Masaryk University
Faculty of Arts
Department of English and American Studies

English Language and Literature

Kateřina Nováková

Place, Corruption and Disillusionment in Michael Dibdin's 'Inspector Zen' Novels

Master’s Diploma Thesis

Supervisor: Stephen Paul Hardy, Ph.D.

2011
I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

.................................................................

Author’s signature
Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor Stephen Paul Hardy, Ph.D.,

for his kind and valuable advice and help.
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
2. An analysis of *Ratking* ......................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1. Italian regions: Venice, Rome and Perugia ...................................................................................... 10
   2.2. Non-Italian regions: England and the United States ................................................................. 16
   2.3. Place in relation to behaviour, language and memories ............................................................... 20
   2.4. Corruption of state, society and individuals ................................................................................. 23
   2.5. Disillusionment in society and human relationships .................................................................... 35
3. An analysis of *Vendetta* ...................................................................................................................... 41
   3.1. Italian regions: Venice, Rome and Sardinia .................................................................................. 41
   3.2. Non-Italian regions: Switzerland .................................................................................................. 46
   3.3. Place in relation to language, memories, movement and time ..................................................... 49
   3.4. Corruption of the state and the police .......................................................................................... 54
   3.5. Disillusionment in the police force and human relationships ..................................................... 62
4. An analysis of *Cabal* .......................................................................................................................... 68
   4.1. Italian regions: Venice, Genoa and Rome ..................................................................................... 68
   4.2. A non-Italian region in Italy: Vatican ............................................................................................ 72
   4.3. Place related to language and memories ........................................................................................ 75
   4.4. Corruption of religious and police representatives ....................................................................... 78
   4.5. Disillusionment in society and human relationships .................................................................... 86
5. Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 92

Works cited ............................................................................................................................................. 96

Summary (abstract) ................................................................................................................................. 99

Resumé .................................................................................................................................................. 100
1. Introduction

The aim of the thesis is to offer an analysis of Michael Dibdin’s detective novels featuring inspector Zen. Because of the limited extent of this work the thesis will examine only the first three novels of the series: *Ratking*, *Vendetta* and *Cabal*. The emphasis will be placed on gradual development of three areas of interest: place, corruption and disillusionment, which will be analysed within the context of each novel. The findings of the respective chapters will be supplemented with a comparison of similar themes in mystery novels and non-fiction works by British and American authors. However, before the analysis of Dibdin’s work may be started, it is necessary to contextualise the genre itself, the particularities of Dibdin’s style and his main character, as well as the three subtopics which will be explored in the main body of the thesis.

The term detective novel is sometimes used interchangeably with crime or mystery fiction, but it is equally frequently considered to be a subgenre in relation to these two. The crime novel revolves around a crime of any kind, usually a murder, but does not necessarily feature a detective, either private or professional (James, *Povídání* 9-10). Mystery fiction can be perceived as an umbrella term for the novels which use suspense and unrevealed secrets as the basis of the story. The main character of Dibdin’s Italian series, Zen, is a police inspector, and as such can be considered a professional detective. For this reason the thesis will treat the three analysed novels as detective fiction.

The detective story has passed through several stages of development. Its first exemplar, however, cannot be easily traced: works with detective elements reach back to ancient times. P. D. James agrees with those historians who believe that a detective story cannot exist without the official police structure which enforces the law. The Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police was established in Britain in 1842, and this date is therefore considered to be the origin of the detective story (14). Pavel Grym, on the other hand, argues in his treatise on the development of the detective novel that an organized
fight against crime dates back to the ancient Chinese era, approximately 5000 years ago (13). The folk stories have been popularized by Robert Hans van Gulik, who collected and translated those materials which featured the Tang dynasty magistrate Di Renjie and used them as a basis for his character Judge Dee (Furth 77). Dee (alternatively spelled as Di) can be viewed as a detective because the judges in Chinese society also held the office of investigating magistrates. Despite this fact, however, the current section of the thesis will focus on the development of the British detective novel since its creation in the mid-19th century, and it will briefly examine the style of major authors of that period to create a context for the analysis of the Zen series.

In his monograph Peter Thoms compares novels produced by some of the most famous writers, including Poe and Conan Doyle, who have embedded detective elements into their stories. He concludes that “nineteenth-century detective fiction is an inherently self-reflexive form . . . The detective functions as an authorial figure, attempting to uncover the story of the crime, and the ‘case’ becomes a story about making a story” (1). The story is usually woven from the detection itself and from a large variety of external documents: letters, diary entries or newspaper reports. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” written by Poe in 1841 is generally considered to be the first detective story in English. It features an amateur detective, C. Auguste Dupin, portrayed as an eccentric with the ability to read human intentions, who is for this reason distanced from the real world. The story is that of the locked room mystery, which enables Dupin to immerse himself in reading the witnesses’ reports in the newspaper and following a generally abstract path towards the solution of the crime. He also enjoys guiding and impressing his friend by revealing his method of detection (47-50). In this respect he is similar to one of the best-known English detectives, Sherlock Holmes, who also likes to manifest his intellectual superiority over his friend, Watson. Thoms explains that “[t]his competition for storytelling supremacy is a recurring ingredient in early detective fiction (123). Holmes, like Dupin, is an
extraordinarily strong character who completely dominates the story. Its climax is reached by the detective’s confrontation and subsequent defeat of the culprit, which further consolidates the detective’s position.

The golden age of detective fiction marks the second and part of the third decade of the 20th century, when authors like Agatha Christie or Dorothy Sayers wrote their best novels. The main convention of the era was to see a detective story as a game, “written according to certain rules, played by writer and reader, detective and murderer, who were to be engaged only in fair play, and were to produce a just and uncontested outcome” (Danielsson 22). The great emphasis on fairness and strict observance of rules is what differences this stage of development from others. There are twenty rules of the genre formulated by S. S. Van Dine in 1928. The most important ones state that the reader and the detective must have an equal opportunity to solve the case, that all clues must be presented and the culprit revealed by logical deduction without any supernatural forces or secret societies included in the process. There is to be only one detective and one murderer, who has to have a certain social status and personal motives for committing the crime. He must be well-introduced in the story, and the design of his crimes must be developed in such a way that a bright reader can reveal the mystery on his own (Van Dine 189-93).

The works of the second half of the twentieth century are more difficult to categorize. As Karin Danielsson explains in her dissertation thesis,

A detective is no longer only a detective. She or he is likely to be a college professor . . . a Native American or an activist for black, gay, or women’s rights. In this manner . . . contemporary detective fiction has become infused with specialties . . . which has resulted in a great variety of styles, settings, and detectives. (65)

There are no guidelines to be followed any more, on the contrary, the novels of this period delight in breaking all the rules set by the Golden era. They “simultaneously deploy
and subvert traditional detective-story conventions . . . Such writings, marked by their intertextuality, often look back to precursors such as Poe, Conan Doyle and Chesterton, while also establishing relations between one another” (Marcus 252). Dibdin employs intertextuality similarly as other postmodern writers do: conscious allusions to works of his predecessors enable him to create stories rich in underlying meanings.

In an article for *The Nation* magazine Carl Bromley praises Dibdin by saying that his novels resemble “the ‘hard novels’ of Georges Simenon and the dark, subtle paranoias of Leonardo Sciascia’s crime stories, but they also crackle with the fun, puzzles and escapism of Conan Doyle” (30). By comparing his novels with those of the three well-established authors he also implies that Dibdin borrows from all developmental stages of the detective fiction: from Doyle in the early period, Simenon of the Golden age, and Sciascia of the modern period. Examination of Sciascia’s work will be most helpful, because he also sets his novels in Italy.

Professor JoAnn Cannon, an expert on Italian literature, remarks that Sciascia and many of his contemporaries “invariably deal with unjust, corrupt societies” (524). This is one of the features which they share with Dibdin, with the only exception that Sciascia explores his native Sicily, while Dibdin uses a greater variety of Italian regions. Sciascia’s novel *Il giorno della civetta* (*The Day of the Owl*) “deviates from the norms of the genre . . . by letting guilt go unrecognized and unpunished. If reason triumphs on the intellectual plane, it fails on the ethical plane inasmuch as it no longer functions hand-in-hand with the administration of justice” (527). This is a great shift from the virtually unbreakable rule of the Golden age, which required the criminal to be revealed and punished in the end. The reason for this deviation in the modern detective stories is the underlying feeling that “something is rotten in the state . . . [and] the evil at the heart of the case cannot be removed by the identification of a single individual” (Priestman 183). In other words, punishing the murder cannot remedy the situation in society because the criminal is closely
linked to the very gangs and secret societies which were held in contempt by the Golden age writers. Dibdin first introduces the concept of criminal groups in Ratking, but the major secret society does not appear until the third novel, Cabal.

Dibdin’s works may be described as “short, terse, sometimes rather compressed novels that . . . blended the straightforward and counterintuitive, variations on noir, giallo, revenge tragedy [and] conspiracy thriller” (Bromley 31-32). What is more exceptional about Dibdin’s style, however, is that he rarely writes about his native country. In that sense he defies P. D. James’s assumption that “one reason for eschewing foreign locations . . . is that detective fiction . . . invariably involves police procedure even if the detective is an amateur. We move most confident on familiar ground” (Scene of the Crime 8). It is true that Dibdin was not born in Italy and his knowledge of the society and the police cannot be compared with that of a native, but he is sufficiently familiar with Italian way of life because he spent several years in Perugia as a university teacher (Hawtree, n. pag.).

His experience clearly served as a basis of the first Zen novel, which takes place in Perugia, while another real-life, set in Calabria, provided the inspiration for writing Vendetta. Moreover, as Leonard Lutwack explains in his theoretical treatise of place in various genres of literature, “detective stories are commonly played out against the backdrops of foreign scenes because actual places impart a sense of reality to compensate for the extravagant action of such plots and intense action seems to be helped by unfamiliar scenes for its enactment” (29). If we assume that a common British reader is not very familiar with Italian society, we may conclude that Dibdin’s choice of setting resolves to remedy this deficiency. But his aim is not purely educational. By transferring his feeling of being “uncomfortable with contemporary England” (Hawtree, n. pag.) to Italy, he enables his readers, who might feel the same way about their native country, to relieve the discomfort by reading about the same problems, but in a different environment.
What is unique about this method of transplanting problems of one country to another, is that in Italy the issues are redressed even less satisfactorily than anywhere else, and the revelation of the criminals does not provide any comfort. The character who greatly contributes to this state of affairs is Zen himself. He is very unlike the great detective icons of the earlier periods of detective fiction. He is not intellectually superior like Holmes or Poirot, because he does not even “assume a dominant position within the text” (Ryglová 23). His conclusions are frequently mistaken, his methods questionable, and even though he manages to reveal the culprit in the end, he does not succeed in bringing him to justice. Zen is defeated every time, much like Sciascia’s detective, Bellodi, but the difference between the two protagonists is that Bellodi’s “optimism remains unshaken [and he] never fully recognizes the fact that he does not represent this ideal nonexistent state but only the corrupt one” (Cannon 527). Zen, on the other hand, is well-aware of the extent of corruption in Italy, which in his case leads to a deepening sense of disillusionment.

Zen’s character is further complicated by the insecurities in his professional and personal life. In Ratking his promotion seems unattainable and later he finds himself “repeatedly posted away from [his] home beat” (Priestman 183). He is troubled by the disappearance of his father and the excessive presence of his mother. The relationships with women are disastrous: Zen’s first marriage was a complete failure, Ellen, his American girlfriend, left him because of their substantial differences, and the relationship with Tania is unbalanced at best. Moreover, he is perceived as a stranger wherever he goes, because of the nature of place depicted in the novels.

Edward Casey in his philosophical study of the meaning of place states that “to be at all . . . is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place” (ix). Place is therefore an inseparable part of human existence. It can be examined from several points of view: Nicholas J. Entrikin focuses on the geographical approach, which includes the physical area and its objects, both natural and artificially constructed. These concepts can
be endowed with symbolic meanings, which reflect our attitudes towards the place (6-7).

Hardy’s study of relations between place and space further specifies that these attitudes relate “both to the earth and to questions of social organization and hierarchy. They can also be related to questions of region and nation” (9). It is particularly the regionalism which is explored in Dibdin’s novels. The Italy, as he presents it, is not a unified place; on the contrary, it is fragmented into largely independent areas, each with its own traditions and rules of conduct. The tensions arise not only between particular regions but also among larger groups: between the north and the south, and between the city and the countryside. A cultural theorist, Iain Chambers, argues that the city is “is both a fixed object of design (architecture, commerce, urban planning, state administration) and simultaneously plastic and historical: the site of transitory events, movements, memories” (188). The countryside, on the other hand, is generally connected with a sense of stillness, which can be perceived either in positive terms as an ideal environment which needs to be preserved, or in negative terms as a place of stagnancy. In the Zen series Dibdin tends to minimize the differences between the city and the countryside. Both areas can be brimming with life or stagnating; what they have in common is that they are both utterly corrupted.

Corruption in the novel is omnipresent and afflicts all spheres of Italian life, be it the schemes of the political representatives or the behaviour of ordinary people. Its extent varies from simple neglect of one’s duties (with potentially dangerous impact on other people) to ingenious conspiracy plans, violence and murder. It is rarely attributed to a particular cause, because the reasons of its expansion are not always easy to discern. Alfredo Del Monte and Erasmo Papagni offer a theory on the rise of corruption in Italy, which encompasses economic, political and cultural causes. The first cause, they argue, is the intervention of the state in the economic life, which leads entrepreneurs to rent seeking. “Companies respond to the importance of the government’s role by striving to influence political decisions” (7). The political cause is closely related to the probability of
the representatives of the state being caught while taking bribes. The last, cultural, cause takes into consideration the social capital, which is “created from the horizontal networks and relations between individuals, groups and organizations in civil society” (9). Important elements of social capital are the social institutions like the family and the school which increase the level of trust in the society. Considering these three causes of corruption in Italy, the situation described in the novels must be seen as their direct result.

The effect which the corruption has on the population is that of disillusionment. To disillusion means “to depress or cause to feel bitter by revealing the worthlessness of an object of admiration” 1. The people who are holding high offices should be regarded with admiration; if these representatives of the state become corrupt, the common people necessarily start to feel disillusioned. The sense of disillusionment, which pervades the entire Zen series, is closely connected to both place and corruption. Dibdin’s Italy is unjust from the top to bottom; it is a country dominated by close-knit groups of perpetrators who enjoy the benefits granted by the authorities to such extent that the possibility of their punishment is practically nonexistent. It is not surprising that people’s reaction to such circumstances is resignation. When this general feeling of disenchantment is combined with the aspects of place, it changes the perception of one’s surroundings because “the mood of a person has much to do with determining the quality of the places he is in” (Lutwack 37). The knowledge of the disappointing state of affairs may lead people to two conclusions. They either start to believe that life is better in other countries, or they begin to think like the Italians, whose desire to rehabilitate their home regions results in detraction of their neighbours. As a consequence of that behaviour, the inhabitants of other regions or countries are believed to be even more corrupt then they already are, which leads to further alienation and disillusionment.

1 Longman Dictionary of the English Language
2. An analysis of *Ratking*

The first novel of the series, *Ratking*, introduces inspector Zen, who is returning to Rome to resume his desk job at the Ministry of Interior. Before he can do so, however, he is unexpectedly summoned to Perugia to investigate a kidnapping of the head of a very influential family, Ruggiero Miletti. The family is extremely reluctant to cooperate with the police; their attitude visibly changes when their lawyer, Ubaldo Valesio, a middleman in the negotiations with the kidnappers, is murdered.

Ruggiero has four children: Pietro, Silvio, Daniele, and Cinzia, who is married to Gianluigi Santucci; none of the five has a good relationship with him. Pietro and Gianluigi would like to see Ruggiero retire, so that they could assume his position in the family business. Silvio and Cinzia hate him for personal reasons: Silvio has been criticized by his father for unmanliness, while Cinzia was sexually abused. Daniele, an irresponsible dandy, is probably the only one who would not gain anything from Ruggiero’s death; he uses his father as a source of money to cover his expenses.

When Ruggiero is killed after Zen’s failed attempt to deliver a ransom to the kidnappers, the inspector is ordered by his superiors to return to Rome. In the few remaining hours of his stay in Perugia he manages to reveal and imprison the real murderer, Ivy Cook. The Englishwoman is a close friend of Silvio – in order to convict her Zen exploits their relationship and blackmails the man with compromising photographs, which he retrieves from Santucci. Even though only few believe that it was really Cook who murdered Ruggiero, the case is solved to everyone’s satisfaction. Ivy Cook uses her connections to escape justice; it is assumed that she has left the country. Santucci’s involvement in the kidnapping is not revealed, so he, as a gesture of good will, persuades Zen’s superiors to promote the inspector to the office of Vice-Questore.
2.1. Italian regions: Venice, Rome and Perugia

As was suggested in the introduction, the Zen series depicts Italian regions as enclosed, relatively separated places. People from each region are convinced that they are superior to those around them. The only example of unity between the regions, however temporary, is created during a meeting of people from the north and the south of Italy, and only because the enmity between these two areas surpasses the petty disputes and differences between single regions.

An instance of such a meeting is depicted as soon as the beginning of the novel. Zen travels on train with several other people, one of them being a Veronese (a Northerner) and another one a Roman (a Southerner). A heated debate arises about the necessity of order in the society; this view is defended by the old Veronese. The young Roman doesn’t agree, but his opinion is influenced by the perceived division of the country, “What you want, signore, this famous ‘order’ of yours is something un-Italian, un-Mediterranean. It’s an idea of the North, and that’s where it should stay” (Dibdin, Ratking 11). It is interesting to notice that the young man first denies order to be Italian at all, while he subsequently attributes it to the North, thus implying that the North is in fact not „typically“ Italian.

Zen’s standpoint in this discussion is also notable. Despite the fact that he himself is from the northern city of Venice, he agrees with the Roman, because he doesn’t want to live in an overly ordered society. He prefers the “burning energy” and “irresistible drive and flair“ (13), which is embodied by two young Romans in the corridor. The irony is that those two lively young men rob the whole company, including Zen, in the next moment, thus supporting the opinion of the Veronese. The course of the debate is further intensified by the old man’s horror at realizing that Zen is not only a policeman who didn’t prevent the robbery from happening, but also a northerner like himself, “But I am from Verona! And to think you disgrace us like this in front of these Southerners!” (14). The message is clear: the man is more indignant about Zen’s betrayal than about the robbery.
itself. The notion of place, in the form of socio-geographical divide in the country, has considerable weight.

The most important city of the series is Venice, its significance established by the fact that it is Zen’s birthplace. It is then surprising that there is very little concrete information about it in either of the three novels. Ratking is the most revealing of the three, stating that Zen comes from Cannaregio district (126). Other references to the city come from two sources: from Zen himself, and from people who are introduced to him and talk about Venice only to spite him. It is obvious that neither of the parties is impartial. For Zen, Venice is the ideal place of his childhood, while for the others it is a rival city and an excuse for having a good laugh at Zen’s expense.

Zen frequently compares Venice to Rome, praising the first and vituperating the latter. This attitude also fits into the general feeling of animosity between the north and the south, even though in Zen’s case there is one exception, as the discussion on the train to Rome revealed. There he took the Roman’s side solely because of his dislike of order; under other circumstances, Zen is no admirer of Rome. Especially because Venice is Rome’s “living antithesis, a city so light it seems to float“ (13). Another comparison with Rome also evokes lightness and gentility of Venice. When it rains in Venice, the city welcomes “water in any form, perfectly at home with drizzle or downpour“ (316). Zen doesn’t show any negative feelings for Venice in the course of the novel; the city in his conception remains an ideal, though almost certainly imagined, place. This depiction is in agreement with observations made in Arthur Symons’ travelogue, which assert that Venice “has been painted by every painter. It has become a phrase, almost as meaningless as Arcadia. And indeed it is difficult to think of Venice as being quite a real place” (Cities 75).

Zen’s view is confronted with other, less idealistic observations. When he conceals the truth of what happened to him after dealing with the kidnappers by saying that he was involved in a traffic accident, his explanation raise laugh from the doctors who treat him,
because “for want of practice, Venetian drivers are proverbially supposed to be the worst in Italy” (Dibdin, Ratking 143). Another person who mocks Venice is Daniele Miletti. The young man tells a joke during a family dinner in front of Zen to offend the inspector: “I’ve always been told that the policemen in Venice have one wet shoe. You know, because when they’ve finished their cigarettes they throw them in the canal and . . .” (58). Although it seems that the remarks are aimed against the people who live in the city (the drivers, the policemen) and not against the place itself, there is always a connection. The drivers’ lack of practice is likely a reference to the city whose transportation consists mostly of waterways, while the joke draws attention to the fact that people in Venice cannot extinguish a cigarette by stepping on it because of the supposed lack of solid ground in the region. The two anecdotes clarify that it is the individual character of place where people live that influences their behaviour or incompetence, rather than the people themselves.

If Zen’s Venice is the symbol of all that is good and beautiful in Italy, then Rome is the place of the utmost corruption and ugliness. Zen is forced to live in the city because of his job, and he has little affection for the place, except for the claim that he used to like his Roman flat while he lived there alone. “The nearest he had come to a personal feeling for the place had been an appreciation of its anonymity: it had been like living in a hotel” (22). People do not attach themselves emotionally to hotel rooms, so if this is the best that Zen can do, it says a lot about his distaste for the capital city.

To make things worse for him, he is deprived even of the cherished anonymity of the flat by his mother, who was forced to move in with him. She fights against the idea until the very end, “Rome? Never!” she cried. ‘I would be like a fish out of water’” (21) but in the end she has to accept. It is not clear from the novel whether Zen’s mother shares the sentiment of her son that Rome is a despicable place, or whether her reluctance to leave Venice is caused by fear of the unknown.
In the extension of the quote about the rain in Venice, Zen says that Rome is “a fair-weathered city, a playground for the young and the beautiful and the rich, and it [deals] with bad weather as it [deals] with ageing, ugliness and poverty, by turning its back” (316). The contrast of imagined attitudes towards such a simple thing as rain is exerted by Zen to criticize the Roman society, but the comparison seems to be greatly exaggerated. The reason for this is that Zen has never learned “to like Rome, never be at ease with the weight of centuries of power and corruption there in the dead centre of Italy, the symbol and source of its stagnation” (13). It is questionable though what he means by the dead centre. It is certainly unusual to refer in this manner to the country’s capital city, which is bound to be bustling with life – if only because of the tourists. The word “dead” more likely describes Zen’s feeling of the city, the sense of the civilization on the verge of a decline.

There is another approach to Zen’s belief that Rome is a dead place. In a sense, it really is. “The whole of Rome is one vast museum, in which the very galleries, palaces, churches . . . are themselves but single items in that museum which is Rome. And what gives to all this precisely its special charm . . . is that Rome is still a living city, the capital of a nation, and with an actual life of its own” (Symons, Cities 17). If Zen apprehended only the antique part of the city, he might reached the conclusion that Rome is dead. But is it possible for anyone to ignore the characteristics which another person ascribes to a lively city? He can, if he does it on purpose. By constantly comparing Rome and Venice, Zen doesn’t only criticize the first, but also praises the latter. In other words, it is essential for Zen to show Rome in bad light, because as a result, Venice gains further glory.

Even though Zen often thinks and talks about Venice and Rome, the main setting of the novel is Perugia, the centre of the Umbrian region. When Zen arrives in the city to start investigating Ruggiero Miletti’s kidnapping, his awareness of Perugia is limited to the stereotypical image offered in the tourist brochures, “Perugia, he thought. Chocolates,
Etruscans, that fat painter, radios and gramophones, the University for Foreigners, sportswear” (Dibdin, *Ratking* 26). None of these people and items are of much interest to Zen at the beginning, but as the story progresses, he learns that the radios and gramophones have been perfected by the Miletti family and that the University for Foreigners played a minor role in criminal activities of Daniele Miletti. In the course of the novel, Zen realizes that Perugia is less conventional than he originally thought.

Perugia is a city with its own characteristics but it is also similar to Venice in one way: various characters tend to compare it with Rome. When Zen enumerates the local commodities, he also reads that “‘Umbria [is] the green heart of Italy’. . . What did that make Latium, he had wondered, the bilious liver?” (26). Latium is naturally the region in which Rome is situated and its geographical location corresponds with the position of heart and liver in human body. Bilious by extension means “suffering from liver dysfunction [and] it is indicative of a peevish ill-natured disposition” (“Bilious”). Zen’s comment is perfectly consistent with his vision of Rome as the heart of Italian corruption.

Another part of the relation between the capital and Perugia is revealed when Zen is welcomed to his new workplace. Chief Iovino calls Zen’s transfer “a symbol of the historic relationship between Rome and Perugia” and Zen silently adds that it is “a relationship consisting of two thousand years of bitterly resented domination” (Dibdin, *Ratking* 31). This scene is one of many which combine place with corruption and/or disillusionment. Iovino’s speech is seemingly warm and amiable, but in reality the opposite is true, and Zen knows that. Its purpose is to humiliate Zen and show him where he belongs. For the Perugians he is a representative of Rome; they will talk respectfully to him, but they will hate him fiercely. Their attitude symbolizes the universal hatred of the peripheral to the centre.

The last person who mentions Rome when speaking with Zen is Antonio Crepi, a family friend of the Milettis. He says about Perugia that “it’s a city on a human scale, not
too big, not too small. Whenever I go to Rome, which nowadays is almost never, I feel like I am choking” (37). The likely reason for feeling this way is Rome’s overpopulation, but it is equally possible that Crepi puts more emphasis on the “human” character of Perugia, which is in contrast to “inhumanity” and facelessness of Rome. In this respect the two men share common ground.

The remark about the city being not too big and not too small is more problematic. As Ryglová hypothesizes, one of the typical features of Dibdin’s novels is a “dual perception” of the setting. “The town of Perugia . . . is described as both an administrative centre of Umbria . . . and a rather dull small town with no sense of its own identity” (85). The conception of Perugia as a centre of the region is well-founded in the text, but it is not possible to agree with the statement that Perugia does not have identity. This would be true if Zen kept his initial view of the city. But during the investigation he realizes that Perugia has many faces.

Arthur Symons glorifies Perugia as “the empress of hill-set Italian cities” (Sketches 111). The city was indeed founded in a hilly area but its local colours added another meaning to the geographical description. When Zen and Bartocci head for a walk, the young magistrate warns Zen that “it’s uphill, like everything in Perugia!” It was a measure of Zen’s state of mind that he found himself wondering whether the words had more than one meaning” (Dibdin, Ratking 85). Bartocci’s remark could pass as an innocent warning against a tiresome exercise but in the light of the magistrate’s preoccupation with possible conspiracy, it is difficult to ignore that “an uphill task” is one which needs a lot of effort and its outcome is debatable. Independently on what Bartocci really meant, this is certainly a fitting description of the fight against crime in Italy.

The above-mentioned dual perception of the setting has another important function: it connects place with the presence or absence of corruption. When Zen reads the report on Ruggiero Miletti’s kidnapping, he observes that “Perugia is blessed with a crime rate
among the lowest in Italy” (42), which is why there were only few policemen on duty during the crucial night. This remark indicates that the act of kidnapping was merely an exception to the conduct of the law-abiding Perugians. But as will be demonstrated later in the thesis, Umbria has its own dark secrets. Some of them are revealed to Zen by Baldoni, an officer in Perugian Drug Squad, who has lost his illusions a long time ago. He discloses to Zen that Perugia is now “crossroads of international terrorism” (166). This means that Perugia is not perceived only as a regional centre on the human scale, as Antonio Crepi would have it, or as a rather backwater city, where people live contentedly without committing crimes, but also as a great centre of criminality. It is possible to conclude that the multiplicity of perspectives is integral to Dibdin’s approach.

2.2. Non-Italian regions: England and the United States

Italian regions have been portrayed as independent units which value themselves above all other parts of Italy. Zen dispraises Rome to elevate Venice, Antonio Crepi believes that Perugia is the best place to live in Italy. The regions form a temporary alliance when a larger adversary – either the north, or the south – appears on the scene. But this is not the only instance when the regions join forces. The whole of Italy becomes united when a foreigner emerges. The Italians, independently of their place of origin, grumble about the situation in their country but by comparing themselves to the foreigners they indirectly show that, in spite of their problems, they are superior to other countries. Ratking introduces two main “others”, the English and the Americans.

There are two characters in the novel who are connected with Englishness. The first one is Ivy Cook, who is an Englishwoman by origin, despite the fact that she was born in South Africa. The other one is Pietro Miletti, an Italian to whom the English features are merely ascribed by other people. Ironically, Ivy Cook is shown as less foreign (and therefore less unacceptable) when she is revealed as a killer, than when she poses as an
innocent English secretary. Corruption is inherent to Italy. When Ivy kills Ruggiero and uses her connections to escape justice, she loses the aura of foreignness, previously characterised by the lack of taste in clothing. This is not seen as a flaw of character, but as an influence of her nationality. When Ivy and Zen go for the meeting with the kidnappers, the inspector evaluates her looks. “Tonight’s colour scheme was more sombre but just as tasteless: chocolate-brown slacks, a violet pullover and a green suede jacket. ‘You’re English, then?’ The association of thought was clear only to him, luckily!” (126). Obviously, a person who is dressed tastelessly, must be an Englishman. By extension, such a person cannot be an Italian, because Italians always dress smartly. It is a first example of imagined differences between places – between the nationalities.

This feature is more evident in the character of Pietro. He is not loud and passionate, which is why he is perceived as more of an Englishman than Italian. It is first emphasized by Antonio Crepi, who warns Zen that Pietro “acts like the model of an English gentleman, all vague and shy and diffident” (63-4) but the inspector must not let himself be fooled by him. It is established that an ideal Englishman has all of these qualities, which are, however, viewed necessarily as a sign of weakness in Italian society. Zen himself has a very concrete idea of the English character:

Short and plump, with receding hair and peevied expression, Pietro looked at first sight like an English tourist who had come to complain about his belongings being stolen from his hotel room, full of righteous indignation about Italy being a den of thieves and demanding to know when the authorities proposed to do something about it. From his tweed jacket to his patterned brogues he looked the part perfectly: . . . as plain and heavy as Zen imagined the English climate, character and cuisine to be. (111)

This passage reveals many prejudices which Zen, and possibly all Italians, have against the English. Moreover, it shows a link between place and corruption. The first part of the quote focuses on Pietro’s physical looks. It is hard to believe that all people with
these, rather unappealing, features come exclusively from England, leaving Italy flooded with male models and making Pietro a sad exception in an otherwise attractive population. It is reasonable to think that a considerable number of people look similarly to Pietro and that it is only unpleasant for the Italians to admit it. It is easier to attribute these characteristics to foreigners.

The other part of the quote portrays the English as chronic complainers, perpetually dissatisfied with everything. The true purpose of this statement, however, is to divert the attention from Italian corruption. Thus the fact that people’s property can be stolen from hotel rooms is abated in the light of the absolutely unacceptable behaviour of the English tourists. The last part adds to what has been said about English taste in connection with Ivy Cook. She is seen as tasteless, and this, for Zen, also translates as plain and unimaginative. Subsequently, the features of the English people are projected to the stereotypical characteristics of their country.

This is not a completely alien idea, because “setting both influences and reveals character” (James, Scene of the Crime 7) but it seems to be the less common approach of the two. Blommaert explores this problematic from a linguistic point of view in his sociolinguistic study on discourse, and he remarks that “place defines people, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others” (223). A similar opinion is expressed by Walter Mossley, the creator of an Afro-American private investigator, Ezekiel Rawlins. Mossley states that “we are all creatures defined by where we are” and he believes that the writer creates “enough about a place that's true, but only 25 percent of the story. The reader fills in the rest” (Smith n. p.). As will be illustrated later, Dibdin allows the readers to fill in the rest only when Italians are concerned. If foreigners appear in the story, he produces a clear vision, bordering on dogma, and attributes it to Italian characters, which in turn reveals more about their over-simplified approach to other countries.
If the English have been shown as bland, shy and unimaginative, the Americans are their exact opposite. Represented by Zen’s girlfriend Ellen, they are perceived as overly enthusiastic and childish. When Ellen zealously talks about an “appalling mass of barren rock” Zen feels uneasy. “Zen had long given up trying to understand. It all came of her being American, he supposed. Americans had more nature than anything else except money, and they got pretty excited about that too” (Dibdin, Ratking 129). What he fails to notice is that by crediting the Americans with excessive love of nature, he simultaneously reveals the lack of it on part of the Italians.

Another flaw of Ellen’s is her candid nature, only this time Zen does not find it infuriating but rather entertaining. “Zen had always derived much amusement from Ellen’s simple-minded approach to current affairs. Despite her intelligence, she could be quite amazingly naive and literal in her judgements. She seemed to believe that the truth was great and would prevail” (168). Curiously enough, this quote once again says more about Zen than it does about Ellen. It shows that the inspector has lost all his illusions, and by doing this it consequently ties place not only to corruption but also to disillusionment.

The last thing for which Ellen is reproached is her cooking style. “Ellen’s attitude to food had initially been one of the sharpest indicators of her very different background. Brought up to assume that women cooked the regional dishes they had learned from their mother, Zen had at first been both amazed and appalled by Ellen’s eclecticism” (317). Zen continues to explain that Ellen does not limit herself to the regional dishes he enjoys but that she cooks food from all over the world. He attributes this to the idea of the melting pot, ironically adding that the food in her pots does not melt but keeps its “rugged individuality” (ibid.). What is more surprising, though, is his final attitude to the dishes, when he starts to appreciate it. “If the menu was bizarre, the food itself was very good, and it all made him feel pleasantly sophisticated and cosmopolitan” (ibid.). This is the main difference between Zen’s perception of the English and the American. While Cook’s
unconventional style of clothing made him feel slightly repulsed, equally unusual food produces in him a feeling of cultivation. The Americans earn a better position among the foreigners even though they are still not seen as equals by the Italians; this is supported by the fact that Zen and Ellen eventually break up.

2.3. Place in relation to behaviour, language and memories

So far place has been analysed in terms of the particularities of regions, both Italian and foreign, but it has also other, more general functions in the text. Even though it cannot characterise its dwellers by itself, people readily conform to stereotypes when judging others, and these place-related prejudices are often transferred to the characters. The features thus created range from physical appearance, to a person’s behaviour and language use. Place also influences human relationships, functioning either as a bond or an unsurpassable obstacle. Ratking abounds with the instances of people being separated by place, both physically and figuratively. The last role which place plays in the story is that of an agent capable of evoking memories.

The central idea of the series is that “Zen is a foreigner everywhere” (Ryglová 53). The emphasis is not placed on his behaviour (which is, in terms of corruption and disillusionment, in agreement with the conduct of the Italian majority) but rather on his physical appearance. At the beginning of the novel, Zen is introduced as a man with “a faintly exotic air about him, as though he were Greek or even Levantine” (Dibdin, Ratking 10). In the course of the novel, as people become introduced to him and realize that he is an Italian, they use the foreign quality of his looks to allocate him to an Italian region they know only superficially. This is similar to what happens in the short story “Murder in the Rue Morgue”. When the witnesses are asked about the nationality of the murderers, whom they only heard, they agree that the first one was a Frenchman, but „the shrill voice was that of a foreigner” (Poe 133). However, when they attempt to identify him, the
Frenchman believes it was an Italian, the German is certain it was a Frenchman, the English denies that it was an Englishman and believes him to be a German. None of these people are acquainted with the foreign language they heard; comparatively, the characters in *Ratking* are mostly unfamiliar with the Italian region they assume to be Zen’s birthplace.

The most prominent example is that of Cinzia asking Zen where he is from. “No, let me guess. Sicily? Yes, you’ve got Norman blood, I can sense it. Am I right? . . . Venice? Well, it’s the same thing, an island (Dibdin, *Ratking* 53). It is not clear whether Cinzia is really that simple, or whether she only pretends it. Given the criminal reputation of Sicily, it is possible that her remark is a clever insult. Antonio Crepi is more accurate when he estimates Zen’s origin. He is certain that Zen is not a Roman, which in this case serves as a compliment, because Crepi had complained about Rome earlier. Crepi believes him to be a northerner from Milan; the city is located in Lombardy, a region which neighbours that of Veneto. When he later says that he has a connection to the region through his daughter, a little detail which establishes Zen as a foreigner is revealed. The inspector drinks coffee with grappa, a liqueur “originally made in Bassano del Grappa, a town . . . in Italy’s northern Veneto region” (“History of Grappa” n. pag.). People are not labelled as foreigners only because of their appearance but also for the habits connected to the place of their origin.

Another idea which the novel conveys is that people living in different places are so separated that they can hardly communicate with each other. This is exaggerated in the story of Zen’s uncle about a city within the city, where “anyone who boards a certain ferry or walks down a certain street or enters a certain building or goes through a certain door disappears for ever” (Dibdin, *Ratking* 227). Zen muses that this happened to him during the investigation of the Moro affair, when he became inconvenient for certain people and was removed from their way. The place where he entered the other city was the quarter in which his colleague was killed.
People can be separated by place in yet another way – through language. The official language of Italy is Italian, but its pronunciation differs from region to region to such a degree that people are often unable to understand a person from another part of the country. *Ratking* reflects this on a number of occasions. Zen uses the advantage of two dialects being mutually incomprehensible when he talks to his mother. He pauses when Maria Grazia enters the room, but it is not necessary because “they had been speaking dialect, and the housekeeper had not understood” (19). Sometimes, the language barrier limits the communication considerably, as it happens when Zen arrives to Florence (in Tuscany) to interrogate the Calabrian kidnappers. “For the Calabrian the Tuscan dialect called Italian was as foreign a language as Spanish, but Zen dimly perceived the general outlines of the story” (244). Similar difficulties appear when Zen and Crepi inquire about the details of a reported shooting. When they ask a sergeant for directions he merely beckons, but as soon as the driver, Palottino, interferes, he is able to get the necessary information. He succeeds because he recognizes the accent; the sergeant is also a Neapolitan (69). Dialects used by people from different regions function as another barrier, but when people from the same region meet, it creates a bond between them, even if they are complete strangers.

The last ability of the place is to evoke memories and images. Because a majority of the novel is rendered from Zen’s point of view, it is his memories that are revealed to the readers. The most obvious ones are those connected with Venice. However, the place where he lives now is not his beloved city, so its image is distorted. “The part of the city [of Perugia] through which they were walking reminded Zen of Venice, but a Venice brutally fractured, as though each canal were a geological fault. . .” (194). He has a similar experience when he visits Cinzia’s flat (which belongs to her husband) that is so sparingly furnished that it reminds him of his mother’s empty flat in Venice, the one she was forced to leave (204).
Other memories can be more distant, exposing the character’s childhood. This happens not only to Zen, but also to Silvio Miletti. When the Questura empties at the end of the working day, it puts Zen into a contemplative mood. He remembers an analogous feeling of abandonment from the time when he was a child exploring old American warships docked in the Venetian lagoon (234). A childhood memory also emerges when he is injured by the kidnappers and left to die on a cold place. He remembers his father who abandoned him for a while in a wind tunnel (141). Desolate places are generally suitable for examination of the defining aspects of the characters. In the section which is told from Silvio’s point of view the readers realize that his perversion is caused by a childhood trauma. When Zen brings him to abandoned barracks, the place reminds Silvio of an old factory where he used to play and where a stranger urinated on him by mistake. This incident influences the rest of his life; it turns him into an unmanly character despised by his father and courted by disreputable characters, which consequently generates some of the violence and corruption depicted in the novel.

2.4. Corruption of state, society and individuals

In *Ratking*, the readers are confronted for the first time with corrupt practices and criminal activities of Dibdin’s Italy. The gravity of the corruption is carefully escalated so that the effect of the initial manipulation of the authorities fades in comparison with the practices employed in order to solve the case. The central concept of the novel, the one which gives rise to the title itself, is that of a ratking. As Bartocci explains to Zen, it is a pack of rats whose tails have intertwined due to lack of space to such extent that they form a single entity (Dibdin, *Ratking* 92). The situation in the Italian society is similar: there are many unscrupulous individuals who hate and support each other at the same time because they have a common goal. As the young magistrate puts it, “[e]ach rat defends the interests of the others. The strength of each is the strength of all” (93). The main problem with
finding and killing the ratking is that he is too smart; ultimately, the hunt for him appears to be pointless, which leads to further disillusionment.

One person, who is devoid of illusions in the face of corruption is Patrizia Valesio, the wife and later the widow of Ubaldo Valesio. After his death she approaches Zen with the accusation that Milettis collude with the kidnappers. When the inspector suggests that she follows the routine and informs the investigating magistrate, she replies:

“Oh, I shall inform him, don’t worry! And I shall inform him that I’ve informed you. And then I shall inform the Public Prosecutor’s department that I’ve informed both of you. Do you know why I’m going to inform so many people, Commissioner? Because I am expecting there to be a conspiracy of silence on this matter and I intend to make it as difficult as possible for the Milettis and their friends.” (104-5)

In other words, she believes that the Milettis and the people whom she is going to inform represent a single ratking, who will do anything to protect itself.

The fact that Italian society as a whole is corrupt is demonstrated on several examples. One of them is the stoicism with which the Italians accept news of murders and other criminal acts. When Zen reads a newspaper article about Valesio’s death, he notices that “below [the headline] appeared a photograph of a scene which had become as familiar a part of Italian life as a bowl of pasta” (76). It is not surprising that people do not react strongly to events which happen on a daily basis. Under such circumstances it is understandable that people assume neutral position, to protect themselves. What is unexpected, however, is that Italians only pretend to be neutral – they secretly idolize the criminals. When Pietro Miletti meets Zen and Bartocci to discuss cooperation between the family and the police, he explains why Italians feel that way. “A corrupt and inefficient police force directed by politically biased career judges . . . is certainly a contributing factor, but . . . the real reason is that in our hearts we admire kidnappers”’ (115). He also blames people that they admire them because they “don’t like successful people” (ibid.). It is
questionable how objective this remark is; Pietro himself is a businessman and it is possible that he stretches the antagonism targeted at his person to all successful entrepreneurs.

The prosperous are not the only group of people who suffer from corruption, there are also the ordinary people. It is curious though, that one person can belong to both of these groups, as it is the case of Ruggiero Miletti. When Antonio Crepi calls to Senator Rossi at the beginning of the novel, he heatedly points out that the state strives to save the victims of criminal activities only when they are important figures. “When something happens to one of you politicians the whole country is put into a state of siege! . . . But when it’s an ordinary, decent, law-abiding citizen like our friend Ruggiero no one even takes any notice”” (2). The thesis will later prove that Miletti is anything but a law-abiding citizen, but if we accept the predicament with omission of his name, it suggests that common people, despite their own faults, are negatively influenced by the corruption in high levels of the state administration. This is partially confirmed by a Venetian saying which Zen shares with Crepi, ““Whether the water is fresh or salt, turds rise to the top”” (62). The two men talk about the ruthless advancement of Gianluigi Santucci, and Crepi eventually admits that he feels admiration for him, even though he is one of the most villainous men he has ever met (ibid.). The appreciation of the criminals might be one of the reasons why corruption flourishes in Italy.

Another area which reflects the dismal state of state affairs is the railroad service. In the novel it functions as an outlet for pent-up anger. The train scene, which was described earlier in this chapter, renders the Veronese who argues in favour of order in society. His motivation arises from the fact that the train in which they are travelling is late again – a situation that is by no means uncommon. For the old man, however, it is ““symptomatic of all the gravest ills of [their] poor country”” (9). His bitterness continues to grow and he eventually accuses the government of mismanagement, saying that they ““give their friends in the construction business billions and billions of lire to build a new railway line between
Rome and Florence! And the result? The trains are slower than they were before the war!” (10). His statement is exaggerated, because the train was delayed earlier, which consequently lead to disruption of the time schedule, but nonetheless, his example shows, that state management does not work properly and people are dissatisfied with it.

Hand in hand with corruption of state representatives goes the demoralization and inefficiency of the police force. In past, Zen himself became a subject to police corruption, which ultimately led to the premature end of his career. He was investigating the kidnapping of an ex-Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, “one of the most powerful and influential men in Italy, at the mercy of the best known organization of political extremists, [the Red Brigades]” (228). The terrorist organization is not fictional. “The Bologna-based, Marxist-Leninist Red Brigades [was] formed in the 1970s by student protesters dedicating themselves to an armed struggle against the capitalist state” (Westcott, n. pag.) and it plagued Italy until the early 1980s. In Dibdin’s version of the reality, the terrorists are assisted by the Political Branch, who directs Zen and his co-workers. When Zen approaches the quarter where his colleague was killed and where Moro is held captive, he is intercepted by his superiors and swiftly transferred to the Ministry of Interior. Zen relates this to Ellen and when she does not understand why the people with whom Moro had worked turned against him, Zen explains that “[p]erhaps he was no longer really one of them. . . . The ratking is self-regulating, it responds automatically and effectively to every situation” (Dibdin, Ratking 232). The rats who form the ratking recruit from the criminal ranks as well as from the police.

As a whole, policemen in the novel are depicted as no less debauched than the real culprits. They either co-operate with the criminals, or they misuse their power to commit illegal acts. When Zen accounts for the theft of Miletts’ car, he is not surprised that the family already know about the incident. “Zen did not need to ask how they had learned of it. Like every top family, they would have a contact in the force” (239). The fact that every
important family in Italy is believed to have an informer in the police discloses two things: the corruption level among the elite of the country is dangerously high, and the police is too weak to deal with it, which is why they prefer to join forces with the criminals.

Possibly the most atrocious example of police abuse of power happens in Florence, where Zen arrives to question the gang of kidnappers. The captain at first does not want to comply with Zen’s wish to beat one of the prisoners, but in the end the only thing that matters to him is that there are no visible marks on the beaten man. The sergeant who escorts the prisoner, on the other hand, clearly enjoys hurting and humiliating the Calabrian. His remarks suggest that he is well acquainted with this area of police work. Zen himself is not completely innocent either. Even though he does not directly beat the prisoner, he causes him pain by pushing him off balance while he is still handcuffed to bars (242–7). The interrogation is interrupted only because the allotted time has expired – it is not possible to say what practices would have Zen used had he been given more time.

The man questioned is a member of a group of kidnappers who are the main antagonists in the story. They commit several acts of violence: they murder Ubaldo Valesio because he could identify one of them, and they maim a child in order to get Zen’s subordinate to spy for them (254). Their behaviour is brutal, it is unjustifiable, but it is also straightforward. The most horrifying message of the novel is that the kidnappers appear to be less despicable than the members of the Miletti family, who use all available – and usually illegal – means to gain benefits at the expense of other people. When Ruggiero sends a letter to his family, he states that the kidnappers treat him well, even better than his own children. “It is not you but my kidnappers who care for me now, who feed me and clothe me and shelter me while you sit safe and secure at home trying to find new ways to avoid paying for my release!” (147). If we consider the physical discomfort and stress which Ruggiero feels and complains about, we necessarily reach the conclusion that the behaviour
of his children must be truly contemptible if he describes the kidnappers as the more thoughtful.

Ruggiero’s sentiment in some degree reduces the animosity towards the kidnappers and shifts the blame to the family and their associates. Zen’s comment on the manner of Ruggiero’s murder reveals an important aspect of Italian attitude to violence. “If [the kidnappers] had killed their victim to teach the Milettis a lesson they would have said so, even bragged about it. But this crime, and above all the manner in which it was mockingly announced, had a twisted sophistication” (185). This view of the gang relates back to the train scene in which Zen had admired the young and passionate Romans who consequently robbed them. He appreciated their vitality and burning passion for life without restraints. When such people turn out to be criminals, they are secretly admired by the Italians. The kidnappers belong to that specific breed of men, which is why they are not strictly condemned in the novel; the killer, on the other hand, violates the unwritten rules of Italian society and Zen is the first to disapprove of it.

It is hardly a coincidence that the murderer, Ivy Cook, is a foreigner. Dibdin invariably presents the English in negative light: they are as different as possible from the Italians. In terms of corruption, however, there is a link between foreignness and the twisted, “unappealing” corruption represented by the Milettis. This link is Ivy Cook, who is closely connected to Silvio Miletti. Their relationship is not built on love or friendship; Ivy associates with Silvio purely because she wants to use him as a tool for satisfying her need for domination. “Silvio was a man of considerable power. And that power was now at her disposal, to use as though it were her own” (306). This hunger for power does not seem to be inherent to Cook, though. As she is thinking about her life when being locked in the holding cell, she remembers that her corruption started with her previous employer. She accidentally revealed that the kind and respected man was involved in unclean financial transactions. Partially because of her shattered illusions about him and also to get a
revenge, she yielded to the temptation of keeping the discrediting file for herself, adding other compromising information to it as years passed. In a more traditional work of literature, she would be punished for her actions, but in Dibdin’s world her decision to keep information on others helps her to escape the punishment because of the idea of the ratking. So when she disappears in the end, Zen is certain that “all sorts of people would have been happy to contribute financially to ensure that the contents of the famous safety-deposit box vanished with Ivy” (325). The message of the novel is asserted once again: the corrupt people are able to get away with their crimes if they tie themselves to other rats.

The second person who unites the idea of foreignness and corruption is Cinzia’s husband, Gianluigi Santucci. He is similar to Ivy in one respect: he is perceived as a stranger by the family, even though he, unlike Ivy, was born in Italy. The difference between a foreign country and a non-Perugian region is blurred in the novel. Gianluigi is seen above all as a Tuscan, which is why he cannot be trusted completely. Such attitude makes it necessary for him to exert himself more than others do. In his case, however, another aspect of the unattractive corruption appears: the dissolution of family relationships. Gianluigi has always been jealous of his brother Pasquale and when he could not compete with him, he chose to hurt him by sleeping with his wife “three times last summer” (263). Gianluigi does not display any remorse in this respect and neither does he pity his father-in-law. On the contrary, Ruggiero’s kidnapping fits into Santucci’s plans of overtaking the SIMP company. The old man realizes this during his captivity and blames the Tuscan openly in the letter, “All you had to do was to hold up the negotiations until I got desperate and then bully me into authorizing the Japanese deal on the pretext of raising money to pay for my release!” (149). Santucci was not the person who ultimately killed Ruggiero, but he deliberately protracted the negotiations with the kidnappers by collaborating with them and making them ask for ridiculously high sums of money. As a result, he gave Cook the opportunity to murder Miletti.
If Dibdin chose only foreigners and strangers for the parts of killers and their accomplices, his story would necessarily suffer from schematization. But the most corrupt people in the novel are the members of one of the most influential family in the region. As Ubaldo Valesio’s widow explains, the Milettis will consume “anything and anyone that comes within its reach, one of them smiling in your face while another stabs you in the back” (104). Santucci’s motivation and politics have already been analysed, but he is not the only one of the family who has gone astray. His wife, Cinzia, acts as a charming simpleton, but she has a similar hunger for power as Cook. Her method of obtaining it is different, though: where Cook uses manipulation and extortion, Cinzia relies on seduction. At the same time, however, she is a victim of someone else’s corruption, in this case her father’s. When Cinzia reveals to Zen that she hated her father for abusing her, she also admits that she enjoyed their relationship because she liked being preferred to her mother. “Half the time I felt like a vicious little whore and the other half like the heroine of a nineteenth-century novel. But mostly I just felt my power!” (201). Even though both women are interested in gaining power and they could be thus expected to form a ratking, it never happens. Cinzia hates the secretary to such a degree that she sends Ruggiero’s letter to Zen. The inspector correctly deduces that if the family believed Cooked to be responsible for it she “would become persona non grata” (203). Cinzia responds to his conclusions by saying that the “bitch has been a thorn in our flesh for too long” (ibid.). This gives us another perspective on the image of ratking. So far it has been proved correct that the rats cooperate when necessary, but it obviously applies only to male rats. The females would kill each other long before their tales would intertwine, which is why there can never be a ratqueen.

In the letter which Ruggiero sent to his family he blamed every one of his children, especially his three sons. The youngest, Daniele, disappointed his father the least of the three. He is seen merely as “a vain, spineless, ignorant lout with no interest in anything but
clothes and television and pop music, who would be rotting in gaol at this very minute if his family hadn’t come to his rescue’” (148). Ruggiero’s critique touches two areas: the first part deals with the generation gap, because of which the parents blame their children for being spoiled, the second part refers to Daniele’s dealings with the criminals from the University for Foreigners. The major objection, though, is not that he got involved with them, but that he was not able to cover his tracks, making it necessary for the family to come to his rescue.

The second son who has not fulfilled Ruggiero’s expectations is Silvio. His pervert behaviour forced his father to make an exception in his policy of buying privileges for the family.

“When the time came for Silvio to do his military service everyone assumed that his father would make a few phone calls and get him exempted. Well, Ruggiero made the phone calls all right, but to make sure that Silvio not only did his full time but did it in some mosquito-ridden dump in Sardinia. He'd just begun to realize that his son was a bit of a pansy, you see, and he reckoned that was the way to make a man of him. I don't think Silvio's ever forgiven him for it.” (61)

The favouritism towards members of one’s family is a special kind of corruption: nepotism. As Leti explains in an article devoted to this problem, “the latin root nepos means ‘nephew’; in fifteenth century Italy illegitimate sons of ecclesiasts were euphemistically called nephews” (qtd. in Sherman 604). It is highly unusual for a person of Ruggiero’s position and origin to deny his son the privilege he is accustomed to. His act suggests that the Italians in the novel value family’s good reputation more than the particular relationships between its members. Being a “pansy”, or, in other words, not having the proper, manly character, is in this case viewed as a serious threat to the good name of the family.

The incident which has transformed Silvio into an unmanly person was described in a previous chapter. He, like some of the other immoral people in the story, has become
corrupt because of the acts of others. The stranger who urinated on young Silvio indirectly influenced the line of investigation Zen had to pursue. When the inspector visits Santucci in order to get compromising materials on Silvio, the Tuscan delights in describing what exactly the photographs capture. “It is a toilet. But a rather special toilet. It's not connected to a sewer, it's connected to Silvio. He's waiting for someone to come along and use it” (Dibdin, Ratking 275). The revelation of this unusual sexual practice is confronted with the manner in which it is exposed. Both Santucci and Zen can be perceived as more despicable than the person whom they condemn. Gianluigi because he believes that by giving the photographs to Zen he is saving himself and Zen because he resorts to this kind of police abuse. But even if Silvio passed as a victim, as far as his sexuality is concerned, he still behaves like a Miletti. Zen solves the case only because of the corrupt nature which is inherent to the whole family. “I arranged for one of my inspectors to call Silvio and offer to get him in to see Ivy in return for various unspecified favours. It's the sort of thing that happens all the time to people in Silvio's position, so he found it completely natural” (319).

The third son to whom the letter is destined is Pietro. Ruggiero claims that Pietro disappointed him more than the other children because he was the one whom he trusted and into whom he put most of his expectations. His illegal activities are not mentioned in the letter. “[Pietro] originally went [to London] to organize the distribution of SIMP products . . . but that's just a cover. His real business is currency manipulation. He's organized a chain of more-or-less fictitious companies and shifts funds around between them, turning a tidy profit each time” (63). His father either does not know (which is improbable), or he does not consider it improper. What truly bothers him, however, is the character of his son: he accuses him of being an extremely skilful and cold manipulator. “You manipulate the plots of the others to your own ends . . . letting them waste their energies in fruitless rivalries while you look on from a safe distance, waiting patiently for the moment to make your move, the day when I drop dead and you can come home and
claim your own”’ (150). The main offense committed by Pietro is not his desire to take his father’s place but the manner in which he proceeds. It is the behaviour attributed to the English that estranges him from his father. “What a superb role he has invented for himself, the English gentleman who stands disdainfully aside from the vulgar squabbles of this Latin rabble to whom he has the misfortune to be related!” (150). Pietro clearly acts as a foreigner, which is the very insult that cannot be tolerated.

From what has been said so far, two distinct kinds of corruption emerge. The first one is represented by the young robbers on the train, and the kidnappers. It is the immorality which is silently approved and even admired by the Italians because the people responsible for the crimes are fiery and indomitable. The other kind of people, who lack these characteristics, are perceived with considerably less amount of tolerance and they are frequently ostracized from the society as strangers or foreigners. The characters who have been analysed in this section fall into one of the two groups. The only person who cannot be categorized so easily is inspector Zen. He displays the whole range of corruption, from cold detachment through heated overreaction, which hurts people who are close to him, to the misuse of police authority.

During the time in which the young Romans are robbing the train, in which Zen travels, it is discovered that he is a police inspector. The Veronese immediately starts demanding that Zen intervenes. When that does not happen and Zen lets the robbers run away, the old man is infuriated. “’You calmly allow innocent citizens to be robbed under your very nose while you hide behind the power of office and do precisely damn all about it!’” (15). The old man is aware of the pitiful state of the police force, but what surprises him is that Zen comes from the north like him. The discrepancy between the learned categorization and the real state of events is the main source of the man’s resentment.

Despite the fact that Zen did not confront the robbers directly, he cannot be characterised as indifferent. In other aspects of his life he behaves like the young rascals
whom he admired. While picnicking with Ellen he starts to think that there is something wrong with their relationship. He purposefully provokes her to find out what the problem is. “He was going to try the only technique he knew: drop some explosive overboard and see what floated to the surface” (224). His behaviour reflects the imperfections of his character, so in a more general sense of the word it can be classified as corruption. But at the same time he is not as passive as he was in the previous example. He knows that he threatens their relationship, but he does not care about the consequences. This episode shows that Zen moves in the grey area between the two groups of corruption.

Concerning the abuse of police power, Zen employs a wide range of unclean methods during the investigation. His main evidence, which eventually leads to the revelation of the murderer, is obtained through kidnapping and blackmailing of Silvio Miletti. To get the compromising photographs in the first place, Zen makes a disreputable agreement with Gianluigi Santucci. He offers to frame Silvio for the murder in exchange for a promotion he was promised before his transfer to a desk job. Even though Zen says at the end of the novel that he was not serious when he asked for the favour, he unscrupulously accepts the position. “His deal with Gianluigi Santucci had only been intended to disguise his real purpose, which was to arrest Ruggiero's murderer. But the Tuscan's double-dealing had evidently gone undetected, and here was Zen's reward” (328-29). It is true that except for the little incident with the questioned kidnapper Zen does not use direct physical violence to obtain evidence, but it does not ameliorate his reputation. It is possible to argue, though, that in face of the widespread corruption, the number of legitimate means of investigation that are available to him is greatly limited. Zen is well aware that there is little he can do to reach justice and this knowledge becomes the source of his disillusionment.
2.5. Disillusionment in society and human relationships

As was implied in the introduction, disillusion rarely appears separately in the series, it is nearly always accompanied by corruption and influenced by place. If disillusionment stems from the feeling of disappointment, Dibdin’s Italians have a great number of reasons to feel disillusioned. It has been pointed out that corruption in Italy afflicts almost all spheres of life. The most depressing is the situation in the high levels of state legislative and agencies, but it also spreads into personal lives and human relationships of ordinary Italians.

From what has been said so far, it is little surprising that people lack confidence in the authorities. From their point of view justice happens so rarely that it is equal to a miracle. When Antonio Crepi calls Senator Rossi in the beginning of the novel and asks him to send his best man to investigate Ruggiero’s kidnapping, he adds “I’m not asking for miracles, Senator. I’m asking for justice. Or does that take a miracle in this country?” (Dibdin, Ratking 4). Crepi is a distinguished person himself and if he cannot have faith in the leaders of his country, the situation in Italy must be truly grave. Senator Rossi attempts to calm Crepi’s temper by claiming that “kidnapping is the scourge of society today, a plague and peril in the face of which we are all equally vulnerable, equally powerless, equally...” (2). These words are merely an excuse, a cover for the Senator’s inefficiency in dealing with criminals. Crepi is in position to refuse this display of cowardice and demand action, but ordinary people do not have this choice. This is why Zen is not surprised that the Milettis were not cooperating with the police. “Most people were happier doing business with the kidnappers, whose motives they understood and who like them had a lot to lose, than with the impersonal and perfidious agencies of the State” (44).

It has been mentioned several times that the Italians admire the kind of criminals who have a passionate spirit. This characteristic ameliorates the wrong-doing in people’s eyes and in some cases the criminals can even be seen as folk heroes. It is the people who
behave passively, like Silvio, or too nicely, that are suspicious. As Zen observes, “the wrongdoer arouses sneaking admiration, but if you want to be merciful or generous without making people despise you then you have to be very careful indeed” (254). Zen does not refer to any immediate situation, which means that the remark is a general expression of dissatisfaction. He criticizes his fellow Italians for not believing in things which look too good to be true – the very attitude which he adopts in most of the novel. He is more than realistic – he is cynical and bitter, which is the true reason for the remark. He was probably trying to be generous in the past and when the person did not appreciate it, he accepted the widely held opinion that the wrongdoers are preferred to kind people.

A person who comes to realize that the Italians do not entertain any illusions is Ivy Cook. “In the end she’d come to admire the Italians as the great realists who saw life as it really was, free of the crippling hypocrisy of the Anglo-Saxon world in which she had been brought up” (288-89). Here the disillusion is applied to the criticism of a foreign country and it works similarly as the corruption. Even though the situation in Italy is not satisfactory, it is worse in England, because the English pretend to believe in things the Italians have long ago revealed not to be worth of admiration.

One of the areas of life which is most affected by disillusionment is police work. When Zen explains to Ellen that he is going to be removed from the case, she exclaims “Oh, I see. It’s the old story. You’re guilty until proven innocent,” but Zen opposes her by saying that “sometimes you’re guilty anyway” (226). What he means is that despite the fact he did not do anything wrong, he has to be summoned back to Rome because he has become inconvenient for certain powerful people. It is the same situation he was facing when investigating the Moro affair. The belief that people are guilty until proven innocent is repeated and elaborated by the kidnapper who is questioned by Zen in Florence. “At Milan innocent till guilty, at Rome guilty till innocent, in Calabria guilty till guilty” (245). It is not a coincidence that the cities are located in different parts of the country but it is the
only instance in the novel where a Southerner believes that a northern city, Milan, is more just than his own region. Disillusion at this point surpasses the corruption.

*Ratking* does not offer only the viewpoints on police work, it also focuses on the police internal affairs. Zen could be assigned to the Miletti case in the first place because one of his superiors was able to arrange it in the paperwork. “‘No problem. I can lose it in the routine postings and bang it through at departmental level. No one ever looks at that stuff’” (6). When Zen arrives in Perugia, his first problems are not connected with the case or the criminals, but with the chief of police who gives him a welcome speech. If he had some illusions left, the speech would sound very affectionate, but because he sees things as they really are, he can immediately detect the hostility, which is hidden behind the eloquent phrases. This manner of reception only deepens his depression and he realizes that he does not care about his job.

With a bit of effort and energy he could soon bring the Questore and his men to heel.

The problem was that he lacked the energy and was not going to make the effort. At heart he just didn't care enough about these provincial officials and their petty pride. He didn't even care about the case itself. Nine kidnapping out of ten were never solved anyway, and there was no reason to think that this one would be any different. (34)

This is an exemplary case of Zen’s attitude to his job. Most of the time he knows that he cannot win against the people who wield the real power, but even when he senses that he could win, he is not willing to make the effort. According to Mark Lawson, a critic writing for the Guardian, Zen is indeed “a sleuth who [is], even by the standards of British fictional contemporaries . . . gloomy and self-loathing [and] increasingly uncertain that he should ever have become a policeman” (n. pag.). Zen admits that the turning episode in his life was the Moro affair, which not only finished his career, but seriously damaged his belief in the police representatives. He explains that he had “long since realized that if [he] allowed that sort of thing to keep [him] awake at night [he] was going to be a chronic
insomniac” (Dibdin, Ratking 230). By “that sort of thing” he means the corrupt and obscure methods of his superiors.

In Ratking some of the practices are displayed, even though these do not reveal the corruption as much as absurdity. When Ubaldo Valesio is killed, Zen is given greater competence which also includes appointment of three assistants to his team. But as he soon realizes, there is nothing to be investigated, and his co-workers are idle. “He should never have asked for three assistants, he realized. Now he would always have them hanging about . . . getting in his way. Moreover one of them was bound to be reporting back to the Questore, and since there was no way of finding out which he would have to keep them all busy” (100). The fact that it is necessary to pretend that a person is working even though there is nothing to work on is a symptom of a society which values the quantity over quality and is more likely to overlook one’s mistakes and corruption than his passivity.

Another example of absurdity in police work is worthy of a comparison with Catch 22. Its most famous logical paradox specifies that “a concern for one’s own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy” (Heller 47). The similar paradox rises around the reports that are given to Zen by his colleagues. He cannot read them so he asks what the marks mean.

“Those are computer codes.”

“Since when have we had a computer?”

“We haven’t, it’s at the law courts. All packed up in boxes . . . You see, this report isn’t meant to be read, it’s meant to be put into the computer.”

Zen regarded him stonily. “But there is no computer.”

“But not yet, no. But they want to be ready, you see.” (Dibdin, Ratking 208)

This incident is probably only one of the many which Zen has to face in his job. Police inefficiency appeared in the older works of detective fiction as well (embodied for example
by the Scotland Yard in the Poirot series) but its only purpose was to draw attention to the exceptional reasoning skills of the detective. In case of Dibdin’s novels, Zen is a part of the malfunctioning system and the tragedy of his character is that he is not able to change it.

The second major area in which disillusionment plays important role is family life. When Crepi tells Rossi that his son has split from his wife, he sees the situation stoically. “These things happen nowadays! I don't really give a damn any more. At our age it’s absurd to go on pretending. Let them do what they like” (1). His resignation suggests that people’s marriages break often and, similarly as the corruption of the politicians, it is something that a person must become accustomed to. The issue of marriage is problematic as a whole in Italian culture because “it lets an outsider into the family” (198). As was demonstrated earlier in this chapter, strangers are never to be fully believed even if they marry into the family. It is the case of Gianluigi Santucci, who succeeds in marrying Cinzia Miletti, but he never wins the sympathy of her father. “Beware of in-laws, my father used to say, and when he's Tuscan into the bargain I think we can expect just about anything” (149). This is a part of Ruggiero’s letter to the family, in which he criticized its every member, including Santucci. The objections against the other male members have already been mentioned: Silvio disappointed him by being unmanly and Pietro by having un-Italian character and manners. The whole letter is manifest of disillusion, written by an Italian who was stripped of the very few illusions he still cherished.

The love relationships in Italy are strongly influenced by the power which mothers have over their adult children. This power becomes the most serious problem in the relationship of Zen and Ellen. She would like him to be less dependent on his mother, while he cannot understand what is wrong with it. “What’s the matter with Italian men, letting their mammas terrorize them their whole life long? Why do you give them such power?” ‘Perhaps we’ve found over the centuries that they’re the only people who can be trusted with it” (28). Zen is in fact saying that people cannot trust their partners, because
they can be betrayed by them at any time. The only person who is free of this suspicion is the mother.

Mothers are also seen as the guardians of their children’s purity. When they are not present and “a man and a woman are alone together for fifteen minutes, it is assumed that they’ve made love” (294). This is not disillusionment anymore; the situation has evolved into paranoia. What is worse, however, is that this attitude has the potential to ruin person’s reputation, as it happened to Ivy Cook. Things have come full circle: from the corruption through disillusionment to newly created corruption.
3. An analysis of *Vendetta*

Back in Rome, inspector Zen is watching a recording of an assault on Villa Burolo. Despite extensive security measures someone managed to enter the house and kill its inhabitants: Oscar Burolo with his wife Rita and the Vianellos, their guests. The motif is not clear and the murderer has not been captured; the only suspect is Renato Favelloni, who had been present at the Villa that evening and left the house before the arrival of the murderer. Zen becomes involved in the case when he is contacted by a corrupt politician known as *l’onorevole*. Favelloni acted as a middleman between the politician and Oscar Burolo; if he was to be convicted, the reputation of *l’onorevole* would be destroyed. Zen is forced to go to Sardinia and attempt to frame an innocent person, the caretaker Furio Padedda, in order to keep his job at the Criminalpol.

The story is further complicated by two initially separate storylines which intertwine at the end of the novel. The first is that of Vasco Spadola, a dangerous criminal who was sentenced to prison for a murder he did not commit. When he is released, he starts a vendetta against the people who convicted him: he murders the judge, Giulio Bertolini, and the informer, who was paid to testify against him. The next person to die is the main investigator, Zen. When the two men finally meet in Sardinia, Zen barely escapes with his life: he is unexpectedly saved by a local woman, who is revealed to be the murderer of Oscar Burolo and his friends. The second storyline revolves around Zen’s amorous feelings for his married colleague Tania. Her jealous husband hires a private detective to monitor Zen’s activities; however, the inspector believes that the man is working for his enemies, which further increases his insecurity.

3.1. Italian regions: Venice, Rome and Sardinia

The animosity between Italy and other countries, and among the Italian regions themselves follows the pattern created in *Ratking*. The second novel of the series continues
in exploration of Venice and Rome, which again serve as contrast for one another, and introduces the region of Sardinia, representing the differences between the city and the countryside. The non-Italian territory which plays a considerable part in the story is Switzerland. By assuming Swiss identity, Zen examines the stereotypes connected to both the Swiss and the Italians. The spheres of life which are influenced by place are also similar to those described in *Ratking*. Zen is still considered to be a foreigner, the communication between people cannot be realized if they speak different dialects, and the place retains its ability to evoke memories. What is new in *Vendetta* is the relationship between place and time, which creates areas laden with history, and between place and motion, which plays a part in characterisation of the killer.

Venice was portrayed as an ideal city in the previous novel and it keeps its attractiveness for Zen in *Vendetta* as well. After the challenging discussion with *l'onorevole*’s representative Zen finds relief in walking through “the Piazza Campo dei Fiori, almost Venetian in its intimacy and hence one of Zen’s favourite spots in Rome” (Dibdin, *Vendetta* 94). The notion of intimacy suggests that Venice is felt to be less crowded and more serene than Rome, which gives it the air of imagined, ideal rurality that exists in contrast to the corruption of the cities.

It has been argued in this work that Dibdin’s Italians prefer their native region to others. This feeling of local patriotism affects Zen as well. When he talks to a clerk in the Archives, Zen becomes angry because the man mispronounces his name. “‘My name happens to be Zen, not Zeno.’ ‘Zen’s not Italian.’ ‘Quite right, it’s Venetian’” (57). If a bystander was not aware that Venice was a part of Italy, he could easily reach the conclusion that Zen was a foreigner. The incident clarifies the reasons for Zen’s exclusion from the society: he cannot return to his native region because of his job, and he is considered to be a foreigner elsewhere, if only because of his name. He also inadvertently solidifies his image of foreignness by acting in accordance with the prejudices about the
Venetians. “Zen’s style behind the wheel was similar to that of an elderly peasant farmer phut-phutting along at 20 kph . . . blithely oblivious to the hooting, light-flashing hysteria building up in his wake” (169). It was stated in Ratking that the drivers from Venice are the worst in Italy because of lack of practice and in retrospective the saying seems to apply.

Contrary to the first novel, there is only one comparison between Venice and Rome, but it has a similar structure. It deals with a seemingly unimportant issue; Zen, however, supplies it with a deeper meaning. He nostalgically thinks about his home in which “cats were the familiars of the city, as much a part of it as the stones and the water” but in Rome they are merely “vermin to be periodically exterminated. It somehow seemed typical of the gulf which separated the two cities” (95). Considering the other observations Zen has made about Venice and Rome, the cats juxtaposition may be extended to apply to people as well. Whereas the Venetians care for everything that is part of their city, including the living organisms, the Romans are perceived by Zen as ruthless people pursuing their own aims.

In Ratking Zen’s view of Rome appeared to be shared by his mother who did not want to move into the city. Vendetta, however, reveals that it was only Zen’s projection of his own feelings into those of his mother’s and that she in fact enjoys living in the city. When Zen is forced to leave her with the Nieddus for security reasons, he finds out upon his return that he does not know his mother at all. He believes that “[s]he never wanted to move here in the first place. She hates Rome!” but Rosella Nieddu proves him wrong by saying that she doesn’t hate it, because they “went to the Borghese Gardens on Sunday . . . [and] she said she hadn’t enjoyed herself so much for years!” (284). This display of Zen’s inability to judge character of other people becomes typical of his conduct in the series and will later resurface during his relationship with Tania.

While Rome is not contrasted extensively with Venice in this novel, it is compared with Sardinia in order to present the differences between the city and the largely rural area. Zen’s feelings for the region into which he goes to fulfil his task of framing Padedda ranges
from wholehearted acceptance to a complete refusal. The positive features include
plainness of people, lack of pretence and crudeness of emotions, which is seen as a result
of their close adherence to nature. While Zen is waiting at the hotel restaurant to be served
dinner, he inspects local people. “[A]ll the men were dressed in very similar clothes: sturdy,
drab and functional. In Rome it was the clothes you noticed first these days . . . [b]ut here
in this dingy backward Sardinian bar it was still the people that mattered” (189). Zen’s
distaste for Rome translates even into his perception of people’s choice of clothes. It is
possible that if he was not prejudiced against the capital, he would see the clothes of the
Sardinians as distasteful and even repulsive.

Another instance in which Zen favours Sardinia over Rome is connected to his job.
Even when being chased by Vasco Spadola, who is determined to kill him, Zen deludes
himself into thinking that the raw emotions of killing and fear are essential and beneficial
for the human kind. “In Rome, when he first sensed that someone was on his trail, he had
felt nothing but cold, clammy terror, a paralysing suffocation. But here in this primitive
landscape what was happening seemed perfectly natural and right. This is what men were
made for, he thought” (237). Zen’s thoughts partially derive from the widespread
admiration of delinquents, but his reaction can also be attributed to a shock caused by the
overt threats against his life. This theory is supported by the fact that before he met
Spadola, Zen longed to return to Rome. “He found himself looking forward to sinking
luxuriously into the Mercedes’ leather upholstery and driving away from this damned
village, listening to the radio broadcasts from Rome, that lovely, civilized city” (221). This is
the other side of the comparison between the city and the village. Zen realizes that despite
his admiration for the unspoiled countryside and rough people he feels better in the city,
preferably in one which combines the positive features of both worlds: serenity and
cultivation.
Sardinia does not function merely as a basis for exploration of Zen’s relationship to Rome. It is a strongly independent region, more openly hostile to the rest of Italy than other territories. The Italian approach to it is surprisingly unified. Sardinia, together with Sicily and Alto Adige, is one of the “problem areas” of the country; all policemen are obliged to spend part of their service time in one of the three regions (169). The consequence of the centralized advancement against Sardinia is exclusion of its people from society and tensions rising between the local people and the rich incomers. When a local gang unsuccessfully attempts to kidnap Oscar Burolo, the reaction of the non-Sardinian villa owners is to support him by buying “T-shirts reading ‘Italians 1, Sardinian 0’” (40). The format of the message is obviously that of a football match, a game which inspires a sense of strong rivalry between the teams. This feeling is further supported by a Carabinieri expert, who observes that the fingerprints found at the scene of crime are remarkably small, like child’s, which provokes “much mirth in the rival force” because Sardinians are “the shortest of all Mediterranean races” (41, 176). The comparison with children does not incorporate only the question of height, it is extended to include the alleged incompetency and illiteracy of local people.

Sardinian response to humiliation of this kind is a deep distrust of the foreigners. Dibdin himself experienced this attitude when he came into the area: he thought the people to be “taciturn and deeply suspicious of incomers” (Dibdin, “An Offer I Couldn’t Refuse” n. pag.). The hostility might be attributed to the fact that Dibdin was an Englishman, because most Italians are reserved when they communicate with people from other countries. However, as Dibdin later experienced in a local bar, and almost exactly transcribed in Vendetta, the Sardinians strongly disapprove only of the Italians, especially if they are police officers; they behave amicably to foreign tourists. Dibdin lets Zen explain this paradox in the novel: “All outsiders [are] suspect in Sardinia, but a foreigner [is] much less likely to attract suspicion than a lone Italian, who [is] automatically . . . assumed to be a
government spy of some type” (Dibdin, *Vendetta* 171). Sardinian history is notable for the fact that the region has never yielded to aggression of Italian regimes. The people who emerged from the disputes were the men “who had survived thousands of years of foreign domination by using their wits and their intimate knowledge of the land” (170). But the experience has changed them in a way which prevented them from trusting the rest of the Italians, who might by later revealed as the aggressors against whom the Sardinians were been fighting their whole lives.

An expected side-effect of Sardinian seclusion should be its unity against the common enemy. However, when Zen asks a man called Turiddu about his relationship to Furio Padedda he is surprised to learn that Padedda is “no one’s friend, not round here! He’s a foreigner. He’s got friends all right, up in the mountains” (213). The long fighting against Italian officers has changed not only people’s attitude to other Italians, but the relationship to their neighbours as well. People have become so much used to being independent that they have started treating the individuals from different parts of Sardinia as strangers, thus creating third level of alienation between places. The first covered the resentment between the whole countries – Italy versus England and the United States. The second worked on the regional level, in which particular territories disliked each other. The third level now adds the antagonism between people of the same region, which further fragments the notion of place described in the novels.

3.2. Non-Italian regions: Switzerland

While *Ratking* introduces characters of two main foreign areas, the English and the Americans, *Vendetta* focuses only on Switzerland. Despite this fact, Dibdin manages to insert one critical remark about his home country into the novel. When police officers discuss the best method of dealing with criminals, one of them, Vincenzo Fabri, appreciates the British modus operandi which allows the English to “catch [the IRA
terrorists] on the job and gun them down” (269). Fabri would like to establish the same routine in Italy as well, but his colleague, De Angelis, disagrees: "Thatcher’s got an absolute majority, she can do what she wants. But here in Italy we’ve got a democracy. You’ve got to take account of people’s opinions” (270). This is the most pointed criticism of the Great Britain in the three novels. It illustrates why Dibdin decided to set his detective series in Italy and not in England. In this way, if anyone reproaches him for denouncing his own country, he can reply that the opinions expressed in his work represent the Italian point of view.

Dibdin uses the Italians for criticizing England; comparatively, his detective assumes Swiss identity in order to expose the weaknesses of both the Swiss and the Italians. It is necessary to add that the exposure of negative aspects of the latter is incidental, because Zen does not realize that by exaggerating the unappealing features of the Swiss character he also uncovers the imperfections of the Italian nature.

Zen decides to play a Swiss who is looking for a suitable property on behalf of his rich client in order to get access into Villa Burolo. He is obviously not very familiar with the Swiss, which is why he perpetually adjusts his behaviour according to what he imagines to be typical of the nation. He remarks that “a rich Swiss stopping his Mercedes outside some rural dive for an early-morning capuccino would instantly become a suspect Swiss” (170). This does not say so much about the Swiss as it does about the Italians, who cannot imagine the beginning of their day without a cup of capuccino. If Zen ordered one so early, it would not only show that he was not a Swiss, it would identify him as an Italian, thus preventing him from obtaining any information from the local people. He is therefore careful to behave in a manner which he thinks is expected from a Swiss. He gives people “a bland, blank look” while consulting the map (172) and he decides to “remain palely polite under any provocation” (175). These characteristics are meant to be insults of the Swiss, because Zen is one of the Italians who admire passionate behaviour. When he assumes that
the Swiss are dull and unexcitable, he places them into the same category as the English, who are seen by Italians as inferior. At the same time, however, he reveals that Italians are easily upset and too arrogant to use a map.

Another feature which Zen adopts to create an impression of Swiss character is related to the manner of his speech. He believes that he has to “speak pedantically correct Italian, but slowly and heavily, as though all the words were equal citizens and it was invidious and undemocratic to emphasize some at the expense of others” (174). This remark betrays Zen’s feeling about Swiss egalitarianism, but it also specifies that this politics is distinctly un-Italian. The quote appears to be in conflict with De Angelis’s comment about Italy being a democracy, but it is necessary to remember that his opinion is used merely as a basis for the criticism of England and that none of the characters believe Italy to be democratic.

Despite his attempt to act like a Swiss, the inspector cannot hide that he is deficient in one crucial area. After a fight with his car’s handbrake, clutch and starter he realizes that “none of this . . . was typically Swiss. The look the crossing-keeper gave him suggested that she felt the same” (172). He reacts to the risk of being exposed by overstating his Swiss identity, which makes the local people even more suspicious. Zen tends to use plural number, which sounds very unnatural and unconvincing. As he is leaving the hotel for a meeting with an estate agent, he says to the bar owner “I don’t know how it is here in Italy, but in Switzerland it is very important to be punctual” (176). Zen believes that the mystery of his origin is explained by this remark, which is addressed to the people at the bar, and he expects no further problems with them.

The second person who has to believe that Zen is a Swiss is the estate agent who is selling the villa. While talking to him, Zen makes two remarks about his Swiss identity. He explains that they have a saying in Switzerland: “No matter how high the mountain, you have to start climbing at the bottom” (178). Zen has most likely invented the saying,
because he uses the exact opposite of the Italian practice, according to which people ask their powerful friends for help to be able to start their career at the top. The second mentioning of Zen’s status is made in plural and is the most unconvincing. At the end of the meeting he says, “we Swiss, you know, are very methodical” (181). A Sardinian would probably realize at this point that Zen was a pretender, but the Genoan agent is too dazzled by the prospect of a rich buyer that he does not notice.

3.3. Place in relation to language, memories, movement and time

Place in Vendetta is connected to most of the areas described in the previous novel. It characterises people in terms of their appearance and behaviour: Zen remains to be perceived as a foreigner because of his countenance, while Oscar Burolo’s act of building a holiday resort is first treated as un-Italian in terms of the chosen location, but later reconsidered because of the extensive security measures enacted on the property, which are seen as typical of the national character. Place also strongly influences the relationships between people. The fact that Zen and Tania both come from the north attracts them to each other, but at the same time it creates a barrier between her and the family of her husband. Their misunderstandings are caused by the sense of foreignness, which is manifested in the dialects spoken by the characters. The language use has a profound effect on personal well-being, as Zen realizes when he is exposed as a deceiver, because he does not understand Swiss dialect. As in Ratking, place also evokes memories: Zen remembers his old cases and places which he previously visited. In addition to these, Vendetta introduces the motives of motion and time, which enrich the interpretation of place by either removing the sense of placement, or strengthening it in particular area.

The characterisation influenced by place is most notable in the main character of the series. Zen’s proud and uncovered embracement of his Venetian roots makes him a stranger in the eyes of most Italians, but on his part it might be a strategy to avoid being
mistaken for a complete foreigner. In the previous novel his countenance was believed to be Greek or Levantine, and in *Vendetta* Zen supports this presumption by adding that “the prominent bones and slight tautness of the skin especially around the eyes, [gives] his face a slightly exotic air, probably due to Slav or even Semitic blood somewhere in the family’s Venetian past” (11). Considering this wide range of distinctively Middle Eastern features, it is particularly surprising that Zen decides to impersonate a Swiss, when his physical appearance does not bear marks of Germanic origin.

Zen’s un-Italianness is established by his facial features, but the initial opposition to Oscar Burolo arises from his unusual activities. There are several aspects of his behaviour which estrange him from the society. Like Pietro Miletii, he is a rich entrepreneur, and Italians reportedly do not admire successful people. But in Oscar’s case, the most important factor of alienating people is the selection of site for Villa Burolo. “Oscar chose an abandoned farmhouse half-way down the island’s most uninhabited eastern coast, and not even on the sea . . . Italians have no great respect for eccentricity, and this kind of idiosyncrasy might very easily have aroused nothing but ridicule and contempt” (8). The typical, and therefore the only proper behaviour of the people who wish to buy a holiday house is to build it near the sea, in a place where all services are provided and which promises comfortable retirement. The inland Sardinian territory does not fulfil any of these conditions; in spite of that, however, Oscar Burolo manages to turn the disadvantages into his favour. He uses the idea which Tim Parks describes in *Italian Neighbours*: he fortifies the house. “If an Englishman's house is his castle, an Italian's is his bunker. There is this obsession with self-defense: railings, remote-controlled gates, security cameras, bulletproof windows [and] armored front doors” (63). While the villa system, which incorporates the gates, cameras and even lions, does not save Oscar’s life, it at least helps him to re-establish his Italian identity.
Most of the characters in the series are defined mainly by place; the first thing that people elicit from a stranger is the region in which he was born. It is therefore not surprising that Zen notices Tania and falls in love with her because of her origin. Like himself, Tania was a northerner, from a village in the Friuli region east of Udine. This had created an immediate bond between them” (Dibdin, Vendetta 34). The details of their first meeting are not explored in the novel so it is not possible to find out whether the common roots unite them by providing similar topics for discussion or if it is merely the notion of geographical closeness that inspires physical intimacy. It is equally impossible to say if Tania shares Zen’s sentiment about place. What is certain, however, is that her descent infuriates her husband’s family. When Tania explains her marital situation to Zen, she describes the dialog between her husband and mother-in-law: “’I’ve heard them discussing me behind my back. ‘Why did you want to marry that tall cunt?’ she asks him. They think I can’t understand their miserable dialect. ‘It’s your own fault,’ she says. ‘You should never have married a foreigner. ‘Wife and herd from your own backyard’” (158). The mother not only insults Tania, she also reveals the true position of women in society. If a local Italian woman has the same value as cattle, than a woman from a different region or country must necessarily be treated with even less respect.

The dialog reported by Tania touches another issue connected to place: the use of language. She says that she understands the dialect which the other side of the family uses, but it is not a common ability in Italy. Many of the misunderstanding arise from the fact that people do not speak other than their own dialect. Because the story is told from Zen’s point of view, it is mostly him who has problems in this area. Before he leaves Rome for Sardinia he hears a group of workers speaking “a dialect so dense that Zen [can] understand nothing except that God and the Virgin Mary [are] coming in for the usual steady stream of abuse” (94). This example is the least important for Zen: he does not know the people, so the fact that he cannot understand them does not influence him or his
work. The situation in Sardinia is different. Zen is not familiar with the region or its people, which is why the conversation between the bar proprietor and a local man sounds almost Arabic to him (175). But not knowing the local dialect is not the most serious problem he has to face during his stay in Sardinia. In the middle of his conversation with Turiddu, he is joined by Furio Padedda and his friend, who greets Zen. “Patrizio held out his hand and said something incomprehensible. Zen smiled politely. ‘I’m sorry, I don’t understand dialect.’ Padedda’s eyes narrowed. ‘Not even your own?’” (214). Padedda explains that Patrizio spent several years in Switzerland and he, unlike Zen, knows the local variety of Italian. The consequences for the inspector are almost fatal. He is evicted from the hotel and located by Spadola, who threatens to kill him. As a result of underestimating the power of language Zen finds himself in the middle of a hostile territory.

The landscape through which he is trying to escape his murderer has a profound effect on him. Considering his desperation and feeling of mortal danger, it is surprising that the inhospitable countryside reminds him of the region he loves the most. “The car drifted downhill . . . [and the] hairpin bends followed one another with barely a pause. The motion reminded Zen of sailing on the Venetian lagoons” (237). On the other hand, the emergence of associations is rarely limited to physical similarity. In this case it is the motion of the car which brings back memories and they have to be of the soothing kind to compensate for the anxiety that Zen feels.

Only once in the novel the place which Zen visits reminds him of the events which happened in the area. In the passage where he is followed by the man whom he has nicknamed Leather Jacket, Zen remembers a case he was investigating years ago. He was looking for a victim of kidnapping, a young girl called Angela Barilli. The police was sent to explore the labyrinth of the Palatine quarter of Rome, only to find the body of the girl later at a completely different place (110). It appears that the ability of place to evoke memories is stimulated by strong emotions. This must also be the case of a “particularly nasty murder
case” (290) which Zen recollects when he sees a classical torso at Palazzo Sisti. Only several moments later he is drawn back to Sardinia, but once again the association is not physical. “As he hovered on the fringes of the gathering . . . Zen found himself reminded oddly of the village bar in Sardinia. . . . He couldn’t get a drink here either . . . but more important, here too he was an intruder, a gate-crasher at a private club” (ibid.). In this last example place combines two of its aspects: it summons the memories, but it also reminds Zen that the Sardinian experience has not completely removed his estrangement from society.

The new aspects which place obtains in Vendetta are motion and time. Movement is important in characterisation of the murderer, who spent large part of her life locked in the cave system below Villa Burolo. This experience influenced her whole personality and behaviour, including movement. “Beyond their locked doors and shuttered windows I came into my own, flitting effortlessly from place to place, appearing and disappearing at will” (74). It has been said that to exist means to be at some place. The woman desperately wants to cease to exist and therefore the displacement might be perceived as one of the necessary steps.

Time, on the contrary, functions as an anchor, which binds the place to history. When Zen compares the new suburb where Tania lives with her husband and an old part of Rome, he arrives at conclusion that Testaccio has a history and for this reason “the merest change in the economic climate would be enough to sweep away the outer suburbs as though they had never existed, but the Testaccio quarter would be there for ever, lodged in Rome’s throat like a bone” (120-21). Less cynical person would probably more appreciate the historical value of the area, rather than its persistence, but considering Zen’s attitude towards Rome, the comment could hardly be more complimentary.
3.4. Corruption of the state and the police

Corruption depicted in *Vendetta* appears in similar spheres of Italian public and private life as in *Ratking*. The difference lies in the extent of attention devoted to particular agents. The majority of illegal activities are committed by the police, closely followed by the politicians. The admiration of delinquents asserted in the previous novel is less straightforward in *Vendetta*, but it still remains a distinctive feature of Italian society. The character who undergoes the most substantial development is inspector Zen. As his disillusionment deepens, he becomes more open to illegal methods of investigation. However, the most corrupt area in the novel is neither police nor the government, but the family. The deformed relationships between its members are the direct cause of the criminal acts that form the basis of the story.

One of the reasons why the Italian society is excessively corrupt is the incompetence of its representatives. Zen is concerned that as a senior officer working in the overflowing public sector he might be forced to retire early, but he comforts himself with the knowledge that the politicians do not have the necessary power to authorize anything. “A government consisting of a coalition of five parties, each with an axe to grind and clients to keep happy, found it almost impossible to pass legislation that was likely to prove mildly unpopular with anyone, never mind tackle the bureaucratic hydra” (23). The real power is not wielded by the public figures, who are elected merely to satisfy the public demand for democracy; it is held by inconspicuous men in the political background. It is they who can help a person to advance his career, as Zen discovers on several occasions. He believes that the fact that he was promoted after the Miletti case created the hostility between him and his colleague, Vincenzo Fabri, because the latter has also attempted “to use political influence to have himself promoted” (27), but unlike Zen, he failed.

The most significant example of a politician granting favours in exchange for other services is the man referred to as *l’onorevole*. It is believed that his “influence had allegedly
been instrumental in getting Burolo Construction its lucrative public-sector contracts” (46).

Because the politician cannot reveal his involvement in these illegal activities, he hires Renato Favelloni to work as a negotiator between him and Oscar Burolo. Zen does not understand how a person like Favelloni could be entrusted with this amount of responsibility, but then he remembers that “there are degrees even in the most cynical corruption and manipulation [and] by embodying the most despicable possible grade, Renato Favelloni made his clients feel relatively decent by comparison” (15). The classification of corruption at the highest places is a new concept in the series. Previously it was assumed that the criminals form a ratking whose members are approximately at the same level. Favelloni’s example reveals that the heads of the criminal underworld need lesser co-operatives to do their dirty work.

The exact nature of the business activities between Oscar Burolo and l’Onorevole is known to Zen from the dead man’s notes. According to them Oscar “had paid Renato Favelloni 350 million lire to ensure that Burolo Construction would get the contract” (182). However, despite this generous sum of money the company does not obtain it, possibly because of the unwanted publicity which is generated in the case of Burolo’s son testifying against his father. Following other business failures Oscar soon finds himself on the verge of bankruptcy, which leads him to a desperate move. He contacts l’Onorevole himself and demands his protection. “If this was not forthcoming, he warned Favelloni, he would reveal the full extent of their collaboration” (183). This is a similar situation to that of Moro affair in Ratking, where the ex-Prime Minister iss killed by the people who cooperated with him, because he is no longer one of them. Oscar Burolo is also dismissed from the ratking and that is why Zen believes that Favelloni is involved in the murders.

The feeling is strengthened during the peculiar meeting with l’Onorevole’s representative, whose name is never mentioned in the novel. Even though Zen does not meet the politician until the end of the story, he significantly influences the course of
events which the inspector witnesses. The young man who invites Zen to Palazzo Sisti explains the difficulties caused to l’onorevole by the police arrestment of Favelloni. He reveals that they have already tried to influence the result of the investigation by asking Vincenzo Fabri to retrieve the tape showing the killings. When Fabri fails, he directs l’onorevole’s attention to his enemy, Zen, whose police record and unorthodox methods are judged to be convenient for the success of the operation. The young man distorts the findings of Zen’s report by saying that it makes it “perfectly clear that the evidence against Favelloni has been cobbled together from a mass of disjointed and unrelated fragments” (88). In reality, the opposite is true. Despite minor discrepancies Favelloni is the prime suspect, because he is the only one who does not have alibi for the time in which the murders were committed. The man at Palazzo Sisti is well aware of that but he insists that Zen goes to Sardinia and finds someone to be framed for the murder, because he must protect the reputation of l’onorevole. “In the course of your investigation you will discover concrete evidence demolishing Pizzoni’s alibi, and linking him to the murder of Oscar Burolo” (91). Zen feels very uneasy about this assignment, but when he realizes that there is no other option, he joins the forces of corrupt policemen.

The police are depicted as even more despicable than in Ratking. They are not only inefficient and lethargic, they commit serious crimes themselves. Their stolidity is criticized by the widow of judge Giulio Bertolini, who is killed in broad daylight. “Even when Giulio received threats, nothing whatever was done! . . . [W]hen we informed the public prosecutor he said there were no grounds for giving my husband an armed guard” (59). The judge had received the same set of threats as Zen: people broke into his house, scattered his properties around and left an envelope for him full of shotgun pellets. These are clear signs of a personal vendetta and as such provide more than sufficient grounds for appointing an armed guard to the intended victim. The fact that the officer does not follow this procedure shows that he does not care about his job.
Another example of police indolence involves Zen as well. When the Archives urge the return of the tape which was stolen from the inspector, he remembers what the situation at the Ministry is. “In theory, official files could only be taken out of the Ministry with a written exeat permit signed by the relevant departmental head. In practice no one took the slightest notice of this” (35). The very fact that Zen was able to take the tape home without any obstructions confirms that the rule is being disregarded. But this behaviour is not described only by Dibdin. In the sequel to his popular study of Italian character Tim Parks notices that the same attitude exists in the Italy he knows. He invites an insurance agent to get information about insurance products, and when he inquires about the financial prospects for his family in case of his death in a car accident caused by his intoxication, he is surprised to learn that “nobody ever checks whether anybody’s been drinking and driving when there’s an accident” (Italian Education 36).

The indifference of the Italians to the troublesome results of people’s negligence stems from the fact that even more than apathy the Italians dislike excessive activity and inquisitiveness. As Zen personally discovers shortly after his transfer from clerical duties to the Criminalpol, the police officers are not supposed to throw themselves “wholeheartedly into the cases” and ask too many questions (Dibdin, Vendetta 26). Similar fate of being ostracized from the community befalls the clerk who is working at the Archives. “Unlike the others, he couldn’t just sit back and read the paper or chat all morning. If there was work to be done, he just couldn’t help doing it. It was this that made him a figure of fun in his colleagues’ eyes. . . . Their looks were derisory, openly contemptuous. They despised him for his weakness” (138). The society which shuns the hard-working people in favour of the lawbreakers cannot be expected to fight corruption very effectively.

The police misconduct mentioned so far included only the examples of dereliction of duty. Where the police officers appear to be passive during a routine investigation of a case, they become extremely active in pursuing their goals when there are any illegal activities
involved in the process. The police officers who arrest the man who broke into Zen’s flat with the intention to kill him assure the inspector that “they would spare no effort to extract any information he might have as to the whereabouts of Vasco Spadola” (168). It is clear that the situation is grave and that a number of people are in danger, but it does not authorize the police officers to break the law by using illegitimate practices.

The most serious example of police abuse of power in the novel is also the initial cause of Zen’s resentment and disillusion, which affects the rest of his police career. When he needs to decoy a clerk at the Archives, he asks for an old file on the Spadola case. As he reads through it he remembers how he managed to bring the killer to justice only to find out later that “Parrucci’s testimony [was] paid for by the victim’s family” and “the knife had been smeared with a sample of Tondelli’s blood and planted at the scene by the police themselves” (149, 57). Even though Vasco Spadola was a criminal and he killed a number of other people, the police were not entitled to cover their inability to arrest him by confusing the evidence.

The effect of this case on Zen has been profound. He has abandoned his inquisitive method of investigation and contented himself with following the dull procedure of writing reports. “Fortunately, it was no part of Zen’s brief to draw conclusions or offer opinions. All that was needed was a concise report describing the various lines of investigation which had been conducted . . . and outlining the evidence against the various suspects” (21). As he gradually loses his detective side Zen becomes more susceptible to corruption, which is already established at the end of Ratking. The course of investigation he used in the Miletti case is the reason why he is chosen to represent the interests of l’onorevole in Sardinia. The young man at Palazzo Sisti reminds Zen that his methods attracted “a certain amount of criticism [but] what no one could deny was that you got results! The conspiracy against the Miletti family was smashed at a single stroke by your arrest of that foreign woman” (91).

The speech seems to suggest that people do not believe that Ivy Cook was the real
murderer. What is more likely, in the young man’s opinion, is that Zen used her as a suitable person to be framed for the murder. The fact that Zen remains in the office of Vice-Questore despite the rumours of his illegal methods of investigation supports the belief that the Italians are accustomed to dealing with corrupt police officials.

Zen’s disrespect for the rules shows also in the scene in which the tape is stolen from him and he has to return it to the Archives. Without thinking about confessing the truth to his superiors he goes to a shop and buys a blank videotape. He then tricks the clerk into leaving his station and applies the label of the Ministry on the tape (54). He does not feel remorseful about the deception; he panics later, when he finds out that the tape is needed by another official – Fabri. The act of corruption is not shameful or inappropriate itself if a person is able to avoid detection; this rule applies to the whole Italian society, and especially to the criminals.

Even though Zen leaves for Sardinia without any enthusiasm for the job he is forced to do, he coincidentally solves the mystery of the killings at Villa Burolo. His procedure can hardly be labelled as investigation because the case is resolved when the murderer, Elia, appears at the place where Zen is hiding from Vasco Spadola and saves his life by killing the man. It is understandable that under these circumstances and with Zen’s reputation his colleagues do not believe that Elia is the real murderer. When they ask him how he managed to frame her and tie all the loose ends, he resigns on telling the truth and narrates the story they want to hear. “The funny thing is, I hadn’t been going to use the woman at all originally. The person I had in mind was Furio Padedda” (273). By openly embracing his corruptness Zen achieves two goals: he solidifies his position at the Criminalpol and partially regains the favour of his colleagues. But the most important favour is bestowed on him by l’onorevole himself, who tells him the magical words “If there’s ever anything you need . . .” and Zen thinks that they are “better than money in the bank” (292). Zen’s last
thought suggests that he has become well versed in the questionable practices of the police officers and politicians.

The criminals in *Vendetta* are more brutal than they were in *Ratking* and they are also less admired. But there is not a direct correlation between the two aspects. The reason why the kidnappers are not glorified in the novel is that they do not succeed in abducting their target. On the contrary, “the abortive kidnap made Oscar Burolo an instant hero among the island’s villa-owning fraternity” (40). It is important to note, however, that the villa owners form a very different group of people from the rest of Sardinia. The kidnappers are not admired by them when they fail, but it is questionable whether the reaction would be different if they succeeded, because in that case they would represent a danger for the rich people. The attitude of the poor shepherds is not explored in the novel so it is equally possible that Sardinians still admire their brethren who earn their living by kidnapping people. What is certain, however, is that in Sardinian history the Italian officials arrested many of the villagers, but it “merely served to strengthen the hands of the outlaws by making them into local folk heroes” (171). The people have become the symbols of fighting against the hated regimes, so that their crimes are disregarded by the fellow villagers.

The truly despicable character of the story is Vasco Spadola. The manner in which he tortures and kills the informer whose testimony sent him to prison is horrifying. It is difficult for the reader to see him as a victim of the police, the innocent man who spent twenty years in prison for a murder he did not commit. When he finally meets Zen and explains why he is going to kill him, the two men talk about the relationship between the policeman and the criminal. Zen argues that Spadola had committed crimes which have earned him even longer sentence in prison than he served, but Spadola explains his understanding of police work. “Christ Almighty, if everyone who broke the law in this country was sent to prison, who’d be left to guard them? . . . But it doesn’t work that way,
does it? It’s a game! And I was good!” (232). In the first sentence he obviously refers to the corruption of the police officers who planted the evidence in his case. But the second part of his remark shows that his concept of justice is very different from Zen’s. It corresponds with the adoration of criminals who avoid punishment. The true reason of Spadola’s revenge might be the loss of the aura of invincibility and admiration.

Where the first novel focused on the link between the criminals of the ratking, *Vendetta* blames the distorted relationships between people, especially inside the family, for the ensuing corruption. The marital problems of Tania and her husband eventually affect Zen, who is attacked and threatened by the man. Mauro Bevilacqua is afraid that Tania is unfaithful to him, but it is his behaviour that helps to create the love affair between his wife and Zen. Rita Burolo, on the other hand, is unfaithful to Oscar with Furio Padedda and her husband not only knows about their relationship, he also records their amorous meetings. “For some people it was still more difficult to accept that Oscar Burolo had known about these orgies and had done nothing whatever about them apart from rigging up a small video camera in the rafters of the hut to record the scene for his future delectation” (43).

These examples are not related to each other, however, they both illustrate the depth of the marriage crisis, which was already present in *Ratking*.

Another issue which was introduced in the previous novel and is further explored in the current one is the crooked behaviour of a father to his daughter. In *Ratking* it was Ruggiero Miletti who had been sexually abusing his daughter Cinzia, in *Vendetta* it is Elia’s father who locks her in the cellar because she lost her virginity with a man who later refused to marry her. “When the police went to the house they found Elia shut up in the cellar like an animal, almost blind, covered in filth and half crazy” (207). This unimaginable cruelty leaves scars on Elia, who is not able to start a new life after her parents die and she becomes free. She still wanders through the cave system under the house which has become Villa Burolo, and she kills the Burolos and Vianellis, whom she does not know,
because they remind her of her own family who had ignored her all the years of her imprisonment. Elia does not describe exactly what her father was doing to her, but she once relates herself to a girl whom she sees outside. “I wanted to comfort her, to tell her how lucky she had been. All her daddy had done was pull her hair. He could have done other things” (137). It is not possible to say whether she refers to her imprisonment or if she also suffered from other ways of abuse, but the most important conclusion of the story is that the domestic violence is the source of nearly all corruption in the novel. If her father did not mistreat her, she would not kill the people, there would be no case for Zen to solve and he would not get involved with the corrupt politician.

3.5. Disillusionment in the police force and human relationships

Even though disillusionment concerns the majority of Italian society, there are areas in which the realistic approach to life is necessary for survival. The outlaws cannot afford the luxury of deluding themselves if they want to endure in the criminal underworld, and the policemen must accept the situation in the corrupt society in order to be able to perform their duties at least at a mediocre level. Disillusionment is a measure of self-preservation; it is both the result and the cause of corruption.

The criminals in Vendetta are particularly realistic in their sphere of activity. Oscar Burolo knows that “while governments come and go, business goes on for ever” (38). Rather than to litigate over a large contract lost during an African coup d’état, he proceeds to solidify the business relations with both sides, securing enough money to cover his expenses and gaining the friendship of the formal African president, who expresses his gratitude by giving Oscar a heavily armoured car. The president, “even more of a realist than Burolo himself, had specified armour-plating and bullet-proof windows” (40) for the car, which eventually saves Oscar’s life during the unsuccessful kidnap.
Another gangster who has lost his illusions is Vasco Spadola. His bitter feelings have accumulated during the twenty years in prison and the only purpose of his life is to take his revenge on the people who arrested him. He tells Zen that nothing else matters to him. “I’m going to kill you, while all this is going on! And it’ll still go on, once you’re dead. Because you’re not needed, Zen. None of us is” (230). This expression of nihilism is extreme even within the scope of Dibdin’s disillusionment; other characters are similarly disappointed with the situation in society but they become accustomed to it and find a way of proceeding with their lives.

Concerning the disillusionment connected to the police work, there are two groups of people who are affected by it: the policemen themselves and the rest of the population who depends on the quality of their work. Zen is the officer who is most acutely aware of the fruitlessness of his efforts. But despite his knowledge of the situation he endangers the advancement of his revived career by being too active.

[Police work never took any account of individual abilities. It was a question of carrying out certain procedures, that was all. Occasionally these procedures resulted in crimes being solved, but that was incidental to their real purpose, which was to maintain or adjust the balance of power within the organization itself.” (26)

According to Zen’s statement the ideal policeman completes the assignments of his superiors by using his writing skills and neglecting the investigative ones. The disillusionment develops in those members of the police force who find this approach incompatible with the theory and ideals they acquired at the police school. The truth about Zen’s position at the Criminalpol is that before the Burolo case “no one wanted Zen to solve the case he had been sent to look into” because “the results desired by the Ministry flowed automatically from his having been sent. He didn’t have to lift a finger, in fact it was important that he didn’t” (26-27). In Dibdin’s Italy it is not what you do that helps your
career, it is the ability to pretend that you are doing your job, while carefully avoiding any activity which might be seen as excessive, that earns you the promotion.

Another skill which is necessary in order to reach a higher position is to know the right people, as Vincenzo Fabri explains when Zen returns from Sardinia. “Do things by the book . . . and what do you get? A lot of headaches, long hours, and a boot up the bum when things go wrong. Whereas if you look after number one, cultivate the right contacts and forget about procedures, you get covered in glory” (270). This comment best summarizes the circumstances surrounding the police. When the working conditions do not motivate the people to work harder, or when the officers are not expected to work diligently at all, it becomes easier to yield to the temptation of illegal, but highly rewarding practices.

One of the people who have experience with the police and who are at the same time able to examine it from an external point of view is Zen’s ex-colleague and best friend, Gilberto Nieddu. He says about the job that it is “a mug’s game. There’s nothing in it unless you’re bent, and even then it’s just small change really” (105). Gilberto left the force after Zen’s transfer to protest against the corruption of their superiors. At that time they shared the same values and illusions about police work, but Gilberto has changed. He has become a successful businessman who sees the casualties at the Villa Burolo as regrettable but unavoidable. “All these cases you get so excited about . . . do you know what that amounts to? Traffic accidents, that’s all. If you have roads and cars, a certain number of people are going to get killed and injured” (105). Gilberto has obviously abandoned the path of justice: he has undergone a similar process as the policemen who have spent several years in the force.

Another person who provides an outside perspective on the police is Vasco Spadola. He cannot be considered objective owing to his history with the corrupt officers, but his insight into their methods is accurate. “[Y]ou make little rules and regulations . . . [but] the
truth of it is that you’re the first to break the rules, to cheat and lie and perjure yourselves to get a lousy rise, a better job or a fatter pension!” (230). It is curious that Spadola relates his disenchantment about the unwillingness of the police to follow the rules of the “game” to Zen for whom the Spadola case was “at once his first great triumph and his first great disillusionment” (54). This two adversaries, who meet in a remote Sardinian bar, share the same sense of bitterness, caused by the common agent: the police officers who have realized that the path of corruption is easy to follow.

Zen’s entanglement with Spadola and l’onorevole creates new areas for disappointment in his already strained perception of the police. Before he leaves for Sardinia the possibility of framing an innocent person for the murders does not occur to him. Even when the favour is demanded by the young man at Palazzo Sisti, Zen does not feel comfortable in pursuing this line of “investigation”. However, he does not have other choice. The man implies that Zen is “...only too well aware of how swiftly one’s position in an organization such as the Ministry can change, often without one even being aware of it” (92). The content of the cryptic message is at once clear to the inspector: if he does not comply, he will loose his job and be transferred to a region where no one will care about his existence. Caught between Spadola and the politician, Zen arrives at the conclusion that he is “bound to lose. If his new friends didn’t get him, his old enemy would” (116). It is only for this reason that he decides to accept the assignment and frame Padedda.

Before he leaves, however, he has to arrange several things. He attempts to persuade his supervisor that his life is in danger because of his involvement in the Spadola case twenty years ago. The chief understands his situation and promises to assign the best squad to guard Zen’s safety, but because their schedule is tight, he can not allocate them immediately. In the meantime he can neither appoint his own man to protect Zen, because the only people who are now allowed to take these assignments are the experts from the elite squad. Zen is not surprised anymore by the development of the situation. “From
bureaucratic point of view, the logic of Moscatti’s position was flawless. He knew only too well that it would be a sheer waste of time to point out any discrepancy between that logic and common sense” (150). Zen has witnessed too many similar catches to honestly believe that the possibility of his getting a guard is real. He projects his disappointment with the police even to the discussion with an informer who is providing a car with Swiss number plates for him. “And afterwards, will [the car] be, er, compromised in any way?” Zen gave him a pained look. ‘Fausto, if I wanted to do anything illegal, I’d use a police car’” (133). The question is whether Zen says that he would use it only because he knows that the people who commit crimes often ride in police cars, or if he also implies that the car would be recognizable by common people as a symbol of corruption.

The other large sphere of Italian life which is affected by disenchantment is also connected to corruption. Because the Italians believe that other people cannot be trusted, the relationships are frequently strained. In Vendetta it is Zen who experiences the deepest disillusionment, especially in regard to his love life. When he falls in love with Tania and cannot find courage to approach her, he bitterly remembers his unsuccessful relationship with Ellen. “The whole affair had been nothing but the self-delusion of an ageing man who couldn’t accept that love, too, was something he must learn to give up gracefully” (69). Zen believes that Tania is happily married, which is one of the reason why he does not tell her about his feelings. But the more important factor is his personality and resignation. “Zen had learnt from bitter experience that when things weren’t going his way there was no point in trying to force them to do so” (185). This attitude helps him to survive his ordeal of being a policeman, but it also separates him from people who would like to bond with him.

When he becomes closer with Tania and rescues her from her jealous and violent husband, his disillusionment turns into paranoia. Tania says that she would like to go to the cinema, but Zen does not believe her because it does not correspond to the image he has
created about her family situation. He is certain that she wanted his help to be able to meet with her lover. Therefore her innocent explanation infuriates him. “To lie so crudely, so transparently, was tantamount to an insult. . . . She must have done it deliberately, as a way of getting the truth across to her faithful, stupid, besotted admirer” (67). This is the first example in the series of misunderstandings between him and Tania, which will increase in frequency and seriousness in *Cabal*.

Zen’s habit of assuming the worst when dealing with people is also reflected in his judgement of Vincenzo Fabri. It is true that the two men do not like each other, supposedly because of Zen’s promotion, but the inspector denounces his colleague without a strong evidence to support his claims. When someone steals the important tape from him on a bus, he is sure that “it would have been a simple matter for Fabri to find some pickpocket who would have been only too glad to do a favour for such an influential man. Once the tape was in his hands, Fabri had put in an urgent request for the tape at Archives, ensuring that Zen was officially compromised” (81).

Zen’s bitterness influences him to such an extent that he starts seeing criminal conspiracies where there are none. He soon finds out that Fabri requested the tape because it was a task from l’onorevole. To a certain degree, their agreement can be considered a conspiracy, which means that Zen’s feeling was correct. However, the tragedy of the inspector is that even though he knows that people are plotting around him, he is never able to reveal the true culprits; moreover, in the process of the investigation he frequently hurts the few remaining people who care for him.
4. An analysis of *Cabal*

In the third novel of the series Zen is asked to pose as an “independent investigator” in the case of a supposed suicide of Prince Ludovico Ruspanti, who fell to his death from a gallery in St. Peter’s Basilica. Zen’s proceedings are complicated by the fact that the crime scene is located on Vatican soil and the Church authorities want to avoid a scandal. Zen willingly obeys the instructions of the clergymen until a second person is killed, this time inside the jurisdiction of Rome. The dead man is Giovanni Grimaldi, a member of Vigilanza, who was entrusted with Ruspanti’s surveillance, ordered by the Vatican.

Zen’s investigation gradually uncovers alarming details about the Cabal, a secret society founded within the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The Cabal appears to be responsible for the murders, which were allegedly committed to cover a political and financial conspiracy involving the Prince. For a period of time, Zen believes to be in contact with representatives of the secret society, their demands being delivered through Antonio Simonelli. However, when the man is killed on the train to Milan and Zen meets with the real Antonia Simonelli, he realizes that the Cabal has never been more than Ruspanti’s creation, which helped him to gain the protection of the Vatican. Zen subsequently corners the real murderer, Raimondo Falcone, who poses as a creative fashion designer Falco, but who in fact uses the designs created by his unknowing sister Ariana. Falcone killed Ruspanti when the Prince threatened to reveal him as a fraud; the two following murders were committed in order to cover his tracks.

4.1. Italian regions: Venice, Genoa and Rome

Place in *Cabal* assumes a less important role than in the previous novels, because the attention is shifted to the growing corruption, especially of the main character. Nevertheless, the concept of place follows patterns similar to those which were introduced in *Ratking* and *Vendetta*. The two cities which are mentioned consistently in all three novels
are Venice and Rome. Even though Venice still functions as the ideal counterpart of the corrupt Rome, in *Cabal* it also acquires darker undertones, while Rome, on the other hand, loses some of its notoriety for decadence. In addition to these two cities, Genoa is mentioned in an attempt to defame Venice, but it simultaneously brings a new perspective on Zen’s allegiance. The last place which is mentioned resists categorization. Despite the fact that the Vatican City is located inside Rome, it maintains its independent status and is perceived as a foreign country. For this reason it will be analysed in the non-Italian section of this chapter.

For Zen Venice remains to be the place of consolation, full of pleasant memories. When he returns unobserved to his mother’s flat to collect some of his possessions, he remembers how reluctant she was to abandon her house in Cannaregio district. This brings the memory of an “emptied space pervaded by the limpid, shifting Venetian light” which makes Zen feel “as weightlessly replete as a child for a moment” (Dibdin, *Cabal* 70). The effect of light, which the city produces, is echoed across all three novels, as is the feeling of returning into a happy childhood. The positive connotations not only effectively prevent Zen from criticizing the city, they also urge him to defy the possibly legitimate, but less idealistic opinions of other people. When Gilberto Nieddu advises Zen to buy a new collection of suits to improve his public image, Zen exasperatedly refuses; he knows that his friend is right, but he has a special bond to his suits. They come from “an elderly tailor in Venice who had once supplied his father. They might not be in the latest style, but they [a]re sober, durable, well-cut and of excellent cloth. To hear them denigrated was like hearing someone speak ill of a friend” (192). Even though it might seem that Zen appreciates above all the quality of the suits, it is their connection to his Venetian past that has the strongest effect on the inspector.

The previous novels portrayed Venice predominantly as Zen’s ideal place. *Ratking* was the more critical of the two – it included the less positive perspectives, externalized in a
joke and a saying about the Venetian drivers. *Vendetta* implemented these premises into real life when Zen’s line of investigation was jeopardized by his inferior driving abilities. Nevertheless, Zen’s allegiance to the Veneto region was never shown as a source of problems or even corruption. *Cabal* slightly modifies this point of view. When archbishop Sánchez-Valdés summons Zen to the Apostolic Palace to ask for his cooperation in the case, Zen assures him that he understands the situation. “I’m from Venice, just like Papa Luciani. If the Church says that this man committed suicide, that’s good enough for me” (25). Zen clearly prefers his Venetian origin to his responsibilities as a police officer. As will be shown later, his loyalty to Venice will misguide him into falsification of the evidence.

Another audience with the archbishop, which is necessitated by the discovery of Grimaldi’s body, touches the issue of Zen’s origin as well. As a part of introductory small talk Sánchez-Valdés mentions that his companion, Monsignor Enrico Lamboglia is from Genoa. This remark prompts him to relate an anecdote from the thirteenth century, which reveals the differences between the “fierce trading rivals” Venice and Genoa. He says that the Holy Father was advised to trade with the Venetians, because “while both the Genoese and the Venetians will gladly offer to sell you their mothers, the crucial difference is that the Venetians will deliver” (103). Zen does not appear to be insulted, on the contrary, he cannot help smiling. Had he maintained neutral attitude it might have been seen as an attempt to hide his disapproval from the archbishop, but when he smiles, he reveals that he thinks the underlying message of the story to be at least partially fitting. The reason why he does not find the idea of Venetian corruption offensive is that his own perceptions has changed accordingly.

Despite the fact that most of the story is narrated in Rome, the city itself is rarely mentioned, because the attention is focused on the Vatican City. When Antonia Simonelli momentarily dismisses the fact that it is de jure a foreign city state, she tells Zen that Rome benefits from the practices of the Vatican.
“They talk about the rival claims of London and Frankfurt as the future financial capitals of Europe, but what about Rome? What other capital city can boast the convenience of an off-shore bank, completely unaccountable to the elected government, subject to no verifiable constraints or controls whatsoever and located just a brief taxi-ride from the centre, with no customs controls or security checks to pass through?” (241).

She is ironic, of course, in describing the lack of financial control as desirable for Rome, but her remark shows nevertheless how closely connected the two cities are. Even though their public and legal spheres are completely separate, the Roman criminals can benefit from the geographical proximity of the Vatican to reach their goals. With help of people like Ruspanti they can take their money from a Roman bank, deposit them in the Vatican bank and then transfer them to a foreign account of their choice without technically breaking the law. In this sense Rome, through the Vatican City, retains its reputation of a corrupt city.

Other remarks which are connected to Rome focus on characterisation of the place in relation to another city. Zen “scandalise[s] the barman by ordering a caffé corretto, espresso laced with grappa, a perfectly acceptable early-morning drink in the Veneto but unheard of in Rome” (180). The reference to this particular kind of beverage is made in all three novels; its importance is derived from the fact that Italians devote considerable attention to people’s drinks, as a single cup of coffee can successfully characterise the drunker. The barman is more likely to have been shocked by a presence of a northerner in his bar, than by an unusual request for a drink.

Another person whose features are defined in relation to Rome is Zen’s mother. Her changing view to the capital city reflects the metamorphosis she herself has undergone. In Ratking she detested the city into which she was forced to move, but in Vendetta she became fond of it when she started going out more often. Cabal combines both
approaches. Zen relates that his mother has transformed from “a semi-comatose recluse . . . into a sprightly, inquisitive old person with opinions and interests, still sharply critical of the city in which she lived like a foreigner, but also aware of its attractions and possibilities” (71). An interesting observation is that Signora Zen never makes these remarks herself. In the first and third novel it is Zen who interprets his mother’s feeling, while in the second novel it is Rosella Nieddu who conveys her enthusiasm. It is perhaps typical of Dibdin’s style that the settings of his stories are often described indirectly, through someone else’s point of view, because most of the characters merely adopt the attitudes of others.

One of the exceptions is Tania, who becomes not only Zen’s girlfriend in Cabal, but also a successful entrepreneur, selling Friuli food all over the world. Because of her extensive business trips she becomes an expert on the differences between various parts of Italy. “‘Up here, [in the north] agriculture is getting more and more commercialized, more industrialized and centralized. . . . The south has been spared all that. It’s just too poor, too fragmented, too disorganized, too far from the centre of Europe’” (269). Her remark corresponds with the observations made in the train scene of Ratking. One of the objections to the northern regions iss their “orderliness”; Tania’s experience suggests that the desire for order has lead the north to undesirable unification. The south, on the other hand, has retained its position of a poor, but more appealing location.

4.2. A non-Italian region in Italy: Vatican

This section of the thesis has so far analysed the United Kingdom, the United States and Switzerland. These countries have been related to the Italian series through the real or imagined origins of several characters. The foreign country which is going to be examined in the current chapter is exceptional in the fact that it is the only one which serves as an existing setting for the novel.
The Vatican City State is “a 108-acre enclave in the city of Rome” presided by the Holy See, whose “full proprietorship and absolute power and sovereign jurisdiction over the Vatican” was recognized by the Lateran Treaty in 1929 (Wright 452). This state of affairs is emphasized near the beginning of the novel by Grimaldi, who notices that the man who died in St. Peter’s was a prominent person. He explains to the ambulance crew, who are removing the remains, that they must wait for the permission of the Vatican. “[W]hen you drove through the archway out there . . . you left Italy and went abroad. Just like any other foreign country, this one has its own rules and regulations” (Dibdin, *Cabal* 10-11). The rules are designed to protect the interests of the state, but in reality they considerably complicate the investigation of criminal cases which occur in the Vatican territory.

The law enforcement in the Vatican City is divided among two agencies: the Swiss Guard and the Vigilanza. The first pledge an oath of loyalty “to serve [the current pope] and his legitimate successors” (“Commitment of the Swiss Guard” n. pag.), while the latter function as guardians of the law in the Vatican City. The jurisdiction of the two organizations is clearly defined; problems arise when a crime is committed on Vatican soil, and recorded or reported by the Italian police. Such incidents occur also in the novel *A Season for the Dead*, in which two detectives investigate a series of murders with religious overtones. One of the detectives, Luca Rossi, complains to his partner, Nic Costa, about the thieves who can steal a bag in Rome, run into St. Peter’s Basilica, and become subjects to the Swiss Guards, untouchable by the Italian police (Hewson 16).

The situation in *Cabal*, however, is slightly different. Zen’s disillusionment emanating from his unappreciated activity during previous investigations, would hinder him, unlike Nic Costa, from pursuing a suspect into the Vatican, which is why Dibdin has the Curia ask specifically for Zen to investigate a case for them. Even though they explain that “Ruspanti died on Vatican soil [and they] are under no legal obligation to consult anyone
“Ruspanti’s death occurred in the Vatican City State, and was therefore not subject to investigation by the Italian authorities. When I acted for you in that affair, I did so as a free agent. If Grimaldi had also died within the walls of the Vatican, I would have been happy to sign this undertaking. But he didn’t, he died in Rome. If I sign this . . . I would be unable to avoid perjuring myself whether I spoke or remained silent” (105). Even though Zen is a good Catholic, the service at the police has taught him to protect his interests above those of other people.

Part of his decision not to cooperate with the Church authorities might be also attributed to his growing dislike of the Vatican City. Even though he does not like Rome, he perceives the Vatican as a more menacing place than the capital city itself. The reason is that the Vatican is too orderly – a characteristic which Zen is known to particularly detest. It was the excuse for his brief siding with the young Roman on the train in *Ratking,* and it is also the cause of his discomposure in the Holy city. The first instance of the unsettling atmosphere evoked by the Vatican occurs when Zen hears church bells ringing. “The bells of the local churches were in some disagreement about the exact moment when nine o’clock arrived, but the Vatican itself opened its doors dead on time, as though to
emphasize that although in Rome, it was by no means of Rome” (97). The second example of Zen’s uneasiness in the Vatican appears when he is invited for a walk with the archbishop. As they pass through the external estates of the Vatican Museum, Zen realizes that something is “not quite real about the Vatican” because the environment and the people are different from the rest of Rome. There is “no litter, no graffiti, no traffic,” the cars are parked correctly and the people walk “briskly along, intent on their business”. Zen concludes that “in principle, this [is] all extremely pleasant. In practice it [gives him] the creeps, like a replica which everyone was conspiring to pass off as the real thing” (109). The idea of the replica might have its origin in the fact that they are walking around a museum, but the rest of Zen’s observations cannot be dismissed so easily. They, above all, persuade him that the Vatican City is truly a foreign country.

4.3. Place related to language and memories

The functions which place performs in Cabal are less extensive than in previous novels. The physical characterisation through place is completely missing, while the behavioural characteristics is represented by a single scene, in which Zen orders coffee typical for northern regions. Connection between place and language appears in the novel, but is reduced in importance. The only function which appears in the story with undiminished power is the ability of place to evoke memories. Its new aspect, only briefly touched in Ratking, is the (un)reality of a location. In the first novel Zen related to Tania the story he was told as a child about another citing existing inside the real one, where people can disappear. This concept is extended in Cabal in order to examine different perceptions of real and invented places.

The language skills of the characters to some extent compensate for the lack of physical characterisation in the novel. It is most evident on the example of Tania. In Vendetta she is portrayed as an abused married woman, whose problems in marriage are
caused by the difference between her and her husband’s family’s origin, while the closeness between her and Zen is established through the geographical proximity of their home regions. Her use of dialect helps to establish her as a typical Italian woman. In _Cabal_, however, she becomes a different woman: successful, well-travelled and fashionable, and her language skills evolve accordingly. When she deals with her customers, she uses “her limited but serviceable English” (47). She is the only Italian in the series who openly speaks English, and therefore this feature has to be viewed as significant for the development of her character.

When Zen investigates Grimaldi’s death, he speaks to the man’s neighbour, who noticed a repairman working around Grimaldi’s flat the day before. He tells Zen that he recognized that the repairman “wasn’t a Roman” because of his accent: “‘all up here in the nose, like a real northerner’” (88). This greatly helps Zen in confirmation of the man’s identity: Marco Zeppegno, who is impersonating Antonio Simonelli, was born in Lombardy. The northern accent also plays a significant role in Zen’s personal life. When he secretly returns to his mother’s flat, he needs to know what she is doing in order to avoid meeting her. The “singsong intonations and the buzzing of the Venetian ‘x’” (69) reveals that his mother is speaking on the phone to her former Venetian neighbour Rosalba Morosini. Zen starts thinking about their relationship and he arrives at the conclusion that the two women regularly talk to each other because his mother wants to “keep in touch with the news and gossip in the only city that would ever be quite real for her” (69). It is another example of one’s feelings being professed as opinions of someone else, but it also contains a reference to the subjective reality of place.

Because of the consequences of the Moro affair, which seemingly confirmed the story about a hidden city existing within the solid one, Zen does not trust those parts of Rome which seem unreal to him. It has been shown that one of these places is the Vatican, but the feeling also extends over less notable structures. Zen does not use the new
underground railway line despite the fact that it is close to his house and would serve him well in transporting him to the office. He tried using it “but experience showed that twenty minutes in the tunnels of the Metropolitana left Zen’s day spavined before it had even begun. The bus journey was by no means an unrelieved joy, but at least it took place in a real city rather than that phantasmagoric subterranean realm of dismal leaky caverns” (175). An underground system of transport is probably too close to Zen’s idea of the “other” city, which is ultimately the reason why he refuses to use it.

Another example of an unreal location returns to the depiction of the Vatican. Zen perceives it not only as distinctly un-Roman; according to him the place produces an atmosphere of mystery and fabrication. Moreover, he is probably not the only one who sees the Vatican in this light. The archbishop claims that “people seem to believe that we are a mediaeval relic which has survived intact into the twentieth century, rife with secrecy, skulduggery and intrigue, at once sinister and colourful. Since such a Vatican doesn’t in fact exist, they invent it” (25). It is questionable whether Zen is influenced in his conclusions about the place by this general belief, or whether the Curia is attempting to hide the real face of the Vatican.

Where the locations reminded Zen of various aspects of his life in the previous novels, _Cabal_ brings only the memories of his native region. The growing seriousness of Zen’s corruption in the series and the frequency with which he thinks about Venice suggest that there is a direct proportionality between the two factors. It is possible to argue that the more corrupt and disillusioned Zen is, the more urgent his desire to return to the time when his life appeared idyllic. As Zen walks to Tania’s apartment, the lights darken and Zen is stricken with panic, because he remembers his colleague Romizi, who lies unconscious in a hospital with a clot on his brain. The fear that something similar has happened to him, produces in Zen a desire to be in a safe place, which is why the house where Tania lives starts reminding him of the family home in Venice (15).
The investigation of the crime scene in St. Peter’s invokes a memory of Venetian lagoon. “The air was filled with a sonorous squealing as the staff . . . manoeuvred the heavy wooden benches into place for the papal Mass. It reminded Zen of the sirens of fogbound shipping in the Venetian lagoons” (35). Here, the main agent of reminiscence is aural, not visual, but the circumstances in which Zen finds himself are only slightly less traumatic than in the previous example. The other policeman present, Giovanni Grimaldi, could barely cope with the sight of the mangled body, and if Zen does not betray any signs of discomposure, it is only thanks to his habit of escaping into the safe, Venetian area of his mind.

4.4. Corruption of religious and police representatives

Out of the three analysed novels, corruption in Cabal afflicts the widest range of institutions. Ratking and Vendetta depicted mostly the degradation of politicians and policemen, but the third detective story shows that Italian businessmen, journalists and medics are no less despicable. Even though Cabal also criticizes religious leaders and endeavours to portray them as the agents responsible for the crimes, the real source of corruption lies in human relationships. The effort to preserve the fragile bond between him and Tania leads Zen into increasingly serious instances of police misconduct, while the unhealthy relationship between Raimondo Falcone and his sister Ariana sets in motion the events which result in deaths of three people.

To begin with the analysis of the state agencies, the media are portrayed as corrupt because five editors of major newspapers publish an unverified anonymous letter, which accuses the Vatican and Zen of a conspiracy, merely to gain advantage over their rivals. “[A]ll five agreed that it would be wiser to hold back until the whole thing could be properly investigated. Chuckling with glee at their craftiness in securing this exclusive scoop, each then phoned the newsroom to hold the front page” (51). The editors not only
fail to confirm the verity of the information, they also lie to each other about their intended course of action. The published letter has a positive effect on the investigation, because it draws attention to the fact that Zen falsified the evidence, but it also confuses the inspector into believing that the Cabal really exists. If the editors honoured the journalists’ code of ethics they could have prevented some of the crimes from happening. This is the underlying message of the series: corruption in Italy does not exist as a result of illegal activities of a small number of important figures; it exists because people allow it to grow by neglecting their duties.

One of the agencies who confirm this presumption is Italian Financial Guard. Its members sometimes cooperate with the outlaws. “‘Big businesses have their own ways around the currency control laws, of course. . . . The bogus orders can be hidden amongst a mass of legitimate transactions and if all else fails i finanzieri have on occasion been known to look the other way’” (239-40). Bribery is naturally illegal in Italy as it is in most countries, but the law enforcers, like Antonia Simonelli, are either not given adequate authorities by the state, or they are already corrupt themselves.

Another group of civil servants scrutinized in the novel, who is also partially responsible for the wrong course of investigation which Zen pursues, is the medical staff of a local hospital. It is clear from the beginning that Zen is shocked by the misfortune which has befallen his colleague Romizi. The abrupt nature of Romizi’s illness causes Zen to doubt the state of his own health. When his colleague dies in the hospital, the inspector is deeply shaken. Not because of their relationship – it was not particularly close – but because Zen believes that Romizi’s death was ordered by the Cabal to serve as a warning for him. Not until the end of the story is it revealed that it was the doctors that killed Romizi in order to free the room. “‘When they called on him, the intern claimed that he had been acting on orders. . . . ‘They needed the bed?’ Tania shrugged. ‘That’s what it looks like’” (267). No example shows the depth of corruption in the society better than a hospital
in which the doctors kill their comatose patients to get room for treating those who are still alive.

The criticism of religious leaders is targeted against two organizations: the Vatican and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The latter was founded in 1048 in Jerusalem with an intention to “care for pilgrims of any religious faith or race” (“960 years of history” n. pag). Its members have devoted themselves to hospital work ever since. The perspective adopted by Zen is slightly different, however. He believes that the pious activities are merely a cover for vanity. “Under cover of the Order’s meritorious charitable work, its members [can] dress up in fancy red tunics, flowing capes and plumed hats and indulge themselves to their heart’s content in the spurious rituals and meaningless honours of a Ruritanian mini-state” (Dibdin, *Cabal* 147-48). The taste for luxury is by no means uncommon in religious circles and has been criticized since the creation of the organized religion. The corruption of Vatican, however, reaches farther.

On his way to the meeting with Lamboglia Zen observes a Vatican car parking at a forbidden place. The inspector is not surprised by the view because he knows that “it could sit there for the rest of the year without getting a ticket . . . Any vehicle bearing Sacra Cittá del Vaticano plates was invisible to the traffic cops” (57). Protection of Vatican’s interests on its own territory is one thing, but breaking the law in Rome is another. The only reason why the Italian policemen ignore the transgression is that they fear the reaction of the Curia. When Zen finally meets with Lamboglia to explain the origin of the letter which was sent to the newspapers, he is surprised that the Monsignor appears to be ignorant about the fact that Ruspanti was murdered. From a prior discussion with the archbishop Zen gathered that the Curia knew about the cause of the Prince’s death and summoned him because they wanted the tracks covered. Lamboglia heatedly explains that Zen misunderstood, but he does not behave in accordance with his words. He is visibly recording their communication, presumably to ensure the transparency of their dealings,
but he frequently pauses and rewinds the tape – especially when the topics discussed become inconvenient for the Vatican. This behaviour is not illegal by itself but it undermines the credibility of the Curia.

Police corruption in the novel is divided mainly among two characters: Giovanni Grimaldi and Zen. The first represents a police officer at the beginning of his illegal career, who is yet to learn the techniques necessary for his advancement, while the latter ultimately decides to put his experience with corruption into practice. Grimaldi is in a good position to succeed, because he develops the kind of contacts that can lead him to a promotion. He becomes a member of the Vigilanza “thanks to a local politician who had a word with a bishop who mentioned the matter to a monsignore in the Curia who had the ear of a certain archbishop in the Palazzo del Governatorato” (9). The novel does not elaborate on how Grimaldi managed to persuade the local politician to act on his behalf, but considering his history in the Carabinieri, it is entirely possible that two men became acquainted during an investigation and that Grimaldi granted the politician a favour which was to be repaid in the future. Grimaldi also believes that his prospects are promising because he can “perceive possibilities of personal advantage” (30), which are connected with the information revealed during his investigation. As the policeman responsible for the surveillance of the Prince, Grimaldi has an access to Ruspanti’s phone communication, which identifies his murderers. Instead of reporting this discovery, Grimaldi decides to exploit it for blackmail, but he underestimates his opponents and becomes their second victim.

Zen is similar to Grimaldi in one respect: he is equally eager to please his superiors. When he talks to Lamboglia, Zen suggests that the Curia denies involvement in the Ruspanti case and he will remain silent. But the Monsignor objects. “There is also the question of the mole.’ ‘You want me to tackle that?’ offered Zen, eager to show willing. . . . I could make a start there’” (67). If Zen was not personally interested in the revelation of the person who sent the letter to the media, his enthusiasm might be mistaken for
diligence, but in the current situation it is clear that the inspector seeks revenge more than justice.

The story of the third novel completes Zen’s evolution from a disappointed, but honest man into a police officer who is capable of anything to reach his goals. It has been already mentioned that Zen altered the evidence during the investigation of Ruspanti’s “suicide”. He chose this course of action for two reasons: he was convinced that he was following the orders from the Vatican and he wished to return to bed with Tania. His mistake was to derive his conclusions from his previous dealings with corrupt organizations, most notably with the political party represented by the l’onorevole. While the politician’s spokesman stated clearly what he wanted Zen to do, the archbishop tells the inspector to “inspect, investigate, interrogate and take whatever action [he] may consider necessary” (26). Zen reads this as an instruction to bend the findings of the investigation in favour of the Curia, but when he meets with Lamboglia it becomes clear that this was not what the archbishop wanted. Even though Zen was not supposed to reveal his conclusions to his own superiors, he was asked to find the truth. But the stage of his degradation prevented him from seeing the task in that light.

This does not mean that the Vatican is completely innocent; the priests do want to cover their inconvenient connection with Ruspanti, but they are less corrupt than Zen judges them to be. He once more misunderstands their instructions when he is asked by Lamboglia to find some incriminating material on Grimaldi, who is suspected of having sent the letter.

There were various ways you could read that, quite apart from the literal meaning, which was in fact the only one Zen was prepared to discount entirely. The question was not whether Lamboglia had expected him to plant evidence in Grimaldi’s room - that was taken for granted - but what that evidence was to prove. After due consideration Zen had decided to . . . frame Grimaldi for the murder. (78)
Zen’s distrust of straightforward explanations is presumably caused by his experience with organizations who wield similar power as the Vatican. But the paranoia into which his sense of disillusionment has transformed leads him to increasingly contemptible behaviour. The only reason why he does not execute his plan for destroying Grimaldi’s life is that by the time Zen arrives in the apartment, the man is already dead.

Another life which Zen supposedly threatens with his actions is that of his colleague Carlo Romizi. The inspector wants to read a file on the Cabal in the closed section of the police database, for which he does not have sufficient access rights. To avoid being questioned about the reasons for his query, he uses Romizi’s name in the identification process. He is aware of the risk this poses for his colleague, which is why he tries to ease his conscience by thinking that his fingers have typed the name “as though of their own volition” and that the deception is “perfectly harmless” because “if anybody bothered to check who had tried to read the closed file on the Cabal, it would at once be obvious that a false name had been used” (159). When Romizi dies in the hospital, Zen realizes the gravity of the situation. He does not yet know that his presumption about the Cabal’s existence is incorrect, which is why he assumes that it was a member of the secret organization who killed Romizi, and that it was his inquiry that prompted the action. “It was a masterstroke of cynical cruelty, calculated not only to strike terror into Zen’s heart but also to cripple him with remorse. For it was he who had condemned Carlo Romizi to death” (184).

At first the death of his colleague fills Zen with remorse. He begins to doubt his decision to sell the transcript which Grimaldi used to blackmail Ruspanti’s killers. “The idea of selling evidence to the highest bidder, never more than an idle speculation in the first place, was out of the question after what had happened to Carlo Romizi” (208). His plan is to go the meeting with Antonio Simonelli in Milan and deliver the materials to him. But when Simonelli, or rather Marco Zeppegno, appears on the train and pretends to be a member of the Cabal, Zen looses the remaining restrictions. Facing an organization which
seems to have its agents everywhere persuades him that there is no reason to obey the rules. He believes that by selling the transcript to Simonelli his position will not change except for the fact that he will gain fifty million lire. In this light it is easy for him to silence his conscience by thinking that “even if he wanted to resist, there was nothing he could do, no effective action he could take” (227). Simonelli has the advantage because he carries a gun and Zen cannot escape from the train. The inspector is saved from the consequences of his actions for the second time when Simonelli/Zepegno dies after being thrown out of the wagon.

This incident helps Zen to reveal the identity of the murderer, but he does not treat the information in a manner which is expected from him. Instead of reporting the findings to his superiors and arresting the criminal, he decides to use the knowledge for his own benefit. “He had bent the rules, turned a blind eye, and connived at various mild degrees of fraud and felony. But never before had he cold-bloodedly contemplated extorting a large sum of money for his personal gain. Still, better late than never. Who the hell did he think he was, anyway, Mother Theresa?” (271). Zen contacts the killer, Raimondo Falcone, alias Falso, and arranges a meeting with him in order to blackmail him, similarly as Grimaldi did. However, the rendezvous does not go according to Zen’s plan; when he accidentally triggers Falco’s gun, the man starts fleeing in panic and falls through a glass cupola of the Galleria. His death saves Zen from his corrupt self for the third time, but it also confirms the inspector’s inability to solve the cases to his own satisfaction.

The main impulse which drives Zen to participation in this level of corruption is encountering Tania with another man. He wrongly assumes that the man is her lover and that she prefers him over Zen because he is wealthy. Zen arranges the meeting with Falco before the misunderstanding is explained, but he does not cancel it afterwards, because he believes that he still needs the money to solve his personal problems. He thinks that Tania refuses to move in with him because his flat is too small; “if he could bring off the little
coup he had planned for that evening, he would have the cash for a down-payment on somewhere much larger” (271). Thus the desire to improve his failing relationship becomes the cause of his moral decline.

Their connection would not be so strained if they trusted each other. Tania has lost illusions about men during her unhappy marriage to Mauro Bevilacqua, while Zen does not feel that he deserves to be loved. Both are behaving irrationally as a result of their presumptions, but Zen resorts to more serious accusations and consequent actions. “A series of loud raps at the front door of Tania’s flat brought no response, so Zen got out the other key and unlocked the door. Once inside, he . . . checked his watch. He had plenty of time to search the flat and then . . . [return] at about ten past eight for his dinner date with the unsuspecting Tania” (201). Zen’s groundless suspicion and general clumsiness in accomplishing his plans jeopardizes the relationship with Tania, when she returns early and finds him in the flat, but the real cause of their problems is their disillusionment.

Another group of characters whose unhealthy relationships contribute to the tragic outcome of the events is the Falcone family. Umberto Falcone, the father of Raimondo and Ariana, worked in textile industry. He “used to bring samples home from the mills at Como and stroke the boy’s infant cheeks with them” because he believed that he was preparing Raimondo for his future role as the heir to the business. “But the child had misunderstood, as children are prone to do. He thought his father was caressing him, expressing a love that so rarely manifested itself on other occasions” (275). For the third time in the series, the story reveals tensions between family members. In Ratking it was the despotic Ruggiero Miletti who ruled his children and was despised by them in return. In Vendetta, the violent father broke Ellia’s spirit and unwittingly transformed her into a killer. The relationship between the father and the children in Cabal is seemingly the least corrupt; because the only deficiency on the part of the father is his lack of professed love. But the
novel reveals that under the right circumstances this is enough to trigger an undesirable reaction in the child.

Raimondo believes that his sister was preferred by their parents while they were alive. “He had always resented the exaggerated fuss which had been made of Ariana, the way her every wish and whim was pandered to.” It is therefore not surprising that he perceives her nervous breakdown after their parents’ death as an “excessive display of temperament” and “just another blatant example of attention-seeking” (279). When he becomes the head of the family, he starts taking revenge on her. At first he justifies the theft of her fashion designs as a joke on a friend, but later he claims that she would not be able to promote them as well as he does, because she is mad. The truth is, more likely, that he punishes her for enjoying the love of their parents by stealing the attention that should be paid to her. When Ruspanti enters this complicated situation and reveals the identity of the true designer, Raimondo feels that he has no other chance but kill him, because his little scheme would be made public. He also cannot stand the growing affection between Ariana and Ruspanti, which might be another contributing factor in his decision to kill the Prince.

4.5. Disillusionment in society and human relationships

*Cabal* shows the most extensive examples of disillusionment depicted in the series up to this point, which might be one of the reasons why corruption plays such an important role in the novel. One way of dealing with disillusionment which the characters apply in the novel is to ostentatiously ignore the authorities – the Church, in this case. Another approach is to adjust the behaviour according to the requirements of the environment, which in Italy means to become corrupt. The character whose thoughts are given the greatest attention is naturally Zen, because the readers perceive most of the story from his point of view, but the third novel examines the inspector’s inner life to even greater depth than the previous two. This amount of scrutiny reveals that Zen is extremely insecure.
about himself and about relationships to other people. To counterbalance this feeling he resorts to increasingly more illegal actions, which are supposed to increase his self-confidence and return him into the midst of the community. However, his ineptitude and misfortune cause the opposite.

The characters who have lost faith in political authorities are likely to be the same who have stopped attending the church. Despite the fact that Italy is a predominantly Catholic country, a priest complains at the beginning of the story that in the past “the church had been the centre of the community” but now the people are distracted by “the shops, discotheques, night clubs, beer bars and fast food outlets” and the churches are almost empty (4). Lack of interest in religious teachings might be seen as a side effect of the general dissatisfaction with the state politics, but a more likely explanation is that the behaviour of the clergy contributes to the aversion. After Ruspanti falls from the gallery of St. Peter’s Basilica and Grimaldi secures the area, the policeman bitterly contemplates the Vatican’s approach to people. “When there was life to be saved, as when Papa Wojtyla had been shot, the Church preferred the high standards of its own Policlinico Gemelli, but when it came to carting away corpses the institutions of the Italian state were good enough” (8). It is certain that no health facility, however well-equipped, would have saved Ruspanti’s life, but it must be confusing for the Italians to see that the Vatican representatives emphasize the autonomy of the city state when the Pope is in danger, but they summon foreign policemen when they do not want to dirty their hands.

But disillusionment is growing equally fast in the other camp. Priests are the people who witness more corruption than others, with exception of policemen. These two professions share the perspective on human nature, and, as the archbishop explains, there are very few things that can surprise them. “Luigi makes the mistake of supposing that we priests are either ignorant of or embarrassed by the facts of life. If he had spent half as much time in a confessional as we have, he would realize that there is nothing likely to
shock us very much” (114). The clergymen enter a vicious circle: common people, who are disenchanted by the country’s politics, commit crimes of their own to cope with the situation. They come to a confession to relieve the burden of their sins in front of a priest, who is eventually affected by it and loses his illusions. In the most serious scenario the priest also becomes corrupt, which produces more dissatisfied people and closes the circle. The secular alternative of the clergy – the police – are disillusioned for similar reasons, as has been shown on a number of examples. Hence Zen’s surprise when he finds the door of Grimaldi’s apartment unsecured. “Surely [his] work could not have left him with such a rosy view of human nature that he went off to work leaving his belongings in an unlocked room in an unguarded building?” (79). Zen obviously draws from his experience; service in police force stripped him of all illusions and it is therefore unthinkable that someone else could have escaped unscathed.

Every illegal act that Zen ponders or directly commits in the novel is supported by his unshakeable belief that there is no other course of action to take. His credo becomes most obvious when he considers the advantages of selling the transcript of Ruspanti’s conversations. Even though he is already pressed by the need of money, he is at first shocked to find himself seriously thinking about selling the evidence. But then the cynic inside him – “or a realist, as he would no doubt prefer to be called” (176) realizes that even if he used the materials to convict the murderers, they would probably escape justice anyway.

[In this particular case, as in so many others, justice was simply not an option, and to pretend otherwise was mere wishful thinking masquerading as idealism. In reality, there were only two possible outcomes. Zen could sell the transcript, thereby solving all his problems, or he could create a host of new problems for himself by setting in motion a major scandal with repercussions at every level of society. (176)
This scene is a classic instance of corruption generating more corruption and disillusionment on top of it. If the legal system of Italy was more efficient and less easily corruptible, Zen’s choice of action would not have to be limited to two equally unacceptable options. On the other hand, Zen contributes to the problem with his unwillingness to endanger his position. He might be simply exaggerating the negative effects of the second option to vindicate his decision to sell the transcript.

In addition to the legal system, the second element which accelerates Zen’s corruption is his disenchantment with the relationship between him and Tania. When she becomes free of her bond to Mauro Bevilacqua she ceases to be the woman with whom Zen fell in love. He prefers the traditional, domestic type of women, and Tania unpleasantly surprises him by drinking alcohol, smoking, and refusing to cook. This behaviour, which Zen finds repulsive, is at first counterbalanced by Tania’s love. Zen is “thinking of himself as essentially unlovable” (17) and her devotion helps him to be less cynical and disillusioned. But when she starts acting unusually as a result of her becoming a successful businesswoman, his insecurity awakens with full strength.

She has a reason why she does not tell him the whole truth. “Eight years of marriage to Mauro Bevilacqua had left her with no illusions about the frailty of the male ego, or the destructive passions that can be unleashed without the slightest warning when it feels slighted” (46). She, too, is a disillusioned character, but she does not employ the characteristic as destructively as Zen. The inspector inclines to cynical pessimism, whereas she is a true realist; this can be demonstrated on their approach to the existence of truth. Zen used to mock the naivety of his former girlfriend Ellen who believed that the “the truth was great and would prevail” (Dibdin, Ratking 168). Tania, on the other hand, does not doubt the insincerity of media. “The one thing you could be sure of . . . was that you would never, ever, know the truth. Whatever you did know was therefore by definition not the truth” (Dibdin, Cabal 47). She does not let others affect her sense of reason. Her
conclusion about the newspaper might be largely simplified, but it helps her to survive in the society and it does not force her to act irrationally.

The gravest mistake of the inspector is to mask his cynicism and insecurity with excessive self-confidence. After a heated row, caused by insincerity on both sides, the couple seemingly separates. Tania has more reasons to believe that Zen is unfaithful to her: she has found him in her flat, speaking amorously to a woman on the phone. Despite this fact, Zen believes to be in the right. “Tania might be ludicrously mistaken about his supposed amours, but he certainly wasn’t about hers. There was too much evidence, both material and circumstantial, and he was too experienced an investigator to be led astray” (216). The only evidence which Zen has is a letter, found at the bottom of Tania’s waste bin, in which a married man invites her for a meeting. The inspector does not consider other options, he persuades himself that the man must be her lover. This conclusion reaffirms the belief, which he has never abandoned, that he does not deserve to be loved.

In the end, however, Zen decides that he must win Tania back. When he sees her in Milan, accompanied by an elegant man, he assumes that her lover is wealthy. This is the only reason why he calls Falcone and arranges a meeting with him. His mid-life crisis reaches the top and he casts away the last remnants of illusions and honesty.

He had been a sucker for long enough, beavering away at a meaningless job without earlier thanks or reward. It was success people respected, not diligence or rectitude. . . Tania was having a fling with some married man with enough money to offer her a good time. And quite right too, he thought. He didn’t blame her. What was the point in playing safe when you could end up like Carlo Romizi at any moment? Would it be any consolation, in that final instant of consciousness, to reflect on how correctly one had behaved? (262)

In this comment he combines the pent-up frustration from all sources: the police work, the failed relationships, and the fear of death. Experience drawn from all of these
areas has shaped Zen into a weak, suspicious, cynical and increasingly corrupt policeman, who is able to solve the cases only by accident, as a side-effect of his efforts. He finally realizes the truth when he mistakenly fires Falcone’s gun and frightens the man so much that he accidentally falls to his death and thwarts Zen’s plan. “He was disgusted with his clumsiness, his unbelievable gaucheness, his limitless ineptitude. Couldn’t he do anything right? . . . Nothing had changed. Nothing would ever change” (301). Many things have changed during the course of the three novels, but Zen’s ineptitude is not one of them.
5. Conclusion

The three analyses of Dibdin’s novels have revealed that the central concepts of place, corruption and disillusionment are closely interconnected in the stories. Place in the Italy created by the author characterises the protagonists in terms of their origin. Their native region is a more significant feature than physical appearance, because it determines the behaviour of other people. The depicted Italians are largely territorial and separated. The only situation which unites them is opposition to foreign countries. Otherwise, the people from individual regions dislike and distrust each other. Moreover, in some parts of Italy, for instance in Sardinia, the local population is further diversified so that the members of particular clans treat each other as strangers.

The only protagonist who breaks the rule of a missing physical characterisation is inspector Zen. In his description, the visage plays an important role, because it marks him as a foreigner and excludes him from society as a result. Through Zen the readers explore the settings of the novels: Rome, Perugia, Sardinia and the Vatican City. But the descriptions provided cannot be considered objective, because Zen is heavily influenced by his painful life experience and disillusion. Because he dislikes Rome, the city acquires an aura of corruption in his point of view, and it retains it until the end of the third novel.

Part of the adversity is caused by the fact that Rome is located in the south and Zen originally comes from Venice in the north. The people from north are nearly always perceived in relation to industry and wealth, while the southerners are usually connected with rurality and poverty. The tensions between the two geographical areas are voiced by several other characters in the novels and they match the divides between the regions in the real countries, especially in the United States and the Great Britain. When Dibdin lets the characters to criticize either part of Italy, he covertly signalizes to his (predominantly British) readers that similar problems occur in England as well. In this manner place serves the purposes of social criticism.
Other functions of place include the connection with language, which often prevents the Italians from communicating with each other, and the ability to evoke memories. With the exception of Silvio Miletti in Ratking, the only character who is influenced by this aspect is Zen. Particular parts of Rome remind him of old cases, while desolate places evoke the feeling of abandonment – the result of his father’s disappearance. But Zen most frequently muses about his beloved Venice, which in his conception becomes an ideal place and helps him to cope with the requirements of his work. On the other hand, his allegiance to Venice also escalates his fall into the depths of corruption in the third novel.

Corruption and disillusionment are presented as inseparable and inherent to Italian society. They affect every part of public life: the politics, the media, and most importantly the police. The corrupt politicians are represented by the mysterious man called l’onorevole, who wields considerable power and strongly influences the course of Zen’s life in the second novel. The media are scrutinized in Cabal and their corruption is revealed to have similar influence over the inspector as the misconduct of the hospital staff in the novel. These examples show that corruption is not limited to particular spheres of public life, it influences and disillusiones nearly everyone.

Police corruption is depicted as the most common form of illegal behaviour; it surpasses even the crimes committed by the criminals. The police officers misuse their authority to gain profit or secure a promotion for themselves. But they violate the rules of conduct even more seriously. Several policemen in the novels hint that they are willingly to beat a prisoner in order to get information they need. Moreover, Zen witnesses two cases when the evidence is falsified by the police: first during the Moro affair, when the officers pretend not to know about the location where Moro is being held captive, and for the second time in the Spadola case, when the policemen hide a bloody knife in Spadola’s house.
Zen initially condemns these practices, but the continuous exposure to the corruption of his colleagues begins to change his attitude. His character is significantly transformed in the course of the three novels. In Ratking he is only disillusioned and tired with his menial desk job at the Ministry of Interior. At the end of the novel he unwittingly persuades one of the suspects to accelerate his promotion to Vice-Questore and he decides to use the opportunity. This decision marks the beginning of his corruption, because it is his illegal behaviour in the Miletti case which serves as a letter of commendation for l'onorevole in Vendetta. The last novel then finishes Zen’s transformation into a corrupt policeman, who does not hesitate to extort money from a suspect. Despite this extensive transformation of Zen’s professional behaviour, his abilities are unchanged, which means that his desire to improve his situation through illegal activities stays unfulfilled. He is not able to effectively bring a criminal to justice in the first novel any more than in the last. The murderer is revealed to the readers only through a series of coincidences, not as a result of Zen’s brilliant detective abilities.

It has been stated that the corruption of the police is the most visible of all kinds of illegal acts, but it is not the most influential. The corruption which surpasses the misconduct of the police officers occurs behind the closed doors, in the families. Each of the three stories includes examples of children being mistreated by their parents. In Ratking it is Ruggiero Miletti who plays the role of a tyrant, because he destroys the self-confidence of his son Silvio and the innocence of his daughter Cinzia. Both children are permanently scarred by the acts of their father, and even though it is not them who kills him, they are suspect for a considerable period of time. The second story is even more tragic. Here the abused daughter, Elia, loses her mind and brutally murders people whom she does not even know because they remind her of her own family who tortured her. The last novel clarifies that unequal distribution of parental love can have equally serious consequences for the children. Raimondo’s character was shaped by his feeling of inferiority to his sister.
who seemed to be preferred by their parents. When the parents die, Raimondo’s fury is unleashed and his sister becomes the victim. He not only refuses to help with her mental distress, he also steals her fashion designs and becomes famous at her expense. The chain of events which started with the negligence of the parents results in the murders committed by Raimondo in order to retain the public attention which is paid to him for the first time in his life.

Corruption and the ensuing disillusionment of the members of society form a vicious circle: corruption of the state representatives encourages their subordinates to follow in their footsteps, until most of the public figures are experienced in the illegal ways of obtaining advantages for themselves. An ordinary person perceives this situation in media and gradually loses illusions about the authorities. In some cases he becomes corrupt himself, because he reasons that if all people around him are spoiled, then there is no reason to be honest, because under these circumstances honesty equals stupidity. This is the path which Zen walks in the three novels, and Dibdin does not indicate that the inspector should leave it in the future.
Works cited


---. Cabal.


---. “Post-war British crime fiction.” Priestman 173-89.


Summary (abstract)

The thesis analyses the detective novels *Ratking, Vendetta* and *Cabal*, which constitute the first three volumes of Michael Dibdin’s Italian series. The thesis focuses on the author’s conception of place, corruption and disillusionment in Italian society. It argues that these notions are closely interconnected. Each chapter is devoted to one of the novels and divided into three subsections. The section which examines place focuses on description of those Italian regions and foreign countries which play the most distinctive role in the novels. This part is supplemented with an analysis of functions which place performs in the stories. The thesis argues that perception of place is connected to physical and behavioural characteristics of the protagonists, to their language use and memories, which are revealed in particular locations.

The second section of each of the three textual analyses examines the examples of corruption in the novels. It reveals that corruption most frequently occurs in politics, media, and in the police force, but its most destructive form can be found in families. The improper relationships between parents and their children are seen as the ultimate cause for the criminal acts which happen in the novels. The third sections of the chapters supplement the observations made in previous parts of the thesis with a deeper analysis of the causes of disillusionment in Italian society. The thesis concludes that corruption and disillusionment in Dibdin’s novels are closely linked to each other.
Resumé

Diplomová práce analyzuje detektivní romány *Ratking, Vendetta* a *Cabal*, které představují první tři díly italské série Michaela Dibdina. Práce se zaměřuje na autorovo pojetí místa, morální zkaženosti a deziluze v italské společnosti a předpokládá, že tyto tři koncepty jsou v románech úzce propojené. Každá kapitola je věnována jednomu z románů a je rozdělena do tří sekcí. V oblasti věnované místu jsou podrobně rozebrány ty italské a zahraniční regiony, které v románech hrají nejdůležitější roli. Tato část je rozšířena o analýzu dalších úloh, které jednotlivá místa v příbězích zastávají. Jedná se zejména o propojení místa s popisem fyzického vzhledu a chování postav, o vazbu mezi místem a použitím jazyka, a schopnost jednotlivých míst vyvolávat dávno zapomenuté vzpomínky.

Druhá část každé z kapitol je věnována rozboru morální zkaženosti postav i celé společnosti. Odhaluje, že úpadek mravů se nejčastěji vyskytuje v politice, médiích a v policejném sboru, ale že nejzávažnější důsledky má v rodinách. Narušené vztahy mezi rodiči a dětmi jsou chápány jako hlavní příčiny kriminálních činů, ke kterým v románech dochází. Třetí část každé kapitoly tvoří poznatky založené na obsahu předchozí sekce, doplněné o hlubší analýzu příčin deziluze v italské společnosti. Práce dochází k závěru, že zejména míra zkaženosti a pocit deziluze jsou v Dibdinových románech úzce provázané.