

L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

1

ANNO XXIV 2016

EDUCATT - UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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PUBBLICAZIONE SEMESTRALE

L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA
Facoltà di Scienze Linguistiche e Letterature straniere
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Anno XXIV - 1/2016
ISSN 1122-1917
ISBN 978-88-9335-058-7

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Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano | tel. 02.7234.2235 | fax 02.80.53.215
e-mail: editoriale.dsu@educatt.it (*produzione*); librario.dsu@educatt.it (*distribuzione*)
web: www.educatt.it/libri

Redazione della Rivista: redazione.all@unicatt.it | web: www.analisilinguisticaeletteraria.eu

Questo volume è stato stampato nel mese di luglio 2016
presso la Litografia Solari - Peschiera Borromeo (Milano)

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SOME TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF 'MINORITY' LITERATURE: THE CASE OF THE SLOVENIAN AND ITALIAN MINORITIES

JADRANKA CERGOLO

The aim of the article is to problematize the use of the term 'minority' literature. The term proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari proves to be too narrow and applicable only to a part of the variety of minority literatures. The aim of the article is therefore to provide a new definition of 'minority literature' by taking into account literature written by two minority groups, Slovenes living in Italy and Italians living in Slovenia and Croatia. The article even goes a step forward and poses the question whether 'minority literature' could be regarded as a completely independent supranational literary system.

Keywords: minority literature, regional literature, Slovenes in Italy, Italians in Slovenia and Croatia, interculturalism

1. *Introduction*

The emergence of interculturalism, accompanied by increasingly globalised cultural flows, has also triggered the reverse process, i.e. the process of promoting and exposing region-specificity and the characteristics of the local area in which the symbols of identity, history and rootedness gain a new level of significance in the lives of individuals and communities. These symbols mainly perform the function of self-affirmation, as each community has the right to be placed in its own historical, social and cultural environment; a crucial role is also played in this by the process of literary production. Exploring this topic also involves an exploration of minor communities, which includes minority communities. This term is currently used either to indicate historical ethnic groups that have been present in a given territory for various centuries or to refer to new, immigrant minority communities, that are appearing in major cities around the world as the result of massive migration flows. In this paper I will confine myself only to those historical ethnic minorities that have emerged after the Second World War at a time when the border between Italy and former Yugoslavia was defined in the area that today divides Italy and Slovenia. One of the consequences of this division was the formation of two minority communities: the Slovenian minority in Italy and the Italian minority in Slovenia and Croatia.

The evaluation of minority literature and the related form of regional literature is becoming a significant element at the level of local communities and regions because it provides a sense of identity while at the same time its diversity encourages tolerance and respect for the other. Minority or regional literatures comprise one of the first examples of transnational interculturality and their research is a priority since it promotes sustainable

development and consolidates the value of respect for one's neighbour. The need for the re-definition of the term 'minority literature' has already emerged in literary criticism along with the need to research the related deeper psychological forces by which it is marked.

2. *Minority literature*

The researchers who first defined the theoretical and methodological basis of minority literature were Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their monographic work on Kafka. The work is derived from the authors' experience of their research of Kafka as a Jew who used the German language for writing literature in Prague, the Czech Republic. However, the French researchers defined the system by the term *littérature mineure*, i.e. 'minor' or 'smaller' literature. Deleuze and Guattari defined minority literature not as literature created by a minority in their own minority language but as literary production that is created by a minority using the majority language. The primary characteristic of this type of literature is revealed by the process of de-territorialisation, i.e. distancing from the mother language. Kafka himself metaphorically described his plight in a letter to Max Brod in terms of an impasse that "closed off access to the written word to Prague Jews and prevented them from possessing a literature: it was impossible to write; impossible to write in German, impossible to write in any other way"¹. Another feature mentioned by the researchers is the political integration of minority literature. The authors argue that in 'major' literatures individual affairs interconnect with and insert themselves into social stratifications at the same time as the social environment supports them as a framework or background; in minority literatures, on the other hand, this process is reversed: "due to its limited space, each individual matter is immediately connected directly to politics"². A third characteristic, closely linked to this feature, is the collective value that the Frenchmen interpreted as being related to the fact that minority literatures belong to communities having a relatively small membership and therefore tending to lack terms to describe individual destiny, which is always very closely related to collective destiny. It is only thus that any literature can actually become a tool for collective expression; only thus it is able to address issues properly³. Therefore, good 'minority writers' are a true rarity; at the same time, they are also all the more welcome because they can describe situations that are impossible to describe within a 'major' literature. Therefore, the authors explain that the description of any such situation alone is essentially a political act. For all these three features, Deleuze and Guattari argue that minority literature, i.e. "a marginal way of writing, also possible via a larger language, allows the definition of popular, marginalised and other literature. It is only thus that any literature can, in fact, become a tool for collective expression; only thus it is able to address issues properly"⁴. Kafka was even of the opinion that a minority literature is much more ca-

¹ G. Deleuze – F. Guattari, *Kafka*, Literarno-umetniško društvo Literatura, Ljubljana 1995, p. 24. All original quotations from essays and poems have been translated in English by the author of the present contribution.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

pable of processing a theme because it is characterised by a specific distance or detachment from the community and the language in which it is created⁵.

The term 'minority' literature as applying to the literary creations of Slovenes in Italy was employed by David Bandelj, who wondered whether it would not be possible to talk about minority literature in terms of a completely independent literary system, separate from the national one and caught up in its own space and time. When faced with the issue of naming the literary system of Slovenians in Italy, Bandelj also notes that minority literature could be considered as transnational, considering it meets all three conditions set by Claudio Guillen in his definition of a transnational community: namely an international dimension, common historical and social conditions, independence of the genesis⁶. An example of such a transnational literary system could be observed in the concept of 'Trieste literature', within which all the authors who were in one way or another connected to Trieste would be addressed, e.g. James Joyce, Srećko Kosovel, Italo Svevo, the Stuparich brothers, Alojz Gradnik, Julius Kugy, Boris Pahor, Alojz Rebula etc. In this case, we could write about transnational literature.

However, since this shift has not occurred yet, the above-mentioned authors are still discussed within their national literature systems; minority literature has not (yet) become an internally stable, independent literary system. Therefore, we can agree with Bandelj who claims that "Slovenian literature in Italy still needs to go a long way before it reaches systemic independence. It is difficult to say that it is [...] fully independent, because it is co-shaped by Slovenian literature and Italian culture"⁷. On the other hand, the researcher is aware that this literary system is "gasping for independence from its original pre-system and strives to become a connecting interspace between the Italian and Slovenian cultures"⁸. Similar arguments could be made regarding the literary system of Italians living in Slovenia and Croatia, as the substantive forces that connect both literary systems are very similar, as will also be shown later on in this paper.

3. The case of the Italian literature in Slovenia and Croatia and the Slovene literature in Italy

While Bandelj took a closer look at the literature of a historical minority community, Deleuze and Guattari based their theory on the case of a German Jew who wrote in a Czech majority environment. If their theory is applied in other cases of minority communities, we can immediately notice that their definition of minority literature is lacking and too narrow to be able to cover other cases of other artists who create in minority languages. I have decided to make an in-depth analysis of two historic ethnic minorities – the Slovenian minority in Italy and the Italian minority in Slovenia and Croatia – the topic of my

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶ D. Bandelj, *Literature of Slovenians in Italy: a subsystem of Slovenian supernatural system?*, "Interlitteraria", 5, 2010, p. 438.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

⁸ *Ibidem.*

research. Given the geographic closeness of their national country and due above all to ties of language and culture, the members of both minority communities feel a sense of national belonging to that national context, and would therefore like to be discussed within the national linguistic, literary and cultural system, i.e. the Italians in Slovenia and Croatia feel part of the Italian cultural space, while the Slovenes in Italy feel that they belong to the unified Slovenian space. At the same time, both communities claim that their literary systems contain at least a few different elements that are not found in the core literatures, as these are related to the society, state and the system in which the community lives.

The literary works produced by members of minority communities tend to be an expression of the time and space in which they are created, thus the motifs of both literary systems are in many ways alike: e.g. both write about their attachment to their own native land, about the conservation of their own roots, the existence and development of the spiritual and cultural heritage left to future generations by ancestors, about their relationship to the other, the close yet at the same time so different neighbour, the language issue, memory and about the strong connection with the past. Another interesting trait is the fact that the authors of these regional literatures continuously struggle to avoid extreme hermeticism and postmodernism, as well as language experimentation, especially in poetry form. This is understandable if we consider that they may well see their language as a value they have been entrusted to safeguard. On the other hand, there are also such areas in which both minority literatures differ: the Italians, for example, extensively include the motif of the exodus, which is generally not covered by the Slovenes; conversely, the Slovenes often include the dichotomy between urban and rural life, which is hardly mentioned by their Italian neighbours. These and other typological guidelines of minority literature were also explored by Trieste professor Miran Košuta, who also based his research on the example of Slovenian literature in Italy⁹. Košuta identifies the creation of Slovenes in Italy in five major typological dimensions: the ontological, ethical, ethnic, linguistic and spatial dimensions.

Therefore, when researching minority literature, I suggest taking into account some dimensions that are common to the minority literary systems under scrutiny.

3.1 The ontological dimension

Miran Košuta understands the ontological dimension of Slovenian literature in Italy as having an emphasis on “anti-nihilism with a Sisyphean endurance in the middle of an absurd and inhuman world, which for older authors is the world of barbaric fascism and Nazism, while for the younger it is the overly bureaucratic and technocratic present¹⁰”. In the writings of Christian writers this anti-nihilism was mainly reflected in religious emotion and faith in God’s transcendence (Rebula, Saksida, Vetrih, Paljk, Bandelj), while secular authors are motivated by fundamental, natural human resistance and defiance, the desire for meaning and sense, but also faith in humanity (Mermolja, Ěuk, Pangerc). A very similar dimension can also be found in the literary creations of the Italians, especially during the

⁹ M. Košuta, *E-mejli: eseji o mejni literaturi*, Litera, Maribor 2008.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

late seventies and eighties after they broke away from neorealist prose and politically-engaged writing. The themes that emerge with the generation born after the Second World War focus on the intimate sphere, the search for meaning in the general human values, with a particular emphasis on the concept of love, and among which we can also find the themes of the relationship between man and nature, issues of identity, search for meaning, escaping to places from the authors' childhood¹¹. One of the most pronounced motives is certainly the motive of faith in man, in spite of the imprisonment of the human soul in the natural world, and despite the cultural and economic dehumanisation of modern society.

Similar themes can be found in the collections of poems by Italian poet Fulvio Šuran, in which he expresses an unbending faith in humanity:

Like snow in the sun
ideals melt
in the anxieties of history:
occurrences and recurrences of the eternal present
chasing one another in mockery of us¹².

On the one hand, Šuran's poetry contains a basic melancholy, a non-acceptance of one's own fate in the given conditions in a society that no longer recognises the beauty and authenticity of its own values, a belief that the modern world can only arouse anxiety and fear of the future ("The ideals of a new world are shattered / in the unease of tomorrow, yet present").

Despite the tragedy of the Second World War and the extreme dehumanisation of human dignity in the calamitous experience of concentration camps, Slovenian writer from Trieste Boris Pahor also manages to keep his faith in humanity; a faith in the possibility of organising the world in a sensible way and in the fact that there can be new life even after such an atrocious experience.

Here is a stronghold of the lost world, which extends into infinity and cannot come into contact with the human world at any point; there is no connection between the two. And so I'm attached to it like to the Sahara desert, where man becomes a flame among flames, yet with its endless emptiness and destructive infinity it strikes him that there, at a distance, he is torn in two and remains in yearning frustration for a new unification. Only the desert fire is clean, the sandy granules innocent, while here it was human hands that ignited the ovens and human ashes that are mixed with the soil of this world. But maybe, on the contrary, I cannot be separated from the meadows precisely because they are in themselves so rounded that they can be embraced with a single glance. There is no granularity like in other camps and nothing spreads out anywhere, it does not extend. Everything is clearly visible. Everything is meaningfully ordered and the demanding mistress was sensibly provided with steps

¹¹ *Le parole rimaste: storia della letteratura italiana dell'Istria e del Quarnero nel secondo Novecento*, N. Milani – R. Dobran ed., Pietas Iulia/Edit, Fiume 2010, p. 333, 2 volumi.

¹² F. Šuran, *Inutilità della storia*, Edit, Fiume 1999.

so that she could easily descend to her bleached altar. I do not know. I do not know what I am missing. In any case, I will go through the latticed wooden door and take this atmosphere with me into the daily granularity¹³.

3.2 Congenital interculturalism

Miran Košuta presents another typological guideline for Slovenian literature in Italy as an ethical marked trait; he identifies it as a basic humanism that is “rooted in the specific chronotope of the minority: an intellectual, a writer who lives and works in a multicultural environment, a man of the border is naturally aware that the humanistic values of coexistence, tolerance and dialogue are as essential to his existence as the air he breathes¹⁴”. Rather than employing an ethic of general stigmatisation of people belonging to ethnic minority communities, I prefer to employ a more specific ethical value that marks the literary production of minorities, i.e. the value of interculturalism, in which the minority members live and function from the day that they are born. It is a kind of *status quo* of interculturalism, which members of minority communities cannot avoid. They are constantly faced with this phenomenon and they adopt very different views on it. However, since in this case the coexistence of two different ethnic and linguistic groups is permanent, the value of respect for your neighbour and cultural inter-ethnic dialogue is in essence a day-to-day issue, and consequently also present in literary creation.

Nelida Milani, an established Italian writer from Pula, exhorts her readers to the imperative that Croats and Italians must learn to work together:

We must, and I repeat, must, learn from each other; we need to compare with each other in order to get to know each other, we must try to work together, the “Matica Hrvatska” with the “Dante Alighieri”, the magazine “Istria” with the magazine “Jurina and Franina”, “Annales” with “La Battana”. The only way to salvation is by comparison: the continuous development of the taboo, of diversity; getting used to listening to the other in order to re-humanise, to live together, to do something more than seek private thrills; producing works that make us aware of the richness of our land, where many cultures met and clashed, works, that is, which are able to shed light on the intimate relationships in these universes, with a view free from bias and political and ideological conditionings¹⁵.

Miran Košuta, likewise, considers the value of interculturalism as a defining factor of Slovenes in Italy: “But even more important is without a doubt the multicultural vein of the minority lyrical organism that is supplied with lifeblood every day through its reciprocal contact with the beating heart of the Italian majority as well as that of the Friulian and German reality¹⁶”. The fact that Slovenian poets are very well aware of the ontological chasm

¹³ B. Pahor, *Nekropola*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 2008, p. 217.

¹⁴ M. Košuta, *E-mejli*, p. 35.

¹⁵ N. Milani, *Nota redazionale*, “La Battana”, 111, 1994, p. 6.

¹⁶ M. Košuta, *E-mejli*, p. 46.

in their cultural environment is also evidenced by the poetry of Miroslav Košuta *Trieste tomorrow morning*:

I only hear throats ensnarled with foreign vocabulary,
I consult my calendar: the day is not far off
when even in me two selves wake up.
But what can you do – such is life¹⁷.

3.3 Ethnicity

I would argue that it is precisely in the value of ethnicity that we should look for the drive that is the most typical of minority literature, also referring to the assumption that I had set at the beginning of this paper: we cannot yet speak of a separate minority literature because the latter is still bound to and closely linked with its national literature due to their link to culture and language. Language and ethnic origin are still the closest ties that characterise minority literature: “national identity is still a topic that has not yet been surpassed, which is also a result of being torn between the Slovenian and Italian worlds, between homeliness and cosmopolitanism”¹⁸.

The literary creation of Slovenians in Italy can even be characterised by national activism, which, as argued by Miran Košuta, is not immune to the bacteria of nationalism, but on the other hand may even raise criticism and the consequent relativisation of the concept of ‘national’, especially with younger authors. However, this does not mean that it consists in an attempt by minority artists to escape from their nation or to exchange their own Slovenianness with Italianness, but is rather a way of looking for ways to overcome the ethnic threat and to accept national origins as naturally or as free of burdens as possible – “in other words an attempt to be Slovenian without experiencing complexes of smallness and vulnerability”¹⁹. The Slovenian language remains largely the artistic expression of choice in the literary creations of Slovenians in Italy, although we can find some examples of authors (e.g. Ivan Tavčar, Igor Pison, Miha Obid), who write in Italian. In Austrian Carinthia, the practice of Slovenians writing in German is more established, while writing in the majority language is yet unpractised among the Italian minority in Slovenia and in Croatia. But the fact remains that, especially over the last five years, some members of various minority communities have decided to write in the majority language (e.g. Maja Haderlap), which proves that the “younger authors are no longer struggling with minority and identity complexes, but are rather trying to live [their] Slovenian reality in an unburdened and trouble-free manner, which has also led to cases where Slovenian writers have selected Italian or

¹⁷ M. Košuta, *Trieste Tomorrow Morning*, ZTT, Trieste 1991.

¹⁸ M. Smotlak, *Narodna identiteta v sodobnem slovenskem romanu v Italiji (1991-2011): primer romanov Zgodba o reki, kripti in dvorljivem golobu Borisa Pahora in Tito, amor mijo Marka Sosiča*, “Slavistika v regijah”, Atti del convegno: Slovenski slavistični kongres, Koper 27 - 29 settembre 2012, Boža Krakar Vogel ed., p. 42.

¹⁹ M. Košuta, *E-mejli*, p. 26.

German for their privileged language code or even decided to create bilingually²⁰. Because of these assumptions, the concepts of national character and the closely associated linguistic character are becoming problematic and will need to be addressed in more detail in the future and be framed into a broader context of social and societal change.

Despite these concerns, it can still be argued that the question of national identity remains one of the key questions that is also present in the works of younger artists on both sides of the Slovenian-Italian border. Also a group of younger Italian artists (Marco Apollonio, Maurizio Tremul, Ugo Veselizza, Roberto Dobran, Laura Marchig, Lino Scotti, Robert Dubac, Aljoša Curavič, Franco Juri), who experience the world differently from their predecessors, prove that the community has got over the pain caused by historical events and seeks to redefine their position in a newly organised society, where they still speak in a language other than the language of the environment and the language of the majority. Questioning and proving one's identity is therefore still very topical, since the works by these authors discuss topics related to identity, identity crisis, generational conflict, loyalty to one's roots, tradition, or on the other hand, rebellion against them.

The death of Tito in 1981. The revolt of the Albanians in 1989. The independence of Slovenia in 1991. The war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the years that followed. In short, my privileged position brought me into a rather peculiar condition: I found myself with a passport of a country that no longer existed. Waiting for Italian citizenship, I was in danger of becoming what is known as a 'stateless person'. Homeless. Things got a bit complicated and, all in all, fell into that bureaucratic casuistry which fills the world to the brim with its rows of exiles, refugees, migrants, etcetera, etcetera²¹.

In this last period of development of Italian literature in Slovenia and Croatia the short story is becoming the privileged form of expression as writers try to overcome the tradition of their ancestors, to which they nevertheless feel attached. It is a very interesting dialogue between the past and the modern reality of the Italian minority as experienced by their members. There is a tangible desire to overcome the traumas of the past, which they did not experience anyway, a search for some kind of social justice and for a new experience of the present Istrian home soil.

Very similar themes can also be observed in the works of Slovenian authors of the younger generation in Italy; however, they often step into an open confrontation with the older generation. Thus, for example, Boris Pahor believes that one of the fundamental tasks of literature is the consolidation of national identity, despite being aware of the opprobrium this position generates in the circle of cultural figures from central Slovenia²²:

²⁰ D. Bandelj, *Literature of Slovenians in Italy*, p. 437.

²¹ A. Curavič, *Sindrome da frontiera*, L'autore libri, Firenze 2003, p. 22.

²² M. Smotlak, *Narodna identiteta v sodobnem slovenskem romanu v Italiji*, p. 44.

I know, he said, and nodded: You have often stressed that in your essays and you were right, because the young cultural workers, as I am now fully aware of, are not bothered at all about national belonging.

On the contrary, they think it outdated to express commitment to the definition of national identity, so their literature must also be free of all clutter and even of Prešerenian tradition!²³

The question of national identity is viewed in a much more untroubled fashion by slightly younger authors, although it should be noted that they definitely do think about it and consider it one of the key motives in their storytelling. They want to give it a new meaning in today's intercultural society and they are trying to experience it in a more unencumbered way, although this is not always easy.

You know, I'm Slovenian, like you; and like you I'm not turning this fact into any tragedy or comedy. I just am. What can I do? I came to this world to a Slovenian mother... as our song says. And this is as far as my Sloveneness goes, whether you like it or not!²⁴

3.4 Attachment to the native soil

Attachment to one's own native soil, descriptions of the native land, escapes to idyllic surroundings from one's memory are also very common themes both in the prose and poetry of minority artists. The sense of belonging to one's territory is also one of the main elements that characterise a nation or ethnic group (Smith, 1988). Already Deleuze and Guattari have defined the first characteristic of minority literature to be the deterioration of a man's identity, i.e. his geographical distancing from his people. When it comes to minority communities, we cannot talk about the nation-state as the homeland of this community. Minority communities do not regard the nation-state as their homeland, as already identified by Sosič in his novel *Tito, amor mijo*, in which the main protagonist wonders what his homeland actually is, because he has heard it defined by different concepts:

Do take me on a school trip if I successfully finish the year, so I will be able to see the Republic of Slovenia, which everyone says is my homeland. A small homeland within a large homeland, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there across the border, in Sežana. Help me understand what the homeland is because Uncle Albert says that our homeland is the whole of Yugoslavia, while Mrs. Slapnik says that our homeland is only Slovenia and Mum says that we are Slovenians living in Italy, and that there are so few of us that we will be gone if there are not enough children, and she says that we have two Presidents, Mr. Saragat and Marshal Tito, who is not a Mr. but a comrade²⁵.

²³ B. Pahor, *Zgodba o reki, kripti in dvorljivem golobu*, Litera, Maribor 2003, p. 282.

²⁴ S. Verč, *Rolandov steber*, ZTT, Trieste 1991, p. 71.

²⁵ M. Sosič, *Tito, amor mijo*, Litera, Maribor 2005, p. 15.

Therefore, if the nation-state is not the homeland for these writers, there is a tangible attachment to their own native soil, which belongs to another country. Descriptions of landscapes, native villages and familiar environments and much more, come to the fore especially in the lyrical subjects in poetry, where this attachment is made even more evident.

A case of such attachment is testified by Boris Pangerc, the poet of *Breg and the olive trees*, who describes his home countryside thus:

All my wealth
 is a single
 large and sunny
 handful of soil,
 that even with stones
 cannot be spoiled.
 Here are the colourful quoins
 of my hard childhood,
 here where the turbulent fields
 of my soul spread out
 here grass and flowers will sprout
 from the nutrients of my body.
 Into you – Breg – they are eating;
 my greedy roots,
 silent and eternal as death²⁶.

The descriptions of the land are also very often linked with memories of youth, which are never negative, but always wrapped in an idyllic veil of a tender and pleasant experience of the author's own daily life. The same is also true for Italian poets like Adelia Biasiol, who describes the Siccirole landscape thus:

From the pass descend the terraces
 rivulets of rain.

The plain is vast where people grow
 salt and peaches.

In mid-air
 between the cypress and the hawk
 between the eel and the water snake
 the young boys just turned men
 never act empty-handed:
 in an agitated grasp of a twig
 they find between the mesh of bushes
 glittery meshes of sea²⁷.

²⁶ B. Pangerc, *All My Wealth*, Fontana, Koper/Capodistria 1991.

²⁷ A. Biasiol, *La piana di Siccirole*, in Ead. *Una voce sommessa. Poesie*, Biblioteca istriana, Trieste 2004.

3.5 The value of language

In a minority literature, language acquires a particular valency, which even matures into a value. The value of language is otherwise closely related to the value of ethnicity since it is the bearer of the existential dimension. There is a feeling expressed in works written by minority members which they all share in common: it is the feeling that they will never be able to be perfectly fluent in their mother tongue, which they are forced to learn with difficulty in an environment that does not use that language.

The teacher, who has a red car and black eyes, says that my writing in Italian is poor. Please make it so that I become better and that this year in the exams, when the teacher dictates, I write correctly all those words that have double letters. Please make it so that Mrs Slapnik, to whom my mum sends me for tuition, teaches me how to speak properly and nicely in Slovenian²⁸.

It is the same linguistic tension that Miran Košuta writes about: a tension that can also lead to enhanced care for the language because the use of Slovenian words represents a fight for their own threatened identity and freedom²⁹. In relation to language, it is typical of both minorities to avoid extreme forms of linguistic experimentation, luddism, dadaism etc., while it is also possible to detect a continuous quest for literary content, consistent classic beauty, with the result that it is also a search for aesthetic beauty in poetic terminology³⁰.

He was a fan of the merry theory – especially merry for Martino – of the Italian regional idioms. According to this theory, in short, the 'pure' Italian language is only a desire, a dream, to which only few people could approach: eminent linguists, some EIAR journalists and several Italianists. The overwhelming majority, even the learned people, write and speak a language, variously colourful and fragrant in accordance with the particular language humus, dialects and regions of Italy, while all the while respecting the fundamental rules of Italian. Professor Callegarini therefore recommended to Mamma Checchina, from the very first interview, to talk to her son as best as she knew, i.e. in the Rovinj idiom. This is a noble dialect, which drew its origins directly from the spoken Latin; it abounds in symbols, images, sayings, which have blossomed through nearly two millennia in the daily lives of that Italian people. The son then, through studying it, would be able to pass those ancient gifts on to the dialect of his own nation, and, through this, to all the others. [...]

And Martino, about to finish his studies, cursed the bad luck that had given him in all those years that bonadagninte, that good-for-nothing teacher who had always blocked him with her ramblings in the Florentine dialect. Now with Callegarini, who knew to *favalà*, that is, to talk, being a man and not a pot of paint, he expressed himself without fear, to no end. He no longer feared that if the fishermen of Acì Trezza spoke a dialect recommended to him by the professor, an Italian with a Si-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁹ M. Pirjevec, *Periodizacija slovenske književnosti na Tržaškem* (od 16. do 20. stoletja), "Annales, Anali za istrske in mediteranske študije", 21, 2011, 2, pp. 353-362, 360.

³⁰ N. Milani – R. Dobran, R., *Le parole rimaste*, p. 338.

cilian fragrance, he could say something that had the aroma of the junipers of Istria. Istria had nothing to be ashamed of in comparison with Sicily³¹.

3.5.1 Writing in dialect

In relation to the linguistic value, it is necessary to mention a specific phenomenon that has been ignored for many years by literary criticism, but which has in recent years been gaining particular valency: the phenomenon of writing in dialect. Dialect writing in the wider European area is becoming a new form of expression of those roots, without which no one would be able to access the vital energy necessary for their own existence. This is particularly evident in the works of dialect poets but also in the output of storytellers who persistently and unconventionally write in dialect. Literary production in dialect among Slovenians in Italy as well Italians in Slovenia and Croatia is extremely rich; its particularity also lies in the fact that it is original. While most Italian dialect texts are produced as the result of translation from literary language to the dialect form³², most minority dialect authors create their works completely originally and write about events, people, places, environments and feelings that they themselves have experienced. Due to its unusual and exuberant boom especially in the poetic form, writing in dialect represents one of the most important and most characteristic phenomena of the Italian minority literature in the Istria-Kvarner region³³. The presence of one or more dialects is of paramount importance for the area and should therefore be maintained and developed as an important part of the intangible cultural heritage. However, the diversity and multiplicity of dialects can also be an obstacle for the study of dialect poetry because there are a large number of dialects; on the other hand, the different poetries also have common characteristics. This is true both for Slovenian dialects in Italy as well as for Italian dialects in Slovenia and Croatia.

Among the most extensively recorded Slovenian dialects is undoubtedly Resian, which, due to the geographical location and the historical reticence of the valley where it is spoken, has preserved some archaic characteristics of the Slovenian idioms (e.g. aorist). Moreover, the phonetics of the Resian dialect is quite different from other dialects and its vocabulary contains many Italian terms due to its direct contact with the Friulian and Italian communities. Representational in this sense is the poem of Silvana Paletti *This Resian Voice* that speaks of the artist's attachment to her valley below Kanin – and particularly to her home language, which she received from her mother and which she feels as the voice of her people.

Tu-w ti rožiněj dulīni,
puložanā pod Čanīnom,
tej da vīlažnji din,

³¹ L. Zanin, *Martin Muma*, Edit, Fiume 1990, p. 140-1.

³² G. Berruto, *Introduzione all'italiano contemporaneo. La variazione e gli usi*, A. Sobrero ed., Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006, p. 355.

³³ *Le parole rimaste*, p. 511.

se mi jasnijo lipe biside,
od noga glasa.
Iti, jê glas od me zamje.

Od mlade od sârca
wzira, pod suncon.
Sârčne biside mu stjïjo.
Sam, zna, jübit od rožicöw
nu na jasnimö, nêbêške racjune.
Iti jê glas, od mëh judi.

Iti jê glas, Rozajanski,
ki zadavit, ni smin,
zabit, ni mörën.
Mo mati, za šenk, na mi dala,
da ja se znej po svëtö,
da ja si maköj Rozajän.

Iti jê glas, Rozajanski,
ki od vïšte od sunca,
skryt, ni mörën ...
Zakoj, iti, jê glas
od me dulïne ...
od me zamje ...
od mëh samih judi³⁴.

Similar diversity can also be witnessed in the Italian minority, which combines Istro-Venetian, Istriotic and Venetian-Rijeka dialect of Romance origin and Chakavian dialect and other dialects of Slavic origin. Writing in dialect has a special additional value for minorities, since it sets them apart from the central Italian dialect literature. On the one hand, the authors decide to write in dialect because it represents a kind of virginity, authenticity, fertility, in contrast to the literary language, which is rigid, colourless, hollow, empty. They therefore feel that writing in dialect is much more appropriate for expressing their own subjective experience of that world which has in recent decades become increasingly focused on materialism. If this may also apply to authors of nation states, it still has an even greater significance for minority writers because through the use of dialect they want to assert their sense of belonging to a different ethnic community, to some other cultural and intellectual world, with the desire to preserve this world and this culture in order not to lose the memory of it. That is why writing in dialect is particularly rich and fertile especially in minority communities because within them it has an extra valency and importance³⁵. For all these reasons, the themes addressed by dialect poets are very subjective in nature;

³⁴ S. Paletti, *La lingua resiana nel cuore*, Založba ZRC, Ljubljana 2003.

³⁵ *Le parole rimaste*, p. 519.

they mainly write about themselves, about their experience of everyday life, about their villages, the sea and the olive trees, the vine and love.

Me piaşi pensar
 a quei brasi suti
 e ma'sci
 che i me podeva strenşer
 e no i ga fato.
 Strènşerme forte
 con un abraso senza fin
 ma i no lo ga fato
 perché

però mi ghe penso a 'sti brasi
 e ghe careso con teneresa
 anca le venetizzatache le palpita
 durante dute le mie note de estate
 perché mai³⁶.

3.6 Historical memory

One of the connecting threads of both minority literatures is an additional typology that Miran Košuta does not state in his essay but which is mentioned by Maja Smotlak in her research work: this is a historical memory, which the researcher described as one of the elements of self-defining of minority ethnic communities³⁷. Historical traumas among minority members are still very much present, although clearly to a lesser degree. If one analysed the resulting work chronologically, one would probably notice that the historical memories of events before, during and after the Second World War and of the time of fascism slowly start to fade out; by about the year 2000 they were already much less likely to occur. Due to the historical and social conditions at the time of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, the subject of historical memory flourished rather late, following the democratisation of both countries after 1990. An analogous argument could probably be made about the Italians, i.e. that the motif rarely occurs in recent years, though it is still quite persistent. Historical memory allows a national community to preserve the testimony of events that characterise and define this same community. Several times we have witnessed an excessive idealisation of the past that is now gradually turning into a more subjective experience of historical events. Hence, historical memory gains specific additional value in literature because it allows the reader to unveil the experiences, emotions, feelings that permeated the people who actually experienced these historical events. This is therefore a subjective aspect of historical memory that remains enshrined in the genes of a nation and community.

³⁶ D. Bržan, *Scoi e onde di vita: poesie in dialetto isolano*, Il Mandracchio, Isola 2008.

³⁷ M. Smotlak, *Narodna identiteta v sodobnem slovenskem romanu v Italiji*, p. 43.

They had been there for centuries, on that red land to which they belonged and from which, if detached, they would not survive; we had been together in our cities from who knows when, we spoke another language, had another culture and we almost ignored their existence or wanted to ignore it, looking at them only to smile behind their backs. A sudden event was now forcing a more direct confrontation between the two sides: one side calling for justice for all those centuries spent in their shadow, bearing as proof their dead in the war and wearing as a symbol of their suffering a red star and the name of Tito; the other side, while recognising at first those sacrifices and the struggle that in many aspects had become common, still did not admit, however, that the roles had been reversed, even if they felt a sense of guilt – and this was their weakest spot – for having harboured in their breasts an evil that now could become fatal³⁸.

Similar claims can be made about Slovenian prose writing in Italy, where a focus on recent history has been (and remains) one of the main themes of Slovenian authors. It is enough to think of the entire opus of Boris Pahor, part of the opus of Alojz Rebula (*Nocturne for Primorska, The Road with a Cypress and a Star, Snake Flower*), as well as that of Mark Sosič (*Tito, amor mijo*) and others. Boris Pahor, in his otherwise little-known novel *Story of a River, a Crypt and a Courteous Dove*, describes the hero Sevken, who is otherwise “critical towards Trieste’s obsession with the past”, [but] himself succumbs to displaying the Slovenian minority as an extraordinary museum exhibit³⁹. “In his mind he repeatedly evokes images of the fascist and Nazi oppression of the Slovenian people. In it there is the desire and need for preservation and the transmission of historical memory.”⁴⁰

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to add some evidence and reflections on the literary-theoretical concept of ‘minority literature’. The previous definition of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari has proved to be insufficient and too narrow, since it only took into account the German-speaking Jew Franz Kafka in Prague, Czech Republic. Based on two other cases of minority communities in Europe, which formed after the global devastation of World War II – namely the Slovenian minority in Italy and the Italian minority in Slovenia and Croatia – I have tried to redefine the term ‘minority literature’. In doing so, I have taken into account the socio-political situation of these historical ethnic communities, but not the ‘new minorities’ arising from migratory flows. Given the fact that both minority communities have developed a very rich and diversified literary creative output, it was also possible to define those common themes that connect the literary work of members of linguistic and ethnic minorities along the Slovenian-Italian border. I sensed the contact points of the

³⁸ C. Ugussi, *La città divisa*, Campanotto Editore, Udine 1991, p. 93-94.

³⁹ B. Pahor, *Zgodba o reki*, p. 308.

⁴⁰ M. Smotlak, *Narodna*, p. 43.

two minorities in their ontological dimension, intercultural values, linguistic and national values, attachment to place and attachment to historical memory.

The research has brought to light a number of unresolved issues since both literary systems are still very dynamic and are constantly intertwined with other cultural and ideological currents running across Europe. I have also mentioned the possibility that the minority literary system may someday become a supra-national entity, which would be no longer strictly tied to the language and culture of the nation of origin, but rather to the space and time in which it originates and lives. Just as David Bandelj has observed before me, the times are not (yet) ripe for this development; however, the fact that the idea is being discussed and written about and the fact that some minority writers choose to write in multiple languages, indicate a shift in this direction; a direction which would be sensible to continue exploring in more depth.



FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

ANNO XXIV - 1/2016

EDUCatt - Ente per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario dell'Università Cattolica
Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano - tel. 02.72342235 - fax 02.80.53.215
e-mail: editoriale.dsu@educatt.it (produzione)
librario.dsu@educatt.it (distribuzione)
redazione.all@unicatt.it (Redazione della Rivista)
web: www.educatt.it/libri/all

ISSN 1122 - 1917



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