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“So, then people do come here in order to live”

*Interiority in the Novels of Rainer Maria Rilke
and Scipio Slataper*

For many, Trieste is better known as the temporary home of the Irish immigrant whom Ezra Pound once referred to as a “refugee from Trieste,”¹ than for the numerous modern Italian authors who lived there. The final words of *Ulysses*, “Trieste-Zürich-Paris,” not only catalogue the three cities in which James Joyce worked on his masterpiece, but also emblemize the way scholars tend to place Italian and German-language literature, in an itinerary that ultimately leads to Paris, as the presumptive capital of modernist culture. Trieste, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until its fall, can, however, also be seen as the geographic and intellectual passage between the German-speaking world, particularly Austria-Hungary, and Italy.² An Austro-Italian rather than a Franco-Italian or Euro-Italian perspective highlights elements of Italian modernism that remain underexplored.

Italian modernism has been less examined than most other national European modernisms and, perhaps because it is chronologically and geographically diffuse, critics tend to concentrate on individual authors, such as Gabriele D’Annunzio, Italo Svevo, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Luigi Pirandello, and F.T. Marinetti, while the idea of a more general Italian modernism has remained a questionable proposition. A comparison of Austrian and Italian authors that concentrates primarily on what is similar between them adds to the picture of Italian literary modernism.³ Engaging German criticism to read Italian works also helps reveal unnoticed meanings. This comparison of Rainer Maria Rilke and Scipio Slataper’s novels is part of a larger project that focuses on what Austrian literature brought Triestine writers, and what Triestine writers then brought to the peninsula as a whole, by focusing on the analogous qualities between pairs of Triestine and Austrian novelists.⁴ Italian Triestine authors were influenced by many of the same philosophers, critics, and psychoanalysts that informed the German-language authors of the Empire. These (at least) bilingual Triestine authors also read, often in the original, and were influenced by Austrian authors. In addition, due to the comparable cultural climate of Trieste and other Austro-Hungarian cities, such as Prague, these Italian and German-language authors often produced similar works. The affinities between Rilke’s *Die Aufzeich-*

nungen des Malte Laurids Brigge [*The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*] (1910) and Slataper's *Il mio Carso* [*My Carso*] (1912) are an example of the latter.

Die Aufzeichnungen and *Il mio Carso* feature walks around and reactions to a modern city. Malte has recently moved to Paris and *Il mio Carso*'s narrator reacts to his own city, Trieste, whose rocky (or carstic, to be more precise) plateau, known as the "carso," provides the work's unusual title. As these narrators explore their respective cities, they also explore their memories and their views on life and art. Though the similarities between these two works run deeper than a brief plot summary can illustrate (and one of their similarities is that a plot summary offers a poor characterization of the work), Rilke's is much commented upon and loved while Slataper's is not well known internationally.⁵ Although the literary qualities of Rilke's work are superior, Slataper's novel is an interesting modernist work that might partially fill the lack that so often characterizes Italian modernism after its strong and early avant-garde movement.

1910, MODERNISM, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Many have described 1910, the year *Die Aufzeichnungen* was completed and *Il mio Carso* begun, as one of fundamental change. While scholars have also made comparable, persuasive claims for 1900, 1914, 1922 and other years as marking the beginning of modernism, 1910 is one of the most, and most famously, cited. Virginia Woolf's claim that, "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (320) has been repeatedly evoked and lends itself both to the title of a book, *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World*, exploring why Woolf pinpointed this time period, and to a website of digital reproductions from 1910.⁶ Although Woolf did not offer her remark without qualifications, Henri Lefebvre has asserted, "The fact is that around 1910 a certain space was shattered" (25). Thomas Harrison has written an entire book on the year, *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance*, and begins it with an epigram from Gottfried Benn: "1910, that is indeed the year when all scaffolds began to crack" (1). There is the sense that perception and space were substantially altered around this time, as these English, French, and German writers note, and that modernism is the resulting deformation.

Die Aufzeichnungen and *Il mio Carso* reflect this change in literary form and content. Although they are commonly referred to as "novels" (and are the only works of both authors that could be called such), they have both been defined otherwise, to account for their fragmented and lyrical forms. Slataper's original subtitle for his work was a "lyrical autobiography" and it was touted as the first book of poetry, although written in prose, from a Triestine writer. The poet Rilke called *Die Aufzeichnungen* his "prose-book." The defining word of the title, "*Aufzeichnungen*," is usually translated as "notebooks" but it can also mean chronicles, transcription, or

sketches. The title was originally translated into English as *The Journal of My Other Self*, a decision based on one of Rilke's original descriptions of the work.⁷ Slataper's publisher told him to shorten his initial title, *Il mio Carso e la mia città* [*My Carso and my city*.] These alternative titles indicate two key ways in which these works have each been interpreted: as veiled autobiographies and as reactions to the modern city.

Although frequently labeled autobiographical, unlike a diary, journal, or most autobiographies, neither work is arranged in order of when the material was composed or when the events occurred in the authors' lives. Slataper included passages that had already been published and Rilke passages he had read in public. Sections of letters from the authors' earlier years are repeated almost verbatim and reflections from the authors' lives are integrated at various points in the texts. Autobiographical reflections and facts are shaped to fit their authors' respective poetic project. A letter written to Arthur Holitscher in 1902 provides the information that Rilke's first address in Paris was rue Toullier 11. The first words of Malte's notebooks are "11. September, rue Toullier," uniquely locating the time and place in which the following entry was written. While "11" is a beginning point for both Rilke and Malte's life in Paris, it is a location in space for one and in time for another. This subtle, complicated, blending of time and space, autobiography and fiction, is typical of the work.

Critics often equate the authors with their narrators: Rilke's later poetry is analyzed and explained with Malte's words. Scholars frequently refer to Rilke's protagonist, though distinguished from the author by name and descent, as "Rilke's Malte," drawing the author and narrator closer together. William H. Gass, in his introduction to the Stephen Mitchell's translation of the work, gives the narrator the playful name "Malte Laurids Rilke." Although "Scipio" is one of the names Slataper gives his narrator, critics generally conflate the author and narrator, referring to the narrator using just the author's last name, which is never mentioned in the text. There are of course reasons for blurring the line between the authors and their narrators: "A rigorous separation of Malte from his author, as if we could have Malte without Rilke's childhood anxieties, is as ludicrous as a total identification of Malte with Rilke would be" (Huysen, "Paris/Childhood" 121). The factors that contribute to this blurring are analogous for Rilke and Slataper.

Rilke's correspondent, advisor, and erstwhile lover, Lou Andreas-Salomé claimed that, "Malte is not a portrait but rather the use of a self-portrait precisely for the purpose of making a self-distinction from it" (quoted Schoolfield 185). Rilke himself explained that "Er [Malte] war mein Ich und war ein anderer" (Huysen, "Paris/Childhood" 121) [Malte was my ego and I was another]. Slataper asserted that *Il mio Carso*, "Non è affatto la mia autobiografia [...] ma la vita d'uno qualunque (anche se mia)" (Falqui 242) [is certainly not my autobiography, but it is the life of someone,

anyone (even mine)]. Although the resemblance between these statements is striking, an autobiographical relationship to a work's protagonist is clearly not unique to these two authors.⁸ The frequent classification of Slataper and Rilke's works as personal and artistic searches, as well as autobiographic inquiry, is one of their more distinctive traits.

In addition to partially developing from the authors' lives, *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso* are interpreted as crucial moments in them, as something the authors needed to write in order to develop both artistically and psychologically. The authors' evaluations of the meaning and success of the novels varied throughout their lives as their views continued to develop. Judith Ryan characterizes *Die Aufzeichnungen* as, "a novel that had been both the earliest expression and the proximate cause of Rilke's poetic crisis" (131). Critics have claimed that for Rilke, "making Malte was . . . not autobiography, but autotherapy" (Prater 173) and for Slataper that writing was "uno strumento per definire e riconoscere la propria identità" (Arosio 94) [an instrument with which to define and recognize his own identity]. Both *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso* are construed as honest searches, attempting to be true, though not necessarily factual. The separation of the author and narrator can be difficult to determine since the authors' visions are not necessarily clearer than that of their respective narrators. Due to this ambiguity, critics are divided in how to understand the ends of both works. Several critical works posit that there is a final and clear reading of the dilemmas that the novels present, and that the authors share a lucid understanding of their narrators' limitations. Other critics make strong cases for the absence of solutions, the impossibility of definite interpretations, and the idea that the narrators' searches continued for the authors.⁹

THE NARRATORS AND THE CITY

The narrators' quests have also, as mentioned, been directly related to their understandings and impressions of the modern metropolis. Critics see the experience of moving to these confusing, urban spaces, Malte's shift to Paris and that of the narrator of *Il mio Carso*'s to the center of Trieste, as a cause of the narrators' disintegration and the impetus for their poetic journeys. While there is no need to justify Paris as a fin-de-siècle metropolis having such a powerful effect, an analogous characterization of Trieste may require brief clarification. Before the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the city was the empire's free port city, a financial center (a number of insurance and banking firms were based there), and a cosmopolitan center for trade. Its position as Austria-Hungary's principal seaport led to considerable urban development: "By the middle of the nineteenth century Trieste had achieved a relatively prominent place on the map of a modernizing Europe. Rapid commercial expansion and urbanization brought with it the diversification

of Trieste's population and lent a heightened significance to its composite religious and cultural lifestyles" (Sluga 13). Although its status has changed since then, Trieste was an important fin-de-siècle metropolis.

Both works have been read in light of theories that Rilke's acquaintance, Georg Simmel, presented in his now classic essay on the effects of the modern city on human perception, "The Metropolis and Mental Life." Since both narrators react to urban turmoil with lyrical prose, *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso* have also been compared to the work of the ultimate city-poet, Charles Baudelaire. One of Malte's entries even ends with a long quotation, in French, from Baudelaire's prose-poem "A une heure du matin." Frederick Garber interprets Malte as responding to Baudelaire's depictions of Paris throughout the work: "the first entry locates Malte squarely in the center of a squalid city, the image which Baudelaire created once and for all for modern literature. This is part of what Malte must order" (326). The narrator in *Il mio Carso* also has the urge to order, artistically, his urban experiences. Elena Coda maintains that Slataper's narrator "believes that through poetry he can reestablish unity and clarity within the urban environment and in this way eradicate the sense of ambiguity that characterizes modern life" (Coda, "Representation" 163). Both works are viewed as attempts to combat the disorienting effect of the modern city. Garber and Coda demonstrate the powerful role of the city in the authors' works and their narrators' artistic development, but the narrators' reactions to the city stem from more than the shock of confronting a modern metropolis.

Slataper and Rilke's reactions to the city can also be contrasted to that of the Futurists, an artistic movement gaining popularity in 1910, particularly to the Futurists' quest "to control their experience of the new environment" (Davies 75). Whereas the urban dwellers in *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso* are confused in their modern environment, those of Futurism are able to order their experiences. Victorious man and the city are dominant themes in Futurist art and exhibitions.¹⁰ January 12th, 1910 marked the beginning of the *serate futuriste* in Trieste and, that same year saw the publication of Marinetti's "Il rapporto sulla vittoria futurista di Trieste" [Report on Trieste's Futurist Victory]. While several articles praising these events ran in the local papers, Slataper published a negative assessment of Futurism in the Florentine periodical *La Voce*. He found Futurist writing formulaic, criticized its reliance on French culture, and claimed, above all else, that it lacked spirit: "Ma i futuristi di Marinetti non si rendono affatto conto del dramma interiore; anzi per non sentirlo, urlano" ("Il futurismo" 205) [But Marinetti's futurists are not aware of interior drama, in fact in order not to hear it, they yell].¹¹ This "interior drama" plays an important role in Slataper and Rilke's work and, for both narrators, is not just a reaction to the external stimuli of the city.

Interior spaces, which figure prominently in descriptions of life before and after the moves to the city, allow a broader consideration of the narrators' reactions

to space and the self. Inside spaces, as cityscapes, are shown to shape and reveal thoughts. Diana Fuss's *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers that Shaped Them* explores the relationship between the interior dramas and interior space: "The 'interior' of my title is an expansive space, encompassing both the psychological and the architectural meanings of interior life" (1). While critics have highlighted Rilke's comments on Paris's effect in his vast correspondence and in *Die Aufzeichnungen*, Rilke's letters and journals also endlessly remark upon the arrangement of his interior space, what his window faced, the height of his writing desk, and what he could hear in his room. Descriptions of his moods and relationships to others are replete with analogies to rooms and houses. In *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Victoria Rosner concentrates on the change of interiority, psychological and architectural, that occurred in the early twentieth century: "By 'interiority' I refer to a cluster of interdependent concepts that extend from the representation of consciousness to the reorganization of homelife; revised definitions of personal privacy, intimacy, and space" (11). Fuss and Rosner both explore the impact that interiors have on mental development and what representations of interiors reveal about perception. Although their works concentrate on actual rooms, in addition to those in creative works, the connection they make between physical interiors and interior life are productive concepts with which to examine *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso*.

As Malte and *Il mio Carso*'s narrator consider interior spaces and their pasts, a process that occupies a sizable portion of both works, it becomes clear that experiencing city life was not the first time they experienced alienation or confusion regarding their identities. The city was not the sole reason for the narrators' senses of fragmentation and alienation. For no extended period of time did the narrators ever feel complete or secure. Andreas Huyssen clarifies this point in his article, "Paris/Childhood: The Fragmented Body in Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*":

Critics have always emphasized that the basic experience of Malte, the 28-year-old aristocratic Dane who comes to Paris with artistic and intellectual aspirations and begins to record his life crisis in his notebooks, is one of ego-loss, deindividuation, and alienation. Often this disintegration of the ego is attributed to Malte's city experiences alone, and his childhood, which also features dissolutions of self, is said to merely foreshadow, to anticipate the later experiences. Not only is such a narra-teleological account not tenable, oblivious as it is to the more complex narrative structure of the novel and to the always problematic 'inmixture' of past and present in narration, but the very thesis of disintegration of self, of *Ent-ichung*, actually presupposes a stable self, a structured ego, a personality in the sense of bourgeois culture and ego psychology that could

then show symptoms of disintegration under the impact of the experience of the modern city. (117)

Huysen goes on to argue, persuasively, that Malte did not experience ego loss, because he had never had a fully developed ego to lose. While I emphasize issues of identity and space rather than the psychoanalytic concerns that Huysen extensively examined, the idea that the city did not break Malte is also crucial to my argument. For both Malte and Slataper's narrator, the senses of fragmentation and loss of identity extend far beyond and anticipate their experiences in the city. The idea of altered space, of Lefebvre's shattered space and Benn's cracked scaffolds, relates not only to experiencing the modern metropolis, but is also relevant to all spaces, including the shattered interiors and ruptured scaffolds that break down the distinction between the outside and inside.

INSIDE SPACES

The first inside scene of *Die Aufzeichnungen* reveals the lack of barriers between the inside and outside: "Daß ich es nicht lassen kann, bei offenem Fenster zu schlafen. Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin" (8) ["To think that I can't give up the habit of sleeping with the window open. Electric trolleys speed clattering through my room. Cars drive over me" (4)].¹² A similar lack of separation between inside and outside has been noted in *Il mio Carso*: "Non c'è più una distinzione netta tra interno ed esterno, passato e presente, ricordo e momento attuale" (Dedola 236) [There is no longer any clear distinction between internal and external, past and present, memory or present time]. *Il mio Carso*'s narrator tries to find security by escaping into the country, into the past, or his room. He attempts to set up polarities, inside-outside, country-city, past-present, but ultimately finds that they all break down. He sees himself, his questions, reflected in nature, the past, and his room, as well as outside in the city and in the present.

Both narrators experience alienation and a sense of incompleteness. Although the narrator of *Il mio Carso* ascends a mountain to escape the city, he finds that the city remains with him. He climbs, "anche se in eterno tutta la città e la sua stanchezza è in te e non la puoi sfuggire" (129) [even if all of the city and its weariness are ever in you and you cannot escape it]. The city similarly inhabits Malte. For instance, he feels a shock of recognition when he comes across a partially demolished building, its insides let out: "Man sah ihre Innenseite" (45) ["You could see its inside" (46)]. Standing before this broken, previously enclosed space, causes Malte to run: "ich will einen Eid geben dafür, daß ich zu laufen begann, sobald ich die Mauer erkannt hatte. Denn das ist das Schreckliche, daß ich sie erkannt habe. Ich erkenne

das alles hier, und darum geht es so ohne weiteres in mich ein: es ist zu Hause in mir" (47) ["I swear I began to run as soon as I recognized this wall. For that's what is horrible—that I did recognize it. I recognize everything here, and that's why it passes right into me: it is at home inside me" (48)]. Malte is not afraid merely of the ambiguity and fragmentation of the city, but how this ambiguity and fragmentation reflect his own being. Broken walls dwell in Malte.

The narrator's shock and then later disgust in front of this building is analogous to the striking and much commented upon image of a woman with her face literally in her hands: "The wall which faces Malte has its exact, grotesque parallel in a sight he could not tolerate earlier, the woman at whom he could not stare because her face was in her hands and he could not bear to see the 'blossen wunden Kopf ohne Gesicht'" (Garber 329). Faces and façades break off in *Die Aufzeichnungen*, leaving no barriers and rendering the viewer uncomfortable. Inside parts that should remain hidden are revealed. The comparison between the human body and building structure is not new: the idea that "architecture, to communicate the vital values of the spirit must appear organic, like the body" (Scott 164–65) goes back centuries. But, while Malte often describes bodies like buildings or vice versa, neither are depicted as organic. The bodies Slataper describes are also partial: "[Nel *Mio Carso*] [n]on c'è la rappresentazione del corpo in movimento, ma la sua frantumazione: esso è bocca, orecchie, naso. La rappresentazione non unifica i particolari, li mostra invece tanto ravvicinati da imperdirne una visione unitaria" (Dedola 211) [(In *Il mio Carso*) the body is not represented in movement, but in its shattering: it is a mouth, ears, a nose. The representation does not unify the particulars, it instead reveals these particulars up close so as to prevent a coherent vision]. Inner fragmentation appears throughout the work.

Almost all the inside spaces described in both novels are transient or partial ones: from rented rooms and bars to destroyed or fragmented houses (in the city or country, past or present). In both works, there is no clear separation between public and private space: "the four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity, from being seen and heard" (Arendt 212). In *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso*, finding a place to hide is impossible. The narrators' searches for solitude and true expression are not contingent on location. The outside almost always compromises the inside. Refuge is impossible. If solitude, both "existential and topographic," connotes "a place of alienation or refuge" (Pike 24), then the narrators can only find the solitude of alienation.

When Malte and Slataper's narrator relate memories of their childhood homes, spaces that usually symbolize stability and peace, they generally evoke fragmentation. Slataper's work is more political and his narrator reveals how national conflicts penetrated his childhood home: "La nostra patria era di là, oltre il mare. Invece

qui, mamma chiudeva le persiane alla vigilia della festa dell'imperatore, perché noi non s'illuminava le finestre e si temeva qualche sassata" (54-55) [Our country was over there, over the sea. And here, mom would close the curtains on the eve of the celebration of the emperor, because we didn't put candles in the windows and she was afraid someone would throw stones]. Even at home, there is always the chance of the outside world entering. In Malte's reflections on his childhood, all rooms are fragmented, ghostly body parts can appear without warning from walls, and houses burn and disappear. The haunted houses of Malte's ghosts and the cityscape comprise what Anthony Vidler has identified as contributing to "unheimlich," uncanny or un-home-like, experiences: "The uncanny was, in this first incarnation, a sensation best experienced in the privacy of the interior. [...] But the uncanny, as Walter Benjamin noted, was also born out of the rise of the great cities, their disturbingly heterogeneous crowds and newly scaled spaces demanding a point of reference that, while not refuting a certain instability, nevertheless served to dominate it aesthetically" (4). Malte comes to the city having already experienced the breaking down of normal space.

During his childhood, Malte's family arrives at the home of their friends the Schulins in the country. In the dark they mistakenly walk up the stairs to a demolished house, since the Schulins have moved nearby to smaller quarters. Young Malte constantly recalls the house's absence, believing that the house continues to exist only when he is not allowed to look for it. Like the Schulins, Slataper's narrator also comes from a literally broken home: one of his key recollections involves the dismantling of the family house: "Sì, mi ricordo che prima di partire avevo visto che rompevano i muri e i viali del giardino per i tubi dall'acqua, del gas: e lavoravano muratori, meccanici, falegnami, vetrai, tappezzieri, terrazzieri" (Slataper 61) [Yes, I remember that before leaving I saw them destroying the walls and paths of the garden for the pipelines, gaslines: and the masons, mechanics, carpenters, glassmakers, paperhangers, and terracemakers worked]. While part of this disruption is due to modernization and a need to upgrade the house, the narrator's departure, as that of the Schulins, is primarily due to financial exigencies. The narrator even describes watching the home's renovations as enjoyable, but recalls, at the same time, that his family could no longer afford to live in this modernized house: "Mi divertivo vederli lavorare. Ma noi s'andava via perché il nonno era morto e venivano a stare altri parenti, più ricchi" (62) [I had fun watching them work. But we were leaving because grandpa and died and other, richer relatives were coming to stay].

Social and class anxiety resurfaces frequently in *Il mio Carso* and *Die Aufzeichnungen*. Malte's poverty causes him to fear that he is one of the "fortgeworfen," the poor throwaways. He is afraid of being looked at and recognized by them. *Il mio Carso's* narrator fears similar identification by the bourgeois. Although there is also a more complex, existential aspect to their concerns, the feelings of alienation and

homelessness for both narrators are related to their family's social and economic decline. In *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso*, the grandfathers die at home. Highlighting the changes in family structure and society, none of their progeny will have this luxury. The contrast between the death of Malte's grandfather, who, as Malte emphasizes, died his own unique death, and that of his father is stark. While Malte's grandfather was carried from room to room and his death disturbed the whole household, Malte describes his father's quieter death in an apartment. His death hardly registers: "Seine Züge waren aufgeräumt wie die Möbel in einem Fremdenzimmer, aus dem jemand abgereist war" (144) ["His features had been tidied up like the furniture in a guest-room after a visitor has moved out" (155)]. The shifts in class and home are reflected on the father's face and affect not only how he lived, but also how he is perceived after he has passed away. Again, a more transient life is compared to a more transient inner space.

THE AUTHORS AND AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

The reversal in economic status that is generally regarded as autobiographical reality for both authors was a common trope in Austro-Hungarian literature, partially because the cities of the empire experienced a later and faster industrialization and urban growth than most other European cities, such as London and Paris. The theme of altered space in modernism crosses national boundaries, as the earlier quotations regarding 1910 from English, French, and German sources attest. But, the focus on a place underscores important aspects of the much debated and frequently redefined term "modernism,"¹³ just as the emphasis on a specific year focalizes significant changes. Modernism, as viewed from England, France, or Germany has slightly different configurations. Partially due to the economic changes Austro-Hungarian citizens experienced, fin-de-siècle Austrian literature has been described as an often self-conscious, "crisis literature" and, depending on the critic, may be seen as emblematic of modernism or postmodernism. More specifically, the literature and philosophy of Austria-Hungary, the original homeland of Rilke and Slataper, has been characterized as particularly concerned with the various crises of identity, crisis of subjectivity, and crisis of language.¹⁴ Ernst Mach claimed that "Das Ich ist unrettbar" ["The self is unsalvageable" or "The ego cannot be saved"]. Ludwig Wittgenstein can be seen as the philosopher par excellence of the language crisis. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, author of the Lord Chandos letter, declared "es ist mir völlig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen, über irgend etwas zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen" (50) ["I have completely lost the ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all" (121)]. They were all Austro-Hungarian.

In addition to the empire's later industrialization, critics have identified several other factors as contributing to this Austro-Hungarian sense of crisis. Schol-

ars regard the disparity between public and private life to have been particularly traumatic, especially in Vienna. More importantly, perhaps, the Austro-Hungarian Empire's population was extremely diverse, both ethnically and linguistically. Its mixture of languages and communities tended to form writers with distinct conceptions of their cities, and their own, multifaceted natures. Often, as in Prague, "una delle città più autenticamente multinazionali dell'Austria" (Ara, "Giani Stuparich" 11–12) [one of the most authentically multinational cities of Austria], tensions existed between the various groups. In the "city of a hundred spires," people of Czech, Austrian, German, and Jewish cultures and backgrounds lived often in conflict with each another and with themselves. Trieste's population was also international, consisting of (in current terms) Italians, Austrians, Slovenes, Croatians, Germans, Greeks and others. Joyce invented the term "Europiccola" to describe the city.

For some, the very difficulty of defining Trieste and what it was to be Triestine created a sense of possibility. Karl Marx claimed that, "Trieste shared the privilege of the United States of having no past at all. Formed by a motley crew of Italian, German, English, French, Greek, Armenian and Jewish merchant-adventurers, it was not fettered by traditions" (140). Trieste was without traditions because of its diversity and placeless because it was a place for too many. The titles of two recent works, Joseph Cary's *A Ghost in Trieste* (1993) and Jan Morris's *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (2001), also characterize Trieste by absence.¹⁵ F.T. Marinetti believed Trieste was one of the most Futurist cities for related reasons and directly contrasted it to the more 'historical' cities of Italy: "Trieste, la nostra bella polveriera [. . .] a tutti i nostri romani antichi, a tutti i nostri fiorentini medioevali, a tutti i nostri veneziani decaduti, noi preferiamo gli abitanti di Trieste" (247) [Trieste is our beautiful powder-magazine (. . .) we prefer the inhabitants of Trieste to all our ancient Romans, our medieval Florentines, our decadent Venetians]. While Marx and Marinetti praised Trieste's, in their opinion, lack of a past and many Triestines called for developing only the Italian cultural traditions of the city, Slataper lamented that the various cultural strains of Trieste were not better integrated. He wrote a polemical article entitled "Trieste non ha tradizioni di cultura" [Trieste has no cultural traditions], which took issue with the city's dearth of cultural interests and promoters. Referring to Germanic, Slavic, and Italian cultures, he claimed that, "il compito storico di Trieste è di esser crogiolo e propagatore di civiltà, di tre civiltà" (*Scritti* 119) [Trieste's historical task is to be a melting pot and propagator of culture, of three cultures]. In 1913 he proposed a pan-European magazine consisting of selections from all European languages. He personally was going to be responsible for seven of the languages. Significantly, the magazine was going to be entitled either "Trieste" or "Europe."

Trieste and Prague, and Austro-Hungarian cities in general, were locations where

one could not avoid issues of national identity. Slataper and Rilke's full names suggest their appropriately culturally varied backgrounds: Scipio Slataper (1888–1915) and René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke (1875–1926).¹⁶ In addition to the heritages suggested by their first names, French and Austrian in the case of Rilke and Italian in the case of Slataper, both were very interested in exploring their Northern and Slavic sides. Neither man limited his interest in “other cultures”: both consistently sought out what could be construed as foreign. Rilke was originally quite interested in the Czech culture of Prague.¹⁷ He corresponded with Czech authors and, unlike some German-speakers of the time, was sympathetic to the position of Prague citizens of Czech background. His works *Larenopfer* and *Zwei Prager Geschichten* reflect this interest in Czech Prague. Related to his investment in Slavic culture, Rilke once thought of Russia as his “spiritual homeland.”¹⁸ He was also fascinated with Danish and Norwegian works and culture. In fact, Rilke interpreted Malte's suffering as due not only to life in the modern city, but also to the conflict between Parisian life and his Danish character. He wrote his wife (after seeing an Ibsen play in Paris) “And again I understood Malte Laurids Brigge and his Nordicness and his destruction by Paris” (quoted in Schoolfield 167).

Slataper, meanwhile, wrote his dissertation on the Norwegian dramatist whose work Rilke esteemed so highly, and explored various aspects of Slavic culture throughout his life. These different cultural, linguistic, and literary influences have all been seen as important sources for both *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso*. Rilke's reading of Ibsen's plays, Danish author Jens Peter Jacobson's *Niels Lyhne*, Norwegian Sigbjørn Obstfelder's *En præsts dagbog* [*A Priest's Diary*], and various German works were all crucial to the development of *Die Aufzeichnungen*. *Il mio Carso* has been compared to the autobiographical works of authors who worked, like him, at the literary magazine *La Voce*, Ardengo Soffici, Piero Jahier, Giovanni Boine, and Clemente Rebora, as well as to the works of D'Annunzio and Carducci, authors whom Slataper mentions in the text itself. But, despite all the Italian works to which Slataper's has and could be compared, Slataper claimed, “Ho trovato la mia forma attuale: poco italiana, nordica probabilmente, ma dove si sente che è un'anima nuova che afferma la sua vita” (quoted Campailla 180) [I found my true form: not very Italian, Nordic probably, but in which a new spirit can be felt which affirms its life]. Although *Il mio Carso* is written in Italian and, at least in the beginning, explicitly addresses Italians, the work's “life,” or spirit, appears to derive from somewhere other than Italy. Both Slataper and Rilke emphasized the foreign, Nordic quality of their work.

In fact, both authors experimented with various national literatures, forms, and literary communities throughout their lives. A recently published survey of Italian scholars interested in Rilke asked them to define his work in terms of its national contexts: “L'opera di Rilke era da Lei riferita a un contesto letterario tedesco o piut-

tosto ad un contesto diverso, per esempio prevalentemente francese simbolista?” (Bevilacqua 21) [Did you associate Rilke’s work with a German literary context or to a different context, for instance the primarily French symbolists?]. The varied responses reveal the difficulty of limiting Rilke to one country: the respondents connected Rilke’s work to French, German, Czech, Russian, Mitteleuropean, or generally European contexts and some denied the possibility of connecting him to any one context at all. Slataper has also been considered a European poet, rather than belonging to any particular nation. Because of this internationalism, critics also often characterize Rilke and Slataper as standing outside any one movement (Futurism, expressionism, etc.). At Rilke’s memorial service in Berlin, Musil made the following observation: “When Rilke was young, Dehmel was considered someone, and Rilke—an Austrian! If one was well disposed toward him one added something about Slavic melancholy” (244). Musil suggests that for an artist to be primarily identified with a nation or location rather than his work is proof of being considered an artist of debatable significance. As Rilke developed, he increasingly avoided association with any one place, particularly perhaps Austria, and “sought his identity exclusively in the realm of poetry” (McCormick 69). As have critics, so too have Slataper and Rilke aligned themselves more closely to the label “poet” than to any national designation. Rilke began *Die Aufzeichnungen* in Rome and finished it in Leipzig: “Rilke’s exile from his native land was self-imposed, permanent, and necessary to his existence as a poet” (Baron vii). Slataper began *Il mio Carso* in Florence and completed it in Prague. The numerous cities and countries in which the novels were composed show the authors’ desire to transcend national boundaries, like their works.

Slataper and Rilke, born in times and places where identity was largely determinable, were partially inspired to create works subsequent to having made any particular choice about location. Slataper started his novel set in Trieste after moving to Florence, a place he regarded as the cultural capital of a potential homeland. The beginning of his work is usually read as addressing the Florentines, particularly the *Vocianti*, the writers and intellectuals associated with *La Voce*. While Slataper went to Florence to study and became involved in *La Voce*, Rilke went to Paris to write on Auguste Rodin. Although Paris was clearly not Rilke’s homeland, it was also the cultural capital of a world he looked toward with desire.¹⁹ Both Slataper and Rilke were engaged in intellectual projects and hoped to fully embrace their newly adopted cultures, but instead of finding a home, they felt foreign in these cities. Neither author discovered any sense of belonging. In fact, their sense of alienation in the cultural capitals of their time may have even shattered any potential idea of home. From their youthful experiences of mixed cultures to their migrations as adults, they were cognizant that identity was not fixed. Alienation could occur at any place or point in time. All homes and homelands are partial.

The narrators in *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso* suggest that a different or real home might make for a more stable identity and enable one to express oneself with greater confidence. Slataper's book starts with a three-time repetition of "Vorrei dirvi" ["I would like to tell you"], followed each time by what the narrator would like to be able to say—that he was born in Croatia, in Moravia, or, first and foremost, in a little house or hovel on the Carso. He would like to explain his struggles with self-expression by saying that his Italian is acquired. He would rather be a stranger than fragmented and always aware that he has chosen his identity. House, self, and artistic production are linked for Malte as well. He imagines the poetry he would write if he lived in a secure home on a mountain: "Und zu denken, daß ich auch so ein Dichter geworden wäre, wenn ich irgendwo hätte wohnen dürfen, irgendwo auf der Welt, in einem von den vielen verschlossenen Landhäusern, um die sich niemand bekümmert" (42) ["And to think that I too would have been a poet like this if I could have lived somewhere, anywhere in the world, in one of the many closed up country houses that no one cares about" (43)]. It did not matter where this "Landhaus" was, as long as it was, unlike Malte's previous homes, closed, secure, and not open to disruptions.

The idea of a home, and losing one's home, figures prominently in two biblical stories central to Rilke and Slataper's works. *Die Aufzeichnungen* ends with an interpretation of the prodigal son story and *Il mio Carso* invokes Cain and Abel. Both of these accounts focus on figures wandering far from their original homes. *Il mio Carso*'s narrator questions God's decision: "Che male ti ha fatto egli, prima di uccidere Abele? perché? La bibbia non dice niente. Pensai che questo potevo essere il pensiero centrale d'una tragedia, e mi misi a ridere malignamente. Io avevo già ucciso Abele" (122) [What had he done to you, before he killed Abel? Why? The bible gives no clue. I thought that this could be a tragedy's main theme, and I began to laugh maliciously. I had already killed Abel]. The narrator does not understand, but looks forward to recreating, in the realm of poetry, the act that will force Cain to wander the earth. He identifies with Cain.

Malte, meanwhile, identifies with the prodigal son. In his version of the story, the son leaves in order to escape burdensome love: "Und den Rest tat das Haus. Man mußte nur eintreten in seinem vollen Geruch, schon war das Meiste entschieden. Kleinigkeiten konnten sich noch ändern; im ganzen war man schoen der, für den sie einen hier hielten; der, dem sie aus seiner kleinen Vergangenheit und ihren eigenen Wünschen längst ein Leben gemacht hatten; das gemeinsame Wesen, das Tag und Nacht unter der Suggestion ihrer Liebe stand" (227) ["And the house did the rest. Once you walked in to its full smell, most matters were already decided. A few details might still be changed; but on the whole you were already the person they

thought you were; a person for whom they had long ago fashioned a life, out of his small past and their own desires; the creature belonging to them all, who stood day and night under the influence of their love” (253)]. A safe house here becomes constricting and limiting. The son journeys home merely to complete the process of mastering his inner self. He returns home when he no longer needs to be at home, when he no longer depends on the love found there. Only then can he finally be at home and enjoy solitude. The use of the biblical stories reveals a universal rather than a personal message of fragmentation and alienation. This sense of homelessness has been viewed as particularly representative of the alienation in the twentieth century. “Rilke’s search for a home, too, has its roots in the early circumstances of his life, though it was far more complicated. His feelings of homelessness has been seen—above all by the critics in the existentialist tradition of Heidegger—as emblematic of modern man per se” (Brodsky 24). No matter where modern man goes, like Cain and Malte’s prodigal son, he is alone and in exile.

While both narrators talk of the possibility of another home and life, this space, the place with which they would like to be identified, cannot be found: “La patria di cui [il narratore del *Mio Carso*] ha nostalgia non esiste in alcun luogo, perché se ‘qui’ (a Trieste, allora absburgica, o in Italia, a Firenze, dove studia e scrive) egli si sente male, egli non saprebbe né vorrebbe indicare un’altra terra natale” (Ara and Magris 4) [The narrator of *Il mio Carso* is nostalgic for a country which does not exist anywhere, although he feels unwell ‘here’ (in Trieste, so Habsburgian, or in Italy, in Florence where he studies and writes), he does not know how and does not want to specify another homeland]. Leaving the city is not a solution since inescapable fragmentation and alienation remains an intrinsic part of the narrators’ experience: their lack of a home will follow them wherever they go. Gaston Bachelard writes “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (Bachelard 5). However, for the narrators of *Die Aufzeichnungen* and *Il mio Carso*, no space is really inhabited and the time when true homes might have existed is now lost. Malte and Slataper’s narrator are unable to really inhabit any space; they are really unable to live: “The interior is not only the universe but also the *etui* [case; cover] of the private person. To live means to leave traces” (Benjamin 155). Without this interior or the possibility of leaving traces, both narrators turn to reading and writing, art for the sake of living. As the narrator of *Il mio Carso* claims, “Esprimere. Tutta la vita è espressione” (162) [Express. All of life is expression].

Both works repeatedly question the possibility of life. Death permeates *Die Aufzeichnungen*, starting with the famous first line: “So, also hierher kommen die Leute, um zu leben, ich würde eher meinen, es stürbe sich hier” (7). The impersonal and pervasive “es stürbe sich” of the German is difficult to convey in English and various perspectives have been distinguished within this first sentence: “It is as if Malte were both within and on the outside of Paris” (McCormick 73). The diffi-

culty of reading this opening line can be seen in three English translations of it: “People come here, then, to live? I should rather have thought they came here to die” (1930 3); “So, then people do come here in order to live; I would sooner have thought one died here” (1949 13); “So this is where people come to live; I would have thought it is a city to die in” (1985 3). Whether “to live” is followed by a question mark or not, “to die” leaves little doubt. In any translation, fragmentation and death seem more possible than life. Slataper’s narrator, reflecting on a friend’s suicide, states, “Io non domando com’uno può morire, io domando come gli altri continuano a vivere” (157) [I do not ask how one can die, I ask how others can continue to live]. The narrator walks by two lovers and reflects on how death lurks even in a moment of tenderness, “la donna giocava con le dita del compagno che la teneva avvincolata a sé. Io pensai: ‘Quella donna gli può benissimo morire proprio questa notte’” (138) [the woman was playing with the fingers of her companion, who kept her close to him. I thought, ‘that woman could very well die this very night’].

The constant concern with and discussion of death in the two works confirms the narrators’ feelings of alienation: “Death is only the most dramatic instance of life’s inherent disunity, the ultimate form of an alienation already embedded in its everyday processes” (Harrison 99) and the “fear of fragmentation [is] related to the fear of death” (Huyssen 1989 125). Everything is more likely to break apart than to remain whole. Both narrators search to create and comprehend life, since they already understand death, the “ultimate form of alienation,” perhaps all too well. Their work can be seen as a means of trying to combat this alienation. Expressing alienation is a way of living through it: “The initial seduction, the first intimacy between Rilke and his readers almost inevitably occurs as an ambiguous complicity in shared confrontation with the near impossibility of living” (de Man 20–21). Both narrators have attempted various forms of communication and have used different stylistic forms: “Ich glaube, ich müßte anfangen, etwas zu arbeiten, jetzt, da ich sehen lerne. Ich bin achtundzwanzig, und es ist so gut wie nichts geschehen. Wiederholen wir: ich habe eine Studie über Carpaccio geschrieben, die schlecht ist, ein Drama, das ‘Ehe’ heißt und etwas Falsches mit zweideutigen Mitteln beweisen will, und Verse” (21) [“I think I should begin to do some work, now that I am learning to see. I am twenty-eight years old, and I have done practically nothing. To sum it up: I have written a study of Carpaccio, which is bad; a play entitled ‘Marriage,’ which tries to demonstrate a false thesis by equivocal means; and some poems” (19)]. There is the sense that their present works represent a kind of rebirth and yet another attempt at communication. Malte’s famous “learning to see” is part of a poetic process that also involves learning, or relearning, to write. Their insecurity in the city is related to their insecurity with themselves as authors. Both hope to confront these insecurities with their new works.

Rilke and Slataper rejected national identities and embraced poetic personae.

In a similar manner, their protagonists create homes not in cities, but in art. Rilke wrote his friend, a few months after beginning *Die Aufzeichnungen*, that he wished to find a “new existence in which I have no friends, nothing but this work which is one with me, is my world and my home, beyond which all else fades into oblivion” (Prater 140). The narrators, although they do not feel truly at home anywhere, construct something permanent and habitable with their works. Like the world of the narrators, this permanent place is also fragmented, since fragmentation is reflected on every level of the works, in their prose, in the organization of the works themselves, and even in the constructed reader. Rilke and Slataper’s works eliminate the barrier between the texts and the reader. The narrators break up their thoughts to ask “have I said this before” or “yes this is true” or “no it is not.” Slataper’s narrator addresses a you plural, a you singular, himself, the Carso itself, one of his female friends, writers from *La Voce*, among others. The addressees in *Die Aufzeichnungen* include friends, people in the street, and unknown people. The variety of addressees suggests that the works present more active experiences for the reader than conventional novels usually do. The identities of neither the reader nor narrator are necessarily stable. The reader, to experience these works, must inhabit their fragmentation.

Slataper originally gave titles to the three main sections of his novel, as well as to its two “intermezzi.” In the end, however, he dispensed with these distinguishing labels, forcing the readers themselves to determine meaning. The two parts of *Die Aufzeichnungen* also appear without titles and editors and translators themselves must distinguish between the two *bändchen*. The names given to the seventy-one sections of *Die Aufzeichnungen* often indicate a scholar’s interpretation of the entire work. Rubrics such as “tableaux,” “entries,” or “miniatures” reveal different conceptions of the work. For this reading I am tempted to call them “stanze” to suggest both their lyrical and “room-like” quality. These seventy-one stanzas construct the work and form Malte’s true home. Both texts are, as Georg Lukács claimed of all novels, “like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness” (41), and in their honest expression of this state, they created strangely habitable fragmented homes and very un-novel-like novels.²⁰

In one of Malte’s rare moments of peace, he expresses the hope that literary works can create a safe place, a sort of home for the alienated homeless. Fittingly, the only space in *Die Aufzeichnungen* that could be described as safe, or as a place to inhabit and live in, where Malte is not disturbed by penetrating noises or fragmented ghostly bodies, is not his family home or his apartment, but the library: “Ich gehe ein wenig scheu, wie man sich denken kann, durch die Straßen, aber schließlich stehe ich vor einer Glastür, öffne sie, als ob ich zuhause wäre, weise an der nächsten Tür meine Karte vor (40–41) [“I walk through the streets a little shyly, as you can imagine; but finally I stand in front of a glass door, open it as if I were at

home, show my card at the next door" (41)]. In the library, in the only entry besides the first to be given a physical location "*Bibliothèque Nationale*," Malte can finally find a space to exist in solitude, an absolute refuge: "Ich sitze und lese einen Dichter. Es sind viele Leute im Saal, aber man spürt sie nicht. Sie sind in dem Büchern. Manchmal bewegen sie sich in den Blättern" (37) ["I sit here reading a poet. There are many people in the room, but they are all inconspicuous; they are inside the books. Sometimes they move among the pages" (38)]. People are truly inside, at home, at this moment, there is no danger of windows being shattered, faces or facades falling, or space changing. While "bodily proximity and narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible" (Simmel 418) in the city, in poetry there is a type of closeness. While neither Malte nor Slataper's narrator discovered or created a private, safe physical space in their rooms or city or past, their struggle for expression and identity exists in the simultaneously public and private space of their artistic works, their textual stanze. The reader can enter their works with the same wonderment with which Malte entered Paris: "So, also hierher kommen die Leute, um zu leben" (7) ["So, then people do come here in order to live" ([Norton trans.] 13)].

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NOTES

- 1 Pound to A. Llewelyn Roberts: "Dear Sir: Re/ your request for information regarding James Joyce (B.A. R. Univ. Dublin). He is a refugee from Trieste" (Ellmann 358).
- 2 For information on Trieste's connections to Italy and the cultural and literary importance of the city to the rest of the peninsula, see Ara and Magris and Pertici.
- 3 For an author continuing to do more substantial work on the topic, as other twenty-first century works have, see Valesio ix. The lack of critical development is particularly true for novels. See, for instance, *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*. The first line of the introductory article reads, "The Italian literary establishment has always had a difficult relationship with the novel, and even more with the theory of the novel" (Ceserani and Pellini 1).
- 4 Although still definitely not as studied as English, French, German, Austrian, or American modernism, Italian modernism has received increasing attention in the new millennium. If, as some critics have argued, Italian modernism began at the peripheries of Italy, with Svevo in Trieste and Pirandello in Sicily, my project traces the course of this modernist influence from Trieste back to fin-de-siècle and Austrian modernism. For Trieste's importance as a peripheral region and its modernism, see Caesar 150–58, Tellini 132, and Dombroski 89–103.
- 5 Romano Luperini's *Scipio Slataper*, a collection of essays entitled *L'inquietudine dei moderni* [*The Inquietude of the Moderns*], and Elena Coda's "The Representation of the Metropolis in Scipio Slataper's *Il mio Carso*" are indicative of the important work that

- has been done on the novel. Coda's article is one of the few works in English that treats Slataper's work. For a comprehensive history of Slataper's critical reception see Coda, *Scipio Slataper*.
- 6 See "On or about December 1910."
- 7 Norton 8. Gass xiv.
- 8 Svevo similarly said of his novel in the first person: "È vero che la *Coscienza* è tutt'altra cosa dei romanzi precedenti. Ma pensi ch'è un'autobiografia e non la mia" (Montale 12) [It is true that *Coscienza* is completely different from the previous novels. But you think it is an autobiography and it is not mine].
- 9 See Harris 129, Coda, "The Representation" 155.
- 10 For a comparison of Slataper's characterization of the city (as weak, feminine) with that of the Futurists, see Ingo 55–56.
- 11 While Slataper argues that Futurists were not aware of interior drama, it can also be argued that there was a conscious choice on the part of the Futurists to overcome this drama.
- 12 Unless otherwise noted English translations of *Die Aufzeichnungen* are Stephen Mitchell's.
- 13 "On the question of what Modernism is, no two critics agree" (LeRoy and Beitz 1158). *The Notebooks* have been defined as Rilke's most and least "modern" work.
- 14 For more on this crisis, see Janik and Toulmin, Le Rider, Magris, and Schorske.
- 15 As Ara has explained, "Trieste was a city which belonged to none of the nationalities which made up the Empire because it belonged to all of them and was of vital significance to them" ("The 'Cultural Soul'" 61).
- 16 Lou Andreas-Salomé preferred to call Rilke by the more Germanic "Rainer," as he is now commonly called, than the more "precious" René.
- 17 For more on Rilke and his relationship with Prague, see Demetz and Demetz, Storck, and Zimmerman.
- 18 Brodsky 25. Ryan 32.
- 19 Rilke "was prepared to be a disciple in the temple of French culture" (Ziolkowski 16).
- 20 For a comparison of Lukács and Bakhtin's ideas of homelessness in their theories and how they relate to ideas on the novel, see Neubauer.

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