the author to the audience to build such collective memory, productions devoted to the theme of territory interlace geography and cultural identity to ignite the same spark. Connected both to geography and to cultural identity, language is a key factor in these productions and specifically in their attempt to re-establish a bond between people and their territory. As outlined earlier in this chapter, in Paolini's oeuvre, language is to be approached as a complex creation, in which two factors in particular play a key role: the mix of Italian and dialect in the performances, and the relation of the theatrical text with written sources. Resorting to a style that he progressively moulded throughout his career, on one side Paolini crafts a language that blends together elements of Italian and of Veneto's dialects in a combination that enriches both with an added layer of meaning provided by the other language. On the other side, words written by Veneto poets and narrators concur to shape the complex of the author's theatrical language, both by direct quotation and by guiding his choice of words. The analysis

of two productions will allow for a wider space to explore the specific modes by which the written texts by Veneto writers enter the theatrical fabric of Paolini's work. What is crucial to consider at this stage is instead the general significance of including these texts within the performances, the underlying idea that brought Paolini to refer to them, and the function they fulfil in the context of the author's operation on territory. In doing this, a valuable starting point is an observation made by Antonello in his previously mentioned work:

> «Se si possono individuare *grosso modo* due categorie, due modalità di racconto di questo paesaggio nella tradizione letteraria contemporanea […] la prima corrisponderebbe a un gruppo narratori cosmopoliti, dislocati, fondamentalmente di estrazione cittadina, la seconda alla stanzialità lirico-poetica, dialettale e rurale» (2005, 3-4).

In defining the premises to his discourse on landscape in Paolini, Antonello identifies two approaches to landscape in Veneto's contemporary tradition. On one side narrators like Piovene and Comisso are held as the prototypes of wandering writers, who observe the landscape in their home region of Veneto more as a pictorial panorama and compare it with the visual impressions and sketches they gathered during their journeys.[77] On the other side, poets seem to maintain a connection to the landscape that is more concrete, made of the same land and of the same words that make the region itself. With regards to his approach to landscape, Paolini walks on both paths:[78] his theatre lives in the dimension of *paesaggire*; landscape to him is not a painting to admire, it is the land on which he walks, the

[77] Both Piovene and Comisso travelled extensively and wrote reportages for Italian newspapers such as *Corriere della sera* and *La Stampa*.

[78] Antonello himself concludes: «Paolini è evidentemente un ibrido: è una sorta di 'terza via' tra la parola poetica e la narrazione, fra la presunta centralità cittadina e la 'campagna'. […] Paolini è semi-spaesato» (2005, 14).

language he speaks, the people he speaks to, and the cultural references he shares with them. At the same time, he distantiates himself from the landscape to be able to observe it, he scrutinizes the country side, but also Venice, the city, he stops and reflects upon what he sees. A reflection of the previously indicated a-modern conception of landscape that characterises Paolini's perspective, the author's practical take on the theme fuses elements of both the poets' and narrators' way to landscape as defined by Antonello.

Highlighting Paolini's collocation within this context is certainly worthwhile as it allows us to evaluate the dialogue he interlaces with the existing tradition of literature on territory in Veneto. However, what is particularly crucial here is that, by examining Paolini's relation to the local tradition of writings on territory, we gain a fundamental insight into the author's use of languages as an instrument for the exploration of territory. The core of the question resides in the evident unbalance in the integration of Italian and dialect sources within Paolini's productions dedicated to Veneto, an unevenness that can be encountered also in the author's direct use of poetic and narrative references. With regards to this, one should note that, unsurprisingly, the work of contemporary poets from Veneto holds a great importance to Paolini's theatre on the region's territory: indeed, poetry represents one of the closest and most significant sources of reference for the author's survey on territory, and the fact is evident in the abundance of readings and quotes in *Bestiario veneto*,[79] in his recurrent mentions of specific poets, and ultimately in his choice of using dialect. On the other hand, however, the case for narrative is slightly

[79] This will clearly emerge in section 3.2.4.

different. Within the context of the productions he devotes to the theme of territory, the ratio of direct use of poetry to narrative is significantly unbalanced. This is true specifically for *Bestiario veneto*, where Paolini often refers directly to his literary sources, whereas in *Il milione* such underlying stratus of written tradition remains concealed. In this context however, poetry fulfils a key role: Paolini uses the poetic word to build a repository of identity traits, a dictionary for the history and geography of the region that defines both memory and landscape. Despite the relevance of narrative sources being comparable to that of poetic ones,[80] the previous' presence in performances dedicated to territory, and specifically to Veneto, is limited. One effective way to consider this phenomenon is to acknowledge that a key discriminant factor in Paolini's sources is the language and to understand why. Firstly then, if the author's perception of landscape is, as noted through the sui generis classification introduced by Antonello, a combination of the traditions of poets' and narrators' approaches, when it comes to his use of language, which provides him the bricks with which to build his theatrical construction, a differentiation surfaces: availing himself of a diverse tradition, the majority of the materials that Paolini actively encapsulates into his work are dialect literary texts. What is crucial to consider, however, is that Paolini needs dialect because dialect carries the concrete meaning of the things he talks about, dialect, more than Italian, functions as natural vehicle for informal and spontaneous communication, and therefore connects things with the people who use and interact with them. If an

[80] Besides having produced the two *Ritratti* on Meneghello and Rigoni Stern, we also know from Paolini's diaries and from his other productions that his interest for Veneto's narrators is indeed vast and bears a strong influence on his work.

extensive pool is available for him to draw from when it comes to dialect poetry, Italian widely dominates Veneto's narrative.[81] Hence, as a natural consequence, Paolini resorts to the poetic word more than prose when it comes to incorporating a specific vocabulary within a theatrical complex that exists in the realm of testimony, shared memory, identity, culture. As one could anticipate, it is the words of an author like Meneghello that provide the key to interpret Paolini's language construction:

> «Ci sono due strati nella personalità di un uomo; sopra, le ferite superficiali, in italiano, in francese, in latino; sotto, le ferite antiche che rimarginandosi hanno fatto queste croste delle parole in dialetto. […] C'è un nòcciolo indistruttibile di materia apprehended, presa coi tralci prensili dei sensi; la parola del dialetto è sempre incavicchiata alla realtà, per la ragione che è la cosa stessa, appercepita prima che imparassimo a ragionare, e non più sfumata in seguito, dato che ci hanno insegnato a ragionare in un'altra lingua» (41).

For Paolini as for Meneghello, dialect pairs with senses, with an instinctive manner of relating to the world and to one's own self. As appears clearly from the previous outline of Paolini's poetics, the author's theatre aims at striking profound chords bound to people's sense of identity, memory, and belonging. Therefore, Paolini's use of dialect responds to the precise necessity of connecting the audience with the intuitive and sensorial reality of what is being represented through words. In the context of the productions devoted to Veneto, borrowing predominantly dialect materials from other literary sources develops as the natural subsequent step in a path directed towards a rendition of territory: an articulate structure to which the audience can relate and, more importantly, in which the audience can situate itself.

[81] Too wide a subject to be included in the research presented here, the presence and significance of the use of dialect in contemporary prose and poetry in Veneto would indeed represent an interesting topic to investigate.

If building the foundations for a survey on the cultural and social scenario of a region through its landscape means by necessity to connect to identity defining factors such as the language, in the case of Veneto, dialect is a fundamental instrument.

Although Paolini's way of using language may often allude to a past dimension that has been transformed by economic upturn and social change, it is crucial to highlight that, while necessarily drawing from the past, the author's work is rooted in and advocates for the current reality from which it springs. The point is a particularly important one to stress, as it is pinned to the author's conception of theatre and, more broadly, to its collocating itself within the branches of the 'teatro di narrazione'. Indeed, the code to interpret Paolini's work does not lie in a nostalgic sentiment towards a lost uncorrupted arcadia, but rather in the idea of creating awareness and triggering reflection. Since the transition from a fundamentally rural culture to an industrial one hit the region of Veneto with no cultural guidance leading the process, the necessity of rebuilding a consciousness of the territory so that the transformation can be rationalised with hindsight is the starting point of the author's theatrical operation. What Paolini calls for through these productions is a cultural exercise, the conscious and thoughtful remodelling of cultural paradigm that remained fossilised in a past dimension while the social and economic structure sustaining it underwent a radical shift: an adaptation *a posteriori*. The consolidation of a collective memory rooted in a cultural and geographical identity becomes, in Paolini's hands, the prime instrument of a prise de conscience that necessarily

excludes any simplistic lamentation for the loss of a more 'natural' and rural world, as indeed:

> «Non c'è niente di incontaminato nel paesaggio italiano, è tutto rifatto come in un orto. Mi ripeto: a me le valli troppo verdi, quella della pubblicità, mettono un'incontenibile voglia di fargli subito dentro la cacca e la pipí per contaminarle almeno un po'. […] Mi da tristezza pensare che la maggior parte dei luoghi che usiamo, attraversiamo, sfruttiamo debbano essere considerati persi. È a quelli che devo dare un nome, perché è quella la zavorra che mi tira sotto, perché la maggior parte del mio tempo la passo lì. Cavalcavia, viadotti, sono emozioni a buon mercato se uno sa andare a piedi, ma se ci passo sopra come faccio a buttarli via, come posso essere indifferente agli svincoli quando di questo Paese uso soltanto una rete veloce in connessioni di […] luoghi convenzionali che usiamo facendo finta che non siano nel paesaggio?» (Paolini 2000, 112-13).

The core of Paolini's approach does not revolve around the sheer condemnation of the uncontrolled expansion of industrial structures to the detriment of the natural environment of Veneto. On the contrary, averse to a dismissive attitude that only deplores the effects of the economic transformation on the territory, the author founds his theatrical operation upon a need for acknowledgment, reflection and reconsideration. What is implied in his call for a reassessment of commonly used spaces that become disregarded as non-places is the necessity to reconsider and re-think territory in the light of the transformation it underwent, to understand the change and conceptualise it. By pulling together the strings of a shared and collective memory, Paolini aims precisely at returning these spaces to the sphere of self-perception and cultural identity, his intent being to enable people with the intellectual instruments to consciously perceive, repossess, and comprehend their own territory.

While talking about the relation between the theatrical text and the written sources, one further clarificatiom should be made with regards to what exactly is

intended by theatrical text – a consideration that is valid for Paolini as well as in more general terms. In the 'teatro di narrazione', where the relation with the public is built throughout the play and through the use of techniques that are specifically aimed at creating a dialogue with the audience, the relation between the actual performance and the written word articulates into a complex web of references, rearrangements, and appropriations. On one level, based on the premise that «non esiste un luogo della mente e dello spirito che pre-costituisce l'atto scenico; in teatro l'atto è l'azione stessa del farsi scena e questo agire non è mai legato a un solo-Io»,[82] it is implausible to assume the existence of a written text that functions as a basis for the performance. The procedure used by narrators when performing is not to memorise a text, but rather to compose within memory. As we've seen for Paolini, each work is preceded by a phase of research during which the author collects materials, testimonies, personal notes on the people and places involved with the story, sketches and outlined for the future performance. These will consolidate into the foundations of a specific theatrical work: by converging into a collected memory of the events to which the work is dedicated to, the personal or recounted experience that the author has gathered forms a repository to which he/she will resort to compose the performance on the stage. In most cases then, the published texts of the 'teatro di narrazione' are a written version of the theatrical performance, which has been adapted for reading, a posteriori. Representing the evolution of the theatrical work, and collating text that comes both from the various productions of the oral performance and from the materials cemented together

[82] Baliani as quoted in Guccini, 22.

during the preceding phase of research, editions are the product of the extreme unification that can be observed in the 'teatro di narrazione' between 'scrittura drammatica' and 'scrittura scenica' (Puppa 2000).[83] Furthermore, as has been analysed above in Paolini specifically, authors often appropriate prose or poetry written by writers whose work is closely related to the theme of what will be the narrator's story. Such materials enter the crucible of the author's collected memory, thus becoming the author's experience, and, at a later stage, the audience's too. The process whereby the audience will in turn appropriate the experience that has been conveyed to it, will subsequently result in the formation of collective memory. In brief, as the combination of written material and oral performance cohabit the dimension of collected and collective memory, as Gerardo Guccini notes, «i procedimenti del 'teatro narrazione' compenetrano testi, scrittura e composizione risolvendosi in spettacoli fissati più in base alla memorizzazione dei riferimenti visuali che non in base alla memorizzazione delle parole» (2005, 30).

Having set the coordinates within which to place Paolini's work with regards to the theme of territory in the region of Veneto, the analysis of two productions in particular will be beneficial for a wider comprehension of the modes by which the element of territory enters the theatrical space in the author's work. Representative of two equally fundamental sides of Veneto's territory, *Il milione* and *Bestiario veneto – Parole mate* will constitute the grounds on which to observe Paolini's practice in both rooting his productions within a specific territory and deeply

[83] While the term 'scrittura drammatica' is generally intended to define the script that will remain as the official written version of the theatrical work, the term 'scrittura scenica' refers to the text used for rehearsals which includes, for example, notes regarding the mise en scène.

embedding this territory in the framework of the script and of the performance. In analysing both productions, reference will be made to the relevant 'quaderno'. As we have seen Paolini tends not to work on a fixed script and he rather adapts each staging of a production to the different location and audience he performs for. However, the written version of his works, the 'quaderno', includes a basic script for the performance, the actual representation of which can vary in terms of the author's choice of words to use or passages to include each night. For what concerns *Il milione*, the script is organised in 'tappeti': each 'tappeto' represents a theme and the sequence of them as it appears in *Quaderno del milione* does not correspond to the actual order in which they should be represented, as *Il milione* does not follow a temporal development, but is rather composed of a juxtaposition of themes. In light of the above, in the present research, preference has been given to quoting from the written 'quaderni', *Quaderno del Milione* and *Bestiario veneto – Parole mate,* as they represent the basic script for the actual performances.[84]

3.2.3 *Il Milione*: the city

In the context of a survey that encompasses the territory of the region of Veneto in its entirety, Paolini's interest stretches across borders on the land and borders on the sea, from cities, to towns, to countryside. With *Il milione* the author's gaze rests

[84] In quoting these two works, I will hereon use QM for *Quaderno del Milione* and BV for *Bestiario Veneto*.

on the only town in Veneto that, at some point in history, has called itself a cosmopolitan city: Venice. Once at the heart of a vast and thriving network of trade and routes across the Mediterranean, until the start of the long decline of the Republic in the late 16th century, Venice was held one of the capitals of the modern world, «[e] lo sanno, i veneziani sanno di essere centro del mondo e chi è *umbelicus mundi* sta sul culo al resto del mondo…» (QM 108).

Pervaded with the author's humorous style and stamped with his jester-like manner of acting, Paolini's exploration of Veneto's territory starts from its waters. Born in Belluno and having lived in Treviso, the author does not claim water as his natural element; he comes from the land, from that Veneto countryside that hardly distinguishes between industrial areas, towns, and actual countryside. Nonetheless the landscape of the aquatic border of Veneto belongs to him too: insofar as it constitutes an inalienable component of the geomorphic structure of the region, water, the Venice lagoon, infiltrates within the complex web of geographical references that intertwine to form a coherent regional identity. The coupled opposites «acqua e tera, acqua e tera» are a constant refrain throughout *Il milione* that reminds to the public of the twofold nature of Venice. In asserting a clear opposition however, *acqua e tera* also represents the inherent antithesis between Venice and the inland, two components which, despite bearing a substantially opposite nature, both define the region in its entirety: acqua *e* tera. Hence water belongs to Paolini's landscape, it is part of the territory he inhabits, and so he

observes it, at first from afar,[85] from the dry inland where he comes from, i.e. Veneto's (used to be) countryside:

> «Eccovi dunque vista da terra la città insulare che sprofonda […].
> Uno specchio d'acqua bassa, invalicabile, la separa da sempre dal resto del mio mondo conosciuto.
> Questa è la mia acqua e questa la mia terra. Di campagna non ce n'è più» (QM 76).

One element, the most immediate one, that bonds together lands and waters in a common identity trait running throughout the region is indeed the language. Despite the fact that the numerous variations of the regional vernacular identify differences not only at a provincial level, but also at a more minute one – as Meneghello remembers: «*Sgànbare*[86] in contrà San Bernardino, *sgàlmare* in piazza» (47) –, the proximity of such linguistic variations in Veneto still provides for a solid common ground on which to found an identity trait shared by the whole region. Drawing on from the technique he shaped and developed through *Libera Nos* and the early chapters of *Gli album*, Paolini uses precisely this common ground to establish a plane of communication that connects the author-actor, the narration, the public, and the territory. With regards to the author's use of language, it is crucial to highlight that, far from being a technique that excludes non-dialect speakers, Paolini's linguistic assemblage results in a generally accessible code. The intonation and phrasing adopted by the author is the typical Venetian one, and many terms are used, which are connected to activities specific to Venice and the lagoon: «*El se ga perso?*» (QM 87) asks Sambo, or, after letting Marco on his boat, «*No ti ga mai visto i burci che vien avanti a spinta?*» (QM 89), a question immediately

[85] To refer to Latour's terminology, he detaches himself from it in a 'modern' way.
[86] Wooden clogs, with a strip nailed at the tip of the shoe.

followed by Sambo's attempt to teach him how to row 'alla vallesana', «*Ara: ti premi e ti staíssi. Ti premi e ti staíssi*» (QM 89). Moreover, in the written 'quaderno' of the performance, *Quaderno del milione* the performance's script is preceded by a 'Sillabario del *Milione*', which includes many vernacular entries with the relative explanation of their meanings. Nonetheless, the inclusion of a specific dialect vocabulary in *Il milione* does not result in the impossibility to understand for non-dialect speakers, rather the opposite: when using a specific vernacular term that might not be known by a viewer, the author's gestures often stand in for it as he mimics it; at times the author simply places a word in a context that will naturally clarify its meaning; at times he explains in Italian or even translates directly. The following passage, besides being an example of the interlacing of the two languages in the author-actors' speech, also exemplifies a number of these devices:

> «Cammino lo scivolo a mano, arrivo in fondo, cavo le scarpe, cavo i calzetti, tiro su le braghe come si fa a San Marco con l'acqua alta e metto giù il primo pié…
> – Aaahhh… *imèghe*…
> Traduco *imèghe*, *limèghe*: chiocciole senza guscio.
> – Aaahhh…
> Il primo *pié*… uno schifo.
> Il secondo… ti abitui.
> Il terzo… *te piase*…» (QM 86).

In addition to elucidating potentially obscure terms, by doing this, the author adds a layer of meaning that would otherwise be incommunicable. On one side, language is disclosed in its function of social and cultural expression: some of the dialect words introduced this way, for instance, do not have a direct equivalent in Italian, implying that some of the local variations of the language derive from the specific verbal necessities dictated by the activities carried out on the territory. On the other side, based on the underlying conception of dialect as the 'tralci prensili dei sensi',

the use of vernacular speech brings up and verbalises a cognitive level that cannot be express only through Italian, as Italian is not only – and often not the main – language in which day-to-day communication happens in the territory pictured by Paolini in his work.

Thus, the use of dialect appears as a crucial device to the author's aim of narrating «*la parte acquea del mio mondo*» (QM 75): driven by this scope, in *Il milione*, Paolini turns language into the main vehicle of his journey. And indeed, conducted along the route of its linguistic necessities, what best typifies *Il milione* is its nature of narrative journey. Rooted in an archetypal yearning for exploration and comprehension of the self, Paolini's enterprise to go elsewhere originates in a distant inclination: «Da bambino ero futurista, mi piacevano le macchine, i treni, i motoscafi, gli aeroplani. [...] Da grande avrei voluto diventare un aeroplano per andar altrove» (QM 73). Never quietened, the desire to explore unknown places resurfaces as the author, once an adult, still feels the recurrent need to be elsewhere, except the lack of space that critically affects the territory he inhabits prompts him to embark in a different kind of journey, a journey on the steps of Marco Polo:

> «Allora a volte mi torna la voglia dell'Altrove: mi basta poco per sentirmi altrove, un po' di spazio… ma è un lusso qui da noi, lo spazio: è tutta terra edificabile. Così navigo su una carta geografica seguendo le tracce di Marco Polo, in Asia, sulla Transiberiana» (QM 75).

Thus the journey begins, but instead of travelling across the world, Paolini's steps retrace the journeys of his wandering forefather no further than within the borders of his home city. If Marco Polo is a long-distance traveller, a polyglot merchant who crossed Europe and Asia on the ancient caravan routes and along the Silk Road to the court of Kublai Khan, traversing unknown lands and experiencing

new customs,[87] Paolini is a different kind of traveller. The author-actor is more apt to a kind of 'residential' travelling, to journeys that take him elsewhere, but not too far, a kind of journey that is probably more suited to someone whose heritage is embedded in a more 'sedentary' history, as opposed to the almost nomadic nature that the Venetians attained through centuries of trades across the continents: «Io non sono il primo, ma quasi, della mia razza che si è messo in viaggio. Prima di me, erano tutti contadini, campagne: stavano sul suo, e basta» (QM 76).

A fundamental source for *Il milione*, in his *Collezione di sabbia*, Calvino, referring to a number of illustrations on ancient maps, observes the existence of 'mappe-Odissea', travel maps, conceived as itineraries and with an implicit narrative structure, which have their counterpart in 'mappe-Iliade', city maps, whose structure hints at the idea of encirclement instead.[88] Paolini's journey unfolds along the coordinates of a 'mappa-Iliade', but in the manner that would be appropriate in following the routes and figures on a 'mappa-Odissea'.[89] With Calvino in mind, just as his plane is about to take off from Marco Polo airport and bring him 'altrove', the author-actor feels the urge to get off, to enter the map and explore the city whose houses, boats, and figures he can only see from the window: «Devo parlare con quello lì sulla carta. Devo scendere. Adesso!» (QM 85); he apologises, «ho *sbaglià*, scusatemi...» (QM 85), and he leaves, to meet Sambo, to explore Venice. So the departure turns into a false departure, the travels begin and

[87] As Paolini reminds us during his performance from Venice arsenal in 1998, unlike Colombo, who lands and sets flags Polo «mangia mongolo, parla cinese» (while not reported in the printed version of *Il Milione*, Paolini uses these words during the performance from the Arsenal in Venice).
[88] See Calvino 1984, 22-23.
[89] At the beginning of his journey the author-actor asks: «Ma se io viaggio dentro una mappa-Iliade diventa Odissea?» (QM 85).

end at the same point, Marco Polo, the airport, is at the same time the origin of the journey and its destination, Venice becomes simultaneously home and elsewhere.

Paolini's path does not take him to discover far-away places, but is rather configured as a map to navigate a territory in search for the self. As he states in an interview, his aim is to explore the possibility of «raccontarsi nella città, per continuare a raccontare la mia terra» (Porcheddu 10). A man of the 'campagne', he narrates the city to narrate his territory: as for its waters, Venice also constitutes part of the author-actor's territorial identity, therefore his theatrical operation stems from the narration of a geography, that of Veneto, which extends into an exploration of the self, of roots, and identity, both regional and individual. Evolving parallel to his expedition through a territory that is already know, but needs to be rediscovered, the author undertakes a path whose starting point is the necessity to acknowledge, reconsider, understand, and reconnect with the roots and development of the region's cultural identity. Directly confronting the fact that the swift, radical transformation of Veneto during the last decades of the 20th century has impeded the perception of such processes and therefore eroded a deep-seated cultural consciousness, *Il milione* addresses precisely the urge to rebuild a profound awareness of territory as a fundamental element in the formation of people's collective identity. For this reason, the author brings the audience along on the path he follows, so that his prise de conscience, his rediscovery of territory and of cultural roots can also become theirs. Thus his journey begins by asking unanswerable questions to encourage the audience to become aware of the land they inhabit and reflect on its configuration and its history:

> «Per chi è costruita la linea Maginot di centri commerciali che circonda le terre del Nordest?
> E chi fu l'imperatore (o fu un doge?) che fece costruire la Grande Muraglia della Tangenziale dietro cui comincia la Terra delle Villette e dei Capannoni, unica città senza più centro […]?» (QM 73).

When did Veneto become the land of small detached houses and warehouses? What processes took place to turn a broadly rural region into one of the core industrial hubs of the Italian economy? How did this transform the region's social and cultural structure? Casting aside any irrevocable negative judgement on the outcome of the economic transformation of the region, what the author-actor urgently calls for is a process of reconsideration and comprehension of the origins and development of the economic upturn and, most importantly, of the related phenomena in the sphere of cultural identity and social interaction. The alienating signs of a rapid twist that affected the socio-economic scenario in Veneto pervade its territory and are brought to the surface by the author by means of a bittersweet humour: as his character imagines approaching Venice from the inland, he is struck by the revelation that «[d]ietro Mestre, di fianco Marghera, davanti Campari. Venezia dal ponte si legge Campari. Hollywood si legge Hollywood, Venezia invece Campari» (QM 78).[90]

The author's exploration of Venice and the lagoon then serves as a model for his own exploration of the self, and collectively for the public's too: by stopping and reflecting on a territory that has been transformed, one confronts an idea of the

[90] As Paolini explains in a note in *Quaderno del milione*, the sign that read Campari, once visible upon approaching Venice from Ponte della Libertà, has been removed since his performances of *Il milione*. Although the author jokes about it being unclear whether this was a consequence of his remarks, the image still stands as a particularly vivid example of the most visible signposts of an epochal turn.

surrounding environment, of what is outside of the self, and subsequently comes to question individual and collective identity. As has been noted in previous chapters, the process of identity formation often involves definitions by contrast: we define ourselves in opposition to what is outside of us and is different from us, not, or not only, by establishing what we are, but rather by establishing what we are not. Standing as a revealing instance of such phenomenon, on crossing the Ponte della Libertà – the bridge that connects Venice to the inland – the author-actor glances over the water separating him from the city and reflects: «[m]a per quelli di là il mondo è ancora diviso in Nostrani, Campagne, Foresti e Napuli. [...] "*Zé dieze ani che sto a Casteo e i me dize ancora teron*"» (QM 76). Identity is defined by its contrast with another identity. The mechanism does not alter even within the borders of the same region:

> «– Voga a la veneta. No ti xe bon? A remengo, va' a remengo… dame el scalmo. Da dove ti vien?
> – Deà
> – Ahhh… Campagne…» (QM 89).

Despite the obvious divergence, towards the end of the journey, the difference is slightly condescendingly, but benevolently accepted: «Sì, sì, *ti va ben*: per essere un Campagne, *ti va ben*» (QM 147). By putting himself in the shoes of the 'foresto', of the contrasting element in the picture, the author-actor accompanies the audience into assuming the point of view of the stranger entering the unknown. Consequently, the public is encouraged to follow the author-actor along his journey towards the acquisition of a renewed awareness and the rediscovery of the already known.

In the performance of *Il milione* staged in September 1998 at the Venice arsenal, which was also broadcasted on national television, Paolini's endeavour is aided by the spectacular setting of the theatrical space: the audience taking seats on boats provided by the local rowing associations, the stage set on a floating platform under the arches of the Gaggiandre, the whole set is conceived to include the totality of its elements as an integral part of the performance. While creating a space where the performance becomes physically embedded with the very territory it aims to represent, this particular arrangement achieves a sense of continuity between the stage and the audience, whereby the public is put in a position to dialogue with the author. Paolini almost invites the audience to share the stage with him: «stasera lo spettacolo siete voi!», he says, encouraging viewers to engage with the stories he is about to narrate, to feel a part of the performance, as well as to follow his steps and partake in the journey he is about to begin, turning into Marco Paolo themselves.

Although the exceptional setting of the waters of the lagoon makes the arsenal performance unique, on more general terms, Paolini employs a number of specific devices, both linguistic and narrative, which also aim at fostering audience participation and dialogue with the public. While some of this techniques pertain to the performance at its most explicit and evident level, other instead apply more implicitly to the use of vocabulary and the structure of the narrative. So on one side, as emerged from the analysis conducted so far, the author utilises techniques like addressing the public directly, so to engage in a conversation with it, whilst also adapting each performance to the specific audience and to the theatrical space it take place in. On the other side, Paolini embeds specific patterns in the fabric of his

narration, which are meant for the audience to identify themselves with the story and become familiar with the territory that the author is depicting. In her essay *Polo, Paolini e Venezia : riflessioni lagunari*,[91] Cristina Perissinotto identifies two of such techniques, used by the author to facilitate the visualisation of the Venetian landscape and the identification between the viewer and the multiple characters that the author-actor impersonates on the stage. The first one of these devices, rooted into the linguistic layer of the narration, can be defined as 'enumeration', and consists in the regular use by the author of lists of words which suggest series of places, ideas, or objects (68-69). By resorting to this mechanism, Paolini's aim is to prompt the audience to form a mental image of such collections of things and spaces, and to envision a scenario in their mind that is only suggested by the words he used. The following is an example of the 'enumeration' technique:

> «Ogni contrada si organizza intorno a una *ciesa*, con davanti un campo. E intorno, officine, botteghe, orti, giardini, tuguri, conventi, palazzi… […] Fondamenta, rughe, calli, strade, corti, rive, rami, rii, *sotoporteghi*, *calleselle*, altri campi» (QM 97).

In this passage, thick sequences of words evoke the buildings and road network of the city, leading the audience to picture churches, squares, shops, gardens, palaces, and stimulating the imagination of the viewers, who mentally compose a complex theatrical background, which is not actually present on the stage. Insofar as it becomes involved in the outlining of the setting – however only at the level of the imagination –, the public actively engages with the performance and partakes in its

[91] Here Perissinotto conducts an analysis of *Il Milione*, tackling the use of the theatrical space in the 1997 performance from Venice Arsenal, the roots and modes of Paolini's theatrical techniques, as well as questions of identity and origins. While providing a precious tool for the analysis of *Il milione*, the essay represents a stand-alone analysis which focuses on this particular work rather than its relation to Paolini's wider perspective on territory.

unfolding. As each viewer forms an individual idea of the scenario hinted by the author-actor and the visible elements of territory take shape in the audience's imagination, narration turns into a personal experience and triggers a process of appropriation which represents the vehicle for transferring experience according to the modes and scopes proper to the poetics of testimony that have been outlined earlier.

The second device discerned by Perissinotto, this time lodged within the narrative structure of the performance, is the 'braiding' of different stories.[92] As Perissinotto clarifies (69-70), there are two ways in which Paolini interlaces stories in his work. On the one hand, as has been previously described and according to a technique that also pertains to the 'teatro di narrazione', during the narration, the author-actor constantly moves in and out of a number of different characters – among which his own self. Although the story is mainly told in the first person, the audience is presented with the perspective of different figures that the actor impersonates, swiftly switching from one to another. This technique allows the author-actor to act on the narrative structure on two levels. On one side, he hops between distant lands and historical periods – in the case of *Il milione* between contemporary Veneto, the late decades of the 20th century, and the ancient world of Marco Polo. On the other side, he assumes a variety of points of view which merge to compose the complex and multifaceted structure of the narration. Besides stepping into the shoes of Marco Polo and impersonating himself as Campagne,

[92] Perissinotto harks back to the work of historian Natalie Zamon Davies, who introduces the concept of 'braided histories' in her work to refer to historical characters and to the ways in which the human networks surrounding them interconnect. See Introduction to *Changing Identities in Early Modern France* (1996).

Paolini also gives his voice to a myriad of other characters, locals as well as foreigners, and by impersonating them he represents a territory: Sambo, Gatto, confused tourists in search for '*Copisaro*', resigned inhabitants still seen as 'Napuli', local elderly widows are just a few of the figures that appear on the stage to compose a picture of the region.

> «Sul muro nord della basilica di San Marco c'è nei bassorilievi la storia di Alessandro Magno.
> Da bambino Marco Polo guardava il muro e diventava Alessandro Magno. Io guardo il muro e divento Marco Polo che diventa Alessandro» (QM 98).

Combining both levels, in this passage the author voices the trajectories of his jumps from his own self to Alexander the Great, then to Marco Polo and Alexander, and finally back to himself and on to Marco and Alexander. While in the passages following the one just quoted Paolini retraces the routes followed by the king and by the merchant traveller, he does so by bringing together three characters at once, by navigating the ancient routes through his own eyes – the eyes of the author-actor –, which become those of Marco Polo, which in turn become those of Alexander. It is by applying this mechanism that it becomes possible for Paolini to seamlessly incorporate within the first person narration the variety of different perspectives through which the experience that the author acquired and turned into testimony will be passed on to the audience.

Originating in the tensions described above and sustained by the use of the techniques just outlined, *Il milione* unfolds as a journey whose foundations lay in the necessity to question identity in relation to territory and whose significance extends from the personal and individual sphere to a shared and collective one. With Venice as its main set and object of investigation, and placed in the context of

Paolini's investigation of the socio-economic change that reshaped contemporary Veneto and its territory, *Il milione* represents one side of the author's twofold survey: the city. Substantially dissimilar from the rest of the region in terms of its nature, its origins, its architecture, Venice's history remains tightly bound to that of the inland, its uniqueness and specific character contributing substantially to the complexity of the region's identity. Within the framework of Paolini's work on Veneto, not only is Venice an essential element to consider when scrutinizing the region insofar as it is part of it, but the exploration and rediscovery of the city as conducted in *Il milione* also brings to the surface cultural traits and inspires reflections that can be extended generally when considering the region as a whole. Among the characterizations of attitudes, habits, and mindsets that emerge throughout the performances of *Il milione*, some can indeed – and are intended to – be identified more broadly as pertaining to Veneto rather than to the sole town. In line with what emerged from the analysis conducted above, these characterizations typify processes involving the definition of identity by means of recognizing the other as something different from the self. Two of the most significant examples that highlight both the existence of such mechanisms of opposition as well as the fact that they can be representative of mindsets and habits diffused throughout the region are included in the ideas of *demanio* and *foresti*. Both instances of the author's use of his discourse on Venice as a blueprint on which a broader reflection on the region can be based, these two examples aim to tackle a diffused sense of extraneousness towards issues that do not affect individual lives directly and a consequent attitude of non-involvement in public matters.

One of the 'tappeti' that constitute the script for *Il milione*, gives voice to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and his repudiation of the old and decadent Venice in *Contro Venezia passatista* (1910):

> «Noi vogliamo preparare la nascita di una Venezia industriale e militare che possa rovinare il mare Adriatico, gran lago Italiano. [...] innalziamo fino al cielo l'imponente geometria dei ponti metallici e degli opifici chiomati di fumo, per abolire le curve cascanti delle vecchie architetture» (QM 121).

A declamation to which the author-actor, returned to impersonating his own character, immediately responds:

> «Bravo! Anch'io da bambino ero futurista.
> E fanno Porto Marghera, l'unica vera rivoluzione a nordest.
> La prima area sul limite della Conterminazione, la seconda e la terza dentro.
> Ma era acqua edificabile.
> No, non più, era bene comune, come quello sottratto dalle valli da pesca, come il terreno dell'aeroporto… Era bene comune… demanio.
> – Appunto: de Manio. No xe miga mio.
> Nella terra delle villette *de Manio, ciava niente a nissun*» (QM 121).

The reflection upon the first phase of the transition towards an industrial Veneto – the creation of the chemicals factories centred hub of Porto Marghera – leads to a consideration of the basis on which such transition was grounded: the land is *Manio's*, not mine. What is under scrutiny here is the existence of a sense of public good, of what is publicly owned in that it belongs to the public, therefore to all citizens as opposed to 'others, so not me'. The uncontrolled development of industrial areas that transformed Veneto in the years of its economic upheaval was sustained by a broad diffusion of such mindset, which is what the author points at as he extends his observations to include the 'land of terraced houses'. Withholding from emitting any sentence on the upturn itself, Paolini concentrates on its effects on the landscape and rather questions the ideological premises backing the

development, i.e. the cultural attitude that made it possible not for the development to happen, but for it to happen in an unregulated and largely unplanned way.

Recalling the ancient debate between Alvise Cornaro and Cristoforo Sabbadino on the urban expansion of Venice, Paolini jokingly draws attention to a long-lived history of unhurried responsiveness from the population regarding questions of public interest: «Trent'anni per decidere il futuro della città con una partecipazione popolare altissima, "*ma, mi, par mi, rangeve!*"» (QM 118). An abiding attitude that centuries later, despite seriously problematic situations and incidents bearing dramatic effects, still persists in a general un-readiness to react to long-standing issues that do not immediately affect individuals' lives. One such situation is the case of the petrochemical plant of Porto Marghera, where the culpable underestimation of the effects of a constant exposure to vinyl chloride by the Montedison directors resulted into a growing number of workers contracting and dying from a rare form of cancer: «Porto Marghera *gaveva 'na classe operaia*, morta di tumori. [...] Da bambino ero futurista. Adesso no» (QM 124).[93] The idea that the author calls for reflection on is that, despite the gravity of this and other situations, once the emergency is resolved, the level of popular preoccupation and engagement seems to plunge back into a state of relieved and unworried tranquillity, rather than prompting a renewed awareness of the issues facing the territory. A dismissive attitude that the author summarizes in the conclusion of his recollection of the extraordinary flooding of 4th November 1966: «[q]uel 4 novembre Venezia

[93] As noted above, this is the subject matter of *Parlamento chimico* (2002).

ga avesto un infarto. Con l'infarto se uno non muore subito se *pol viver* ancora, basta star più attenti» (QM 93).

Consequently to the region's rapid development, the population of Veneto also underwent a radical change, both in terms of its relation to a new socio-economic environment and in terms of its composition, having swiftly tuned from a land of emigration to a land of immigration. What was once known as a cosmopolitan civilization, with Venice at the centre of trades connecting all corners of the world – «Ogni città ha un quartiere d'altre città: Costantinopoli è fatta tutta a spicchi di città diverse. Anche qui un mercato per i Turchi, uno per i Tedeschi, un centro per i Genovesi… *fūndūq*, arabo» (QM 103) – is nowadays a territory where the dominant feeling towards who is different is one of fear, a territory where diversity and the other are perceived as a threat to local identity:

> «[…] uomini bianchi di denti e scuri di pelle che vanno a piedi carichi di tappeti e tovaglie da Mestre a Scorzè, da Noale a Conegliano e si siede a riposare sulle panchine di Treviso. Non avevo memoria di gente che va a piedi così lontano dal centro. Ma la terra delle villette e dei capannoni non ha più centro» (QM 74).[94]

Once again recalling the 'land of the small detached houses', Paolini sheds light on an issue that he observes while talking about Venice, but indeed exists in the whole region. Following the economic boom, Veneto started attracting great numbers of workers, legal and illegal migrants, from other regions and countries, due to the extensive presence of industries in need of labour force. The social impact of such mutation became widely perceptible throughout the territory, often sparking

[94] In a footnote, Paolini clarifies that in 1997 Treviso still had benches, but that following an ordinance of the municipal council in 1998, benches were removed for reasons of public safety, as – the author points out ironically – multilingual and riotous crowds would gather and sit on them to rest and chat (QM 74).

tensions between the local population and the large multiracial community and culminating in invectives by Lega Nord's exponents, often accused of using racist and xenophobic language.

Venice represents the starting point for a general discourse centred around issues of identity involving Veneto and the Northeast. The author's conclusive remark that 'in order to proceed in life, one does not necessarily have to go in straight line' aptly closes the circle of a journey which ends in the same point where it began. «Da bambino ero futurista. Adesso no» (QM 124): Paolini seals his exploration of identity and territory with a stamp of renewed awareness. Leading him from the land to the water and back to the land, the circular motion that guided his journey poses *Il milione* as the blueprint for a broader exploration around the nature of people's relation to their territory.

3.2.4 *Bestiario veneto – Parole mate*: the inland

As has been outlined in this chapter, set along the trail of the 'teatro di narrazione', the original nucleus of Paolini's theatre developed around the telling of stories by the actor-narrator. If in early productions like *Gli album*, the narration was focused on biographical memories and historical events, with works like *Il milione* and *Bestiario veneto*, the initial core matter centred around the telling of a story developed into the telling of a geography. Bringing to its culmination a process that started with *Il milione*, with *Bestiatio veneto – Parole mate* Paolini employs the

narrative techniques of the 'teatro di narrazione' to depict Veneto's inland, using words as brushstrokes to paint a picture of its territory. The critical importance of *Bestiario veneto* originates precisely in the fact that this work represents the realisation on stage of the concept of *paesaggire*. If Paolini intends Zanzotto's coin as 'reading the signs of the transformation in what we see',[95] *Bestiario* is the enactment of such practice. By reading the landscape, observing its mutation and its people, Paolini reads the territory and by impersonating the author's readings on the stage, *Bestiario* becomes a metaphorical landscape that the audience can read itself. The analysis of the production presented here aims at highlighting how, in Paolini's work, landscape is moulded into an almost physical shape through the representation of characters that encapsulate the essence of the transformation of Veneto, thus becoming the touchstone on which to evaluate how the whole territory and the regional identity have changed.

One of the conclusive images of *Il Milione* is that of Venetian dwellers beginning a slow – at times shy – migration movement towards the inland, to Mestre, longing for a 'three-bedroom house with a radiator' (QM 123) as the sight of the industrialised countryside almost acquires the quality of a dream:

> «Mestre era bellissima, vista dalla Laguna… campagna, boschi… posto ideale per ville e villeggianti, la Riviera del Brenta, un sogno: i Veneziani cominciano a coltivare il sogno americano dei pionieri e iniziano la marcia attraverso le grandi pianure dell'Ovest, in cerca di terra da coltivare, lungo sette fiumi» (QM 109).

Symbolising a metaphoric journey from the waters to the inland, this pictures smoothly ferries us to explore Veneto on the other side of the lagoon.

[95] See section 4.2.2.

Complementary to *Il milione* in that it discloses the second facet of the city-countryside dichotomy which defines the region's identity, *Bestiario veneto* shares with its counterpart the nature of 'work in progress'. Also based on a 'quaderno' – the *sui generis* script that contains the text of the theatrical performance, annotations from the author's notebooks, interviews and conversations with poets and people met while travelling through the region, and drawn sketches – the performance of *Bestiario* underwent constant reshaping throughout the time of its staging: as happened with *Il milione*, each performance is a variation on the blueprint provided by the 'quaderno' adapted to the different settings and audiences.

However, if on the one hand the two productions are structurally similar, on the other hand, they differ substantially from the stylistic point of view, most evidently in the use of the language. As has been mentioned before, the reference to dialect poetry dominates *Bestiario veneto*, a phenomenon that does not occur in *Il milione*, despite the author's wide use of dialect in both productions. While in *Il milione* Italian and dialect blend together to compose the fabric of the speech, in *Bestiario* not only the two languages coexist, but dialect poetry is also integrated into the speech. Besides the considerations made above on the choice of using dialect – the motivations for which precede the stylistic outcomes of the operation – one other language-related factor plays a key role in the delivery of performances of *Bestiario veneto*: from comparing it with *Il milione*, it is immediately clear that, whereas the latter is characterised by a speech-like delivery, the diction's rhythm in the former is transformed to add a new level of musicality to the performance. This is achieved both through the integration of poetry within the text of the performance

and by moulding the text into a rhythmic, in places song-like speech, so that in *Bestiario* the difference between the 'quaderno' and the performances does not only lie in the inclusion, exclusion, or transformation of single passages according to the specific set, but also in the musical element that dominates the performance and for obvious reasons does not surface in the text.

While adopting a different stylistic approach to performance, on the plane of contents, *Il milione* and *Bestiario veneto* also represent two complementary sides of the author's portrayal of Veneto's territory. If with *Il milione* Paolini's focus was placed on an exploration of Venice and on the element of water, what the author looks at through *Bestiario* is the mainland, the urbanised countryside that extends across the territory of the region. Springing from a drive to complete a discourse started with the previous work, *Bestiario* incarnates the final stage of the author's switch from telling stories to telling a geography. If indeed in *Il milione* the figure of Marco Polo could still function as a point of reference holding together the general development of the narration, *Bestiario* follows a mainly geographic logic, juxtaposing scenes that are each a portrait of the region's territory taken from a different point of view, 'a collection of landscapes', as the author calls it:

> «Dopo il lavoro su Venezia mi è venuta voglia di continuare e di raccontare stavolta la terraferma, che è più o meno un modo diverso per chiamare il paese dove vivo […]. È una raccolta di paesaggi raccontati senza macchina fotografica, di persone e di storie di questa terra e di poeti […] che mi trasmettevano qualcosa di importante per farmi un'idea del luogo dove vivo» (BV 10).

The subject matter of *Bestiario* is the Veneto of «fiumi e ossari» that extends from the «galassia pedemontana» to the «laguna mondo» explored in *Il milione*. By evoking the image of a galaxy, the author offers a pan shot of the urbanised

countryside of Veneto as a proliferation of sparkling specks which switch on at night-time to sketch a synchronic map of industrialisation in the region. The first topographic elements to be forgotten,[96] rivers run across this map, defining the region's borders and recounting its history. Suffice it to think of the role of rivers like the Piave during World War I:

> «*Di qua e di là del Piave*… […] Perché da queste parti la memoria della Grande Guerra è più viva di quell'altra? […] Tutti i nomi dei paesi da queste parti parlano di quella guerra: Nervesa della Battaglia, Sernaglia della Battaglia, Moriago della Battaglia fino a Vittorio Veneto passando per l'Isola dei morti» (BV 24).

The memory of the Great War is preserved in place names as well as in the presence of many monuments dedicated to its dead, through charnel houses that, following Zanzotto, can be joined together to into a 'linea degli ossari' that goes from the Adriatic sea to the Channel passing through the Montello in Veneto.[97] For Paolini, these elements identify the historical and geographic coordinates that define Veneto and form the basic outline of the territory he intends to explore in *Bestiario veneto*. Setting these coordinates to delineate the subject of his scrutiny, the author uses them as a starting point to draw attention to the transformation that this territory underwent, not during the period of general economic growth after World War II – «La guerra era finita da un bel po', ma il dopoguerra non finiva mai» (BV 20) – but rather in the years following the oil crisis of 1973:

> «Una volta di qua e di là dal Piave ci stava solo un'osteria, adesso ci sono i più forti distretti d'Europa. Nelle sere limpide si vede dal Montello accendersi la Galassia Pedemontana coagulata in diverse nebulose secondo misteriose linee-guida. Lassù sotto il monte Pasubio, il grande comparto del tessile e delle

[96] The author refers to this in a few scenes in which he unsuccessfully asks for directions to the river Sile.

[97] In an interview with Paolini, Zanzotto reflects that «percorrere il Montello è incontrarsi a ogni piè sospinto con cippi, singoli monumentini alla memoria di vari caduti» (BV 102) and approximately defines a 'linea degli ossari' that runs across Europe through the Veneto mount.

> macchine industriali. Sotto il Montello, tra il Piave e Montebelluna, l'area dello scarpone. Attorno a Bassano del Grappa le stalle delle ceramiche. Lassù sotto le Alpi i vigneti miliardari del Cartizze. Laggiù verso Treviso, il regno di Benetton e dei suoi diecimila fornitori. Oltre il ponte della Priula verso Conegliano la 'Inox Valley' della ristorazione. […] Come si fa ma come si fa a delocalizzare un mondo così iperlocalizzato e stanziale…?» (BV 26).

Inspired by Paolo Rumiz's *La secessione leggera*, Paolini readapted a passage of the journalist's essay into this ballad-like enumeration of the industrial areas that sprung up across the Veneto countryside and their product specialisation. Thus he portrays a picture of the region as it appears after a process of intense urbanization turned the rural landscape of Veneto's countryside into a land of unending commercial and industrial activities. By sketching a range of scenes in which people interact with their territory, or with each other in the territory, Paolini recounts a transformation that began with an economic upturn, reshaped the landscape, and resulted in a modification of the social and cultural fabric of the region which profoundly altered people's perception of their territory.

As the author's gaze lands on the surface of Veneto's mainland, the different layers in which the process of radical transformation of the territory unfolds are all scrutinized, starting from the most superficial and visible one: the landscape. What the author points at is a countryside that used to be countryside, but is not anymore. The landscape in Veneto is dominated by the small detached houses and warehouses which first made their appearance in *Il milione*, the rural landscape that had characterized the region and its mainly agriculture-based economy for centuries is hardly recognizable by the contemporary observer: «ogni tanto due campi di granoturco o di soia spelacchiati a bordo strada ti illudono che sei fuori dal centro… No! La linea dei capannoni/villette ti corre parallela» (BV 27). Paolini paints a

picture in which the frantic rush to economic development did not follow any guidance nor took into account any overarching development plan, and industrialisation swept its way across the rural landscape creating confused and confusing road arrangements: «[l]a segnaletica agli incroci è demenziale, invece dei nomi dei comuni i nomi delle ditte ogni incrocio 60 ditte […]. Viaggiare qui è eccitante come sfogliare le pagine gialle» (BV 27-28).

These and other confusing occurrences, epiphenomena of a profound and radical structural transformation, are what stands at the origin of a work like *Bestiario Veneto*: for Paolini, the necessity to tell a geography, to 'recount landscapes without using a camera' originates precisely from the feeling of 'spaesamento' caused by circumstances like the ones just mentioned. In *Bestiario*, this feeling works as a nucleus around which the text of the performance emerges and gravitates. It is in this sense of alienation and in the impossibility to fully recognise the surrounding territory that the author's urge to try and understand is rooted. The region's territory was radically modified by industrialisation over a period of time that was too short for people who were born before the start of this process to grasp the dimension of the change. Reflecting on the feeling of puzzlement that the transformation of a territory can induce, during an interview Paolini explains the process by comparing it to people's relation to modern technology:

> «Ogni generazione ha avuto a che fare con cose da apprendere e se c'erano già erano naturali se venivano dopo erano tecnologiche. La quantità di modificazioni del paesaggio nell'arco di una sola generazione trova un equivalente nello spaesamento dei non nativi digitali rispetto all'uso delle nuove tecnologie. Per tutti coloro che sono nati prima di questo paesaggio che è cresciuto velocemente c'è lo sradicamento da quel che c'era prima e un po' la sensazione confusa di non riuscire a legare come e quando questi

> cambiamenti sono avvenuti perché sono stati rapidi e sovrapposti. Se io leggo questo come tecnologia, lo spaesamento è dovuto al fatto che troppe cose sono avvenute dopo la mia nascita».[98]

By referring to the sense of estrangement that people tend to feel towards those things – like digital technologies – that are not native to them, Paolini sketches a lucid idea of the 'spaesamento' that the transformation of the territory has inspired in that portion of society that saw it unfolding before their eyes: as happens with technology, the process of understanding and adapting to a transforming landscape can take a longer time than it takes for the shift itself to happen. Consequently, the key factor in the emergence of such feeling is the pace at which change occurs: with no time to reflect upon the nature and implications of the remoulding of an agricultural civilization into an industrial one, society failed to wholly adjust to the substantial reshaping of its own roots. The inability to grasp the full breadth of the transition, the fact that the process of adaptation was limited to the economic plane but failed to include the cultural sphere, was perceived by the sharpest observers of society as a loss of meaning, as the removal of a intelligible cultural framework within which society situates itself.

The confusion originated by the failure to recognise a landscape that has been radically transformed in the turn of a few years adds on to the fact that in this scenario, nothing seems to indicate that the region still bears the inherent features that define its identity:

> «[i]n dieci venti chilometri setacciati a passo d'uomo […], non c'è più niente che ti dica questo è veneto, né architettura, né nomi, né vestiti, né gesti, né lingua [...]
> Lingua? […] Certo per uno che viene dalla Toscana è chiaro che sei del Veneto, ma tu che ci vivi, tu che ci sei là dentro, lo senti quello che sta

[98] Unpublished interview, 2014.

> diventando? Qui si parla un italiano da segreteria telefonica […]. Qui si siga un dialetto che sembra un fax andato a male […].
> MA DA NOIALTRI SE MAGNA BEN
> sì, ma non capisco più le parole, il paesaggio…
> MA SE MAGNA BEN
> Ho capito, ma i don't understand…
> MA SE MAGNA BEN!
> E mi trovo un po' spaesà» (BV 29).

If driving across the Veneto countryside is to make one's way through a dissemination of warehouses and blocks of flats, small detached houses and factories, where the distinction between industrial areas and residential ones, as well as the boundaries between different towns are virtually inexistent, Paolini notes that also the language spoken in the region is subject to a process of flattening and homogenization. In the passage just quoted the author introduces a parallel between the transformation of landscape and that of language: as the landscape of the region has turned into an unintelligible entity, Paolini realises that the sense of alienation he feels towards it extends to the words spoken by the people too. Based on the homologation of languages and dialects that Pasolini had anticipated and Zanzotto also refers to,[99] the author's observations point at the impoverishment of the language as one of the elements that – together with the defacement of the landscape – determine his feeling of 'spaesamento'. Thus, Paolini ties a tight net of connections between the two elements of landscape and languages: on one side, he acknowledges that the shift in the appearance of territory inspired the observation that the language was also implicated into a broader process of transition. On the other side, whilst both factors concur to trigger a necessity for reflection, when it

[99] For Pasolini, see *Nuove questioni linguistiche* in the issue «Rinascita» published on 26 December 1964, for Zanzotto, see Paolini's quote from BV 61 on page 253.

comes to engaging with such issues, the author feels that languages fails him: «[m]e ciamo dentro lo già detto. Cosa posso fare? Non ho le parole, servirebbe un altro parlar. E io non le trovo le parole per parlare con questi della mia gente, questi che 'Londra bisogna andarghe se no ti si un ebete, se no te ghe si mai andà'» (BV 34). The necessity to engage with and re-appropriate territory is what drives Paolini to blow a whistle and call for attention and reflection through his theatre, but how does one communicate when one does not have the words?

Firstly, *Bestiario veneto* lays its foundations in the consideration that the transformation of the landscape, which is the most evident effect of the economic transition from agricultural to industrial society in Veneto, is part of a much broader modification in the structure of territory, of which landscape is one aspect – while others include for instance social relations, cultural references, and language. As the author's engagement is channelled through the theatrical form, communication and language assume by necessity a crucial role, therefore urging a profound reflection on the matter of their significance within the framework of such process. Retrospectively commenting on the origins of *Bestiario veneto*, Paolini draws a parallel between the fragmentation of landscape and that of language in contemporary Veneto that offers an insight into his approach to the subject as well as a key through which to read the production:

> «Credo che ci sia un nesso stretto tra frammentazione del paesaggio e frammentazione del linguaggio e spaesamento […]. Sento che il *vulnus*, la ferita del paesaggio è davvero una cicatrice sulla pelle mal chiusa e tutto questo è come se avesse delle conseguenze sul modo di parlare, sul modo di guardare, sui sensi, sul funzionamento del cervello».[100]

[100] Unpublished interview, 2014.

By linking the two elements, the author does more than just establishing a connection: what is implied in the acknowledgement of such relation is the idea that territory is a complex construction whose multiple components are interlocked and reflect transformations happening on a range of different levels. Paolini's starting assumption is that the modification of the landscape in Veneto does not merely consist in a change in its appearance due to the development of industries and infrastructures, but it is underpinned by an epochal transition involving territory in its complexity. Although territorial structures develop over centuries through sequences of transitions like the one in question, what makes the case of contemporary Veneto a peculiar one is the pace of such transition: it is precisely the accelerated rhythm of it that created a sense of cultural uncertainty, «[e] io non so più se sono in un Piccolo mondo antico che muore o in una Los Angeles che nasce» (BV 30).[101]

If *Bestiario veneto* indeed puts a strong focus on the transformation of the territory of Veneto and of its landscape during the last decades of the 20th century, it is nonetheless fundamental to underline that Paolini's production revolves not so much around the process of transition itself, but rather on its outcome. The author dwells in fact on the evocation of the current post-industrial phase of economic development, rather than on the years of the upturn. The Veneto that the public see in *Bestiario* is the same Veneto that Carlotto describes in his *Nordest*: a region whose landscape is dominated by a seamless fabric of industrialised countryside

[101] Interestingly, Paolini refers precisely to Los Angeles. As will become clear in the next chapter, the one between Veneto and the American city is an apt parallel, the two territorial entities resembling each other in their being constantly expanding and centre-less cities, defined by Edward Soja as *expolis*.

and where unregulated economic growth weakened the pillars of cultural identity producing a fertile ground for identity myths and sinister surges of intolerance. However, such scenario is not so much the conclusion, but rather the starting point of both authors' survey. The phase documented is not the phase of the upturn, but a stage at which the growth has reached its pinnacle and for example, big industries seek to relocate abroad to find cheaper work force:

> «'DELOCALIZZARE, andaremo via tutti. I ne sofega, 'le tasse, 'le ta-ta-tasse ne ciava tuto el guadagno. […] Delocalizzare, porteremo in Asia le machine e le linee di produzion. Co le trentacinque moriremo'. I siga, i siga… na vòlta i sigava i operai e i mezzadri adèsso siga i paroni» (BV 26).

Having defined what it is that Paolini talks about in *Bestiario*, the following step is to understand how he approaches his subject and in this perspective a crucial point needs to be made, which ultimately concerns the work's objective. One could argue that the stance taken by authors like Paolini and Carlotto, by other writers like Rumiz and Stella, but also by Diamanti in his sociological analysis, pursue a blind criticism against the industrialisation of Veneto's territory without fully taking into account the benefits of such process, like for example a large part of the region's population being relieved from a condition of poverty, or technologically advanced businesses being attracted to the area. What is fundamental to stress with regards to this criticism – and in order to understand the significance of a production like *Bestiario veneto* – is that the author's aim is not to lament the vanishing of a previously existing civilization where human activities and natural world co-existed more harmoniously. The key he employs in *Bestiario* is not a nostalgic one and to impose upon it a Manichean separation between a good pre-industrial Veneto and a bad post-industrial Veneto would mean to provide a simplistic interpretation of

this production and of the author's work in general. Rather than expressing a thoroughly negative judgement on the impact of economic development on the Veneto landscape, the grounds on which *Bestiario* is based are the cognizance of the transition and the necessity to understand it. Referring to a previous historical and economic phase thus serves the purpose of retracing the origins of a transformation that is not only economic, but also social and cultural. As the outcomes of such transformation have not been fully comprehended, going back to the roots is a way of starting from a framework that is instead well known. «Ma cos'è questo un inno all'Arcadia, alla perduta civiltà rurale, che cosa sto cercando? […] Non è l'arcadia, non è un mondo di cui avere nostalgia, è solo qualcosa di familiare» (BV 48-51): the acknowledgment of the fact that the recent industrial history of Veneto originates in the history of Veneto before industrialisation and that, in order to understand the previous, one should begin from considering the latter, constitutes the backbone of Paolini's work in *Bestiario*.

If the author's feeling of alienation towards his territory indeed comes from the fact that Veneto's territory has become an entity that he struggles to recognise, yet the idea of having lost the connection with a centuries-old history, of having missed some crucial point that would allow him to make sense of how the region's cultural identity has developed does not coincide with a nostalgic reminiscence of the rural world that has now disappeared. Once more, Paolini clarifies this point by saying «[n]on ho nostalgia, però un po' di paura di aver disimaparato qualcosa di importante» (BV 55) and by explaining that this feeling of uncertainty springs from

the observation that, in contemporary Veneto, landscape and the human element are too often left out of the equation.

In Paolini's analysis, on one side is the observation that the processes of decision-making seem to be limited to political and economic perspectives:

> «C'è un eccesso di attenzione politica, economica su questo paese, dell'uomo e del paesaggio non si parla mai.
> Io provo una specie di saturazione a furia di sentire parlare di lavoro come 'prodotto interno lordo da record', di economia come 'lotta tra iniqua oppressione fiscale e orgogliosa capacità aziendale', di politica come 'storica rivendicazione secessionistica da un canton all'altro'.
> Ho come perso le coordinate di questo posto […] e ti viene la tentazione di chiamarti fuori. No, col cavolo, io non mi chiamo fuori: questa è la mia città.
> My hometown Barba Zuchòn town
> Un'unica grande città tanti comuni tante periferie tanti sindaci in realtà nessun centro, nessuna periferia» (BV 27).

On the other side is the strong stance that the author takes against the irreparable damages induced by a short-sighted exploitation of the landscape:

> «Qualcosa dovremmo demolire per dare aria al paesaggio, quando impareremo a '*paesaggire*' a leggere i segni del cambiamento in quello che vediamo. Quando impareremo che tutto questo male lo facciamo a noi stessi che il paesaggio non è una quinta asportabile senza che strappino anche noi dalla scena e che per questo ci troviamo persi e spaesati» (BV 93).

What needs to be considered, and what Paolini strongly advocates for, is that landscape never functions as a passive background. Bender's words – landscape is never inert –[102] echo in the author's words just quoted, appealing for the necessity to learn how to read the landscape and to understand that the way in which it changes is nothing but a reflection of how a territory and its society have changed as well.

Collocating his work in the perspective just outlined, the author subsequently proceeds to undertake a route that allows him to reflect on his sense of

[102] See chapter 1.3.

'spaesamento' while at the same time indicating a way to 'paesaggire', to read the landscape and reconnect with the region's identity and memory: Paolini describes a 'zoo-paesaggio'. By recalling the tradition of Medieval treatises about animals, *Bestiario* uses the living creatures that are closest to the natural elements of territory in order to look at it and understand it through their eyes. The 'bestie' that populate Paolini's bestiary, however, are not only the many figures of dogs, pigs, birds, and fish in the text of the production: they are also the poets he often quotes and reads during the performances. The vicinity of the animal world and of the poets' voices to the region's landscape is condensed and explained in what constitutes as a second crucial nucleus in *Bestiario* and can be pinpointed by the word 'eus'. The 'eus'[103] are the voices of the animals, the noises they emit that one cannot simply hope to hear while walking through a forest: one needs to stay still and quiet and listen, only then will he/she be able to hear the 'eus'. In the unfolding of *Bestiario,* these voices represent a connection between human beings and the world surrounding them. By drawing this parallel, Paolini indicates what he believes to be the way to relocate the connection, not merely with the natural world of which the landscape is an expression, but with the regions' identity and history, and ultimately with its territory. Listening to the 'eus' of the poets means to re-discover a collective memory and to lay the foundations for a renewed awareness and understanding of one's own roots. Like Ernesto Calzavara's dog, the poets' voices thus become the vehicle of a profound reflection and comprehension of the surrounding world:

[103] The word comes from the dialect used by Paolini's friend Mauro Corona as he explains to the author that «se vuoi sentire le voci degli animali non puoi andare nel bosco, camminare dritto e sperare di sentirne le voci. [...] La regola prima è di stare tranquilli, fermi in una radura, un'ora o due e allora puoi sentire i movimenti delle bestie… le voci» (BV 43-44).

> «El can camina sui sassi.
> Se no ghe fusse el can
> che sta tra mi e i sassi
> no capirìa sto mondo
> no capirìa» (BV 94).

The relation between humans and their environment then runs through an 'in-between' channel, which is the poetic voice. *Bestiario veneto* is an invitation to listen, to try and rebuild a collective memory by hearing what was there before the present time, to question roots to understand where they are grounded. Thus poets will remind us that we have a history and that understanding it will raise questions that need to be answered: «i poeti non sono solo l'arcadia e non sono dei nonni benevoli, sono altri mondi con cui parlare e ti dicono che noi, 'gli umani' di adesso, siamo arrivati e ci siamo insediati qui da padroni, senza memoria e senza identità, ma da dove siamo immigrati tutti noi?» (BV 58).

In *Bestiario*, Paolini points at the poetic 'eus' as a repository of memory and source of reflection. If, to the author, this is a fundamental point to start from in order to recuperate the bond between society and territory, what is also of capital importance to him is to rebuild a vocabulary through which to communicate this collective memory, to reconstruct the language he feels has failed him. Thus, following Meneghello's footsteps, *Bestiario* is built upon the belief that when a word is lost, it is not just the word that dies, the thing it named dies with it too. So the only way to preserve the memory of things and of the world surrounding us is to name them, which is precisely what Paolini aims to do with his *Bestiari*:

> «Questa è la suggestione di Walt Whitman,[104] che io non amo per niente, però me lo ritrovo tra i piedi continuamente. Il delirio di Whitman mi è a volte

[104] The reflection is a response to a question about his statement «non ho più storie da raccontare, solo luoghi, fili d'erba» (*Bestiario italiano*, 80).

> francamente insopportabile, però lo capisco: nella sua ossessione di nominare tutto fa esistere le cose, e questo è fondamentale. La mia logica nei *Bestiari* è quella di costruire dei glossari».[105]

Here the author refers to both *Bestiario veneto* and *Bestiario italiano*, but it is easy to understand how, if these productions are meant to function as cultural glossaries, language would play a key role in the author's general conception of both works, and especially in *Bestiario veneto*, in which the compilation of the cultural glossary extends to the layer of dialect too. In Paolini's view, in order to reassert the reality of things and therefore the knowledge of territory in all its components, from landscape to society, the defining function of language needs to be propounded through a reconsideration of its expressions: «[l]'avanzata del remissiamento che vien fora dal mondo come Zanzotto chiama l'omologazione dei linguaggi […] ha lasciato un segno sulle cose come se un mondo virtuale sostituisse l'esperienza reale delle cose. Così oggi per raccontare ancora questo paesaggio ho sentito il bisogno di ripartire da questi libri, da questi autori […]» (BV 61). Rethinking the language, rebuilding a vocabulary, and doing so by starting from the poets – specifically from those who use dialect – is therefore of capital importance, because:

> «[c]ome lo traduci gombina? Che in certe parti chiamano vaneda o vanesa, come lo traduci in italiano? Aiuola? Ma le aiuole non sono coltivate solo a fiori? La parola più corretta sarebbe zolla o porca, che però è proprio toscano. Il fatto è che nessuno coltiva l'orto in italiano» (BV 61).

To maintain the specificity of the language is the path Paolini aims to follow with his work. Naming things is a way to infuse them with a meaning that they would not otherwise have, which is they inherent reality: to name something is to make

[105] Unpublished interview, 2014.

that thing real and what the author intends to do with *Bestiario* is to name the things that make the reality of Veneto's cultural identity.

By activating this process through his theatre, Paolini becomes a bridge that connects people – his public – to territory. Far from seeking to impose his view on his audience, the author's objective is instead to trigger questioning, to inspire reflection: «[l]'attore è un ponte, il suo compito è far conoscere, far saltare i muri […]; non è quello di convincere, ma di far girare le idee» (BV 12). By casting a light on aspects of the regional culture overlooked by society, the author-actor's geographical narration pulls together loose threads to weave a sense for an otherwise fragmented reality. 'Paesaggire', listening, reading, naming: avoiding any kind of moralisation and didacticism, Paolini points at these exercises as the way to fill in the gaps and understand matters of identity, roots, and territory:

> «[i]mmaginare per me non significa credere nel virtuale, nel diavolo o nel mito della Padania Promessa. Immaginare non è rifiutare quel che c'è per scappare da un'altra parte, è invece saper leggere, vedere, ascoltare, riconoscere, paesaggire, dare un nome e un peso a quello che c'è per capire meglio cosa manca e cosa si rischia» (BV 36).

The analysis conducted so far highlights the presence of a precise development in Paolini's survey on Veneto's territory: from waters to land, from Venice to the countryside, the author explores aspects of the transformation of landscape and of the cultural and social reality of the region because the radical shift brought by the peculiar path of the economic development in the region left these spheres neglected in the public discourse. The journey he embarks on through works like *Il milione* and *Bestiario veneto* is as much a discovery for him as it is an experience to share with his audience with the intent of inspiring the need to dig into cultural identity to understand roots. A key aspect surfacing from the present

survey of the works that Paolini dedicates to the region of Veneto is that the author places an emphasis on elements of a regional reality like landscape and language, while these emerge as expressions of the complex structure that is territory. The author's criticism against the excess of attention towards matters concerning politics and economy in the region thus appears as a call to reconsider territory in its entirety.

Although it is clear that the basic lines of the author's discourse are transferable as similar foundations can sustain reflections and debate around other territorial entities – and, as indicated by their titles, *Bestiario veneto* and *Bestiario italiano* indeed share intent and structure – it is also important to note that the author employs a model to mould it to a specific regional reality. Besides the author's obvious ties to Veneto being at the origin of his focus on the region, Paolini also recognises the importance of generally adopting a local perspective when analysing issues concerning territory.[106] It is only by filtering the narration through a local perspective, by using the poetic voice to tie the present reality to its roots, that the process of recollection of a shared memory can be triggered. In order to do this, projecting the intent of his work into a future dimension, «[l]a memoria […] serve ancora, la nostalgia non più, l'ironia è preziosa, l'epica può essere utile, ma serve immaginazione, per paesaggire, per imparare a leggere in quello che ci sta intorno i segni di ciò che è stato e di quel che sta arrivando» (Paolini 2000, 67).

[106] As he states in the 2014 unpublished interview, «non si puo` parlare di queste cose in astratto, bisogna sempre fare l'osservatore locale».

CHAPTER 4

MASSIMO CARLOTTO: ACKNOWLEDGING THE TRANSFORMATION

4.1 *IMPEGNO* THROUGH CRIME FICTION

4.1.1 A *fragmented* context

When analysing the opus of Massimo Carlotto, the features that stand out as defining this author's work are his use of genre – predominantly crime writing – and his attention to territory, both in broad terms and in the sense of a lengthened observation of the specific territory of Veneto. As will become clear throughout this chapter, Carlotto uses crime writing as a tool to reflect on a range of social issues pertaining to the specific reality of the territory he focuses on, which is often that of Veneto or any other stretch of land he might be dedicating his writing to. Besides the fact that the author has widely expressed his take on the genre explicitly, even a very brief overview of the themes of his novels would be sufficient to reveal the kind of intent he is pursuing when employing it as a tool for casting a light and denunciate a number of social, political, and economical issues. Therefore, before moving on to analyse the specifics of Carlotto's work a brief premise will be needed

to outline the context within which the writer's work is situated. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the elements composing such panorama, on one side the author's work needs to be related to the development of national literary trends since the 1990s, with specific reference to the questions of 'realism' and *impegno*, on the other side Carlotto's oeuvre finds its collocation in the frame of the Italian tradition of crime writing.

Far from being two matters to be discussed separately, the question of *impegno* and the highly debated one of an apparent comeback of 'realism' in contemporary Italian literature will in fact prove to be very strictly entangled. The matter of a presumed 'return to realism' in contemporary Italian literature became one of fervent dispute following the publication of issue 57 of *Allegoria* in 2008.[107] The issue was published with the intent of questioning the possibility of a 'return to reality' in both Italian narrative and cinema after the end of the postmodern phase. Setting the exhaustion of postmodernist poetics as their initial assumption – «Sebbene non vi sia accordo su una fine dell'età postmoderna [...] sono tuttavia numerosi e innegabili i segni di un esaurirsi delle poetiche postmoderniste» (7) – editors and contributors to the volume detected a «ritorno alla realtà, inteso sia come recupero dei modi storici del realismo […], sia come impegno degli intellettuali sui temi della vita civile» (7). Observing this phenomenon unfold at an international level, [108] the volume notes its existence also as a substantial trend in Italian literary

[107] The volume is issue no.1 of 2008. Edited by Raffaele Donnarumma, Gilda Policastro, and Giovanna Taviani, the issue was published by the theme 'Ritorno alla realtà? Narrative e cinema alla fine del postmoderno'. Refence to the volume in the bibliography can be found under 'Donnarumma'.

[108] Referring to writers like José Saramago, Amos Oz, J. M. Coetzee, Jonathan Franzen, and Don DeLillo among others, Donnarumma hypothesizes a reaction against literature conceived as a

and cinematographic production since the 1990s and the issue of the journal is indeed meant to investigate «i modi di questo ritorno nella narrativa e nel cinema italiano degli ultimi quindici anni circa» (7). [109]

In the pursuit of this aim, the journal's enquiry then continues to include, among other essays, eight interviews with eight Italian writers, each one asked to discuss the alleged end of the postmodern era, the possibility of a 'return to reality', and the social and political role of literature[110]. Although the authors' responses articulate in a complex and multifaceted discussion, one interesting element that seems to emerge from the analysis of the eight interviews is the existence of a feeling of general scepticism on the side of the writers towards the idea of a 'return to realism', a dubiousness that the authors express both with regards to their own work, and with regards to the general scenario of contemporary Italian literature.[111]

«pratica derealizzante» (27) and a recovery of faith in narrative as an instrument of analysis of present-day society and of the material world: «questi scrittori hanno fiducia nel racconto come strumento d'analisi della società presente, della vita interiore, del mondo materiale» (27).

[109] The volume touches on the theme of cinema as well, however, for the purpose of our discourse here, only the discussion relating to narrative will be taken into consideration.

[110] The list of interviewed authors includes Mauro Covacich, Marcello Fois, Giuseppe Genna, Nicola Lagioia, Aldo Nove, Antonio Pascale, Laura Pugno, and Vitaliano Trevisan.

[111] A few examples of the reactions – some mild, some more fierce – generated in the interviewees will help to clarify the tone of the piece as well as the character of the debate that later sparked from the publication of the volume. The first to be interviewed, Mauro Covacich questions the very notion of 'realtà' that the editors intend to propose: «L'ossessione per il reale nasconde l'angoscia per la smaterializzazione del mondo fisico. Ogni fatto sembra offrirsi già subito come oggetto di finzione [...]. Rispetto a questo, è normale che ci sia una reazione anti-finzione, ma questo ritorno alla realtà, come lo chiamate voi, non è detto che significhi un ritorno alla verità» (10). Upon the same topic, Marcello Fois sounds rather dismissive when it comes to assessing the relevance of the element of 'realtà': «la realtà è una categoria senza nessun interesse per un narratore. Nel senso che conta piuttosto la verosimiglianza che la realtà» (11). Considering the subject of a 'return to reality', Giuseppe Genna takes a step back into the debate and also questions the roots of the idea of such return by noting: «non mi pare che il postmoderno si sia mai allontanato dalla realtà» (12). Subsequently, he notices that Italian literature never fully absorbed the essence of American Postmodernism, but rather created a specific declination of modernism that was labelled 'postmodern' by critics, hence, he says, «non parlerei di 'ritorno alla realtà', quanto di ritorno al racconto» (12). A rather strong stance is taken by Nicola Lagioia, for whom «il concetto di 'ritorno alla realtà' applicato alla buona letteratura, a mio parere non ha senso. [...] Ogni romanzo che ha qualcosa da dire si occupa della realtà» (16). The examples given indeed provide an idea of the

The publication of the volume sparked a heated debate among critics and the journal's stance has been criticized by some who held *Allegoria*'s interpretation, and Donnarumma's in particular, constrained and based on a weak claim, as instances detected in the contemporary literary practise were made to coincide with a general tendency that instead seemed to be rather vague. One of the most powerful responses was that of Andrea Cortellessa, who in turn edited, in November 2008, a supplement to *Specchio* where he conducted an attack against the curators of *Allegoria* accusing them of using sensationalist slogans without a valid foundation and, more precisely, of talking about 'realism' «mai specificando di quale realismo si tratti» (138). *Specchio* then responded to *Allegoria* with a series of essays, almost counter-interviews, to writers and critics,[112] whose intent is to question the presuppositions of a 'return to reality' as well as to highlight the faults in the discussion, as for example Gabriele Pedullà does as he notes that the whole debate around realism lacks a reflection upon the role of style.[113]

The dispute around the issue was protracted as many voices joined from within and beyond the national borders.[114] Nonetheless, the many contrasting views

hesitation that met part of arguments sustained by the editors of Allegoria. Despite some points of agreement, for example on the belief in literature's ability to have a social and political power, on which topic Genna says «Mi pare che dopo gli effetti meritati di Gomorra, la possibilità di una letteratura incisiva [...] sia a dir poco innegabile» (10), it is fairly clear that the responses of the authors interviewed by Raffaele Donnarumma and Gilda Policastro do not thoroughly align to the idea of a return to realism as postulated by the editors of the journal.

[112] These include Antonio Scurati, Gabriele Pedullà, Tommaso Ottonieri, Andrea Bajani, Laura Pugno, and Daniele Giglioli.

[113] «[R]ispetto alla grande tradizione novecentesca di studi sul realismo (da Auerbach a Barthes), dal dibattito contemporaneo [è] sempre assente qualsiasi richiamo allo stile» (142).

[114] To quote one example, Donnarumma intervened among others in the collection of *essays Finzione cronaca realtà*, published in 2011 and edited by Hanna Serkowska. Bringing together the parallel discussions of realism and the opposition between fiction and non-fiction, the volume embraces the idea of a return to realism in contemporary Italian literature, encompassing analyses of works by various authors like Enrico Deaglio, Walter Siti, Eraldo Affinati, Wu Ming, Massimo

on the subject left the question of a 'return to reality' in contemporary Italian literature essentially unresolved. As the impossibility to find a common ground to define the matter inspires the necessity to pose further questions, it appears that a different approach might provide a helpful tool to disentangle a complex issue. Indeed it appears that a more proficuos persepective would be to consider that the instances of a new focus on reality that the editors of *Allegoria* detected might coincide with a renewed interest towards a tradition in Italian literature that is not that of 'realism', but rather that of *impegno*. What underpins the idea of a rupture between a postmodern phase and a 'return to realism' is the assumption that the resurfacing of narrative modes after a phase of stylistic experimentation indicates that before such 'return' all traces of interest towards social and political issues in contemporary literature had been erased. When analysing the literary production relative to this period, which is customarily indicated as owing to the postmodern zeitgeist and being chiefly preoccupied with meta-reflections and linguistic experimentation, it becomes clear that boundaries become in fact blurry. Among the critical interventions that take the matter into consideration, some convincingly embrace a position to which this study aligns in that they aim at debunking the idea that what is generally indicated as 'postmodern' in the Italian tradition had dismissed any kind of social and political engagement through literature.

One such study is *Fragments of 'impegno'. Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2000* by Jennifer Burns. While delineating

Carlotto, Giuseppe Genna and others in a cross-genre overview on recent Italian literature that sides on the 'return of reality'.

an historical overview of the tradition of *impegno* in Italian lietrature,[115] Burns argues that, although critics have generally identified the 1960s phase of experimentalism with an interruption in the path of social and political engagement in literature, what textual analysis seems to point out in fact, is the existence of different lines of development: while in general terms the literary production tended to turn towards linguistic experimentation, this shift of focus did not necessarily cast aside the idea of *impegno* in literature. On the contrary, the persistence of social and political engagement surfaces – sometimes in more obvious sometimes in more covert ways – through the works of many writers, ranging from Antonio Tabucchi, to Andrea De Carlo, Pier Vittorio Tondelli and some among Italian immigrant authors,[116] during what is generally intended as the politically unengaged 'postmodern' phase. If it is true the modes and language of narration underwent a phase of self-interrogation, it would be misleading to say that meta-narratives and linguistic experiments completely silenced the commitment to social and political issues that was indeed maintained in the work of some writers like the ones mentioned above. Moreover, is it possible to interpret the phase of the *neoavanguardia* as the transition from one kind to another of *impegno*. As Burns explains, this phase rather prepared the ground for the following developments of

[115] Burns traces the origins of *impegno* back to the early post-WW II years distinguishing three main phases in its development: during the first two decades following the war, in a cultural scenario dominated by the influence of the Italian Communist Party, the literary practice was imbued with the idea that writers should engage with political and social issues. The growing uneasiness towards an idea of impegno as commitment to a precise political agenda aroused criticism and lead to the subsequent phase of experimentalism of the neoavanguardia in the 1960s and '70s, which coincided with the erosion of the principles backing the idea of politically committed literature that had dominated the previous decades. Later on, during the 1980s and '90s, the exhaustion of such experience would leave an empty space for new literary practices, which in turn developed following different directions and seemingly rediscovered a way to impegno.

[116] Burns analyses works by Tahar Ben Jelloun, Pap Khouma, and Mohsen Melliti among others.

the 1980s and 1990s: the 'spaccatura' identified by Pasolini[117] – the 1960s – could be interpreted as the interruption which liberates the idea of commitment from the ideological straitjacket applied in the immediate post-war period.

The miscellaneous volume *Postmodern* Impegno. *Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnung in 2009 shares a similar premise and perspective. Like Burns, the editors and contributors to the volume «do not agree that the postmodern rejection of universalism and meta-narratives necessarily marks the end of *impegno*, or indeed of emancipatory politics» (3): advancing from the same view, the idea of 'postmodern *impegno*' not only implies that postmodernism did not represent an halt in the development of the poetics of social and political commitment in Italian literature, but assert that the questioning attitude characterising postmodernism is a condition that naturally fosters such kind of commitment. Aligning itself to this line of interpretation, this study excludes that a 'comeback of realism' could be defined in such terms and embraces instead the idea that, as the experimental phase of the *neoavanguardie* was concluded, the literary current relating to the *impegno* tradition resurfaced more clearly in the Italian literary scenario.

As will become clear, Carlotto fully embraces the tradition of *impegno*. If what has been said so far identifies the first term of reference to contextualise his production in terms of contents, a second, closely related coordinate is needed to

[117] In a 1973 review of *Le città invisibili* by Italo Calvino, Pasolini reflects that at the beginning of the 1960s «qualcosa si spaccava, e io e lui [Calvino] eravamo sulle parti opposte della spaccatura». In Burn's interpretation, this rupture identified by Pasolini is representative of two separate ways of intending the social and political role of literature as well as of different approaches towards the innovations introduced by the *neoavanguardie*.

outline a complete plane of reference: the tradition of Italian crime writing, which strongly influences his style.[118] Despite an initial lack of critical attention, the genre proliferated and evolved within the Italian literary tradition, shaped in its development by the works of national founding fathers such as Giorgio Scerbanenco, Loriano Machiavelli, and Leonardo Sciascia. Inherently concerned with themes such as the rule of law and its breaking, the quest for justice and public weal, crime writing can offer a privileged view point to observe the world of criminality and therefore a prime instrument for literary reflection in the fields of law, justice, the State, and ethical and moral integrity. Decisively preoccupied with such themes, during the 1960s, authors like Sciascia and Scerbanenco in particular, first moved towards moulding the genre into an instrument to analyse Italian post-war society and to denunciate the State's dysfunctions, the corruption and drifting of institutions and politics in the country. Titles like *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) or the Duca Lamberti series of the late 1960s stretched the traditional structure of the genre, turning the criminal plot into an extremely valuable tool to lay bare the

[118] An imported genre in Italian literature, crime fiction became popular following the publication of the Mondadori series 'I libri gialli', which first appeared in 1929 under the direction of Lorenzo Montano (a pseudonym for Danilo Lebrecht). A writer, scholar, and among the founders of *La ronda*, Montano collaborated with Arnoldo Mondadori to start the series with the publication of *La strana morte del Sig. Benson* by S.S. Van Dine. Originally consisting for the major part of translated American, British, and French crime novels, the series started to include Italian authors during the 1930s. Although censored by the fascist regime during the war, the series was the main vehicle for the proliferation of the genre in Italy which enjoyed a wide popularity among the public. Nonetheless, due to the idea that a plot-focused genre would naturally privilege functionality over artistic value in writing, crime writing was met with suspicion and long frowned upon and considered a minor and escapist genre by the critics. Even when established writers like Carlo Emilio Gadda, Leonardo Sciascia and, more recently, Umberto Eco started resorting to it, the side of their oeuvre dedicate to crime writing would be approached as 'letteratura alta' wherein the use of a crime narrative structure served as a mere divertissement to the author. It was only recently, and in connection with the vast success of a new wave of crime fiction dominating the Italian literary panorama from the 1990s onwards, that the genre gained a renewed critical attention and its significance within the Italian literary contexts started to be recognised and researched.

functioning of Italy's society and its deep-seated contradictions. In these works, the details and solution of the crime share an equal relevance with elements such as the Sicilian and Milanese setting and the inquiry and social focus of the novels. Gathering such legacy, Italian crime authors have since progressively employed this genre as a means to engage with social, ethical and political issues relative to their contemporary reality. Its popularity steadily increasing, crime writing has flourished on the Italian literary scene especially since the early 1990s, with authors like Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli, and Marcello Fois at the forefront of a 'new' wave of Italian *giallo*.[119] Undoubtedly appealing to vast readerships, it is easy to understand how crime writing derives a lot of its inborn captivation from the intrigue generated by the investigation process and from the pleasurable experience of observing the plot unfold and the mystery being resolved thanks to the skills of the investigator. Such inherent qualities of the genre, however, also imply that crime writing can be used as a valuable and flexible tool to communicate contents to wider audiences. This element is especially interesting within the context of the contemporary Italian scene, as one particular trait that characterises the new wave of Italian crime writing that started in the 1990s is the prominence of an element of *impegno*, namely the focus on topics and issues that are crucial within the current social and political state of affairs in the country. As the presence of some specific critical works such as *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*, and as Giuliana Pieri argues, the Italian *giallo* of the 1990s onwards, following onto the

[119] The definition is to be intended as opposed to a first phase of 'literary' crime novels such as works by Gadda, Sciascia, and Eco.

path of socially and politically committed literature sprung during the immediate post-war period, features a strong focus on the investigation of a range of historical episodes and current social issues that have a significant impact on the history of the country as well as on the shaping of its identity and of its present social and cultural character (Antonello, 2009). Moving both on the historical as well as on the contemporary plane, works like *Ferro recente* and *Sheol* by Marcello Fois, the De Luca trilogy by Carlo Lucarelli,[120] or *La presa di Macallè* and *Il nipote del Negus* by Andrea Camilleri, just to give a few examples, deal with issues like the legacy of the *anni di piombo* in Italy, the development of the Italian right in the context of the re-insurgence of extreme right-wing movements in Europe, the Fascist era in Italy, all of which had a fundamental role in the formation of Italy's cultural identity. This trend of socially committed crime literature generally embraces the idea of writing as a tool to analyse society, and crime writing in particular as an instrument to decipher the contemporary world and specifically its malfunctioning and contradictions. However, the interlocking of the investigation narrative with the tradition of socially committed writing constitutes one of the defining traits of Italian crime writing from the 1990s, and:

> «Il giallo viene usato oggi come strumento che garantisce la tensione e l'interesse del lettore ma anche come veicolo privilegiato per indagini diverse – storiche, sociali, esistenziali – e per una ricerca di identità nella complessa e frammentata realtà contemporanea» (Pieri 1998).

[120] The series comprises the novels *Carta Bianca* (1990), *L'estate torbida* (1991), and *Via delle oche* (1996).

4.1.2 Profiling narrative styles: the structure of Carlotto's work

Massimo Carlotto's work sits at the crossroads between the above outlined coordinates. As the final aim of this chapter is to analyse the writer's use of the territorial element in some specific novels, understanding the context in which he operates is a matter of crucial importance, especially in the light of the author's perspective with regards to *impegno*. However, before moving further into the analysis of the relevance of territory within the author's oeuvre, it will be useful to outline a brief overview of Carlotto's production from his literary debut to the present day and to place it into context more in detail.[121] Such operation will be far from exhaustive, also given to the changes in perspective that the regular publication of new novels by the author might bring to the general frame. Nonetheless, sketching a profile of the writer's production will be fundamental in order to understand and fruitfully analyse those works that are particularly relevant to the aim of this study.

Born in Padova in 1956, Massimo Carlotto began his career as a writer in 1995, when he published the autobiographic account *Il fuggiasco*. His path into writing began with his will to talk about his own vicissitudes as a fugitive in France and Mexico: Carlotto had by then been at the centre of one of the most discussed judicial cases in recent Italian history, which started in 1976 with a murder accusation and went through a number of trials and escapes to end with presidential

[121] For clarity, when quoting from Carlotto's works, the following abbreviations will be used: VA: *La verità dell'Alligatore*; MM: *Il mistero di Mangiabarche*; NCU: *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*; CC: *Il corriere colombiano*; AAC: *Arrivederci amore, ciao*; MN: *Il maestro di nodi*; OIM: *L'oscura immensità della morte*; NPNM: *Niente, più niente al mondo*; NE: *Nordest*.

pardon in 1993.[122] Two years later, a few months after Carlotto's first book was published, detective *sui generis* Marco Buratti also made his first appearance as the protagonist of *La verità dell'alligatore*, marking Carlotto's debut as a crime writer, as well as the beginning of the Alligatore series. Thus, following his first autobiographical work (which in itself does not gravitate far from the sphere of the author's preferred genre), Carlotto started dedicating himself predominantly to crime writing.

When analysing Carlotto's work, genre is one of the main questions that need to be tackled, as well as a good starting point from which to consider the general structure and purpose of his writing. Although the author is indeed known and commercially classified as a crime writer, such label might become in ways reductive when it comes to define the substance of some of this author's work. Finding an ideal collocation in the context of a renewed attention to social issues in contemporary literature, and embracing a view of writing as a tool to unveil and denounce social injustice, Carlotto adopts crime writing as an instrument to investigate issues that go beyond the facts and characters encompassed in the main plot. The genre thus becomes the most congruous tool to explore the so called 'grey area' wherein the world of regular institutions and social interaction meets that of illegality and concealed associations and trafficking. Furthermore, as becomes clear from an overview of his work, the author's general aim is to investigate social and criminal issues by linking them to a specific geographical context, which can vary from defined local realities to a broader international context. As a consequence,

[122] For further details, see Erbani.

Carlotto's work spans a wide range of topics, explored by adopting different perspectives and narrative modes. Hence, identifying what can be defined as distinct branches in Carlotto's writing will be of great use. In doing this, far from organising the authors' work in set and closed compartments, I mainly wish to indicate the presence of some general trends that feature in the writer's production, which represent his span of interest. However, despite the benefits of employing such distinction, it is important to bear in mind that Carlotto's works also remain bond together in the common intent that forms the multifaceted unity of his opus.

In this perspective, the Alligatore series is the most distinctive and easily discernible group of novels by Carlotto. Such characteristic, besides obviously deriving from the series being conceived as a proper cycle, also originates in the author's choice to write these novels along the lines of a specific sub-genre, the American hard-boiled. Up to the present day, the cycle is comprised of six novels, written between 1995 and 2009, all featuring ex-convict Marco Buratti, better known as Alligatore: *La verità dell'alligatore* (1995), *Il mistero di mangiabarche* (1997), *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita* (1999), *Il corriere colombiano* (2000), *Il maestro di nodi* (2002), *L'amore del bandito* (2009).[123] Varied in the range of topics it deals with, the series nonetheless bears a strong unifying character, as well as a precisely recognizable focus on the social environment and criminal history that gravitates around the Italian northeast. Also related to the cycle is *La terra della mia anima* (2006), where Carlotto narrates the evolution of the Italian criminal

[123] At the time of writing, Carlotto had announced that a new title would be added to the series. The book, *La banda degli amanti*, was subsequently released in 2015, but is not included in this analysis.

world from the 1960 onwards through the eyes of a man – a close friend of the author met during his time in jail – who inspired the figure of Beniamino Rossini, an associate of Marco Buratti in the series.

Despite sharing a similar intent with the rest of the author's production in terms of his idea of writing as a socially committed activity, a way to *impegno*, the Alligatore cycle does represent a self-standing piece of work in the general context of Carlotto's writing. However characterised by some distinct caricature-like features, Marco Buratti and his associates are well-rounded and evolving characters, whose development is crucial to the shaping of the cycle as well as to creating the strong unity that characterizes the series. Opting for a first person narrator and a self-made detective whose figure obviously recalls that of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, with their dry and often crude language and plots modelled on the traditional scheme of crime-investigation-solution, the books in the Alligatore series stand as a uniform and self-standing whole. Having conceived each title as part of a series, the author clearly adopted a different narrative code when writing the novels that feature Marco Buratti as their main character. As he explains himself, the separation is neat and meant precisely as a distinguishing factor that situates the Alligatore series on one side, and his other novels on the other side:

> «Ho volutamente lavorato sull'hard-boiled con i romanzi seriali – in cui tra l'altro utilizzo i personaggi per ironizzare sul genere: l'Alligatore infatti, almeno apparentemente, è un tipico personaggio hard-boiled – mentre mi sono dedicato esclusivamente al noir quando ho scritto *Arrivederci amore, ciao* o i romanzi d'inchiesta. [...] L'Alligatore e i suoi amici sono personaggi seriali, in qualche modo positivi perché hanno una loro etica. Giorgio Pellegrini, al contrario, è il punto di vista del Male» (Carlotto, Amici, 26).

The author's words clearly expose his resolution to employ two different narrative codes in the complex of his writing: the hard-boiled model for his serial novels, and the noir for his other novels, including the enquiry ones.

Although referring to genres as types from which to borrow a set stylistic code, what the author declares in the above quote does not only concern the style of his novels: by identifying two model genres as different sources of inspiration for his work, and thus splitting his production into two main branches, Carlotto also distinguishes between different perspectives in his production. The labels he uses refer to traditional modes of crime writing, which constitute the blueprint for two different sides of his production. However, rather than introducing a subdivision of his own work into to sub-genres, such partition translates into divergent approaches to the same subject matter. As will become clear from an outline of the novels' topics, the author stretches the traditional confines of both the hard-boiled and the noir model, making use of their mechanisms, but at the same time introducing an element of social commitment that turns his novels, both the hard-boiled ones and the noirs, into hybrid creations straddling crime writing and enquiry. Thus, on the side of the hard-boiled one finds the figure of the Alligatore, who lives on the edge between 'regular' world and criminal underworld and for whom the boundaries between rightful and criminal are blurred, while the side of the noir is inhabited by a diverse population of characters spanning straightforward criminals who present us with the point of view of unrepentant unlawfulness, alienated human beings whose sense of reality has been corroded by misery, and victims, some of which turned into torturers by their own sufferings. In both categories however, the aim

of the writer is to assume the point of view of figures which are – or become – involved with the criminal world in order to cast some light on broader social issues that become exposed due to their relation to the plot. What constitutes the main distinction between the two modes employed by Carlotto, besides the consequent stylistic implications, is that the use of one model genre for the Alligatore series and one for the serial novels goes parallel with a modification in the narrative focus: if the non-serial novels span across a variety of themes, mostly connected with a specific social and geographical environment, the cycle of the Alligatore almost exclusively deals with the context of the Italian northeast and the peculiar phenomena that characterised its economic development and consequent social transformation. While the general enquiry intent remains similar in both categories of novels, the question of the Northeast is warranted the space of a whole series of novels and treated as a more rounded sociological analysis of a whole territory.

In brief, the style and the point of view, as well as the specific subject matter are the features creating the most noticeable divergence between Carlotto's hard-boiled and noir novels. The Manichaean distinction whose existence the author seems to imply when he talks of 'the point of view of the Evil' might be a questionable one. Although it is true that some of the protagonists of Carlotto's noir novels do impersonate straightforward criminals with whom his readership is not likely nor intended to identify, some others are difficult to classify as serial, amoral offenders. In some cases – like for example in *L'oscura immensità della morte* (2004) –, these are characters who find themselves enmeshed in a condition that triggers a criminal behaviour which might not have otherwise sprung.

Consequently, a classification that draws a straight line to set apart Carlotto's hard-boiled novels from his noir production on the basis of a separation between 'good' and 'evil' protagonists would be reductive as it would not take into account neither the complexity and ambiguities of the figure of the Alligatore and his associates, nor of the variety of situations and perspective that we are confronted with when reading Carlotto's 'noir' novels. Indeed, although Carlotto refers to this side of his production by generally labelling it as noir, when taking a closer look at these works, it is easy to see how this label indeed takes a variety of distinct shapes when it comes to the specificity of the actual narratives. Defining these works as 'noir', as the author does, can certainly be useful insofar as using this category allows us to draw a clear distinction between those works that are more straightforwardly detective stories and those which are not. However, the variety of interests and focuses that the rest of Carlotto's writing approaches is rather vast and using the same denomination to define all that it includes could be misleading as these novels surely do not all comply to the specific set of features of a strictly codified genre. The reference to 'noir' should then be intended as a useful tool, within Carlotto's production, to define by contrast those works that are not modelled on the hard-boiled. Having established the existence of two main branches in the author's production, it will be worth having a closer look at the noir novels, before proceeding to a contextualisation of the author's work and to a more in-depth analysis of one in particular among the novels in the Alligatore series and of *Nordest*. These titles, in which Carlotto's interest in territory concentrates

specifically on the region of Veneto, will be excluded from the following brief overview.

The first non-serial book to be published by Carlotto was his fourth overall. Written in 1998, *Le irregolari. Buenos Aires horror tour* is a narration of the tragedy of Argentinean desaparecidos. The book was originally meant as an account of the author's journey to Argentina's anarchic communes, but then developed into an inquiry into the disappearance of thousands of people following the author's meeting with Estrela Carlotto, president of the association of The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and a distant relative. Proceeded by two new Alligatore titles, Carlotto's second non-serial novel was then published in 2001 by the title *Arrivederci amore, ciao*. This novel is the first to feature Giorgio Pellegrini, a character that, as mentioned above, is described by the author as being 'the point of view of evil'. Indeed representing the figure of an unrepentant criminal, Pellegrini unscrupulously turns in some of his former militant companions to gain a reduction of sentence, except then maintaining his contacts and affairs within the unlawful to grant a comfortable life for himself out of jail. The third noir title by Carlotto is the aforementioned *L'oscura immensità della morte*. Published in 2004, the book explores the failure at forgiveness and consequent hunt for vengeance of a man whose wife and child were killed in a robbery. Another psychological exploration, *Niente, più niente al mondo* is a winding monologue that allows the reader into the mind of a mother and wife who lives in misery and whose existence has lost any kind of purpose or even a clear identity. Amalgamated to a context of mediocrity and standardization, her life is reduced to the shade of a TV show, her hopes for her

daughter's future set on a career as showgirl-dating-footballer. Deprived of her own personality, her sense of reality diluted in the desolation of her existence, she fails to even live the pinnacle of her tragedy and watches herself killing her daughter as if in a catatonic state. The following year, Carlotto published *Nordest* with Marco Videtta. Although the book will be the subject of an in-depth analysis later on in this chapter, it will be to the benefit of this overview to mention here that the plot, set in an unnamed town in the northeast of Italy, revolves around a young lawyer's investigation around his bride-to-be's murder, leading to the dreadful discovery that the culprit is his own father. *Mi fido di te*, published in 2007, features one of Carlotto's unrepentant criminals and explores the issue of food sophistication. The plot including a murder and the following investigation, the book does maintain the major features of a crime novel. However, as is also true for most of Carlotto's works, the author main intent is rather to investigate a pressing matter of wide-spread social impact, in this case the production and commercialization of food and ingredients that have been illegally processed to obtain a cheaper, potentially harmful product to sell on a mass scale. Carlotto's first step into the so called Mediterranean noir was taken in 2008 with the historical noir *Cristiani di Allah*. Set in 1541, the book questions matters of religious beliefs and tolerance through the story of two ex-lansquenets who renounce their Christian faith in favour of Islam to become corsairs and live their homosexual love. The title constitutes a unicum, as it is the only book by Carlotto that is not set in a contemporary context. Moreover, this title exposes the surfacing of an idea of the Mediterranean as a region spanning different states and cultures, which needs to be approached as such in literary

production. Written in collaboration with the collective Mama Sabot, *Perdas de fogu* was published in the same year. The issue tackled in this book is a very specific one, linked to the territory surrounding the military training rifle range at Salto di Quirra in Sardinia. Experiments carried out on war armaments at the site are thought to have provoked leukemic diseases to a vast percentage of the population living in the area, an issue that the writers involved in this project intend to confront through this enquiry novel. Underpinned by a similar drive, the subject theme of *L'albero dei microchip*, published in 2009, sees the author's interest partially step into an international scenario: two separate inquiries intertwine in this book, one led in Italy into an illegal dump for electronic waste, the other one taking place in Liberia and investigating diamonds smuggling. With *Alla fine di un giorno noioso* (2011), Carlotto brings Giorgio Pellegrini back to the scene. In this noir novel, a sequel to *Arrivederci amore, ciao*, the focus returns to the side of the criminal: here, the ex-convict is swindled out of the two million euro that he had put together in ten years of under-the-counter traffics in his trendy venue in the Northeast. *Respiro corto* (2012) broadens the horizon of Carlotto's enquiry novels and extents the setting to a wider portion of the European continent. Featuring a gang of high-profile criminals who met while studying Economics in Leeds, and with a plot unfolding between Chernobyl, Switzerland and Marseille, this novel represents the expansion of its author's enquiries from the national level to a wider plane which includes an investigation on the mechanisms of contemporary criminality on a global scale. Carlotto briefly returned to the northeast of Italy with *La pista di campagna*, a short story included in *Cocaina*, a book written in 2013 with Gianrico Carofiglio and

Giancarlo De Cataldo. One of Carlotto's most recent projects is a series titled *Le vendicatrici*. By adopting four women as protagonists, each lending her name as the title of one of the books in the series, the author's aim is to portray the point of view of marginalised people and their condition of conflict with society and its institutions. Published in 2014, *Il mondo non mi deve nulla* is Carlotto's latest title so far. The plot is centred around the figure of a burglar who, much to his surprise, finds that the woman whose house he intended to rob is not only unexpectedly fearless, but willing for him to assassinate her.

4.1.3 Joining the threads: genre as a way to *impegno* in Carlotto's work

Massimo Carlotto declared social and political engagement to be the foundation of his writing in multiple occasions. The author has expressed his views on the investigative and pedagogical function of literature in many interviews, however the pre-eminence of an interest in searching and exposing unrevealed and controversial issues in contemporary society also surfaces from the above summary of the author's production. Driven by an underlying scepticism towards the ability of the judicial system to always produce a truthful reconstruction of facts, the author aims at «dévoiler les mécanismes qui se cachent derrière les affaires, car je pense que la vérité institutionelle est de toute façon toujours partielle, et partiale» (Lombard 2002, n.p.). The idea that diffused wrongdoing and the collusion of institutions with criminality are a widespread but under- or misreported

phenomenon is what stands at the root of Carlotto's stance in favour of investigating and denunciating such issues through the means of writing. Moreover, besides addressing what he perceives as a grave problem of scarce knowledge, the author's social commitment also aims to tackle a matter of circulation, especially with reference to the Italian context. In Carlotto's view, the decline of investigative journalism[124] in the country has produced a gap in the general knowledge of specific situations and phenomena affecting the Italian territory, which in his view are culpably neglected by official justice, disregarded by the media, and therefore withdrawn from public awareness. Parallel to his intention to shed light on such range of matters, the author's strong belief in the necessity for writers to fill such void also fed into his conception of writing as a means to engage with social, ethical, and political issues. Originating from these premises, the author's idea of *impegno* hence developed into a twofold conception of the practice of writing: on one side a tool to unveil obscure social and criminal mechanisms with the intent to denunciate them, on the other side a means through which to divulge broader knowledge on such themes in order to create public awareness; these two interlocking functions have shaped Carlotto's production since the author's literary debut.

Given the nature of the reflection that Carlotto aims to inspire in his readers, it comes to no surprise that his writing should revolve around stories in which the existence of diffused criminality within contemporary society would clearly

[124] In *The Black Album*, referring to the 1990s, Carlotto says: «L'altro elemento teorico importante che viene sviluppato in quegli anni è la riflessione sulla morte del giornalismo investigativo, che in Italia non viene più praticato. Questo in un primo tempo ha determinato un forte senso di consapevolezza del proprio ruolo da parte degli scrittori di poliziesco e di noir, che decidono di raccontare l'Italia reale attraverso storie reali» (33). The author also refers to the disappearance of investigative journalism in Morro 2006.

surface. Due to its suitability for exploring the so-called 'grey area' where the regular activities and illegality overlap, crime writing became a natural choice for an author who aims to shed a light on the ambiguous relation between these two worlds.[125] The foundation of his work laying into the ethical dimension of writing, Carlotto thus turns genre into a political project. In doing this, the author steps once more into Sciascia's shoes. In a 1970 interview with Walter Mauro, the Sicilian author said about his work:

> «Le cose che scrivo partono sempre da un'idea e si svolgono su uno schema. Voglio 'dimostrare' qualcosa servendomi della rappresentazione di un fatto immaginato o inventato; e dico inventato nel senso di trovato: trovato nella storia e nella cronaca. […] La mia è dunque una materia saggistica che assume i 'modi' del racconto […]» (Mullen 19).

What Sciascia says here is interesting insofar as it allows the observation of a double shift in meaning as the narration draws from factual reality, which flows into fiction, which in turn aims to inspire a reflection on the factual reality. Exploring this process in detail, Lise Bossi notes that this also constitutes the basic mechanism of Carlotto's work of denunciation:

> «Per Carlotto, il riferimento all'*auctor* siciliano non è solo pertinente riguardo all'impegno etico-civile manifestato attraverso gli argomenti politici trattati nei suoi libri, ma è anche valido riguardo all'uso sovvertito che egli, come Sciascia, fa dei presupposti filosofico-letterari del genere di cui strumentalizza i codici e la struttura a fini di denuncia» (2007, 68).

The starting point for both authors is a case or situation, fictional but bearing a strong resonance within national current affairs or events of criminal nature taking place in a specific context, which cab be clearly recognizable by the reader as

[125] Based on the premise that «i presupposti stessi del romanzo poliziesco lo fanno entrare nell'ambito di una riflessione sullo Stato, sul diritto e sulla giustizia, da un lato, e sulla verità e sul bene dall'altro» (Bossi, 69), within the context of Carlotto's writing «[i]l noir dunque viene individuato come lo strumento più adatto per raccontare storie, disseppellire segreti, denunciare ingiustizie e raggiungere al contempo il maggior numero possibile di lettori» (Lombard 2007, 15).

pertaining to his/her own reality. Through the creation of a metaphorical structure, the case is turned into the subject matter of a narrative work. Its details and the identity of the characters transferred onto the domain of fiction, the case is investigated by a character who assumes the function of detective and conducts the enquiry. Based on the premise that the case is modelled onto a reality that is not fictional and with which the reader will most likely be acquainted, the narration unfolds, investigating perpetrators and motives that have a counterpart in the factual reality of the case. It is precisely this bond between fiction and current factual reality that allows both Sciascia and Carlotto to subvert the traditional functioning of the genre to turn writing into an instrument of denunciation:

> «[i]l meccanismo dell'inchiesta, applicato nella finzione a crimini i cui autori, strumenti e moventi sono ricercati dall'investigatore, può dunque permettere, invertendo il processo di trasformazione metaforica, di denunciare autori, strumenti e moventi nella realtà fattuale» (Bossi 70).

One further element worth considering is that such mechanism necessarily establishes a dialogue between reader and writer, a feature that indeed distinguishes this socially committed crime fiction from the traditional detective novel. Whereas traditional *gialli* can be read exclusively on the plane of the plot, the enquiry style of Carlotto's novels calls for a higher level of involvement on the side of the reader: indeed, the intended denunciation aim of the narrative will be nullified unless the reader recognises the factual level to which the fiction refers. Therefore, the use of recognizable references, such as people and places, becomes fundamental to the creation of that sentiment of awareness that the author aims to inspire in his readers. It is by this means that the author's attempt to unveil whatever has been left behind by official justice and his efforts to promulgate a deeper understanding of

contemporary reality among the national public come together in one project, which encapsulates the nature of crime writing according to Carlotto:

> «Je crois que le rôle du roman policier n'est pas seulement de raconter la réalité qui nous entoure, mais aussi de créer une prise de conscience chez le lecteur. Prise de conscience qui se transforme ensuite en instruments d'analyses pour comprendre le réel. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas par hasard si, en Italie, le polar a remplacé l'enquête journalistique d'autrefois» (Lombard 2002, n.p.).

In both its declinations of hard-boiled and noir, Carlotto's production is consequently modelled around the author's project to stretch the traditional boundaries of genre to superimpose an enquiry-style novel on a narrative structure based on the traditional crime-investigation-solution scheme. As the core of such structure is represented by the interlacing of the two opposing elements of fiction and non-fiction, it is important to note that the two are each destined to a distinct place in the narrative context of the writer's works: while the fictional element lies entirely in the plot, in the main characters and in the names of others, in the reconstruction of dialogues and of the unfolding of facts, the background against which the novels are set and the cases they refer to belong to the realm of non-fiction. Characters like the Alligatore, Giorgio Pellegrini, Gigi Vianello, Francesco Visentin, or Zosim Kataev[126] are indeed a creation born of the author's pen, as are the myriad other characters that constellate the plots of the serial and noir novels and that interlace their stories with those of the protagonists. Nonetheless, whenever a character is inspired by actual facts or people which would be known by the general public, they are 'fictionalised' to become part of the narrative plot while

[126] It is worth remembering that a certain autobiographical element does surface in the figure of the Alligatore. The other characters are respectively the protagonists of *Arrivederci amore, ciao* and *Alla fine di un giorno noioso*, *Mi fido di te*, *Nordest*, and *Respiro corto*.

maintaining a clear recognisability: the figure of Felice Maniero, the well-known founder and boss of the Mala del Brenta[127] in 1970s, is hence re-named by wordplay and serves as a model for the character of Tristano Castelli in *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*. On the contrary, the backdrop against which the novels are set, in many cases the northeast of Italy, but also other regions within the national borders and other countries, as well as the cases that provide the story line for the author's novels are instead a faithful rendering of an actual reality. As emerges from the sharp connotation of local realities, all of Carlotto's works are preceded by a long phase of research, his plots always based on actual news items drawn from national and international papers: «il lavoro di preparazione per *Nordest*» for example, «è durato tre anni in cui Videtta e io abbiamo letto con pazienza le pagine economiche dei quotidiani del Nordest» (Melis n.p.). In other cases, for instance in *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*, the overlapping of plot and actual facts becomes apparent as the narration alternates with extracts from actual court proceedings.

The fact that Carlotto's interest in narrating these stories goes beyond the telling and solution of a crime plot to embrace an almost sociological and sometimes anthropological observation of the factual reality that surrounds the story also surfaces in the consideration that in most of his books the dénouement does not coincide with the restoration of any social equilibrium and those guilty are rarely subject to the official course of justice. The question of 'whodunit?' often finds an answer halfway through the narrative, whereas the enquiry and depiction

[127] The 'Mala del Brenta', also known as 'Mafia del Brenta' was a criminal organization that took control and ruled the widest and more lucrative illicit activities and traffics in Veneto between the 1970s and '90s, extending its influence also to the neighbouring regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna, as Croatia.

of the social context of the novel continue throughout. Besides reflecting in some cases the verifiable course of history, this mechanism demonstrates that the author means to address an issue that is more related to the non-fictional context than it is to the 'game' of finding the culprit or to any psychological development of the characters. Moreover, even when a culprit is identified, the line that draws the distinction between good and bad is almost always blurred; no 'right side' seems to exist, and no one is ever completely innocent: the consolatory aim of traditional crime fiction, where the guilty part is eventually consigned to justice vanishes in the awareness that there is no good and no evil.

This ambiguity is exemplified in the Alligatore series, where an improvised trio of detectives led by ex-convict Marco Buratti conduct investigations in parallel and in the shadow of official justice. Unlike other figures of detectives in Italian crime writing, who usually belong to or cooperate with official justice,[128] Buratti and his two *soci* live on the border of unlawfulness, one of them a fugitive,[129] the other previously associated with Milanese mafia, all unable to integrate into the world of 'regular people' and all prone to use rather unorthodox investigation methods.[130] In addition to the protagonists of the series sitting on a rather blurry line, both in the series and in the non-serial novels by Carlotto, the culprits

[128] Suffice it to think of Camilleri's inspector Montalbano, Scerbanenco's Duca Lamberti, an ex doctor cooperating with the Milanese police, or of Lucarelli's detectives De Luca, Coliandro, and Grazia Negro to just name some among the most well-known.

[129] Although an fugitive at the beginning of the series, Max la Memoria, the analyst of the group, receives a pardon and, after spending some time in prison, rejoins his *soci* as a free man at the beginning of *Il maestro di nodi*.

[130] Buratti's personal policy is never to carry weapons, but his associate Rossini very often does and most certainly does not avoid using them when his very strict underworld moral requires it, which often implies murder. Both characters use violence, torture, deception, and bribery to obtain what they need to continue their investigation.

themselves often have little to do with the identification of wrong and illegality. Their function is instead to reveal to which extent crime is rooted in society: not only it is indeed clear that a widespread and expanding unlawful network exists, what emerges from the novels is also that this network leaves no sphere untouched. Official justice, media, political figures, and the ruling class are all accused of moral corruption, as common criminals, as for instance drug-addict Alberto Magagnin in *La verità dell'Alligatore*, become the easy scapegoat paying for the criminal activities of the corrupt but well-respected provincial bourgeois class. Thus, the real conflict that Carlotto brings to light through his writing skips the distinctions between lawful and illicit or right and wrong, and rather opposes official and unofficial. As Maria Pia De Paulis-Dalembert highlights, the unfolding of the many different story lines which compose the plots of Carlotto's novels are intended precisely to denunciate such state of affairs:

> «[i]n questo sostrato antropologico, la storia criminale costituisce l'ossatura che rinsalda l'organizzazione narrativa secondo la tecnica dell'imbricazione di tante microstorie emblematiche, rese omogenee dall'intento di denuncia che Carlotto affida al suo romanzo» (141).

The conclusion to emerge from all the considerations made so far is that Massimo Carlotto's writing shows a significantly more definite intent to explore the complexity of the background in which his stories are set rather than the sequence of events that unfold in the foreground to compose his plots. By means of stretching the boundaries of the highly codified genre of crime writing, and gathering the legacy of authors like Sciascia, the author's aim is to mould crime writing into an instrument of social and political commitment, to use genre as a way to *impegno*. Wrapping up some reflections about *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*,

Saveria Chemotti encapsulates the intent and development of the author's work in a few lines:

> «Il romanzo noir di Carlotto diventa progressivamente, per la sua stessa essenza, un romanzo sulla polis, sulla politica, uno strumento di riflessione e di denuncia che non ha lo stile solenne del pamphlet, ma quello più basso, referenziale, talvolta ruvido, delle conversazioni vivaci, intense e ironiche di due investigatori atipici e disincantati» (Lombard 2010, 41-42).

4.2 Territory as a Character in *Nordest* and *La verità dell'Alligatore*

4.2.1 A question of territory

As the above examination shows, the relevance of the role played by territory in the author's work begins to emerge even from a non-specific analysis. The brief overview of Carlotto's plots highlights the presence, both in the serial and in the noir novels and with the only exception of *Cristiani di Allah*, of a constant interest towards issues that pertain a specific social and economic context in the contemporary world. Switching the focus from the ways of drug trafficking, to food sophistication and to other more specific matters, the author identifies in each of his novels a subject around which the plot gravitates, functioning as a pretext rather than as the core matter. The sequence of facts unfolding through the story drifts from the foreground as it becomes clear that the real protagonist is in fact the context in which the story is set. Examples of this are clear across the author's production, but to mention a few, suffice it to note that when talking about military pollution the setting, the references and reports are linked to the specific example of Salto di Quirra in Sardinia, when employing a more psychological perspective to focus on the mind of a disturbed mother, Carlotto places her at the periphery of

an industrialized area such as Turin's suburbs: the author's interest lies as much in the lives he portrays as it lies in the environment that informs their background. Different novels are to be placed at different ends of the spectrum, and whereas some of them are indeed predominantly focused on the psychology of a single character – as is the case for example in *L'oscura immensità della morte* or *Niente, più niente al mondo* – others place a strong focus on the investigation of matters that more generally concern the social and economic dynamics of entire communities or geographic areas – the author's attention to the Italian northeast being the most evident case. However, if a common ground can be identified to connect Carlotto's plots, it is in the intent to analyse the interaction between human beings and their environment. This point constitutes the key to understand why examining the author's *impegno* is indispensable in order to comprehend the importance of the element of territory in his work: regardless of the specific plot, Carlotto's commitment to social and political issues is conveyed precisely through his analysis of the context in which his novels take place. Notwithstanding their social status or their position in the eyes of the law, Carlotto's characters, ex-convicts, high-profile lawyers, psychotic mothers, unrepentant criminals, researchers, are all presented to the reader as part of a specific environment. Reiterating once more the considerations made in the first chapter of this study, if territory is to be considered as the combination of geographical, economic, and historical elements that shape the environment in which people live, then it is easy to see how, by using his 'looking glass' to focus on the context and by consistently

defining the set of his novels on a geographic basis, Carlotto turns the element of territory into one of the most fundamental cornerstones of his literary search.

In the same passage quoted on page 189-190 where Carlotto refers to the distinction between noir and hard-boiled in his work, the author also clearly states the importance of defining space in his novels:

> «L'unico elemento che i miei romanzi noir e gli hard-boiled hanno in comune è la formula narrativa: il racconto di una storia criminale in un luogo e in uno spazio precisi come pretesto per raccontare la realtà sociale, politica, economica e storica che circonda gli avvenimenti narrati» (Carlotto, Amici, 26).

Besides delineating a constant and assiduous commitment that extends throughout his oeuvre, this passage highlights and seals the relevance of the spatial element in the author's work: the 'social, political, and economic reality surrounding the narration' indeed coincides with the specific territorial contexts where the plots are set. Hence, resolving itself into a twofold function, territory becomes first an object of observation and subsequently an active subject in the narrative structure of Carlotto's crime fiction.

This double-sided role reveals the existence of two functions: one relates to the material reality of which territory is part, i.e. actual territory, the other refers to territory as it is portrayed in the book, where it is submitted to the rules of the written word. Based on this premise, on one side is an 'internal' dimension, related to the modes in which territory surfaces through the writing and is perceived by the reader; in this sense territory is projected from the book outwards, towards the reader. On the other side is an 'external' dimension, where instead territory is a physical reality subject to literary scrutiny: considering such aspect means to analyse the direction taken by the author's research and his motivations for focusing on a certain region.

To make the distinction clearer, we can say that the internal dimension coincides with the reader's perspective on territory, whereas the external dimension overlaps with the author's one: while in the previous territory is to be intended as the portrayal of it that emerges from the book, the latter is shaped by the author's view of territory and by how he chooses to depict it. As it mirrors the basic dynamics of the relation between literature and territory as outlined in the theoretical introduction to this study, the observation of this binary interaction provides a ground to respond to some of the questions posed in the first chapter: does literature reflect on the transformations that affect a determined territory and its landscape, and if so, how does such reflection integrate within the literary text?

The consideration of the external dimension of the territorial element just identified can be employed as a tool to address to the first part of such question: what emerges from the general overview of Carlotto's work – i.e. that the criminal plot functions as a pretext for the author to investigate the gearings of a specific territorial context – indeed proves the fact that the close observation of a territory can inspire the necessity to use literary means to examine its functioning. As has been noted before, Carlotto's modus implies the acknowledgment of a particular unresolved case or consistent criminal activity carried out in a well-defined geographic context, followed by a phase of research aimed at determining the circumstances from which such case or wrong-doing originated, and concluding in the transposition of the case into narrative form by means of a metaphorical structure supported by a central plot line. Once identified a case of interest – which, as noted, can range from the judicial history of the Mafia del Brenta, to the evolution

of drug trafficking in the context of the Italian northeast, to chemical weapon pollution, food sophistication, or toxic waste smuggling – Carlotto constructs a story line around a main character to investigate the surrounding environment. A specific territory hence becomes the subject of scrutiny, not only in terms of its physical and geographical features, but as a multilayered structure that encapsulates, within a unitary entity, the spheres of social life, economic drives, historical legacy, and relation to the natural environment. The point is an important one to stress since, as will become clear through the analysis of the texts, territory does not appear in Carlotto's production as the neutral scenario onto which characters play their role, but rather becomes a character in its own right, not painted in the background, but acting and interacting with the human elements of the plot.

The features of Carlotto's work highlighted so far help establishing the presence of a strong geographic component in the drive behind the author's choice of plots. To simply underline such presence however, would mean to define only half of the role played by territory as an 'external activator' for Carlotto's work. Indeed, if part of the function of territory in its external dimension is to determine which contexts will be the centres around which the author's writing gravitates, there is also a detectable pattern in the development of his production that points towards a geographical criterion at the root of the author's oeuvre. If one was to map Carlotto's work based on the locations where his novels are set, using one pin to indicate each of the locations where his stories take place, indeed the area of Veneto and of the Italian northeast would be the most densely represented. As is known, a predominant proportion of the author's writing is dedicated to his native

Veneto and more broadly to the Italian northeast. However, such map would also include vast portions of the Italian territory, of Europe, and of some other continents too. In other terms, what would be visible is a number of pins scattered across a world map, where the concentration of the markers decreases progressively with distance from the central cluster of Veneto. If one was to then overlap such map with a chronological one indicating the years of publication of Carlotto's novels, it would become clear that the geographic expansion occurred gradually over time, indicating a path that brought the author from consistently focusing his literary investigations on his home region to progressively extend his area of concern to and beyond the national borders.

As mentioned above, the Alligatore cycle as well as the other Northeast noirs were conceived as part of a vast enquiry into the state of affairs of a local social and economic context. Once exhausted his discourse on the region, Carlotto moved on to take into consideration different issues related to different territories. The fact that, at this stage, the span of the author's survey into contemporary society expanded in a geographical sense is a particularly interesting one to notice. Far from implying the existence of a linear path developing in precise and strictly defined stages,[131] it is still clear that Carlotto's perspective evolved as a geographical dilation as the author left Veneto to explore a reality that progressively included a

[131] Specifically, one should make reference, on one side, to *Le irregolari. Buenos Aires Horror Tour*, published in 1998, therefore in the main years of the Alligatore cycle, and, on the other side, to two titles in which the Northeast returns at the centre of the author's attention, published respectively in 2009 and 2011: *L'amore del bandito* and *Alla fine di un giorno noioso*. *Le irregolari* was originally meant as an account of the author's journey to Argentina's anarchic communes, therefore originates from an autobiographic perspective similar to that of *Il fuggiasco*. However, the book eventually developed into an inquiry into the question of Argentinean *desaparecidos* following the author's meeting with Estrela Carlotto, president of the association of The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and a distant relative.

national and international dimension. With titles like *L'oscura immensità della morte* (2004), *Niente, più niente al mondo* (2004), *Mi fido di te* (2007), *Perdas de fogu* (2008), and *L'albero dei microchip* (2009) the writer first shifted towards the examination of different aspects of criminal behaviour and diffused illicit activities on the against the backdrop of contemporary Italy, and subsequently landed to an international plane. Such process of expansion reached its pinnacle with the publication of *Respiro corto* in 2012, with which the author definitively embraces a global perspective on crime. If with his previous titles the author's investigations were focused on the reality of a specific territory, this novel differs from his previous production as the crux becomes examining how globalisation has transformed markets, and therefore how the local, national, and even European dimensions are in fact reflecting social and economic changes that happen internationally on a much wider scale.[132] Once more, a definition of geographic nature becomes crucial and as the plot unfolds, the reader can see Marseille emerging as a character in its own right: the scene of large-scale street violence and diffused prostitution, home to a number of gangs acting for international drug cartels, the French port city is at the core of a vast and intricate net of illegal

[132] His prime focus remaining on criminality and its links to 'regular' society, through *Respiro corto*, Carlotto pursues a survey on the impact of globalization on organised crime by comparing the old generations of criminals and their ways with a new, up-and-coming generation of young, well-educated, business-oriented criminals, projected into a dimension of fast-growing international markets, as reflected in the author's own words: «In *Respiro corto* il conflitto tra vecchia e nuova criminalità si gioca fondamentalmente sulla velocità. I cattivi ragazzi di Leeds hanno compreso che la convenienza dell'agire criminale è determinata dalla velocità con cui il crimine si trasforma in denaro. Per questo motivo il nuovo terziario del crimine si vuole svincolare dalla lentezza delle mafie e dalla loro struttura tradizionale e verticistica. Le nuove generazioni criminali non vogliono rimanere invischiate in guerre che non hanno iniziato, che non gli appartengono e che trovano perfino stupide. A loro non interessa mantenere il potere su un determinato quartiere, controllando la prostituzione o la droga. Si fanno molti più soldi con i rifiuti e la sofisticazione alimentare. Rischiando meno galera, tra l'altro, o non rischiandola affatto» (Carlotto, Amici, 115).

trafficking and a prominent hub for organised criminality. The plot hops across the Atlantic Ocean to South America, and then to India, Russia, and back to the old continent weaving a net of connections and piecing together stories that all end converging in Marseille. To wrap up these observations, with *Respiro corto*, from being a local entity, the element of territory becomes global: at the culmination of the process of geographic expansion in the author's enquiries, society is no longer a provincial community in a specific region of Italy, but a global network in which national boundaries pose increasingly less limitations to the circulation of people, goods, and criminality. On the map representing Carlotto's production, *Respiro corto* would be signalled by multiple pins, underlining the fact that the author's geographical focus has expanded, that the portion of territory making its way into the narrative plot has enlarged. To pinpoint such development in Carlotto's production not only demonstrates that indeed the factual reality of territory flows into the dimension of writing, but also brings out the existence of a geographic, therefore territory-related, criterion driving the author's choice of themes and leading the development of his oeuvre.

If what has been said so far covers what we called the external dimension of the element of territory in Carlotto's oeuvre and the author's perspective on it, it is now necessary to consider the reader's one and how territory travels from the pages of a novel outwards; in other words the question that shall be addressed is: what does territory look like in Carlotto's works and how does it emerge from the narrative plot? In order to answer this question, a fruitful starting point is to spend some considerations on the function of characters in Carlotto's novels. One

interesting feature that can be observed while analysing the author's production, is that in order to carry out his enquiries, the writer normally chooses figures that, consciously or not, sit on the fence between right and wrong. Some are inherently ambiguous as Giorgio Pellegrini, who is the epitome of the unrepentant offender, but enjoys nonetheless a well-respected position in society, or like Marco Buratti, the Alligatore, whose past as convict prevents him from being able to fully function within ordinary society; some are witnesses, as is the protagonist of *Nordest*, whose innocence will be spoiled as he steadily unveils the rottenness in the pillars of his own and his community's identity; others are made difficult to judge, as their criminal intentions spring out of extraordinary circumstances, such as the killing of a wife and son (OIM). Nonetheless, regardless of their role within the structure of the narrative, the function that these characters share is to provide a privileged point of view into the environment they inhabit: charged with ambivalence, these figures become the eyes through which the reader sees the case that the author is aiming to shed light onto, the eyes through which the reader sees the territory where the author has taken them.

Conveyed through the point of view of the characters, territory emerges in its entirety in Carlotto's novels. Unlike a scene in a theatrical context, the territorial element rises to a well-rounded dimension, of which the visual side is only one aspect. Indeed, while the author does provide geographic indications and occasional descriptors of the physical environment in which his novels are set, it is through the close reading of the rules of social interaction, of the character's activities, their relations, their habits, their language, through the insight provided through their

point of view into the economic structure and evolution of the area that the territory takes shape, becoming a character in its own right. If remarks like «E poi Torino è la capitale del vermouth, è roba nostra» (NPNM 10) or «Raggiunsi il porto industriale [...]. Prima di arrivare in Sardegna la nave battente bandiera di Hong Kong aveva fatto scalo a Bari» (MFT 5) tell us where the story is taking place, it is through indications like «Adesso mi danno 6 euro e 50 l'ora» (NPNM 11); «In quartieri come questi è meglio avere figli maschi, ti danno meno preoccupazioni» (NPNM 12); «Mi diressi verso il centro e parcheggiai la mia Cayenne di fronte al ristorante *Chez Momò*. Era mio anche quello» (MFT 7-8) that we as readers form an idea of the social environment in which the characters live and, more importantly, of how they relate to it and, as the plots unfold, of what mechanisms rule its functioning. As we see the protagonists and secondary figures of Carlotto's novels dealing with their context, struggling or benefitting from a well-defined socio-economic situation, we realise that the complex of territory, the combination of economic and social factors that determine its current reality, acts as an independent force, often determining people's lives and fortunes, and interacting with these figures as they strive to find their place within society. The events narrated, the social role of the characters and the ways in which they exploit or succumb to the surrounding environment, their links to the criminal world, the historic developments at the origin of the state of affairs described form, as a whole, the shape into which the character of territory is moulded, as Mario Tropea notes:

> «Non sono "scenari", questi, in cui calare l'azione, e neppure paesaggi nel senso descrittivo, pittorico, del termine, ma territorio, paese reale che viene fuori e si dispiega alla nostra conoscenza per la stessa forza dei fatti e quasi per l'intensità di semplice elencazione dei nomi. Carlotto non descrive ma, per usare una categoria del vecchio Lukács, "narra", e la storia, i personaggi,

> l'ottica del racconto sono il prodotto della sua rappresentazione dura e concatenata. È il succedersi degli eventi che crea, di per sé, il contesto» (Lombard 2007, 142).

Although such narrative devices are used to turn the context from a bi-dimensional background into a well-rounded construction across Carlotto's production in general, the major opportunity for the author to weave together all the different layers that form a territorial entity and to make it emerge clearly from a narrative structure was, unsurprisingly, presented by his wide-ranging examination of the region of Veneto and the surrounding Northeast.

4.2.2 A Northeastern *Exopolis*?

Indeed, not only is the region often the object of Carlotto's scrutiny, it is also the sole territorial entity, within the complex of his oeuvre, to be the subject of such wide scrutiny: the background to the stories set in this areas, the circumstances of the development that brought Veneto to its current social and economic conformation become an integral part of the narration on different levels. While the modus might apply to the examination of other territories in the author's production, the fact that at least eight of his novels are focused on the area of Veneto and the Northeast, assigns a decisive overall predominance to the theme, making it possible to identify a proper 'Northeast cycle'. Firstly then, in order to define the borders of Carlotto's enquiry, it will be worth remembering which titles belong to such extensive enquiry into the malfunctioning of the rich north-eastern society. Based

on the premise that Carlotto's interest in the area obviously comes from his closeness to his region of origin and from the necessity to fully understand how the Northeast has evolved in relatively recent decades, the author dedicates to the task most of the Alligatore cycle (specifically *La verità dell'alligatore*, *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*, *Il corriere colombiano*, *Il maestro di nodi*, *L'amore del bandito*). On the side of Carlotto's noir works, three other novels also deal with the question of the Northeast: *Arrivederci amore ciao*, *Nordest*, and *Alla fine di un giorno noioso*. Each of these novels, as well as the above mentioned titles in the Alligatore cycle, sheds light on a specific issue related to the context they are set in, as well as contributing with a number of tassels to compose the complex mosaic of the northeastern territory.

When analysing these novels in search for elements to determine the extent to which the setting becomes the actual object of the literary search, two classes of indicators are to be taken into consideration. On the one hand Carlotto's readers are presented with direct reflections about the transformation that the territory and its landscape have been subject to during the years of the economic upturn in Veneto and in the Northeast; on the other hand, it is difficult to overlook how characters' behaviours and attitudes respond to cultural dynamics which are in most cases the result of the unregulated process of economic development described earlier. While in the first case the author, adopting the point of view of one of his characters, engages in sporadic remarks assessing the transformation the region's landscape, which form a continuous thread within the whole Northeast cycle,[133] in the second

[133] Examples of this will be included in the analysis of *La verità dell'Alligatore* and *Nordest*.

case it is not any particular utterance by a character or specific observation made by the narrating voice that brings up the question of a social and deeply-rooted cultural change in the territory. Doctors and lawyers of the Padova middle-class orchestrating murders and condemning an unprepared petty criminal to a life as a scapegoat (*La verità dell'Alligatore*); a corrupt police force and a conspiring judicial system cooperating to secure the partial impunity of Mafia bosses while the 'middlemen' take the blame and pay with their lives (*Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*); local drug dealers fighting against South American drug cartels to gain control over the high demand for illegal substances in the Italian northeast, which becomes the battle ground for a number of foreign criminal organisations (*Il corriere colombiano* and *L'amore del bandito*); a couple above suspicion entangled into a violent sadomasochist network on the backdrop of the infamous demonstrations against the G8 summit in Genova (*Il maestro di nodi*); or finally the grim saga of Giorgio Pellegrini,[134] the epitome of the unrepentant, recidivist, self-centred criminal mind, rising from his long stay in prison to re-establishing a respected social status in a town of the Northeast. It is the situations unfolding along these plots that speak for themselves, it is through the interlacing of the micro-narratives constructed around each of the primary and secondary characters and through the relations forming between them that we see a whole societal complex depicted in and across these novels.

[134] An anti-Alligatore as the beginning of *Arrivederci amore, ciao* seems to suggests: «La carogna dell'alligatore galleggiava a pancia all'aria» (9).

As will become clear through the textual analysis, what emerges from Carlotto's Northeast novels is a well rounded and complex notion of territory which encapsulates the social, historical, and geographical characteristics of the region. Before entering the analysis of this structure it will be helpful to pose one question: what does Carlotto's *nordest* look like? The geographical landscape that the reader finds in the books is one that is recognizable by anyone who has driven around the region, dominated by the 'urbanized countryside' described earlier. In order to define such space it will be interesting to draw a parallel with a similar landscape:

> «Orange County may have no dominant city in the traditional sense, no easily identifiable center or skylined downtown […], but it is a metropolis none the less, a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area of around 2.6 million inhabitants, an industrial capitalist city of a new kind, a city whose "flexible accumulation" of wealth and power is indicative of a restructured political economy» (Soja, 247).

Here Edward Soja talks about Orange County, but the resemblance of his description to Veneto is indeed striking: from the lack of a clear centre, to the homogenised industrial landscape, to the conformation of the region as a vast metropolitan area where urban agglomerates are practically indistinguishable,[135] to the «tightly manufactured landscape […] backed by hyperconservative local politics» (246). This is what Soja defines *exopolis*: «the city without» (238), «ex-centrically perched beyond the vortex of the old agglomerative nodes» he describes them as «improbable cities where centrality is virtually ubiquitous» (239). In this sense, Carlotto's Northeast can indeed be defined an *exopolis*: a constantly expanding periphery[136] gravitating around hollow centres and a postmodern

[135] Orange County is to date one of the most densely populated areas in the USA.
[136] While the space for further analysis in this context is limited, it is still interesting to note how the mode of expansion of the modern *exopolis* can be analysed through the Deleuzian concept of

metropolis where, in Paolini's words, when you look around 'nothing tells you that you are in Veneto'.

Yet what we see in Carlotto's novels *is* Veneto. While the *landscape* we see is sparsely defined but indeed an 'exopolitan' one, the *territory* that emerges from the narration bears a more precise definition. There is little in the landscape that tells us we are in Veneto, but the clues lie elsewhere, in the habits and mindset of the characters, in the cultural remnants that emerge almost unexpected (as we will see with the rare utterances in dialect). At this stage, in order to understand the process underling such characterisation of the territory it will be useful to hark back to the theoretical premises of this study, specifically to Bender's idea of landscape as an element playing a crucial role in defining both people's individual identity and their identity as a group. Bearing in mind the pace at which a once rural Veneto turned into an exopolis, by applying these anthropological principles, it is easy to understand how having lived through and witnessed the transformation of the landscape in Veneto must have had a tangible effect on people's perception of their own environment and contributed to creating that – mostly unconscious – sense of disorientation that the population began to feel as the region's territory was mutating in such a radical way.[137] Provided that processes of this kind generally act at a subdued and unconscious level, still in such conditions, the effects of a change

'rhizome': used in constast to the 'arborescent' type to describe a theory whose structure is non-hierarchical, the concept aptly describes the sweeping, unstructured movement of the *exopolis* constantly growing and incorporating grounds. The concept is elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980).

[137] It is important to stress that, while such process was examined and articulated as part of the cultural debate in the region, a sense of 'things being different' is still well alive and vivid in people's imaginary and often surfaces in conventional popular speech through expressions in which time references like 'una volta' indicate the years preceding a decisive economic upturn in the region.

in the landscape range from a growing sense of extraneousness – the feeling of *spaesamento* that, as we saw, Paolini extensively verbalises in his production – to a consequently increased awareness of an environment that has become difficult to recognise, to the crumbling of the traditional cultural references shaping the long-standing identity of the region. Carlotto himself reflects that in the Northeast:

> «Il passaggio dai grandi poli industriali alla fabbrica diffusa nel territorio, la piccola, media e microproduzione [...] ha portato alla scomparsa di ogni dimensione di appartenenza storica e culturale dei veneti e dei friulani alla propria terra. La cultura, intesa come la cultura diffusa nel territorio, è stata completamente spazzata via. Sono bastati vent'anni di questo tipo di sistema economico a stravolgere la memoria delle persone. La profonda modificazione del territorio […] ha fatto sì che questo non fosse più riconosciuto dai suoi abitanti» (Carlotto, Amici, 91).

It is crucial to note that, while the transformation of the landscape is one of the key factors triggering cultural changes on such scale, Carlotto does not directly engage in detailed descriptions of what the landscape now looks like, but rather addresses the issue of the effects of the cultural shift that entailed from it: he does not offer us a picture of a modified geographical context to compare with previous depictions, but he tackles the internal mechanics of a territory of which landscape is only the visible surface. In his novels, the author hints at the transformation that the territory of Veneto has undergone outlining a setting made of warehouses, concrete, factories, and traffic, which tends to stress the fact that Veneto has evolved into something that has little to do with the scenes of country roads, woods, fields, and peasants which instead, as has been noted above, feature in the works of authors like Meneghello or Rigoni Stern. When comparing Carlotto's Veneto with theirs it is clear that the natural landscape has succumbed to the industrial expansion: the portion of Carlotto's production that is dedicated to the Italian northeast is dotted

with passages that allude to a pre-industrial stage and indicate the swift string of development stages that uniformed the appearance of the region, almost coating it with a blanket of small detached houses and warehouses – *villette e capannoni*, another common refrain that we often hear in Paolini's work:

> «Si trovava a pochi chilometri da Padova, in un paese che, uguale a tanti altri, si era sviluppato negli anni Settanta intorno all'unica chiesa dell'unica piazza e lungo la provinciale, invadendo i campi e le vigne con villette a schiera, laboratori e piccole fabbriche. Quando ero giovane e il locale era ancora una casa del popolo, si andava lì a mangiare e bere per poche lire e a discutere di politica [...] Negli anni Ottanta era diventato via via una paninoteca, una creperia, una snackeria, una yogurteria finché non avevo mandato Rudy a trattare con la padrona» (NCU 18).

Because it appears mainly in the context of sparse remarks, one could argue that the reflection on the mutation of landscape itself does not occupy a prominent proportion of this author's narrative. However, limiting ourselves to evaluate what fraction of Carlotto's Northeast cycle represents the geography of contemporary Veneto would curb our ability to interpret the interesting aspects of his work that allow us to analyse the relation between literature and territory: it is precisely the fact that Carlotto portrays a territory and its transformation without privileging the description of the landscape that makes his work extremely interesting in the context of this research. Therefore it is crucial to stress that, however briefly described, the modification of the landscape in Veneto remains in his novels an essential component of the overall mutation of the region into a radically transformed entity, but it is the latter constitutes the ultimate focus of Carlotto's work. As is true in general in this writer's oeuvre, within the context of his writings on the theme of the Northeast, his interest is indeed attracted by the portrayal of the social and cultural facets of the matter, on the exploration of the mindset and

functioning of a society that he often reveals in its most contradictory and corrupted aspects (as epitomised in the ambiguity of most of the key characters, from the Alligatore to Alvise Visentin in *Nordest*). Given that the nucleus of the author's representation of the north-eastern society predominantly revolves around his enquiries into the social and economic layers that form the local territory, it has been rightfully noted that Carlotto uses «l'economia come cartina di tornasole per analizzare le spinte sociologiche e culturali, in senso lato, della trasformazione di un territorio, il Nordest» (De Paulis-Dalembert 137). As the following analysis will show, it is precisely these two driving forces – economic powers and social interaction – that emerge as the pillars of the author's rendition of Veneto and the Northeast.

4.2.3 Delineating the coordinates of a territory: *La verità dell'Alligatore*

La verità dell'Alligatore is the first title in the Alligatore series as well as the first of Carlotto's novels to be dedicated to the theme of Veneto. Throughout the Northeast cycle, Carlotto's plots span across the region to portray a territory that has been widely homogenised by economic development and can therefore be approached, to the purpose of his enquiries, as a territorial unit that roughly coincides with the regions forming the Triveneto.[138] The seamless cohesion of this

[138] Namely Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Trentino. Although Carlotto refers to the area as 'Nordest' and the whole territory constitutes his dialectical objective, the cases he investigates mainly bring him to name, when he does, specific locations in Veneto, sometimes in Friuli, while Trentino does in fact not feature in the cycle.

territorial entity emerges in the early titles in the Alligatore series and evolves throughout and beyond the series, as will be observed in the analysis of *Nordest*. With *La verità dell'Alligatore* however, Carlotto first outlines the coordinates of the Northeast he intends to talk about and does so by sketching the basic contours of the places and by starting to define the figures populating them, which will ultimately be the instruments through which the author's portrayal of the territory is conveyed. As has been observed with reference to the wider context of Carlotto's production, the author defines its setting on a geographical basis and names the places, but the territory that the readers sees, far from simply coinciding with a landscape, is instead the combination of spatial location and economic and social structure. Assuming *La verità dell'Alligatore* as the starting point of all Carlotto's enquiries – the title is indeed also the first crime novel after the autobiographical *Il fuggiasco* – helps to recognise that the novel functions as a blueprint to the author's oeuvre. If with this book the author first introduces his readers to 'the Northeast', intended as three-dimensional and complex character that absorbs in itself all the contradictions of the society it represents, it is also true that, as has been noted by Vito Santoro, such portrayal can also be read in terms of a broader denunciation as «Carlotto […] fa parlare il Nordest, assumibile come metafora dell'Italia contemporanea e un'epoca, la nostra, e fa loro raccontare i fatti nella loro nuda crudezza» (Lombard 2010, 77). Furthermore, despite adopting the narrative code of the noir – and therefore casting aside the presence of a recurrent investigator and a rough distinction between a 'good' and a 'bad' side –, when shifting his focus to directly engage with cases set in other regions of Italy or beyond the national

borders, Carlotto still adopts the basic model casted on this first *giallo*: a central crime plot, set in a defined geographic space, articulating into a grid of interconnecting micro-stories which all serve the aim of shedding light on one or another aspect of the social and economic drives defining the current functioning of that specific territory.

Having established that with *La verità dell'alligatore* the author assembles the foundations of his future work, and having identified it as the basic narrative model on which the author's enquiries are built, the next step will be to understand the practical use of such model by analysing its fundamental components as just outlined above: a plot, a defined space, and the interlacing stories of the different characters. The story line in *La verità dell'Alligatore* revolves around Alberto Magagnin, a drug addict and a burglar, condemned for a murder he claims he hasn't committed, who suddenly disappears while in 'semi-liberty',[139] after more than a decade in prison, only to stumble again into another murder whose dynamic unmistakably resemble that of the previous one. Covertly investigating on behalf of Magagnin's lawyer, Marco Buratti puts together his unlikely team of detectives to uncover a plot that reveals Magagnin's innocence and the involvement of wealthy powerful members of Padova's high society, criminal lawyer Alvise Sartori, textile industrialist Carlo Ventura, and forensic scientist Emilio Artoni, in a vast network of bribery and in the cover-up of Sartori's and Ventura's own childrens' role in one of the two murders.

[139] In this case, the convict is allowed to leave jail during the day to work in a social cooperative and has to go back to prison at night.

The story is set in and around Padova. It is immediately clear, as the characters move around the city and drive across the region, that this is a completely different scenario if compared to Veneto as it emerges from works by what has been previously defined as the 'older generation of writers'. Natural elements are virtually absent in the book, and while the author does not dwell on long descriptions of the landscape, the brief sketches that make their appearance all depict an industrial environment: factories, blocks of flats, roads and motorways, clubs, bars, small detached houses and villas compose a territory where «non c'è più soluzione di continuità tra un paese e l'altro ma si ha un unico susseguirsi di capannoni» (Carlotto, Amici, 91). An old farmhouse in the countryside is described as «[u]na vecchia fattoria circondata dai campi e ristrutturata con gusto decisamente kitsch» (VA 35), a clashing sight, possibly betraying the loss of purpose of such building in an area where traditional agriculture and farming are no longer leading activities. Similarly, most of the dwellings populating the outskirts of the city portray a surface that has grown distant from the traditional identity of the region, the most evident effect of a rapid growth. Some are the villas of the rich, corrupted, few: «[c]i fermammo di fronte al cancello della villa a due piani. Il giardino era disseminato di lampioni e sfoggiava aiuole ben curate e alberi d'alto fusto» (VA 249). But most of them are the already known *villette*, the symbol of a phase of swift economic expansion and rapid enrichment: «[u]na graziosa casetta a due piani con giardino, ai margini del quartiere Sacra Famiglia, simile a tante altre, costruite all'incirca una trentina d'anni prima» (VA 17); «una villetta monofamiliare nelle

campagne circostanti Monselice […], tradiva un'origine modesta nonostante il costoso abbellimento, frutto di una successiva ristrutturazione» (VA 204).

On the other hand, Padova appears as a fragmented reality with an ambiguous connotation. On one side are the wealthy neighbourhoods in the historical centre where lawyers like Sartori have their studios: «[c]ontrollammo i luoghi che frequentava abitualmente: l'abitazione, il centro di cui era direttore e lo studio privato [...], il cui portone si affacciava su una stradina dell'antico ghetto, a ridosso di piazza delle Erbe» (VA 127); on the other side the city also shows a different face made of drug dealing and criminal affairs: «[c]acciati dal centro, ormai i tossici stavano tutti in Prato della Valle» (VA 16); «Piazza Mazzini era deserta e battuta da una pioggia torrenziale. Ci riparammo sotto il solito portico e poi ci avvicinammo a piedi al bar Jamaicano. La banda Caruso al completo era nel locale» (236). At the same time, the Alligatore haunts yet other neighbourhoods:

> «[il chiarore ...] illuminava l'interno del locale in cui mi trovavo – il Noisebar Banale – uno scantinato trasformato nel club più frequentato di Padova, situato al Portello, quella zona della città un tempo gagliardo quartiere di malaffare, oggi popoloso rifugio-dormitorio per universitari fuori sede: ogni cinque portoni una pizzeria al trancio, ogni dieci una lavanderia a gettoni e ovunque cumuli di biciclette arrugginite, incatenate ai pali della segnaletica stradale» (VA 7).

Overall, the most outstanding feature of this landscape, is precisely that nothing in it speaks of the region's traditional identity, once more 'there is nothing here that tells you that you are in Veneto'. Even the language does not seem to help in this perspective, if we consider for example that the author only uses a dialect words in a couple of occasions, putting them in italics, see «*tramacci*» (VA 219), or that one of the few utterances in dialect is aimed at denouncing a culpable silence on covert criminal activities: «No iera miga afari mii» (VA 209). Both aspects

appear to signify a detachment from traditional cultural roots. The places described in this novel, and indeed in the rest of the Northeast cycle, sound like the words spoken by the characters of *Westwood Dee-Jay* by another local writer, Marco Franzoso: just like their speech is a mix of local dialect and English, a badly assembled fusion of words from different languages pieced together in a shallow juxtaposition that does not have any cultural root, the places Carlotto describes seem to be a clashing combination of old and new, of 'modest origin and costly embellishment'. Far from denying the distinctiveness of some of the architectural landmarks in Padova (Piazza Erbe, Prato della Valle, the Ghetto), the overall impression is that a very little portion, of the landscapes Carlotto sketches manifests its local cultural identity in a significant way, as they rather reveal themselves as an odd mix of tradition and renovation in which the two instances do not communicate resulting into an un-integrated whole.

And yet this is Veneto. The region Carlotto describes is very different from what it used to be, but it is precisely the peculiar history of Veneto that transformed the region into this mix and it is precisely because the region underwent a phase of economic development that unfolded in a peculiar way that this became *exopolis*, a non-space, yet a clearly defined one. The territory Carlotto describes, its social and economic fabric as well the landscape, is the result of a very specific process, and while there is nothing here that tells you you're in Veneto when you look at the landscape, the specific territorial entity resulting from the process of economic development hinted by the author is clearly identifiable as Veneto. Once more, it is crucial to note how this concenrs the territory as a whole, i.e. the region in its

appearance and social structure, rather than simply its landscape. Indeed, thinking of Veneto in these terms, as territory, allows us to analyse Carlotto's work in ways that using an approach focused on landscape alone would not allow. As Carlotto has also directly pointed out in many occasions, the idea conveyed by his novels is that the transformation of the territory was too quick and radical for the population to gradually adjust to a new social and economic fabric: the traditional identity of the region was eradicated and substituted with customs and habits whose origin is in no way rooted within the cultural history of the region. One of these is the popular social ritual of the *spritz*:[140] asked if, as appears from his portrayals of Veneto, this is «l'unico collante che tiene insieme il territorio» Carlotto responds that:

> «[è] così. [...] Da Treviso a Vicenza, da Vicenza a Padova, se vai nelle piazze al momento dello spritz sono tutti fuori a fumare col bicchiere in mano. È diventato un momento un cui la gente si incontra e parla, ma è un rito fasullo» (Carlotto, Amici, 93).

While the sense of continuity with the traditional identity of the region was suddenly lost, the conditions for such detachment to happen are specific to the reality of this region, making this a phenomenon that is peculiarly *veneto*. Best visualised as the image of a connection snapping, this sense of fragmentation and lack of grounds on which a region's culture can set its feet is also transposed into and conveyed through the characters that inhabit the places in Carlotto's novels. Whilst it is in the later *Nordest* that such transposition reaches its pinnacle in the specific characterizations of the principal figures in the book, *La verità dell'Alligatore*, besides first introducing the trio of detectives that will run the

[140] In Carlotto's novels, the social occasion of the *spritz* makes its appearance in the pages of *Alla fine di un giorno noioso*.

investigations throughout the Alligatore cycle, also begins to shape the sort of conflicts that define inter-characters relations and are aimed at exposing the short-circuiting and malfunctioning of a society whose structure has been drastically twisted.

The book is told in the first person, and the story of the Alligatore surfaces in the very first pages, defined by his past and by the effect this had on his present life. As a student, Marco Buratti was also a blues singer: «[p]rima di finire nei guai ero il cantante di un gruppo, gli Old Red Alligators, e fu così che iniziarono a chiamarmi Alligatore» (VA 9). His *guai* started as he gave shelter to someone he didn't know, «[u]na sera era arrivato un tizio dall'accento romano, con una borsa sportiva e una faccia che avevo già visto da qualche parte. Ci arrestarono all'alba. Lui è ancora dentro, io gli ho fatto compagnia per sette lunghi anni» (VA 8). Having refused to give up names to the police, he serves his time in jail, building a reputation of intermediary and turning, once out, into part-time private detective:

> «[i]n galera continuai a non vedere e a non sentire. Questo fece di me una specie di saggio, una persona di rispetto […] fungevo da intermediario. [...] Una volta uscito ho continuato a godere di una buona reputazione. [...] Da allora svolgo piccole indagini per tutti quei legali che hanno bisogno di entrare nel mondo della malavita» (VA 8-9).

Unable to reintegrate in the world of the *regolari*, he lives his low-key life knowing that whoever might need his help will know where to find him. His whole figure is modelled on American hard-boiled detectives but his romantic allure and a mysterious woman leaving him with a broken heart and an addiction to Calvados draws him closer to Chandler's Philip Marlowe more than any other fictional detective: «[d]alla galera sono uscito senza più la voglia di cantare e suonare. Mi va solo di ascoltare. E di continuare a bere. Ormai soltanto calvados, tutto ciò che

mi rimane di una donna perduta in Francia» (VA 10). The relevance of the figure of the Alligatore, and the reason why it is key to reflect on Carlotto's creation of such character – straddling criminal world and legality but not really belonging to either – is that, analogously to how crime writing can provide a privileged view to observe the infiltration of crime within the regular society, presenting cases through the eyes of an endearing yet undoubtedly ambiguous figure allows the author to shed light on a wider range of perspectives into the territory he is investigating: given his knowledge of both worlds, the Alligatore can provide readers with a deeper insight that any character sitting on either side of the fence. In a similar way, both of Marco Buratti's collaborators share with him a past of troubles with the law and repeatedly employ unlawful means, but with the aim to serve a justice that goes beyond what they deem to be the failures of the judicial system. Entering the scene early on, Beniamino Rossini

> «[n]onostante l'età – cinquant'anni suonati, una buona quindicina dei quali trascorsi in galera – conservava un fisico snello e muscoloso, "alla Moser", come amava definirsi lui stesso. Uno degli ultimo rappresentanti della vecchia malavita Milanese, la cui specialità erano le rapine ai furgoni portavalori» (VA 28).

Making a late appearance, but nonetheless playing a vital role in what will become an established trio, Max la Memoria is never introduced by his real name, but rather by his political stance:

> «[n]egli anni Settanta si occupava di controinformazione per un gruppo della sinistra extraparlamentare. Aveva messo in piedi una rete di informatori insospettabili e spiava tutto e tutti in questa città. Qualche anno fa dei pentiti l'hanno accusato di aver passato informazioni a gruppi che praticavano la lotta armata e da allora è latitante. Ma so che si nasconde qui a Padova e che continua a spiare, la sua rete non è mai stata smantellata. [...] È un cane sciolto che usa quello che sa ai fini di una strategia del tutto personale: vende o regala

> informazioni solo se l'uso che ne viene fatto coincide con i suoi disegni politici» (VA 147-148).[141]

If one could rightly say that, in his novels, Carlotto aims at exposing the points of contact between the shining glaze of economic wealth that spread across the region with its mass-scale industrialization and the rottenness that lays beneath it, then these characters are the ones to give us a perspective on such points of contact, as they move across these two layers, without belonging to any of them.

While it is undeniable that diffused wealth and economic growth have improved the life conditions of a vast portion of the region's population, the influx of money has also attracted avid illegal trades, bringing along corruption on a large scale and criminal activities like bribery and drug smuggling, and with them a trail of profiteers and one – much longer – of defeated human beings. Hence, on one side are figures like Alberto Magagnin, «un tossico del giro di piazza dei Signori, si era introdotto in una villa del quartiere Arcella per rubare [...]» (VA 12) and «Marietto Carraro, una storia di droga come tante altre. Ladruncolo per necessità, sempre dentro e fuori di galera, trai pochi sopravvissuto della sua generazione di *sbusoni*» (VA 16); while on the other side one finds epitomes of corrupted success

[141] In the book, Max la Memoria is also defined by his physical appearance: «Mi ritrovai a fissare un uomo grande e grosso, con la pancia tipica di chi beve molta birra a e conduce una vita sedentaria. Aveva una barba corta spruzzata di bianco e due grandi occhi azzurri che tradivano l'aspetto bonario del fisico, rivelando tutta la scaltrezza e l'intelligenza del personaggio» (VA 151). Overall the trio owes to a long-standing international tradition of crime writing, as has been rightly noted by Vito Santoro: «L'Alligatore condivide con il Marlowe chandleriano un atteggiamento disincantato nei confronti di ciò che lo circonda, il romanticismo, la difficoltà di stabilire una relazione sentimentale stabile, la sigaretta perennemente accesa e l'appuntamento ripetuto più volte nel corso della giornata con l'alcol, il calvados, e con il Duca Lamberti di Scerbanenco, la passata esperienza carceraria, l'analisi lucida, diretta e razionale della società e della civiltà che lo circonda e l'indignazione sociale, che lo porta a essere "un cavaliere errante della modernità" (MM, 26). Analogamente, Max ricorda nella stazza e nella sedentarietà Nero Wolfe e nella passione per la cucina Pepe Carvalho; mentre Rossini nel suo kitsch sembra essere uscito da un film di Tarantino» (Lombard 2007, 61-62). In the quote, MM stands for *Il mistero di Mangiabarche*.

like Alvise Sartori who, «[l]aureato a pieni voti, inizia una folgorante carriera come penalista. Alla fine degli anni Sessanta diventa l'avvocato della Padova intrallazzona» (VA 155).

As far apart as these two worlds might seem, it is once again the presence of characters who are in-between that reveals the fragility of the glass wall separating society's winners from its losers. The murder of Piera Belli, an apparently discreet and innocuous English teacher, temporarily off-work, sheds light onto a darker side of her life,[142] which will be the key to unveil the vast plotting set up by well-regarded professionals in the public eye to smooth out their affairs while exploiting and condemning the weaker elements of society. As the plot unfolds, we see the stories of seemingly unrelated characters becoming more and more entangled to expose the merciless functioning of a society corrupted by power and money. Among the markers indicating the presence of deep-seated contradictions in a territory that seems to has lost its cultural roots to become devoted to the accumulation of wealth alone, is an incongruous relation with religiousness, an element that will often emerge within the Northeast cycle to highlight the hypocrisy of the ostensibly pious surface raised by the most reckless criminals:

> «"In questo caso, ti chiedo un favore: potresti telefonare all'avvocato Sartori e dirgli che lo voglio incontrare domani alle undici nel suo studio?".
> "Sarà un piacere... ma caro... domani è domenica…".
> "Hai ragione. Facciamo allora alle tredici, dopo la messa"» (VA 217).

While a crime plot revolving around corruption could indeed be set anywhere, what Carlotto's novel truly reveals is the context in which it is set, a context where

[142] As well as running a circle involved in sadomasochistic practices, «[l]'irreprensibile professoressa, nonché ex giudice popolare di Corte d'Assise, era dedita all'uso di stupefacenti» (VA 77).

the sudden growth of wealth has produces a specific mentality and where elements ingrained in the traditional cultural set up, such as faith and religion, clash with a newly found social set up driven by money and success, where the clash between the new wealth and the old rural context emerges in the architecture of the *villette*, cheap but embellished. A clearer and most comprehensive picture of Carlotto's operation could only be gained by examining the whole Northeast cycle. However, it is with this book that Carlotto sets the basis of his enquiry into the current state of the region. Indeed Most of the elements observed in this analysis will become recurrent features in Carlotto's characterisation of the territory of Veneto and the Northeast. Therefore, whilst functioning as a model for his enquiries, *La verità dell'Alligatore* also sets the coordinates of the territory that the author aims to scrutinize through his Northeast cycle. Having defined the borders of the subject, in order to fully understand the extent of the writer's work on this subject, it will now be worth shifting our attention to see in which direction Carlotto's investigation into this territory develops.

4.2.4 *Nordest*: territory as a collective voice

«I due pilastri su cui l'impresa nordestina, a partire dagli anni sessanta, ha costruito le sue fortune sono la famiglia e il territorio» (Costa, 32). As well as encapsulating the quintessential elements underlying the process of economic development of the Italian northeast outlined in the previous chapter, this sentence also works perfectly as a key to understand what rules really drive the social reality described in *Nordest*

written by Carlotto with the cooperation of Marco Videtta. Chronologically the second-last in the Northeast cycle, *Nordest* represent the apex of Carlotto's moulding operation of the north-eastern territory into a self-standing character. The articulated plot interlaces together a number of stories, each shedding light on a different aspect of the complex fabric of the society the book portrays. The investigations on the murder of a promising lawyer and bride-to-be, the mystery of the young victim's father suddenly reappearing after years of absconding, the unveiling of an illegal traffic of toxic waste, the series of robberies committed by the 'Cherokee mob', are all entwined and linked to the constantly present background scenario, the miraculous land that is the Northeast, a superincumbent structure emerging from the radical economic transformation that forged the reality in which these people live, informed their mentality and views and surely concurs in defining people's behavior and social dynamics. If readers of Carlotto had become familiar with such presence from his previous works, the further step in the process that the authors achieve in *Nordest* is the creation of a choral voice, which fuses a myriad of individual voices and their stories into a single, overarching one that coincides with that of the territory of Veneto and the Northeast.

Besides being one of Carlotto's noirs, therefore employing a different register from *La verità dell'alligatore*, the first element to leap out and set this novel aside, not only from the hard-boiled novels, but also from other titles in the Northeast cycle, is the lack of a precise geographical indication for the setting. More similar in this to *L'oscura immensità della morte*, whose opening reads «1989 – una città del Nordest» (OIM 7), the location for *Nordest* is defined no further than in its title.

The implication could not be clearer: the book is not set in the Northeast, the Northeast is the protagonist of the book. A territory whose landscape and culture have been homogenised by twenty years of unregulated industrialisation is in itself defined as a uniform whole of *villette e capannoni*, where drawing a border between a village and the next is an unnecessary exercise as the pattern of the 'urbanised countryside' covers, uninterrupted, most of the land. Even casting aside the title, the description of the context is sharp and punctual to the extent that the background is clearly recognizable to the Italian reader and it would not be necessary for the authors to name a specific town or village to give rough indication of the area where the novel is set, so strong is the connotation of the character of the region. Moreover, although the actual name of the place where the plot takes place is never mentioned, the characters constantly refer to *il paese* not only in the geographical sense, but also as a sort of collective character, an homogeneous entity that represents the standardized attitudes and thoughts of the community. «Di giorno il paese ha mille occhi e mille lingue» (NE 95); «per le donne del paese Antonio Visentin "era ancora un bell'uomo", mentre per gli uomini "di Antonio Visentin non se ne fanno più"» (NE 61) are only two of the many examples that show the strict compartmental structure of the community, 'the village', and the weight its judgement undoubtedly has for those who belong to it.

Besides shining through the choral voice of the village, which will be shortly analysed in more detail, the reality of the socio-economic background of the region is also brought forward through other devices, as explicit references to the issues that arose in the geographic and social fabric of the region during the economic

miracle, especially the transformation of the landscape,[143] often enter the narration and even precede its start. Firstly, one of such devices consists in a three-page long digression at the beginning of the book, where the authors provide a news-like enunciation of mainly economic facts pertinent to the region and presumably drawn from local newspapers, as well as a series of events that render a sharp snapshot of what lies behind those facts. The events reported all happened on the same day Giovanna, the victim, will be found dead, but could potentially belong to any day's columns in the Northeast, and each highlight aspects of the region's day-to-day reality whose roots are interlaced with the peculiar circumstances of growth in Veneto:[144]

> «Era stato un mercoledì come tanti. Un mercoledì d'inverno del Nordest. Nel corso della giornata le strade si erano riempite di pendolari e Tir. […] Altri quattro capannoni vuoti con la scritta affittasi, tradotta anche in cinese. Di capannoni aveva parlato nella mattina un docente di urbanistica della Facoltà di architettura di Venezia. Ai suoi studenti aveva spiegato che, a forza di costruire 2.500 capannoni l'anno, erano stati sottratti al paesaggio agrario ben 3.500 chilometri quadrati e che nella sola provincia di Treviso c'erano 279 aree industriali, una media di quattro per comune» (NE 7-8).

A second device consists in inserting explanatory remarks among the words and thoughts of the characters themselves, remarks that merge smoothly in the narration, as the omniscient narrator constantly switches point of view and enters the characters' minds to refer their own words. Hence, the characters' awareness of the transformation of their territory comes, on the one hand, from comments

[143] Once more, one should note that the novel includes reflections on the mutation of the landscape as one of the factors encompassed into a wider transformation, which is that of the whole structure of a territory: as landscape indeed constitutes the visible surface of territory, it does not alone constitute the essence of territory.

[144] The quote has already been used in the previous chapter but will be reported again here for the purposes of textual analysis.

describing the landscape surrounding the village such as «Qui a parte le vigne, ci sono solo capannoni» (138), combined with more articulate reflections like:

> «Tutto era accaduto in fretta, nei pochi vertiginosi anni in cui il Nordest si era trasformato da terra di contadini ed emigranti nel polo industriale più ricco e produttivo d'Europa. Un libero mercato, un'edenlandia della produttività che nemmeno lo statalismo più retrivo e paludato era riuscito a ingabbiare. Questo avevano in comune lei e Antonio: il gusto del moderno, il gusto del nuovo» (NE 66).

Moreover, others that observe the transformation from its endpoint, the post-industrial phase of development that starts revealing the cracks in what was hastily judged as a successful economic model:

> «Conosceva il suo pubblico, lo conosceva bene. Piccoli imprenditori divenuti arroganti con le palate di soldi fatti negli anni '80 e '90 e che ora se la facevano sotto all'idea di essere spazzati via dai cinesi. Sempre 'sti cazzo di cinesi. Prima erano comunisti, ora capitalisti e intanto le fabbriche licenziavano, chiudevano, si trasferivano. Artigiani, commercianti, ristoratori con le tasche sempre meno piene. Tutta gente che non aveva riflettuto sulla sua fortuna, che si era sentita invincibile e che adesso era impaurita. E incazzata. Ancor più incazzata perché non potevano nemmeno prendersela col solito governo ladro, visto che al governo c'erano quelli come loro» (NE 75).

On the other hand, the awareness of territorial issues also comes through the characters having to face – or actively perpetrating actions related to – situations that are endemic to the territory, like the delocalization of factories to eastern European countries and the smuggling of toxic waste:

> «La Fondazione Torrefranchi ha deciso di delocalizzare l'intero gruppo. Stiamo ultimando un'area industriale alle porte di Timişoara, in Romania. Qui resteranno solo alcune attività tipicamente locali e di prestigio, come la produzione vinicola» (NE 100).

The few examples just given reveal already that the Northeast does not simply act as the setting for a plot, but gains a substantial role and plays in the foreground of the narrative as it imposes its presence by being recognized as the deep-rooted framework shaping the socio-economic environment the characters live in and by

becoming almost personified under the guise of a collective voice. Hence the consideration that *Nordest* indeed «non è un romanzo su qualche singolo o qualche singolarità. É un romanzo su una società, una civiltà» (Camon, n.p.), a society, a civilization that sprung upon the very peculiar response of a region to the particular circumstances that characterized a late phase of 20th century Italy's development. In other words, Veneto and the Northeast do not come across as simply a setting, the region is not presented as landscape, what we see here is territory as a whole, an entity that includes a landscape made of *villette e capannoni* as well as its local economic history. The point is an important one to stress, as it highlights once more how referring to the concept of territory allows us to integrate a multiplicity of different aspects as well as to appreciate that indeed the author intends to bring into focus a transformation that is much deeper than simply the gradual appearance of industrial areas, what has changed is the entire mental and social structure of the region's identity. As in Carlotto's previous novels, in *Nordest* the reader is not presented with a description of a landscape in which his novel takes place, but rather with the reality of territory as a complex structure of which landscape is one part.

As has been mentioned above, the socio-economic environment identified in the novel is a clearly distinct one, with features and issues so ingrained into the regional reality that, the specific village where the novel takes place need not be named: Carlotto is not talking about one place, he is talking about the Northeast. The unidentifiability of singular places in Carlotto's Northeast inevitably brings to

mind Marc Augé's idea of 'non-place':[145] the difficulty in telling where a village ends and one begins, coupled with the near pointlessness of naming a particular location almost likens the region to a giant supermarket, airport, or shopping mall where people transit without establishing meaningful relations with the place or each other, where there is no sense of identity. Indeed, «if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity» Augé says, «then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place» (77-78). A region where traditional cultural references have gone lost, the lansdscape has been uniformed in clusters of houses and factories, where there is nothing left to tell you that you are in Veneto, would appear to tick all the boxes. Yet, in this novel the means through which territory finds a voice are the characters themselves, their attitudes, and their mentality. While homogenised within boundaries, the territory is defined precisely by some of the traits that make it resemble a non-place. The people who populate the village in *Nordest* behave and interact according to an unspoken set of values and shared habits that are firmly interwoven with the specific geographical, social and economic context they are part of, a context that developed out of the cultural eradication brought about by the economic upturn of the 1970s and 80s. Since the conditions for a gradual absorption of this new reality did not exist, the sense of confusion and loss of identity translated into the population failing to understand or face the many mutations their land was undergoing. The inability to control migration, for example, made society

[145] Augé's considerations are collected in *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (1995).

unprepared to face the huge influx of migrants coming in search for work, so that the accepted truth became that «"I foresti", "quelli che non sono gente nostra", i negri, gli albanesi, i marocchini. Erano loro i responsabili che polizia e carabinieri non colpivano» (NE 75). Furthermore, in an overly urbanized society, the community and the village would still loom over people's lives with their judgemental look: «Quello era il paese. Le grandi famiglie non davano mai spettacolo in pubblico» (NE 23). In this context, the demand for the façade to remain undamaged, for appearance to retain its prominence over other aspects of social life is one of the only values that has been passed on from one generation to the next. The possibility of communication between fathers and sons is irreparably broken as the cultural gap between the two generations is too wide: «I figli delle grandi famiglie erano dei rammolliti, incapaci di gestire le imprese messe in piedi con tanta fatica dai genitori» (NE 24). The remarks quoted here do not stand by themselves, they are part of a wider picture that defines territory as a whole. Moreover, these characters are dwellers in this space, they live in it, do not contemplate it, they are part of it and contribute to shaping its reality as a whole.

The examples given relate to a reality that is far from being only fictional. The same phenomena that Carlotto represents are investigated in the aforementioned sociological studies by Ilvo Diamanti and in the non-fictional commentaries by Paolo Rumiz and Gian Antonio Stella. In the light of his objective as a writer, it is evident that Carlotto's aim is to denounce the dangerous spread of criminal behaviour within the 'regular' establishment, but also, and more importantly, to conduct an investigation into a society he feels the need to question

and understand. Hence, stretching the observation beyond the perspective of the Carlotto's *impegno*, it is crucial to note that with *Nordest* the territory portrayed by the author acquires the features of a character in its own right, as it is through such characterisation that the authors stretches his investigation to its maximum extent, while at the same time offering to his readership a comprehensive picture of an issue – the transformation and progressive fading of the cultural roots of a whole society parallel to its economic development – that is meant to inspire a precise prise de conscience in the wider public.

In *Nordest*, Carlotto uses a particular narrative device to bring out these themes, which is linked to characters and the pivotal role they play in defining the subject matter. Excluding Francesco, the protagonist through whose eyes the story is told and who speaks in the first person, each of the characters in the novel is portrayed in the third person, their thoughts exposed by the voice of an omniscient narrator, the style and language adapting to their personality and nature. The key element that links the representation of the characters with the construction of the collective voice through which the territory itself emerges is the fact that each of these figures, apart from their functionality within the plot, are also related to a specific topic and serve the purpose of its exploration. Such function is associated to all characters of the plot, with only one broad distinction. Some of them are not individually defined but are nonetheless crucial as they concur to shaping the voice of that collective and choral entity that is 'the village': Beggiolin, for example, the TV journalist who «forniva le notizie che il paese voleva sentire» (NE 51), or Paola, the alcoholic wife of the unscrupulous bank branch director who is partly

responsible for the ruin of the victim's family, and well represents the stereotype of the submissive credulous woman who would turn to a sorceress when things in her life come to standstill. On the other hand, other characters are well-rounded and stand independently in their purpose to serve the conveyance of a specific theme that is then developed throughout the book alongside their role to the plot: this is the case of Francesco and his father Antonio, of countess Selvaggia and her son Filippo, whose interconnected relationships are representative of the impossibility of communication between old and young generation in the context of the Northeast; but also of Carla, who instead conveys with her character the theme of the unveiling of bonds between crime and ruling class.

A few examples relating to the latter category will help clarify this mechanism. The two strongest relationships around which the plot of *Nordest* revolves are the one between Francesco Visentin and his father Antonio, and the one between Countess Selvaggia Calchi Renier and her son Filippo. While the bond between the first two is apparently strong and grounded in the great respect of Francesco for his father and what his authoritative figure stands for – «[s]arei diventato un avvocato di successo, e un pezzo grosso in paese e in regione. Come mio padre. La mia vita era già scritta in lettere d'oro. Ero un Visentin. E avrei spostato la ragazza più bella del paese» (NE 26) – the relation between Selvaggia and Filippo is instead a turbulent one, made of incommunicabilty and profound resentment. As the plots unfolds however, the ties between Francesco and his father begin to crumble under the son's growing concerns that his father might be untrustworthy and the tension between the two culminates in the revelation that

Antonio is Giovanna's murderer. This represents a point of no-return in the plots, as the terms of both relations shift to oppose two generations against each other: on one side are Francesco and Filippo, who was at first suspected to be the killer; on the other side are Selvaggia and Antonio, representatives of a generation who has failed to pass on its legacy to their children. The fragility of a system based on a transformation that brought diffused wealth but left the population devoid of a stable cultural identity emerges abruptly at the first generational change:

> «A rischio il ricambio generazionale ai vertici delle aziende» titolava a tutta pagina l'articolo di apertura dell'inserto economico. Le associazioni di categoria dell'industria e del commercio del Nordest esprimevano la loro preoccupazione per l'incapacità dei rampolli delle grandi famiglie a prendere il timone delle aziende fondate dai padri. Uno psichiatra di fama era stato chiamato a tenere delle conferenze sul tema. Secondo il professionista questi giovani erano cresciuti nella certezza del successo e adesso erano incapaci di affrontare la crisi economica» (NE 215).

The picture that comes out of Carlotto's observations in *Nordest* is definitely focused on the discrepancies sweeping under the surface of a story of economic success: they present the reader with the picture of a society where ruling groups, unconcerned about compromising or even dealing with organized crime, tend to guard their own interests while institutions generally lean towards a conniving attitude. What is more, such system is shown as it is on the verge of crumbling under its own inability to perpetuate itself, exposing the frailty of the grounds onto which it was built. Claudio Milanesi observes that:

> «In questa ricostruzione del lato oscuro del Nordest, e dell'Italia di fine secolo, Carlotto esita fra due visioni della società; la prima che la descrive come una sorta di blocco compatto di interessi impermeabile a qualsiasi mutamento di equilibri, in cui i diversi poteri – magistratura, forze dell'ordine, potere politico, mondo degli affari, criminalità, mass media – invece di controbilanciarsi si reggono l'un l'altro in una sorta di complicità che ne garantisce gli interessi reciproci; la seconda, più foucaultiana, che guarda alla società come a un sistema di micropoteri in conflitto, in una sorda guerra dove

> nessuna mossa è esclusa, dove la legge è calpestata e a prevalere sono i settori che meglio sanno amministrare la violenza, il ricatto e il danaro» (2000, n.p.).

Acknowledging the validity of both interpretations and recognising that reality is probably a combination of these two dynamics, the interpretation presented here similarly advocates that what emerges from Carlotto's *Nordest* is the picture of a territory that holds on the delicate balance between contrasting forces that oppose each other or cooperate on the basis of self-interest and of a blind rush to the accumulation of wealth.

To conclude, in *Nordest,* the reality of a specific territory comes forward, speaks and acts for itself through the words of the characters of a crime novel. By means of the portrayal of, and reflection on, people's demeanour and shared beliefs, territory becomes a defined entity with a legitimacy and a raison d'être which is equal to that of any other character in the novel. Hence the reiteration that the novel indeed, in Camon's words, «non è un romanzo su qualche singolo o qualche singolarità. È un romanzo su una società, una civiltà» (n.p.), a society that grew out of the region's response to the peculiar circumstances that characterized its most recent phase of development.

CONCLUSIONS: AN INTERPRETATION

The path followed by the study presented here began with the outline of a theoretical framework to continue with the delineation of an historical and literary background and end with the analysis of a specific case study. To sum up and conclude, this last section will follow the opposite trail: from an evaluation of what has been observed with regards to Paolini's and Carlotto's work to an assessment of how this translates to the plane of the transformation of the territory of Veneto and to that of the general relation between literature and territory.

When looking at the broad picture that emerges from part II of this research, it is clear that, within the context of the production they dedicate to the theme of territory, Paolini's theatre and Carlotto's crime novels are both complementary and very different at the same time. Besides the obvious distinctions that originate in the use of the oral practice on one side and of the written form on the other side, the two authors also approach the critical discussion of a similar acknowledgement – the transformation of territory in Veneto over the last decades of the 20th century has had a severe impact on the region's cultural identity – from two distinct angles. The basic premise for both authors consists in their interest for the region of Veneto; for both, such interest goes beyond the resolution to engage with their native land

and indeed springs from a certain idea of literature and complements a general commitment to raise awareness on a range of topics that cross the borders of the region to involve the national as well as the international plan. Yet the topic of Veneto represents for both an earnest concern, a matter to which both Carlotto and Paolini go back many times. The fundamental nucleus of the question is one: the society in Veneto, its composition and its rules, have changed in response to the transformation of the region's territory; the traditional identity of the region, based on the pace of natural cycles and on the social hierarchy proper of a civilization whose main economic force was agriculture, has been swiped away; a new economic model based on the family unit gained a foothold in the region and generated a widespread increase in wealth; while the general life conditions of people have benefited from this transition, the hasty rhythm of the process hindered a progressive adjustment to the new cultural formation that the region had become. The economic base changed swiftly leaving the social and cultural superstructure devoid of grounds on which to stand and therefore unable to wholly connect with it. The cracks in this system become evident as new production methods, territory management, and development plans overlap with the mentality, habits, and cultural references that belong to a previous rural civilization. Linguistic short-circuits, somewhat superficial social traditions, disconnectedness from cultural roots, negligence towards the territory: all emerge from both Paolini's and Carlotto's works.

However, the path that the two authors follow in exposing the state of affairs in their territory diverges substantially since their very first steps onto it. On the one

hand, Paolini brings the territory on the stage, by putting himself and his impersonations under the spotlight, the author-actor directly questions his public and invites them to reflect on their own roots. Paolini's theatre functions in ways as a mirror that reflects a reality well-known by his audience, through it, he directly asks 'do you recognise yourselves?', so 'where do you come from?'. On the other hand, Carlotto encapsulates his perspective within the frame of reference of crime and illegal activities, which, while diffused, constitute a world that is generally considered to be removed from most people's day-to-day lives. In the author's works, to shed light on the profound roots of the malfunctioning of the institutions and justice in the region coincides with laying bare the contradictions characterising a societal structure resulting from the transformation of the territory: the failures in the system become the key to analyse the transition. Whilst Carlotto focuses on what he believes are facets of the territorial reality which, due to their criminal and covert nature, the general public might be unaware of, Paolini represents through his theatre a reality that his viewers know well, a reality that they might not stop and think about, but which they recognise and feel part of. One element to play a crucial part in this distinction is the authors' use of language: as has clearly emerged, the local vernacular features in Paolini's work as a fundamental component of the regional identity – which indeed it is – whereas dialect words sporadically appear in Carlotto's writings and are almost treated as elements of a foreign idiom. In a silent retracing of the debate around the question of the language that saw Calvino and Pasolini take a stance on opposite sides during the 1960s and '70s, Paolini almost seems to recreate on stage that «santissima dualità» identified

by Pasolini between spoken and written Italian, while Carlotto's language, despite the frequent harshness and the TV-like speech of some characters, appears to abide more to the principles of «traducibilità» that Calvino indicated as part of the necessary concerns of a writer. Thus, overall, Carlotto's novels are crafted around the objective of uncovering the underground mechanisms of criminal activity in Veneto to expose the circumstances that allowed their wide spreading and do so by centring their plots on issues like the diffusion of illegal practices within the institutional and high-society spheres, the evolution of criminal networks, the smuggling of toxic waste and drugs, the relocation of factories in Eastern European countries and its impact on local economies. Paolini on the other hand, aims to pose questions, he explores the territory, meets people, reflects on the culture, dialogues with poets and narrators and renders his own testimony of this territory on the stage for his audience to listen and think. He steps on the stage with questions that echo the need to ponder the cultural roots of the present society: 'when has this region stopped looking like Veneto to become *Barbazùchon town*?', 'when did we stop being *grebani*?'.

These two portraits depict the same Veneto, yet they look very different. This is also due to the fact that modes of the depiction also differ substantially. Carlotto's crime novels offer an inside point of view: in most of the books in the Northeast cycle, the author seems to almost place a video-camera on his characters, to let the readers see what the characters see. The adoption of several viewpoints renders the multiplicity of perspectives, allowing the reader to see first-hand how, for example, relocation is a good deal for those who aim to recklessly exploit the potentiality of

a territory, but also represents the crumbling of family bonds and traditional values. The voice of the author Carlotto disappears and the readers' perspective is projected inside the novel as the characters provide the narrating voice and tell the story themselves. Paolini's stance acquires instead a more personal tone as the actor steps himself in the shoes of territory: as has been observed, Paolini hops in and out of his many impersonations without casting aside his own voice; as the author-actor does not adopt the perspective of one or any of his characters, the points of view he brings on the stage represent the testimony of his own experience of the territory and its people. At the same time however, Paolini also takes a step back and distances himself from the subject of his theatre in order to be able to observe the bigger picture and pose questions, inviting his audience to reflect and doubt. Thus, Paolini does not claim to speak for anyone other than himself, but offers his own testimony to challenge his audience's awareness and inspire a sense of necessity towards a shared cultural legacy. Reflecting the different relation that they establish with the local literary tradition – Paolini engages in a tireless dialogue with different authors whereas in Carlotto the link with the regional tradition is not visible – the authors' approaches are substantially divergent: Carlotto employs an enquiry-like structure based on a sociologic approach which allows him to denunciate the present, whereas Paolini calls on the reconnection with a shared identity, grounded in the region's collective memory of which the literary tradition is a fundamental aspect, as an instrument to understand such present. Yet, on the whole, analysing both these authors proved critical to the objective of this study as their perspectives offer a complementary picture of the territory of Veneto: if on one side it is a sharp

snapshot of the region as it emerged from a rapid jump into a new phase of economic development, on the other side we face questions on the nature of the transition, on its pace, on its impact on the society, on the culture, and on the identity of the region.

Bringing the discourse one step back on to the trail outlined at the beginning, and considering the level of the case study of Veneto, it is now time to summarise what the textual analysis conducted in part II can tells us about this specific case. A succinct yet conclusive observation is that, over the course of the late 20th century, Veneto has been subject to an epochal transition and regional literature proves to be an invaluable instrument in the analysis of such transformation. Indeed, as has been observed in practice through the study of examples from Paolini's and Carlotto's production, on the immediate level of the relation between literature and territory in the specific case of Veneto, literature has become the first receptor of social and economic transformations as well as the prime tool to convey a prise de conscience and a wide reflection on the implications of such change. Works like *La verità dell'Alligatore* and *Bestiario veneto* represent an early acknowledgement, on the side of the region's cultural establishment, of a crucial period in the region's history upon which discussion was urgently needed. At the same time, works such as these have constituted the most fruitful tool to convey such acknowledgment to the wider population, urging people to take into consideration the foundations of their identity. Far from promoting an anachronistic return to values that belong to past civilizations, authors like Paolini and Carlotto have insisted on the necessity for people to equip themselves with the tools necessary to understand the reality

they are part of, by questioning the values of a civilization founded on an industrial economy, by making sense of a new social construction, by considering the consequences of exploiting their territory. Overall, these observations succeed in answering the question: does literature reflect on the transformation of a territory, especially when it entails the drastic mutation of its landscape? Indeed it does. Where cultural guidance failed to shape within the institutional powers, literature has played a crucial role in raising awareness of a transformation that involved the whole structure of the territory, which includes landscape, economy, and society at large.

Bringing up the issue of landscape also leads to the observation that, besides Carlotto and Paolini, the majority of voices that rose to speak of the transformation of the territory of Veneto (authors as well as journalists like Rumiz and Stella) have done so by conducting a sometimes overt, sometimes underling condemnation of the processes that led to the vast spreading of diffused industrialization throughout the territory. Criticism of such positions often comes in the shape of arguments according to which to pour scorn on the historical mutation that the region underwent means to fundamentally misunderstand the potential of an economic surge like the one that invested Veneto, as well as to elude the improvements that the transition brought to people's life. Arguing also that the point of view of those who have seen the transformation happening from 'inside the factory' and did not find it ugly is never represented, such stance seems to underlie a suggestion made by Alain Roger and reported in Bertone's *Lo sguardo escluso*:

> «Io sono del parere che essa [la fobia della città; ma si potrebbe aggiungere qualsiasi altra fobia e "resistenza" di fronte al dominio della merce

> visualizzata] esprima soprattutto l'inadeguatezza del nostro sguardo e il ricorso nostalgico, anacronistico, e in ogni caso sterile, a modelli bucolici ormai superati. Noi non sappiamo ancora vedere le nostre città industriali, la bellezza di un'autostrada, di un esercito di tralicci schierati in ordine di battaglia… Spetta a noi inventare gli schemi visivi che le renderanno estetiche» (69).

Although this represents a legitimate position to sustain, and indeed one surely worthy of deeper and further consideration, it is important to highlight that, while sheer – and equally legitimate – criticism of the industrialisation process exists, this involves mainly a critique of its modes, the lack of a long-term development plan, and the failure to establish a route for the economy to flourish while preserving the territory and its landscape. As poverty was virtually erased from the region, the benefits of the economic upturn become indeed unquestionable. However, the model providing the backbone for such development proved to not be sustainable, as for example it failed to integrate the increasing income of migrant workforce, or – and this becomes clear in *Nordest*, which is focused on the post-industrial phase in Veneto – as the delocalisation of factories in poorer countries has relocated the production outside the national borders, preventing the region from successfully facing a severe economic crisis.

Secondly, it is important to stress that while authors like Paolini and Carlotto certainly intend to denounce the short-sightedness of the regional institutions in governing the economic development, their main objective is not to deprecate an already established system, but to question its faults and encourage an active interrogation on the side of the people. Therefore, the aim of this study is not to present the view of the writers in question as the only one possible, but rather to examine the elements connecting the transformation of a territory and its landscape

to the representation of territory within the literary scenario. In terms of a general evaluation of the transformation process itself, the words that best encapsulates the hopeful vision backing this study are those of Andrea Zanzotto – who indeed was not known to be a supporter of the sprouting of malls and other concrete clusters around Veneto:

> «Oggi abbiamo un paesaggio in cui sembra prevalere la fabbrichetta velenosa, la puzzolente discarica, l'orribile intasamento del traffico […] Ma anche continuano a esistere nonostante tutto i meravigliosi colori delle piante, anche infestanti se si vuole, anche in anticipo magari sulla stagione, ma felici, come i gialli topinamur, che se ne infischiano di ogni ordine coatto di giardini…» (Fofi 2009, 30).

Taking a final step to reach one level up and relate this case study to the theoretical plane of the relation between literature and territory requires transposing this instance to a broader sphere. What has been observed through the examples presented here offers us an instrument to understand how deeply the connection between the two elements of territory and literature runs. In this case, authors from the region have expressed the urgent necessity to address the matter of territory as they realised that it was undergoing a vast and significant mutation, and, channelling their work within broader trends in contemporary literature, have renewed their literary instruments employing the poetics of *impegno* and testimony to explore and communicate the issue. Their modus and the fact that Paolini and Carlotto are the most representative example of a wider call for attention towards the subject highlight the fact that literature and territory are part of the same cultural construction. Functioning through the fundamental filter of landscape, the two elements' interaction concretely shapes in mutual correspondences between the structural mutation of one and the response of the other: a change in the landscape

originating from a transformation in the underlying complex of territory can trigger a cultural response in the form of literary production because the two do not work as separate compartments, but are part of the same system. What has been observed on the theoretical plane thus becomes evident in the actual literary practice. The processes that transformed the region of Veneto originated in the development of its economy and deeply influenced the social and cultural over-strata, as people began to adjust to the new organisation of the production system and life-style. While such mutations were taking place at a structural, invisible level, the landscape was changing dramatically and evidently: in theoretical terms, this is precisely the surrounding environment that, as explored by cultural anthropologists, takes part in the process of identity formation. As a result of this phase of development in Veneto, people were no longer integrated in a landscape that was the expression of an agriculture-based society, but began to see themselves as part of a metropolitan and industrialised world: adapting to a significantly modified context, the perception of the self is also reformed, reflecting a way of life and responding to values that no longer coincide with what was customary before the change. In this context, literature assumes the two functions of litmus paper and of mirror. If it is through some of the literary voices raising in the region that the necessity to conceptualise an epochal mutation is first expressed, it is also through literary expressions that the transformation is represented and questioned; if the litmus paper tells us that something structural has changed, the mirror allows us to look into the transformation by scrutinizing our own environment and ultimately ourselves.

In the case analysed in this thesis, Marco Paolini and Massimo Carlotto do not confine their work to representing the transformation of the territory of Veneto, they mould it into an instrument – almost a combination of a mirror and a magnifying glass – which offers to their public the possibility of observing territory from a particular perspective: while, as it is put in front of their eyes, people perceive it as external object, the fact that they recognise themselves in it implies by necessity that as they are observing it, they are also observing themselves. In broader theoretical terms, this implies that, if landscape and territory enter the process of identity formation, literature exposes the very essence of such process by unfolding its essential components for a reader or a viewer to see. The close reading of the authors' texts thus becomes a fundamental tool to fully understand the mechanisms presented on a theoretical plane: on one side, the texts epitomise pivotal aspects of the interaction between literature and territory that highlight precisely how the element of territory plays a key role in the formation of people's identity; on the other side, analysing the texts within the context in which they were conceived allows us to appreciate which mechanisms drive literary reflections on territory and how literature addresses the questions of identity that come with its transformation. Firstly then, the fact that landscape, and indeed territory, play a crucial role in the formation of people's identity becomes evident in the works analysed in this thesis, as the society they portray is not only different from the one that characterised earlier times in the history of the region, but is also represented as transformed in parallel to the dramatic transition through which the territory underwent. As is evident in *Nordest*, with economic development the general

population became wealthier, but also unable to communicate with the previous generation, whose legacy is consequently lost while new habits are created, which in ways lack the deep-rootedness of older social customs (the *spritz* is an example). *Bestiario veneto* tells us of how people grew estranged and detached from the local geography, as echoed for instance in the author's unanswered question «Scusi dov'è il Sile?» (BV 72), or in his constant sense of *spaesamento* towards a region that does not seem to know where its roots are. Territory, the complex entity of which landscape is part, was reshaped, Veneto turned into *Barbazhùcon town*, and the identity of the region – a group of people as in Barbara Bender's words – was transformed with it: as the surrounding environment was changing, people's values and cultural references switched from those of a rural society to those of a metropolitan and industrial one, their collective identity visibly mutated. It is precisely these two levels that Carlotto and Paolini portray in their works: the transformation of the region's territory brought along a transformation of the region's identity.

If textual analysis allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics interlacing territory and collective identity, the close reading of these authors' works plays a key role also in our comprehension of how territory enters the literary space. As emerged from the analysis of the historical and literary context presented in this thesis, the transformation of territory in Veneto was at the root of a renewed necessity, expressed mainly through literary means, to reflect on matters of regional culture and identity. Following the long-standing local tradition of territory-based literature, Paolini and Carlotto, among a significant number of other authors,

maintained the region as one of a core theme throughout the development of their literary path. By observing the transformation of the territory they were portraying, such authors felt the need to dig deeper into their understanding of the region's culture, to question and understand its identity. Harking back to Cosgrove's words, the fact that landscape and literature are part of the same social construction emerges clearly in that literature responded to the change in Veneto's landscape by questioning the underlying phase of reassessment of the whole territory. The radical change sparked the necessity for a wider reflection on the mutation of the social and cultural structure of the region, which these authors voiced precisely by *reading the transformation*, by employing the literary word to investigate territory and question identity. Thus, the analysis of the case study aims at conveying the actual realisation of the concepts that theory breaks down and analyses: the theory and the practice become complementary and key to our understanding, to echo Calvino's words, of the complexity of reality.

As has been noted in the introduction, when considering literature, landscape, and territory, the relation between literature and landscape is the one that is more widely taken into account in critical works, mainly articulating in histories of landscape as a subject of literary representation, or indeed of its origin and establishment as such in Western art. Through the case study presented here, this research underlines the bond tying the element of landscape to the broader structure of territory and, as its premise, examines the importance of landscape in the definition of the relation between literature and territory. By demonstrating that the network of connections linking the three elements expands in much broader terms

than the simple artistic representation of a subject, and by establishing that theoretical works on landscape can constitute a useful tool to shed light on the nature of territory and on its interaction with other elements of human culture, this study highlights the interest and the potential that lay in the exploration of the interaction between literature and territory. As flaws will inevitably be noted and as it remains open to further investigation in many different directions, this thesis surely does not have the presumption to utter a final word on the matter of literature and territory. Nevertheless, its aspiration is to offer a theoretical framework that can potentially be used in the context of other studies to further our understanding of such relation: as a basis for the exploration of similar cases which appear particularly apt to address this matter, or as a source of specific tools to analyse the twofold relation between territory and literary production in any work whose core is the examination of a specifically defined geographic context, one example being the identification of the 'inward' and 'outward' functions of the element of territory in Carlotto's work.

On the whole, this study brings together elements that are generally not combined in critical analyses of literary works and aims to expand the knowledge of some specific aspects of contemporary literature in Veneto and of two of its foremost authors' oeuvre. In writing it, my hope is that its readers will find a greater curiosity for the themes it has touched, from the broader issues to the close-up examinations, a deeper understanding of how literary expressions and surrounding territory interlace in human experience, and ultimately a potential model to pose

similar questions in a range of contexts within and beyond contemporary Italian literature.

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