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## MARISA MADIERI, JAN MORRIS AND IRENA ŽERJAL: ENGLISH, ISTRIAN TRIESTINE AND SLOVENE LITERARISATION OF TRIESTE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper analyses the ways in which the town of Trieste and its surrounding area are portrayed in literary works in the period following World War II. To this end, we have adopted a comparative approach in analysing three novels about the town of Trieste written by Irena Žerjal, Marisa Madieri and Jan Morris, belonging to different cultural and language traditions. Our analysis applied an interdisciplinary approach; geocriticism and literary imagery as well as the concepts of traumatic collective memory and postmemory. From a geocritical perspective, we have interpreted the literarisation of the town of Trieste from three different perspectives: the perspective of a Slovene author (Irena Žerjal); the Western-European perspective (Jan Morris); and the exile's perspective (Marisa Madieri). All three authors adopt a similar approach in their literary representations of the town of Trieste, namely going back in time, which allows them to shift the action from the present to the past, i.e. to Trieste as they knew it in their youth. In doing so, each author focuses on a different part of town. In those rare occurrences where action is set in the same places, each author ascribes a different meaning to the location. While the authors acknowledge the presence of the Other in Trieste, this has a negligible impact on the novel's course of action.*

**Keywords:** Marisa Madieri, Irena Žerjal, Jan Morris, Trieste

## MARISA MADIERI, JAN MORRIS E IRENA ŽERJAL: LETTERATURA INGLESE, TRIESTINA ISTRIANA E SLOVENA SULLA TRIESTE E DINTORNI ALLA FINE DELLA SECONDA GUERRA MONDIALE

### SINTESI

*Nel presente articolo, abbiamo utilizzato un'analisi comparativa per indagare il modo in cui la città di Trieste e il territorio triestino sono stati letteralizzati durante la fine della seconda guerra mondiale, in romanzi appartenenti a tre diverse tradizioni culturali e linguistiche. Si tratta dei romanzi su Trieste scritti da Irena Žerjal, Marisa Madieri e Jan Morris. L'analisi si è basata su un approccio interdisciplinare: geocritica, immagologia letteraria, memoria collettiva e postmemoria. Nel contesto dell'analisi geocritica, abbiamo osservato la percezione di Trieste espressa dalle tre autrici che denota tre diversi punti di vista: la visione nativa (Irena Žerjal), il punto di vista di un viaggiatore del Europa Occidentale (Jan Morris), il punto di vista di un rifugiato (Marisa Madieri). Le autrici usano un metodo simile per descrivere la città, ovvero il tempo salta dal presente alla Trieste della loro giovinezza. Le stesse si focalizzano su varie aree della città, ma raramente si soffermano sugli stessi luoghi. In tal caso, questi ultimi vengono comunque presentati in modo diverso. L'Altro nella città ha un ruolo minore nei loro romanzi.*

**Parole chiave:** Marisa Madieri, Irena Žerjal, Jan Morris, Trieste

## INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses three novels written in three different languages: Slovene, Italian and English.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the Second World War, our three authors—a Slovene woman from Trieste, a woman from Istria and a woman from Wales/England—all ended up living in the same place, i.e. the town of Trieste and the surrounding area. As adults, they have turned their youthful memories of life in this town into literary discourse.

Irena Žerjal (1940–2018) was born in the village of Ricmanje, near Trieste, where she spent her childhood. After graduating in Slavistics from the University of Ljubljana, she worked as a teacher, a translator, a poet and a writer. Her early childhood memories about the end of the Second World War and the post-war period in Trieste under the Allied Military Government are recounted in her novel *Kreda in hijacinte* (Chalk and Hyacinths). After many years of writing, the novel was finally completed in 1990 (Žerjal, 2006, 149) and was first published in 2006.

Marisa Madieri (1938–1996) was born in Rijeka. In 1949, she was exiled from Istria<sup>2</sup> with her whole family and ended up in the Silos reception centre for exiles in Trieste. After finishing her studies in literature, she worked as an English teacher and started a family with the writer Claudio Magris. She lived in Trieste until her death many years later. Her novel *Verde acqua* (Aqua Green), which was published in 1987, is a collection of emotional fragmentary memories of her first years in Trieste.

Jan Morris was born in 1926 as James Morris to an English mother and a Welsh father. She is considered to be one of the greatest English authors from the post-war period and is an internationally-renowned journalist. After the end of the Second World War, i.e. from 1946, she spent some time in Trieste as a soldier of the Allied Military Government (she changed gender in 1972). Although she only lived in Trieste for a short time, this town made a lasting impact on her. In the following decades she returned to Trieste many times and in 2001 she depicted the town in her novel.

In conducting a comparative analysis of the above-mentioned novels, we will draw from an interdisciplinary approach: from geocriticism (Westphal, 2011), from literary imagology (Beller & Leerssen, 2007), and from the concepts of traumatic collective memory and postmemory (Halbwachs, 2001; Hirsch, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

Geocriticism originates in from the field of comparative literature and is based on the premise that: “the referent and its representation are interdepend-

ent and interactive” (Westphal, 2011, 113). One of the methodological tenets of geocriticism is the multifocalisation of views on a given referential space (Westphal, 2011, 113). Multifocalisation is expressed in three basic variations: endogenous (autochthonic vision), exogenous (vision of the traveller), allogeneous (somewhere in between) (Westphal, 2011, 128). We should also take into account polysensoriality (which states that we experience our environment with all the five the senses: sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing (Westphal, 2011, 132). Literary imagology draws from comparative literature and focuses on the binary opposition between the Self (the home culture) and the Other (the foreign culture).

Firstly, we shall analyse how each author portrays Trieste and its surrounding area. We will focus in particular on the importance that each author ascribes to the different parts of town and to the town's surroundings, i.e. to the town as a whole. Secondly, we shall analyse the literary strategies used by each author to achieve the desired effect in their literary characterisations, for example the use of sensory inputs (colours, sounds, smells, etc.). We will then focus on how authors deal with, reflect on and problematise the presence of the Other in town. For example, we will analyse the instances in which Jan Morris talks about the Slovene population of Trieste and the passages in which she mentions the presence of people from Istria in town. In doing so, we will look into the literary strategies she uses to include these two groups in her narrative and we will attempt to define what role they play in her literary representation of Trieste. Specific aspects of the three selected works will be analysed applying from geocriticism and literary imagology, while also taking into account the impact of traumatic collective memory and postmemory on the literary representation of Trieste and its surrounding area.

## THE DEPICTION OF TRIESTE BY IRENA ŽERJAL, MARISA MADERI AND JAN MORRIS

## Chalk and Hyacinths

Verka, the main character in the novel *Kreda in hijacinte* (Chalk and Hyacinths) remembers Trieste in 1945, right after the end of World War II, with the following words:

*Everything was chaotic. In town, a crowd of people was singing and shouting. There were those who had returned from Nazi concentra-*

1 A comparison would also be possible with the novel in the context of Italian Triestine literature – the literature of the majority – but this is beyond the scope of the present article.

2 For additional information on Istrian exiles see for example Gombač (2005).

3 For additional information on literary imagology see Beller & Leerssen (2007). For additional information on the notion of collective memory see Halbwachs (2001). Postmemory is defined as the transfer of traumatic collective memory from the generation that experienced trauma to the following generations (Hirsch, 2008).

*tion camps, exiles, people who were homeless in their own town, persecutors whose names had been put on the list to be incinerated at the Risiera di San Sabba, ordinary people who had been pushed on the verge of poverty by the war, as well as supporters of the former fascist ideology [...] As English-speaking people flocked into our house, a wagon carrying bay-leaf wreaths and a trampled flag drove by, followed by a lorry full of exhausted but cheerful partisans. (Žerjal, 2006, 25)*

Soon after the end of the war, all this unrest and chaos subside. Memories of bombings and lives being under threat are replaced by idyllic descriptions of the villages on the outskirts of Trieste. Here one can find plenty of fruits and vegetables, all kinds of crops, tasty home-made food, fresh-baked bread, fish, oil and wine. Although the author focuses on farmers who work hard on their farms, in their gardens, fields and vineyards, these are happy scenes. In fact, the narrative conveys vitality and true passion for life. The people are busy rebuilding the buildings that have been torn down, happy couples are getting married and babies are born. These scenes also imply that the Slovene people in Trieste belong to a tightly-knit community, and cooperate in organising sport events, running cultural associations and attending religious services. Considerable importance is given to Slovene-language schools and to the use of the Slovene language. Schoolchildren have the opportunity to attend drama classes, to improve their public speaking skills, to perform radio dramas or publish their writings in magazines. Verka, the novel's protagonist, attends grammar school and reads many classics (works by Sienkiewicz, Čehov and Dostojevski) (Žerjal, 2006, 60, 66, 72). Interestingly, however, Italian authors are not mentioned in the novel, nor is the everyday life of the Italian population of Trieste. The author's literary strategy of "erasing" the Italian-speaking community from the narrative is most likely related to traumatic collective memory and to the oppression of the Slovene people in the province of Trieste.<sup>4</sup> This assumption is validated in several places in the novel where attention is drawn to the contrast between the nationally-conscious Slovene community and the Italian inhabitants of Trieste, who often display anti-Slovene feelings. The author also points out that the use of the Slovene language in public places was not viewed favourably by the Italian population:

*There was a lot of talk about politics, about how some people<sup>5</sup> responded to hateful comments from the elderly,<sup>6</sup> who did not like the fact that they spoke Slovene on the famous Molo San Carlo celebrated by Kette.<sup>7</sup> Not even a year had passed since Italy, with its countless promises, had been proclaimed the ruler of Trieste. (Žerjal, 2006, 61)*

Thus, Irena Žerjal portrays Trieste as a very lively town which draws its strength from the tightly-knit Slovene Triestine community. The latter strives to preserve and strengthen the national identity of the Slovene people in the province of Trieste. Consequently, readers are not given detailed descriptions of the various town quarters, nor does the author show emotional attachment to specific parts of town. Her focus is on the neighbourhoods where young Slovene people meet: the grammar school of Via Lazzaretto Vecchio, the pastry shop, the San Giusto hill overlooking the town and the seaside quarters of Barcola and Miramare.

The author focuses on the life of the Slovene inhabitants of Trieste; her novel does not include scenes portraying the life and activities of the Italian-speaking population. This also becomes apparent in her choices of place names. The dock which was then known as Molo Audace is referred to with its old name of Molo San Carlo, which was used under Austro-Hungarian rule. Thus, it can be inferred that the author indirectly rejects the Italianisation of Trieste.

### **Verde acqua (Aqua Green)**

In her novel, Marisa Madieri focuses on her impressions of Trieste in the postwar period. The town comes to life through her memories, which seem to suggest that she has not yet fully overcome the trauma of being exiled from Istria, living in poverty in the Silos reception centre for exiles in Trieste and being ashamed of her situation in her teenage years. Also central to her memories is her mother's affection and her own feeling of distress. The title *Aqua Green* actually refers to the colour of a skirt her mother bought her after selling her few valuable possessions so that she could pay a visit to her wealthy Triestine classmate without feeling embarrassed. Thus, for the author the aqua green colour is a symbol of love (Madieri, 2003, 129–130).

4 For additional information on the oppression of the Slovene population under the Fascist regime see for example Kacin Wohinz & Pirjevec (2000), Čermelj (1965).

5 Author's note: Here Irena Žerjal refers to Slovene people.

6 Author's note: Here Irena Žerjal refers to Italian people.

7 The author mentions the cycle of poems titled *Na molu San Carlo* (On the San Carlo dock) by the Slovene poet Dragotin Kette (1876–1899). The former *Molo San Carlo* (today called *Molo Audace*) is the town's main dock situated in one of the town's most popular walking areas. *Molo Audace* got its current name at the end of the First World War after the Italian military ship *Audace* which was the first ship to moor in Trieste. Thus, symbolically it conquered the town.

In her memoirs the author describes her arrival in Trieste and her first impressions of the town

*My first impression when I arrived in Trieste [...] was that of heaven on earth, of a promised land. To me, the busy streets, the white bread, the abundance of newspapers, weekly magazines and comic books at the news-stands, the goods displayed in shop windows and the way people dressed represented great wealth. (Maderi, 2003, 51)*

This image of wealth is in stark contrast with that of the Silos reception centre for exiles, which became the author's home for many years. The Silos is compared to Dante's *Inferno*: a place full of small, poorly-lit, dusty stalls which accommodated whole families. In the author's memories, the Silos smells of sweat, hospitals and cooked beans—food for the poor, which was the main staple of the people living there (Maderi, 2003, 75, 112). Due to poor acoustic isolation the place is filled with constant noise: the sounds of the radio coming from various stalls, the sound of coughing, crying, yelling, raindrops falling from a leaky roof, etc. (Maderi, 2003, 74–75, 107). Despite the evident lack of privacy, the author associates the Silos with feelings of loneliness (Maderi, 2003, 104, 115).

On the one hand, the Silos is full of people shivering in the windy Triestine winter. The author remembers how her mother used to boil water for her to warm her feet in while she was studying: *"When I was studying and I had to spend long hours reading books, my mother used to boil water, fill up a basin and place it under the table so that I could soak my aching feet in it"* (Maderi, 2003, 101). On the other hand, in summer the Silos is unbearably hot, so the author remembers spending time in the shade of trees in Piazza Libertà or in the seaside quarter of Barcola (Maderi, 2003, 86). The passage about the summer heat contains two of the few instances in which the author mentions a neighbourhood in Trieste other than the area around the Silos. Another place she includes in her narrative is Via Gambini, where she and her family used to get a meal which was prepared especially for the exiles at the Silos, and the Dante Alighieri grammar school (Maderi, 2003, 76, 85).

Memories of her teenage years are also filled with negative emotions. Above all, she feels ashamed for having to wear a worn-out dress, while her classmates wear fashionable clothes (Maderi, 2003, 102). The feeling of shame which leads to self-isolation is present in various parts of the novel:

*It wasn't easy to combine my day-to-day life at the Silos with the outside world I discovered through reading. My teachers and my classmates [...] knew almost nothing about me, about how difficult it was to study in a cold and noisy place; they could not imagine how uncomfortable I felt for always wearing the same dress [...] I was ashamed of my situation. (Maderi, 2003, 121)*

As it becomes clear from the above-mentioned passage, the constant noise in the Silos forced the author to learn how to completely isolate from the outside world. This way she was able to concentrate on her studies, whilst simultaneously escaping from the real world into an imaginary world. Her life at the Silos was no longer real, since her real life was happening in her imagination. Literature helped her considerably in creating a different reality: *"My friend lent me War and Peace. [...] Life at the Silos was more bearable if Natasha ended up marrying Pierre. [...] My life was a dream, the people around me were shadows"* (Maderi, 2003, 88, 105). In her quest to create her own genuine, beautiful and real life, the author does not want to grow up. Before becoming an adult she wants to be able to lead a normal life and experience everything she would have been able to enjoy under normal conditions (Maderi, 2003, 120).

Her perception of Trieste changes during her time as a student. On a summer day, when she leaves Barcola after going bathing and she heads back to the Silos after a storm, she looks at the sky and suddenly realises that:

*In the background, at the end of the gulf, the contours of the houses and of bell tower of Piran were clearly visible. A bit further, beyond Istria, my home town would soon be covered in dark clouds, I thought. But I had no regrets. The waves, the sky, the wind there were the same as here. Suddenly, I felt at home. I started running and skipping, my heart filled with joy. (Maderi, 2003, 126)*

Despite this positive step, we should not overlook the structure of her novel, which she wrote thirty years later. Her narrative which constantly shifts from the present—her life in Trieste with her husband and children—to the past, i.e. her life at the Silos. Since she has not fully overcome trauma, her past constantly resurfaces from her subconscious and permeates the present moment. This is when the author wishes she were able to surrender to her emotions.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> When a person loses someone dear or faces any kind of loss (the loss of their homeland, of freedom, etc.) a period of mourning follows. This period ends when the person elaborates the pain and accepts their loss. However, in case of traumatic events, a person may not be able to elaborate the loss and will therefore become melancholy. In such cases, the past constantly impinges on the present and the relationship with the traumatic event is preserved. Literature becomes the space where to express this feeling of nostalgia of the past and of what has been lost (Boulter, 2013).



Thus, it can be concluded that the author's representation of the town is based primarily on the opposition between Trieste—which symbolises abundance—and the Silos—a place of unpleasant visual, auditory and olfactory impressions, physical pain, hunger, loneliness and shame. Other parts of town are only mentioned in passing, since the author shows little interest in them.

### Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere

Jan Morris starts her Triestine journey with the following words: *"Ever since I arrived there as a young soldier at the end of the Second World War, the city has curiously haunted me"* (Morris, 2001, 3). Her relationship with this town is ambivalent. Despite the feeling of melancholy, it evokes in her, she keeps coming back: *"In Trieste more than anywhere I remember lost times, lost chances, lost friends, with the sweet tristesse that is onomatopoeic to the place"* (Morris, 2001, 188).

In her discovery of Trieste, Jan Morris pays special attention to the town's geographic and historical peculiarities. She shows interest in architecture, in the Trieste railway and in local fashion in Habsburg times (Morris, 2001, 5, 20, 24, 41, 50, 53, 57). A special chapter of her novel is dedicated to Jews: *"In my mind Jews and Trieste go together [...] in Habsburg times people in Vienna considered Trieste a Jewish city"* (Morris, 2001, 89). The author often draws cultural, historical and national analogies between events that occurred in Trieste and her native Wales (Morris, 2001, 4, 99, 116). On several instances she goes as far as to compare Trieste to Chicago, Riga and Vilnius (Morris, 2002, 50, 102). She shows particular interest in writers (Marcel Proust, Umberto Saba, Ricarda Huch, Italo Svevo; Morris, 2001, 65), intellectuals and other prominent figures of different nationalities who spent a period of time in Trieste. Thus, she unveils fragments of James Joyce's life by taking the reader on a tour of the different town quarters (Morris, 2001, 8, 92, 98, 112). She sees the town as being the centre of socio-political life, while it also serves as a backdrop for intimate stories and anecdotes about local and foreign intellectuals and prominent figures. In her own words, the essence of Trieste lies precisely in this transition between reality and fiction: *"[T]he true meaning of nowhere—this half-real, half-wishful Utopia"* (Morris, 2001, 181). She then continues: *"For all its traditional sobriety Trieste is a hallucinatory city, where fantasy easily brushes fact,*

*and a lot of what I have written about it has come from my own mind"* (Morris, 2001, 187).

Thus, the author is able to roam around Trieste in Habsburg times in the company of Maximilian, Franz Joseph's brother, who resided in Miramare Castle (Morris, 2001, 13). *"'Hurry up, coachman', Maximilian calls as his carriage pulls away from the Obelisk, 'the Governor is expecting us for dinner'"* (Morris, 2001, 16).

To describe the town's unique Italian cultural identity, Italian Triestine authors from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came up with the concept of *triestinità*, while later on their Slovene counterparts coined a similar term—*tržaškost*—to talk about the town's multicultural identity.<sup>9</sup> Jan Morris, too, feels the need to define the town's elusive essence and attempts to capture it by using the term *triesticity*:

*During my original time in Trieste I had a dear friend who was to become central to my conception of the place. Otto was a bit of a mystery. His national origins were indeterminate. [...] His manner was a mixture of the florid, the stiff and the deliberately outrageous. [...] In those days I thought of his ironically tolerant outlook as idiosyncratic cosmopolitanism, but now I would characterize it as Triesticity* (Morris, 2001, 117).

At this point, it is also worth mentioning the author's astonishment at some unusual, mangled surnames present in town: *"Any list of Trieste names, in almost any context, is bewilderingly multi-ethnic. The orchestra that played [...] last time I was at the opera, included violinists named Ivevic and Leszczynski, a cellist called Iztpk Kodric, Neri Noferini a horn player and an oboist named Giuseppe Mis Cipolat"* (Morris, 2001, 98).<sup>10</sup>

As it becomes evident, the author's perception of Trieste is that of a very diverse and dynamic town. In fact, she defines it as a hallucinatory town, thus allowing reality and fiction to merge freely in her descriptions and memories of life in Trieste and in her journey back in time to the Habsburg era. She recounts the town's past during the Habsburg empire, which in her opinion, represented the town's golden age. Thus, Trieste evokes in her feelings of melancholy about times past and all that has been lost. At the same time, she sees Trieste as a mysterious, undefined and complex town. All of these features are included in the concept of *triesticity*.

9 For additional information on the concepts of *tržaškost* and *triestinità* see Toroš, 2014; Pizzi, 2007.

10 In his review, Ložar draws attention to the author's carelessness or rather lack of knowledge of the Slovene/Croatian/Italian language. The correct spellings of proper names, as listed by Ložar, are as follows: Ivcevic, Izток, Giuseppe. Ložar also points at some other misspelled Slovene and Italian words, and notes that the author often uses the term *Slavic* when she should be using the more appropriate term *Slovene* instead. Ložar focuses particularly on the chapter "Risiera's victims", in which there is no mention of the Slovene victims (Ložar, 2003).

When the author talks about Trieste, she takes into consideration the town's Roman and Germanic cultural traditions. In fact, the novel includes a number of anecdotes relating to James Joyce's Triestine period. Her idea of *triesticity* most likely ensued from the Italian concept of *triestinità*. The author seems to be unaware of the historical significance of some Slovene and Istrian Triestine literary symbols. One such symbol is the *Molo San Carlo*, the dock celebrated by the Slovene poet Dragotin Kette. Although the dock is one of the novel's settings, the author does not mention Slovene literary traditions related to this place, namely Kette's poem *Molo San Carlo*. Moreover, in Morris's work there are no references to the Silos, which is a crucial feature of Madieri's work.

#### A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

#### Us, You and Them in Trieste. Slovene, English and Istrian literary intersections in Trieste

##### *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*

As suggested at the end of the previous section, when mentioning the Slovene Triestine community and the Istrian Triestine community, Jan Morris does not provide much detail on the day-to-day life of these communities. In fact, she shows little curiosity and does not pay much attention to literary symbols of these two communities present around town in the way she does with Germanic and Romanic authors (for example, she mentions "the Rilke path", "the Svevo trail", "the Joyce trail" (Morris, 2001, 173). When it comes to the Slovene and Istrian communities, she only refers to a number of historical and political events relating to the two communities. Slovenes are mentioned when she writes about the oppression of the Slovene population in Trieste and about the ban on the Slovene language in the interwar period (Morris, 2001, 114), while Istrians are mentioned when she narrates their postwar exodus (Morris, 2001, 143).

##### *Chalk and Hyacinths*

In Irena Žerjal's novel, the Allied Military Government, or rather the Allied soldiers who came to Trieste (i.e. the group Morris belonged to when she first arrived in town) are mentioned when the author recalls the time when her father was job-hunting. In fact, Verka's father is looking for a job at the Allied Military Government, but to no avail. This episode is mentioned in several passages of the novel, since it had a considerable impact on their finances. Moreover, job hunting was psychologically draining: "It is obvious that everything is a political decision. Someone like me, who is fluent in several languages and who was the first telegraphist and endured horrible working conditions,

is now forced to carry sacks" (Žerjal, 2006, 57). The author continues: "Granny Karla knew that he should be able to secure at least a part-time job and a regular income at the Allied Military Government that administered Trieste, but there was no hope" (Žerjal, 2006, 28, 29, 31). On the other hand, skilled seamstresses made a very good living under the Free Territory of Trieste: "Seamstresses who offered to sew parachute silk shirts earned good money for the heaps of clothes they sewed and ironed for the Allied soldiers" (Žerjal, 2006, 31). The Allied Military Government in Trieste is subsequently mentioned in relation to the establishment of Slovene-language schools after the war, since it was entrusted with selecting the teachers and its decisions were not always in line with the expectations of the members of the Slovene community (Žerjal, 2006, 37).

The above-mentioned extracts show that the Allied Military Government plays a marginal role in the novel's narrative. In fact, it is only included in the plot when its actions directly affect the Slovene community in Trieste. A similar pattern can be observed with regard to the Istrian Triestine community in the province of Trieste. Istrians ("many came from Yugoslavian villages in nearby Istria"; Žerjal, 2006, 32) are mentioned only in passing, namely in an episode where they advance demands for the priest in the Slovene countryside to say mass in Italian especially for them. Since the priest refuses, they report him to the archbishop.

These two examples show that the Other is a subject of interest only when it comes in direct contact with the local Slovene population and when its actions go against the interests of the Slovene community, which the protagonist is a member of. From the point of view of the imagology method, this is a relationship of phobia (the other two are philia and mania). It is characterized by fear, fear of another culture.

##### *Aqua Green*

In Marisa Madieri's novel, Allied soldiers are included in her first memory of Trieste. They are an integral part of the town's grandeur and of the author's general perception of Trieste as a wealthy town—in stark contrast with the poverty of the Silos:

*The presence of English and American soldiers with very shiny shoes, who offered chewing gum to the children, never ceased to amaze me either. The Free Territory of Trieste had been created by the superpowers in the difficult post-war years and was divided into two Zones. Trieste belonged to Zone A. (Madieri, 2003, 51)*

Marisa Madieri finds herself in a similar situation as Irena Žerjal, since her father's chances of employment depend on the decisions of the Allied Military

Government in Trieste. However, unlike Verka's father, Madieri's father had a positive experience with the new authority. He was offered a job, he learnt to speak English and befriended some allied soldiers: *"In a short time he was able to communicate in English. He made friends with the American soldiers and became their mascot due to his Herculean strength and adventurous spirit which made him look like a Far West hero"* (Madieri, 2003, 87).

There is another point where Marisa Madieri's narrative intersects with Irena Žerjal's literary world, namely in their descriptions of tensions between the Slovene and the Istrian community in Trieste. In one chapter, the reader meets Madieri's aunt on her mother's side. She is married to uncle Rudi, who is *"of Slavic origins"* (Madieri, 2003, 122) and is therefore ignored and insulted by his mother-in-law—the author's grandmother: *"Granny [...] ruined the atmosphere the most with her insinuations and insults directed towards the weaker sex. Slovene women were not only lazy, but also sciave"* (Madieri, 2003, 123). This negative stereotypical image of the Slavic population is characteristic of Italian irredentist literary works written by Italian Triestine authors. In later years, it also frequently appears as a metaimage in 20<sup>th</sup> century Slovene Triestine literature.<sup>11</sup>

### Three literary representations of Trieste and its surroundings. Crossing paths and isolated points of focus: the Karst, the Molo San Carlo, the Risiera di San Sabba and the Silos

As we have already seen, in the three novels analysed in this paper the presence of the Other in Trieste (the Slovene Triestine community, the Istrian Triestine community and the Allied Military Government) is only mentioned in passing. Instead, the novels focus on different settings in and around the town: squares, streets, etc.

Jan Morris's favourite setting is the centre of town (*Piazza Unità, Città vecchia*, etc.), where she lived when she first arrived in Trieste: *"The Hotel de la Ville was the American officers' club, the Albergo Savoia Excelsior was ours"* (Morris, 2001, 100). As she walks around this distinctively Habsburg neighbourhood, she adopts an extremely inquisitive approach and attempts to breathe some life into its forgotten stories—be they real or imaginary—which are closely related to the town's cultural and literary history. In doing so, she gives her personal interpretation and adds further developments of the plot.

As already noted, Marisa Madieri's focal point is the **Silos**. Although other parts of town are mentioned in her novel, she does not place great importance on them. Similarly, the novel by Irena Žerjal places emphasis on the life of the community to which she belongs—the Slovene Triestine community.

As has already been said, one point that Irena Žerjal's and Jan Morris's novels have in common is that they both mention the **Molo Audace** (Audace dock). As Jan Morris sits on the dock, she reflects on Trieste: *"On a warm day in 1946 I sat down on a bollard on the Molo Audace [...] to write a maudlin essay"* (Morris, 2001, 100). In contrast, Irena Žerjal calls this dock **pomol San Carlo** (San Carlo dock) and mentions it in relation to Slovene literary history, namely in relation to the poem *Na Molu San Carlo* (On the San Carlo Dock) by Dragotin Kette.

Marisa Madieri is socially unprivileged and therefore does not take part in social events which take place in **Triestine cafés**, nor does she include them in her novels. In contrast, Irena Žerjal frequents cafés with her classmates. Similarly, for Jan Morris: *"The smell of coffee" is "a classic fragrance of Trieste"* (Morris, 2001, 171). In fact, the vibe of bustling cafés takes her back to the past, when Trieste was a Habsburg town, more precisely to the year 1897. In her imagination, she becomes the protagonist, the guest of one of the cafés on the town's main square, from where she observes passers-by: *"All around me first-class passengers, awaiting the time to board their ship, are enjoying their last half-hour on Austrian soil before sailing away to America, Alexandria or the East"* (Morris, 2001, 43).

Another setting that Jan Morris's and Irena Žerjal's novels have in common is the former **Risiera di San Sabba**. However, the significance the two authors ascribe to this place is very different. Irena Žerjal explains her feelings about the Risiera in the novel's introduction: *"In her childhood, the protagonist and her family were taken off the list of "useless" beings, which was drawn up by Gestapo officers based on allegations from spies. The people on the list were to be incinerated in the Risiera—the symbol of degenerate fascist laws in force in the previous century"* (Žerjal, 2003, s. p.). Thus, for the protagonist the Risiera becomes a symbolic motivation for writing a novel about her family, about the Slovene Triestine community and its long-standing vitality in spite of the many attempts to annihilate it. On the other hand, Jan Morris only mentions the Risiera in relation to the oppression of the Jewish people, and says: *"I hate to go there now. It is one place in Trieste that speaks of the tragic rather than the poignant"* (Morris, 2001, 92).

11 A metaimage is a concept from literary imagology. It designates a perception of the Self (the local culture) that is greatly dependent on the value that the Other (the foreign culture) is believed to attribute to it. For additional information see Leerssen (2016, 21). To learn more about stereotypical images of the Slovene people in Italian early 20<sup>th</sup> century literature see Toroš (2011). For examples of metaimages in Slovene Triestine literature (the image of the Self – how Triestine Slovenes believe the Other, i.e. the Istrian inhabitants of Trieste, sees them) see for example Čuk (1998) and Umek (2010).



### *The countryside of Trieste*

Irena Žerjal's settings are mainly confined to the countryside surrounding the town, i.e. the Karst—the centre of cultural life of the Slovene Triestine community. Neighbourhoods inhabited by other, non-Slovene communities, are not mentioned.

The Karst is actually the only setting that all three novels have in common, since it features in the other two novels, too. All three authors describe it using similarly positive tones. At the end of the novel, Marisa Madieri enthusiastically recounts about discovering the wonderful natural landscape of the Val Rosandra. The latter serves as a bright comparison to the dark Silos (Madieri, 2003, 133).

Irena Žerjal considers the surroundings of Trieste and the Karst as her home: a place of abundance; a fertile land which yields a variety of wholesome crops; a vibrant and lively place inhabited by the hard-working and culturally active Slovene community. Jan Morris also depicts it using similar images of vitality: "*with patches of extreme fertility. There vineyards flourish [...] a place of butterflies*" (Morris, 2001, 136). For her, the Karst is also the antithesis to the town, "*an antithesis to civic normality [...] it is very Balkan [...] is like an unexpected spell or exorcism, left in the attic*" (Morris, 2001, 130, 138). Morris adopts a similar tone when describing the Istrian peninsula, Marisa Madieri's homeland: "*[W]e are in the heartland of that esoteric abstraction. It is a hard country, like the Karst*" (Morris, 2001, 147).

Thus, Jan Morris relates Slovene (Slavic) people with the Karst and the Balkans: exotic places which are in direct opposition to the town of Trieste. Her impressions of the Slovene (Slavic) world stems from a Western-European literary tradition and is based on the opposition between Western Europe—with which she is familiar—and Eastern Europe (the Balkans), i.e. from the contrast between civilisation on the one hand, and barbarity and savage beauty on the other.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, it is worth drawing attention to some obvious references to the work *Il mio Carso* (My Karst) by Scipio Slataper—whose thoughts are included in Jan Morris's novel on several occasions—and to his division of the world into Slavic, Germanic and Romanic cultures, where the Slavic culture is associated with nature and authenticity (Slataper, 2015).

### *Community, vitality and melancholy*

Besides analysing the role and the meaning ascribed by the three authors to the various town quarters, it is important to look at the feelings that life in Trieste and its surroundings evokes in them. In fact, another common trait of these three novels is that they dwell

on the feelings evoked by the town: feelings of vitality in the case of Irena Žerjal, and melancholy in the case of Marisa Madieri and Jan Morris.

Irena Žerjal is not familiar with this feeling of melancholy. The Slovene microcosmos she describes is full of vitality. She gives prominence to her desire to preserve the Slovene identity and continue to study the Slavic and Slovene cultures. On the other hand, in Marisa Madieri's novel, there is no such feeling of belonging to a community. The only exceptions are the demonstrations in favour of the annexation of Trieste to Italy: "*I, too, took part in the student protests and in this patriotic enthusiasm I felt, for the first time, that I belonged to a community and that I was an important part of it*" (Madieri, 2003, 124). At the core of her perception of Trieste are feelings of anxiety and loneliness.

This melancholy perception of Trieste is similar to Jan Morris's feelings: "*Trieste makes one ask sad questions of oneself*" (Morris, 2001, 65). Morris tries to find the reasons behind this melancholy through in-depth reflections. In the end, she comes to the conclusion that this feeling of melancholy can be ascribed to historical developments, namely to the feeling that Trieste's golden era is long past; to the town's isolated location, to the Karstic landscape and to the weather, especially to the strong wind called the Bora (Morris, 2001, 66, 131).

Morris's perception of Trieste as a melancholy place goes hand in hand with her conviction that Trieste is a town for exiles. When thinking about the Russian writer Ivan Bunin—who spent most of his life in exile and is therefore Morris's archetype of an exile—she says: "*He would have been among friends in Trieste, for this is a city made for exiles*" (Morris, 2001, 74). She backs her statement with examples of famous people of different cultures and from different historical periods who found a job or a place to live in Trieste and who had a negative perception of this town: from Casanova and French noblemen exiled during the French revolution as well as those exiled under Napoleon's rule to writers who came to Trieste for work (Charles Lever, Henri Beyle–Stendhal, James Joyce, Richard Francis Burton) (Morris, 2001, 80, 82). She also points out that people in Trieste suffer from many imaginary illnesses and feel the need for self-reflection (Morris, 2001, 67, 121).

As it has already been said, when Jan Morris attempts to gain a better understanding of the town of Trieste and its specific characteristics, she draws primarily from Romanic and Germanic traditions. Thus, she does not gain a deep understanding of the problems of the Istrian Triestine community depicted by Madieri. Similarly, she does not mention the

<sup>12</sup> For a representation of the Balkans from a British viewpoint see Hammond (2010).



migratory currents going in the opposite direction, i.e. from Trieste to a foreign country. It should not be forgotten that the Slovene Triestine community was deeply impacted by such migration waves, especially in the inter-war years.<sup>13</sup>

### *Microperspectives, macroperspectives and trauma*

At the end of this comparative analysis let us consider the authors' different outlooks on the town of Trieste by drawing from geocriticism (*"vision of the traveller"*, *"autochthonic vision"*, *"somewhere in between"*; Westphal, 2011, 128). In fact, these visions feature in the works of all three authors and can be regarded as consequences of their different perceptions of the town.

Irena Žerjal was born in the province of Trieste. Since she was immersed in the Slovene Triestine microcosmos, she does not have the outsider's vision that is characteristic of Jan Morris and Marisa Madieri. Despite some similarities, Morris and Madieri actually have fairly different visions of the town. The latter was an exile and was forced to live in an environment that she perceived as hostile, while—with the exception of her first short stay in as a soldier of the Allied Military Government—Jan Morris was free to choose where to stay. These different perspectives also stem from their different cultural backgrounds and geographical origins (Istria and Great Britain).

Jan Morris describes Trieste and its surroundings—the squares, the streets and the countryside—from the point of view of a town's temporary or occasional dweller, an outsider (vision of the traveller). Her accounts of life in town are lively and full of anecdotes from the lives of foreign writers who also lived in Trieste. Through her eyes, we discover a different, more diverse and animated town than the one we get to know through the works of Slovene Triestine authors. The main reason for such differences in perception probably depends on the fact that, when talking about Trieste, Slovene Triestine authors describe their home town and are therefore more likely to have a microvision, a narrower focus, greater attention to the details of everyday life. It is not surprising that they tend to include in their narrative those parts of town which are significant for the Slovene community (**autochthonic vision**). It should also be considered that Slovene Triestine authors from the war and postwar generations have a very specific outlook on Trieste. This can be ascribed to traumatic cultural memory and postmemory of the Slovene Triestine community. Thus, their narratives are characterised by a specific literary

discourse, its core topical issue or rather its main focal point being the oppression of the Slovene people in the province of Trieste, as well as the efforts to preserve the Slovene community and to ensure it gets the respect it deserves.

Based on Marisa Madieri's novel, similar features can be observed in Istrian Triestine literature. In fact, her narrative also focuses on a time characterised by traumatic collective memory, i.e. the period after the end of the World War II which marks the beginning of the Istrian exodus. The author's point of view is the same as that of other authors who have been exiled from the Istrian peninsula (**some-where in between**).

In her reflection on the traumatic memory of Triestine Jews, Jan Morris reaches a similar conclusion with regard to the persistence of traumatic memory: "[J]ust as what happened to the Jews of Trieste in 1943 may well last longer in the collective memory than all their years of successful exile" (Morris, 2001, 93).

### CONCLUSION

Based on our analysis of three novels belonging to three different cultural and linguistic traditions, we have ascertained that each novel only provides insight into the life of one community of people living in the town of Trieste. Only by conducting a comparative analysis of all three novels do we gain a comprehensive, three dimensional and three-coloured view of what life in Trieste was really like at that time and of how it was recounted in literary works. From a geocritical perspective, it can be concluded that the literarisation of Trieste occurs through three different perspectives: the *"autochthonic vision"*, i.e. the microvision of a Slovene author (Irena Žerjal); the *"vision of the traveller"*, i.e. a Western-European macroperspective (Jan Morris); and a *"somewhere in between"* vision, i.e. an exile's perspective (Marisa Madieri). However, when depicting Trieste in their novels, the three authors adopt a similar approach and go back in time: from the present time to Trieste as they knew it in their youth. In doing so, each author focuses on different town quarters. Jan Morris concentrates on the very centre of town, i.e. the *"Habsburg"* area. In her novels there are several fictional, imaginary inserts. This is in line with the author's view of Trieste as a hallucinatory town. Marisa Madieri, on the other hand, describes life at the Silos exile centre by drawing on the senses: it is a place characterised by a multitude of noises, unpleasant smells and physical discomfort due to the cold weather in the winter and the heat in the summer. On the other hand, Irena Žerjal focuses on experiencing and

13 For additional information on migration from Trieste between the two wars see Kalc (2016).

portraying the vibrant and flourishing countryside on the outskirts of town. The three novels have very few settings in common and ascribe different meanings to those they do (e.g. the Molo Audace, the Risiera di San Sabba, the town's cafés and the Karst). Their contrasting perceptions of the same settings also indicate a lack of interest in the Other. Irena Žerjal's focal point is her own community, i.e. the Slovene Triestine community; Marisa Madieri focuses on the everyday life of Istrian people in the Silos centre for exiles; and Jan Morris concentrates on Trieste in Habsburg times, i.e. on the anecdotes of the lives of Western-European intellectuals and

other historical figures who spent time in Trieste. Although the Other (e.g. the Allied soldiers in Irena Žerjal's and Marisa Madieri's novels) is present in their literary works, it has a negligible impact on the plot's development. Moreover, the three authors have a different perception of the town of Trieste and of its distinctively "Triestine" features. For Irena Žerjal, this town is home to a lively Slovene community; for Marisa Madieri Trieste is a place characterised by loneliness, shame and poverty; for Jan Morris it is a nostalgic place which mourns its past glory, while at the same time being a mysterious, undefined and complex town.

## MARISA MADERI, JAN MORRIS IN IRENA ŽERJAL: ANGLEŠKA, ISTRSKOTRŽAŠKA IN SLOVENSKA LITERARIZACIJA TRSTA IN TRŽAŠKEGA PROSTORA OB KONCU DRUGE SVETOVNE VOJNE

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### POVZETEK

*V pričujočem članku smo raziskovali, na kakšen način sta literarizirana mesto Trst in tržaški prostor v obdobju konca druge svetovne vojne, in sicer v romanih, ki pripadajo trem različnim kulturnim in jezikovnim tradicijam, pri čemer smo ugotovili, da vsak od romanov ponuja uvid zgolj v življenje ene od skupnosti, ki so takrat sooblikovale tržaški vsakdan. Tako nam šele komparativna analiza vseh treh romanov ponuja celovitejši, trobarvni pogled na tržaški prostor tistega časa ter na metode literarizacije le-tega. V ta namen smo s komparativnim pristopom obravnavali romane o Trstu izpod peresa Irene Žerjal, Marise Madieri in Jan Morris. Pri analizi smo izhajali iz interdisciplinarnega pristopa, geokritike, literarne imagologije ter konceptov (travmatične) kolektivne memorije in postmemorije. V okviru geokritike smo razbrali literarizacijo Trsta skozi tri različna gledišča: slovenski (mikro)pogled (Irena Žerjal), zahodnoevropski (makro)pogled (Jan Morris), vmesno gledišče oziroma pogled begunke (Marisa Madieri). Avtorice uporabijo podobno metodo za literarizacijo mesta, in sicer časovne preskoke iz sedanjosti v Trst njihove mladosti, pri čemer osvetlujejo različne mestne predele; Morrisonova predvsem osrednji, habsburški del mesta, Madierova begunski center Silos, Žerjalova tržaško podeželje. V primeru redkih dogajalnih stičišč pa so slednji običajno drugače poantirani (Pomol Audace, Rižarna, tržaške kavarne, Kras). Različnosti dogajalnih prizorišč sledi tudi odsotnost zanimanja za Drugega v mestu. Žerjalova je osredotočena na življenje njene lastne, slovenske tržaške skupnosti, Madierova na življenje Istranov v Silosu, Morrisonova na habsburški Trst oziroma na zahodnoevropske kulturnike v Trstu. Zaznavanje Drugega na Tržaškem (denimo zavezniških vojakov pri Žerjalovi in Madierovi) je sicer prisotno, vendar nima globljega pomena za razvoj romanesknega dogajanja. Različno je tudi občutenje Trsta in Tržaškega kot celote. Za Žerjalovo je to prostor vitalne slovenske skupnosti, za Madierovo je to prostor osamljenosti, sramu, pomanjkanja. Morrisonovi mesto poraja občutke melanholije nad vsem minulim in izgubljenim. Obenem je to zanjo mesto misterija, nedoločenosti in kompleksnosti.*

**Ključne besede:** Marisa Madieri, Irena Žerjal, Jan Morris, Trst

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