

**VISIBLE TRACES
THE CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE IN THE NARRATIVE
OF ITALO CALVINO**

A Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts

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Introduction

At the end of the first chapter of *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* the anonymous reader is holding a book by Calvino also entitled *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* and beginning to read it. The narrating voice describes the reactions of the Reader to the book's initial impact:

Ecco dunque ora sei pronto ad attaccare le prime righe della prima pagina. Ti prepari a riconoscere l'inconfondibile accento dell'autore. No. Non lo riconosci affatto. Ma, a pensarci bene, chi ha mai detto che questo autore ha un accento inconfondibile? Anzi, si sa che è un autore che cambia molto da libro a libro. E proprio in questi cambiamenti si riconosce che è lui.

(*Se una notte*, 9)

These shifts in tone are probably the characteristic which I too as a reader find most fascinating and surprising in Calvino, and indeed this study was born as an attempt to pay tribute to it. The problem I set myself from the outset was to analyse a theme or element which would recur sufficiently often to reappear in works that were different one from the other, and indeed possibly throughout the entire course of his production, but which nonetheless did not arise from the deep structure and which

therefore were not so general as to appear in all, leaving me with the problem of having to choose those works I felt were most typical, when in fact the main characteristic of this author seemed to me to be variety. In short I needed an element from the surface structure, marginal but not too marginal - for instance, a background. The ideal solution seemed that of studying the successive reworkings of the landscape module sea - city - mountains, a background which recurs often, but not always, in the body of Calvino's work. This seemed to me a fruitful approach also because, paradoxically, I had not even noticed its recurrence, partly because it is not a particularly central element and partly because of the variations which the author brings to it from one narrative to another¹.

The descriptive motif is linked to a biographical one: this background is a literary representation of the landscape of Sanremo, where Calvino (though he was born in Havana and lived there for the first two years of his life) spent most of his childhood, his entire adolescence and his early youth. Indeed in the 1964 preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* Calvino states that this landscape constituted his starting point and gave him his very personal tone vis-à-vis other works of the time.

He noted in the preface that the Italian writers generally known as Neo-realists, following the example of the American writers of the Thirties, had been inspired by the great variety of landscape and dialect of the various regions of Italy brought into mutual contact by the experience of the Second World War; and that these same writers had found a common starting point in three books of their predecessors:

entity. I have analysed the works in which the author uses this procedure in the first chapter.

In the second, I have looked at the problem of the appearance of the landscape around Sanremo in a fairy-tale context. Oddly enough the only work containing the entire pattern proved to be *Il visconte dimezzato*, possibly because it is the only piece of "fairy-tale" fiction by Calvino long enough to require, and accommodate, the entire pattern. Other stories of the Neo-realist period such as "Ultimo viene il corvo" and "Il bosco degli animali" (*I racconti*, 1958) contained only one segment, usually the one inspired by the Ligurian foothills, and I have not taken them into consideration.

In the two following chapters I have analysed the way in which Calvino's attitude to the landscape - one of "possesso geloso", as he himself says - obliges him to represent it no longer in a mimetic fashion but rather masked or transfigured, so that it becomes hard to recognise. Works such as *Il barone rampante* and *La speculazione edilizia* are studied in the third chapter because, despite the obvious difference in tone between them, the procedure used by the author in relation to the landscape background is the same: he multiplies one of its details using an echo effect (the trees in *Il barone rampante*, concrete in *La Speculazione edilizia*), so that the rest becomes marginal in comparison.

In the fourth chapter I have looked at works which each use the pattern in a completely different way but which have in common the fact that they deal with it as an inner landscape, a starting point in the world, and above all as a place of the imaginary. This is an attitude which

Calvino explains indirectly, by trying to understand the absence in his fiction of the landscape of Paris:

Da alcuni anni ho una casa a Parigi, e vi passo una parte dell'anno, ma finora questa città non compare mai nelle cose che scrivo. Forse per poter scrivere di Parigi dovrei staccarmene, esserne lontano: se è vero che si scrive sempre partendo da una mancanza, da un'assenza. Oppure esserci più dentro, ma per questo dovrei averci vissuto fin dalla giovinezza: se è vero che sono gli scenari dei primi anni della nostra vita che danno forma al nostro mondo immaginario, non i luoghi della maturità. Dirò meglio: bisogna che un luogo diventi un paesaggio interiore, perché l'immaginazione prenda ad abitare quel luogo, a farne il suo teatro.

(*Eremita a Parigi*, 5)

In this fourth chapter I have analysed the ways in which Calvino reworks the landscape at greatest length, because it is here that I have also looked at works such as "Il conte di Montecristo" in *Ti con Zero* and *Le città invisibili*, where the material has been transformed to such an extent as to make recognition particularly peripheral and uncertain.

The material of each chapter has been subdivided on the basis of criteria of representation, and the works are studied in chronological order based on the dates of first publication, with the aim of reconstructing a hypothetical discourse, with the landscape as its ideal protagonist, through the pinpointing of themes which Calvino links to this same background. One of the most important of these, and it is worth saying as much in this introduction, is his ambivalent relation to Sanremo. In reply to Maria Corti's question concerning the places which had been most congenial and stimulating to him, Calvino replied with the paradox:

La città che ho sentito come la mia città più di qualunque altra è New York. Una volta ho perfino scritto, imitando Stendhal, che volevo che sulla mia tomba fosse scritto «newyorkese».

(Corti 1985, 51)

And yet, as he also stated in *Eremita a Parigi* (1974), the various cities where he lived - Milan and Turin immediately after the war, New York, for which he expressed such devotion although he lived there only briefly, and Paris, where he moved with his wife and daughter in 1964, to return to Italy and settle in Rome in 1980 - do not figure very large in his writings. Or rather, as he himself said in the same interview with Corti, these cities are not *seen* in his writings. In connection with Sanremo, however, he said:

Come ambiente naturale quello che non si può respingere o nascondere è il paesaggio natale e familiare; San Remo continua a saltar fuori nei miei libri nei più vari scorci e prospettive, soprattutto vista dall'alto, ed è soprattutto presente in molte delle *Città invisibili*. Naturalmente parlo di com'era cinquanta o sessanta anni fa, quando ero bambino. Ogni indagine non può che partire da quel nucleo da cui si sviluppano l'immaginazione, la psicologia, il linguaggio; questa persistenza è in me forte quanto era stata forte in gioventù la spinta centripeta la quale presto si rivelò senza ritorno, perché rapidamente i luoghi hanno cessato d'esistere.

(Corti 1985, 51)

This passage, with its juxtaposition of the verbs "respingere", "nascondere" and "saltar fuori" and by defining that force which actually drew away from Sanremo as a "spinta centripeta", once again demonstrates his ambiguous and unresolved relationship with the

landscape. I have quoted the passage from *Eremita a Parigi* in which, talking of the places he does not write of because they are too close to him, he recalls that writing always proceeds "da una mancanza, da una assenza", and the passage in the preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* where he says "il mio paesaggio era qualcosa di gelosamente mio". The closing words of the above quotation confirm that absence is indeed "present" here.

It is the necessary experience of loss which sparks off the imagination. Furthermore, if we bear in mind that "immaginazione" and "fantasia" are one and the same, we might recall another of Calvino's paradoxes: "la fantasia è un posto dove ci piove dentro", an observation which gives rise to the penultimate of the *Lezioni americane*, devoted to visibility.

Da dove «piovono» le immagini nella fantasia? Dante aveva giustamente un alto concetto di se stesso, tanto da non farsi scrupolo di proclamare la diretta ispirazione divina delle sue visioni. Gli scrittori più vicini a noi, (tranne qualche raro caso di vocazione profetica) stabiliscono collegamenti con emittenti terrene, come l'inconscio individuale o collettivo, il tempo ritrovato nelle sensazioni che riaffiorano dal tempo perduto, le epifanie o concentrazioni dell'essere in un singolo punto o istante. Insomma si tratta di processi che anche se non partono dal cielo esorbitano dalle nostre intenzioni e dal nostro controllo, assumendo rispetto all'individuo una sorta di trascendenza.

(*Lezioni americane*, 86)

NOTES

1. I have not found other studies of this recurrence, though it has been noted by several critics. It is referred to briefly in the biography by E. Mondello (1990), and, for the landscape in *La speculazione edilizia*, *Il barone rampante* and *Le città invisibili* in Quaini (1988). Adopting an almost anthropological point of view Nava (1987), gives a short study of spaces in Calvino's fiction.

CHAPTER 1

THE REALIST LANDSCAPE

I.1 "Uomo nei gerbidi"

To gain a clear idea of the landscape in question, we should begin from its first chronological appearance, which dates back to a story of 1946 entitled "Uomo nei gerbidi" (*I racconti*, 205-209)¹. The narrative first person is clearly autobiographical, and one can even recognise a brief portrait of Calvino in the following:

camminavo a passi lunghi come mio padre ma con le mani
seppellite nelle tasche e il lungo collo appollaiato tra le spalle
(*I racconti*, 205)

Equally autobiographical, from the psychological point of view, is the narrator's admission that he is prone to contemplation and daydreaming, though these are characteristics in connection with which he feels some reticence and a certain sense of alarm:

La Corsica sparì bevuta dalla luce, ma tra mare e cielo il confine
non si quagliò: rimase quella zona ambigua e smarrita che fa male
guardare perché non esiste.
(*I racconti*, 206)

"Uomo nei gerbidi" is an account of a hare-hunting expedition with his father, of the route taken to reach the ideal location and of talk with a local peasant and his daughter while his father has gone off to drive the game out of the wood. But hunting is merely an excuse for the narrator to reach the preferred position from which to contemplate his panorama.

The description of the landscape dwells mainly upon the moment of perception, as we see right from the first phrase: "Al mattino presto si vede la Corsica" (*I racconti*, 205) and it continues by juxtaposing flat, objective observations:

Colla Bella è un'altura dalle pallide rive tutte terreni gerbidi, erbe dure a brucare e muri franati di antiche terrazze,

(*I racconti*, 205)

and similes based on colloquial usage:

Più sotto comincia la nera *nuvolaglia* degli uliveti, più in su i boschi fulvi e *spelacchiati* dagli incendi come *schiene di vecchi cani*,

(*I racconti*, 205)

(My italics)

But attention is focussed on the phenomenon of dawn, the changing and brightening of the colours from that half-light where, although the field of vision was greater, the masses of colour were almost indistinguishable:

Le cose impigrivano nel grigio dell'alba come in un socchiudere di palpebre ancora assonnate. Al mare non si distinguevano confini, traversato fino in fondo da lame di foschia.

(*I racconti*, 205-206)

This change is produced by light:

L'alba andava scoprendo i colori, a uno a uno. Prima il rosso delle bacche di gigaro, dei tagli zonati sugli alberi di pino. Poi il verde, i cento, i mille verdi dei prati, dei cespugli del bosco, poco prima tutti eguali: adesso invece ogni momento c'era un nuovo verde

che nasceva e si distingueva dagli altri. Poi l'azzurro: quello *urlante* del mare che assordò tutto e fece restare pallido e timoroso il cielo.

(I racconti, 206)

(My italics)

The expedient of using an extraneous and incongruous point of reference to describe the dominance of one blue over another, the recourse to words taken from the semantic field of sound, emphasises the quality of the perception and at the same time increases the magnetic power of the object observed, introducing the sense of dizziness which upsets the observer.²

The light is reflected off the sea, it is dazzling. Its task of breaking up the solid, compact mass overlooking it, is harder:

A un tratto case, tetti, vie nacquero a piè delle colline, in riva al mare. Ogni mattina la città nasceva così dal regno delle ombre, tutt'a un tratto, fulva di tegole, baluginante di vetri, calcinosa d'intonachi. La luce ogni mattino la descriveva nei particolari più minuti, raccontava ogni suo andito, enumerava tutte le case.

(I racconti, 206)

Lighting up the nearest things first (the berries of the cuckoo-pint), then the horizon, and after having lingered on the village below - all at different speeds - the light now rises:

Poi veniva su per le colline scoprendo sempre nuovi dettagli: nuove fasce, nuove case. Arrivava in Colla Bella, gialla e gerbida e deserta, e scopriva una casa anche lassù, sperduta, la più alta casa prima del bosco, a un tiro di fucile dal mio fucile, la casa di Baccinin il Beato.

(I racconti, 206)

Throughout, the description the subject of the action is thus not the observer's gaze, as it will be in *Palomar*, but the light - hence the joking reference to the ricochet from the house to the gun, a cleverly comic inversion. The effect is one of alienation on the part of the narrator, an exaggerated passivity which seems to be one of the main themes of the story, but it also gives an illusion of objectivity, of a scientific study of the phenomenon in question, and in a certain sense it represents that detachment from the ego which Calvino will try to portray overtly later, from "La spirale" (in *Le cosmicomiche*, 1965) onwards.

The meeting between hunter and peasant is comical: the low-mimetic key in which all the characters are treated descends to caricature when talking of Baccinin Beato and his daughter Costanzina. The dialogue is made up of reiterated remarks, following the model of Vittorini, but here the pathos is gestural and comical, a sublimated aggressivity in response to a list of misfortunes, and this indeed is the problem: in the midst of so much beauty, Baccinin - a latter-day noble savage who lives cut off from human society and has no interest in it - is a total failure. He is not without initiative, but everything he does goes wrong.

The land is "gerbido", nothing grows on it, hunting yields nothing, and just as he does not trust nature, Baccinin does not believe in History either, he is not interested in it: he has not even noticed that the war is over, for war is the business of city-dwellers and one way or another he is sure that they will never manage to mend their differences.

(Baccinin) - E la guerra, come va la guerra?

(Narratore) - Del bello che è finita la guerra, Baccinin.

- Ben. Quel che c'è al posto della guerra, allora. Io poi, che sia finita non ci credo. Tante volte l'han detto, tante volte che ricominciava in un altro modo. Dico male? -

- No, dite bene. -

(I racconti, 208)

Faced with such an outlook, it seems only reasonable that the narrator should not disagree with Baccinin, out of exhaustion or lack of interest, but the inner desire to abandon these places is already smouldering beneath the surface. Shaking off the passivity induced by contemplation, he feels a resurgence of desire for human contact, for city bustle. Constanzina is telling the narrator of her latest, entirely rustic, discoveries, and the narrator's question to her: "Ti piace abitare a Colla Bella?" barely conceals a destabilizing intent (why "abitare" and not "vivere" or, indeed, the more direct "Ti piace Colla Bella?"). The girl in fact answers yes, she does like it, but only as long as the town below is visible, and not when it disappears of an evening: Constanzina speaks of countryside and town without giving one preference over the other. Perhaps, too young to have clear ideas on the subject, she accepts whatever either has to offer in a positive sense.

I.2 *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*

The panorama of "Uomo nei gerbidi", although it does all it can to seem so, is not objective: the fact that one can see Corsica is a reference to the panorama of Sanremo, though the narrator has omitted any reference to what he does not like about Sanremo, as he declared in the preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*:

Del paesaggio della mia città - Sanremo - cancellavo polemicamente tutto il litorale turistico - lungomare con palmizi, casinò, alberghi, ville, - quasi vergognandomene.

(Il sentiero, 10)

He will be able to represent these aspects only in the emotional distortion to which war has subjected them:

anche le ville, riuscivo a rappresentare ora che le avevo viste requisite e trasformate in corpi di guardia e prigionieri: anche i campi di garofani, da quando erano diventati terreni allo scoperto, pericolosi ad attraversare, evocanti uno sgranare di raffiche nell'aria.

(Il sentiero, 10)

In *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* landscape and action are fused: no longer, or not only, a descriptive element and a framework, the landscape is a constant feature because the characters live in it, cross it as they move from one point to another, charging it with vitality and pathos. By stating the various emotions which it aroused in the writer, the "Prefazione" suggests a reversed reading, according to which the novel's plot is

determined by the very personal relation which Calvino had with these places: the plot reifies the author's idiosyncrasies, suggesting danger, conflict, and intrigue where the relationship was one of conflict, and safety, positive behaviour, and daydreaming where it was less fraught. Thus the old city acts as the backdrop from which the protagonist starts out and the wood lends itself to natural discoveries and daydreaming, while the elegant bourgeois villa houses the prison, and the fields of carnations immediately inspire panic.

The almost epic opening is particularly effective and seems to suggest that it may be able to dispense with the personality of the narrator.

Per arrivare in fondo al vicolo, i raggi del sole devono scendere diritti *rasente le pareti fredde*, tenute discoste a forza d'arcate che traversano la striscia di cielo azzurro carico.

Scendono diritti i raggi del sole, giù per le finestre messe qua e là in disordine sui muri, e cespi di *basilico e di origano* piantati dentro pentole ai davanzali, e sottovesti stese appese a corde: fin giù al selciato, fatto a gradini e a ciottoli, con una cunetta in mezzo per *l'orina* dei muli.

(*Il sentiero*, 29)³

(My italics)

Repeating the model of a town "recounted" by the rays of the sun in "Uomo nei gerbidi", and incorporating elements referring to the senses of touch and smell (to allow Pin's shout in the subsequent paragraph to introduce that of hearing), this opening scene, introducing the reader into the poor overcrowded parts of the city, is as impartial as a stage direction; and indeed the effect of the crescendo of light before the beginning of the action on stage is also theatrical. But with the appearance of Pin we become aware of a reduplication of focus: narrator and character do not

coincide, nor could it be otherwise: the choice of an anti-hero such as Pin entails an explanation of his action almost of necessity, a continual process of mediation and reconciliation between character and reader.

The landscape follows this general dichotomy: it is frightening, grotesque, incomprehensible if seen with Pin's eyes and full of lyricism and pathos if described by the narrator. The two voices often appear one beside the other in the moments of greatest tension: for instance when, with a deep sense of humiliation and uncertainty, he comes out of the inn where he has been incited to steal the pistol:

Pin ora è nel carrugio. E' sera e alle finestre si accendono i lumi. Lontano, nel torrente, cominciano a gracidare le rane; di questa stagione i ragazzi stanno la sera appostati intorno ai laghetti, ad acchiapparle. Le rane strette in mano danno un contatto viscido, sgusciante, ricordano le donne, così lisce e nude.

*(Il sentiero, 39)*⁴

The lens used by Calvino is bifocal, the elegiac one of the narrator which contrasts the group activity of the boys playing and the frogs croaking, and the expressionistic and grotesque one of the solitary Pin who already imagines himself in close contact with the sliminess of the frog. This is the pathos of distance alluded to by the memorable and ironically dialectical essay by Cesare Cases (1958)⁵.

In other cases one senses autobiographical echoes in the words of the narrator, for instance in the description of the prison:

La prigionia è una grande villa di inglesi requisita perché nella vecchia fortezza sul porto i tedeschi hanno piazzato la contraerea.

E' una villa strana, in mezzo a un parco d'araucarie, che già prima forse aveva l'aria di una prigione, con molte torri e terrazze e camini che girano al vento, e inferriate che già c'erano prima, oltre a quelle aggiunte.

(Il sentiero, 61)

where the precise botanical terminology referring to a fairly rare species of tree cannot be that of the semi-literate Pin, but even more clearly in that "forse" which, irrespective of the author's preface, is enough to indicate that the character himself could never have thought of it.

It is interesting to note that "forse" is also the key word of another character, the "commissario di brigata" Kim: to counterbalance the extreme clarity with which he expresses himself, it recurs thirteen times in his thoughts, together with other expressions of doubt, with the obliquity of verbs such as "sembrare" and "parere", and with the reiterated use of the subjunctive.

Un giorno forse io non capirò più queste cose, pensa Kim, tutto sarà sereno in me e capirò gli uomini in tutt'altro modo, più giusto, forse. Perché: forse? Bene, io allora non dirò più forse, non ci saranno più forse in me.

(Il sentiero, 150)

Kim, the protagonist of the atypical Chapter IX, is a character who stands apart from the others by virtue of his bourgeois antecedents, here experienced as a source of friction. He has responsibility for overseeing the work of the resistance fighters, but does not forget them even for a moment when he is alone with his nightly imaginings; passing from free indirect speech to interior monologue, he wonders about their future after

the end of the war (*Il sentiero*, 149-150): an enlightened and populist member of the bourgeoisie, Kim talks like the narrator.

Calvino says that this ninth chapter is a sort of "prefazione inserita in mezzo al romanzo" (*Il sentiero*, 11) and it seems to me that this switching from one narrative level to another, that is, from the plot to reflections on the plot, should be seen as the first form of *mise-en-abîme* implicitly engaged by Calvino.

In my view Kim is the personification of the implied narrator in the work and it is important for my argument to note that his reflections surface in the text amidst the shadows of a night walk, hence "d'int'ubagu" (*La strada*, 134), in a landscape made uncertain by mist and darkness.

La valle è piena di nebbie e Kim cammina su per una costiera sassosa come sulle rive di un lago. I larici escono dalle nuvole come pali per attraccare le barche.

(*Il sentiero*, 152)

Bearing in mind these ghostly greyish colours, all the references to the violent light, which alarms Pin and hurts his eyes, appear more justified.

A un tratto le penombre del parco si diradano ed ecco aprirsi ai loro occhi uno scenario luminoso, a colori vivissimi, come quando si scopre una decalcomania. Hanno un movimento di paura e subito si gettano a terra.

(*Il sentiero*, 77)

Quando Pin si sveglia vede i ritagli di cielo tra i rami del bosco,
chiari che fa quasi male guardarli.

(Il sentiero, 88)

E' un giorno azzurro come gli altri, che fa paura vederlo così
azzurro

(Il sentiero, 159)

Il mare che ieri era un torbido fondo di nuvola ai margini del cielo,
si fa una striscia d'un cupo sempre più denso ed ora è un grande
urlo azzurro al di là d'una balausta di colline e di case,

(Il sentiero, 187)⁶

Night can be even more alarming, but in a different way. Light
calls forth an instinctive fear, a more immediate, physical foreboding of
death, while darkness causes mysterious "paure bambine" to resurface,
fears which have their roots in blood, as in the recalling of explicitly
Freudian primary scenes:

Pin sale per il carrugio, già quasi buio; e si sente solo e sperduto in
quella storia di sangue e corpi nudi che è la vita degli uomini.

(Il sentiero, 40)

Allora le ombre del ripostiglio si trasformano in sogni strani, di
corpi che s'inseguono, si picchiano e s'abbracciano nudi, finché
viene qualcosa di grande e caldo e sconosciuto, che sovrasta su di
lui, Pin, e lo carezza e lo tiene nel caldo di sé, e questo è la
spiegazione di tutto, un richiamo lontanissimo di felicità
dimenticata.

(Il sentiero, 42)

With darkness a sense of protection returns, conducive to abandonment and tenderness, a greater ability to be kind, at one with nature: here then we have a scene from a "fiaba di bosco" as the book was defined by Pavese (1962, 273-276):

Pin esce da dietro il serbatoio: il gracidare delle rane nasce da tutta l'ampia gola del cielo, il mare è una spada luccicante nel fondo della notte. L'essere all'aperto gli dà un senso di piccolezza che non è paura. Ora Pin è solo, solo su tutto il mondo. E cammina per i campi coltivati a garofani e a calendule. Cerca di tenersi alto sul declivio delle colline, per passar sopra alla zona dei Comandi. Poi scenderà al fossato: là sono i suoi luoghi.

Ha fame: di quest'epoca sono mature le ciliege. Ecco un albero, distante da ogni casa: che sia sorto lì per incantesimo? Pin si arrampica tra i rami e comincia a sfrondarli con diligenza. Un grosso uccello gli piglia il volo quasi tra le mani: era lì che dormiva. Pin si sente amico di tutti, in quel momento, e vorrebbe non averlo disturbato.

(Il sentiero, 83)

But night also reawakens dormant tales of horror which inspire fear:

Sotto il casolare i boschi diradano in strisce di prato, e là dicono che ci sono spie seppellite e Pin ha un po' paura a passarci la notte, per non sentirsi tirare i calcagni da mani cresciute in mezzo all'erba.

(Il sentiero, 104)

This presentiment will come true with the grotesque joke played by Il Dritto (*Il sentiero*, 115). Night is thus the domain of the imaginary, the unexpected, it contains enchanted gardens and Gothic novels: every

gesture (like shooting at the spiders' dens) may take on incongruous and magical proportions, every encounter (for instance the two meetings with Cugino, which both occur at night) proves to be an essential part of the plot, which is Pin's personal fairy story.

In his review of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Pavese wrote that "la guerra partigiana diventa favola di bosco" (Pavese 1962, 273) , that is, the microstory of Pin is inscribed within the macrostory of the war and, in its way, interprets it. To me it seems rather that the plot of Pin's adventures has as its aim the search for a friend, that it is a fable about solitude and how to defeat it, just as the partisans' war is described in terms of the search for allies, for associative values where personal struggle may become collective struggle.

To be able to recognise his own friends is Pin's main concern, though in one way or another he remains disappointed until his second meeting with Cugino; thus I cannot fully agree with Falaschi's otherwise very elegant interpretation, when he says "per la verità Pin a volte odia anche gli adulti, ma ciò non toglie che il suo disaccordo resti limitato alla natura: essi infatti gli sembrano 'incomprensibili' come 'bestie'" (Falaschi 1976, 121). It seems to me that what Pin hates in men is what they have in common with him and, furthermore, it is only with this type of man that he can really come into contact: he draws back from the pompous heroism of Lupo Rosso (*Il sentiero*, 67 and 80), and from the sentimental and religious kindness of the old people who feed him and want him to pray with them (*Il sentiero*, 186-187); both episodes furthermore treated in accordance with the political and strategic thought of Kim, who believes

in the basically positive nature of banding between like-minded men, because only between such men does one sense real human contact, does one struggle for oneself and others.

In this sense the fable of Pin's existential solitude and his desire for redemption have the positive value needed for participation in History, and Pin becomes the mascot of the partisan war. But he is a mascot who is unknowing, unaware: only for Kim and his narrator "tutto è chiaro", they know what Calvino will say about the "verità" of fairy tales, in the preface to *Fiabe italiane* of almost a decade later, when he says that their pattern reveals:

[...] la comune sorte di soggiacere ad incantesimi, cioè d'esser determinato da forze complesse e sconosciute, e lo sforzo per liberarsi e autodeterminarsi inteso come un dovere elementare, insieme a quello di liberare gli altri, anzi il non potersi liberare da soli, il liberarsi liberando [...]

(*Fiabe italiane*, 16)

This is a historical ethic which we find again almost word for word in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of freedom:

Ferai-je cette promesse? Risquerai-je ma vie pour si peu? Donnerai-je ma liberté pour sauver la liberté? Il n'y a pas de réponse théorique à ces questions. Mais il y a ces *choses* qui se présentent, irrécusables, il y a cette personne aimée devant toi, il y a ces hommes qui existent esclaves autour de toi et *ta* liberté ne peut se vouloir sans sortir de sa singularité et sans vouloir *la* liberté.

(Merleau-Ponty 1942, 501)

Pin perceives all this, perhaps, but in a very indistinct and doubtful way. His integrity consists in not yielding to a momentary salvation -

either by enrolling in the black brigade, an offer made to him during his journey to the prison (*Il sentiero*, 59-61) or by staying on in the hut in the wood with the old people (*Il sentiero*, 186); in both cases Pin trusts to his intuition that he has nothing in common with them:

Ma i tedeschi e i fascisti sono razze imberbi o bluastre con cui non ci si può intendere [...]

(*Il sentiero*, 58)

and in the other case:

Ma Pin non è abituato a trattare con la gente buona e si trova a disagio, e nemmeno a dire il rosario è abituato; così mentre i due vecchi ruminano le preghiere, a occhi chiusi, lui scende dalla sua sedia piano piano e va via.

(*Il sentiero*, 186-187)

Thus here we have self-determination, marked by honesty with oneself, a theme we shall find again both in Calvino and in Merleau-Ponty: "le choix véritable est celui de notre caractère entier et de notre manière d'être au monde" (Merleau-Ponty 1942, 501), but which in Pin is absolutely spontaneous, unreflective. He knows the negative sides of his character, those which he cannot explain but which he nonetheless senses in himself and in others as a dark, mysterious force, the "comune sorte di soggiacere ad incantesimi, cioè d'essere determinato da forze complesse e sconosciute" (*Fiabe italiane*, 16), a desire for violence which he vents upon nature.

Here finally we come to nature seen with Pin's eyes, a detail of the landscape, the particular in the general. What is it like? Above all it is not hostile; indeed, with the exception of lice and the odd bite from Babeuf, it

is rather benevolent; in his way, Pin is aware of this, yet because he is defenceless, he vents desire for revenge upon nature. His destructiveness is motivated by the difference he recognises between himself and animals, so that toads are slimy, crickets have absurd horse-faces, spiders and fire-flies are disgusting and, just as they are monstrous for him, so he knows he is for them. And he is aware of his cruelty:

Pin è cattivo con le bestie: sono esseri mostruosi e incomprensibili come gli uomini; dev'essere brutto essere una piccola bestia, cioè essere verde e fare la cacca a gocce, e avere sempre paura che venga un essere umano come lui, con un'enorme faccia piena d'efelidi rosse e nere e con dita capaci di fare a pezzi i grilli

(Il sentiero, 51)

It seems to me that this cruelty is presented as an act of revenge for Pin's frustrations. He tears up everything which at first sight cannot become a friend; whereas the symbolic value which Pin attributes to the pistol implies both the ability to strike things that are far away from a distance, and thus make various goals attainable and interlinked, and the illusion, through the possession of the pistol, of taking on those characteristics of power and bravura which would earn his friendship and respect. Of the two, the second is undoubtedly the stronger, yet it proves to be unattainable, while the first is convincing only theoretically; practically speaking, it is a boring game.

These frustrations are at the root of the pistol shot as an impetuous gesture, aimed not at an object or an animal, but at the spiders' dens, at an associative life from which he is excluded, as he is excluded from human society. The effect is double-edged:

Pin è preso da spavento prima, e poi da gioia: tutto è stato così bello e l'odore della polvere è così buono. Ma la cosa che lo spaventa davvero è che le rane tacciono d'improvviso, e non si sente più niente come se quello sparo avesse ucciso tutta la terra.

(Il sentiero, 52-53)

To kill the earth would be tantamount to losing the very hope of finding a point of contact with the world, to remaining, this time, well and truly alone.

Poi una rana, molto distante, ricomincia a cantare, e poi un'altra più vicina, e altre più vicine ancora, finché il coro riprende e a Pin sembra gridino più forte, molto più forte di prima. E dalle case un cane abbaia e una donna si mette a chiamare dalla finestra. Pin non sparirà più perché quei silenzi e quei rumori gli fanno paura.

(Il sentiero, 53)

Thus the world is not over, but the concerted way it starts up again frightens Pin once more, because he has the feeling of an aggression rebounding upon him, to his detriment. Yet his project of revenge and punishment - against whom? his sister, society? - is merely postponed:

Però un'altra notte tornerà e non ci sarà nulla che potrà spaventarlo e allora sparirà tutti i colpi della pistola anche contro i pipistrelli e i gatti che girano a quell'ora intorno ai pollai.

(Il sentiero, 53)

We shall see that his brutality is related to his problematical relationship with human beings at the beginning of Chapter VIII (*Il sentiero*, 125-126) when, from the new encampment in the wood, Pin discovers the natural world with different, less worried eyes, at least for a time; there is a direct allusion to having "dimenticato il carrugio" and then to "essere ripreso dal contagio peloso e ambiguo del carnaio umano" and

to his different behaviour; this is shown again, and more clearly, in his second, satisfying and calming meeting with Cugino, to whom Pin shows the dens that have survived Pelle's excavations.

- Dai, buttaci dentro il fiammifero, - dice Pin - vediamo se esce il ragno. -

- Perché povera bestia? - fa il Cugino - Non vedi quanti danni hanno già avuto?

- Di', Cugino, credi che li rifaranno, i nidi? -

(Il sentiero, 192)

Cugino's presence is enough for relations with nature to become feasible once again; his words are no consolation for the state of conflict between man and nature, but they make possible a vision of it which is at least tolerable:

- C'è pieno di lucciole -, dice il Cugino

- A vederle da vicino, le lucciole, - dice Pin, - son bestie schifose anche loro, rossicce. -

- Sì, - dice il Cugino, - ma viste così sono belle. -

(Il sentiero, 195)

I myself feel that by the end of the novel a middle-way has been found between the open, "quadrangular" vision of the narrator and the narrow, "telescopic" one of the character.

1.3 *L'entrata in guerra*

Still within the sphere of realistic landscape representation, we now move to a trio of stories ("*L'entrata in guerra*", "*Gli avanguardisti a Mentone*", "*Le notti dell'UNPA*") published together under the title of the first.

Together, in my view, they represent the clearest attempt Calvino ever made to immerse himself in the meanderings of his own memory in order to reproduce the past and to scan it for the roots of his own actions. Overtly autobiographical in character (see p. 87 below), the central episodes are put forward to serve as examples, that is, in such a way as to cast light upon the state of mind of the very young Calvino in connection with the war and the Fascist rhetoric which generated it.

That individual point of view which the narrator had decided not to emphasise at the time of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* is now reconstructed, years later, without awkwardness of any kind: the untroubled, confident and mature voice of the narrator questions and portrays the adolescent he formerly was, analyses his behaviour and attitudes, breaks down his models of behaviour, to the point of recognising, in what I see as an affectionate and elegiac tone, his debt to the old-style bourgeois values in clear contrast to the arrogance of the new Fascist rhetoric, bourgeois values inculcated in him by the family circle, and the reason for innate opposition to the regime.

Furthermore it should also be said that these particular stories are very untypical of Calvino: the weight of truth lies a little too heavily upon the figure of the adolescent, whose main feature is an austere reticence, a

moralism masked by irony which makes him embarrassed, unforthcoming, isolated from his friends. Calvino, so skilled at representing adolescents from the outside, is a little less incisive with this internalised and realistic viewpoint: not wanting to attribute to his former self other virtues than those of having been able to keep faith with the family grounding of honesty and respect for work and nature in which he had grown up, the narrator seems almost to want to keep to a paradigmatic view of an adolescent from a respectable family, and the narrative is somewhat impersonal as a result (see also Fink 1979).

Set in Sanremo in the summer of 1940, all three stories begin with the description of an adolescent on holiday, rather bored but also free at last to spend the day as he chooses. From one story to the next we are given the sense of a gradual maturing, in a noticeable growth of confidence.

Erano tempi che non avevamo voglia di niente.

(I racconti, 231)

Dopo cena non vedevo l'ora di uscire a passeggio benché quasi non facessi altro tutto il giorno. Forse proprio in quel tempo venivo prendendo gusto a vivere [...] Così conoscevo il pessimismo e l'esaltazione dei tempi, e confusamente vivevo, e andavo a spasso.

(I racconti, 242)

Ero un ragazzo tardo; a sedici anni per l'età che avevo ero piuttosto indietro in molte cose. Poi, improvvisamente nell'estate del '40, scrissi una commedia in tre atti, ebbi un amore, imparai ad andare in bicicletta.

(I racconti, 263)

It seems to me that the critics who have talked of alienation in connection with these stories (see for example Ricci 1986, 31) have not understood the precise implications of Calvino's decision to highlight moments of conflict rather than moments of exaltation ("Le memorie difficili" is in fact the title with which they appeared in the 1958 edition of *I racconti*).

In the terms in which it most interests us, that is, in connection with landscape, we may note that the action shifts from the sea, and some final adolescent games, to a survey of the townscape, in particular that of the "Città Vecchia" and, finally, to an imaginary walk over the hills in the footsteps of his father.

The first story opens under a cloudy sky on the day war is declared. During the morning there are still glimpses of sunshine during which the protagonist and two other boys on a raft express their hopes that war will not be declared after all. But even during those first days of June, with their uncertain weather, the foreboding of an early end to the holidays is clearly hinted at:

Ai bagni quasi tutti gli ombrelloni erano chiusi;

(*I racconti*, 231)

and the town soon becomes a crossing-point for military convoys going towards the front and tourists leaving a region regarded as a danger zone.

Verso la stazione passava una fila di soldati. Qualcuno dalla balaustra della passeggiata applaudì. Nessuno dei soldati levò il capo.

(*I racconti*, 232)

Ogni tanto un treno con cannoni e truppe manovrava e ripartiva verso il confine.

(I racconti, 232)

La città era attraversata di continuo da macchine militari che andavano al fronte, e macchine borghesi che sfollavano con le masserizie legate sopra il tetto.

(I racconti, 233)

Passavano macchine militari, verso monte, verso le strade d'arroccamento alla frontiera.

(I racconti, 241)

The theme of general movement is used to highlight the central episode of the evacuation of the refugees from the frontier areas, with whom the protagonist finds himself in contact, discovering the obverse of the way in which he had judged the war.

Io pensavo al nostro distacco verso le cose della guerra, che con Osterio eravamo riusciti a portare a un'estrema finitezza di stile, fino a farcene una seconda natura, una corazza. Ora la guerra mi si rivelava nel portare al gabinetto i paralitici, ecco fin dove lontano mi ero spinto, ecco quante mai cose accadevano sulla terra, Osterio, che non supposeva la nostra tranquilla anglofilia.

(I racconti, 239)

The speed with which soldiers and civilians are moved about - as well as the reason why Osterio does not go with the protagonist to help the

refugees, namely, because his family are trying out a car to replace the one requisitioned by the army (*I racconti*, 234) - with the slowness of the evacuees and the discomforts of their journey:

Salii per la gradinata e dovevo andar piano perché avanti a me sostenevano una vecchia [...]

(*I racconti*, 235)

At all events, there is already a divergence between the general town-dwellers' neurosis, as they invent spy stories in the usual search for a scapegoat (*I racconti*, 233) and the thinking of the boy's family circle, with his mother refusing to give in to the false rhetoric of this second world war as compared with the memory she had of the first, and his father who:

ora vedeva anche sconvolgersi lo scenario immutabile delle montagne familiari a lui dall'infanzia,

(*I racconti*, 233)

with a deeply-felt concern both for the hardships of human beings and for the adverse effect upon agriculture and nature in general.

Ora vedeva le fasce abbandonate tornar gerbide, i muri a secco franare, e dai boschi emigrare, spaventate dai colpi di cannone le ultime famiglie di cinghiali che ogni autunno egli inseguiva con i suoi cani [...]

(*I racconti*, 234)

For the protagonist, help for the refugees is a source of greater discomfort, the resurfacing of a sense of injustice which has made him middle-class, and has made them dispossessed.

[...] perché loro, questa gente, per me erano già stati una pena, un rimprovero - per me diverso da mio padre - a vederli, che so? Imbastare dei muli, aprire all'acqua i solchi di una vigna con la vanga, senza poter con loro mai avere un rapporto, mai pensare di venir loro in aiuto.

(*I racconti*, 235)

In the face of such wretchedness a single, bitter certainty comes to the mind of the boy in the uniform of an *avanguardista*:

Io tutta questa gente non l'amavo.

(*I racconti*, 235)

Then comes another horrible discovery, utterly personal this time, which, as Germana Pescio Bottino rightly points out⁷, foreshadows the passage "Era un'Italia nascosta..." in *La giornata di uno scrutatore* (p. 25).
- that of the faces of some of the evacuees, disfigured by mental, or hereditary, illness:

[...] era questo volto buio dei paesi montanari ora obbligato a svelarsi, a sfilare in parata il vecchio segreto delle famiglie contadine attorno a cui le case dei paesi si stringono una all'altra come le scaglie di una pigna.

(*I racconti*, 237)

The *avanguardista*, now without his uniform, ends up by mingling with this slow, macabre, war-induced procession, in the grim paradox in which the federal inspector mistakes him for a relative of the dead paralytic old man, and shakes his hand in condolence.

This painful episode has at least clarified matters: the war, which at the beginning of the story had appeared as an obstacle to the holidays, an irritation, has now become a certainty; the return home, as for a soldier on leave, has become a short-lived illusion for the protagonist too.

Era una sera chiara, il cielo era rossiccio, io salivo una via tra case e pergole.

(I racconti, 241)

A temporary lull, but one which will not be shattered by the excitement of the moment:

A un tratto ci fu un muoversi, un correre sul marciapiede, un impigliarsi di tende cacciamosca alle botteghe di frutta e di barbiere, e dicevano : - Sì, sì è lui, guarda lì, è il duce, è il duce.

(I racconti, 241)

An epilogue to a novella of movement is provided by the passing of Mussolini's open car, the theatricality of his gesture and above all the detachment with which the narrator already views Mussolini as more immature than himself.

La mia città, interrotto per la guerra il suo turismo, si era come rappresa nella sua scorza provinciale; io la sentivo più familiare e più misurabile.

(I racconti, 242)

These are the narrator's reflections at the beginning of this second story, where the main theme is the cutting between private and public space, so that the open air seems precisely to put the stress upon the protagonist's walk through the town in search of his friend Biancone.

Nei soliti bigliardi non c'era; per andare a casa sua bisognava salire per la città vecchia. Sotto i neri archivolti le lampade imbrattate d'azzurro mandavano una luce falsa che non raggiungeva i margini dei vicoli e delle rampe acciottolate, ma si rifletteva solo sulle strisce di pittura bianca che segnavano i gradini; e indovinavo di passare accanto a persone sedute al buio fuori degli usci, sulle soglie o a cavalcioni di sedie impagliate. L'ombra era come vellutata di queste presenze umane che si manifestavano in chiacchierii, improvvisi richiami e risa, sempre con un fruscante tono d'intimità: e talora nel biancheggiare di un braccio di donna o di una veste.

(*I racconti*, 243)

The darkness in which the old city is plunged and in which the human presence of its inhabitants is felt, however indistinctly, contrasts with Menton, empty and abandoned.

Ero già triste. Il lento battere del mare contro gli scogli si congiungeva al silenzio naturale della campagna e chiudevano in un cerchio la città vuota, il suo silenzio innaturale, rotto ogni tanto da rumori isolati ed echeggianti: un solfeggio di tromba, un canto, il rombo di una moto.

(*I racconti*, 250)

The reconstruction of these contrasting city models contains reflections on the nature of the town, and they should be seen in relation to the stories of Marco Polo in *Le città invisibili*. But for the moment we are concerned more with the link between the following passage and *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*:

Dal buio di un'arcata sbucai alla fine sotto il cielo aperto, che solo allora vidi senza stelle ma chiaro tra le foglie d'un enorme carrubo. La città lì finiva l'aggrumo delle case e cominciava a seminarci nella campagna, ad allungare le disordinate propaggini su per le vallate. Oltre il muro d'un orto le ombre bianche delle ville sul

versante opposto filtravano solo esigui spiragli di luce intorno ai telai delle finestre. Una strada fiancheggiata, da una rete metallica scendeva a mezza costa verso il torrente, e là in una casetta sormontata da un terrazzo a pergola abitava Biancone. Mi avvicinai nell'aria quieta e sussurrante di canne e fischi verso la casa.

(*I racconti*, 243-44)

This is probably Pin's favourite area, but it is described in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* so as to achieve completely different effects:

E' notte. Pin ha scantonato fuori dal mucchio delle vecchie case, per le stradine che vanno tra orti e scoscendimenti ingombri d'immondizie. Nel buio le reti metalliche che cintano i semenzai gettano una maglia d'ombre sulla terra grigio lunare [...] [il posto delle tane dei ragni] è una scorciatoia sassosa che scende al torrente tra le due pareti di terra e d'erba.

(*Il sentiero*, 50-51)

In both there is the transition between the enclosed place and the expanse of countryside: in "Gli avanguardisti a Mentone" the human presence is sought in the lights filtering from distant windows, a desire for order and quiet as a contrast to the round-ups of which we shall soon be informed, whereas in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* the stress is on the disorderly, the ghostly, the sense of human absence, which are more in keeping with Pin's fear and loneliness. This same area recurs as the opening setting for the third and much the most successful of these stories. Once again it is the meeting place between the young Calvino and his friend Biancone, between the diffidence of the one and the playfulness of the other. Together the two boys begin to explore the night, making it the backdrop for jokes and adventures, but Calvino remains slightly aloof, with a lingering moralism which distances him from the arrogance of his

friend, which he finds false and exaggerated. Two presences now take shape in the sleeping town, the presence of those who work during the day, and the hedonistic and ugly presence of the frequenters of gaming dens and brothels. Instinctively both boys side with the former; as a squad of militia passes by singing a rowdy song, almost as though in contempt of that hard-earned sleep, the character feels a sudden prophetic awareness:

L'irruzione loro in quel punto portò un vento di violenza; mi s'aggricciò la pelle come a un tratto fossi piombato nella guerra civile, una guerra il cui fuoco era da sempre durato nella cenere e di tanto in tanto levava una lingua di fuoco.

(*I racconti*, 273)

The adventures which follow take place within the dark space of the "Città Vecchia": they include the sighting of a Communist, the advances of a greasy pimp, a visit to a horse-faced prostitute (like la Nera di Carrugio Lungo in *Il Sentiero dei nidi di ragno*) and to a brothel, until the two characters part, the young protagonist going off, disappointed, to look at the sea, though it holds no attraction for him. He watches the departure of the fishermen who have to be out at sea by dawn, and he feels the contradiction, the conflict between that peaceful, hard-working world and the world of the false bragging of the night-walkers more strongly than ever.

Later, at dawn, the two boys finally decide to go to bed, but the protagonist cannot sleep: he imagines his father, already up and walking around his estate.

E forse i soli momenti suoi felici erano questi dell'alba, quando passava col suo cane per le note strade, liberando i bronchi dal catarro che l'opprimeva la notte e guardando pian piano dal grigio

indistinto nascere i colori nei filari di vigne, tra i rami degli olivi, e riconoscendo il fischio degli uccelli mattinieri uno per uno.

(I racconti, 279)

This identification with the father figure implies the conscious espousal of the values for which his father is the mouthpiece, but also a return to those strips of vine, that dawn of colour, dictated by the aesthetic choice of a privileged place, rich in emotional memories.

NOTES

1. It is worth mentioning in passing three articles by Calvino on Sanremo and Liguria, published in *Il Politecnico* in this very period: "Liguria magra e ossuta" (1945), "Riviera di ponente" and "Sanremo città dell'oro" (1946). Full references are given in the Bibliography. The first analyses the natural and historical causes of the poverty of local agriculture. "Riviera di Ponente" gives a concise description of the intertwined paths of two sorts of local history: "La storia della Riviera di Ponente si può raccontare in due maniere; una che tratta della storia degli uomini tra loro, del popolo e della piccola borghesia prima contro i saraceni poi contro i nobili, poi contro i vescovi, poi contro i genovesi, poi contro i Savoia, poi contro i fascisti. L'altra che racconta la lotta degli uomini con la terra di come i terreni coltivati a segale o a fave tornarono incolti, di come agli agrumeti succedettero le piantagioni di rose e di garofani, di come gli uliveti deperirono e furono abbandonati e distrutti". "Sanremo città dell'oro" outlines the history of the ancient and poor Sanremo, also known as "la Pigna", and of its modern reversed image: the touristic and affluent Sanremo. This article, signed only by the initials I. C. will be quoted more in detail later on in the present work for the descriptive similarities between "la Pigna" and "Città Vecchia" of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*.
2. The same effect may be found in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (p. 187).
3. Compare the description of the "Città vecchia" to that of "la Pigna" in "Sanremo città dell'oro" (1946): "Fulcro di questo inurbamento era la Pigna, la vecchia Pigna rannicchiata ancora per paura dei pirati, con le case sostenute una addosso all'altra con archi e volte, sempre più aggrovigliata per le aggiunte e gli adattamenti delle successioni ereditarie, sempre più pigiata per le scosse dei terremoti, con le strade ripide e acciottolate piene di sterco di mulo, la Pigna senza fogne, senz'acqua nelle case, buia nelle strade strette." It is also worth noting that the name of the area, "la Pigna", never appeared as such in Calvino's fiction. On the other hand it did appear several times as a simile, and in one occasion as a metaphor

- of protective isolation and enclosure (See "L'entrata in guerra", 237 and also *La strada*, 125).
4. Such rude oedipean misogyny is to be attributed to Pin once again. For an exemplary analysis of the broader misogyny in the text see Milanini 1990, 30-34. It should be added incidentally, that there is at least one character, Kim, who, with his "Ti amo, Adriana" rises above the general misogyny of the others.
 5. One of the best examples of this "pathos of distance" is the scene describing the bombing of the town, seen through a pair of binoculars (*Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, 136-137). Il Dritto, who, after the fire, has just been accused of negligence, reacts with an angry *cupio dissolvi* wishing his own house to be the first to be destroyed. Pin seems most of all fascinated with the pair of binoculars but, neither he or the narrator spares a thought for the inhabitants of "la Città Vecchia" who are under the bombing. Moreover this scene reminds the reader of "Irene" in *Le città invisibili* (p. 131).
 6. See also footnote 2 above. Whilst analysing more or less the same descriptive passages Milanini remarks that they are all represented in a foreshortened perspective, and that they never take in the horizon "a ricordarci che la nostra conoscenza del reale è sempre parziale e precaria, che la nostra aspirazione alla totalità è tenuta ad esprimersi mediante rappresentazioni circoscritte e tendenziali" (Milanini 1990, 14).
 7. See Pescio-Bottino 1976, 31, and also Ferretti 1989, 92-94. Between "L'entrata in guerra" and *La giornata di uno scrutatore* there are remarkable similarities. Both narratives portray historical events realistically and the dramatic or even tragic quality of the times is shown through the suffering brought about for those being who are not even responsible for their own actions. Calvino's ethical stance seems to be the magnetic field generated by the opposite poles of "insensatezza colpevole" and "alterità innocente" (Ferretti 1989, 148). For an interesting analysis of the ethical implications in Calvino see also Berardinelli 1991 and Milanini 1990, 164-167 and 184-187.

CHAPTER II

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE FAIRY-TALE

One of the "fairy-tale" works by Calvino to include a landscape which completely and recognisably reintroduces the sea - town - mountains pattern of the Sanremo countryside is *Il visconte dimezzato*.

In "La tradizione popolare della fiaba" (1973) we read that although studies on the narrative scheme of fairy tales have revealed how much versions told in very different countries and completely different historical/social conditions have in common, the fairy tale does contain indications which enable it to be localized in both time and place and that:

[...] ridurre la fiaba al suo scheletro invariante contribuisce a mettere in evidenza quante variabili geografiche e storiche formano il rivestimento di questo scheletro. [...] La fiaba, nella formalizzazione di Propp, non può prendere le mosse se non da una funzione di *danneggiamento* o *mancaanza*, e non è un caso che, esaminando le raccolte dei folkloristi, il massimo di specificità temporale e locale si noti appunto nelle sequenze iniziali, nelle avversità della situazione di partenza, mentre lo sviluppo e la soluzione fortunata sono più spesso stereotipe e lontane dall'esperienza vissuta del narrante e del suo pubblico (le solite nozze con il solito principe o la solita principessa).

(*Sulla fiaba*, 113)

At first sight the beginning of *Il visconte dimezzato*, where the setting is made explicit and indeed Bohemia is actually mentioned, seems to form an exception to these observations on the popular fairy tale:

C'era una guerra contro i turchi. Il visconte Medardo di Terralba, mio zio, cavalcava per la pianura di Bohemia diretto all'accampamento dei cristiani.

(*I nostri antenati*, 7)

And indeed we can explain the discrepancy only by considering *Il visconte dimezzato* as a narrative which uses the scheme of the popular fairy tale, but which is in fact the original creation of an author and not part of an oral tradition. From "Nota 1960" (*I nostri antenati*, 399-409) we learn that the author's prime concern was to move away from a tradition, rather than conforming to one as an oral narrator would probably have done:

Dunque, da un po' di tempo pensavo a un uomo tagliato in due per lungo, e che ognuna delle due parti andava per conto suo. La storia di un soldato, in una guerra moderna? Ma la solita satira espressionista era fritta e rifritta: meglio una guerra dei tempi andati, i Turchi, un colpo di scimitarra, no: meglio un colpo di cannone, così si sarebbe creduto che una metà era andata distrutta, invece poi saltava fuori. Allora i Turchi col cannone? Sì, le guerre austro-turche, fine Seicento, ma tutto lasciato un po' nel vago, il romanzo storico non m'interessava (ancora).

(*I nostri antenati*, 401)

What has to be inferred in a fairy tale in the popular tradition through a laborious network of suppositions is revealed in an original work by the date of composition and, if one is luckier still, by introductory notes. Thus we discover without much effort that the war against the

Turks stands for the Second World War and the cleaving of Medardo represents the tensions of the subsequent cold war. But it is interesting to note that the historical setting of *Il visconte dimezzato* serves to mask conflicts nearer in time in a more distant and veiled fashion. We know that the war is occurring in Bohemia because we are told as much explicitly, which is rarely the case in fairy stories: indeed the function of "absence" (or "lack") and "injury" (Propp 1928, 25-65) (articulated here at two distinct moments of the narrative, as we shall see) also serves to create that aura of wonder which tells the reader that this is indeed a fairy tale.

The Bohemian plain offers no particularly "Bohemian" characteristics to the eyes of the future lieutenant Medardo: we know that he has left behind him "l'ultimo castello in mano cristiana" (*I nostri antenati*, 7), there is talk of a barren plain, of countryside shrivelled by drought, of dried-up rivers, of stubble and bushes: in short of a desolate, but indeterminate landscape. What makes the panorama characteristic and at the same time alerts the reader to the fairy-tale nature of the situation, are the visual incongruities and the grotesque (and fantastical) explanations of the groom Curzio.

Thus it seems to me that the first chapter is devoted to performing the function of absence: absence of normality in the general situation (storks, flamingoes and cranes in the place of eagles, piles of human corpses at first sight inexplicably feathered, etc.) and a symmetrical absence of normality in the non-existent reactions of the protagonist:

In cuore non aveva né nostalgia, né dubbio, né apprensione. [...] Sentiva il sangue di quella guerra crudele, sparso per mille rivi sulla terra, giungere fino a lui; e se ne lasciava lambire, senza provare accanimento né pietà.

(*I nostri antenati*, 11)

"Injury" appears, in the form of a cannon-ball, in the second chapter, at the end of which the vicissitudes of the half-hero can begin. Once again we may usefully turn to "Nota 1960" where Calvino warns the reader not to take what might seem a Manichean division into Il Buono and Il Gramo too seriously:

Dunque: una metà sopravvive, l'altra comparirà in un secondo tempo. Come differenziarle? Il sistema d'effetto sicuro è fare una metà buona e una cattiva, un contrasto alla R. L. Stevenson, come *Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde* e i due fratelli del *Master of Ballantrae*. Così la storia s'organizzava su se stessa secondo uno schema perfettamente geometrico. E i critici potevano cominciare ad andare su una falsa strada: dicendo che quel che mi stava a cuore era il problema del bene e del male. No, non mi stava a cuore per niente, non avevo pensato neanche per un minuto al bene e al male. Come un pittore può usare un ovvio contrasto di colori perché gli serve a dare evidenza a una forma, così io avevo usato un ben noto contrasto narrativo per dare evidenza a quel che m'interessava, cioè il dimidiamento.

(*I nostri antenati*, 401-402)

The cleaving of the character is undoubtedly an event belonging to the sphere of the marvellous, and yet the cleaving of Medardo has antecedents in the literary rather than the popular fairy tale: here, though numerous cases of bodily mutilation come to mind, they are worked by enchantment and not by almost believable agents (in this case, the cannon ball).

Calvino explains the cleaving of Medardo in terms of the existential condition of contemporary man. As Lavagetto has elegantly observed (Lavagetto 1988, IX), and as I too believe, the most convincing literary antecedent for the cleaving of Medardo is to be found in the comic, prophetic and threatening argument put forward by the character of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*; though I feel that one should also bear in mind Dante's Mahomet, with his cloven trunk, among the other "seminator di scandalo e di scisma" (*Inferno*, XXVIII, vv. 22-42) where "scisma" implies an allusion to both the civil war (in other words, a fratricidal war, with important consequences for what we shall say later on) in Italy, and to the global cold war.

We do not find cleavings of this kind in the popular fairy tale. However, we might also bear in mind other closely associated models of splitting, for instance the stories in which the protagonists are two brothers (more rarely sisters). This comparison is useful here because in part *Il visconte dimezzato* makes use of this scheme. I have chosen to quote the one briefly outlined by Bettelheim:

[...] in other fairy tales in which two protagonists - usually brothers - stand for seemingly incompatible aspects of the human personality, the two usually separate after an original period of having been united, and then have different fates. In these fairy tales - which, though little noticed today, are among the oldest and most widely disseminated ones - the stay-at-home brother and the adventurous one remain in touch through magic. When the adventurous brother perishes because he has permitted himself to live in accordance with his desires or to disregard dangers, his brother sets out to rescue him, succeeds and forever after the two live happily reunited. The details vary [...] What all these stories

have in common are features that suggest the identity of the two heroes, one of whom is cautious and reasonable, but ready to risk his life to rescue the other brother, who foolishly exposes himself to some terrible perils; and also some magic object, a life token, which usually disintegrates as soon as one dies, serving as the sign for the other to set out on the rescue.

(Bettelheim 1975, 90-91)

It is clear that in *Il visconte dimezzato* both parts of Medardo are particularly averse to the idea of a reunion, and that no magic object in the literal sense reunites them. But one might extend the category so as to include Pamela, who is after all the only character in the text to have quasi-magical powers (even the wet nurse Sebastiana, who at a certain point acts as a "magical assistant" through her knowledge of the "virtù di tutte le erbe", does not have supernatural powers, but owes her knowledge to her pirate father and hermit grandfather (*I nostri antenati*, 93) in that Pamela at least "sapeva parlare alle sue bestie" (*I nostri antenati*, 46). The two Medardos are kept in contact not exactly by magic, but by an unexplainable form of telepathy, as one deduces from il Gramo's question to Trelawney, "Mi spieghi lei dottore ho un senso come se la gamba che non ho fosse stanca per un gran camminare. Cosa può essere questo?" (*I nostri antenati*, 46), which foreshadows the return of il Buono. Furthermore, when il Gramo is nearly massacred by his fellow-countrymen for his misdeeds, he is saved by il Buono who persuades the rebels to pardon him and sends him the phial of unguent given him by the Bohemian hermits to soothe the pain of his wound (*I nostri antenati*, 67).

Amongst the variants to the pattern mentioned, one very common and one also considered particularly significant by Bettelheim concerns leaving home, a step not always taken by the adventurous brother. In

Grimm's version, both brothers are originally driven from home together and divide only subsequently, taking paths which fork in the middle of the forest. Bettelheim explains:

The forest, where they go to decide that they want to have a life of their own, symbolises the place in which inner darkness is confronted and worked through; where uncertainty is resolved about who one is, and where one begins to understand who one wants to be.

(Bettelheim 1975, 93)

Perhaps Calvino's decision to represent an involuntary and traumatic separation on an open battle-field may conversely be interpreted as injury taking a reluctant and psychologically unprepared character by surprise. To quote Bettelheim again:

In the stories of the "Two Brothers" type, the heroes are depicted as being in what we would call the adolescent age - that period in life when the relative emotional tranquillity of prepubertal child is replaced by adolescent stress and turmoil, brought about by new psychological developments. Hearing such a story, the child comprehends (at least subconsciously) that although what he is told about are adolescent conflicts, the problems are typical of our predicament whenever we are confronted with having to move from one developmental stage to the next.

(Bettelheim 1975, 93)

These observations may help prepare the ground for the entrance of the character-narrator, Medardo's anonymous nephew. At the end of the story, after the happy fairy-tale ending, he says:

Io invece, in mezzo a tanto fervore d'interesse, mi sentivo sempre più triste e manchevole. Alle volte uno si crede incompleto ed è soltanto giovane.

Ero giunto sulle soglie dell'adolescenza e ancora mi nascondevo tra le radici dei grandi alberi del bosco a raccontarmi storie. Un ago di pino poteva rappresentare per me un cavaliere, o una dama, o un buffone; io lo facevo muovere dinanzi ai miei occhi e m'esaltavo in racconti interminabili. Poi mi prendeva vergogna di queste fantasticherie e scappavo.

(I nostri antenati, 76)

This time in the wood, Calvino's adolescent behaves in a way very similar to the child listener analysed by Bettelheim¹. I have quoted this passage to pinpoint the shades of ambiguity it casts on the story just told, whose truth it allows us to doubt, but also to look more closely at the place where these adolescent fantasies occur: a wood, from which one can see a town overlooking a bay: in a word, the countryside around Sanremo. From the bay we move away to the final exchanges. Trelawney, the young narrator's adult friend, acts as Medardo's benefactor, in that he is the doctor who sews the two halves together again. But before being a benefactor, Trelawney was depicted as a bungling scientist, a chaser after will-o'-the-wisps. If the point of the story is the phase of transition from adolescence to maturity, Trelawney's departure represents a farewell to the will-o'-the-wisps of childhood, which the narrator tries to pursue one last time:

- Dottore! Dottor Trelawney! mi prenda con sé! Non può lasciarmi qui, dottore! -

Ma già le navi stavano scomparendo all'orizzonte e io rimasi qui, in questo nostro mondo pieno di responsabilità e di fuochi fatui.

(I nostri antenati, 77)

"Responsibility" seems to be the keyword, all the more so in that what little previous biographical history Calvino provides for the narrator allows us to see him as a fully paid-up escapist/nature-loving daydreamer:

Io ero libero come l'aria perché non avevo genitori e non appartenevo alla categoria dei servi né a quella dei padroni. Facevo parte della famiglia dei Terralba solo per tardivo riconoscimento, ma non portavo il loro nome e nessuno era tenuto a educarmi. La mia povera madre era figlia del visconte Aiolfo e sorella maggiore di Medardo, ma aveva macchiato l'onore della famiglia fuggendo con un bracconiere che fu poi mio padre. Io ero nato nella capanna del bracconiere, nei terreni gerbidi sotto il bosco; e poco dopo mio padre fu ucciso in una rissa, e la pellagra finì mia madre rimasta sola in quella misera capanna.

(I nostri antenati, 25)

The Sanremo landscape and the character-narrator are presented together at the beginning of the third chapter. For the sake of brevity I shall quote the passage describing the mood of patient expectation:

Ogni nave che si vedeva allora, si diceva - Questo è Mastro Medardo che ritorna, - non perché fossimo impazienti che tornasse, ma tanto per aver qualcosa da aspettare.

(I nostri antenati, 16)

where the narrator seems to be the mouthpiece for the expectations of the whole community, which is a peaceful agricultural one,

Il giorno avevamo vendemmiato e attraverso i filari vedevamo nel mare grigio avvicinarsi le vele d'una nave che batteva bandiera imperiale. [...] un giovane chiamato Fiorfiero, pigiando l'uva in cima al tino, gridò: - O, laggiù-; [...]

(I nostri antenati, 16)

Here again Calvino gives emphasis to the visual aspect and the contrast between light and dark in the landscape:

Fu di sera, già a buio; era ottobre; il cielo era coperto. Il giorno avevamo vendemmiato e attraverso i filari vedevamo nel mare grigio avvicinarsi le vele di una nave che batteva bandiera imperiale. [...] era quasi buio e vedemmo in fondo valle una fila di torce accendersi per la mulattiera; e poi, quando passò sul ponte distinguemmo una lettiga [...]

(I nostri antenati, 16)

Furthermore Medardo's village is actually called Terralba. Here too Calvino avoids mentioning the names Sanremo or Liguria, which is surprising, considering that he not only names other regions, but even does so in ways that leave no doubt about the locating of Terralba. Thus for example in connection with the alleged poachers cruelly punished as a result of il Gramo's verdict, the narrator informs us that they were "cavalieri toscani che, diretti in Provenza passavano attraverso i nostri bordi" (p. 22) and later on, introducing the Huguenots, he says "Era gente scappata d'in Francia [...] Nella traversata delle montagne [...] Così s'erano messi a coltivare le dure terre di Col Gerbido [...]"(p. 33).

The narrator does not say much about Terralba as a town, but we know that there is an aisleless church (where the wedding ceremony takes place), a ruined castle with a courtyard and several towers, occupied initially by Medardo's family, and later just by il Gramo, with servants who survived the fire started by the owner himself; a carpenter's workshop, the undertaker's house and a cemetery, where Trelawney tries to ensnare the will-o'-the-wisps with his nets. The spatial relationship between these elements cannot be deduced, since everything is left vague; the only certainty is that the vineyards and the sea can be seen from the castle.

All the rest, perhaps because of the historical setting, implies a rural economy. There are vineyards for the production, perhaps, of "cancarone" wine (a Ligurian term, still in use, for poor quality wines and possibly an example of antonomasia); little wheat is grown (p. 34), maize and chick peas (p. 63), there is a press (p. 70) for the olives that are collected (as also in *Il barone rampante*, p. 264, for walnuts) by spreading sheets under the lowest branches of the olive trees (p. 38). Horticulture is clearly an important feature: there is mention of courgettes (p. 29), melons (p. 16) and tomatoes, which are even spread out to dry in the sun (p. 59). The fruit trees mentioned are apple trees, pear trees, pomegranates (p. 58) and figs (pp. 16 and 63).

Animal rearing includes goats, pigs (p. 16) and sheep (p. 59); of cattle there is mention only of a bull (which il Gramo makes drunk on *grappa*, p. 68), donkeys, used to draw water from the wells (p. 65), bees (p. 44), rabbits (p. 29) and poultry (pp. 44 and 58, but also Pamela's duck).

The woodland fauna is more revealing: Aiolfo's birds (pheasants, turtle doves, magpies, tits, shrike); squirrels, dormice, vipers, processionary moths and eels in the streams (p. 50). The trees in the wood are mainly pines, but there are also mulberries (p. 44), chestnuts (p. 50) and raspberry bushes (p. 33). In the undergrowth there are mushrooms: boleti, "vescie", puffballs, agaric (p. 20).

By contrast, the sea is unproductive and there is no mention of sea fishing; though we do hear of limpets, crabs, octopi (p. 40) and jellyfish (p. 42). But it is also true that unexpected and esoteric creatures emerge from the sea, such as the turtle and the pineapples exhibited by the English

sailors of Captain Cook (p. 76) as evidence of a horizon broader than the immediate one.

There is talk of regional culinary habits, such as "andare per pigne" (pine-nuts being a vital ingredient for "pesto", p. 71), eating slugs (p. 59) and frying mushrooms (p. 21).

I have brought together this information to show how detailed the story is and how it would be possible, theoretically, to locate the narrator's horizon even if it is anonymous. Nor does this richness of detail work against the generic mood typical of the fairy tale because these are elements functional to the story, and such specialized description can also be seen in "genuinely" popular fairy stories². It is however true that in popular fairy stories the landscape is by convention generic - which explains the sparseness of information of Terralba as a town - and functional to the plot. In the case of the *Visconte dimezzato*, this is true above all when Medardo and/or Pamela appear centre stage. Description of the "Prato delle monache" or the bridge "della ghigna", despite the specificity of their names, is minimal: that is, in the first case we are told that it is a clearing with a pool in the middle - functional because in this way il Gramo can contemplate the misleadingly whole reflection of the halves of the mushroom floating on the surface and look at himself without seeing himself as a whole, however misleadingly - and in the second, that there is a duckboard construction between two crags - equally functional because it represents the second of il Gramo's three attempts to kill the narrator. The same is true as far as il Buono is concerned: the pond on whose banks the meeting with the narrator takes place is functional to the first three good deeds he carries out - replacing the eel

with the ring, rescuing the narrator who is about to be stung by the red spider and of Trelawney who falls into the water and cannot swim. The same might be said of Pamela's adventures in the wood.

Now let us look at the more extreme treatment of the settings for the allegorical figures who, as "Nota 1960" tells us, represent opposing attitudes towards literature, namely the Huguenots of Col Gerbido for commitment and the lepers of Pratofungo for escapism. It is easy enough to see Col Gerbido as corresponding to the estate of S. Giovanni and Ezechiele to the author's father (see *La strada di San Giovanni*, 15-40), which partly explains the greater characterization of the Huguenot setting, but the fact remains that one of the criteria for representation, that is, work in the fields, is inevitably more applicable to the Huguenots than to the lepers. Both communities have aspects that are atypical vis-à-vis the norm (Terralba). But Col Gerbido has more markedly rural features while Pratofungo has to suggest a licentious sophistication which is completely alien to the norm.

But it is interesting that Calvino also differentiates them in rural terms. It is true that the lepers live on charity and do not have to work, but even they do grow something ("Son tornati i giardinieri" is the cry on their return to Pratofungo, p. 49); however, what they grow are strawberry grapes (*uva fragola*, p. 29), jasmine (p. 30), peppermint, rosemary, thyme (p. 47), bay hawthorn, anemones (p. 48), origano and mallow (p. 49), marginal and superfluous items, aromatic herbs, vaguely transgressive and quite different, as Sebastiana explains, from the borage and cress whose infusions combat leprosy (p. 48). In reality borage and cress are plants used in "poor" Ligurian cooking³.

The Huguenots' agricultural model is hard-working and absolutely without frills, partly because of the earth itself, which consists of "ripiani calcinosi dove a fatica cresceva qualche misera vite e dello stento frumento" (p. 34); it is reached by a "mulattiera sassosa" (p. 61). The produce they do manage to cultivate is limited to olives (p. 34), a yellow vine, figs, rye, rape (p. 63), cattle fodder, wild endive, maize and chick peas (p. 64).

All this may lead one to think that *Il visconte dimezzato* is a mere celebration of a narrow regional panorama and perhaps even more the idealization of an archaic and thus almost idyllic society, which would be far from doing justice to the text. As the already quoted analysis of Bettelheim makes clear:

The stories on the "Two Brothers" theme add to this internal dialogue between id, ego and superego another dichotomy: the striving for independence and self-assertion, and the opposite tendency to remain safely home, tied to the parents. From the earliest version on, the stories stress that both desires reside in each of us, and that we cannot survive deprived of either: the wish to stay tied to the past, and the urge to reach out to a new future. Through the unfolding of events, the story most often teaches that entirely cutting oneself off from one's past leads to disaster, but that to exist only beholden to the past is stunting; while it is safe, it provides no life of one's own. Only the thorough integration of these contrary tendencies permits a successful existence.

(Bettelheim 1975, 91)

Here we should look again at the Buono/Gramo dichotomy which characterises the two parts of Medardo and which, if they do not represent a moral contrast of a strictly Manichean type, do at all events represent

polarities which we might define as conventionality and transgression in relation to the norm. Irrespective of the personal dissatisfaction of the two parts of the divided Medardo, his lack of wholeness makes him inefficient in terms of integration into society; that is, the transgressive part, il Gramo, also has some success, and the conventional part is highly inept, as his relationship with applied science shows, clearly represented by Mastro Pietrochiodo. At all events, what is stressed is that Medardo's action expresses scientific interests, traditionally regarded as progressive, and which initially can find little positive application.

Again, atypical societies too carry seeds of rebellion within them, as the figure of Esaù shows for the Huguenots and as the sense of alienation indicated by the wearing in protest of a nun's habit by the wetnurse Sebastiana does among the lepers. But the escape of the narrator too is a sign of rebellion, however inconclusive and passive. To conclude, we might consider the following quotation, partly as an apparently autobiographical curiosity, partly as a piece of minimal information which tends to bear out my hypothesis of a reading of *Il visconte dimezzato* within the scheme of fairy tales which have two brothers as protagonists:

Questo modo di fare di Esaù non mi garbava, e quello dei suoi parenti mi metteva in soggezione. E allora preferivo starmene per conto mio e andare alla marina a raccogliere patelle e a cacciar granchi.

(I nostri antenati, 40)

NOTES

1. At all events the persistence of the state of lack at the end of the story is part of the tradition of Italian fairy tales, which conventionally end with pairs of lines such as: "Vissero in pace e in carità/E a me mai nessuno niente dà" (p. 222); "Così stettero e godettero/Ed a me nulla mi dettero" (p. 295); "E lì se ne stiedero, e se godiedero/E a me nulla mi diedero./No, mi diedero un un centesimino/E lo misi in un buchino" (p. 342); "Così vissero e godettero./Sempre in pace se ne stettero./Ed a me nulla mi dettero" (p. 350) "e se ne stettero contenti e consolati, mentre noi siamo rimasti qui assetati." (p. 467); "Fecero tante feste, balli, canti/E noi restammo con le mani vacanti" (p. 494); "Loro restarono felici e contenti,/E noialtri siam qui senza niente" (p. 627). I am quoting from Calvino, *Fiabe italiane*.
2. Compare, for example, the note at the end of Calvino's version of the popular Sicilian fairy tale "Sfortuna", in *Fiabe italiane*, 528.
3. Talking of *Prezzemolina*, Calvino explains how the initial alimentary transgression "la scorpacciata di prezzemolo della donna incinta" is reminiscent of "l'opposizione pianta alimentare - pianta aromatica [...] d'una botanica arcaica basata sull'opposizione alimento-aroma, agricoltura-giardinaggio, Cerere-Venere". *Sulla fiaba*, 119.

CHAPTER III

ECHO EFFECTS

III.1 *Pesci grossi, pesci piccoli*

This chapter looks at those works where one detail of the landscape has been repeated and diffused to the point of making the usual pattern sea - town - hills almost unrecognisable. The procedure is undoubtedly an expedient to avoid the background becoming monotonous, but it clearly charges it with other connotations. Thus one might say for example that the panorama of the bay as it appears in this group of works has been transformed into a garden of delights (or torments).

The difference between Eden and a garden of delights lies in the fact that while in the former one returns to a condition of prelapsarian innocence, in the second it is desire - and its opposite, fear - which, as an externalised element, becomes the "place" where the hero undergoes a trial, since he has to prove that he is equal to the situation: in other words that he is spotless.

In the category of the "marvellous", as in Eden, the world is benign and indeterminate, whereas the fantastic creates a world where desire, projected outwards, is mirrored everywhere: as for instance in the caves of crystal and oriental *shish mahal*, places regarded as sacred; but also in the power of the dream according to the Freudian interpretation, of its compensating function, which is found in a large number of fairy stories

and popular tales (a classic example is probably the witch's house in Hansel and Gretel, with its reverse outside/inside polarity).

This bipolarity of the fantastic and the theme of the trial seem to me to be succinctly represented in one story, "Pesci grossi, pesci piccoli" (*I racconti*, 9-15) though it is true that the whole Sanremo pattern does not occur, but only the sea and the rocks.

In "Pesci grossi, pesci piccoli" the protagonist Zeffirino is haunted by a passion for underwater fishing and has acquired the necessary equipment

Quel giorno Zeffirino era riuscito a mettere insieme tutto l'armamento per la caccia subacquea. La maschera l'aveva già dall'anno scorso, regalo di sua nonna; una cugina che aveva i piedi piccoli gli prestò le pinne; il fucile lo prese a casa di suo zio senza dir niente e al padre disse che gliel'avevano prestato.

(*I racconti*, 9)

Now he begins to pursue a whitebreem which, as certain magic deer or gazelles lead the hero into the wood, takes Zeffirino into a hollow amongst the rocks, peopled by droves of assorted fish.

Era un posto ricchissimo di pesca, quasi uno specchio chiuso, e dovunque Zeffirino guardasse incontrava un guizzare di pinne sottili, luccichii di squame, tanto che dallo stupore e dalla gioia non gli venne di far partire quasi un colpo.

(*I racconti*, 11)

The trial awaiting him has nothing to do with fishing: he has to console signorina De Magistris, a fat weeping siren, for her sufferings in

love. The two characters are the mirror image of each other, one being in ecstasy and the other in agony.

Nello stesso momento, nello stesso posto esistevano due struggimenti così opposti e inconciliabili. Zeffirino non riusciva a pensarli entrambi insieme; né a lasciarsi andare all'uno o all'altro.
(*I racconti*, 12)

The symmetry of the situation generates an impasse. The symbolic action in allegorical narrative, as Fletcher shows, may take the form either of progress or of battle; in the first case there is ritualistic and unilinear movement forward, in the second an effect of symmetry and balance, suggesting a stasis in the conflict (Fletcher 1964, 146- 159).

Zeffirino tries to distract the weeping woman with his fishing, to make her share in his pleasure. He tries to project his enthusiasm. But she, too, projects her pain on to the fish that have been caught, discovering in each of them traces of seagulls' beaks or water fleas gnawing at them under their scales. Here we are back with the "pathos of distance": from a distance fish are fascinating, from close to they inspire pity. But through a sort of magic, created by desire, the phenomenon has undergone an effect of enlargement, of multiplication, or resonance; here we have the echo as amplifying system, whose effects on the characters have already been pointed out by Falaschi in relation to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Falaschi 1976, 116), and which now also acts externally.

The garden of delights and the garden of torments are symmetrical and juxtaposed. The landscape, filtered through the characters' states of mind, is reduced to a minimum, to the enclosed hollow, to a short-sighted

vision. One natural element is broadened and proliferates unduly (in accordance with the character's desire or fear).

We know that in allegory what counts is the hero's strength of mind, the upholding of his own convictions to the end. Those of the woman waver before the octopus: of all the creatures caught, it is the only one which does not fit in with her state of mind. To touch it is unwise, and yet it rescues her from the hold of her earlier melancholy.

The octopus has the function of a magical creature, it performs the cathartic action which Zeffirino intended, but in an unexpected and incongruous way. Thus the image that Zeffirino receives of it from the water is all the more powerful:

Vide la donna grassa con il polpo che dal braccio allungava un
tentacolo e la prendeva per la gola.

(I racconti, 15)

The octopus is immediately sacrificed and, in a sudden, crucial transition from the fabulous to the low mimetic, it is offered to De Magistris "per cucinarlo fritto".

III.2 "*La formica argentina*"

According to Todorov's classification, in the "marvellous" the protagonist's initial amazement is not the norm: when it does appear, it is a sign that we are on the borderline between the "marvellous" and the "fantastic" (Todorov 1970). This, it seems to me, is the register in which "*La formica argentina*" (1958) should be read; it is a long story about the ups and downs of an immigrant who settles with his family in a coastal district infested by ants.

According to Pietro Ferrua the story is based on a real phenomenon (Ferrua 1977, 367-370); yet partly for its rarity, and partly because of the allegorical nature of the narrative, which once again proceeds through antithetical examples of behaviour, it seems to signify the human struggle against natural evil.

From the narrator's point of view we can recognise three different phases in his relationship with the landscape: the first is desire, the idealization which has led him to make the journey to settle there with his family, the second is his gradual awareness of the problems present in this new world, the third is the discovery of a way of not allowing himself to be overwhelmed by them.

The narrator begins his story with his bewilderment in the face of the unexpected phenomenon. The theme of the journey, the search for a friendly natural environment, are used to give this effect of surprise, but they remain outside the story: they are part of the past, they already belong to memory.

The word "formica", constantly repeated and stressed in this initial phase of the story, has to span the distance between its usual value and the circumstantial one. The exceptional nature of the phenomenon belongs to the natural order, and thus we are in the field of that "ambiguity" described by Falaschi (1976, 126 and ff.), with the discrepancy between the beauty of the countryside and the invincible nature of the plague of ants.

Although they are mentioned constantly, the ants are never described in detail, perhaps because, since they are part of everyone's experience, it would be hard to make them seem repulsive; but we infer that this is a particular species, smaller than usual and apparently totally gregarious in character, an impression possibly also given through the use of the collective singular, which makes it impossible for the reader to imagine them individually. To give an idea of the difference between the ordinary ant and the Argentinian ant, the narrator uses a comparison which, though leaving the second species somewhat vague, nonetheless does give some idea of it:

(...) formiche? una formica, avremmo visto, sperduta, una di quelle nostre formiche grasse (mi sembrano grasse, ora, le formiche dei nostri paesi)

(I racconti, 357)

Apart from this, we know that they have a bitter smell and that they tickle unbearably. Thus rather than of repugnance, they give a sense of uncontrollable unease; of obsession and frenzy rather than anxiety.

Almost invisible though they are, they still dominate the landscape; the attempts to combat them - whether the captain's grotesque traps, the

coloured trails of the Reginaudo's insecticide, the daubings of poisoned state molasses - are all signs of their insidious presence.

Ma per strada, già i posti mi sembravano diversi da ieri: in ogni orto, in ogni casa indovinavo le file di formiche che salivano sui muri, che coprivano gli alberi da frutto, che muovevano le antenne verso ogni cosa zuccherosa o grassa; e il mio occhio ormai sull'avviso scopriva subito le masserizie messe fuor di casa a sbattere perché le formiche le avevano invase, e il soffietto dell'insettifugo in mano a una vecchia, e il piattino di veleno, e, aguzzando gli occhi la fila che camminava, imperturbabile, lungo il cornicione.

(I racconti, 372)

Here the "pathos of distance" implies something more than usual: the narrator cannot escape the phenomenon, and thus even in his first walk with his wife, from above, the two project a vision of themselves into the landscape below; they could equally not do so, they could forget it, but they do, and they are filled with pity.

Mia moglie ed io salivamo per questo viale e giù dalle balaustre vedevamo la casetta dove abitavamo, ancora così poco a noi familiare, e la sterpaglia del terreno incolto, e il giardinetto dei Reginaudo simile al cortile d'un magazzino, e il giardinetto dei Brauni con la sua compostezza quasi cimiteriale, ed ecco ora potevamo dimenticarci che erano luoghi neri di formiche, ecco ora potevamo vederli come sarebbero stati senza quell'assillo al quale non ci si poteva sottrarre neppure per un attimo, ecco ora a quella distanza potevano anche sembrare un paradiso - e però più dall'alto li guardavamo più ci prendeva un senso di pietà per la nostra vita laggiù, come se a vivere in quel meschino, gracile orizzonte non si potesse che continuare a batterci contro problemi gracili e meschini.

(I racconti, 378-379)

The horror with which Pin perceives what is close to him has here been joined by pity, "sympathy" between man and nature. (In fact, of course, what signorina De Magistris had been feeling was also pity, despite the strongly caricatural tone in which it was expressed).

We have said that the narrator remains in a position of stalemate throughout the story, trying as he is to gain an idea of how to combat this scourge, unable to take up any definite stand. The story moves between opposing poles of behaviour, whose faults and virtues it illustrates and which it also rejects. The discourse follows a logic of gradual negation in a crescendo of bitterness culminating almost in anger.

Here we have a change of register: the narrator takes the family to look at the sea. The wonder of the child's gaze as it contemplates the still unfamiliar countryside communicates itself to the adult narrator:

Nostro figlio si voltava stupito a vedere ogni cosa e a noi toccava prendere parte alla sua meraviglia

(I racconti, 384)

But this child-like gaze sees something very particular; a partial view of the old town, etched by the sunlight, becomes peopled with vaguely surreal vignettes. Elusive, purely descriptive, incongruous, they occur irrespective of judgment, as in a silent film.

Finally this gaze will be fixed upon the sea, on the great stretches of water, on the colours of the waves, and our thoughts turn to the smoothing process which the currents work upon the shells. The words,

the interest of this narrator, obsessed with the ants' indomitable will, ends in a vision of natural beauty, a sort of cosmic embracing of the elements: the sea, Freudianly understood as the maternal womb, retains the fascination of a life which extends to times both before birth and after death.

The observer has gone beyond the boundaries of his own personal concerns, he has gone beyond the ego, he is not trying to find causal links between one scene and the other.

III.3 *Il barone rampante*

This bemused remoteness leads us on to Cosimo's first scanning of the world from the top of the trees, after his rebellion, in *Il barone rampante*:

Mio fratello stava come di vedetta. Guardava tutto, e tutto era come niente. Tra i limoneti passava una donna con un cesto. Saliva un mulattiere per la china, reggendosi alla coda della mula. Non si videro tra loro; la donna al rumore degli zoccoli ferrati, si voltò e si sporse verso strada, ma non fece in tempo. Si mise a cantare allora, ma il mulattiere passava già alla svolta, tese l'orecchio, schioccò la frusta e alla mula disse:- Aah! - E tutto finì lì. Cosimo vedeva questo e quello.

(*I nostri antenati*, 91)

Such a dispassionate vision befits the person who has found an inner measure, that is, the right way of being himself and of being in the world, a central metaphor in this highly successful allegory, entirely set in the open air, in a Ligurian landscape embellished, for the occasion, with trees of all kinds.

Più in là le chiome degli alberi si sfittivano e l'ortaglia digradava in piccoli campi a scala, sostenuti da muri di pietre; il dosso era scuro di oliveti, e, dietro, l'abitato d'Ombrosa sporgeva i suoi tetti di mattone sbiadito e ardesia, e ne spuntavano pennoni di bastimenti, là dove sotto c'era il porto. In fondo si stendeva il mare, alto d'orizzonte, e un lento veliero vi passava.

(*I nostri antenati*, 91)

Ombrosa corresponds to a longed-for eighteenth-century Sanremo deep in woodland, a landscape which at the moment when it was described by the narrator already no longer existed, destroyed as it had

been by the infamous profit motive, from the Napoleonic wars onwards (*I nostri antenati*, 106, 179 and 293-294).

The nostalgic vein evident in the words of Biagio, alone in the unrecognisable countryside, is firmly contained; more important is the enthusiasm dominating Cosimo's life of exploration of the arboreal world, the beautiful descriptions at the beginning of the fourth and tenth chapters in a growing familiarity with the "universo di linfa" (*I nostri antenati*, 108) in which the character is immersed.

Again there are references to an instinctive world which reifies desire: the tree which acts as a "stepping stone" between the familiar and domestic world of his father's villa and the park of the D'Ondariva is the scented and seductive magnolia (p. 93), the background against which Viola moves is an exotic garden, mysteriously planted with every species of tree (p. 92); during the period of arson even the night sky is lit up by the glitter of incandescent stars (p. 181); Ursula, the noble Spanish damsel on whom Cosimo bestows his first kiss on a "tenero mandorlo" (p. 208) is the object of a tender adolescent passion which burgeons amidst the spring flowering of the branches (p. 209).

The relationship between man and nature is absolutely central; Cosimo's growing familiarity with the wood begins with a self-quotation, with the episode of the boy who finds himself sitting near a blackbird which he did not notice until it flew away (p. 92)¹.

Yet with all his love - or, as Calvino would say, because of all his love - Cosimo is not an "idealized" figure, he is no noble savage: at first the toes of his shoes graze the branches of soft wood, "aprendo bianche ferite nel nero della scorza" (p. 93). Later he will solve the problem by wearing slippers, because the difference between Cosimo and later generations lies precisely in his greater degree of awareness, in the sense of responsibility at the root of his behaviour.

Similarly, later he will learn the art of tree-pruning and, as Biagio will comment:

Insomma l'amore per questo suo elemento arboreo seppe farlo diventare, com'è di tutti gli amori veri, anche spietato e doloroso, che ferisce e recide per far crescere e dar forma.

(I nostri antenati, 178)

The same applies to hunting, a youthful passion which he will also repudiate over time, though the narrator continues to imply that his first instinct was perhaps more healthy than the subsequent one (*I nostri antenati, 257*).

The love between Cosimo and his "element" is thus uninhibited and passionate: the wood brings together all his anxieties, from those which are still childish, as when he climbs unseeing, without looking around him (*I nostri antenati, 115*) to adult ones where the very way he climbs denotes dissatisfaction with himself:

Non sapeva neanche lui cosa voleva: preso dalle sue furie s'arrampicava rapidissimo sulle vette più tenere e fragili, come se cercasse altri alberi che crescessero sulla cima degli alberi per salire anche su quelli

(I nostri antenati, 224)

as well as erotic desire:

Pareva preda a un'irrequietudine da uccello: saltava di ramo in ramo, ficcanaso, ombroso, inconcludente.

(I nostri antenati, 215)

and enthusiasm expressed through mad scamperings from branch to branch:

Cosimo si gettò nel folto; avrebbe voluto che fosse mille volte più folto, una valanga di foglie e rami e spini e caprifogli e capelveneri da affondarci e sprofondarci e solo dopo essercisi del tutto sommerso cominciare a capire se era felice o folle di paura.

(I nostri antenati, 232)

followed by the bitter pain of Viola's desertion, which turns Cosimo into an eighteenth-century version of Orlando, though here method replaces brute force:

Poi venne il tempo della violenza distruggitrice: ogni albero cominciava dalla vetta e, via una foglia via l'altra, rapidissimo lo riduceva bruco come d'inverno, anche se non era d'abito spogliante. Poi risaliva in cima e tutti i ramoscelli li spezzava finché non lasciava che le grosse travature, risaliva ancora, e con un temperino cominciava a staccare la corteccia, e si vedevano le piante scorticate scoprire il bianco con abbrividente aria ferita.

(I nostri antenati, 254)

to the madness, mid-way between elation and incoherence, with which he tries to recover from his pain by preaching and declaiming from the tree-tops, covered with feathers, declaring himself now "codirosso", now a "barbagianni", now a "codibugnolo" (*I nostri antenati*, 256), a madness indeed expressed through senseless decorations:

I suoi alberi ora erano addobbati di fogli scritti e anche di cartelli con massime di Seneca e Shaftesbury, e di oggetti: ciuffi di penne, ceri da chiesa, falciuole, corone, busti da donna, pistole, bilance, legati l'uno all'altro in un certo ordine.

(*I nostri antenati*, 257)

Cosimo spends his time amidst the darkness of the trees, but again it is interesting that there are three large-scale general views, three panoramic broadenings-out corresponding to the moments of greatest narrative pathos: the already-quoted initial wonder (*I nostri antenati*, 92), the ending of the love affair with Viola (p. 234) and, lastly, death (p. 292).

With Cosimo's disappearance, before the end of the narrative, the panorama of Ombrosa dissolves before Biagio's eyes, and his anxiety about a bay without woods begins:

Ogni tanto scrivendo m'interrompo e vado alla finestra. Il cielo è vuoto, e a noi vecchi d'Ombrosa, abituati a vivere sotto quelle

verdi cupole, fa male agli occhi guardarlo. Si direbbe che gli alberi non hanno retto, dopo che mio fratello se n'è andato, o che gli uomini sono stati presi dalla furia della scure.

(*I nostri antenati*, 293)

This is the end of the Utopia, the end of the dream; to find a new balance between the positive and negative values of the imaginary, when the adventures of the baron are over, Calvino will embark upon a symbolic endeavour in *La speculazione edilizia*, trying to discover the true nature of "la furia della scure" which has destroyed Ombrosa.

III.4 *La speculazione edilizia*

Calvino himself tells us about the method he used in writing *La speculazione edilizia*:

Per dare il senso di come il nostro tempo si muove e avere una coscienza completa di ogni processo degenerativo, sento il bisogno di un atteggiamento che definirei "mimesi attiva della negatività"; cioè trasportarci violentemente dalla parte di ogni fenomeno, ogni modo di pensare che giudichiamo negativo, entrare nella sua logica interna portandola alle ultime conseguenze, vivere insomma la negatività "al grado eroico". Finora sono riuscito a farlo solo ne *La speculazione edilizia*, dove un intellettuale costringe se stesso a entusiasinarsi di ciò che sommamente odia, la febbre di nuove costruzioni che sta mutando il volto alla Riviera, e a lanciarsi in disastrosi affari di aree fabbricabili. Vittorini ha definito "neobalzacchiano" questo atteggiamento. Difatti Balzac, di fronte alla nascente borghesia degli affari, pur odiandola ideologicamente, ne faceva vivere lo slancio ai suoi eroi, e ce ne creava così un'immagine di verità ineguagliabile.

(Monticelli 1959, 3)

Thus for Calvino the return to the realistic Sanremo becomes charged with a desire for self-injury, the price to be paid so that the character of Quinto Anfossi may be in step with the times. Thus we should say immediately that the hilltop view inevitably disappears from the narrative, while the view from down in the town remains, always stopping at the nearby, new wave of concrete. Thus spatially a sense of gloomy claustrophobia is produced, which contrasts with the free-roaming gaze of Quinto's memory (*I racconti*, 387), a claustrophobia which tallies with his sophisticated and discontented way of reasoning, that of a disappointed and over-clever intellectual.

The gloom of the concrete, grimly acknowledged as an obstacle between past and present and present for the traveller who raises his eyes from his book in the train, is overlaid with other unpleasant values: it means the withdrawal of an old and decent urban city bourgeoisie in favour of a band of newcomers with neither scruples nor any sense of responsibility: it means the advance of an amoral cynicism, of short-sighted greed, of total insensitivity.

Quinto's mother represents all these declining values, remote as she is from the rhetoric of complaints or scandalized comments; close to the earth, and investing much of her time and affections in cultivating the beauty of her plants².

Thus it is the polemical clash of these values, already regretted as irredeemably lost, which drives Quinto to undertake his adventures as a speculator, but it is also a desire to establish his realistic and tangible importance, to regain his own position in urban activities, to become part of the anti-aesthetic and amoral actions typical of the present; an involvement in horrendous bureaucratic intrigues, the choice of the worst possible partner etc.

In this story, historical considerations occupy considerable space, more space than the descriptive passages; the concrete springs up everywhere, in particular at the beginning of the book, then becomes the tip of the iceberg of the amoral human relations which underlie it, in a crescendo of disgust and dissatisfaction with the present.

It is interesting to see how Calvino tried to answer this same question over successive phases in the last three works considered: how to associate with other men to join common battle. The historical question is resolved in different ways, ranging from the angry and solitary realization of the narrator of "La formica argentina", through the radiant exemplariness of the behaviour of Cosimo, to the bitter challenge faced by Quinto Anfossi.

In this connection, Germana Pescio Bottino talks of a clear and gradual tendency towards anarchism in Calvino's thinking (Pescio Bottino 1976, 70); basically I agree with her, particularly if one looks at the works from the point of view of the protagonist; though it also seems right to bear in mind that in *La speculazione edilizia* the last hope to which Quinto cannot but turn is in fact still the help of his former party-comrade Masera, who offers him help as disinterested as it is unexpected.

NOTES

1. See also *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p. 83.
2. As the autobiographical ego is admittedly deformed the portrait of the author's mother seems somehow bigger than life and rings like an homage. The recurring motif of distance and affectionate concern was also portrayed in the relationship between Cosimo and Konradine von Kurtewitz in *Il barone rampante*, where the portrayal of the mother is an affectionate caricature. For a sensible evaluation of the autobiographical quality of Quinto Anfosso see Milanini 1990, 94-95.

CHAPTER IV

THE INNER LANDSCAPE

The various theoretical statements formulated by Calvino tend to repeat one basic concept, namely that his fiction has as its starting point the decodifying of an image/symbol. Thus we know that the child in the trees or the empty armour are the starting points for *Il barone rampante* and *Il cavaliere inesistente*, and it is the development of all the implications that can be linked to them which constitutes the story line of the narrative.

Furthermore, as Mengaldo has already noted when talking of the resumption of the theme of the city, from the opening of "La nuvola di smog" to *Le città invisibili* via the end of *La giornata di uno scrutatore*, it is clear that "spesso le opere di Calvino nascono per la dilatazione tematica di una cellula generativa precedente" (Mengaldo 1975, 416). This is certainly the case with the landscape of Sanremo, and the writings brought together in this chapter confirm it.

The landscape of Sanremo as an image/symbol is however atypical because it defies a definitive treatment. For example the image of the child in the tree which appears first in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, then briefly in "La formica argentina", and becomes the central element in *Il barone rampante* does not appear in any later work by Calvino. It is as if the author had actually found a proper and final place for it with *Il barone rampante* and did not need concern himself with it any more. The landscape of Sanremo on the other hand even when it is treated as a

central image/symbol (notably in at least *two* works: "Dall'opaco" and *Le città invisibili*) is not really dealt with and crops up again in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, and one can only speculate that had the author lived longer it would probably have reappeared in his work.

If one considers the autobiographical element disguised in the representation of this landscape, this phenomenon is not uncommon, suffice it to think of authors like Joyce and Bassani, whose entire work is set in and anchored to their respective home-towns. In a way one might also infer that the literary nature of the link between one author and his or her landscape of childhood, by implying a constant reminder and scheme of reference and comparison for one's experience, adds to the difficulty of relinquishing the theme.

The lie of the inner landscape, whether of childhood or adolescence, may be interpreted in different ways, the first of which is the one which defines it as the earliest touchstone for all the landscapes to follow (*I giovani del Po*, *La strada di S. Giovanni*, "Dall'opaco" and some sections of *Le città invisibili*); or, as previously in Proust, as the root of psychological tendencies laid down by the environment which first influenced the author (*La strada di S. Giovanni*) or again as an absolute image, basic and inexhaustible because it cannot avoid what it does not encompass ("Dall'opaco", "La spirale"); as a single resolved fragment ("Il conte di Montecristo", *Cosmicomiche*, 307-317), as an introduction to reflections on memory (*Le città invisibili*) and lastly as a furthest limit, an alpha containing the omega of the individual existence (*Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*).

These are the various routes which we shall now follow. Not surprisingly, for this archaeological delving into the inner world we shall use the instruments and terms codified by psychoanalysis. Irrespective of judgements of taste concerning the use or suitability of psychoanalytical analysis in a literary context, neither author nor reader can avoid it, since it remains the most sophisticated and all-inclusive key to the inner world. The reluctance with which Calvino paraded his own private world in public is well-known (and in my view admirable), but this does not mean that the boundary between these two worlds is not elusive. *Tout se tient*, and childhood memories, which are among the most private possible, are indistinguishable from the ego.

Furthermore one may conceive of the individual experience as a further reaffirmation of the general rule, as for instance in the section of *Il castello dei destini incrociati* entitled "Anch'io cerco di dire la mia" where the narrator appropriates the myth of Oedipus explained by the "gran pastore d'anime e interprete di sogni Sigismondo da Vindobona." (*Il castello*, 102) or one may transfer the emotional charge retained by the past on to the panorama which has been its backdrop.

To conclude this introductory note, one might say that the landscape of Sanremo appears in these pages as a two-sided presence: on the one hand, as the landscape of memory as a figurative and visual element, on the other as a first psychological landscape.

IV.1 *I giovani del Po*

From January 1950 until July 1951 Calvino worked on a novel which he published only many years later, in serial form, in a specialist review rather than as an independent book. Indeed in the introductory note he claims to have published it as material for discussion and analysis. The novel in question, *I giovani del Po* (1957-58), is unfinished, which makes any definitive judgment problematical and unjust. Nonetheless, and within these limits, *I giovani del Po* seems to me highly relevant for my analysis.

The novel consists in part of correspondence between two friends, and in part of a third person narrative. The correspondents are Nino Torre, a worker and trade unionist in an unnamed city (clearly Turin), and his childhood friend Nanin, a general mechanic who has stayed on in a small town on the Riviera. The narrative inserts in the third person, however, concern only the union and amorous activities of Nino Torre in Turin. It is therefore evident that the activity is mainly urban and that Nino is its undisputed protagonist: Nanin does not contribute to the development of the plot in any way, his is a voice off with a double role, on the one hand as the exact opposite of Nino and on the other as a figment, a shadow of his past.

The pair represent a contrast between the man of action and the intellectual. While Nino is practical, positive, committed to union organisation and interested in debate with his fellows, Nanin appears introverted and bitter, taciturn and pessimistic, unable to find satisfactory

solutions to the problems he sees around him. Love for nature, deeply felt by both, is charged with eroticism in Nino's stories and with deeply-felt unhappiness in Nanin's reflections.

Caro Nino. Puoi fare l'operaio e il sindacalista e il filosofo, non ti dirò mai che non devi farlo, e se lo fai bene ti dirò anche bravo. Però l'unica cosa che non credo buona è che tu parta sempre con illusioni spropositate: arrivare al nocciolo di tutto, trovare la chiave del meccanismo generale. Non c'è né meccanismo né chiave, sta tranquillo. Se arrivi a capire bene una cosa, tutte le altre ti sfuggono e smentiscono quella che capisci. Una cosa è vera solo se serve a qualcos'altra vera allo stesso modo. Tutto quel che facciamo è limitato e misero. Fabbrichiamo motori e fucili e siamo in questo più bravi degli uccelli, dei pesci e dei molluschi. Ma chi ti dice che abbiamo ragione noi? Le patelle che stanno attaccate allo scoglio, e sono rotonde e piatte, e hanno un guscio di silice, e non hanno occhi né bocca, e non formulano pensieri ma solo aderiscono col loro corpo a ventosa e si tengono protette in quel loro duro guscio, chi ti dice che non ne capiscano di più di tutti gli uomini di quel che è successo e succede e può succedere? T'ho detto come la penso io. Ciao. NANIN.

(I giovani del Po, V, 546)

Here and elsewhere Nanin talks from a non-anthropocentric point of view, as an ascetic naturalist. His dialectical function seems to be to broaden Nino's debate, to set it in a wider context in which humanity, whether in the private sphere, or as social interaction, is of little account. But his superior wisdom does not help to make him particularly sympathetic or alive, his epistolary warnings remains too isolated not also to appear incongruous. The decision to imagine the limpets' point of view, too, will reappear in "La spirale", apparently the first, chronologically, of the cosmicomic stories. Here, moreover, the narrator is Qfwfq, that is to say a sort of universal narrator who, while using an

anthropomorphic language, is not human and has no moral obligation vis-à-vis history. This saves him from the impasse in which Nanin finds himself since, to survive, he cannot avoid taking decisions which go against his ideals.

Perché l'importante è continuare a avere la propria idea, anche se per una ragione o per l'altra si finisce sempre per fare tutto il contrario. [...] Io invece sono sempre quello di prima anche se faccio cose che avrei giurato di non fare mai; se vuoi saperlo, ho lavorato con l'impresa Groppelli, per conto del Comune, all'impianto delle barche illuminate per la festa padronale.

(I giovani del Po, II-III, 407)

Far from being paradisiacal, life in close contact with nature is a continual process of conflict with oneself or with anyone abusing nature, for instance the *Comune*, until one no longer knows which side to be on, whether with men against nature, or vice versa. The dilemma emerges in a letter in which Nanin tells Nino that a mutual acquaintance has lost a hand when fishing with explosives:

Così Niculin è rovinato; dài e dài l'hanno avuta vinta i pesci. Alle volte penso che sto dalla parte sbagliata, che dovrei tenere per i pesci, i corvi, le formiche. E quando gli uomini hanno il fatto loro, rallegrarmi. Forse il genere umano sta per distruggersi; io al momento buono passerò dall'altra parte: con le formiche o con chiunque verrà. Ma non c'è modo d'uscirne. Chi ama i pesci e gli animali selvatici gli dà la caccia, finché uno distrugge l'altro, come capita. Non c'è altro rapporto che questo farsi a pezzi [...] ci sbraneremo tutti finché ne resterà una fibra. Ma forse ogni cosa si disfa e ricresce.

(I giovani del Po, V, 538)

The second aspect of Nanin's personality is his extraneousness to the action. When Nino returns to the Riviera for the holidays, the reader expects an account of some conversations with his friend, but the three letters which mark his arrival, his stay and his return do not make any mention of them:

Caro Nanin, prepara le lenze, gli ami, i vermi, gli arpioni, le punte per i ricci, i fucili, le maschere, le vele, i remi, cos'altro? La nostra motocicletta se non te la sei venduta, il mio tascapane. Sabato arrivo. Evviva. Nino.

Cara Giovanna, tutto è come l'avevo lasciato: le frane, le pietre, i muri, e la cadenza del mio dialetto, l'alzata di spalle dei miei amici, i gesti che si fa quando si pesca, quando s'innaffia i garofani, il verso della ghiandaia, il sapore della focaccia, degli zucchini ripieni. Ma ora è come se avessi quattro occhi: i due di me che sono cresciuto qui e ho sempre avuto intorno queste cose tutti i giorni della mia vita, e i due di me che sono arrivato da fuori e per cui tutto è nuovo e straordinario. Quattro occhi non sempre danno una vista completa: spesso ci sento in mezzo il vuoto dei mesi che sono stato via e che intanto sono passati anche qui. Ed ecco quel che devo dirti: se ci fossi tu mi piacerebbe ritrovare i miei posti mostrandoli a te. Ora, per me solo, tutto mi sembra un po' sprecato, anche i ricordi. Nino.

[...]

Caro Nanin, Per te l'estate continua ancora e per me è già finita.

(I giovani del Po, V, 544)

Nanin is conspicuous by his absence. It is as though Calvino intended to develop the character of Nanin at a later date and instead

decided to abandon the manuscript entirely. But, keeping to the text as it stands, it seems rather that Nanin is merely Nino's second pair of eyes; and rather unreliable eyes at that, separated by time.

So why try to bring the Riviera into a story that is mainly about Turin? Perhaps because the Riviera is the starting point for the ethics of civic commitment, the place where the protagonist learned to appreciate what he has around him, and at the same time a term of comparison for the present, as in the contrast between the sea and the Po:

Nino avrebbe voluto spiegare quel che andava scoprendo: che il fiume è tutto il contrario del mare, che il senso del mare è nell'essere deserto e smisurato: per poco uno s'inoltri non distingue più la gente a riva, va e va e non vede più neanche la terra, e il mare, il mare vero comincia solo allora; il fiume senza nessuno invece è squallido, via per quel principio di pianura; il fiume ha un senso per quel tanto che c'è gente che gli va addosso, che si fa portare da lui, gli fa festa, gli lavora intorno, lo intorbida, lo guasta.

(I giovani del Po, I, 332)

There is no remotely panoramic description of the Riviera, no glimpse of landscape, but brief references, recognisable details (for instance in Nino's letter to Giovanna quoted above) which aim to depict a way of life in the open air rather than a specific panorama.

Perhaps because they are part of an unfinished work, the landscape of the Riviera and the character of Nanin have in common that they are remote and intangible; but perhaps only because they belong to memory.

IV 2 *La strada di San Giovanni*

I giovani del Po (1950-51) and *La strada di San Giovanni* (1962) are separated by eleven years, during which the landscape of Sanremo appears several times - for instance in *Il visconte dimezzato*, "La formica argentina", *L'entrata in guerra* and *Il barone rampante* - with descriptive functions and criteria analysed in the previous chapters. The story's subject is autobiographical and indeed linked fairly directly to the conclusion of "Le notti dell'UNPA" in which, as we have seen, the main character, half-asleep, remembers his father who sets off for the fields at that hour, but also to the shorter "Uomo nei gerbidi" and in general to the family atmosphere of that narrative section included in *I racconti* with the title "Le memorie difficili".

The resemblances with these works cease at the level of context in that, here too, the main object of the narrative is the climb with his father up the alleys and pathways leading to the Calvino estates. But the autobiographical material is now presented from a totally different viewpoint and the climb up the stretch of hillside is laden with psychological connotations and existential reflections which could be sensed but which were not overtly expressed in the previous stories. For the first time, for instance, we are told that the outing follows a set route to be taken on alternate days like a disagreeable medicine, and that a complex mechanism of feelings of guilt and trials of strength links the steps of the youthful author to those of his father.

It is undoubtedly an attempt at a "sincere" autobiographical interpretation, which probably represents a path that is equally difficult for and distasteful to the author, in view of the fact that he had previously kept due distance from it. We already know that for Calvino there are at least two modes of autobiographical writing, as it is to be deduced from the letter to Lucio Mastronardi:

"Autobiografarsi" è l'operazione letteraria più difficile, sia se ci si propone l'assoluta verità secondo l'arduo esempio di Rousseau, sia se si sceglie (come fanno i più) una qualche forma di mistificazione (che sarà sempre un modo di dire la verità anche quello).

(I libri degli altri, 561-562)

La strada di S. Giovanni seems to me to constitute the most important attempt at autobiographical truth. It might be objected that the three stories which make up *L'entrata in guerra* too (if not the whole section entitled "Le memorie difficili") should be seen as explicitly autobiographical, but the very choice of the content of the stories, opportunely limited to isolated episodes and exceptional events, lends itself to a fictionalised account rather than to introspective analysis. They should certainly be seen as so many parts of a "complete" autobiography, which Calvino never wrote as such. Yet the degree of directness, particularly as the considerations on the family circle are concerned is obviously far higher for *La strada di San Giovanni* than for "L'entrata in guerra" where they are presented from the outside, almost exclusively as an element of sociological interest.¹

It should be noted that according to Lejeune's classification, only this story respects what he calls the "autobiographical pact", in that only here, and however obliquely, does the author's surname appear, and one may thus be certain that it is indeed an autobiography (Lejeune 1975, 13-46 and also Milanini, 91-96), while for "I ricordi difficili" one may talk only of a recurrence of autobiographical elements or of ambiguous autobiography because neither the title nor the stories themselves ever reveal any definite correspondence between the author and the narrating "I". But even if one cannot talk of autobiographical ambiguity, the relation between narrator and subject is ambiguous from the start. Consider the opening anti-climax

Una spiegazione generale del mondo e della storia deve innanzi tutto tenere conto di com'era situata casa nostra,...

(*La strada*, 15)

whose humour may be interpreted as caricatural in relation to the autobiographer's sense of self-importance but which at the same time inscribes personal experience within the general parabola of the world and history. The narrating "I" - who in "Uomo nei gerbidi" was described through individual characteristics which made him an alienated figure by virtue of his superior imagination², though without excessive complacency - still bore traces of a romantic individualism which have not become extraneous to the story. Here, on the contrary, individualism is a given, indispensable fact and, as such, it is something positive, something to be celebrated. Why, one may ask, should one begin by recourse to an ironic celebration?

Yet paradoxically, the narrator is sincere, or at least consistent with what he will say later on in the story, because, according to the childish

topography to which he refers, the world is indeed on one side in relation to the house, and history on the other; the first being understood as the world of his father, who undoubtedly represented the relationship with nature, and the second as the one preferred by the main character, "la città" which, equally certainly, represents history. (One could trace this topographical symbolic system back to the reading of "Uomo nei gerbidi", but what was implicit in the 1946 story here becomes overt). It is possible that the humour alludes to the reductive candour of a childish assertion, but the vocabulary and perhaps even more the construction of the sentence do not strike me as childish.

However the joke is meant to be taken, it is soon dropped. The author's intention is undoubtedly to celebrate the past with the greatest truthfulness possible, such indeed as we may expect from a list of proper names, names which, as the author himself admits, have long fallen into disuse. Thus we learn right from the start that the region of which the author is speaking was once called "punta di Francia" and that San Giovanni is the place where Calvino's father had his model estate. This onomastic enthusiasm is explained in its turn in one of the numerous parentheses in the passage (*La strada di San Giovanni*, 17). Yet even allowing that these names do retain the emotive charge that the author seems to attribute to them, they arouse the suspicion that they might be important for the sole reason that they had not been so before, just as the Latin names of the various species of plants which the young author has refused to learn and the mature author is far from regretting, give rise to a type of parodic onomastics which makes up the most successful part of the passage.

Both the names of places and the names of plants are indissolubly linked to the figure of the father:

Per mio padre le parole dovevano servire da conferma alle cose e da segno di possesso; per me erano previsioni di cose intraviste appena, non possedute, presunte. [...] Per me le cose erano mute. Le parole fluivano fluivano nella mia testa non ancorate a oggetti, ma ad emozioni, fantasie, presagi.

(*La strada*, 20-21)

Calvino is clearly paying homage to the father figure in these pages, to the point of describing him implicitly as the inspiration for the figure of Cosimo, with words which might be taken from a page of *Il barone rampante*:

[...] e in questo nominare le piante metteva la passione di dar fondo a un universo senza fine, di spingersi ogni volta alle frontiere estreme d'una genealogia vegetale, e da ogni ramo o foglia o nervatura aprirsi una via come fluviale, nella linfa, nella rete che copre la verde terra

(*La strada*, 18)³

This is a celebration of the father, and at the same time of distance from him, of the unbridgeable divide between their two characters; here the route taken along the ridge of the hills also represents a mutual stiffening of respective positions. Moreover literature, as wearisome as the climb with the father, is that same "strada di San Giovanni", where San Giovanni represents the best possible relationship between the author and nature.

E io? Io credevo di pensare ad altro. Cos'era la natura? Erbe, piante, luoghi verdi, animali. Ci vivevo in mezzo e volevo essere

altrove. Di fronte alla natura restavo indifferente, riservato, a tratti ostile. E non sapevo che stavo anch'io cercando un rapporto, forse più fortunato di quello di mio padre, un rapporto che sarebbe stata la letteratura a darmi, restituendo significato a tutto, e d'un tratto ogni cosa sarebbe divenuta vera e tangibile e possedibile e perfetta, ogni cosa di quel mondo ormai perduto.

(*La strada*, 39)

This might seem almost like a résumé of *La Recherche*, except that Calvino, unlike Proust, does not seem satisfied with what literature has given him in exchange, in view of the irreparable loss which was its cause. This is the most painful part of the story. Republished at the author's request, it appeared only five years after his death, in a collection which was to have included other unpublished texts, some of which were unfortunately never written. One might therefore well imagine that this text might have been revised. It is hard to believe that this final sense of dissatisfaction would not have been at least mitigated in a revision. As it stands it is unconvincing, as literary complaints in general are unconvincing, in that writing fills the very sense of emptiness of which it is the fruit. If this does not happen, it is a sign that something needs amending.

IV.3 "La spirale"

The impasse of which Nanin is a victim does not find a solution in *I giovani del Po*, but it is interesting to note that the above-quoted passage in which he tries to see the world through the eyes of the limpets gives rise to a far more successful text, namely "La spirale" (1965). Among the series of *Le Cosmicomiche*, "La spirale" marks a very clear departure in Calvino's fiction: it is the beginning of a way of narrating which no longer sets out to represent human events naturalistically, but in a coded and symbolic fashion, like a mathematical expression. What interests us, however, is to note how, as a text, "La spirale" differs from the other stories in *Le Cosmicomiche* in that, unlike the others, it is not introduced by a short section putting forward a scientific theory, but by a simple authorial reflection:

Per la maggioranza dei molluschi, la forma organica visibile non ha molta importanza nella vita dei membri d'una specie, dato che essi non possono vedersi l'un l'altro o hanno solo una vaga percezione degli altri individui e dell'ambiente. Ciò non esclude che striature a colori vivaci e forme che appaiono bellissime al nostro sguardo (come in molte conchiglie di gasteropodi) esistano indipendentemente da ogni rapporto con la visibilità.

(Cosmicomiche, 225)

It seems to me that this decision not to put forward a scientific theory underlines the metaphorical tone of the narrative - here Calvino could simply have reversed a statement taken from the quantum theory, on

how the observer's very presence conditions the phenomenon under examination.

Furthermore the story is divided into three parts (a division which is not found in the stories which make up the first collection of 1965); the second of these, differentiated by the use of italic, is the one which will concern us most because it reconstructs the landscape of Sanremo. But before considering this latest appearance of the landscape, we should pause briefly on the meaning and implications of the text of "La spirale" as a whole.

Qfwfq's discourse tries to prove a paradoxical theory, that is, that sight depends more upon the images than upon the eyes which will receive them:

Ora è ridicolo pensare che uno avendo l'encefalo ne dirami un nervo come fosse una lenza tirata al buio e finché non gli spuntano gli occhi non possa sapere se fuori c'è qualcosa da vedere o no. Io di questo materiale non avevo niente, quindi ero il meno autorizzato a parlarne; però mi ero fatto una mia idea e cioè che l'importante era costituire delle immagini visuali, e poi gli occhi sarebbero venuti di conseguenza.

(Cosmicomiche, 234)

At face value the theory is somewhat absurd; but if, as seems necessary, we replace the faculty of sight with the capacity to criticise and enjoy the world or, basically, to "see" it⁴, it becomes clear that the shell of which Qfwfq is speaking represents art, that is literature, music and everything we call creative. Qfwfq's approach is also a reflection of the authorial reiterated claim that his writing starts with an image-symbol.

See p. 79 above, *I nostri antenati*, 401 and *Lezioni americane*, 57, 81-98.

The whole story should be understood as a metaphor for artistic creation, from its obscure gestation, partly spontaneous, partly the fruit of an intentional act of self-differentiation, down to the final product:

questa conchiglia era una cosa diversa da me ma anche la parte più vera di me, la spiegazione di chi ero io, il mio ritratto tradotto in un sistema ritmico di volumi e strisce e colori e roba dura [...]

(*Cosmicomiche*, 230)

The metaphor is so explicit that we shall not insist on this point except to say that this would inevitably have to be the instrument, or possibly the device, offering a way out of the trap into which Nanin's philosophising had fallen.⁵

The second section of the story, differentiated by the use of italic, marks a qualitative shift in the characterization of the narrator; here Qfwfq is no longer a mollusc and, although it is not said what species he belongs to, it is certainly endowed with sight.

(*Tanto che adesso, passati cinquecento milioni d'anni, mi guardo intorno e vedo [...]*

(*Cosmicomiche*, 231)

What Qfwfq sees is the bay of Sanremo, but the perspective is reversed: rather than from the top of the hill, the visual angle starts from the rock with the limpets and zig-zags upwards.

vedo sopra lo scoglio la scarpata ferroviaria e il treno che ci passa sopra [...] e sparisce nella galleria sopra alla quale corre la strada

camionale con il cartellone "Volate Egyptair" che rappresenta le piramidi, e un motofurgoncino di gelati tenta di sorpassare un camion [...] ma poi frena e si riaccoda perché la visibilità è impedita da una nuvola di api che attraversa la strada proveniente da una fila di alveari situati in un campo da cui certamente un'ape regina sta volando via tirandosi dietro tutto uno sciame in senso contrario al fumo del treno rispuntato all'altra estremità della galleria, cosicché non si vede più nulla per questo strato nuvoloso di api e fumo di carbone, se non alcuni metri più sopra un contadino che rompe la terre a colpi di zappa [...] in un orto che circonda un osservatorio astronomico con i telescopi puntati al cielo [...]

(*Cosmicomiche*, 231)

The observatory (which really exists in Sanremo and belonged to the author's father) is required by the story: at this moment Qfwfq is interested in a vision which includes human activity in history, as the references to Herodotus, the pyramids, the chance finding of a fragment of neolithic hoe, the shape of the Zodiac of Chaldean astronomers etc. show, and the observatory serves as a reference to the measurement of time.

In relation to the previous descriptions of the Ligurian landscape, the perspective is reversed because it is narrated by an anti-character, a character far removed from any traditional role, above all by its reluctance to take on human form. This detachment from human representation is highly provocative, not only because it offers continual comic opportunities but because it does not allow us to pause on the negative aspects inherent in every specific condition, including that of the "*fuchi che agonizzano in fondo all'alveare dopo aver compiuto il loro atto di continuazione della specie*" (*Cosmicomiche*, 233).

Even in the final section, a gasteropod once again, Qfwfq does not complain much of being without eyes, indeed he boasts of having made them possible:

Tutti questi occhi erano miei. Li avevo resi possibili io; io avevo avuto la parte attiva; io gli fornivo la materia prima, l'immagine. Con gli occhi era venuto tutto il resto, quindi tutto ciò che gli altri, avendo gli occhi, erano diventati, in ogni loro forma e funzione, e la quantità di cose che avendo gli occhi erano riusciti a fare, in ogni loro forma e funzione, veniva fuori da quel che avevo fatto io. Non per nulla erano implicite nel mio star lì, nel mio aver relazioni con gli altri e con le altre eccetera, nel mio mettermi a fare la conchiglia eccetera. Insomma avevo previsto proprio tutto.

(Cosmicomiche, 236)

The irony of the last sentence is given by the pomposity that characterises the narrator, and it is the final comic touch, because he immediately concludes with a further stylistic switch,

E in fondo a ognuno di quegli occhi abitavo io, ossia abitava un altro me, una delle immagini di me, e s'incontrava con l'immagine di lei, nell'ultramondo che s'apre attraversando la sfera semiliquida delle iridi, il buio delle pupille, il palazzo degli specchi delle retine, nel vero nostro elemento che si estende senza rive né confini.

(Cosmicomiche, 236)

The story's moral does not strike me as simplistic; on the other hand it is understandable that, like all attempts at the overall integration of nature, history and humanity, it too should generate suspicion, as we immediately see, to quote Calvino himself: "Così ho messo tutto a posto.

Sulla pagina almeno. Dentro di me tutto resta come prima" (*Il castello*, 111). The page in question also marks the appearance of a deeper and more enduring dimension, a consoling dimension which had always been present but which the author had never previously explicitly explored: one might compare this ending with that of "La formica argentina":

Il mare andava su e giù contro gli scogli del molo, muovendo quelle barche dette "gozzi", e uomini dalla pelle oscura le riempivano di rosse reti e nasse per la pesca serale. L'acqua era calma, con appena uno scambiarsi continuo di colori, azzurro e nero, sempre più fitto quanto più lontano. Io pensavo alle distanze d'acqua così, agli infiniti granelli di sabbia sottile giù nel fondo, dove la corrente posa gusci bianchi di conchiglie puliti dalle onde.
(*I racconti*, 385)

The allusion is the same, in both cases the "happy ending" comes from the universal communion of elements, but while the narrator of "La formica argentina" presents his thinking in the form of an intuition and momentary sense of relief which also marks the end of the story, Qfwfq talks with complete assurance throughout. Two reasons come to mind to explain this change. The first is that the sense of the adventurous and the novelistic were interesting to Calvino less and less: the instinctive liveliness of the young narrator who feels his own historical responsibility as a moral and didactic task is replaced by the hesitancy of a narrator who no longer has any great certainties upon which to build his discourse.⁶ The sense of bereavement, of rarefaction, of uncertainty in the mature Calvino (the Calvino who offers the most explicit and painful self-portrait in *La giornata di uno scrutatore*), has raised many doubts and much resistance among critics. First among them Calvino himself, who long tried to resist the feared spectre of the "mare dell'oggettività" maintaining

his own unilinear voluntarism for as long as he could, expressed paradigmatically in the assertion in the introduction to *I nostri antenati*:

una persona si pone volontariamente una difficile regola e la segue fino alle sue ultime conseguenze, perché senza di questa non sarebbe se stesso né per sé né per gli altri.

(*I nostri antenati*, 404)

The rule, from Qfwfq onwards, is to narrate the narratable, abandoning any play of predictions, any attempt at constituting a position of reference for generations to come and so on. Thus Orlando, in *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, is transformed from a paladin of action into a contemplative ascetic and refuses to go back to being as he was before.

Voleva dire che comunque giri poi viene il momento che lo acchiappano e lo legano, Orlando, e gli ricacciano in gola l'intelletto rifiutato?

Nell'ultima carta si contempla il paladino legato a testa in giù come *L'Appeso*. E finalmente ecco il suo viso diventato sereno e luminoso, l'occhio limpido come neppure nell'esercizio delle sue ragioni passate. Cosa dice? Dice: - Lasciatemi così. Ho fatto tutto il giro e ho capito. Il mondo si legge all'incontrario. Tutto è chiaro.

(*Il castello*, 34)

IV.4 *Il conte di Montecristo*

The theme of the spiral as a concentric fortress which grows upon itself returns in "Il conte di Montecristo" (*Cosmicomiche*, 307-317), written in 1967. Edmond Dantès, the narrator of the last of the cosmicomic stories contained in *Ti con zero*, has been locked for years in a cell in the fortress of If. He has lost his sense of direction, from within the prison he can see a rectangle of empty sky and hear the sound of the sea:

La finestrella a grata è in fondo a un cunicolo che fora lo spessore del muro: non inquadra nessuna vista; dalla luminosità più o meno intensa del cielo riconosco pressapoco le ore e le stagioni; ma non so se sotto s'apra il mare o gli spalti o uno dei cortili interni della fortezza.

(*Cosmicomiche*, 307)

Il mare lo si sente battere, specie le notti di tempesta: alle volte pare quasi che le onde si rompano qui contro la parete alla quale accosto l'orecchio; alle volte pare scavino dal basso, sotto gli scogli delle fondamenta, e la mia cella sia in cima alla torre più alta, e il rombo salga per la prigione, anch'esso prigioniero, come nella tromba di una conchiglia.

(*Cosmicomiche*, 307)

This irretrievable loss of any sense of direction dooms all attempts at escape by the old Abate Faria, who no longer recognises even Zenith from Nadir:

Alle volte sento grattare il soffitto; cade una pioggia di calcinacci; s'apre una breccia; ne spunta la testa di Faria capovolta. Capovolta per me, non per lui; striscia fuori della sua galleria, cammina a testa in giù senza che nulla si scomponga nella sua persona: né i

capelli bianchi, né la barba verde di muffa, né i brandelli di tela di sacco che ricoprono i suoi lombi macilenti. Percorre come una mosca il soffitto e le pareti; si ferma, conficca il piccone in un punto, s'apre un pertugio; scompare.

(*Cosmicomiche*, 310)

If Dantès is the narrator, Faria is the character. If both are fictitious, Faria is so in a different way from Dantès (for instance, he is not subject to the law of gravity, whereas "i calcinacci" still are). If Faria is a man of action and proceeds pragmatically, overcoming one obstacle at a time, Dantès is the theoretician who comments, unfavourably, upon his general behaviour:

[...] ma nel momento in cui l'ultimo colpo di piccone dovrebbe aprirgli il varco sulla scogliera, s'accorge d'essere sbucato in una cella ancora più interna di quella da cui era partito. Basta un piccolo errore nei calcoli, un lieve scarto nell'inclinazione della galleria ed egli s'inoltra nelle viscere della fortezza senza più modo di ritrovare la rotta.

(*Cosmicomiche*, 308)

While Faria's movements "continuano ad avvolgersi su se stessi come in un gomitolo" (*Cosmicomiche*, 310), Dantès decides that he can think of escape only by choosing Faria as protagonist. For Dantès the outside world does not equal freedom, but the past, the pile of sheets of paper ready and waiting to go from Dumas' desk to the printers, a pile of paper which

contiene la Marsiglia della mia giovinezza; percorrendo le righe di fitta scrittura posso farmi largo sui moli del porto, risalire la Rue

de la Canèbiere nel sole del mattino, raggiungere il villaggio dei Catalani inerpicato sulla collina, rivedere Mercedes [...]

(*Cosmicomiche*, 316)

Return to the past would be counterproductive:

Se la prigione è circondata dal *mio* fuori, quel fuori mi riportebbe dentro ogni volta che riuscissi a raggiungerlo: il fuori non è altro che il passato, è inutile tentare di fuggire.

(*Cosmicomiche*, 313)

Thus the route should be reversed,

Se fuori c'è il passato, forse il futuro si concentra nel punto più interno dell'isola d'If, cioè la via d'uscita è una via verso il dentro

(*Cosmicomiche*, 313)

The inner dimension is a map which is superimposed upon other maps, every line may be followed in different directions, the desire which drives Faria to escape from the prison-fortress has its centripetal reverse in the search for the treasure at the centre of the island of Montecristo. His individual course is predetermined, or at least it is part of the magnetic field of nineteenth-century European history, and his destiny follows that of Napoleon with his escape from the island of Elba, which ends with further imprisonment on St Helena. But Faria cannot yet foresee this and his task is to try to fit the map of this own action into that of the events of the Napoleonic Era. Success does not depend upon his efficiency, but upon the decisions of Dumas, who moreover gets help from two collaborators who proceed by exhausting all the possible outcomes of each single episode. The work cannot include them all, but it will attempt to salvage the most significant combinations, increasing in volume in

proportion with the links which are necessary to splice together the best bits.

Just as in the succinct description of the Marseille of "mia giovinezza" we recognise the essential features of Sanremo (which is one reason why I could not omit its analysis), so in the description of the genesis of the work we get a glimpse of Calvino's narrative method, with the branching of the alternatives thought up by Maquet and Fiorentino in place of the binarism and self-imposed following of an inner rule to its extreme consequences, and with the systolic phase in which Dumas "sceglie, scarta, ritaglia, incolla, interseca" (*Cosmicomiche*, 315).

But it is a partial description in that it seems to start from the premise of the existence of the end product, just as Faria digs in the belief that the fortress does hold a way which leads to escape.

Whereas Dantès, although aware that his destiny lies, already written, among the variants strewn Dumas' desk, and that in one of them, the one which at one time he would have preferred, his innocence and vengeance triumph over his persecutors, remains indifferent to this particular solution, and looks for a way out of his prison among the rejected material, that is, the hypothetical point of contact between the reality of the "fuori" and the principles of the "dentro".

Considering Dantès as the mouthpiece for Calvino's attitude to literature, in the opinion of Francesca Bernardini, one would reach the conclusion that:

compito della letteratura allora non è tanto quello di indicare una via d'uscita dalla prigione-labirinto, quanto un metodo, ed in sede ideologica di garantire la possibilità di un mondo *autre*, di cui il libro è sempre per metafora un progetto.

(Berardini 1977, 57)

The explanation is satisfactory from the theoretical point of view, but does not pay sufficient attention to the dark nature of the representational choice, which becomes clearer if one adopts a psychological approach, according to which Dantès dilemma is that of an ego rebelling against the edifying decisions of the super-ego-Dumas, and against the narrowness of the instinctive id-Faria. The result is a fragmentation by which the ego, rather than refined, is gradually weakened, to the point of becoming reduced to the paralysed awareness of the later figure of Palomar⁷.

IV.5 "Dall'opaco"

Observing the chronology of publication dates for lack of reliable information concerning their real order of composition, the text in which the Sanremo landscape next appears is "Dall'opaco". This is not a work of fiction, but a discourse with which the author's hypothetical original/primitive ego describes the form of the world.

The initial hypothesis is not so much the initial condition "Se allora mi avessero domandato che forma ha il mondo" (*La strada*, 119) as the unity of the ego, the identity of the consciousness which brings about the synthesis of the perceptions because of which the reply to the question formulated in the present remains the same, "e così anche adesso se mi chiedono che forma ha il mondo", that is, the presence of an ego "che abita all'interno di me" (*La strada*, 119) . It is through this supertemporal ego that Calvino proposes to describe the form of the world.

The decision to describe the bay of Sanremo, not specified in the text just as the speaker is symmetrically anonymous, clearly answers a logical need, in so far as that is the first image which the ego retains of it, the one from which all others derive. The problem is that even the first image is actually made up of successive states - not because the ego changes, but because the form of the world varies over time. Thus the form of the world cannot but change continually, and the ego which perceives it is obliged to provide not a single image of it, frozen at the fleeting instant of perception, but a whole series of superimposed snapshots which take in the whole process. All the representations have to be referred to the ego as to a single centre of reference, and that centre of

reference must be motionless: in its successive stages of perception, the ego is motionless like the draughtsman's graticule. The eye of the describing ego, like the draughtsman's pencil, moves within this fixed framework following the outlines of the object to be reproduced in an increasingly detailed analysis until it has to be broken off, not because there are no further details, but because, looked at generally, the overall view has changed and it becomes necessary to start all over again:

per chi osserva da fermo il mondo si sfalda discontinuo alla vista e
all'udito nella frana dello spazio e del tempo

(La strada, 128)

A faithful representation of the world cannot but take account of this discontinuity and for once (and once only, as far as I have been able to ascertain), Calvino does not completely comply with the conventional rules of layout, and uses an unconventional spacing, skipping a line and beginning a new line. But this casual approach¹³ is far from being unintentional: on either side of the blank lines are a total of forty "paragraphs" which subdivide the discourse, and they follow the narrowing down of attention from the world to the ego.

"Dall'opaco" is the most exhaustive of the descriptions Calvino has given us of Sanremo framed by a visual angle which seems to correspond to that of "Uomo nei gerbidi". From some fixed but indeterminate point on the hills, the descriptive device rotates to survey all directions before it; it uses different lenses for near and far, has a memory of what these places were like in the past, is able to register sounds and to regret the fact that only at night are they proportionate to the distances

from which they come, is endowed with a stroboscopic device with which it studies the rotation of shadows around objects, and even has an economic intelligence which allows it to make profit correspond to desire for sun: in short, the apotheosis of hyper-realism.

However, this being Calvino, the apotheosis is in the negative. The inner panorama attains a maximum of density and is continually crumbling, fragmented, dissolved. The perfection of the mechanism is continually thwarted by the presence of new obstacles: from a point with maximum visibility objects cannot be seen in their entirety; whatever line one tries to follow - with the exception of the line between sea and sky, which we already know to be illusory - will inevitably come to end in the void. Furthermore, after having positioned itself to the south and turned towards the sea, the Calvinian ego begins to seek out the opaque, what is behind it and which it cannot see so well, what cannot be seen because it is beyond the horizon, in short everything which is outside the frame.

Here, I believe, we have the same desire for flight which appears in "Il conte di Montecristo", and as the possible escape which Dantès tries to contemplate is left as a question mark which will give rise to "un *Montecristo* col segno meno" (*Cosmicomiche*, 317), the opaque is defined as the reverse side of the world:

Solo al fondo dei torrenti irti di canne dal frusciare cartaceo, o nelle valli che s'inarcano a gomito, o dietro i cocuzzoli protuberanti sui poggi, e più indietro nel succedersi di contrafforti della catena montagnosa parallela alla costa, si dà quell'incupirsi del verde, quell'affiorare di rocce dalla terra dilavata, quella vicinanza del freddo che sale da sottoterra e lontananza non solo dal mare invisibile ma anche dal feroce azzurro del cielo

incombente, quel senso d'un misterioso confine che separa dal mondo aperto ed estraneo, che è il senso d'essere entrati "int'ubagu" nell'opaco rovescio del mondo

di modo che potrei definire l'"ubagu" come annuncio che il mondo che sto descrivendo ha un rovescio, una possibilità di trovarmi diversamente disposto e orientato, in un diverso rapporto col corso del sole e le dimensioni dello spazio infinito, segno che il mondo presuppone un resto del mondo [...]

(La strada, 131-132)

The opaque, the reverse side of the world, the elsewhere, represent the non-present and the possible. If the "aprico" is the past, describable and real, the "opaco" is the future, which can at most be hypothesized and conjectured about. But the conflict between the two exists from the start:

e se partendo da quella posizione iniziale considero le fasi successive dello stesso me stesso, ogni passo in avanti può essere pure un ritirarsi, la linea che traccio s'avvolge sempre più nell'opaco, ed è inutile che cerchi di ricordare a che punto sono entrato nell'ombra, già c'ero fin dal principio, è inutile che cerchi in fondo all'opaco uno sbocco all'opaco, ora so che il mondo che esiste è l'opaco e l'aprico ne è solo il rovescio, l'aprico che opacamente si sforza di moltiplicare se stesso ma moltiplica solo il rovescio del proprio rovescio

(La strada, 134)

Understanding the discourse as a description of the thinking ego in time and space, the impossibility of defining the direction of thought will come as no surprise; in relation to the eternity of the present moment, past and future are points on a line which can close in on itself in a circle. But at this point the "aprico" seems to indicate the world and the "opaco" the thinking ego:

"D'int'ubagu", dal fondo dell'opaco io scrivo, ricostruendo la mappa d'un aprico che è solo un inverificabile assioma per i calcoli della memoria, il luogo geometrico dell'io di un me stesso di cui il me stesso ha bisogno per sapersi me stesso, l'io che serve solo perché il mondo riceva continuamente notizie dell'esistenza del mondo, un congegno di cui il mondo dispone per sapere se c'è.

(*La strada*, 134)

Basically the argument goes back to Kant, but this work seems to me to contain a further development which is better explained in a passage of *Palomar*:

Ma come si fa a guardare qualcosa lasciando da parte l'io? Di chi sono gli occhi che guardano? Di solito si pensa che l'io sia uno che sta affacciato ai propri occhi come al davanzale di una finestra e guarda il mondo che si distende in tutta la sua vastità lì davanti a lui. Dunque: c'è una finestra che si affaccia sul mondo; e di qua? Sempre il mondo: cos'altro volete che ci sia? Con un piccolo sforzo di concentrazione Palomar riesce a spostare il mondo da lì davanti e a sistemarlo affacciato al davanzale. Allora, fuori dalla finestra, cosa rimane? Il mondo anche lì, che per l'occasione s'è sdoppiato in mondo che guarda e mondo che è guardato. E lui, detto anche "io", cioè il signor Palomar? Non è anche lui un pezzo di mondo che sta guardando un altro pezzo di mondo? Oppure, dato che c'è mondo di qua e mondo di là della finestra, forse l'io non è altro che la finestra attraverso la quale il mondo guarda il mondo. Per guardare se stesso il mondo ha bisogno degli occhi (e degli occhiali) del signor Palomar.

(*Palomar*, 116)

The identity, or at least the interdependence, between subject and object, between ego and world, establishes an equivalent identity on the page between those aesthetic categories known as form and content. Landscape description and philosophical argument are interrupted and retraced in ways which may possibly be intended to reproduce the

comings and goings of the eye along "le linee spezzate e oblique con segmenti che tendono a sporgere fuori dagli angoli di ogni gradino, come fanno le agavi che crescono spesso sul ciglio" (*La strada*, 120). Just as the landscape is completely in the open, incapable of containing interiors, so too the ego is denied any form of *intimiste* dimension; to explain itself and tell of the interior, it needs to represent the exterior: "[...] la finestra inquadra il comò con lo specchio su cui passa una nuvola" (*La strada*, 125). Similarly the discontinuity of the eye, which can wander freely "eppure é frantumato tra piani e distanze diverse" (*La strada*, 126) screened by partial obstacles, imposes upon sight a continual association of incongruous elements:

le palme si aprono e si chiudono come un ventaglio sulle alberature
delle barche da pesca, s'alza il getto di una manica e inaffia un
campo di invisibili anemoni

(*La strada*, 126)

Even dimensions appear weird: "mezzo autobus svolta nella mezza curva della carrozzabile e sparisce tra le spade dell'agave" (*La strada*, 126) in an associative gymnastics which seems spontaneously to generate that play of combinations characteristic of Calvino's story-telling. We are even given exercises of narrative fantasy, possible plots sketched in in a few lines:

la nave che vedo prendere il largo e sparire nel riflesso del sole,
approderà a porti opachi, vedrà spalti grigi di moli affiorare da un
mattino di nebbia, le luci ancora accese dei docks

(*La strada*, 132-133)

while, conversely, "Il cacciatore che risale la mulattiera nel gerbido" will manage to "scorgere una thule dalle porte dorate, una helsinki con la sua bianca piazza, città aprica su un golfo di ghiaccio" (*La strada*, 133).

To conclude, the answer to the philosophical question of the form of the world coincides with a stylistic self-portrait.

IV.6 *Le città invisibili*

The interview with Maria Corti already quoted (1985, see p. 10 above) vouches for the presence of the Sanremo landscape in *Le città invisibili*, but a key passage is to be found at the beginning of the sixth dialogue when the Khan, for once leaving the imperial residence, takes Marco to visit the old Quimsai district and asks him if he has ever seen anything like it. Although the description of the city in which they find themselves leaves no room for doubt (it is Venice, and certainly not the lost Quimsai), Marco's reply is, surprisingly, in the negative. We have no doubts about the fact that Marco is lying: he avoids Kublai's eye and bows his head. No less disoriented than the emperor of the Tartars, the reader must wait for night to fall in the story, and for the questioning of the merchant to run its course until all the cities known to him have been exhausted. And now at last the emperor asks him about Venice, the only city he has never heard of. Marco retorts that he has been talking of nowhere else and although, as the Khan points out, he has never mentioned it by name, Venice is the "implicit" city, the one in comparison with which all other cities assume their own characteristics. The Khan would like to force him to begin to describe Venice in its entirety and then tell of other cities independently of the memory of Venice, but Marco replies:

- Le immagini della memoria, una volta fissate con le parole, si cancellano, - disse Polo. - Forse Venezia ho paura di perderla tutta in una volta, se ne parlo. O forse, parlando d'altre città, l'ho già perduta a poco a poco.

(*Le città invisibili*, 94)

This observation is not limited to the relation between Marco and Venice, but also applies to that between Calvino and Sanremo; indeed the reflective play between the author who manages not to name it, and the character whose intentional omission, or lie, it underlines, becomes charged with symbolic pathos. And here we have the procedure or expedient of the revealing and concealing of the Sanremo landscape contained in the descriptive metaphor which precedes Marco's words:

*L'acqua del lago era appena increspata; il riflesso di rame
dell'antica reggia dei Sung si frantumava in riverberi scintillanti
come foglie che galleggiano,*

(Le città invisibili, 94)

where the image is viewed not in its entirety, but broken up, transformed by a simile, and reflected. Basically, we already know about this reflection: the writer is not striving for a representation of reality, but for the representation of a reality limited to the inner dimension. The breaking down, on the other hand, may be seen as a procedure which, beyond its undoubted negative implications - in this case, perhaps, the absence of a complete description of the hypothetical palace lit by the rays of the rising sun - also offers positive ones, here "l'effetto brezza", both clear and implicit.

Il mio libro in cui credo d'avere detto più cose resta *Le città invisibili*, perché ho potuto concentrare su un unico simbolo tutte le mie riflessioni, le mie esperienze, le mie congetture; e perché ho costruito una struttura sfaccettata in cui ogni breve testo sta vicino agli altri in una successione che non implica una consequenzialità

o una gerarchia ma una rete entro la quale si possono tracciare molteplici percorsi e ricavare conclusioni plurime e ramificate.

(Lezioni americane, 70)

This statement, contained in the *Lezioni americane*, makes it possible to choose a route which (though we cannot think of beginning with the word Sanremo or Riviera di Ponente), does proceed from the name, which is also the title of one of the sections of the book. Of the five cities which make it up, it is the third, and thus the central one, Pirra - an intentional homage to a mythical progenitrix of humanity - which provides the most recognisable portrait of Sanremo, because it has two faces. There can be no doubts as to the view of the city described in the words of one who knows it only by hearsay:

A lungo Pirra è stata per me una città incastellata sulle pendici d'un golfo, con finestre alte e torri, chiusa come una coppa, con al centro una piazza profonda come un pozzo e con un pozzo al centro.

(Le città invisibili, 99)

While we do not know whether the information concerning the city after the arrival at Pirra corresponds to the truth, for Sanremo,

[...] e io credevo d'avere sempre saputo che il mare non è in vista della città, nascosto da una duna della costa bassa e ondulata; che le vie corrono lunghe e diritte; che le case sono raggruppate a intervalli, non alte [...]

(Le città invisibili, 99)

even if we sense that the low houses are those of the Ligurian town at the time of Calvino's childhood, and if we smile at the almost certain

mendacity of "credevo d'avere sempre saputo", we must resign ourselves to uncertainty⁹. In essence our problem is similar to Marco's

Anche la città alta sul golfo è sempre là, con la piazza chiusa intorno al pozzo, ma non posso più chiamarla con un nome, né ricordare come potevo darle un nome che significa tutt'altro.

(Le città invisibili, 100)

A non communicable name, whose meaning varies according to occasion and individual experience, would make no sense on an inner map. Again, the missing name, the name of the real, known city, which does not correspond to its image, refers us to Aglaura, a city on whose qualities there exists a pre-established discourse which, according to Marco, does not correspond to what he himself has seen, "una città sbiadita, senza carattere, messa lì come vien viene" yet nonetheless "a certe ore, in certi scorci di strade, vedi aprirti davanti il sospetto di qualcosa d'inconfondibile, di raro, magari di magnifico", a place which "vorresti dire com'è, ma tutto quello che s'è detto finora d'Aglaura imprigiona le parole e t'obbliga a ridire anziché a dire" (*Le città invisibili*, 74) Furthermore, if the discourse woven firmly around Aglaura is false, there is not, and cannot be, a true one:

E anche a me che vorrei tenere distinte nella memoria le due città, non resta che parlarti dell'una, perché il ricordo dell'altra, mancando di parole per fissarlo, s'è disperso.

(Le città invisibili, 74)

The crossroads indicates two equally impossible routes. If, as Freud maintained, "memory consists of a continual process of transcription," (Freud 1925, 427) and the path to be taken is that of permutation, one will arrive at Clarice, whose successive reworkings,

aimed at rethinking and reusing the vestiges of an uncertain past in accordance with the needs of the moment, succeed only in destroying them, effacing their value. (Thus the city which at the start was described as "glorious" is transformed into its opposite: "Forse Clarice è sempre stata solo un tramestio di carabattole sbrecciate, male assortite, fuori uso", *Le città invisibili*, 114).

If on the other hand memory is a reservoir of images "fissate con le parole" once and for all, the goal of the journey stops at self-quotation:

Irene é la città che si vede a sporgersi dal ciglio dell'altipiano nell'ora che le luci si accendono e per l'aria limpida si distingue laggiù in fondo la rosa dell'abitato: dove é più densa di finestre, dove si dirada in viottoli appena illuminati, dove ammassa ombre di giardini, dove innalza torri con i fuochi dei segnali; e se la sera é brumosa uno sfumato chiarore si gonfia come una spugna lattiginosa al piede dei calanchi.

(*Le città invisibili*, 131)

One omission - the sea - and two variants - artificial light rather than that of the sun, and the possible mist - distinguish the invisible city from its sister-city at the beginning of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* and of "Uomo nei gerbidi", but the crucial point is that the distance between the observer and the space described has become unbridgeable. And this makes return not only undesired: "Non che [quelli che la guardano] abbiano intenzione d'andarci - e comunque le strade che calano a valle sono cattive - [...]"¹⁰ but impossible: "Irene è un nome di città vista da lontano, e se ci si avvicina cambia" (*Le città invisibili*, 131-132).

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Calvino makes an exceptional narrative swerve to emphasize this distance, and while in the descriptive chapters it is presumably to Marco that he entrusts the role of the first-person narrator and to Kublai that of recipient (silent, like the reader), for once he has them both appear together (as in the dialogue in italics) so that we pass from the immediacy of the present declarative to the static atemporality of the narrative present. At the end, the image of Irene has faded and in its place we hear the peremptory words of an ego which, no longer attributable to Marco, is faceless, a mere "voice off":

La città per chi passa senza entrarci è una, e un'altra per chi ne è preso e non ne esce; una è la città in cui s'arriva la prima volta, un'altra quella che si lascia per non tornare; ognuna merita un nome diverso; forse di Irene ho già parlato sotto altri nomi; forse non ho parlato che di Irene.

(Le città invisibili, 132)

(My underlining)

Marco's words on Venice¹¹ would seem to have completed a vicious circle and returned to their starting-place; except that what we have here is not a circle, but perhaps a spiral, because there is still one direction in which to look in the metaphor of waste with which Clarice ended, Clarice a city whose "regola è mescolarli [i pezzi che la compongono] ogni volta e riprovare a metterli insieme" and which, to judge by the Khan's observations, is not very different from Marco's descriptive procedure:

Kublai Khan s'era accorto che le città di Marco Polo s'assomigliavano, come se il passaggio dall'una all'altra, non implicasse un viaggio, ma uno scambio d'elementi.

(Le città invisibili, 49)

The combinatory rule followed by both Marco's descriptions and the transformations of Clarice, is not arbitrary: it is dictated by reasons, possibly secret and inscrutable, but which can be seen as deriving from an inner perspective (as in the orientalizing fable which concludes the fifth series); while the "*città a scale, esposta a scirocco, su un golfo a mezzaluna [...]*" (*Le città invisibili*, 49) hypothesised about *in abstracto* by the Khan is declared to be non-existent. We may note that the first words describing this non-existent city at least indicate Sanremo, though its gratuitous evocation, the fruit, like the dreams of the Khan, "*della mente e del caso*" (*Le città invisibili*, 50), exclude it, according to Marco, from the imaginable cities. Thus for cities, as for dreams, Marco seems to be saying that it is desire or fear which inspire the laws which keep them together and make their description possible (*Le città invisibili*, 50).

The subtle arabesque which links Marco's discourse and the stratifications of Clarice is the balance between desire and fear, between worth and wastage, between the positive and negative aspects which symmetrically dominate the opening and closing *cornici* of the book. It is also an insoluble equation, which cannot be reduced to zero, just as the Khan's empire, reduced to a square of the chessboard, is still just a piece of wood, cut from a particular tree, in the vastness of a forest which, however far away and unknown, is still part of the Khan's Empire. Here too we may sense an autobiographical implication in that the woods to which Marco alludes may be related to the trees which surrounded the distant Sanremo villa, and the scientific description of buds and frosts and pruning which he proffers so knowledgeably, may be a tribute to the author's botanically-inclined parents, and the memory of a lesson learned during childhood.

Balance is probably one of the book's basic characteristics: not just in terms of its geometrical structure, but also, and perhaps above all, in the relationship between what is said and not said, what is written and what is hidden in the writing itself. Although often intentionally contradictory, the *cornici* allude on several occasions to preverbal communication between Marco and Kublai:

Ma ciò che rendeva prezioso a Kublai ogni fatto o notizia riferito dal suo inarticolato informatore era lo spazio che restava loro intorno, un vuoto non riempito di parole. Le descrizioni di città visitate da Marco Polo avevano questa dote: che ci si poteva girare in mezzo col pensiero, perdersi, fermarsi a prendere il fresco, o scappare via di corsa.

(*Le città invisibili*, 45)

(My underlining)

Clearly, this is a silence capable of triggering off an imaginative mechanism, a spacing of discourse which is filled up only according to the needs and availability of the recipient - that is, once again, his desires and fears - an act of speech dictated not by the voice, but by the ear (*Le città invisibili*, 143). It is up to the reader to decide what to make of the allusions which the text contains as the occasion arises, choosing which should be seen in relation to other bits of the text and which should be placed in the wider context of the author's work, as for example the metaphor of Marco's imprisonment,

*[...] altra ancora quella [la descrizione del mondo] che potrei
dettare in tarda età, se venissi fatto prigioniero da pirati genovesi
e messo in ceppi nella stessa cella con uno scrivano di romanzi
d'avventura*

(Le città invisibili, 143)

which refers both to the historical information on the character and the composition of *Il milione*, and to *Il conte di Montecristo*.

IV.7 *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*

The pattern sea - town - hill reappears for the last time in Calvino's work in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. It is connected mainly with Pëtkwo, the seaside resort where the diarist, the narrator of the third novelistic *incipit* entitled "Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa", is staying. But the Ligurian landscape has undergone such alteration and camouflage - for instance the shift of light and colour towards violet, the constant reference to the harshness of the climate, the replacement of the Mediterranean deckchair with covered wicker armchairs typical of Northern countries, as beach furniture - that it might have seemed more apt to consider it in the earlier section together with *Il barone rampante* and *La speculazione edilizia*. All the more so in that one might well maintain that here it is only one detail of the whole - the geographical orientation or the transposition of latitude - which brings about the transformation of the whole. Nonetheless, it differs in certain important respects from the works of the previous section: firstly, whereas, in the former, it might be said to be precisely the detail in question (trees, or rather love of trees; ants, concrete, or rather the loathing of ants and concrete) which generated the plot, the transposition of latitude is completely incidental to the plot of "Sporgendosi della costa scoscesa" (microplot) and serves rather to link it to the previous *incipit* and hence to the general narrative framework (macroplot). Secondly, the peculiarity of this narrative is the introduction of a cluster of emblems, each already amply elaborated and exploited by Calvino, such as the shell, the weather station and the prison, clearly used both as evident self-quotation and as generators of the plot¹². That is: beyond this masking, elements of the re-

elaboration of previous literary material come into play, but these seem to me closer in spirit, or in level of compositional sophistication, to the works studied in this chapter than to those of the previous one.

In the general scheme of *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* which Calvino published in *Alfabeta* (1979), "Sporgendosi della costa scoscesa" is described as a "romanzo simbolico-interpretativo". Indeed the narrator is immediately presented as a subject exaggeratedly interested in the analysis of everyday events not as such, but as symbolic indicators provided by the world for the ego. The minuteness with which he looks at the world links him with other narrator-observers, even if here the caricatural aspects are heavily emphasised, and both the reference to convalescence from an unspecified illness, and the implications of unsociability and sexual repression, help to instill in the reader a sardonic distrust vis-à-vis his powers of judgment. The conclusion of the story will see him suddenly caught up in a network which the reader has been allowed to sense for some time. Even though here he is not a child, we are again in the presence of a naive narrator-observer whose diary has the function of registering both the events he witnesses and the daily conjectures he weaves around them.

The methodical manner in which these daily events are reported creates an analogy between the narrative framework and the first symbol to appear on the scene, namely the weather-station, introduced by the emphatic, and apocalyptic, consideration that:

Se la fine del mondo si potesse localizzare in un punto preciso,
questo sarebbe l'osservatorio metereologico di Pëtkwo.

(*Se una notte*, 53)

This comment clearly characterizes the diarist rather than the place described - as he will say later, "un'inclinazione naturale mi porta a riconoscere i miei stati d'animo nell'immobile sofferenza delle cose" (*Se una notte*, 61) reinforcing the reader's detachment from a narrator who is presented as emotionally fragile. But the main attribute of the weather-station, too, is fragility: metal roofing held in place by "quattro pali di legno un po' traballanti, una fragile attrezzatura", a complex

che isolato sul ciglio d' una scarpata del giardino municipale [...] sembra una trappola per cicloni, un'esca messa lì per attirare le trombe d'aria [...] offrendosi già come relitto ideale alla furia degli uragani.

(*Se una notte*, 53)

The weather-station is linked to the figure (visually a vignette from a comic paper of the early years of the century) of the meteorologist signor Kauderer, of whom it is said

Mi sono reso conto che la presenza del signor Kauderer è importante per me: il fatto che qualcuno dimostri ancora tanto scrupolo e metodica attenzione, anche se so bene che tutto è inutile, ha su di me un effetto tranquillizzante, forse perché viene a compensare il mio modo di vivere impreciso, che - malgrado le conclusioni cui sono giunto, - continuo a sentire come una colpa.

(*Se una notte*, 57)

Thus the figure of Kauderer is a further embodiment of the unswerving if perennially dissatisfied devotion to professional duty for which Calvino shows such ambivalence. But his is also put forward, however mockingly, as an embodiment of political engagement, in his

clandestine involvement in the project of collective escape of which we shall say more later.

The second symbol to appear is in fact the fortress-prison, interpreted at first in the circumscribed, narcissistic manner of the narrator:

Oggi ho visto una mano sporgersi da una finestra della prigione, verso mare. [...] Pur sapendo che vi sono rinchiusi i carcerati, ho sempre visto la fortezza come un elemento della natura inerte, del regno minerale. Perciò l'apparizione della mano m'ha stupito come fosse uscita dalla roccia. [...] Per me è stato come un segno che veniva dalla pietra: la pietra voleva avvertirmi che la nostra sostanza era comune e perciò qualcosa di quel che costituisce la mia persona sarebbe rimasto, non si sarebbe perso con la fine del mondo: una comunicazione sarà ancora possibile nel deserto privo di vita, privo della mia vita e d'ogni mio ricordo.

(Se una notte, 54)

The prison suggests a symbol of something negative and unavoidably physical. From the rest of the story it seems legitimate to associate the hand protruding from the grating with the imprisoned lover of signorina Zwida, at whom the gesture is probably aimed (it seems to me that the text may be interpreted in this way). What certainly does seem important is the narrator's instinctive identification with the imprisoned man:

dirò che la mano mi è parsa bianca e sottile, una mano non dissimile dalle mie, in cui nulla indicava la rozzezza che ci s'attende da un galeotto.

(Se una notte, 54)

This is an identification which, as we have seen, already functions with the other symbols to imply that the scenario of Pëtkwo is an inner scenario in which each element, however different it may be, is to be considered as part of the ego. This seems also to be true for signorina Zwida, who first appears as seductively absorbed in drawing shells. Like Kauderer, Zwida too represents an attitude to reality with which the narrator feels uneasy:

[...] L'applicazione con cui questa ragazza si dedica a disegnare conchiglie indica in lei una ricerca della perfezione come forma che il mondo può e quindi deve raggiungere; io al contrario sono da tempo convinto che la perfezione non si produce che accessoriamente e per caso; quindi non merita interesse alcuno, la natura vera delle cose rivelandosi solo nello sfacelo [...]

(Se una notte, 56)

Thus the dilemma of which the narrator is victim may be described as a position of stalemate - imprisonment, perhaps - between the voluntaristic attitude of the one and the optimistic attitude of the other. This is a conjecture which seems justified by the plot's final solution, in which it is Zwida's vitalism which wins over Kauderer's dogmatic rigidity. Just how self-imposed (and ill conceived) the choice of position of the one is in relation to that of the other, we shall consider further on.

In symmetry with the hand of the invisible convict protruding from a grating in the fortress, the presence of Zwida too is indicated by the fluttering of a lilac ribbon concealed by the curved back of the wicker armchair. Zwida is seated where, a few moments earlier, the diarist had felt a giddy sensation of loneliness:

Oggi sono arrivato al belvedere sotto al quale si scorge un pezzetto di spiaggia, giù in basso, deserta di fronte al mare grigio. I seggioloni di vimini dalle alte spalliere ricurve, a cesto, per riparare dal vento, disposti in semicerchio, sembravano indicare un mondo in cui il genere umano è scomparso e le cose non sanno che parlare della sua assenza.

(*Se una notte*, 54-55)

Thus right from the start the presence of Zwida fills a void, satisfying an instinctive desire which is immediately coloured by erotic connotations. In the dream context the shells she draws represent the female genitals, and that an allusion is being made to this type of representation is confirmed by the fact that further on this obvious but restrained symbol is replaced by another, much more explicit one:

La signorina Zwida stava disegnando un riccio di mare. [...] Il riccio era rovesciato su uno scoglio, aperto: contraeva le spine cercando inutilmente di raddrizzarsi. Il disegno della ragazza era uno studio della polpa umida del mollusco, nel suo dilatarsi e contrarsi, resa in chiaroscuro, e con una tratteggiatura fitta e irta tutt'intorno. [...] Tanto la vista del riccio quanto il disegno trasmettevano sensazioni sgradevoli e crudeli, come un viscere esposto agli sguardi.

(*Se una notte*, 58)

The shift from both the surreal lilac ribbon to this description of an upturned sea-urchin give the sense of a dramatic, and regressive, lessening of abstraction. It is true that Calvino continues to express himself through symbols and metaphors, but this is done in conformity with the narrative register of this particular *incipit romanzesco* and does not apply to the rest of *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. What is interesting here is the markedly dream-like character of "Sporgendosi della costa scoscesa", not just for the detail, significant in itself, that Zwida claims to be drawing the

sea-urchin "perchè era un'immagine che tornava nei suoi sogni e voleva liberarsene" (*Se una notte*, 59), but because the whole narrative mechanism seems built up as a collage of dream images re-ordered with the misleading interpretative logic of the narrator, in itself a sort of parody of the dream process. This, it seems to me, is how the descriptive fragments quoted in connection with the prison and the armchairs on the beach, and the diarist's fantasy of satisfying Zwida's request, should be interpreted:

Vidi me stesso nell'atto di presentarle il grappino di ferro come fosse un mazzo di fiori: l'immagine nella sua incongruità aveva qualcosa di stridente e di feroce. Certo vi si nascondeva un significato che mi sfuggiva; e ripromettendomi di meditarvi sopra con calma risposi di sì.

(*Se una notte*, 62)

The grapnel is the key to the story: not only because Zwida's request conceals (though only for the narrator) the plan of escape which will lead to the final loss, but also and above all in that its interpretation casts light upon the dilemma of the protagonist.

Compresi che l'oggetto racchiudeva un messaggio per me, e dovevo decifrarlo: l'ancora, un'esortazione a fissarmi, ad aggrapparvi, a dar fondo, ponendo fine al mio stato fluttuante, al mio tenermi alla superficie. Ma ques'interpretazione poteva lasciar adito a dubbi: poteva essere pure un invito a salpare, a buttarmi verso il largo.

(*Se una notte*, 61)

The indecisive narrator does not clarify what he might cling to, nor in which direction he might put out to sea, because suddenly the grapnel takes on the form of a symbol of a risky emotional investment:

Qualcosa nella forma del grappino, i quattro denti rincagnati, le quattro braccia di ferro consumate dallo strisciare contro la roccia dei fondali, m'ammonivano che ogni decisione non sarebbe stata senza strappi e sofferenze. A mio sollievo restava il fatto che non si trattava d'una pesante áncora d'alto mare, ma d'un'agile ancorotta: non mi si chiedeva dunque di rinunciare alla disponibilità della giovinezza, ma solo di sostare un momento, di riflettere, di sondare l'oscurità di me stesso.

(*Se una notte*, 61)

The diarist substitutes the study of the messages sent him by the surrounding world with that of the messages contained within the ego. The link with reality, already tenuous, is broken and the final catastrophe becomes inevitable. The effect is comical, however, because from the start the author has provided us with sufficient reason to regard the narcissistic daydreaming of the diarist with detachment. Read as a parable, the text of "Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa" once more confirms the triumph of what in Freudian terms one might call the reality principle over the pleasure principle.

But it is an ambiguous confirmation. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud explains the abandoning of the reality principle in terms of instinctual behaviour which masks a desire for self-destruction. Pleasure would thus be a self-destructive challenge to the reality principle: whereas healthy behaviour tries to learn to bear lack of pleasure by appealing to the reality principle, the neurotic deals with it by repeating an earlier painful experience, retracing an infantile, instinctual model.

Thus the text of "Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa" uses a neurotic character-narrator, but a Freudian reading may go further. It may be a

new, certainly chronologically the last, explanation which the author offers of his desire to bring the landscape of Sanremo on stage again. Freud defines the self-destructive compulsion to repeat as instinctual and, in the same essay, instinct is defined as "an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things" (Freud 1920, 308), using an example taken from the behaviour of certain species of fish which lay their eggs in waters remote from their natural habitat and which scientists believe was their original one. It is possible that Calvino would not have objected to a comparison between his own creativity and the behaviour of these species of migratory fish, but the scientific nature of the comparison is not as cheering as it might seem: still according to Freud, instinctual life as a whole is destructive.

The hypothesis of self-preservative instincts, such as we attribute to all living beings, stands in marked opposition to the idea that instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death. Seen in this light, the theoretical importance of the instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion and of mastery greatly diminishes.

(Freud 1920, 311)

In "Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa" the theme of death appears twice, as linked to life through an exchange of smells in the description of the inn "la Stella della Svezia", and in the secret meeting between the diarist and Kauderer in the cemetery. These are the only two night scenes in the diary and in both the diarist is given information which concerns him and which he does not understand: the relationship between Zwida and the convict, and the escape plan. But the night setting is also indicative of a definite link to the macroplot and the information before and after "Sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa". As Segre explains (1979, 184), Cimmeria, the fictitious country of provenance of the author Ukko

Ahti, is a borrowing from Homer, corresponding to the region never reached by the sun's rays, where Ulysses meets the shades of the dead, and also from Ovid, here corresponding to the abode of sleep and dreams.

Dreaming takes us back to the Freudian theory of compulsion and repetition and the impossibility of repressing the tension caused by repressed instinct; a compulsion harmful to the individual, though useful to society:

What appears in a minority of individuals as an untiring impulsion towards further perfection can easily be understood as a result of the instinctual repression upon which is based all that is most precious in human civilization. The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction. No substitutive or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension [...] The backward path that leads to complete satisfaction is as a rule obstructed by the resistances which maintain the repressions. So there is no alternative but to advance in the direction in which growth is still free - though with no prospect of bringing the process to a conclusion or of being able to reach the goal.

(Freud 1920, 315)

The impossibility of reaching the goal, of arriving at any conclusion, is the central theme of *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. From the very first failed attempt we know that the failure will be repeated, as the Reader's prophetic dreams tells us:

Passi una notte agitata, il sonno è un flusso intermittente e ingorgato come la lettura del romanzo, con sogni che ti sembrano la ripetizione d'un sogno sempre uguale. Lotti coi sogni come con la vita senza senso né forma, cercando un disegno, un

percorso che deve pur esserci, come quando si comincia a leggere un libro e non si sa ancora in quale direzione ti porterà. Quello che vorresti è l'aprirsi di uno spazio e d'un tempo astratti e assoluti in cui muoverti seguendo una traiettoria esatta e tesa; ma quando ti sembra di riuscirci t'accorgi d'essere fermo, bloccato, costretto a ripetere tutto da capo.

(*Se una notte*, 27)

At the end of the novel the invisible design surfaces casually: it is the list of titles which, read one after the other, forms the beginning of a new novel

"Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore, fuori dell'abitato di Malbork, sporgendosi dalla costa scoscesa senza temere il vento e la vertigine, guarda in basso dove l'ombra s'addensa in una rete di linee che s'allacciano, in una rete di linee che s'intersecano sul tappeto di foglie illuminate dalla luna intorno a una fossa vuota, - Quale storia laggiù attende la fine? - chiede, ansioso d'ascoltare il racconto".

(*Se una notte*, 260)

Once again the landscape repeats the pattern of the Sanremo landscape, and this time it is the substitution of the sea with the "fossa vuota", the last and unavoidable goal of the biographical parabola, which confirms the importance of the Freudian interpretation I impute to the recurrence of the landscape itself.

NOTES

1. Calvino's dislike for any exposure of information on his personal life is well known, well documented, and well publicized. The first monographic study on his work contained one of the briefest biographical notes imaginable: "Italo Calvino é nato all' Avana nel 1923. Tornato bambino in Italia, ha vissuto a Sanremo finché si é trasferito a Torino nel dopoguerra, lavorando presso la casa editrice Einaundi. Ha viaggiato in Russia e in America ed ora abita a Parigi." (Pescio-Bottino 1964, 3). Moreover it is likely to contain at least one lie (the journey to Russia?) as is threatened in a letter by Calvino to Pescio-Bottino: "Gentile Signora, sono contento che Lei voglia dedicarmi una monografia. Contento e anche spaventato, perché finora monografie non me ne avevano dedicate e mi credevo in salvo, dato che conto di far dimenticare il mio nome nel giro di pochi anni. [...] Dati biografici: io sono ancora di quelli che credono, con Croce, che di un autore contano solo le opere. (Quando contano, naturalmente). Perciò dati biografici non ne do, o li do falsi, o comunque cerco sempre di cambiarli da una volta all'altra. Mi chiedo pure quel che vuol sapere e Glielo dirò. Ma non Le dirò mai la verità, di questo può star sicura." (*I libri degli altri*, 479) Such frivolous attitude is more honest than it might seem, since the alteration of data is at the base of Calvino's creative approach. It produces also another divertissement: "Sono nato nel 1923 sotto un cielo in cui il Sole raggiante e il cupo Saturno erano ospiti dell'armoniosa Bilancia. Passai i primi venticinque anni della mia vita nell'a quei tempi ancor verdeggiante Sanremo, che univa apporti cosmopoliti ed eccentrici alla chiusura scontrosa della sua rustica concretezza; dagli uni e dagli

altri aspetti restai segnato per la vita. Poi mi tenne Torino operosa e razionale dove il rischio d'impazzire (come già il Nietzsche) non é minore che altrove. Vi arrivai in anni in cui le strade si aprivano deserte e interminabili per la rarità delle auto. Per abbreviare i miei percorsi di pedone attraversavo le vie rettilinee in lunghe oblique da un angolo all'altro - procedura oggi, oltre che impossibile, impensabile - e così avanzavo tracciando invisibili ipotenuse tra grigi cateti. Sparsamente conobbi altre inclite metropoli, atlantiche e pacifiche, di tutte innamorandomi a prima vista, d'alcune illudendomi d'averle comprese e possedute, altre restandomi inafferrabili e straniere. Per lunghi anni soffersi di una nevrosi geografica: non riuscivo a stare tre giorni di seguito in nessuna città o luogo. Alla fine elessi stabilmente sposa e dimora a Parigi, città circondata da foreste di faggi e carpini e betulle, in cui passeggio con mia figlia Abigail, e circondante a sua volta la Bibliothèque Nationale, dove mi reco a consultare testi rari, usufruendo della Carte de Lecteur n. 2516. Così, preparato al Peggio, sempre più incontentabile riguardo al Meglio, già pregusto le gioie incomparabili dell'invecchiare." (*Il castello* 1969, quoted in Bonura 1972, 41-42)

In the quotation above the name of his daughter has the ring of an academic joke, and anyhow it is false; the hint to astrology which seems here completely ironic turns out to be genuine elsewhere (*Lezioni americane*, 50-53); and finally the image of an anonymous reader of the National Library is one in line with the information later contained in *Eremita a Parigi*. The reference to Croce in the letter quoted above helps to understand the pose of philosophical

detachment from fame and publicity. It is very interesting to note however that as for the autobiographical quality of his writing his attitude shifted in time (Milanini 1990, 92) and that gradually Calvino became slightly more open (see interview in *Paese Sera* 7.1.1978 quoted in Ferretti 1989, 157).

2. This applies above all to the narrator's considerations on Corsica (*I racconti*, 205).
3. I have underlined the word "genealogy" because I believe it represents a reference both to the title of the trilogy *I nostri antenati* and to the family pride, unshared by Cosimo, of his baron father.
4. That the verb "vedere" is used in a broad sense is obvious and requires no further comment; but it is interesting to note that the posthumous collection *Sotto il sole giaguaro* (1986) inspired by the five senses, was to have contained a sixth one roughly definable as "senso culturale" (Dolfi 1987).
5. Calvino himself quoted Leopardi as among the sources of inspiration for *Le Cosmicomiche*; and it seems to me that in his repertoire of symbolic images, the limpets correspond to Leopardi's "ginestra".
6. See *Palomar*, 104-109. It may be noted that there is a fundamental unity and consistency in Calvino's professions of faith in literature as stated in "Il midollo del leone" (*Una pietra sopra*, 13-14) and in the opening of *Lezioni americane* (unpaginated). What has certainly disappeared is the optimistic and somewhat boastful tone. The

former spells out and emphasizes a list of practical purposes in literature. It is a list tinged with post-war, left-wing, optimistic positivism. In *Lezioni americane* the emphasis is on a degree of conciseness which could be called elliptic and on the individual taste (rather than the common good). See also Berardinelli 1991, 52, Ferretti 1989, 154-159, and Milanini 1990, 164-167 and 184-187.

7. Cf. "Il modello dei modelli" in *Palomar* (p. 112). The underlining is mine. "In tutto questo, non che Palomar elaborasse lui stesso dei modelli o s'adoperasse ad applicarne dei già elaborati: egli si limitava a immaginare un giusto uso di giusti modelli per colmare l'abisso che vedeva spalancarsi sempre di più tra la realtà e i principî. Insomma, il modo in cui i modelli potevano essere manovrati e gestiti non entrava nelle sue competenze né nelle sue possibilità di intervento. Di queste cose s'occupavano abitualmente persone molto diverse da lui, che ne giudicavano la funzionalità secondo altri criteri: come strumenti di potere, soprattutto, più che secondo i principî o le conseguenze nella vita della gente. Cosa questa abbastanza naturale, dato che ciò che i modelli cercano di modellare è pur sempre un sistema di potere; ma se l'efficacia del sistema si misura sulla sua invulnerabilità e capacità di durare, il modello diventa una specie di fortezza le cui spesse mura nascondono quello che c'è fuori.

8. See "The gap between past and future: the nunc stans", in Arendt (1978), 202-213. To represent the temporal perception of the thinking ego Arendt interprets and comments upon a text by Kafka as follows: It analyses poetically our "inner state" in regard to time, of

which we are aware when we have withdrawn from the appearances and find our mental activities recoiling characteristically upon themselves - *cogito me cogitare, volo me velle*, and so on. The inner time sensation arises when we are not entirely absorbed by the absent non-visibles we are thinking about but begin to direct our attention onto the activity itself. In this situation past and future are equally present precisely because they are equally absent from our sense; thus the no-longer of the past is transformed by virtue of the spacial metaphor into something "behind" us and the not-yet of the future into something that "approaches" us from ahead (p. 202).

9. Cf. I. Calvino, "Riviera di Ponente" (1946) "E scendendo si continuano a vedere fasce, cunette e vasche per l'acqua, e poi ancora paesi, sempre grigi e ammicchiati. Uscendo da una "rivolta" vedi che c'è il mare lì sotto, e alberghi e ville e autobus: solo allora ti accorgi che sei arrivato alla costa". La San Remo storica, è descritta nello stesso numero del "Politecnico" come "un agglomerato di case a mezza-costa".
10. It should however be noted that the affected lack of interest is described in the "Prefazione" of *Il Sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (pp. 23-24), as an irreparable and painful loss: " [...] il primo libro diventa subito un diaframma tra te e l'esperienza, taglia i fili che ti legano ai fatti, brucia il tesoro di memoria [...] Di questa violenza che le hai fatto scrivendo, la memoria non si riavrà più: le immagini privilegiate resteranno bruciate dalla precoce promozione a motivi letterari, mentre le immagini che hai voluto tenere in serbo, magari con la segreta intenzione di servirtene per opere future, deperiranno,

perché tagliate fuori dall'integrità naturale della memoria fluida e vivente. La proiezione letteraria dove tutto è solido e fissato una volta per tutte, ha ormai occupato il campo, ha fatto sbiadire, ha schiacciato la vegetazione dei ricordi in cui la vita dell'albero e quella del filo d'erba si condizionano a vicenda. La memoria - o meglio l'esperienza, che è la memoria più la ferita che ti ha lasciato, più il cambiamento che ha portato in te e che ti ha fatto diverso - , l'esperienza primo nutrimento, anche dell'opera letteraria (ma non solo di quella), ricchezza vera dello scrittore (ma non solo di lui), ecco che appena ha dato forma a un'opera letteraria insecchisce, si distrugge. Lo scrittore si ritrova ad essere il più povero degli uomini. [...] Un libro scritto non mi consolerà mai di tutto ciò che ho distrutto scrivendolo [...]" Furthermore this passage seems to me to contain also an explanation for the motif of distance and fog which characterizes Irene (*Le città invisibili*, 131-132): "Così mi guardo indietro [...] e tutto è lontano e nebbioso [...]" (*Il sentiero*, 23).

11. Though it may be useful to conclude the matter of the name of Sanremo by observing that in his other works too Calvino kept to the unwritten rule of avoiding uttering it (and the omissions which appear most obvious concern the "realist" writings we have considered in the first part of this research). Thus a paragraph in "*La poubelle agréée*" (1977), strikes me as all the more exceptional. Mere childhood and considerations of an economic order are closely intertwined and create the impression of a guilty Eden, where the only possibility of redemption seems to lie (as in fairy-tales) in the transformation of the narrator into a roadsweeper, which does indeed partially happen, in that the narrating ego is responsible for the

removal of rubbish (though only for his own family). Consideration of "*La poubelle agréée*" is germane to my argument, because of its closeness, and in a sense its complementarity, to the theme that is the object of study in *Le città invisibili* (chronologically, too, if one believes the text itself, p. 115). The subject is disposal as relationship between the individual and the society in which he lives, rendered in mimetic style (low-mimetic or comic, one might even say, given the initial anti-climax: "Delle faccende domestiche, l'unica che io disimpegno con qualche competenza e soddisfazione è quella di mettere fuori l'immondizia" (p. 89), and limited, at least at first, to the implicit rules and rituals which govern the disposal of rubbish); but the ending brings the hidden theme to the surface - namely, that of writing as a transformation of thought and memory from private to public material, with the inevitable conclusion that: "Scrivere è dispossessarsi non meno che il buttar via, è allontanare da me un mucchio di fogli appallottolati e una pila di fogli scritti fino in fondo, gli uni e gli altri non più miei, deposti, espulsi." (p. 115)

12. It should be noted that the possibility of a different orientation was already contemplated in "Dall'opaco", however in that case it referred to the ego rather than to the world (*La strada*, 132). See also above p. 107. World-rotation will come rather naturally to Palomar and will only require a little effort of concentration on his part (*Palomar*, 116). See also above, p. 109.

Conclusions

The pattern sea-city-hills which represents the landscape of Sanremo more or less directly, appears in fifteen works by Calvino written over a period of thirty two years.

My analysis took as its starting-point a preliminary subdivision of the material according to criteria of representation, or perhaps rather of representational distortion, applied to this landscape. I singled out four types of representation which formed the basis of this thesis' division into chapters. The order of the chapters is linked in part to the chronology of composition of the first of the texts analysed in each group; and partly, more significantly perhaps, to my evaluation of Calvino's attitude to his landscape, and at the same time to how he envisaged the role of the landscape in literature, from the more conventional to the more transgressive.

I defined the landscape of the first chapter as 'realist', without in any way wishing to suggest that the treatment of the landscape of Sanremo was a faithful copy of reality in the works studied here. Indeed, right from the introduction, I have stressed the freedom with which, by his own admission, the author treated his material. Thus by 'realist' we should understand a relationship that is more directly linked to the roots of the

narrative convention which goes by the name of nineteenth-century realism.

This is a convention in which landscape has a clearly defined role and function as a setting within which the action occurs, with isolated moments of lyricism in which a character, who may also be the narrator, turns his attention to those areas which remain nebulous and with which he cannot establish any direct contact. I believe that this definition covers the landscape in "Uomo nei gerbidi", *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* and *L'entrata in guerra*, both for its value as a stage on which the action takes place, and for its inner, personal implications, such as that of the outline of Corsica for the narrator in "Uomo nei gerbidi", the silhouette of the Old Town under bombardment for young Pin who is looking at it from a distance, and the human presence, sensed but not seen, of the other townsfolk in the summer's night in "Le notti dell'Unpa".

But these works too contain a representational constant of considerable interest, namely the description of the landscape seen at the moment when it is touched by light. This attention to the instant of apperception is without doubt one of the stylistic features of Calvino's prose to have earned him a reputation as a scientific writer, in the non-literal but again nineteenth-century sense of a writer able to capture and express the essence of a range of natural phenomena tersely and effectively.

The landscape which figures in the only 'fairy-tale' work examined in this thesis is also linked to the conventions of the genre. Here my analysis aims to bring out those elements which characterise it as a

Ligurian landscape, though quite implicitly, given that the landscape of fairy-tales is, by convention, universal.

The possibilities afforded by landscape distortion by means of the emphasis of a single one of its elements emerges particularly clearly in the third chapter, which looks at works linked to widely differing genres, as are "*La formica argentina*", *Il barone rampante* and *La speculazione edilizia*. In these the author's descriptive procedure concerning the landscape is basically the same, and has the effect of modifying the pattern as a whole, through the extreme attention focussed on one of its parts.

Thus the landscape, which should constitute a novelty for the narrator of "*La formica argentina*", is thrust into second place by swarms of almost invisible ants. Similarly the same landscape pattern sea-city-hills becomes an almost unbroken wooded expanse in *Il barone rampante* and an asphalt jungle in *La speculazione edilizia*.

The landscapes studied in this chapter are all distorted using the same method, and in this case the method constitutes the madness. The function of the landscape in these works is different from that of the realist-nineteenth-century model: rather than a setting within which the action takes place, the landscape, the external world, actually determines its course. Vis-à-vis the landscape studied in the first chapter, the landscapes which appear in the third are much more obvious projections of the narrating ego. More precisely, they are projections of a fraught relationship between the internal and the external, between the ego and a world in which both parties have become demonized: where the landscape of the first chapter was multifarious, that of the third is exaggeratedly one-

dimensional, and where the realist ego of the first chapter had a limited scope for action and responsibility, power and capacity for control.

The relationship between ego and landscape is absolutely central to this narrative triad. But all in all it is still a conventional relationship, one in which both ego and landscape are acting a part - the ego the part of the human being, of everyman, and the landscape that of the world. Outside the sphere of nineteenth-century realism, these three fictions share the same didactic substratum, the same status of *roman à thèse*, put forward as universally valid.

The works analysed in the fourth chapter are extremely disparate, but in them the Sanremo landscape takes on the form of an inner landscape, a landscape of the past. The relationship between ego and landscape has become an annexation of the landscape by the ego.

From a place within which an action unfolds, the landscape becomes a place of reflection, a place where the ego withdraws to meditate upon itself. Perhaps it can no longer even be called a place, but a cipher, a symbol whose various values are explored as they arise. Mostly, having become an inner landscape, the pattern sea-city-hills once again becomes recognisable as the Riviera di Ponente from the descriptive and visual point of view. This is so at least for *I giovani del Po*, *La strada di San Giovanni*, "La spirale" in *Le cosmicomiche* and "Dall'opaco", and slightly less precisely, given the descriptive fragmentation, in *Le città invisibili* and "Il conte di Montecristo" in *Ti con zero*. But there continue to be differences between one landscape and another which are directly ascribable to the various camouflages of the narrating ego, disguised

alternatively as a mollusc, a fourteenth-century traveller or a hero from a nineteenth-century popular novel. But these disguises no longer have the function simply of making the landscape different, or less recognisable or less monotonous for the reader: now they generate new narrative possibilities in the exploration of the individual's past.

The relationship between the ego and its inner landscape, too, may be considered as a universal relationship. It is legitimate to suppose that everyone has their own particular childhood landscape. It may be Venice for Marco Polo (and, for example, the Riviera di Levante for Montale, etc.). By extension the relationship may also be projected on to the fictitious characters: Marseilles for Edmond Dantès (and for instance London for Moll Flanders, etc.). This time Calvino's decision to put himself in others' clothing also emphasizes the literary nature of his intent, the self-referential irony of the text. All this seems highly transgressive, but it is in fact so only in the sense in which parody has always been transgressive: in this case too we may speak of convention, of a taste for parody which now goes by the name of postmodern.

Particularly striking among the other inner landscapes are the more directly autobiographical ones, which are attempts to proceed from the universal to the personal: that is, the one when Calvino talks of himself and his youth, and of the cluster of memories linked to the countryside around Sanremo as seen going up into the hills with his father in *La strada di San Giovanni*, and that of Calvino as the 'writing ego' looking out over the inner landscape and darkness in "*Dall'opaco*".

Unfortunately these two attempts at 'honest' autobiography too have their limits in convention. The first might be said to use a

convention of the language of psychoanalytical self-analysis, and of a referential vicious circle which, using a concept from Svevo and bearing in mind a passage from Borges concerning the two Borges who co-exist within him, attempts to distinguish the person 'who lives' from the person 'who writes'. And perhaps because even these two autobiographical attempts do not succeed in containing and explaining everything, by means of a further leap in level of self-referential irony, we find a further reworking of the pattern in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. This time the variant consists in a rotation of orientation by 180, and we also have a cold, nordic landscape, strewn with symbols already met with in previous appearances of the landscape.

If the constant of the fourth chapter is the inward nature of the landscape, the novelty of the works dealt with in this chapter is their introspective quality. Calvino's self-questioning concerning the landscape, his rereading of it in a psychological-autobiographical vein, allows and at the same time enforces a rereading in this same sense of the previous works as well.

Thus for example in the light of the information contained in *La strada di San Giovanni* we understand more clearly the remoteness of the paternal figure ("Uomo nei gerbidi"), the search for a surrogate father (Pin and Cugino in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*) and lastly the reappropriation of the father figure through the imagination ("Le notti dell'Unpa") and hence the centrality of the search for the father in the works analysed in the first chapter.

The works analysed in the second and third chapters, on the other hand, could all be reread not only as variations on the conflict between

ego-landscape, and individual-world, but also as individual-family-world. In this case it would be revealing to note how remoteness is, if not completely reassessed, at least seen in a more favourable light; one might then infer that these narratives mark the stages of a reassessment and possibly an understanding of the paternal attitude. But irrespective of psychoanalytical suggestions, the return of the Sanremo landscape and of the relationship with the family in the group of stories analysed in the second and third chapter bear out the impossibility of detaching morals from personal and family experience.

To the question 'why did the landscape of Sanremo reappear so many times in Calvino's work?', we might give at least two answers, both linked to a strictly biographical reason. The first is the one Calvino himself gave then he said that it is the images that surround us during the first years of life which form the stock of the imagination. The second is that by containing a reference to the landscape of Sanremo, each of the works examined bears a visible autobiographical mark, the sign of a specific experience, the brand of something truly lived.

These very reasons, the centrality of the eye and the visual in Calvino's fiction on the one hand and his protective and at the same time detached attitude to privacy, make the landscape a motif of perceived importance in his narrative style.

The reasons for the masking and reworking of these same inner landscapes is harder to determine. One reason, at least up to a point, must have been a desire to avoid repetition, to escape Pavese's saying that 'every great writer is infinitely monotonous', which has the ring of a curse

rather than a compliment. Another is that the narrating of lived experience is always distorted by the genre in which it occurs. Yet another is that the world of the imagination is par excellence something which cannot be revealed in its entirety, but which can be explored only by means of partial modifications.

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