

Rural Writing

Rural Writing:

Geographical Imaginary and Expression of a New Regionality

Edited by

Mauricette Fournier

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INTRODUCTION

FROM REGIONALIST LITERATURE TO LITERATURE OF THE REGIONALITY

MAURICETTE FOURNIER

*The region is then a topos, a place for argumentation from which the
discourse of regionalism — the anamnesis of a traumatic loss — can begin*

—Roberto Maria Dainotto

A sign of the contemporary porosity of the social sciences and humanities, researchers of various nationalities, from two main disciplinary fields, geography and literature, have contributed to the present book, centered on the writing and representations of the rural space and regionality. This interdisciplinary dialogue is a continuation of the epistemological Spatial Turn generated by postmodern criticism which, since the years 1960-1970, has endeavored to rehabilitate the place, on the one hand of narratives, on the other hand of space. Globalization and the awareness of the spatial transformation of the world has led the human and social sciences, like literary studies, since the 1980s especially, to carry out a "Spatial Turn" (Soja, 1989; Lévy, 1999) and to consider that space is fundamentally a component of the complexity of the social. At the same time, the geography, discipline of space, made a "cultural turn", which led it to take an interest in literature, individual and collective representations of the world or spatial imaginaries, first in the Anglo-Saxon world (Tuan, 1978; Pocok, 1988), before extending to Francophone research (Lévy, 1989; Brosseau, 1996; Dupuy, 2009).

This "geographical turn" has had an impact on the outlines of the different academic disciplines, as well as on their reciprocal relations. The general interest in spatiality has allowed for rapprochement, a dialogue between geography and literature (Brosseau and Cambron, 2003; Bédard and Lahaie, 2008). Thus, for twenty years, a new literary geography has emerged, diffused by the works of Franco Moretti (2000 and 2008), Bertrand Westphal (2007 and 2011), Michel Collot (2011). This is further

illustrated by the increase in collective publications (Lévy, 2006; Tissier, 2007; Rosemberg, 2007; Dupuy and Puyo, 2014 and 2015; Madoeuf and Cattedra, 2012; Fournier, 2016 ; Peraldo, 2016).

Literature and geography are therefore linked. The novel in particular appears as an instrument of knowledge allowing by the detour of fiction to explore the real. At this prism, literary geography has often chosen to observe the urban universe (Madoeuf and Cattedra, 2012) according to the preferences of the writers of the last century. Although, corollary of urbanization, many artists (writers, painters...) seized, as early as the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century, the city as object and scene of their reflection on a world under construction, it has not been the same for rural areas.

It is clear that, with some exceptions, until recently the countryside's representations have been shaped by the writings of a ruling class (Bergounioux, 2014). Thus the production conditions explain largely the symbolic appropriation of rural areas by various ideologies. The regionalist literature, with a predominantly ruralist coloring, was important in France during the Third and Fourth Republics (with authors like Henry Pourrat, Jean Giono, Marcel Pagnol filmography), but also well represented in other countries (e.g. José Maria de Pereda in Spain, or Patrice Lacombe in Canada, or Verga and Federigo Tozzi in Italy). "*Regionalism* [writes Francis Langevin (2010)] *sought to reorganize the system of attribution of authority between a region considered peripheral (to the global marginal influence), and a center (with overdetermined global influence)*". Anne-Marie Thiesse (1991 and 1993) showed how these literary demonstrations were, in France, skillfully recovered for various purposes by political discourse: it was a question of repatriating, into the national "central" imagination, the peripheral regions, whose symbolic attachment remained fragile for historical reasons.

In recent decades, however, beside the "country novels" or "terroir novels" that follow in line with the rustic trend initiated in the nineteenth century and meet real popular success given the importance of printing, more demanding productions have emerged. These writings often fed by a sense of loss and the end of a certain agricultural lifestyle also explore the contemporary reconstructions of rural areas, little publicized. They redefine a new "regionality" (or a new "provinciality") a term recently used by Francis Langevin (2010), as less militant and certainly less connoted in its nostalgic links to the land. Various researchers have begun to analyze the expressions of this new "regionality": Sylviane Coyault (2002) for France, Stuart Taberner (2004) for Germany, Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Manet van Montfrans (2002) in the Netherlands, etc. As a

follow-up to this research this book proposes to revisit the rural areas and their representations in contemporary writings, in popular and legitimate cultures, in order to draw a global landscape of current countrysides and new regionality.

By "writings" we mean literature in all its forms - novels, autobiographies, tales (chapter 10), songs (chapters 5 and 11) - but also audio-visual productions (chapters 9, 13, 14, 15 and 16). The book is divided into four parts. The first has for object to present an overview of the new literary expressions, in connection with the transformations of rural areas in various parts of the world. The following two parts illustrate two particular geographical areas, the French Massif Central and the Francophone America (Quebec, Acadia), concerned both by the same problems of contemporary representations of a new regionality, sobering to identity issues, authenticity, transmission of the memory and values in a globalized context. The last part focuses on it more in a particular genre, detective stories, in novels and on screen, investing more and more rural areas (here from Italy, Outer Hebrides, Russia, Québec) to give them new representations.

Rural textuality: permanence and transformation of peripheral areas

The first part of this book concerns the rural textuality, the continuities and transformations that affect peripheral areas, which are increasingly often described by contemporary writers. The first chapter starts on an observation: scholars of the social sciences and literati, who have focused their research on the geo-literary approach, often contrast "high" literature with the popular terroir novel. This contrast continues to be very topical, particularly in the French context. **Marina Marengo** does not propose to demonstrate the supremacy of the neorural novel over the terroir novel, or indeed the opposite. Instead, she attempts to understand how two very different literary forms have contributed to building the spatial imaginary of rural France (whether in terms of peasants and rural society of the past or right up to the present) which underlies current European agricultural policies and/or the promotion of French rural heritage.

As in France, in the last decade, several Iberian writers have dedicated part of their literary production to the representation of the rural space and their writings reflect the deep changes that have transformed the land during the 20th century. **Maria Dasca** shows that writers such as Francesc Serés (1972), Ramon Erra (1966) and Joan Todó (1977) have developed a critical view of the present rural milieu by which they overcome the

traditional ideological opposition between rural and urban space. The goal of her paper is to examine the representation of these contemporary marginal spaces, some of which were troubled by the Spanish Civil War or the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe. She focuses on the role of memory in the creation of emotional realities related to personal and collective identity.

The study of the literary representation of rural Spain continues with the contribution of **Joan Tort Donada** and **Rosa Català Marticella** who seek to provide an overall vision of the idea of rural in the works of Josep Pla, generally considered to be the writer that has made the widest and most meaningful contribution to Catalan contemporary literature. Josep Pla defined himself as a farmer, because of his own family background. In fact, the works of Josep Pla suggest two directions explored in this essay. They appear on the one hand, as a key for discovering the contemporary meaning of the countryside and the rural world, not only in Catalonia and Spain, but also in the European context, and, on the other hand, as a tool for tackling, in a creative manner, the great questions and challenges the rural world must face in the second decade of the twenty-first century – that is to say, in the era of globalization.

This part is concluded with an article devoted to Lebanon from the study of the novel *Poste restante* by Hanan El-Sheikh. Although the work of this author is an ode to the city of Beirut, the presence of the campaign, embodied by the Bekaa, holds a special place. Even plagued by drug trafficking – it is a haven of peace, opposed in all respects to the danger of the constantly bombarded Lebanese capital. The writing of the author reinforces the sensitive dimension compared to rural areas, dimension that **Nora Semmoud** and **Florence Troin** try to highlight, especially via the translation by the narrative maps. The novel thus reflects a particular relationship to war-torn areas. They are the extreme images of some socio-spatial concepts discussed by geography (fragmentation, border) and – of particular interest to us – the marginalized spaces. The underlying idea of this paper about "Poste restante" is that the war exacerbates the emotional relationship to space. The work, thus forcing the trait of the dimensions of the lived and perceived spaces, gives special light on this input of geography.

To conclude, **Mauricette Fournier** proposes a reflection on the contribution of literature to the territorial sciences (in particular geography and anthropology). She is based mainly on two stories, *Espèces d'espaces* by Georges Perec and *Miette* by Pierre Bergounioux, to show how these writers participate in redefining spatiality and regionality.

New expression of regionality in the French Massif Central: literary revival in search of authenticity

This section, dedicated to the French Massif Central, starts on a paper by **Antoine Marty** and **Mauricette Fournier** who study the setting diachronic perspective representations of the Ardèche mountains in the song “La Montagne” (The Mountain) written by the French singer Jean Ferrat in 1964 and the current website of the Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park. They want to highlight the relations between geographical imaginary and the territorialization process of space and mutual co-construction between representations and dynamics animating the territory. The comparison of the geographical imaginary carried by the two media (song and website) can highlight the systemic evolution of space: from the end of the rural society and the rural exodus to a development of tourism and recreational, to an idealization of the past which gives back an attractiveness to the territory and capitalizes on a territorial identity perceived as strong and rich.

The three following contributors have chosen to analyze *Pays Perdu*, by Pierre Jourde, a book published in 2003 that became “known” for its poor reception, and more widely the work of its author on the issue of authenticity. This short narrative has been nurtured by his knowledge of his family’s land, in Lussaud, a hamlet in Auvergne, where about twenty peasants reside, an ageing population that lives modestly from traditional farming, a tradition on the verge of extinction. Pierre Jourde’s text presents the reader with not only a series of portraits, but also with anecdotes and reflections on peasant life, its roughness and beauty. Jourde’s tribute was not appreciated by all the inhabitants, and some felt contempt and indiscretion. Therefore, in 2005, they greeted him with insults, threats and blows. Ten years after the publication that severed the author’s relationship with his former neighbors, Pierre Jourde published a text with a biblical title, *La première pierre* (2013). In this essay, the Parisian iconoclastic critic expresses his self-criticism partly questioning his writing, partly convincing his reader of the legitimacy of his pictorial ode to the “lost country”.

Based on several works of Pierre Jourde, *Pays perdu* (2003) and *La première pierre* (2013) in the first place, but also *Géographies imaginaires* (1991), *La littérature est un sport de combat* (2015), etc., the analysis of **Annie Jouan-Westlund** investigates the various power dynamics at play in the autobiographical work positioning the author as an authority figure over the farmers who inspired his characters. While debating the author’s claim to an “authentic” piece of literature, the study

analyzes the impact of the farming community's social structure and its media coverage on *Pays perdu*'s reception. This exploration of the multiple textual and non-textual fictional representations leading to a misunderstanding of the text, addresses the limits of creative freedom when the expectations of "rural" readers are not fulfilled and the "city" writer, like Pierre Jourde, is considered a traitor.

For his part, **Jérôme Cabot** aims at reconsidering the novel in order to define its aesthetic, anthropological and social dimension, and to study, also, why the inhabitants that it portrays received it badly. He finds that contrary to conventional local color literature, in *Pays perdu*, the description of Lussaud is based on a blurring of space-time landmarks which breaks away from the homotopic consensus and celebrates a "smooth space", complicated with conflicting geographical references, pre-industrial anhistoricity, legends and myths. For the author, the text gives nobility to the little hamlet, in a mock-heroic manner which raises the common everyday life up to epic, turns humble people to heroes, makes prosaicness aesthetic, and gives a metaphysical sense even to the cow dung. This paradoxical eulogy produced an unacceptable text, which exhumes the dead and converts the oral memory, its secrets and its taboos, into written Literature. Thus, *Pays perdu* was intrinsically doomed to offend, trapped by the difficulties of any non-native literary speech.

Finally, **Pierre Couturier**, geographer, addresses the question of the relationship between literature and social sciences from the writings of Pierre Jourde. He finds that in *Pays perdu*, Pierre Jourde binds in a same feeling of loss, beings and places. Subsequently, taking a reflective look at his novel, Pierre Jourde develops the link between the loss and the "sense of place", which leads him to the question of authenticity in literature. Pierre Jourde comes to assimilate the search for authenticity rather than the "typical" that hides the truth. The paper examines to what extent this allows literary viewpoint to inform and enrich the debate within the social sciences between supporters of authenticity as analytical category and those who confined it to a native class.

New expression of regionality in francophone America: tensions between memory to transmit and values to share

This second part with regional character leans on documents highly varied (novels, movies, tales, even toponymical inventions) to explore new expressions of the regionality in francophone America (Quebec and Acadia).

Marie Pascal is based on two classic novels – *Séraphin, Un homme et son péché* (Claude-Henri Grignon: 1933) and *Le Survenant* (Germaine Guèvremont : 1945), to study the theme of rurality, enhanced here in two of its main aspects: the Catholic religion on the one hand, and the family on the other. The two literary characters – both eponymous – illustrate the fragility of rurality, however rooted on secular beliefs and habits and are very well adapted for the screen on the edge of a new century and therefore, for a new public. Indeed, the two directors (Charles Binamé: 2002; Éric Canuel: 2005) enhance, develop, and worsen the literary characters' transgressive aspects through several crucial sequences of their filmic adaptations. In doing so however, they but accentuate the implacability of rural life which in the end leads to the failure of the two figures of marginality. The paper proceeds to these questions: how is the rural order represented in the two novels and how do the different types of transgressions – intratextual through the study of marginality and extratextual through the directors' additional scenes – only accentuate the fact that rural life will endure.

Pierre-Mathieu Le Bel and **Aurore Mirloup** studied the case of the Municipality of Saint-Élie-de-Caxton, Quebec, interesting by its contemporaneity and its commercial success. This town has seen its destiny change following the success of the work of the storyteller, poet and writer Fred Pellerin. Since the early 2000s, the work of Pellerin served as a lever for development for the municipality. A tourist trail has been created associated to his tales, supported by maps and audio guides on which the visitors hear the author himself narrate traditional myths, historical anecdotes and his own inventions. This author can be considered as creating a link between a secular rural oral memory and the contemporary urban reader. Pellerin's tales become a mediator between locations. The paper studies the narrative processes mobilized by Pellerin to see how texts create a specific geography. Then it explores how the texts content is instrumentalized by local actors as they use literary tales to value isolated rural areas, and which aspects of the socio-spatial representations are adopted by visitors.

For her part **Marie-Laure Boudreau** is interested in Acadia, a rural French settlement in the New World that had well-defined borders. Following the "Great Deportation" of 1755, its people have been scattered throughout Europe and the Americas. As a result, its official borders on the map dissolved. Today, people still identify as "Acadians", even if there is no clear geographic boundaries defining Acadia's territory. Where is "Acadia" today? If most people who identify as Acadians live in rural areas, there are also those who live in urban areas. Acadians, who share

cities with antagonistic Anglophone communities (such as Moncton, New Brunswick) or live as "exiles" in other North American cities, often long for a rural home. Drawing on concepts borrowed from Yi-Fu Tuan about conceptual appropriation of a territory, this article explores place names and landscape description in Acadian contemporary songs as an attempt to localize a place called "Acadia".

Finally, **Ekaterina Isaeva** analyses a peculiarity of language: the use of periphrasis for secondary naming of Quebec place names. Periphrasis as a process of language and discourse while accentuating the expression of the text presents a new image of the object as it holds additional information. In the case of place names, the first information about it often falls into oblivion in the collective memory. And the secondary naming is used in the media today, titles and / or signboards. Periphrasis replaces toponym with a pictorial expression containing more words and thus more information. The reason for the creation of a periphrastic toponym is in the desire of individuals identifying themselves with the same language and culture to present an important place's quality shared by everybody. The periphrastic toponyms are not only rich in expression but contain judgments of the world and oneself. In this context, Quebec periphrastic place names represent an undeniable scientific interest in verbal-cultural approach.

Noir in the countryside: rural areas in detective novels and crime films

Alessandra Bonazzi recalls that the strategy of the writer Andrea Camilleri for avoiding the so-called "disenchantment with the world" is to construct for one's characters a land made up of different parts, shaping and structuring a land based on reality. But she describes what happened during the nine seasons (from 1999 to 2013) of the televised version of the detective novel series featuring Inspector Montalbano as the progressive voiding and systematic "cleansing" of the "half-made-up places" that form the settings of the novels written by Camilleri. The very human clutter of the "invented land" was transformed into a silent empty landscape. With a sort of hyperbole the landscape established its independence first from the novel and then from the action, becoming a stage whose function was the (global) reconstruction of an imagined Sicilian geography. Thus the paper looks on at the broadcasting of a progressive transformation of the landscape into a geographical imagination irreducible to reality, though quite effective for their very concrete repercussions on reality itself.

In her paper **Oksana Dognon** tries to distinguish the opposition of the rural side to the big city in Russian Mafia cinema, as well as its influence on the viewer. She shows that the influence of the rural appears to be the benefactor to the Russian Criminal protagonist: the rural often turns a hard personality of the criminal into a human being, as is illustrated by the example of the film "Boumer" which shows the representation of the rural and its influence on the evaluation of the four criminal friends. The originality of the Russian mafia cinema genre was, in some cases that it was produced and performed by former criminals: for example Vitaly Demochka, a former criminal, became a producer and an actor, a peculiarity of his story, that he transferred his real life into the movie. Thus, the former members of his criminal group have become actors in his film "Spets" and heroes of his novel "Special".

Franck Chignier-Riboulon was interested in the work of Peter May, a Scottish novelist, now living in France. Among his detective stories, the Lewis trilogy takes place in the Outer Hebrides, a far west archipelago, separated from the Scottish Mainland by a dangerous strait, The Minch. Isolated for centuries, Gaelic culture has survived until now in these islands. In his books, Peter May makes comparisons between the 50's and 60's with nowadays. The author shows how May plays with former decades to present changes and continuities, overall in cultural aspects. By showing religious behaviors or the black skies of the archipelago, the writer helps readers to re-discover a world away, a despised territory. Moreover, the paper explains how May has tried to restore the image of Gaelic culture, associated for a long time with under-development and a backward world, and, finally, participated in a renewal movement for a very weak Gaelic culture and a still poor people.

In his paper about *Sous les vents de Neptune* [*Wash this Blood Clean from my Hand*] by Fred Vargas (2004), **Christophe Gelly** focuses on the only novel in which this French detective fiction writer places her recurring investigator, superintendent Adamsberg – a character whose traits are very much indebted to a whole tradition of French crime fiction – in a foreign environment, namely in Ottawa where he is being trained on DNA profiling. The aim of his study is to show how the image of Canada is reconstructed on an imaginary level, noticeably as far as language is concerned, which enables the author to depict her character's investigation and method quite differently from the way they appear in her other novels. In this outlook, Christophe Gelly first examines the issue of realism in the novelistic representation and then focuses on the question of language as a symbol for otherness. These topics are examined according to their specific meaning in the poetics of the genre specific to Fred Vargas.

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PART 1:

**RURAL TEXTUALITY:
PERMANENCE AND TRANSFORMATION
OF PERIPHERAL AREAS**

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE RURAL “TERROIR”
TO THE “NEORURAL” NOVEL:
THE CONTRADICTIONS
AND COMPLEMENTARITIES BETWEEN
POPULAR AND HIGH LITERATURE
IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCE

MARINA MARENGO

The countryside: one territory, many territories

Today as in the past, the countryside and rural areas have often been the subject of interest not only for researchers, geographers in particular, but also of many writers. Nineteenth century French campestrial literature is a classic example and George Sand is one of its better-known exponents. His works have been part of French children’s literature for well over a century. There were numerous literary works, mainly novels, connected to realism, naturalism and verism particularly between the mid-1800s and the early 1900s, which left an important mark on the literary world with regard to ruralism. These authors produced works which became the subject matter of important scientific studies. Nonetheless, some of the early 20th century novels were classified as popular (Thiesse 1993 and 2000), mainly consisting of literary sagas and *terroir* novels (a specific term relating to France and Québec¹). Scholars and literati have rarely appreciated or even respected these works. Over the last few decades, as if in complete contrast to popular literature, a new strand of

¹ The Quebecan fictional genre is defined “du terroir” and it all but disappeared when urbanisation and the urban lifestyle took hold. In recent years it has made a comeback in Quebec, but with a new concept of terroir, which is both rural and urban.

neurural novels has developed in France. The writings of Michon, Bergounioux, Lafon, to name a few, have received recognition from “high” literature, resulting in a renewed contrast between the different genres of literary fiction in France.

Setting aside the French literary diatribes, Unesco’s list of World Heritage Sites bears witness to the renewed interest in rural contexts on a global level. Embedded in this current “race” towards heritisation is an ancient concept, somewhat overused and emptied of profound meaning: the *terroir*. Although today it refers mainly to vineyards and wine production, its origins trace back to the French Middle Ages. From a spatial point of view, *terroir* corresponds to *finage*, that is, the municipal territory. A definition was agreed on in 2010 shared by scholars and local actors in the territory. The *terroir* is

[...] defined as the delimited geographical space where a human community, throughout its history, has built a collective intellectual knowledge of production based on a system of interaction between the physical and biological environment as well as a collection of human factors. The socio-technical paths are defined over time and are specific to it and in practical terms they are established by conferring a reputation to the typicality and singularity of the specific geographical area (Fanet 2010, 4).

Rural literature: diatribes about a very “hexagonal” phenomenon

The two types of novel mentioned above, actually show the two sides of the same coin, despite their profound differences. The *terroir* novel, consecrated by the affirmation made by the *Ecole de Brive* and the *Salon du livre de Brive-la-Gaillarde*², is characterised by the abundance and redundancy of words and the linearity of the writing. Its success with the general public has not prevented it from being considered as an inferior genre. The *terroir* has often been made into a film version or television series, bringing fame and greater literary success, but distancing it further from the “real” rural literature. Nevertheless, the two types of literature are

² *Foire du livre de Brive-la-Gaillarde* was created in 1973. It began as a local event and has now become an international phenomenon, which takes place in a small provincial French town and brings together writers, poets, critics, journalists, scholars and people of letters. Following the success of Claude Michelet’s literary saga, set in a small town near Brive, a group of authors who do not consider themselves *terroir* writers, but rather as literary writers of the local context.

undoubtedly complimentary. The likes of Michon and Bergounioux lead us to the essence of the French countryside, where we go in search of these basic elements of an agricultural and rural world, which represent our origins and our deepest socio-cultural roots, even though they have completely changed over the past century. The *terroir* constitutes the hard core of contemporary heritage processes, in a context where traditional rurality has all but disappeared, and the modern form of rurality has to fend off the onslaught of the urban way of life and production.

Popular literature, in spite of being considered a minor genre, has helped to define the spatial imaginary of France, largely due to the fact that these novels are compulsory reading books at secondary school. Moreover, those who are not accustomed to reading, like the inhabitants of the *terroir* themselves, usually find this type of literature much more approachable. Furthermore, as they are essentially literary sagas, the time span is greater and the transformation of certain features can be fully appreciated, namely: landscapes, local communities and specificity of the farms – from small landowners and share farming with multiple crops to the large farming industries specialised in monoculture or selective animal husbandry. All this without the authors of the *terroirs* considering themselves as real *litterati*, despite receiving literary awards and general acclaim. Claude Michelet serenely stated in his autobiography, *J'ai choisi la terre*: “When the newspaper I worked for closed, I still had the writing itch [...] I kept it up and was drawn toward the novel” (2005, 152).

This ongoing lively debate between *litterati*, as well as high and popular literature, has also had other effects, namely: the identification of new territorial subjects and the instruments to study them, promotion of the local environment and a greater consideration of the contents of projects and processes regarding territorial and cultural marketing in the local context.

Geographical and literary reflections on the *terroir* and popular literature

Pierre Ouellet points out that

[...] *terroirs* offer numerous perspectives, head on or sideways, which add a gravitational pull to one's viewpoint like a stone in freefall. We must take advantage of this because the *terroirs* disappear and our view will be exhausted (1996, 171).

A traditional geographer, like Maurice Le Lannou, had also previously maintained that,

[...] the so-called “localised” novel³ allows us to perceive facts with greater sensitivity, whereas systematic science simplifies and deforms these facts through its processes of classification and risks becoming just a scientific document. [...] The key to its usefulness lies in the description, in the topography of the agricultural landscape (1967, 36).

Jean-Louis Tissier, considering all the literary works as a whole, wrote:

The literary environment is [...] much more than a huge field of “monocultural” text with a poor yield. There are different literary varieties and genres, which establish privileged relationships with the territory. Geographers have not been particularly sensitive to these differences, thus becoming consenting victims of the hegemony of the novel (1992, 240).

Researchers, mainly geographers, have been distanced further by the linearity of the descriptions of popular literature. Only Michel Chevalier, when referring to the *terroir* novel, sustains that

[...] many passages are like “parts” of an anthology, similar to the arrival of a tractor in the hamlet in 1950. One can perceive [...] the evolution of the town, which is not only depopulated, but stripped of its noteworthy residents and tradesmen and replaced by commuters and second homes, thus condemning traditional rural society. [...] It is a shame that no geographer has seriously considered using these literary works (2001, pp. 113-114).

As far as the neurural novel is concerned, it is able to represent the essence of the phenomenon using fewer words and thanks to the “rarefied” writing style, using metaphors and complex narrative techniques, unheard of in scientific texts. Marc Brosseau described this genre as a geographical description without the description (2008). The two types of literature are equally important for researchers, particularly with reference to the rural environment and the processes of change over the last century. The literary works chosen for this part of the analysis regarding the geo-literary approach, give us an insight into the transformation of the landscapes, local communities, the running of the farms as well as the types and methods of production. The analysis will also look into the transformations

³ In this period the concept of terroir had not been appreciated and enhanced from a geographical point of view and there was no talk of heritisation.

resulting from the mechanisation and industrialisation of agriculture, as well as the changes brought about by the European Common Agricultural Policy (C.A.P.).

The combined contribution of these literary works gives us an understanding of how they have contributed to building and transmitting the spatial imaginary of rural areas, whether in terms of the traditional past or the ultramodern present. Nevertheless, it should be noted that from a methodological point of view, the literary quotes in this paper are not used to illustrate the analytical reflections on just one concept, but rather to create a point of discussion regarding the conceptual categories that are being analysed.

A cross-section of the traditional rural world

The plotlines of both neorural and *terroir* novels, take us

[...] to Corrèze and Creuse. Or in Dordogne [...] Somewhere down there, on the edge, of course, but right in the centre: swallowed boundaries [...] It is all about new continents, just drifting [...] places lost in time, as time too is lost, strange upside-down places, rare spaces in danger of extinction, breeds of bastard places (Ouellet 1996, 166).

These places, their boundaries lost, are often indecipherable, not only because they are marginal, but also due the fact that they are so imbued with the vital essences that have allowed entire generations to reach us, but in a form that is no longer clear or legible. In the past:

They ploughed only where the plough was able to churn the soil and until the land became steep. The rest was left as pastureland or moorland, if the grass didn't grow. It is difficult to imagine it now. Only by looking at postcards of the region dating back to the beginning of the century, can you get an idea of what it was like (Bergounioux 1995, 89)⁴.

⁴ The literary quotations in the text refer to the following editions of the novels: Bergounioux, Pierre. 1995. *Miette*. Paris: Gallimard-Folio. Lafon, Marie-Hélène. 2009. *L'annonce*. Paris: Gallimard-Folio, Michelet, Claude. 1979. *Des grives aux loups*-Volume 1. Paris: Robert Laffont, and 1980. *Des grives aux loups. Les palombes ne passeront plus*-Volume 2; 1990. *Des grives aux loups. L'appel des engoulevents*-Volume 3; 1998. *Des grives aux loups. La terre des Vialhe*-Volume 4. The last three published in Paris by Robert Laffont-Pocket.

As well as this osmotic relationship with the land, there was another relationship, between landowner and peasant, which was regulated by a share-cropping contract:

No one knew where they came from, they weren't from the area. They had arrived eight years before, it seems they came from the Brive region, some thirty kilometres away. Foreigners [...] Share-croppers, who cultivated the three hectares of the notary's farm fairly well: two cows, six sheep, a pig and some chickens. They lived poorly, spoke little, and did not get involved in the town life of Saint-Libéral-sur-Diamond. And everyone distrusted them (Michelet 1979, 15).

The lives of poverty led by the peasants sometimes justified petty theft from the landlord's share of the crops. Even poaching was widespread, a source of extra family income, as well as an important source of protein in their poor diet:

[...] many did not forgive him for remaining the incorrigible poacher of his childhood. Everyone knew he still laid traps, but no one had ever caught him in the act. It was obvious he was a fraudulent hunter, but from knowing it to actually catching him in the act [...] the gamekeeper and the Ayen gendarmes had failed miserably to do so (*ibidem*, 83).

In other areas, small properties were common, passed down generation after generation and carrying specific obligations: “Baptiste had inherited the property, the 1930s house, most of the land and the obligation to look after them” (Bergounioux 1995, 16). For this reason there was always someone in the family who was leaving, voluntarily or not. “They said that Adrien had always preferred craftwork to agriculture [...] He left the town to look for work in Paris” (*ibidem*, 16-17).

There were also many small family properties, built up over the centuries, using the strategy of marriage (Fel 1992). As they grew progressively, they were often characterised by fragmented land, which made the farming more difficult and laborious:

As the only son of Mathieu-Édouard and Noémie Vialhe, he had inherited the main part of the current property, eight hectares patiently collected generation after generation by a dynasty of Vialhe, who had passed down the land, knowledge, and the name Edouard, given to all the first born sons. He had added another hectare to the existing eight when he returned from military service. His wife, Léonie, had brought a dowry of two hectares of good fields in 1859. A year later, their son, Jean-Edouard, was born and he in turn had helped them greatly with the farming work. He had

also made an excellent choice, when he married, at the age of twenty-eight, the young Marguerite, ten years his junior, as beautiful as a flower and a dowry of four hectares of high quality fields (Michelet 1979, 26).

The progressive growth and fragmentation of these properties over one or more municipalities, made it necessary to name every plot of land.

Pierre-Edouard loved this immense stretch of land, he felt at home in these fields. He knew everyone by name, at least the ones belonging to the Vialhe. Over there was the Long field with its old oak trees, down there, next to the Caput hill, was the Peuch field, a little further away, the Malides – a wheat field –, still further, the Perrier field and at the very end, hidden by Puy Blanc, was the Big Field, sown with rye. The boy even knew who the other fields belonged to, where the boundary stones were, and he also knew the owners, share-croppers and tenants who worked there. [...] The Vialhe family with their fifteen hectares, eight cows, twelve sheep, two goats and three sows, were among the most important landowners in the municipality. Only the properties of the notary, the castle and a few share-cropping properties owned by people from Terrasson, Ayen and Objat were larger than their farm (ibidem, 17-18).

The reputation of a rural family built up over several generations has been summarised in an exemplary way by this literary description.

Changes in the French countryside in the 20th century

A great change took place in the French countryside at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as in the rest of Europe.

It is no longer possible, after 1920, to live as Miette has, to live as those who had been in the position she now occupied for the last three thousand years. Machinery had to be bought. A new, more spacious, two-storey house will be built, still in granite though. It will be a hundred paces away from the original house where the date of its construction, 1610, is inscribed on the lintel” (Bergounioux 1995, 92).

The younger generation of farmers at the beginning of the 20th century were innovative, not only for purchasing or hiring mechanical farming equipment, but also for using “exotic” fertilizers, such as guano, or even chemicals, alongside the traditional manure: “Jean-Édouard, was gaining independence from old Edouard’s paternal authority [...] He was the first one to use chemical fertilizers, with such expertise as to earn the respect of everyone” (Michelet 1979, 75).