

Travel Literature, images and mirages in the work of Lumo Skëndo “Zvicra”



Literature

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Abstract

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century will be the periods where significant studies upon the comparative literature will come to light – and as a consequence, it will be a significant period even for imagology as one of the most authentic results of the whole journey. To depict new places, to make judgements upon the other authors, to confront oneself, and to emerge in an activity in another place are only some of the reactions provoked by the encounter with a tourist, a traveller and why not they are even the reactions provoked by the television images. Similarly, even literature plays an important role in the creation of this “imaginary” that has as a target individuals and new places which are totally new for the traveller. Literature is an eternal source of “information”, absorbing you bit by bit, even though it does not have a straightforward impact upon you. Nonetheless, it has the power to go in the depths of our thoughts even through nations or identities which are totally different from others. Since literature, deals with the past, it transmits on us images, thoughts, judgements expressed in all the times and in all the cultures. A similar view is transmitted through the written work of Lumo Skëndos “Zvicra” in 1915.

Guides, diaries, travel manuals used during pilgrimage and other various travels, were not only a useful source of factual advice for the travellers but they also contained their own literary dignity. They were interesting and they turned out to be a “predecessor” of what would be later called “travel literature”.

The first authentic works of the travel literature, began in the 15th – 16th century, during the european expansion. These first authentic works were to be followed by other works even more professional.

Travel Literature is a literature which was studied relatively late, if we compare it with the time when it was sprouted.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century will be the periods where significant studies upon the comparative literature will come to light – and as a consequence, it will be a significant period even for imagology as one of the most authentic results of the travel literature.

We can admit that imagology did not have a full expansion as it does now. If we refer to traditional imagology we can name important elements such as: “the environment”, “the moment” and “ the people’s composition”. These elements attracted more the traveller attention. They helped to make an impression upon a specific nation. They would contribute later on even to understand their lifestyle. Therefore, if we would halt for a moment during the World Wars, and more specifically in the World War II, getting to know “the other” was indispensable even from the historiscal character. Then, it is understandable that due to the influence that nations would have on each other, a new viewpoint would be created in the comparative literature.

Study aspects, viewpoints, facts that would come to life in a literary work will be in a total harmony with the time they belong to. Travels, descriptions, literary works started to break away from the traditional in an effort to improve. New concepts were beginning to emerge during the literary studies, and between various scholars. There was an attempt to interweave the historical with the artistic aspect so as to attract the general public towards imagology or comparative literature.

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Similarly, even literature plays an important role in the creation of this “imaginary” that has as a target individuals and new places which are totally new for the traveller. Literature is an eternal source of “information”, absorbing you bit by bit, even though it does not have a straightforward impact upon you. Nonetheless, it has the power to go in the depths of our thoughts even through nations or identities which are totally different from others. Since literature, deals with the past, it transmits on us images, thoughts, judgements expressed in all the times and in all the cultures.

Even nowadays, when the first place of image and thought communication is held by more advanced ways like Internet – literature scope does not fade at all. The description of foreign places in literature is a very old phenomenon. The necessity to show a new reality to a certain society would get us closer to know the unknown and would help us to know “the other”.

In order to confirm what we said above, it is necessary for us to study the manuals by Christopher Columbus where the “indigenes” are depicted. However, we can analyze even literary works of our century, which help us create a bond between the visions that sprung up during the description of “the other” but we can even analyze antic literary works where “the other” was even more different.

The analogies created define clearly the different cultures, in this way they create at the individual an undisputable recognition of “the other”. This is the main aim of the imagology.

The target is clear: a continuous effort that attempts to study every possible literary objects in relations to other cultural’s elements.

Therefore, imagology deals with the study of images, prejudices, assessments, stereotypes and opinions over nations and cultures which come from literature.

The most important concern of imagology is to reach the ideal value that some literary works of art may have. To talk about the others is always a way in order to discover something from oneself. There is always a direct or indirect bond between texts that contain the latest images that have gained a popularity in their kind.

The encounter with “the other” can always guarantee, adventures and unexpected things even when you don’t come across it. To leap out of your nation, the place where you have always belonged to and it has always belonged to you, in order to jump into the unknown through literature is ultimately a challenge.

Literature knows how to cut down on distances, to make the encounter with “the other” a pleasant adventure where sometimes it is noticeable the “supremacy” or inferiority of “the other”.

Only in the last twenty years, due to the attempts to study intercultural genres, texts related to travels started to be present.

In this way we can read and look for details which at first may be trivial but they describe the meeting with “the other”, the “supremacy” of the dominant cultures that usually the traveller encounter.

Nowadays we are facing a reconstruction of the literature that deals with the travels and we must be attentive while we cope with it. This is demonstrated through published literary works of art and other projects in development.

Travelling is an object of study of many different genres; historical, scientific, but even of a total different one such as tourism.

One of the biggest concerns of our researches is whether the diaries, travelling manuals or tourist guides must be included in the travel literature.

Theoretical-literary thoughts upon this issue are totally different.

The travel literature is a genre which relies with other genres and is continually creating movable boundaries.

Therefore, travel literature can be defined as a starting point which made it possible for the other disciplines to be created. It has been mentioned even the travels made during the year 1500 that for the first time opened more complex and wide geographical horizons.

However, due to its character the travel literature encompasses its boundary. Moreover, it is this initial character that encompasses the boundaries so as to see what is there beyond what can be seen. It has the ability to translate, interpret the meeting with “the other”.

This is exactly the most important key connection with the comparative literature since this type of literature does the same thing: it observes everything and then it compares. We can deduce that this is the ultimate aim of it.

Meeting “the other” enables in us the expectations; we create a specific image about “the other” and everything regarding it. Not only in the traditional travel literature but even in nowadays literature, the diary remains one of the most used means of writing in order to create the structure of their later works.

Therefore, the travel literature does not have as a mission to show foreign places, but in some aspects it aspires even to reach the internationalism or “interculturalism” as it is widely used in the manuals of the “travel literature”.

In relation to these concepts, we find traces of the travel literature in the work of Lumo Skendo “Zvicra” in 1915.

His work is divided in seven short chapters, the writing is old but understandable and clear. The style is not very complicated and the language used is not very difficult so as to be in total harmony with the reader who is going to read it (the reader during the years 1912-1915 was not very educated).

The work is build up in the form of a diary, with 72 pages, in which Skendo very often mentions “the first fourteen years”, “second year”, etc.

In this work he draws parallellism when he gives a cultural “selfimage”. When he shows a specific view seen in Switzerland, he compares it with a view in Albania.

A wind of freedom was blowing in those mountains while in ours are planning the worst to happen.

In the end of the preface the author describes the importance of travel literature as a means of selfreflexion. This is how he writes:

I will be glad if these pages will exalt between Albanians the desire to travel with the sole purpose to see and to know.

Clearly Skëndo shows the importance of “the other” as an indispensable approach in case we want to know cultures which are different from ours.

If we compare Skëndo’s work with that of Vedat Kokona “From Tirana to Stockholm” in 1935, the work of Skëndo reveals sadness symptoms when he writes in his preface about his setting off.

I didnt have nor the necessary mind tranquility and nor the time to do a stroll or to do a proper study.

The work starts with the description of Milan, one of the Italian cities. He compares this city with other cities such as Bari or Brindisi and he gives the advantages of Milan compared to these latter ones.

Switzerland gives a reminiscence of Albania to the author. It reminds him Albania. Every now and then, whenever he saw breathtaking views he thought about Albania and he creates in his mind new images, just like the ones he would like to be present in Albania. Whenever a comparison is made we become witness of a very bitter reality.

What I see on the side of the mountain is pretty similar to our places, everything reminds me of Xunen and Babje or Skrapari. However, the difference is that here the land is totally covered and the meadows are well-maintained, and the forests are well-kept.

Skendo asserts in his work that all the nations are satisfied to be visitors in the wonderful Switzerland, whereas the Albanians get bored. The visitors are so numerous that they make up the majority for them.

The author sees the lack of social development as the main cause of the lack of the visitors despite it owns the same beautiful places just like Switzerland. There are some numerous factors that show the slow steps of Albania towards the development.

Albania is located between East and West. Nevertheless, the Eastern orientation for several centuries would transmit to generations after generations a very limited culture, insufficient to make us integrated into the West. Naturally, the geographical position, but even the foreigners opinion that Albania is a tool in the hands of the Easter. Albania let them to interfere in every field and unfortunately their traces would last long.

What surprises the man who comes from the Eastern, Albania or one the nearby countries is that everybody plays, wanders, laughs and shouts but nobody goes to spoil a flower or anything else.

It is necessary an example like this in order to compare our habits. These are simple things which reveal us a lot about the behaviour of the individuals.

The departure is fully described inside the travel where we can read about an Albania which is badly organized, where every jurisdiction enjoyed independence of decision-taking from the other. It was described as a country where the social, economical and cultural development was very low and everybody was living below the poverty line.

Albania “selfimage” would be reconstructed again, but this time it was harder. It would make us suffer when we would witness that what is happening abroad is totally different from what it is happening here. We would see that we are left behind.

What I notice is people tranquility. I do learn that murders and other wicked things cannot be encountered in Switzerland. People become weird when I tell them that in other places there are people who

murder people. At this point I start to think about my own country. Among us everyone sees himself free to work how he likes, to do what anger makes him do and to shoot through guns very easily. How will Albanians learn that nobody has the right to kill the other.

Naturally, the feeling of inferiority, the fact that there was a lack of unwritten laws, the presence of customary laws such as Kanun, and the irresponsibility of the individuals make it easier for Albania to be left so behind and with a lack of everything.

Skëndo starts to describe “the other” and ends up to talk about the “oneself” by seeing it in deep differences compared it with the reality. Skendo reveals the reality just as it is, totally different from Switzerland where the government functions properly. He mentions that in our country instead of supporting the police and Justice, we support the murderer.

While seeing these places, I spare a thought to Albania, because my mind is always occupied by my country whether I want it or not. It seems to me that Albania is not left behind for beautiful places. There are a lot of picturesque places which are pretty similar to these in Switzerland. Many places here reminds me of Tomorrca or parts of Quksi. It seems to me that these places are outstanding and they cannot be found easily in Switzerland. Everytime I have moved from Elbasani to Korça, and from Korça to Vlora and I’ve been amazed and astonished by Berat.

Very often the cultural heritage of “the other” seems more admirable and attractive. However, while the supremacy of “the other” is seen during the way, inevitable it makes you turn your head back and think about your own country. We want our country to possess the best ever so as we can compare it with “the other” with dignity.

Albania possesses all the necessary possibilities but there are a lot of obstacles which make it so different from Switzerland. Sometimes the geographical distances vanish when cultures clash among each other through a process of give and take.

Compared to Switzerland, our country has got fields, a wonderful climate because it is near the sea. It is a place where olives and oranges are cultivated. Our Albania can feed not only one million people but even four million people.

Skëndo, stops every now and then so as even to show stories about Switzerland. He tells us that their road toward development has not been easy but thanks to everybody’s responsibility they managed to build the Switzerland which is now. Cultural and religious tolerance has made this country a positive one. They respect what people believe in and they even respect the country you come from.

There have been many years that there are no religious intolerance. In fact, they don’t even mention the differences in religion. Because before being Protestants and Catholics they are Swiss.

The author is totally absorbed by the culture and historical objects which assert a very old civilization .

Prehistoric museums, stories concerning the fine arts make the visit worth; especially to see Pestalozziamum, a museum in the name of Pestalozi, a Swiss that has done a lot for pedagogy. In this museum which is placed in a very small house above the river Liman, are gathered full of love even some of the manuscripts of the the great lecturer.

Skëndo concludes his work by standing very near the border. He describes everything he sees. This moment in the Comparative Literature would take the name “return”.

You walk, and you walk by making noise, by whistling. Your country is always the most beautiful one, the mountains, the rocks and a lot of picturesque places.

In conclusion we can say that what is seen clearly in this work are all the elements of travel literature and imagology.

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