

Ana Toroš

The Coded Literary Discourse of the Senjam Song Festival of Benečija

The following article discusses the poetic output in Beneška Slovenia (Benečija) written for the Senjam Song Festival of Benečija. While considering the context of the region's history and migrations, it focuses on the literary aspects of the festival, particularly on the analysis of the themes and the poetry writing technique. It builds on certain theoretical premises from literary imagology and psychoanalysis. The subject of the analysis are the lyrics from the period between 1971 and 2012, published in a three-volume collection featuring over 150 authors. The article notes the following most prevalent themes: issues of assimilation, migration, and the dying of villages in Benečija. Categorised by basic mood, they fall under one of two extremes: they are either cheerful and humorous in order to encourage and bring joy and hope to the Slovenes of Benečija; or they are pervaded with deep pain and concern over the situation in their region. The lyrics of the latter use a particular writing technique, which merely hints at the pressures of assimilation, conveying them through images and metaphors.

Keywords: Benečija, migration, poetry, minority, trauma.

Zakodirani literarni diskurz Senjama beneške pesmi

V pričujočem prispevku smo obravnavali pesniško ustvarjanje v Beneški Sloveniji, ki je nastajalo v okviru Senjama Beneške pesmi. V prispevku smo se, upoštevajoč zgodovinski in migracijski kontekst, osredotočili na literarne vidike festivala, predvsem na tematsko analizo in tehniko pisanja pesmi, pri čemer smo se naslonili na nekatera teoretska izhodišča s področja literarne imagologije ter psihoanalize. Analizirane pesmi, nastale v obdobju 1971–2012, so bile objavljene v treh zbornikih, pri katerih je sodelovalo več kot 150 avtorjev. Prevladujoče teme pesmi so asimilacijska problematika, izseljevanje ter umiranje vasi v Benečiji. Pesmi se po temeljnem občutenju delijo na vedre, šaljive pesmi, ki želijo bodriti in vnašati vedrino in upanje med Benečane, in na pesmi, prežete z globoko bolečino in zaskrbljenostjo nad razmerami v Benečiji. Slednje uporabljajo posebno tehniko pisanja, ki zgolj nakazuje asimilacijske pritiske in jih ponazarja preko podob in metafor.

Ključne besede: Benečija, migracije, poezija, manjšina, travma.

Correspondence address: Ana Toroš, University of Nova Gorica, Vipavska cesta 13, SI-5000 Nova Gorica, e-mail: ana.toros@ung.si.

1. Introduction

The article discusses the poetic output in Beneška Slovenia written specifically for the Senjam Song Festival of Benečija (or Senjam Festival for short), which marks its 50th anniversary this year.¹ It is a unique literary production, barely researched in the field of literary history, born out of the distinct socio-political and migratory circumstances in Benečija. The article, within the context of history and migration, focuses on the literary aspects of the festival, particularly on the analysis of the themes and the poetry writing technique. It builds on certain theoretical premises from literary imagology – which introduces the terms I (domestic culture) and The Other (foreign culture) (Pageaux 2010; Leerssen 2016) – and psychoanalysis. It attempts to look at the phenomenon of the Senjam Song Festival of Benečija through the lens of the study *The Uncanny Inner Stranger* (2009) by psychiatrist Pavel Fonda.² While Fonda applies his study primarily to the Trieste area of the 20th century and the tensions between the minority and the majority, the structure of the relations in Beneška Slovenia is similar. Consequently, we can speculate that the Slovenes of Benečija also suffered collective cultural trauma through the process of forced assimilation from the late 19th century onward. An attempt will be made, therefore, to understand the Senjam Festival as a reaction to a “catastrophic anxiety” which forms in a “paranoid-schizoid position” (Fonda 2009) upon facing the demise of one’s culture.³

Marija Pirjevec has pointed out that “because of its deeper purposes and meanings” the Senjam Festival as a phenomenon “cannot be classified as mere popular singing and song writing” (Pirjevec 2011, 131). In his papers *Some Remarks about the Most Recent Venetian Poetry* (2013) and *The contemporary poetry of Venetian Slovenia. A model of engaged poetry by Slovenes in Italy* (2016), David Bandelj wrote about the poetics of some of the more prominent authors who have taken part in the Senjam Festival, while Irena Novak Popov (2015) studied the festival through the lens of the revival of dialect poetry.⁴ During the 2005 Vilenica International Literary Festival, Roberto Dapit identified the native land and the mother tongue as the two most typical motifs of contemporary Slovene literary production in Benečija (Dapit 2005, 379). In addition, Anna Bogaro writes about the poetry of Beneška Slovenia in her book *Letteratura nascoste* (2011, 111–131).

2. The Uncanny Inner Stranger

In his study, Pavel Fonda (2009) draws on Freud’s reflection on the uncanny, wherein he distinguishes between suppressed content and dissociated content. Suppressed content relates to the inner stranger, and in this context, it also relates to the suppressed elements of one’s own ethno-national identity. Dissociated content refers to the unrecognised self-image of an individual or a group,

which is vastly different from the self-image that an individual or a group consciously holds. For the purpose, he highlights three categories of a person's or group's mental positions, which represent the process of development and maturation: the undifferentiated position; the paranoid-schizoid position: a person or group perceives every experience as either good or bad, but anything bad is projected onto the outside world; the depressive position: a person or group manages to tolerate their own flaws. The co-existence of love and hate towards the same object is accepted. When facing danger, a group will regress from the depressive position into the paranoid-schizoid position, which makes it easier to close ranks, identify the common enemy, and enforce both positive emotions towards one's own group and negative emotions towards the outside world. In this position, the world of objects will be reduced to the enemy group versus the idealised object/group to which one belongs. According to Fonda (2009), regression from the depressive into the paranoid-schizoid position causes a rupture in the semipermeable membrane separating the collective from the individual. In the process, collective stereotypes (the severely dehumanizing perception of the other, for example) will penetrate the mental space of an individual. The stereotypes formed in the paranoid-schizoid position correspond poorly to reality, because the perceived images of others become distorted by the negative content of the self that one projects onto them. The stereotypes/images adopted from the group culture become the inner objects/images that determine the way one relates to the members of one's own, as well as other groups (Fonda 2009, 101–134).

Saying that, it is necessary to point out, in the context of this article, that members of a minority will subconsciously introject a number of their own perceptions, as well as the majority's perceptions of their national identity. They will, therefore, find within themselves two stereotyped national identities: the way the minority sees itself and the way it is perceived by the majority.

By internalising the national culture of the majority, the minority will also subconsciously adopt negative images of itself, and it requires a lot of energy to suppress them. As a result, it will possess both an idealised group image and an introjected negative image of itself.

In the literary discourse of Slovene writers in Italy,⁵ the introjected negative image is symbolised by the insulting word *ščavi*.⁶ The lyrics to the Senjam songs also use various images to convey this most painful part of self-perception, which self-deprecatingly bring down the level of the language to that of a dog barking: "When you bark at others here, / I can see they have a hard time understanding / perhaps ... I think ... it could be / that you bark in Slovene, like all of us" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 66).⁷ Also noticeable is the critical self-image of a weak, helpless community, which can also be understood as an introjection: "Why was my language fearful / of defending my home?" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 20). Sometimes the lyrics contain a negation of this image; it stems from the introjected idealised image of the minority (the way the minority sees itself): "We never

hang our heads / no, it can't happen again / that we reply 'Si signore!'" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 99). Let us look at the lines by David Klodič from the same perspective: "Lower your voice, so no one can hear, / I am now very respected here" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 27).

According to Fonda (2009), a traumatic experience has to be processed properly, and this is often beyond the scope of an individual/group, who therefore remains in a paranoid-schizoid position. For the Slovenes of Benečija, the processing of the trauma is made difficult by the uncertain situation the minority experienced in the decades after World War Two – the circumstances in Benečija remained unfavourable for the Slovene language and culture to thrive even after the war (Kacin Wohinc 2001, 153–154), while the law on the protection of the Slovene minority was passed as late as 2001.

3. The Fear of the Ultimate Demise of One's Culture

If the literature of the Slovenes in the Trieste region formed its distinct common attributes at the turn of the 20th century with the rise of fascism as, we can assume, a reaction to the traumatic experience of the repression of Slovene culture and to the aggressive anti-Slovene discourse in the Italian regional literature of the time, the literature of the Slovenes in Benečija seems to contain something more than mere cultural trauma: another crucial element in the momentum for literary production – the fear of the ultimate demise of one's culture. From a psychoanalytical point of view, as Pavel Fonda (2009) explains, the demise of a group's culture generates catastrophic anxiety. As the subsequent analysis of the themes will show, the poetry of the Senjam Festival consistently speaks between the lines about life, and therefore Slovene culture, dying out in Benečija, so we can assume that the latter is the momentum behind the fifty years of poetic creativity.

This assumption is corroborated by Aldo Klodič's foreword to the third volume (Klodič 2013, 3) of the collection, containing song lyrics from between 1996 and 2012. He points out that the festival is at an important crossroads, as the older generation is passing the torch to the young. As a result, the themes seem to be more varied: from the authors

who still describe with nostalgia our peasant Slovene culture [...] we have moved to the more specific emotions of our young people, who, nevertheless, still can't break away from the heavy and unfair wounds that assimilation tried to inflict upon us. Hopefully, this search for something new will continue to preserve us and prolong the life of our Senjam and our national Slovene community (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 3).

The catastrophic anxiety is also present in the lyrics of the festival songs themselves, during the entire analysed period, e.g.: "if we go on like this, / we'll lose our blood, as well" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 21). The song *For You Who Come*

Among Us contains the following self-image: “We are / a bit tough / where we fear / to lose our soul” (Klodič 2013, 70).

4. Migrations from Benečija

Several factors have contributed to the gradual decline of Slovene culture in Benečija: besides assimilation, mass migrations have also played a part. In his study *Material on Emigration from ‘Venetian Slovenia’: The Case of the Comune of Sovodnje/Savogna*, Aleksej Kalc points out that this Slovene ethnic territory cannot be understood without its history of emigration (Kalc 2000, 175). Migrations from Benečija coincide with migrations from the rest of the hilly regions of Furlanija/Friuli, but with some deviations. Friuli began to see considerable migrations in the 19th century, as a result of demographic and socio-economic changes (e.g., the crisis of the agrarian and pastoral mountain economy). Migrations from Benečija, on the other hand, occurred later than those from other upland parts of Friuli and began on a small scale. They increased after World War One and continued into the late 1920s. Migrations from Benečija then scaled down again but became steadier; people tended to move overseas, to work in mining and construction. These changes coincided with the global economic crisis and the shrinking international labour market, as well as the restrictive Italian emigration policies after 1927. A new wave of migrations from Benečija began after World War Two, due to the difficult economic situation in the country, particularly in its mountainous and foothill regions. At that time, Italy included the export of workforce among the programme guidelines of its economic policies and entered into an intergovernmental agreement with Belgium, which needed workers to jumpstart its coal industry. Belgium thus became one of the destinations of the Slovene migrants from Benečija; others included France, Switzerland, England, Yugoslavia, and the industrial parts of Italy. Later, the flow of migration also turned towards Canada, Australia and Germany. A radical shift in the nature of migration occurred at that time: if before they had been temporary, people were now leaving the valleys for good (Kalc 2000). All of this is reflected in the poetry of the Senjam Festival, for the launching of which the post-war emigration wave was key. As Kalc points out,

the familiar process of the demographic decline in Benečija had thus began, and in the decades following World War Two the region lost over half of its population. [...] In comparison to the rest of the upland parts of Friuli, Benečija suffered a much more dramatic process of depopulation, which was only partly due to the “natural” socio-economic tendencies. In fact, the blame also lies with the policies of development and spatial planning, which, for political and nationalist reasons, conditioned through positive provisions the economic growth and increasing marginalisation of these areas. In conjunction with the elements of the suffocating anti-Slovene climate enveloping Benečija for long decades after the war, it was an added impetus for the population to emigrate (Kalc 2000, 185).

In the four decades following the 1950s, Benečija recorded a loss of over 60 % of its population.

5. The Senjam Song Festival of Benečija – General Overview

For the purpose of this analysis, three volumes of festival verse were reviewed, containing the song lyrics from the very first festival (in 1971) up to those from 2012. As a testament to the ways of life in Benečija after World War Two, the lyrics have an intrinsic ethnographic value. They include the motifs of polenta (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 72); basket weaving (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 61); and chestnuts (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 12).

The introductions to the three volumes highlight the circumstances in which the festival was born, reflecting the catastrophic anxiety surrounding cultural demise (Fonda 2009). The first volume, published in 1984, begins with a foreword by the Rečan Cultural Society, which states that the first Senjam Song Festival of Benečija in 1971 opened with the word night – the title of the very first song ever sung at the festival, written by Elda Vogrig. The foreword explains:

[A]nd there was indeed an imposing, cold, harsh night in the valleys of Benečija. In ever greater numbers, young people were scattering around the world, while their parents at home were forced to leave their land for lack of help. Our Slovene culture was barren, and it seemed this was the end of our people (S. N. 1984, 5).

In the years 1973, 1990 and 2001, the festival was dedicated to church songs. The foreword to the church festival of 2001 notes that “the Church, too, has a good influence on the progress of our people” (S. N. 2013, 97). This mirrors the historic significance of the local patriotic priests for the preservation of the Slovene language in Benečija (Cencič 2008). Understanding the connections between the clergy, faith, and the Slovene identity in Benečija can lead to the deeper layers of meaning in the festival songs of that particular year. In this sense, the lyrics to the song *Dear Mother* also express a concern for the preservation of Slovene identity among young people: “we ask you to keep / all our family / and most of all / our youth / so they don’t stray / from the right path” (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 102). The words to Viljem Černo’s *Easter* should be understood in the same context: “Thorns are the flowers of our land; / our footsteps end up / nailed to your wooden cross. / O, Lord, give us strength / to seize the laughter / of our land, / to inspirit the flower / of our soul” (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 108).

In 1974, the festival took a back seat to other events and did not take place. Financial difficulties have often threatened its existence and were the reason for its cancellations in 1975, 1979, 1993 and 2002 (S. N. 1984, 51; S. N. 2000, 152).

In 1976, the festival did not take place because of an earthquake. 1981 was a milestone year, because the Slovenes from Rezija (Rino Chinese) joined the festival. The festival of 1987 was special because the grand finale was broadcast live on RAI Radio Trst A and Radio Opčine (S. N. 2000, 68). The introduction to the festival hinted at one of the troubles that has often plagued the festival: "It has to be said, though, that this Senjam, like so many before, could not go by without an occasional nail on the road!" (S. N. 2000, 68). As we can see, a particular writing technique was used – simply alluding to, hinting at, certain facts, without giving any detailed explanations or context. Perhaps the fear of consequences for criticising the Other (the enemy group) too loudly may have played a part in this. Not to mention that the participants of the festival, the locals, were only too familiar with the state of affairs in Benečija.

Keeping in mind this writing strategy, we can understand Jože Štucin's foreword to the second volume, comprising song lyrics from 1984 to 1995. Štucin underlines the issue of emigration and the "unkind policy" (Štucin 2000, 5). This volume, too, highlights the verses by Aldo Klodič; this time they address the dying of Benečija: "Where have the grapevines gone / and where are the farmers / who once lived in Benečija?" (Štucin 2000, 6).

2002 was darkened by the loss of the singer-songwriter Francesco Bergnach – Kekko. Together with Aldo Klodič and Luciano Chiabudini, he was one of the most prolific authors in the first volume, which featured some 30 writers. The number of authors more than doubled in the next volume, featuring over 60. Again, Francesco Bergnach – Kekko and Aldo Klodič stood out for their number of contributions. A similar number of writers featured in the third volume, which also saw an increase in collective song writing. The following writers stood out for their number of contributions: Viljem Černo, Aldo Klodič, David Klodič, Luciano Feletig, Michele Obit and Francesco Bergnach – Kekko, who remained an active member of the festival right up to his death.

It was not only the death of Francesco Bergnach – Kekko that hit the festival hard at the time, but also the six-year gap that followed: "The problems were many and varied, but mostly it was the finances and the lack of people" (S. N. 2013, 123). However, this time was used to reflect on past festivals, which resulted in an event called Once Upon a Time There Was a Festival, featuring new cover versions of past songs. Despite the eventual relaunching of the festival, the 2010 introduction, again in fragments, reveals the difficulties the organizers faced: "Volunteer work doesn't cover all the costs of our Festival and financial support from public authorities is dwindling. Consequently, the Rečan Cultural Society has decided that Senjam will become a biannual event" (S. N. 2013, 139).

6. Analysis of the Themes

56

To start off the analysis, we will refer to the foreword to the second volume, written by Aldo Klodič in the name of the Rečan Cultural Society. He was one of the most prolific and talented festival authors in its 50-year history. He writes:

It is assimilation that weighs most heavily on our people; it has done a big job, gnawing at our bodies and getting almost to our very bones. [...] We've convinced our friends that creativity is a must, even if it germinates in the garden of our dialect culture, and we've shown our opponents that it is our roots we respect and not the roots they've been forcing upon us [...] Many in our Slovene community in Benečija have lent a hand to preserve, develop and enrich our culture, our language and our lives (Klodič 2000, 7).

6.1 Root

The word root, in the sense of multi-generational existence firmly entrenched in the land of Benečija, also appears in much later verses by Klodič himself: "We are a tiny / land / and our people / are few / and our tough / roots / help us everywhere" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 70). The word root is also found in other lyrics, which continue to expand its connotations. Like the 1988 lyrics to *My Little Benečija*: "My little Benečija, / you are my wealth, / this is my homeland / and you are my root" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 107). Similarly, the lyrics by Daniele Capra, who have the word roots in the title: *Roots*: "It's strange to think / to be so strongly, / to be so bonded / with your village. / There's a force / that keeps me here, / and it's always, always hard to leave. // It's my roots / that keep me here, / in this valley / in these hamlets" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 154).

In 1996, the metaphorical field of the word expands even further, towards an eternal flow, towards the progeny who will ensure life, a hope of life, for the culture of Benečija: "From an old root / a new flower was born [...] a new, strong flower of Benečija" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 10). Yet another meaning appears at that time – the root of the spirit: "I will call my friends / to come back here / and look around / [...] they'll see the roots / of their spirit [...]" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 20).

Let us look at the Izidor Predan's lyrics to the song *The Sun*, which expand the image of the root onto those other, threatening, malicious roots that oppose the Slovene culture in Benečija: "May the sun warm up our valleys / and chase away a century of cold, dry up malicious roots / and save our true face" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 96). *Like Water Rushing in* by Michel Obit contains a negative utterance of the Other: "We're water rushing in and we're a river flowing, / we won't be stopped by those who'd take / our language, our old rights, / the roots that won't die" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 162). The Other (the enemy group) is named neither in the forewords to the festival volumes nor in the lyrics

themselves. The Other's main characteristic is that they oppose the blooming of Slovene culture in Benečija. In terms of Fonda's (2009) categories, this is a case of a poetic utterance from the paranoid-schizoid position, which activates when a community is under threat. The position also prioritizes strong community. This is reflected in the festival songs, which are often written in the first-person plural or speak of the problems of the entire community as it is trying to preserve its culture in Benečija.

6.2 The Flower Metaphor

Aldo Klodič also wrote the words to the song that opened the festival in 1971 – *Let Us Plant Flowers* – which gave the title to all three volumes of the collection. The key, symbolic message of the title becomes clear in the following lines of the lyrics: "Let us sing – the way we like, / speak and cry – write and read / in the language, – that our mother with all her love / imparted to us in the cradle" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 11). Aldo Klodič's lyrics from 1995 read like a chorus to these words: "They let us plant flowers, / but they didn't give us strength to fertilise them, / so where they still blossom, / it is only by God's grace, / this is a great miracle" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 184).

Let Us Plant Flowers is not the only one of Aldo Klodič's poems to use metaphors taken from the environment of the Rečanska Valley (withered and trampled flowers, silent birds) in order to draw attention to the pressures of assimilation and to the relation of I versus the Other (those, who are against us, against our Slovene culture in Benečija): "All things stand still there / as if bullied into silence. / I'm thinking: The flowers are ugly, / hanging their heads in shame" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 30).

These clandestine, sometimes fragmentary messages also appear in the lyrics of other authors. There is a general atmosphere of anxiety, oscillating between encouragement and hope, and desperation over the existence of the Slovene community in Benečija: "People of Benečija, do not despair" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 142). And in *A Parish Church* by Antonio Sdraulig: "Lord / protect all justice everywhere" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 40). And also: "We are always giving / light to our valleys" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 134). On the other hand, there are poems of utter despair, for example: "Too much hatred and too many injustices / keep us from / calling ourselves the sons of our Father" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 45).

We should mention that as a counterbalance to the analysed lyrics, which are full of anxiety and melancholy as they tackle the painful sides of Benečija (assimilation, emigration, the end of culture), the festival also features light, cheerful songs. They wish to express the joy of life, the lighter side of life; however, they probably do not arise from a genuinely cheerful disposition, but rather from a need for encouragement, from an inner sense of urgency to protect oneself from

despair over the oppression and the demise of one's own identity. The introduction to the 1978 festival songs, which ends in an ellipsis, seems to suggest this: "With these songs, we contribute what we can to make life better for the entire Benečija [...]" (S. N. 1984, 77). Certain festival song lyrics express the same sentiment: "protect my people, too" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 141); as well as a covert wish for a life of peace, without the pressures of assimilation: "While we, Slovenes from Benečija, would just live in peace" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 88).

As mentioned before, this and similar cases rely on a particular writing technique – one could call it a coded technique of writing and poetic expression – which is about alluding; approaching and then pulling away; suggesting without being explicit; while all the while assuming that the reader will recognise the hidden message. The point is communicated indirectly, possibly because the subject matter is too painful and traumatic, but also because external circumstances may not favour discussing certain topics. Because of this type of literary discourse, which only describes the effects of events rather than the actual agents and actions – in this case the non-utterance of the Other – the lyrics are coded to a degree, and the meaning is only accessible to the authors' own community. This corresponds to the assumption of a recipient/reader, a member of the Slovene community in Benečija, who knows and lives the underlying reality.

6.3 Community

With their identity being under threat, the lyrics communicate the need for community, for the bonding of like-minded people: "We also ask of you, merciful Lord, / to let brotherhood bind us" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 47). And also: "For now / there's still much to do, / and if we all put on / the love that will keep us together, / we can mend everything" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 74).

Gabriele Blasutig stresses the importance of a cooperating community in the title of his song *All Together*: "We are the ones who are still here. / We continue on our path [...] all of us who are still here, / should proudly say: 'I live here.'" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 99). Igor Cerno conveys a similar message in *Let's Join Hands*: "Let's join hands, / let's help each other, / we won't die!" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 170).

6.4 Benečija

Consequently, in the role of affirming the Slovene community and its identity, the word Benečija itself (and sometimes Rečanska Valley) is often used in various phrasings and titles: "I'm a boy from Benečija", "in the valley of Benečija", "from villages of Benečija", "for friends from Benečija", "a boy from Benečija", "a girl from Benečija", "our Benečija lineage", "we are two guys from Rečanska Valley" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 53, 62, 99, 123, 127, 145, 152, 100), "with a bouncy tune of Benečija" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 13).

6.5 Emigration

Another important festival theme is emigration, represented symbolically in the title of Adriano Noacco's *An Emigrant's Song* (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 190). In the festival's first year, the topic was addressed in the lyrics to the song *A Man* (Franco Cernotta – Izidor Predan), portraying the hardships of Slovene workers from Benečija abroad, particularly in respect to the life and work of miners: "A man went to work in Belgium [...] Nobody knows, / how he was crushed by a minecart [...] Nothing's left of him but a sad memory. [...] A swallow flies across the hill / to provide for her young, / it flies across cities and villages, / across rivers, woods and high barriers" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 17).

Other festival songs also touch upon the issue, as their titles reveal: *Empty Roads, Where Are You Going?*

The lyrics often talk about **the painful separation from one's birthplace, home and motherland, and about the hope to come back**: "When I was young, / life was hard. / I had to leave my land and go" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 73). Similarly, the lines by Angela Petricig: "So, two or three from each house / had to leave Benečija" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 152). And again: "I will come back, my beautiful village, / I will come back, / my hills of green" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 55).

Aldo Klodič treated the theme masterfully in *Thoughts*: "A swallow is gathering / her family, / to go / on a long voyage. // The night is coming. // Everyone's spurring me on: / off you go, too, / don't wait here / for your death / ... / The heart is crying. / ... / The soil smells so sweet" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 83).

The separation from family, mainly parents and partners, is portrayed as a particularly painful subject: "Once I've earned enough, / I will come back to you" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 81). Similarly, in the lyrics to *Once There Was a Boy*: "There was hunger, / and he left his old mother / and father at home, / and what was even harder, / his young sweetheart" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 26). And again, in Petar Zuanella's *Tear*: "The day has come for the boy / to take his suitcase and leave" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 80).

6.6 The Dying of Life in Benečija

Emigration is associated with the dying of life in the villages, and the lyrics are filled with nostalgia for everything that is inevitably disappearing and will only remain in these verses. Lyrics of this type are most numerous during the 1984–1995 period. This corresponds to the timeline of migrations from Benečija described in the beginning, which began in the 1950s and lasted for four decades. Most of these people never returned (Kalc 2000). Viljem Černo wrote: "Oh Mother, what is it that keeps us living here, / we are so few, so old, one could cry

one's eyes out over us. / ... / They were leaving day by day, / and before long we will be gone, as well" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 148). Luciano Chiabudini's lyrics are similar in tone: "The village is so empty, my heart is breaking / ... / What a lovely dream I had tonight, / our people have come home" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 79).

Michele Obit is equally straightforward about the situation in Benečija: "Do you remember the days, when we worked and sang / and the old and the young, we were happy, / and I don't know how it can be that our land / is now dying without hope, as people are dying / and the bramble's already overgrowing the old rafters; / how can it be that there's not a thing we can do" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 162).

Lorette Bernich's words in *The Death of My Village* are also poignant: "Among the flowers, up on the hill, / eight little houses, / ... / ten quiet voices. // There were a hundred voices / ... / They're dying, and my village, / my beautiful village, / is dying with them" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 52).

6.7 The Land

The land is another recurring motif, which continues in the mature years of the festival. The element of the land can appear in the title itself – *My Land*: "My land, / I have to go, / my land, / I'm leaving you / ... / My land, / listen to my heart, / it's only here that it resounds" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 73). The land can even appear as a personified member of the Slovene community in Benečija: "Raise your head, the land of Benečija" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 58).

7. Changes Over Time

The lyrics of the most recent analysed period of 2008–2012 differ from the rest in the sense that certain topics typical of the earlier periods (emigration, dying villages, threatened identity, language, land) begin to fade away. We notice a shift towards Slovene standard language and the presence of English vocabulary: "*Tell me why*. / Tell me why / you're not coming back to this paradise" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 159). Albeit as a quote, words in English already appear at the end of Michele Obit's 1994 lyrics to *A Song*: "The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind, / the answer is blowing in the wind" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 176).

7.1 Linguistic Shifts

The shifts in the language are partly due to the broader involvement of the younger generation. In 2012, "all the protagonists [were] younger than the festival, which was born in 1971; those under thirty played an important role" (S. N. 2013d, 155). The bilingual school, which opened in 1984 in Špeter, contributed

greatly to the proficiency in Slovene language, as Aldo Klodič noted in the foreword to the third volume (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 3).

Very few of the lyrics written between 1971 and 2012 that were analysed contain any foreign (Italian) vocabulary. Lyrics with alternating Slovene and Italian language are scarce. One could argue that it is a deliberate choice to search for, learn and preserve the vocabulary of the Slovene dialect of Benečija, without the help of Italian words. This, for example, was the explicit wish and the writing principle of Viljem Černo.

The first two songs with Italian vocabulary appear in 1982; they are *Our Čelešta* (Chiabudini 1983, 139–140) and *Smooth as Down* (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 150).

Regarding language, *Our Čelesta* is different: it mangles the Italian words, or rather, writes them in a Slovenised version. The letter *k* is most prominent – *kon wiski, un kappellino, konóško* – which could be seen as a response to the Italianised Slovene names in Benečija.

The protagonist Čelesta is a ridiculed character because she flirts with the urban, richer, non-Slovene world. The name itself is multifaceted: it comes from Italian (*celeste*), but it is Slovenised, and its first letter (sibilant, caron) gives away her Slovene lineage. The disapproval over Čelesta's choice (her disloyalty to the Slovene community in Benečija) becomes apparent in the humorous effects created by the alternating use of Slovene and Italian: "In my *ricoti* / I have a *fiorelino*, / and a *kapellino* / on my head; / bloody rake, / I don't *konóško* you, / I'm going in the *boško*, / but with a *dekolte*" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 139–140). There is some suggestion of prostitution, which seems attributed to the Italian element. Namely, if we assume that the lyrics are written from the paranoid-schizoid position, everything viewed as negative will be projected onto the opponent.

We may suppose, therefore, that Italian is used to criticise Čelesta's choice, her wish to leave the Slovene community (rural countryside) and enter an urban (non-Slovene) environment: "I am Čelešta, / *vestita a festa* / I carry manure / in a basket; / every Saturday / *vado a danzare*" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 139–140). As we can see, the protagonist's favouring of the foreign community is also reflected in her speech; she changes/mangles the Slovene language on the side of Italianisation: *danzare* (*plesare* in the original – the Slovene root of the verb to dance with an Italian conjugation). One cannot overlook her statement: "I don't *konóško* you" ("I don't know you"), which can be seen as a denial of her own community.

In terms of literary imagology, the character of Čelesta could be understood through the meta-image (Leerseen 2016), that is, through the home community's perception of how it is assessed by its own member who pulled away from its ideas and values. If we follow Fonda (2009), the image could be understood from the paranoid-schizoid position of the group, where an individual is forced

to identify with only one group. Fonda further explains that the separation from the group is painful and dangerous. The paranoid rule (you are either with us or against us) creates a threat of expulsion and projective identification which identifies/assimilates the other person with the enemy (Fonda 2009), attributing negative traits to him or her, as is the case with Celesta. The community's expectations of affiliation with the group can also be seen in Kekko Bergnach lyrics: "I love you, because you think like us" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 66).

The other lyrics with Italian vocabulary, *Smooth as Down*, use a passage in Italian to describe the light-hearted life of the younger generation: "The young sing cheerfully: / 'Com' é bella questa vita, / una pizza e la partita'" (Kulturno društvo Rečan 1984, 150). The lyrics contain mild criticism of young people, who are not aware of the commodities they have in comparison to the older generation, which experienced hunger. Joyfulness and carefreeness seem foreign to the home community and inappropriate as a virtue, and are, therefore, through the use of the Italian language, projected outward onto the Other.

7.2 Thematic Shifts

Aside from the linguistic shifts, it is also apparent that the lyrics no longer descend into those painful corners of Benečija. Nevertheless, central themes of the past, like emigration, still reverberate: "He hasn't been away long, / and wants to come back, / he left his valleys, / his family and his heart" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 130). And also: "I happily left you, / had to go far away, / in my mind I thought / I'd return to you" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 90). Likewise, the nostalgia and pain over the dying villages are still present at times: "I've changed my glasses but I'm still seeing the same, / the autumn colours, the empty valleys, the crying and laughter" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 172).

There are fresh connotations of the homeland – the Matajur mountain: "This is our homeland" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 142). The younger generation's lyrics can deal with the dying of Benečija with slightly different, less anxious feelings: "When the week ends / I grab my tools / and prepare my car, / I quickly leave the town. / I go to see my Nan, / who lives in the field, / among flowers and valleys, / life is good. / ... / But it comes to an end, / on my way home / sadness grabs me, / my heart feels sick" (Trusgnach et al. 2000, 181).

In recent years, the festival has seen two surprising semantic shifts within the traditional topics. The lyrics with the provocative title *Don't Count on Us* probably refer to the trans-generational weight of the cultural trauma and the related hopes of the older generation that the younger generation will protect Benečija from the loss of its Slovene culture: "We're not going anywhere, / we will stay here, / we are your hope. / We're not going anywhere, / we'll fade away here, / we are your hope" (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 146). The same lyrics then use the traditional image of a root to show that the faith in the strong Slovene community

in Benečija is crumbling: “We fly up, we fall, we despair, / then our families, / the roots of Benečija, / fall apart” (Trusgnach et al. 2013, 145).

It is worth noting that collective trauma is also passed on through generations because it has been inscribed into the culture of the group (Fonda 2009) in the hope that the younger generations will process it adequately. The Senjam Festival is an example of these efforts by the older generation; and it has borne fruit in the sense that the younger generations have indeed continued striving to preserve the Slovene culture in Benečija. It is still alive in the 21st century, despite the disturbing set of circumstances in the early 1970s, which brought about the birth of the festival. Or, as the closing words to the third volume suggest: “It may be that the lyrics are not always at the highest level, but the feelings they express illustrate beautifully the situation of our Slovene nation” (S. N. 2013, 177).

We may conclude that the festival songs are the result of a unique situation and unique energy, efforts, and the desire of the community to survive. Consequently, they are immeasurably full of courage, pain, fear, and depth. Every word is a metaphor, because it utters what is forbidden, unspoken, through the images of life in Benečija. In this sense, this is poetry with a capital P.

8. Conclusion

The Senjam Song Festival of Benečija was born in 1971 to meet the perceived need to preserve the Slovene culture and language of Benečija, which had been severely damaged by assimilation and migration. Although it experienced a few short gaps due to financial, personnel and other issues, it celebrates its 50 years in existence this year. This article has attempted to understand the festival through literary imagology and Pavel Fonda's theory of the uncanny inner stranger, while focusing on the literary aspects of the lyrics. As well as noting their ethnographic value in describing the Slovene culture in Benečija and in preserving the dialect, the article has identified their most prevalent themes. As it turns out, in the early period of the festival, the emphasis was on the issues of assimilation and migrations. In subsequent years, the festival themes focused even more on the dire situation in Benečija: the dying villages, abandoned agricultural land, empty houses, and thus the gradual decline of Slovene culture and language in the region.

The lyrics of Senjam songs are simple in form and written in the local dialect. They are set in the region they call home – Benečija. According to their basic mood, they fall into two categories: they are either cheerful and humorous, or they are pervaded with deep pain and concern over the situation in Benečija. The writings in the festival's collection and their forewords seem to suggest that the cheerfulness is there to encourage, to bring hope as people feel catastrophic anxiety over their cultural demise. The other group of lyrics, with darker undertones, uses a particular writing technique, which merely hints at the pressures of

assimilation, conveying them through images and metaphors. One of the most famous metaphors of this kind is that of a flower: Let us plant flowers. It is a verse by Aldo Klodič, one of the main, most prolific, and most talented poets of the festival. Besides his lyrics, the analysis has also looked at the work of another important poet from Benečija, Viljem Černo. Another typical poetic image is that of a root, which has changed over time and acquired new connotations. Finally, the motif of the land is also an important element of the Senjam Festival.

Through the decades, the language of the lyrics has moved closer to Standard Slovene – this is also because of the influence of the bilingual school, which opened in Špeter in 1984. The use of Italian words as a means of creating distinct semantic effects is scarce. The analysis of the lyrics of two songs with Italian vocabulary has shown that Italian is used to denote the negative traits that the speaking subject in his or her paranoid-schizoid position projects onto the outside world (Fonda 2009). The lyrics from the most recent years of the festival still covered in the analysis (until 2012) occasionally use English words, however, their use is relatively neutral, with no hidden semantic messages. The more recent festival songs have also gone through changes in terms of their themes, but despite a certain alleviation of anxiety, they still display responsibility and commitment towards the preservation of the Slovene culture in Benečija, which the older generations have passed on – also through Senjam – to the younger ones.

References

- Bandelj, D., 2013. Nekaj opazk o najodobnejši beneški poeziji. [Some Remarks about the Most Recent Venetian Poetry]. *Jezik in slovstvo* 58 (4), 59–71.
- Bandelj, D., 2016. Sodobna poezija Beneške Slovenije: model angažiranega pesništva med Slovenci v Italiji. [The Contemporary Poetry of Venetian Slovenia: A Model of Engaged Poetry by Slovenians in Italy]. *Jezik in slovstvo* 61 (2), 37–47.
- Bogaro, A., 2011. *Letterature nascoste*. Carocci, Roma.
- Cencič, M., 2008. *Beneška Slovenija in njeni Čedermaci*. Društvo za negovanje rodoljubnih tradicij organizacije TIGR Primorske, Škofije.
- Cergol, J., 2021. Čustveni vidiki pri izbiri jezikovnega koda slovenskih literarnih ustvarjalcev v Italiji. *Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ethnic Studies* 87, 233–252, DOI: 10.36144/RiG87.dec21.233-252.
- Dapit, R., 2005. Sodobna slovstvena ustvarjalnost v Benečiji. In M. Cunta & B. Šubert (eds.) *Vilenica: 20. mednarodni literarni festival*. Društvo slovenskih pisateljev, Ljubljana, 374–378.
- Fonda, P., 2009. Nedomačni notranji tujec. [The Uncanny Inner Stranger]. In L. Accati & R. Cogoy (eds.) *Fojbe: primer psihopatološke recepcije zgodovine*. Krtina, Ljubljana, 101–134.
- Kacin Wohinz, M. & Pirjevec, J., 2000. *Zgodovina Slovencev v Italiji 1866–2000*. Nova revija, Ljubljana.
- Kacin Wohinz, M. & Troha, N. (eds.), 2001. *Slovensko-italijanski odnosi 1880–1956: poročilo slovensko-italijanske zgodovinsko-kulturne komisije / I raporti italo-sloveni 1880–1956: rela-*

- zione della commissione storico-culturale italo-slovena / Slovene-Italian Relations 1880–1956: Report of the Slovene-Italian Historical and Cultural Commission. Nova revija, Ljubljana.
- Kalc, A., 2000. Prispevki za zgodovino izseljevanja iz Beneške Slovenije: primer občine Sovodnje/Savogna. [Material on Emigration from “Venetian Slovenia”: The Case of the Commune of Sovodnje/Savogna.] *Dve domovini/Two Homelands* 11/12, 175–202.
- Klodič, A., 2000. Šele cvedejo. In L. Trusgnach, A. Clodig & Ž. Gruden (eds.) *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške pesmi XI–XX, 1984–1995*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura “Ivan Trinko”, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli, 7.
- Klodič, A., 2013. Poganjajo le napri. In M. Trusgnach, A. Clodig, L. Trusgnach & Ž. Gruden (eds.) *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške pesmi XXI–XXX, 1996–2012*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa, Garmak/Grimacco; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura “Ivan Trinko”, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli, 3.
- Košuta, M., 2008. Ime in duh rože: sodobno slovensko slovstvo v Italiji. In M. Košuta *E-mejli*. Litera, Maribor, 23–64.
- Kulturno društvo Rečan, 1984. *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: 10 let senjama beneške pesmi*. ZIT, Trst.
- Leerssen, J., 2016. Imagology: On Using Ethnicity to Make Sense of the World. *Revue d'études ibériques et ibéro-américaines* 10, 13–31.
- Novak Popov, I., 2015. Senjam beneške pesmi kot dejavnik prenove narečne poezije v Slovenski Benečiji. *Primerjalna književnost* 38 (2), 157–174.
- Pageaux, D.-H., 2010. *Le scritture di Hermes*. Salerio editore, Palermo.
- Petricig, P., 1997. *Pod senco Trikolore*. Zadruga Lipa, Špeter.
- Pirjevec, M., 2011. Vprašanje narečne poezije. In M. Pirjevec *Tržaški književni razgledi*. Mladika, Trst, 123–136.
- S. N., 1984. [Uvod]. In *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: 10 let senjama beneške pesmi*. ZIT, Trst, 5, 51, 77.
- S. N., 2000. [Uvod]. In L. Trusgnach, A. Clodig & Ž. Gruden (eds.) *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške pesmi XI–XX, 1984–1995*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura “Ivan Trinko”, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli, 68, 152.
- S. N., 2013. [XXVI. SBP 2001 (CERKVENI)]. In M. Trusgnach, A. Clodig, L. Trusgnach & Ž. Gruden (eds.) *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške pesmi XXI–XXX, 1996–2012*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa, Garmak/Grimacco; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura “Ivan Trinko”, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli, 97, 123, 139, 155, 177.
- Štucin, J., 2000. Predgovor. In L. Trusgnach, A. Clodig & Ž. Gruden (eds.) *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške pesmi XI–XX, 1984–1995*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura “Ivan Trinko”, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli, 5–6.
- Toroš, A., 2020. Literary Manifestations of Traumatic Collective Memory and Postmemory: The Case of Istrian Triestine and Slovenian Triestine Literature. In V. Mikolič (ed.) *Language and Culture in the Intercultural World*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 387–401.
- Toroš, A., 2021. Minority Literature and Collective Trauma : The Case of Slovene Triestine Literature. *Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ethnic Studies* 86, 65–81, DOI: 10.36144/RiG86jun21.65-81.

- Trusgnach, L., Clodig, A. & Gruden, Ž. (eds.), 2000. *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške piesmi XI–XX, 1984–1995*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura Ivan Trinko, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli
- Trusgnach, M., Clodig, A., Trusgnach, L. & Gruden, Ž. (eds.), 2013: *Pustita nam rože po našim sadit: Senjam beneške piesmi XXI–XXX, 1996–2012*. Kulturno društvo/Circolo culturale Rečan, Lese/Liessa, Garmak/Grimacco; Kulturno društvo/Circolo di cultura Ivan Trinko, Čedad/Cividale del Friuli.
- Valentinčič, D., 2020. Nekaj dilem glede koncepta krovnosti pri slovenskih zamejskih organizacijah. *Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ethnic Studies* 84, 97–128, DOI: 10.36144/RiG84.jun20.97-130.
- Zuanella, N., 1998. *Mračna leta Benečije: dejavnost tajnih organizacij v vzhodni Furlaniji*. Cankarjeva Založba, Ljubljana.

Notes

- ¹ The event is organised by Rečan Aldo Klodič Cultural Society (Kulturno društvo Rečan Aldo Klodič). Within the Slovene minority in Friuli Venezia Giulia there are several active cultural organisations, united in cultural associations, which are members of one of the two umbrella associations. For more on this, cf. Valentinčič 2020.
- ² Fonda leans on the research by Melanie Klein (1952, cited in Fonda 2009).
- ³ Beneška Slovenia was part of the Republic of Venice from 1420 to the latter's dissolution in 1797, when it became part of the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1866 it became part of the Kingdom of Italy, which aimed for a one-nation state and the assimilation of its inhabitants (Kacin Wohinz & Pirjevec 2000, 17–19). In comparison to the Slovenes of the Gorizia and Trieste regions, one of the major differences in the education of the Slovenes in Benečija was the lack of local Slovene-language schools until 1984. Consequently, the Slovene clergy played a major role in spreading Slovene national ideas. Mira Cencič, among others, writes in her work *Beneška Slovenija in njeni Čedermaci* [Beneška Slovenia and its Patriotic Priests] (2008) about the clergy of Beneška Slovenia who strove for the preservation of the Slovene language, even after its use in public and in church services had been prohibited during fascism. In fiction, their struggle for the mother tongue was portrayed by France Bevk in his novel *Kaplan Martin Čedermac* [The Chaplain Martin Čedermac]. For Benečija after World War Two, and various Tricolore organisations, cf. *Mračna leta Benečije* [The Dark Years of Benečija] (Zuanella 1998) and *Pod senco Trikolore* [Under the Shadow of the Tricolore] (Petricig 1997).
- ⁴ Poetry writing in Benečija, as part of Slovene literature in Italy, is discussed by Miran Košuta (2008).
- ⁵ For Slovene literary discourse in Italy in relation to the collective trauma and emotional aspects in choosing its language code, cf. Toroš (2020; 2021) and Cergol (2021).
- ⁶ From *sciavo* or slave; the etymology of the word is also connected to the Slavs.
- ⁷ All lyrics cited here are from the first three volumes of the collection of the Senjam Song Festival of Benečija (1984, 2000, 2013). The article, and the literary excerpts in it, were fully translated by Katarina Jerin, in collaboration with the author of the article.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the financial support by the Slovenian Research Agency for the research programme Historical interpretations of the 20th century (P6-0347).