

„ЕЗИЦИТЕ“ НА ЛИТЕРАТУРНАТА ТВОРБА

“THE LANGUAGES” OF THE LITERARY WORK

LITERARY AND MYSTIC INTERTWINES: KAFKA, RAMADANI, DIBRA

Vjollca DIBRA, Rezarta RAMADANI, Fikret RAMADANI

University “Ukshin Hoti”, Prizren, Kosovo

E-mail: vjollca.dibra@uni-prizren.com; rezarta.ramadani@uni-prizren.com;
fikret.ramadani@uni-prizren.com

ABSTRACT: Despite his late occurrence in Albanian literature, Franz Kafka’s influence has been particularly noticed in Musa Ramadani’s (1944-2020) novel “The Prophet from Prague” in Kosovo and Ridvan Dibra’s (1959) novel “Franz Kafka Writes to His Son”. This paper aims at examining Kafka’s influence in Albanian and Kosovan literature (e.g., through subjects and philosophical/aesthetic sensibilities) having Ramadani and Dibra’s works as primary comparative subjects. Dibra outlines his Kafka, the authorial Kafka, giving voice to his philosophy about life, love, and death. In addition, the biographical method has also been applied occasionally because Ramadani augments the narrative partly on Kafka’s biographical signs, but also on metaphysical and mystical ones. These findings reveal that Kafka’s cult, or more precisely Kafka’s myth has not been exempted even from Albanian literature; Albanian writers plunge into the labyrinth of research with their own means of literary expressiveness and thus become self-personified in their imagination. It is precisely in this regard that we find Kafka in Musa Ramadani and Ridvan Dibra’s novels.

KEYWORDS: Kafka, Musa Ramadani, Ridvan Dibra, Albanian Literature, comparative, biography, influence

1. The history of Kafka’s presence in Albanian literature

Though Kafka’s work was mainly published at the turn of the 20th century, it became accessible and popular to Albanian readers much later. “The Trial” first appeared and was read in Kosovo; only later did it arrive in Albania. While the Yugoslav federation was governed by a monolithic social and cultural order, the socialist self-government was much more tolerant and liberal than the socialist rule in Albania. Yet, in Kosovo it held a special significance: while most people in Yugoslavia read and enjoyed it without burdens and enjoyed its artistic, aesthetic, and philosophical qualities, Kosovar Albanians read it as a secret code of messages, finding an articulation of their oppressed and transgressive destiny in the national and political plan. As the official language was compulsory for all, almost all Albanian writers here knew it and read Kafka. It is no wonder that the first translations of “Process” and “The Castle” in Albanian were also done in the Serbo-Croatian language.

In socialist Albania, however, Kafka occurred much later, after the collapse of the social and dictatorial order at the end of the 20th century. For the truth’s sake, it cannot be said that no information was available beforehand about Kafka, Sartre, Camus, Schopenhauer, Joyce, Croce, and other so-called representatives of decadent, revisionist and bourgeois literature. But, even the sheer mentioning of these authors was more than enough to put the censorship on, as was the case with the essays of Alfred Uchi and Myzafer Xhaji, as well as Kadare’s lectures at the Faculty of Philology. Yet, despite the strict government surveillance, students were still able to capture the notion that, somewhere out there, there was a complex world of opinion and art beyond the boundaries of the dictatorship.

Alda Bardhyli in her article “Kafka Scares Translators,” reveals more about the occurrence of Kafka’s work in Albanian literature. She writes, “In the Albanian language, the first serious attempt to bring his work [to Albanian readers] was made by Gjergj Vlasi. Rarely have I come across translators who are also writers, but Vlasi was excellent in both. While Kafka, according to Umberto Eco, is one of the “holy trinity” of modern storytellers along with Joyce and Borges, Gjergji with his translations, became a “servant” of this “trinity” precisely with Kafka’s works.” (Bardhyli, 2013)

Virion Graci, passionate about Kafka's literature, published a story about his works on the 130th anniversary of Kafka's death, and it states: "Kafka's literature will be readable even after 200 years, because it is the epic of the modern man, the authentic inhabitant of the 20th century, a contemporary of the civilization which we still belong to today. When this type of civilization is to be globally overcome, Kafka will be read...as he is the insurmountable narrator and novelist of the individual; his human revelations and seemingly minimalist characters have a majesty and immortal relatable power that tragic faces have, those who came from ancient Greek theatres or from Shakespearean dramas. It has made the visible invisible, it has made the natural extraordinary, it has made the believable incredible with a clear, fluent language, with an accessible vocabulary of free conversational style." (Bardhyli, 2013)

The overthrow of the socialist dictatorship in Albania brought more of Kafka's publications and translations. Perhaps more thoroughly and accurately than anyone else before him, the writer Ardian Klosi appreciated Kafka, as he wrote: "When you enter Kafka's work, you have passed a threshold that has nothing to do with everyday life anymore, with your historical, philosophical or psychological knowledge. You have simply entered into his world as you enter into the world of Greek mythology when you read a book on ancient myths, or as you read the Old and New Testament, but without its moralizing or didactic parts." (Klosi, 2016)¹

2. Kafka's impact on the Albanian literature

Since literature can be a productive, internationalizing, edifying, and emancipatory phenomenon for a culture and people, it is quite natural that a new, foreign entry will find its disciples, readers and its creators. Soon, deeper readings will emerge and connections between the foreign work and native literary tradition will be made. This fact should be viewed tactfully and moderately because, beyond the admiration for Kafka, Albanian authors are first of all a product of the socio-cultural context of the time of the Balkan Peninsula area; they are a product of regional ethno-psychology, as well as of the specific level of their literary formation that, not always, stands close to the image of their "prophet" or their "chosen" one. For example, when worldwide literary criticism has dealt with Kadare's work, his stylistic and substantive similarities to Kafka have almost never been overlooked. Certainly, in this sudden introduction to foreign literature in Albania, there were unjustified exaltations and exaggerations, as well as misunderstandings that are unavoidable under the circumstances in which a value system undergoes profound transformation. Then, it should also be acknowledged that Kadare in his prose, almost never gave references to Kafka's work. The parallels and comparisons of different scholars have been extended to the level of contents or the totality of ideas of one and the other within their literary works.

However, the second stage followed where the scholars engaged with the concrete socio-cultural topics and literary works in a more serious and academic way.

3. Kafka as a character in the Albanian literature

In Albanian literature Kafka also lives in the role of a character. There are two novels in which Franz Kafka has taken refuge as a protagonist: Musa Ramadani's novel "The Prophet from Prague" and Ridvan Dibra's "Franc Kafka writes to his son." Ramadani's novel was published by MAPO Publishing House, Tirana in 2017 and it was given the highest national literary award, the Kadare Prize. In the meantime, Dibra's novel was published by TOENA PUBLICATIONS, Tirana in 2006. Though published nine years after Dibra's novel, the two parts of Ramadani's novel were in fact completed before that: the first has the completion note, Prishtina 1998, and, the second, January 5 and 6, 2004, which means several years before Dibra's novel. If we consider the chronology of Musa Ramadani's publications and the bibliographical notes, we come across an additional fact: he published "Inamor 55", where many parts of the novel "The Prophet from Prague" have been even earlier included. (Ramadani, 2000)

In Ramadani's and Dibra's novels, Franz Kafka appears as the main character, at least preliminarily suggesting that both Albanian authors deeply knew Franz Kafka's life and work. In fact, Musa Ramadani's visit to Kafka's birthplace in Prague was well-known even in the literary circles of Prishtina. In his novel he even reproduces one of Prague's streets and a café route with a cartographic

¹ All quotations in Albanian have been translated in English by the authors.

precision: “Gets to the known park Chotek. It is his most beloved and most beautiful place in Prague.” (Ramadani, 2000, p. 3) Or: “There, at Staro Mesto, between Husova and Melantrichova streets ... must be the Jitska or Jilska street departing from Uradnica.” (Ramadani, 2000, p. 3)

Herewith, Ramadani augments the documentary and general bibliographical notes about Franz Kafka. What does this fact reveal to us? Musa idolatry pushes our author towards a self-personification with the worshiper, an attempt of imitation *sui generis*. This aspect, to a large extent, also dictates the structure of the literary edifice to him. On the other hand, Dibra jumps into the imaginary level trying to “read” the unrealized thoughts to his character. In thick lines, we would say that, the first, is hypnotized after the form while the second, intertwined the content as an authorial projection. We have pointed out this phenomenon in Dibra’s work, in the first collection of his stories “The Virgin Prostitute,” where he affirms, even without modesty, the role of a teacher and a role-model of another foreign author, namely the Italian writer, Dino Buzzati.

Dibra, amazed by his writing, not only “submits” to that narrative magic, but also does not hesitate to recognize and openly accept its influence. The figure of the oxymoron, the paradox and the sudden turn or surprise in the epilogue of the stories is nothing more than a Buzzatian arsenal of narrative tools. The new century’s second decade finds Dibra in the new circle of another world author, namely Franz Kafka. Dibra will now come up with the novel “Franz Kafka Writes to his Son” (2007) and the short stories “I, Franz Kafka and the Bologna Charter.” (2009)

In contrast with what the author claims in relation to Buzzati in the first case, the relation with Kafka, is of a completely different nature. It is not the case of influence here. First of all, we are dealing with a re-reading or a palimpsest of the Kafkaian opus. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that, despite the author’s referential title, it seems that he has already been opening a line to Dibra for his imaginative projection. So, Dibra profiles his Kafka, the authorial Kafka, giving voice to his philosophy about life, love and death. In other words, we get an Albanian Kafka with all its authenticity, despite the paper scheme for the non-existent son. A narrative style that is still unique according to the method of retardation, as a foreword of an epilogue that has already happened. In Ridvan Dibra’s interview for *Ars Poetica* No. 23, in September 2009, he claims that, just like Kafka, he is also affected by the *Kafka syndrome*, since he considers writing as a passion as well as a curse or punishment. This can also be seen in his book “In Search of the Lost Child.” As a whole, it is interesting how both authors have chosen Kafka as the carrier of their novels’ plot, and thereby they have elaborated on the complexity of the content, outlook and world perception of the Czech writer. Perhaps the attempt to put oneself under the authorial membrane of a foreign writer, within his soul, is nothing but an attempt to incarnate or embody the idol, in the first case and the chosen one, in the second case.

4. The two novels’ structure

Ramadani’s novel “The Prophet from Prague”, as mentioned above, consists of two parts with seven chapters in total. The first part contains the endnote Prishtina 1998 and opens with a PRE CHAPTER: NEWS-ANNOUNCEMENT-INVITATION, which functions as an authorial poetry-essay on Kafka. The first chapter, GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENT, presents the protagonist, “Prague. The year nineteen sixty-five. After 41 years of his disappearance, on his 82nd anniversary of gestation, the Jewish-German-Czech writer Franz Kafka had suddenly appeared again in his hometown” (Ramadani, 2000, p. 3). Hereafter, a question of Kafka’s being and his non-being unfolds the adventure of a missing character. Chapter 2 portrays the protagonist’s search for his birthplace, and the third chapter examines the feminine wrath through the presentation of four of Kafka’s letters to his girlfriends: Felices, Gretes, Milena and his sister Ottla. Chapter 4 is titled “Getting to Meet Again with an Old Friend.” The fifth chapter, named “This Chapter was Written by Franz Kafka Himself, Read it!,” is quite specific, with the author adding at its end, “Borrowings from the Diary, Letters and Autobiography of Kafka made by M. Ramadani.” The first part ends with Chapter 6, “An Enigmatic Man and seven Herman’s Answers to Franz’s Letter.” The second part of the novel includes the following chapters: 8. “What was the Title of *The Process*,” 9. “Franz Kafka d. v. He also wrote this chapter / Letters from Berlin / 1923”, 10. “... Anci and ... Lena on Boulevard,” 11. “Man a Public Book,” 12. “Accident: Kafka with Kafka,” 13. “Lilliputian Street– the Alchemists,” 14. “One Night in K.’s Room in Kierling.” The novel finishes with a POST SCRIPTUM and BACKGROUND:

ON-STONE-WRITING. Throughout Musa Ramadani's work, Kafka's artistic pain—as reflected in his testament whereto he wished to have his work and manuscripts burned—is felt as an internal rumble. Erjon Uka remarks, “Built as a symbiosis of documented facts and Ramadani's imagination, Kafka comes to us differently this time. It is precisely the failure to put the will of burning his work into practice that brings the writer back to the world of the living, to see the impact he had on the twentieth-century literature, which he certainly would not have imagined. Kafka in this novel is broken down into three different plans: Kafka in the family plan, Kafka in relation to women plan, and of course Kafka as the narrator of his life that did not lead him to the end. It is interesting that Franz Kafka, who has been revived many times, is Musa Ramadani himself.” (Uka, 2017)

In terms of narration or narrative structure, the researcher Agron Gashi has singled out the following elements:

“*The Prophet from Prague* also contains documentary elements, built partially on Kafka's biography, but also on metaphysical and mystical elements. The novel has, above all, the structure of a feature film where Ramadani extends his narration of the plot from various perspectives.” (Gashi, 2019) The entire narrative takes place in the present, through which Kafka as a man, as a writer and as a character returns to the era when he died, looking for the places he loved and seeking a reunion with his friends, books, girlfriends, and family. He sometimes appears in the role of a narrator, sometimes in the role of a character, thus dressing the novel with great fictitiousness, but always maintaining the correct contextual references, (e.g., names of people, streets, bars, libraries, museums, etc). The “Prophet from Prague,” despite being ostensibly focused on one character, includes many references to European art, culture, and literature. The erudite author offers a work that resembles a literary encyclopaedia with various references to the Talmud, Zohar and Torah, and other books in Czech, German, and Hebrew. In Ramadani's work, dramatic and musical forms, epistolary literature, and cinematographic images abound to create a synthesis novel of world culture and literature that figuratively relates to the present fate of the Albanian artist. “The book goes everywhere through poetry. Poetry enters into clear dialogues where the space between the two epochs is felt and it leaves the reader thinking about the present. It is easy to discern that we are dealing with a poet, a playwright, a writer, a painter, a composer,” the researcher Ledia Dushi concludes. Despite the elliptical form that the author has given to his work, the resultant novel is like a mosaic or bricolage, perhaps a book co-written by Ramadani and Kafka. Agim Baçi always falls for this appreciative sound: “Ramadani's story, reconstructing Kafka's life, brings to the man who carries almost everything worth knowing, the possible and the impossible, the achievable and the imaginable. A return that invites the reader to see and revisit himself before returning, in order to find the reason of life.” (Baci, 2017) Ridvan Dibra's novel “Franz Kafka Writes to his Son” opens with a preface of the writer, where each paragraph begins with “if” to justify the cause of writing the letter, within which there are ten breaks, which mark the ten chapters of the book: 1. Fairy Tale, 2. Silence, 3. Bird, 4. Apples, 5. Balloons, 6. One Floor Below, 7. In Queue for One, 8. A Mouse, 9. In the Name of a Son, and 10. Ripe Fruit. The holidays are essentially introductory chapters that help form a whole novel of letters. The author gives us the most direct dismantle of the character in the novel, when in one of his IF-s, he writes: “if after the two failed engagements, in the third (the true third) I would be married to Felicia (to her and only to her)!; if She, besides everything a woman can give, would also give me a son; ... if all these things were to happen, then most likely, I, Franz Kafka, would write to my son: Dear son ...” (Dibra, 2006, p. 6)

5. The commonalities and particularities of these two novels

Being fully aware that conducting comparative analysis can include several methods, in our view it seems more reasonable to deal with the methods mentioned by Charles Tilly in his book “Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons,” which deals with individualization, universalization, finding variations, and inclusion. Individualism cannot be taken as truly comparative, but uses comparison to a small extent of research; *Universal comparison* aims to prove that every instance of a phenomenon essentially follows the same rule; the Comparison of finding variations seeks to create a principle of changing the character or intensity of a phenomenon by noting the systematic, logical differences between the phenomena; Comprehensive comparison places different cases in different places within the same system in order to explain their characteristics with

the system as a whole. In the following, there is a discussion of the logic of comparison as such: Comparison of Finding Variations and Comprehensive Comparison that come close to my goal. The first common element of these two works without question is their allusion to Kafka in the title. “The Prophet from Prague” characterizes Franz Kafka as a literary prophet, while Dibra’s work is even more direct, “Franz Kafka Writes to his Son.” Both have some attributes of postmodern prosody, use bricolage, and build their fictitious narratives through the vehicle of other writers’ ideas. In Ramadan’s work, Kafka appears once directly as his son and the other time as a ghost that returns after four decades of death and sees reality from a distance. Meanwhile, Dibra has entirely constructed the structure of his novel in the form of letters, letters that come from the missing Franz Kafka and are addressed to the missing son who was actually never there. In using this structure, Dibra stands close to Kafka’s surrealist creativity. This conclusion is supported by the researcher Ledia Dushi, who writes, “The style of Dibra is oneiric, full of shadows, perhaps mysteries and visions, which is actually a guide composed of topics with obsessive treatments such as time running out, memory, anticipation, smoke, the anxiety of filling this smoke, the loneliness that unites and divides humanity, frustrations, illusions, delusions... A few years before his death, Buzzati had stated that since he began writing, his cross had been Kafka. Ridvan Dibra makes his literature unmistakable, using the language so well and without getting infected by the chaotic disease of Albanian literature.” (Dushi, 2016) Musa Ramadan’s novel is dominated by fragmentation, but it is also compact because it uses the protagonist’s unique perspective as a reference. The author and the character seem to have a teacher-student or prophet-disciple relationship and they agree on biographical details from Kafka’s life. This fact has been ascertained by the researcher Prof. Dr. Ledia Dushi, who writes, “The author does not build a boundary between his word and what Kafka once wrote. The words move from Kafka’s writings to the author’s words. Both come as feelings, they relate to metaphors and I will try to portray them that way. They give each other life as two waves that after they meet, mix and foam, easily sing a sonata that the author dedicates to Kafka being “forgotten” in it.” (Dushi, 2016) Furthermore, in an interview with Viola Murati, Ramadan himself stated, “I am sorry to say, but, for us Albanians wherever we are, the process of oblivion is more powerful than that of memory. Literature can or should have a foothold of fact, but artistic fiction is necessary. Picasso said: ‘I started each painting with something concrete, then the work was shaped by imagination.’” (Murati, 2017) In Ridvan Dibra’s “Franz Kafka Writes to His Son” it seems as if what “Kafka could say to his (absent) son is absorbed by the author and conveyed as a collection of lessons and experiences—regarding life and art, philosophy, morality and religion.” (Dibra, 2006, p. 43) Coincidentally, Ridvan’s son, Eros, happened to be an artist, a painter. In this domain Dibra is more persistent. It seems as if his fantasy is plotted through the Kafkaesque labyrinths, respectively of his work, to assimilate the learning-experience from the guilt and fatal fate of man, from the sin committed and from the guilt of the innocent who came to this world without their will.

6. Conclusion

This work, meanwhile, draws a comparative parallel between the two novels of Albanian authors. The comparative subject of Kafka, with Kafka and for Kafka is only the pretext, it is the track where they meet and share. To compare two literary works does not only mean to confront them, but also to deduce their form and content, linguistic and figurative structure, their realization and results, especially in the artistic and aesthetic plan, without leaving aside the totality of ideas. When we say the totality of ideas we mean ideology without the political determinant, which has become a bad practice, especially in the countries of the former communist rule. In conclusion, it is not for the sake of modesty, but for the sake of reality, to present the fact that this type of writing, as in this paper, on the basis of comparative literature is very rare and without any tradition in Albanian literature. Even when an attempt has been made the lack of theoretical knowledge has compelled the authors either in positions of animosity and preferences, or in destructive and disregarding denials. This happened especially in cases where critics and scholars were far below the level of authors or writers who were the subjects of their treatment. The mind tells us that at least in this domain we have completely been liberated from the hypothetical burdens and narrow goals. Both Musa Ramadan and later Ridvan Dibra developed their artistic careers in totalitarian systems, where the dictatorship was institutionalized and ideological censorship was prevalent. The pressure resulting from restrictions on

freedoms and human rights therefore incentivized the writers to use irony, symbolism, surrealism, and imaginary structures in order to convey their ideas. Musa Ramadani has been praised and honoured with national awards for his many literary works. However, his latest work “The Prophet from Prague,” despite being awarded the “Ismail Kadare” Prize (the highest literary honour in Albania), has not become the object of serious scholarship yet. Almost all of the articles so far belong to reviews and reading impressions, which makes it somewhat difficult to examine the work’s substantive and artistic content. The same can be said about Dibra, also the recipient of several national literary awards. His works on Kafka, or as it is called “... the letter sent to his son” and ‘I, Kafka and the Bologna Charter’ have not been seriously treated to the extent that they should have.

The phenomenon of artistic influence in literature has often been seen through rather sceptical eyes, leading the works to be seen sometimes as copies or imitations. On the topic, we will assert that literary influence is an emancipatory element both for the original author and for the later authors. Going back to Aristotle’s mimetic theory in the Poetics, if we closely look at the whole world literature, we will see that the base of all literary works is nothing but life, love and death. Orestes, Electra and Iphigenia are no longer the property of an Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides, but also of Virgil, Dante or Goethe. And still, others are by-products of the works of these greats.

In the same way, Ramadani’s and Dibra’s works stand firmly on Kafka’s foundation. And because our authors not only rely on this foundation, but also weave in their own experiences and ideas, they make Kafka their own. In doing so, it is clear that Ramadani and Dibra’s creative visions and purposes have been accomplished.

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