Abstract — From Malot’s to Benjamin’s Paris, through Dickens’ London up to Calvin’s invisible cities or the long-debated Ballard’s “Ultimate City”, the city has taken on, within the all-time literary landscape, a crucial importance for the novel’s framework, becoming “un lieu scénique” intended as a space, latu sensu, of the “modern” linguistic and literary geography, “hyperbole de la grande opposition dialectique culture versus nature”. Within these dynamics, the Italian city has enchanted, with its unusual and unique details, French and Francophone writers that, starting from Stendhal and George Sand, have fictionalized it in cameos with recognizable features in works in which, as pointed out by Jean-Yves Tadié “la carte de la ville organise la narration; l’éclatement de la mégapole la multiplie la pulverize”. On the contrary, as this paper will attempt to show, the Italian city in Jean-Philippe Toussaint’s work is presented to the reader in two ways: on the one hand, in the first part of his literary production, as a city “sans qualities”, a “non-lieux” where “rien ne bouge” and in which the non-personality of the first person narrator sees his reflection in a narcissistic Lacanian mirror game; on the other hand, in the second part of his literary production, the Italian city is a kind of topical landmark, milestone, implying both a narrative turning point and a substantial change in the first person narrator’s personality.

Keywords: city, Italy, first-person narrator, stillness, sea