



Research Article

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**Does it Ever Rain in Italy?
Metaphors of Landscape and Weather of Italy in British Fiction (1946-2001)**

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Abstract: Arising from the poetic aspirations of Dante, Petrarch or Bocaccio, the Italian art, the ancient Roman grandeur, consecutively, the beauty of the landscape and the attractive people, the contemporary perspectives on Italy are the outcome of a tradition which reached its climax with D.H. Lawrence and this is where this essay proceeds to explore the metaphor of Italian landscape and the sun during the second half of the twentieth century British fiction. I argue that temporal acuity also transforms British writers' perception of this "idyllic" country where the sun seems to shine continuously with the implication that it never rains. I contend such unrealistic paradisaical image of the postwar period gradually lends to the introduction of rain in harmony with the characters' mood and transformation of Italy. This essay covers the fiction of Linklater, Waugh, Murdoch, Golding, Brookner, Parks, Dibdin, Spark and Woodhouse.

Key words: Italy in British Literature, the Italian sun, rain, Tim Parks, Michael Dibdin, Muriel Spark, Anita Brookner, Sarah Woodhouse

"A man to leave Italy and not to write a book about it!
Was ever such a thing heard of?"
(Landor 50)

Introduction

Italy has always been captivating for people from all around the world by the beauty of its landscape fascinating cities which hold monuments centuries-old for beholders to meditate and the enigmatic people who have been dwelling on this land since before Christ. It has similarly attracted several canonical British writers among which the earliest was Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1340-1400) who visited and wrote about Italy and since then Italy has been prevailing with its diverse aspects in the literary perspectives of the British writers as well, enticing numerous studies by scholars. Therefore, since it is an enormous topic, I have narrowed down the genre to novel and focused on the British writers of a specific period. Since the writers of the earlier eras have been

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discussed widely by scholars, this essay covers the time span starting from the fiction of the Post World War II period by Eric Linklater's (1899-1974) *Private Angelo* (1946) and ending by Tim Parks' *Destiny* (1999). Some British writers mention Italy or Italians partly and only in one of their works, yet for some authors like Tim Parks¹ (1954-) and Michael Dibdin² (1947- 2007), Italy is the sole location in almost all their fiction, so I have not covered all their work. The writers in between with the chronological order of their particular works are Evelyn Waugh, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, William Golding, Anita Brookner, Jonathan Keates, Sarah Woodhouse, Barry Unsworth, and Michael Dibdin. On the other hand, Annie Hawes' *Extra Virgin* (2001) is a memoir, yet it is included only to denote the bias of perception at the turn of millennium.

In modern literature, more concrete tropes relating to perceived idyllic and cheerful states of mind representing Italy are common, especially through the depiction of the sun/sunny weather, as an allegory for the presumed cheerfulness and possible naivety of Italian people or for the idyllic landscape. However, subsequently in timeline some writers also write about rain in Italy, hence, I scrutinize all works on the basis of time to detect the changes in the portrayal of Italy. In *Literary into Cultural Studies*, Easthope maintains that Cultural Studies considers every form of "signifying practice" in literary works (6). Based on the principle of cultural studies this essay focuses on how each author uses landscape and weather as signifiers to reflect the characters' state of mind. I argue that temporal change in general worldview by the end of second half of the twentieth century also transforms British writers' perception of this "idyllic" country where the sun seems to shine continuously with the implication that it never rains. I contend such unrealistic paradisiacal image of the post-war period gradually lends itself to the introduction of rain in harmony with the characters' mood and transformation of Italy³. Smith states that the twentieth century has "ushered in the discovery of deep space or at least its social construction", and yet it is only as the twentieth century draws to a close that this "fundamental discovery is becoming apparent [...]. Deep space is quintessentially social space; its physical extent infused with social intent" (160-78). Thus, transformation of social space for both British and Italian cultures are also reflected in literary works. Gregory likewise argues that spatial implications are essential to "transcend the partitions between the metaphorical space and the material space" (5). Since it is "almost impossible to escape from travel as metaphor" in the British novels that are discussed in this essay, I suggest the physical extent of the place, in this case the Italian landscape, the dazzling sun or rain creates a metaphorical space transcending the material place (Jokinen 25).

Sunny Skies, Gorgeous Landscape

Eric Linklater's *Private Angelo* (1946)

Beginning with the post-war fiction, the earliest example of landscape depiction is of Eric Linklater's (1899-1974) *Private Angelo*. *Private Angelo* is a comic figure; a naïve universal soldier who lacks courage and tries to survive by the closing of the Second World War. Linklater portrays the conventional image of Tuscany along with the small village of Pontefiore, expanding the image:

A narrow ravine divided the southern slope of the hill, and this, in one noble arch, was spanned by an ancient bridge whose abutments, at the proper season of the year, were overhung by blossoming trees. Even in Tuscany, where a handsome view is the merest commonplace, Pontefiore was notable for its dignified yet gentle beauty, and there was little wonder that Angelo [shed] delighted tears to see again its yellow roofs, the cobbled streets, and the castle tower rising among cypresses against a clear blue sky. (20-1)

Northrop Frye asserts that the idyllic preserves the theme of escape from society to the extent of idealizing a simplified life in the country. It is created by the close association with animal and vegetable nature which recurs in the sheep and pleasant pastures of the idyllic; such imagery is also often used in the Bible for the theme of salvation (43). As such, the beauty of the landscape and nature signifies bliss and salvation. From *Angelo's*

¹ Born and grew up in England, he moved to Italy in 1981 where he has been living since then.

² British crime author wrote a series of 11 crime novels with the main character named Aurelio Zen and all set in Italy.

³ See, Toplu, Şebnem. *Diverse Aspects of Italy and Italians in Contemporary British Literature*. Modena: Il Fiorino, 2001.

Italian point of view there is not much difference between his love of his land from that of a foreigner. However, it should be kept in mind that the Italian characters are created by the British writers.

I [...] adore this land of mine, this Tuscany of the green candles and the terraced hills that are crowned with men's houses, adore because it is complete. As the little grapes in the valley are sweet already and coloured with their ripeness, so Tuscany wears its bloom and is plump as a young grape with its sweetness [...] The land is very ancient, yet summer comes to it with the colour of a new invention. When Rome was but an angry thought, we were civilized and had our arts, and when the world was in dark despair we woke it with our painting and our poetry and quarrelling. And still our olive trees are silver and green, and the olives grow fat. All the countries have come to us, either to conquer or to learn, in love or envy, and we are still Tuscany, and the grapes are ripening again. (241)

Evelyn Waugh's *Helena* (1950)

Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966), on the other hand, sets his novel *Helena*, in the year 273 AD. Nonetheless, the yearning for Rome, the city of river, "or the city of the Ruma, an old Etruscan family" in this historical novel reveals an ancient intensity for the British authors (Pauli 3). It is reflected in the main character princess Helena, youngest daughter of Coel, "Paramount chief of the Trinovantes". She marries a stranger, Constantius, chosen by herself since he promises to take her to "The City". The conventional image is then broken with a negative view of pagan Roman Empire, ironically to be yet restored with the mythological personification of beauty:

It was spring and everywhere fountains were playing among the falling smuts. But Rome was not beautiful. Compared with Trèves it seemed gross and haphazard. Beauty would come later. For centuries the spoils of the world had flowed into the City, piled up and lost themselves there. For centuries to come they would be dispersed and disfigured [...] Then beauty would come [...] Beauty would come in her own time, capricious, adorable wanderer, and briefly make her home on the seven hills. (92)

The novel has got more religious overtones on Christianity than Italians since after deciding on Christianity as her chosen faith, Helena sets out in her quest to find the true cross and finds it. Hence, Waugh's Italy signifies Christianity, and is devoid of Italians.

Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl* (1964)

Iris Murdoch's (1919-1999) sunny Italian weather, on the other hand, is an explicit metaphor of change and salvation in *The Italian Girl*. Murdoch's narrative is claimed to tend towards the affirmation of good. Hence for Ronald Carter they are novels of the human condition seen in terms of weakness and strength, portrayed in thought rather than action, with a high regard for spiritual values (525). Although the context is Britain, Murdoch's *The Italian Girl* embodies a legendary accumulation of Italian characteristics. The affirmation of good is set by "the Italian girl" Maria Magistretti, wise and beautiful, who leads Edmund out of depression caused by his solitary life. Edmund comes back home for his mother Lydia's funeral where he reunites with his brother Otto, his wife Isabel and their daughter Flora who is going through an emotional turmoil. The only stable character is represented by Maria, who holds on to the values in her role as the housekeeper. Although the story is located in England, the housekeepers Lydia had chosen have always been a succession of Italian girls for curious reasons. After the settling down of chaotic relations by the help of Maria, Edmund confesses his love for Maria, the so far nameless Italian girl, and decides to move with her to the "South", to Italy. The relation between the enthusiastic change of mood and what Italian weather signifies is explicit in Edmunds following words "I said, 'I'll go and pack. Then we can think about times and places. Why, it's Italian weather already'" (171). Moreover, for this division of North and South, North in the sense of England and South in Italy, Shields holds that the British debate over the regional divisions presents a tendency to attribute "casual power to space itself, again demonstrating the process of fetishisation and hypostatization central to the common-sense vision of the spatial common across Western social spatialisations" (259).

Muriel Spark's *The Public Image* (1968), *The Takeover* (1976) and *The Only Problem* (1984)

A starlet in England, Annabel Christopher achieves fame and beauty in Italy and succeeds in building a public image by the help of her Italian film director and his secretary in Muriel Spark's (1918-2006) *The Public Image*. It is located in Rome and the sun shines: "It was the middle of Friday morning. The sun shone gold-brown on the expanse of parquet floor, in room after room" (5) and "[...] the sunlight on the floor, was at the back of the building, removed from the more boisterous traffic of Rome" (6). Despite the signification of the weather *The Public Image* mostly focuses on Italian society's sense of solidarity.

Besides the humorous way Spark narrates Maggie's endeavours to get Hubert out of her villa in *The Takeover*, Italy signifies beauty with sunshine despite its inevitable outcome heat: "Hubert Mallindaine's terrace had a view of the lake and the Alban hills folding beyond" (6) and "[t]here was a heatwave so fierce you would have thought someone had turned it on somewhere by means of a tap, and had turned it on too high, and then gone away for the summer" (7). Yet the beauty of Lake Nemi is influential:

The very panorama of Nemi, the lake, the most lush vegetation on earth, the scene which had stirred the imagination of Sir James Frazer at the beginning of his massive testament to comparative religion, *The Golden Bough*, all this magical influence and scene which had never before failed in their effects, all the years he had known the place and in the months he had lived there, suddenly [the house] was too expensive [to afford]. (8)

Hubert of course is not the only one who enjoys the view, he is supported by the American Jesuit, Father Cuthbert Plaice "What marvellous weather! That's the thing about Italy. You can sit outside in March" (11). The heat of the summer is mentioned very specifically: "It was an exceptionally hot August. He [Hubert] didn't like Rome in the heat" (59-60), "We [Maggie] are leaving for Sardinia next week- out of this frightful heat!" (57); "It was mid-September and still the heat of summer hovered far into the nights of Rome and its surroundings. Tonight, at Nemi there was a faint hill breeze, hardly enough to flicker the candles through the open doors of the dining-room balcony" (73); and, "It was a hazy hot afternoon towards the end of June. Beyond the ranges of the Alban hills you had to imagine the sea, for indeed it was there, far away, merging invisibly into the heat-blurred sky-line" (152). Thus, Spark mentions the heat of each month specifically along with the panorama.

On the other hand, in *The Only Problem*, Spark repeats the denotation of the Italian weather, though the novel is not set in Italy. In the eighties, the Italian autostrada (highway) and the trip to Florence cause Harvey and his wife Effie's separation since the latter steals chocolate from the supermarket and justifies her act by stating that it is against the rich. Thus, the autostrada forms the context for the couples' separating point and the weather conversely is not the oppressive heat, but cool in Spring. Later on, Effie gets caught in Rome and when released from the prison she becomes a Communist terrorist. Interestingly, Spark's Italy signifies a context for drastic change, Italians are not included and the image is contrary to the beauty and happiness it inspired in the sixties.

William Golding's *The Paper Men* (1984)

William Golding (1911-1993) in *The Paper Men* also alludes to the "autostrada" along with the Tuscan region which has the Apennine Mountains as its backbone. For Wilfred Barclay, an English author who runs away from his wife and the American professor of English Literature Rick Tucker who wants to write his biography, Apennines are a source of inspiration: "There, hanging in the fringes of the Apennines [...] I wrote *The Birds of Prey* in next to no time, with no more than five per cent of myself" (25). The Italian atmosphere has the effect of emitting peace after spiritual turmoil: "Three hours after I was in a plane bound for Florence and another hire car. By early evening I was driving through the Apennines on my national home, an autostrada. I was calm, watching the motionless landscape stream past [...] and I was my own master" (95) and "I remember sitting and, as they used to say, discussing a very tolerable bottle of wine and watching the sun set in the general direction of Rome, and deciding that I was at peace" (100). The mention of the sun and heat is inevitable though: "The sunglasses! That was why the morning sun was now trying my eyes!" (97). However, the heat is yet oppressive: "[B]ut no matter how long I waited I could feel the heat inside me and the heat outside me for the

day was sweltering. It wasn't ordinary daylight, it was incandescent daylight, not sunlight at all but an atmosphere with a luminescence in it [...] Even the circle of sea round the island had an odd, brassy look about it" (120).

Anita Brookner *Family and Friends* (1985)

Although penned in mid-eighties, Anita Brookner's (1928-2016) *Family and Friends* emits nostalgic overtones about Italy and Italians since the context is the Second World War similar to *Private Angelo*. The novel is partly set in Italy; The Cariani family runs a music school in London and one of the owners Sofka's two sons, Frederick, marries Evie whose "real" home is on the Italian Riviera, where her father owns several hotels on that "blistering strip of coast" between Nice and La Spezia (76). Evie's father hopes in time "to bring them into line with his more prestigious establishments in San Remo and La Spezia" so, Frederick is "overjoyed. He loves the sun; he loves hotels; he loves company. He is tired of the factory" (81-2). Frederick and Evie settle down in Bordighera a small seaside resort:

the weeping skies of London, a city which now appears to him small, huddled, grey, and unheroic [...] Frederick, acute always to the implications of colour, outline, the elegance of silhouette, the charm of appearance, far prefers this little town, where, under skies as blue and as cloudless as the inside of a painted cup, he can stroll down the Corso Italia and see nothing less harmonious than the jagged leaves of an overgrown palm tree [...] Frederick will see oranges and lemons growing on trees; he will see and smell the café with its gusts of vanilla and its squawking coffee machines [...] the golden light that illuminates Frederick's early morning excursion will have effectively blotted out the sparse colour and harsh winds of London, where he feels he would no longer be at home. (141-2)

The beauty of Italian ambiance thus becomes the metaphor of ease, idleness, happiness and eventually home for Frederick, a source of salvation from London. The sensuality of his experience is reinforced by immediate repetition in the narrative:

In the scented night Evie and Frederick take their late walk, arm in arm, sometimes hand in hand. The sky is now an impenetrable indigo, yet along the horizon there is still a faint smudge of salmon-coloured brilliance. The wind rustles the leathery palm leaves and the oranges and lemons glow on the trees as if lit from within [...] calm in the conviction of another beautiful day tomorrow, under the same unalterable sky. No wonder Frederick never seriously considers going home again. (150)

Accordingly, Frederick "appears to have dematerialised into the Riviera sun" (183).

Jonathan Keates' *The Strangers' Gallery* (1987)

Set in a historical period similar to Waugh's *Helena*, Jonathan Keates' (1946-) context is the Spring of 1847. Like *The Public Image*, the Italian landscape is depicted at the inception. The British protagonist, Edward Rivers is nineteen, lonely and bored until a chance encounter with the beautiful Italian girl Cristina Bentivoglio changes everything. Despite the historical context of the novel, the representation of the land is timeless, the beauty remains the same:

Imagine a broad, flat plain, its western distances bounded by the bluish-grey bar of the Apennines, and everywhere else towards Ferrara, Bologna or Mantua stretching away in a limitless regularity, a mirror of the infinite world. Put upon this blank a grid of ditches and channels, each with its level bank, striping the yellow and green fields. Add to this the ranks of lacy poplars, the grizzled brick bell towers of the churches, and the absolute roads laid point to point across the landscape like pieces of tape, with a rationality born less of benevolence than of despair. Here and there, gently intrusive to the design, stand the farms and country houses, in parks of beech, chestnut and elm, with big colonnaded barns, discreet chapels and mounded ice-houses in the grounds [...]. Summer makes the towns and villages of the unshaded plain turn colour in the heat [...]. In this workaday country, without pose or suavity, the traveller reckons with the sublime commonplace, a directness in lights, shapes and colours which lingers naggingly in the mind's eye. (1)

Just as in Golding and Brookner this beautiful landscape becomes a spatial metaphor of epiphany for the main character: “He [Edward] had learned, without the least encouragement or direction beyond the promptings of his own heart, to love this landscape because of the way in which it and he had both found one another out” (189).

Tim Parks’ *Cara Massimina* (1990) and *An Italian Education* (1996)

Tim Parks (1954-) also alludes to sunshine after rain in the introduction of the novel:

The twilight had a curious liquidity about it that had to do with the freshness after an afternoon’s rain and the way first streetlamps stared into the dying light. It wasn’t a moment to hurry, Morris thought. It was a moment to loll outside a bar sipping a glass of white wine and feeling the space between things, their weight, their presence. It was a moment to watch the shadows sharpening slowly and coolly as daylight bled away and the lamplight strengthened- to watch the colours die on stuccoed walls when the bright neon stabbed out beneath. A magic moment. (1)

However, the cliché for the Italian sunshine becomes ironic in Parks’ portrayal of Italy. While everything goes wrong for the English teacher Morris Duckworth in Verona, when he writes home to his father it is delineated as “[e]verything’s fine here. Never rains. Splendid sunshine” (14). Nevertheless, the heat prevails along with the sense of idleness as in all the previous novels so far: “The prospect of this summer, looming as an interminable scorching hot lazy blank, nothing to do” (40); “They [Gregorio and Morris] sat sipping wine under a torch of a sun”(49); and, “[t]he sun was boiling, the air unpleasantly still [at Vicenza]” (61). Morris kidnaps his student Massimina for a handsome ransom from her rich mother, while she thinks they are eloping. They arrive in Rimini, a fashionable seaside resort on the Adriatic coast and the sun and heat accord with an excuse for the unthinkable crimes Morris commits acting on impulse: “The weather was too hot. Far too hot to think straight” (103). Ironically, even after having murdered an Italian man and his English girlfriend to stop them from talking about his kidnapping Massimina, the Italian landscape has a soothing effect:

The train pulled out of Termini [Rome] towards two thirty and for the rest of the journey Morris hypnotized himself into a state of calm, gazing out of the window at brilliant yellow June corn broken by row after row of vines. If you didn’t move your eyes to focus on any particular spot the effect of the shining green of the vine leaves against the golden carpet of grain became quite soporific and by the time the train pulled into Rome, shortly after four, his mind was completely empty, drained; and perfectly operational. (145)

Furthermore, Parks is the only writer who criticises the way of life and climate in Britain comparing it with Italy sarcastically,

[t]he boat plied a sea the blue of brochures. Not a ripple, not a cloud on the horizon. Certainly none of those awful northern buffets which made the Anglo-Saxons feel so gratuitously heroic. His father, for example, insisting they hold firm on the beach despite a near gale that lifted the sand and threw it in angry handfuls against the rented windbreak. You’d have thought they were the rearguard at Dunkirk for God’s sake [...] And then when Morris had started whimpering because he was cold and still damp from the sea (yes, you had to *swim* for Christ’s sake), then it was the moment for dad to explode with his ‘pansy’ and ‘cry-baby’ [...] and Mother would pour oxtail soup from one of a battery of thermos flasks, putting another towel round Morris’s shoulders (183) (emphasis original)

Another comparison between Italian and British weather is repeated in Parks’ *An Italian Education* (1996) a non-fiction where he honestly talks about every aspect of his experience in Italy with his Italian wife Rita and their two children. When they are at the beach at Pescara, Parks comments “where I was brought up, if you got down to the sea at 8.30 in the morning, you would freeze to death” (3) and “if you set up a sunshade on the beach at Blackpool, where I lived as a child, the chances are it would be blown away. Even with a huge cement base” (3-4). On the contrary in Pescara the sea “scarcely moves at all on summer days. Or it is as if a broad dishful of water were tipped ever so gently this way and that” (4). Whereas, when you went swimming at

Blackpool “you pulled off your clothes in a hurry and were shivering before you’d got your costume on. To fight the cold you ran fast across the beach through shallow water, or on a hard, ribbed sand that hurt your soles” (5) but, the sun is “scorchingly hot” in the “[m]iles and miles of white beach [of Sardinia]” (200) in *Cara Massimina*.

Sarah Woodhouse’s *Meeting Lily* (1994)

Though written within the last decade of the twentieth century, Woodhouse’s (1950-) fiction also covers the time of the post-war Italy. It is the story of an English woman’s survival in Italy after her husband’s death, trying to run a small hotel in the popular British setting, the Tuscany region. “For two years since Nan had been widowed strangers had come and gone admiring the views, Pisa, Assisi, Perugia” (3). However, symbolically “[t]he Italian sun did not penetrate beneath her wide-brimmed hats” (4) so, Nan was always pale. Only during the course of the novel does the Italian sun starts to transform her character. As a result of her life in Italy after her husband’s death, her character develops into her own particular individuality and strength.

Nan adds British touch to the ambiance of beauty in her own way:

The house was silent now. Heat enveloped it but did not penetrate. The tall old rooms were cool. On the terrace the Hazelwells dozed, surrounded by discarded guidebooks, maps and postcards. ‘Idyllic place, marvellous scenery, Assisi round the corner’ began one message home. In the hall Nan’s vases of flowers were ghostly in the dimness, great white peonies and roses in romantic profusion [...]. The drive, between myrtles and cypresses, was dusty and deserted. (6)

Moreover, another outcome of Nan’s improved inner strength due to her love of Italy is her financial survival:

She had begun it only because Robin died [...] ‘What can I do?’ she had asked Umberto Degnare the lawyer, fuddled with grief and chaos. There was no money coming in from anywhere [...] Degnare, consoling but businesslike, had said encouragingly, ‘There is always the villa, signora.’ The villa was large and comfortable, was undoubtedly charming. And did not English people love Italy, love charming shabby elegant old houses where they could feel at home instead of loud new defective hotels with rapacious staff?’ (6)

Hence, Nan starts to run the villa as a hotel; Villa Giulia. It is not the main character only who adores the sun; the hotel guest, old Mrs. Baghot, who eventually becomes a permanent resident at the villa also falls in love with Italy, taking walks very frequently and enjoying life. For the Italian housekeeper Maria, “[t]hat woman’s strange in the head [...] But, no, no, she’s an old lady feeling the Italian sun. Let her walk in the garden. Four, five o’clock in the morning” (9). Villa Giulia becomes the metaphor of liberation and the sun the means of happiness together with the beauty of the land for Mrs Baghot who suffered because of her husband, “[t]he narrow road to Cittavigile wound first between cypresses. Here Molly Baghot might have lingered to look out across fold upon fold of hills, chequered all shades of green” (9). Consequently, the metaphor of the constant sunshine and beautiful land alludes to paradise and idyllic life as a form of salvation for the two English women after the long struggle with affliction:

Nan and Robin had come to the villa in ‘47. Though there were still ruins elsewhere the war had apparently passed by Cittavigile clinging to the flank of its remote hill. For two years after this life had been a perpetual summer holiday, even when the rain fell or the mist closed in from the mountains. After the years of looking after her mother, after the queues, worry, boredom, dread of war, Nan let herself sink into idleness as into a blessed and restoring bath after hard labour. (18)

Italy is also the signifier of a new life and rebirth in Woodhouse’s narrative. It becomes the symbol of a carefree life under a perpetual sun which has added powers: “‘We can have another child,’ Robin said, and for his own sake and for hers he rushed her away to Italy and the green hill and the Villa Giulia ‘and sun’, said Aunt Dot, who believed implicitly in its healing powers” (174).

Michael Dibdin's *Così Fan Tutti* (1996)

Dibdin (1947-2007) names his detective novel in accordance with the gay mood and the harmonious title to the opera *Così Fan Tutte*⁴. Naples form the context and moreover, the plot is similar to the main flow of the opera. The two daughters of the rich lady Valeria Squillace fall in love with the men who are not considered as proper, hence, their love is tested. The love story is parallel to the detective novel genre adding mystery, Mafia and murder. Dibdin's main character detective Aurelio Zen is not British but Italian. Dibdin is the only British writer in the second half of the twentieth century who has no British characters in his Aurelio Zen series of Italian detective novels. Despite this fact, nevertheless, he carries on with the same basic topics that the other British writers allude to in their novels with British characters. So, Aurelio Zen leads Lady Valeria Squillace's daughters Orestina and Filomena "out into the bright wash of sunlight overlaying the town [Naples] and beyond" (12). When the daughters are sent to London, the contrast is sharp "'So how are they finding London?' he [Zen to Valeria] asked. "'They say it's just as dirty as Naples, the traffic's even worse, there are more beggars and it's cold and raining'" (120). In Dibdin's Naples, the view of the landscape is enriched with the presence of the sun and the city: "It was a large, comfortable silence, as unconstrained and embracing as the hazy sunlight which coated every surface around them, or the blowsy air which shifted caressingly to and fro. In the extreme distance, the ghostly outline of the peninsula of Sorrento could just be made out, like an old print bleached out by the sun" (29).

Barry Unsworth's *After Hannibal* (1996)

Unsworth's (1930-2012) conventional Italian sun and the beauty of the landscape signify more complex means in this novel. Initially, for the British couple the Chapmans, Umbria, which is the region next to Tuscany represents the conventional metaphor of beautiful landscape and fine weather even in April:

From their landing window, broad and deep-silled, the Chapmans had a view which included a piece of the road, a narrow, yellowish ribbon rising and curving between terraced olives and a field of young maize. They had stopped on the way downstairs to look out. 'Oh, to be in England now that the spring is there,' Harold Chapman declaimed [...] 'It was nine degrees centigrade in London when we left, and outlook variable. Seventeen here.' [...] 'Not a cloud in it.' He glanced at his wife, Cecilia [...] The view from their holiday villa in Umbria, recently acquired, [...] there was the curve of the road, the ancient olives, the stiff green shoots of the half-grown maize. Above this the land rose in terraces of vines, bare still between their tall posts. Then the beautiful dipping line of the hills, half-melted in the pale-blue haze of morning, with the walls and towers of little towns nestling here and there among them, places whose names Harold did not know yet, but he knew that some of them had been old already when the Romans came. (2-3)

Nevertheless, the foreshadowing of Cecilia's liberation from her husband Harold is parallel to the theme of self-acknowledgement just as it had been for Edward in *The Strangers' Gallery* and Molly Baghot and Nan in *Meeting Lily*. Besides the spatial beauty, Umbria helps Cecilia Chapman to analyse her true feelings and her relationship with her husband Harold. The beginning of conflict is foreshadowed by their discussion on the colours of nature:

Immediately below them there was a peach tree in first flower, the buds a deep rose colour [...] 'My God, the peace of it,' he said. 'Heavenly, isn't it?' Cecilia turned to him [...] 'Darling, look at that patch the man turned over for us. It has dried from the deep brown it was at first. It is a reddish ochre now, the true Umbria colour.' She suddenly felt the moment to be a prophetic one. 'It is like us,' she said. 'We will settle into our true colours here.' 'Well, we are not likely to dry out,' he said. 'Not with all this wine around. I should have thought that the true colour of Umbria was umber.' 'Umbra is a pigment, not an earth colour. It was just brown really'. (3-4)

⁴ "Women are like that" (tutte is plural for feminine but Dibdin changes it to tutti plural for "all")

By the end of the novel, Cecilia is able to recognise her true feelings and realises that she has nothing in common with her husband. Harold is vulgar and thus she decides simply to leave him and go away. Nevertheless, she does not intend to go back to England but decides to go somewhere else in Italy:

The sun was high overhead. She was aware of the heat on her face and the blaze of the flowering bloom all around her and the strong, sweet scent of it. A sense of fierceness of this place came to her, dispelling her tears. The day was cloudless and the air very clear; she could see the roof of their house below her and the road and the broad valley with its fields of sunflowers and maze. Beyond this, the gentle wooded hills and the blue shapes of mountains behind them.

She had loved the landscape of Umbria ever since first seeing it as a young girl. It was she who wanted to have their house here. Warm in colour, at once fertile and spare, old in its connection with man, it had always seemed to her a place where she could be happy. (201-2)

Tim Parks' *Europa* (1997)

The oppressive heat has an explicitly negative force on the moods of characters different than Spark's *The Takeover* and Italy signifies a trap for Jerry Marlow while the novels' chronological sequence near the end of the century. When Jerry and his French mistress Christin argue Jerry says "I was shrieking at her on a hot afternoon in her Verona flat" (88). Vikram Griffiths, Jerry's Welsh-Indian colleague claims his "psychopathic ex-wife, always plunged into the most extreme of depressions by the hot August weather" (229) and the night when Vikram comes to dinner at Jerry's and tells about his sad and pervert life story "[b]ut then it was Ferragosto⁵ in Milan, and the weather suffocating" (231).

Annie Hawes' *Extra Virgin* (2001)

Though a memoir, I include it for Hawes' (1953-) book denotes that the metaphoric idyllic life of Italy is still attractive for the British writers in the new millennium:

Enough lurking in the London gloom, skidding home exhausted through greasy city dark and drizzle. What did I care about a career? Or real estate, for that matter? Freelance horticulture would do very nicely. So here I am, middle of February, in Italy and ready to graft. San Pietro may correspond hardly at all to any idea I have previously formed of the Italian Riviera, but it is undeniably a great improvement on London. No more miserly damp horizons stopping twenty feet away at the nearest office block. Here they stretch up into the misty foothills of the Maritime Alps on the one hand, down into the intense blue vastness of the Mediterranean on the other. The sun shines warmly even at this unlikely time of year; the sky is blue; and I am seeing plenty of both. (4-5)

Clouds and Rain

Apart from the beauty of the dazzling Italian sun and the fascinating landscape, what rain in Italy might signify for the British authors becomes another interesting theme to explore. Going back in the timeline order of the novels to detect rainy weather, it is revealed that the cypresses always rise against a clear blue sky in Linklater's *Private Angelo*, Waugh's *Helena*, Murdoch's *The Italian Girl*, Spark's *The Public Image* and *The Takeover*, that is between 1946-1984. However, Spark's final book *The Only Problem* (1984) contains an episode on a cloudy day in Italy, though the novel is set in France:

Harvey had written Effie off that time on the Italian *autostrada* about a year ago, when they were driving from Bologna to Florence- Ruth, Edward, Effie, Harvey and Nathan, a young student-friend of Ruth's. They stopped for a refill of petrol; Effie and Ruth went off to the ladies', then they came back to the car where it was still waiting in line. It was a cool, late afternoon in April, rather cloudy, not one of those hot Italian days where you feel you must have a cold drink or an ice every time you stop. (14)

⁵ 15th of August

The clouds foreshadow the conflict that arises between Effie and her husband Harvey as Effie steals some chocolate from the supermarket where they stop. Although Effie justifies her act as against capitalism, this does not convince Harvey and he leaves the group at the next gas station: “They lost the truck at some point along the road, after they reached Florence. Harvey’s disappearance ruined Effie’s holiday. She was furious [...] they were travelling along the Tuscan coast stopping here and there. It would have been a glorious trip but for Effie’s fury and unhappiness” (16).

In *The Strangers’ Gallery*, “[t]he rain outside fell more heavily now” (23); “[t]hey [Edward and Basevi] could hear the rain tumbling onto the young leaves of the sycamores in the garden outside” (25). Nevertheless, this storm is transitory and does not cast a foreshadowing on the narrative in general: “The storm on the day of his fateful embassy to Guido had offered a single niggardly concession. Otherwise the hot weather trust itself upon them with a renewed fierceness” (184). Similarly in Parks’ *Cara Massimina* “[t]he twilight had a curious liquidity about it that had to do with the freshness after an afternoon’s rain and the way first streetlamps stared into the dying light” (1), the rain refreshes the beauty of the city and has a positive metaphor of renewal “[a] magic moment” (1). Later on, when it is “[a] surprisingly dull morning with a spot of rain, but bright for Morris” it has no negative connotations (115). Finally, non-premeditated, but still an act of terrible crime, Morris’ murder of Massimina is foreshadowed by rain, which is not refreshing any more “Roberto drove them home early after a sudden thunderstorm had washed out the idea of drinking late on the beach. The rain was heavy and persistent” (204).

In Woodhouse’s *Meeting Lily* rain is used more explicitly as a adverse signifier: “The morning was misty. ‘Is it going to rain?’ asked Mrs Holland who did not expect rain to fall while she was on holiday” (60). “The heat was oppressive. There was a sudden roll of thunder and a few drops of rain [...] Large raindrops spattered the windscreen, stopped, and drummed down again furiously. Alan Prescott craned to see the road. ‘Some holiday!’ he said” (68). Here the rain signifies their negative mood, as Nan is jealous of Fortunio’s little affair with Mrs. Prescott and of course likewise, Alan Prescott of his young wife’s. Contrary to the other writers included in this essay, Woodhouse mentions rain realistically: “The weather was capricious for a few days [...] The Greenways, [Americans] who were not enjoying themselves, asked Nan mournfully, ‘Should it be like this?’ for they had imagined Italy eternally scalded by the blessed sun” the narrator comments ironically. So, Nan points out “‘Well, there are mountains” (153).

For Dibdin’s *Dead Lagoon* (1994) rain is the most suitable metaphor for Venice, since the convention goes back to Shakespeare’s enigmatic Venice. As the title connotes, the lagoon is formed by the Adriatic that surrounds Venice. It is another mysterious detective novel featuring Aurelia Zen and this time rain and the ghosts that La Contessa Ada Zulian claims to see in her home create the perfect atmosphere for rain, mist and crime. Dibdin’s setting is poignant at the beginning of the book: “Over towards Marghera, a bloated sun subsided into a dense bank of smog, dwarfing the striped stacks of the refineries. Giacomo noted the rippled layers of cloud spreading across the sky like wash from a motorboat. The weather was changing. Tomorrow would be squally and cold, a bitter north-easterly *bora* raising choppy seas on the lagoon” (1) (emphasis original). The rain image elsewhere in the novel is also used with negative adjectives: “The pale rain is still falling limply, covering the pavements in a greasy sheen and raising a rash of pockmarks on the surface of the water” (6). The sunlight is always diffused, “[t]he sun, barely veiled by haze, set up blocks of shadow seemingly more solid than the surfaces from which all substance had been leached by its slanting, diffuse light” (18) and “[o]utside, a warm wash of diffuse sunlight flattened every perspective, obliterating details and distinctions, calling everything into question” (49). Dibdin uses rain along with fog which is highly factual for Northern Italy: “By morning, a dense fog settled on the city. When a combination of high tides and strong onshore winds flooded the streets with the dreaded *acqua alta*⁶, the council posted maps showing the zones affected and the routes on higher ground which remained open, but the fog respected no limits” (101) (emphasis original). Actually, Charles Richards claims that “[t]he statistics may show that more rain falls on Rome than on London” and that “rain is never merely rain. It is always precipitation. Milan’s airports are closed more often by winter fog than is Heathrow” (“Introduction” xx).

⁶ “High water” i.e. when the rains cause flooding in Venice

Nevertheless, the Italian fog affects the mind as the narrator maintains “Zen got up from his desk and walked to the window. Now the fog seemed to have penetrated not just the building but also his mind, woozy from the wine” (114). The cold and snow also accompany the fog in Venice:

At first it looked as though the clouds which had hidden the sun for most of the week had fallen to earth like a collapsed parachute, covering every surface with a billowy white mantle. The next moment, shivering at the bedroom window as he clipped back the internal shutters, Zen thought vaguely of the *acqua alta*. It was only when he became aware of the intense cold streaming in through the gap between window and frame that he realized that it was snow. A sprinkling of fat flakes was still tumbling down from the thick grey sky. Every aspect of roofs and gardens, pavements and bridges, had been rethought. Only the water, immune by its very nature to this form of inundation, remained untouched. (245) (emphasis original)

Despite the rain though, the beauty of the landscape persists: “Although the sky was overcast, the air was clear enough to reveal the snow-clad Dolomites over a hundred kilometres away to the north” (248). When the snow clears away the effect of weather on the psychology of the characters is explicit:

The house did not feel quite as cold as the day before, and when he threw open the window it was clear that a thaw had set in. All but the largest heaps of snow were already gone, leaving only a faint sheen of water which made the worn paving stones gleam like a fishmonger’s slab. Diffuse sunlight lent a vernal suppleness to the bright, clean air. It was a day for assignments and excursions, a day to tear up your plans and arrangements and make things up as you went along, preferably in the company of a friend or lover. (276-7)

To set the tone, Dibdin uses the condition of weather at the beginning of each chapter, such as: “The day might earlier seemed an augury of spring, but by mid-afternoon the realities of February had asserted themselves. Once past their peak, both the warmth and the light faded fast. Darkness massed in the chilly evening air, silvering the window of Zen’s office to form a mirror which perfectly reflected the decline of his hopes for the Durrige case” (305).

It never rains in Unsworth’s *After Hannibal* (1996) but conversely in Tim Parks’ *Europa* (1997) rain signifies Jerry’s sad trip to Strasbourg- where while they try to present the problems of the expatriate university teachers’ case in the European Parliament, -their colleague Vikram Griffiths commits suicide “[s]o that even as we pull out of Piazza dell’Università into the morning traffic on Corso Vercelli in this strange city I have lived in for so long of stone and trams and noble façades and Moroccans selling boxes of contraband cigarettes laid out on the pavements under propped-up umbrellas- because it’s raining, as it will in Milan in May” (1).

Dibdin’s *A Long Finish* (1998) takes place in the northern part of Italy, in Piedmont. Just like in Venice the rain is in harmony with his moods and signifies the detective Aurelio Zen’s feeling of loneliness and the ongoing murders: “The sudden appearance of cold winds and relentless rain after so many weeks of glorious late summer weather was trying enough in itself” (42). Zen is in a small town in Piedmont: “There had been nothing sparkling about Asti at nine o’clock the previous night, however, with a blustering and buffeting wind and sheets of rain which spattered on the platform like liquid hail” (42). Zen is so troubled about his mistress’ having an abortion to lose their baby that he starts walking in his sleep and the dark mood of the town accompanies him throughout: “When he (Zen) emerged from his hotel the next morning, the sky had settled back into a grey, overcast mode which brought it down to a point where it seemed to graze the rooftops” (183). The bad weather in Piedmont region is alluded to Venice: “Outside the window, the landscape had started to ripple and break into waves, curling lazily over like the slow, spent wash of Adriatic storms fetching up on a mudbank in Zen’s native lagoons. But the sky looked threatening” (191). The diffused sunlight that Dibdin also chooses to use in his earlier novels is repeated, but the metaphor of the “baby’s ear” signifies his sadness at the loss of the baby by abortion, who he believes to be a boy and even names him as Marco: “Zen got back to his hotel late that afternoon [...] Above the wavering outline of the darkening hills, the sky was a molten glory, ranging from a creamy peach to a delicate glowing pink like sunlight filtered through a baby’s ear” (209). When it shines the allusion to children keeps up the baby metaphor, “[l]ike some children, the following day was born with a mild, sunny disposition which time merely focused and intensified. The air was still and bright, with just a hint of winter to add some welcome edge, the sky as flawless, bleached blue whose diffident haziness made it seem infinitely distant and desirable” (332).

In Parks' *Destiny* (1999) rain in Genoa signifies Christopher Burton's grief for his son's suicide; "bundled into our son-in-law's car [...]. In normal weather, Giorgio said, a couple of hours [...]. We sat at the traffic light with the rain drumming torrentially on the roof [...]. The rain was loud" (54).

Consequently, rain signifies a negative representation for the characters and events in the aforementioned books in general and moreover, of the oncoming events, rain or fog foreshadows trouble in human relations. It rains in Italy mostly in Parks' and Dibdin's novels; for Parks, I would suggest that his quite realistic perspective is the outcome of his living in Italy for a long time and the postmodern turn in his narrative; as for Dibdin, enigmatic cities accompanied with rain and fog are perfect signifiers for his crime fiction. Furthermore, besides the beauty of idealised Rome, enigmatic Venice and the most favourite Tuscany area, there are industrialised cities like Milan gradually included in the British perspective. However, as we have seen bad weather is not a commonly used signifier for Italy when compared to the abundance of sunshine and blue skies. The weather is also mostly intertwined with the depiction of beautiful Italian cities. On the other hand, the topic-wise readings of the narratives also reflect the transformation that Italy and Italians themselves went through, proceeding from the post war idyllic rural Italy of the forties to the miraculous development of technology and urbanisation of the seventies and finally to becoming one of the strongest economic forces of the European Union. Thereby, the British writers transform their perceptions along with Italy when the novels are explored in a linear order. To conclude, in terms of the beauty of the landscape during the second half of the twentieth century, the Italian sun of "then" keeps on shining "now", but it is also pointed out that it rains in Italy, even during the beautiful summer days in the beloved Tuscany.

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