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# **The Role of Literature in the Processes of Destereotyping (Through Examples from Macedonian Literature)<sup>1</sup>**

## **Theoretical contextualization**

Literature, as a discursive practice in the contemporary sociocultural context and, inevitably, in correlation with them, is included in the imagological processes of creating literary (hetero- and auto-) images, which are often based on stereotypes and prejudices, thereby participating in the processes of stereotyping, as has already been affirmed in other (non-literary) discourses. Literature, however, thanks to its linguistic medium, rhetorical potential,

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as well as its rich repertoire of narrative methods, is privileged in its ability to participate in the deformation and transformation of stereotypical representations of the Other, thereby becoming part of the processes of destereotyping.

According to Daniel-Henri Pageau, stereotypes are a “powerful form of image”, a “sign that imperceptibly points towards the only possible interpretation”: “The stereotype, as a brief survey, a short expression of a culture, expresses the least information for the greatest and amplest possible communication, which also strives towards generalizations” (Пажо, 2002, pp. 106–107).<sup>2</sup> These definitions underline two aspects of stereotypes: 1. Their effectiveness for communication, as they offer a readymade system of information that eases social interaction. 2. Their narrowness and indirectness: based on selectivity and general representation, they lead to stereotyping – to generalized impressions of and attitudes towards the people of the stereotyped group.

The Balkans have a complex imagological substance that is comprised of positive and negative stereotypes, thus confirming that “[t]he production of a Balkan semantics is based on a narrow range of persistent images, reinvented as appropriate in each historical moment” (Norris, 1999, p. 37) and that “the Balkans are hostages to a tradition of stereotypes” (Тодорова, 2001, p. 276). For example, positive stereotypes are usually associated with notions of Balkan patriarchal culture; with the stereotype of the Balkans as a crossroad and its geosymbolic meanings; and with notions of a multicultural, multilingual and multireligious environment. Negative notions are epitomized in stereotypes of the Balkans as a “powder keg”, “wild Europe”, “damned peninsula”, and “Balkanization”. Positive and negative notions of the Balkans and the Balkan peoples that are constructed in language, folklore, literature, movies, jokes, travelogues, political discourses, news media, social media, and academic research are firmly based in specific sociocultural and cultural-historical contexts. These are marked by the two Balkan wars, the beginning of the First World War, the duration of the Second World War, the Yugoslav civil war, and the mixture of nations, ethnicities, religions and cultural communities. These contexts trace the complex relations between Balkan (geographical) neighbours as war allies/enemies and as political and ideological partners/adversaries, and this is also reflected in the numerous linguistic, national, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes. Balkan history is, thus, a good example that history is one of the basic mechanisms for the argumentation of stereotypes and that the multitude of

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<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Macedonian language were translated by Igor Popovski.

contexts – their “reusability in all times” (Пажо, 2002, p. 108) – enable their manipulation and escalation in times of crisis, an example being the war on the territory of former Yugoslavia. Stereotypes of the Balkans tend to oscillate between two extremes: on the one hand, the affirmation of images that mark the “shared heritage” between Balkan peoples and “collective figures of memory” (Kulavkova, 2009, p. 23) and the comical affirmations of difference/Otherness; on the other, images that emphasize ethnic, national, religious differences as identity markers, (ab)used for political and nationalistic purposes. Within these two extremes, stereotypes about the Balkan neighbours contribute to the shaping of the Balkan Otherness, juxtaposed not only with European civilizational and cultural values, but also with basic human values.

Destereotyping is a process within the problematization or the revelation of stereotypes as imagological and ideological constructs. Dubravka Oraić Tolić connects the deconstruction of stereotypes with the denaturalization of stories and with the need to reveal, unmask and recognize the ideologies that are hidden in the cultural imaginarium, which shows that they are fictionalizations and poeticizations of personal and collective desires, of social conventions and ideological options (Oraić Tolić, 2005, p. 267). The conversion of stereotypes, their euphemisms or rhetorical correctness can be used to raise awareness of and gain control over stereotypes, but the dilemma of whether these processes are destereotyping remains. According to Gordana Đerić, in recent decades the attitude towards Otherness, from a narrowly rhetorical perspective, has shifted as a result of the deconstruction of the dominant narratives, although it is unclear whether renaming it has had any effect on changing old notions.

When we change the labels and the names of the stereotypes of our time in the public discourse, is it just a rhetorical mask whose obligatory use only acknowledges and legitimizes the existence of stigma, thereby only exacerbating the ‘sensitive issues’, or does it somehow produce a change in the status of the ‘labeled’, thereby making ‘Afro-Americans’ less ‘black’, ‘Roma people’ less ‘gypsies’, and ‘Western Balkans’ less ‘Balkans’? (Đerić, 2009b, p. 20)

Therefore, destereotyping occurs not by “turning the image upside down”, by replacing and denying stereotypes, but by seeking answers to the questions “when, how, why and what is achieved with these stereotypes?” (Đerić, 2009a, p. 11).

Literature has offered some excellent examples of destereotyping by creating narrative situations, characters and actions that affirm its power to change or oppose existing images, whether adopted from other media/discourses or inherited as stereotypes and prejudices under the influence of formal and

informal groups that participate in the processes of socialization. After all, the (re)affirmation of basic human values is part of its social and ethical function, and this is often one of the criteria when selecting literary works in curricula. By articulating the processes of destereotyping, literature confirms that it contains within itself both the critical and the creative potential to act correctively on models of power that are based on discrimination, disqualification, and subjugation.

### **Interpretive contextualization**

Along these lines, our goal is to interpret the role of literature in breaking the stereotypes that circulate in the communication between Balkan peoples/neighbours. In the Macedonian collective consciousness – in its history – there is the experience of belonging to a federal community (SFRY) and participating in an interliterary community (the Yugoslav community), which has resulted in many imagological representations of the neighbour/Other, with a certain addition: the neighbours that were part of the federal community, and those who were not (Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians) but are part of the wider Balkan community. The break-up of the federation and of the collective (Yugoslav) identity and the creation of independent states with new social systems that strive to legitimize a new (national) collective identity leads to the redefinition of the status of “internal” and “external” neighbours. These newly created ideological, political, historical, social contexts bear witness to the conversion of stereotypes (from positive to negative).<sup>3</sup>

In the focus of our interest are three novels of contemporary Macedonian literature: Luan Starova’s 2014 novel *Balkanvavilonci* (*Balkan Babylonians*), Dragi Mihajlovski’s 2006 novel *Mojot Skenderbej* (*My Skanderbeg*), and Blazhe Minevski’s 2008 novel *Nishan* (*The Target*). Our motivation is twofold: 1. these novels refer to historical events and persons, confirming that history is the basic mechanism for the argumentation of stereotypical images; 2. these

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<sup>3</sup> The conversion of stereotypes is illustrated by the transformation of the concept of brotherhood and unity among the Yugoslav peoples, promoted in the federal context as unity in diversity, whereas the post-federal period accentuated the differences between the Yugoslav peoples. This culminated in the renewal of negative stereotypes used during the Second World War: for example, the Serbs were chetniks, the Croats were ustashe, the Bosniaks were balii.

novels demonstrate destereotyping both thematically and structurally, but also by appearing in a certain historical context aimed at promoting universal human and cultural values such as love, empathy, forgiveness, dialogue, tolerance, education, progress, love of books, optimism, and humaneness, all of which are usually treated as originally European values.

These novels depart from existing stereotypical representations of Macedonians and Albanians, referred in these stories as patterns of perception that are inherited from tradition or from the immediate surroundings and which can be easily renewed and abused in different historical-political contexts. However, these novels also illustrate the process of destereotyping: by raising awareness of the consequences of stereotypes and by promoting alternative models of neighbourly communication. A precursor of this type of destereotyping is the poem *The Sirdar* or *O Armatolos* (1860) by Grigor Prlichev (1830–1893), especially in the scene where the Ghegs/Albanians bring the body of their murdered enemy, the Macedonian sirdar Kuzman Kapidan, to his mother and honour his heroism.

Luan Starova's novel *Balkanvavilonci* follows conversations between the two main characters, the Father and Kliment Kamilski, and between the Albanian and the Macedonian, through the prism of a child who is the son of one of the characters. Their conversations trace the wider imagological perception of the East and the West, as the characters are educated in both Paris and Constantinople and have acquired both knowledge and different cultural experiences and values. Although they are of different ethnicities, religions and professions, what connects these two "kindred spirits" is their education (one holds a doctorate in pedagogical sciences, the other is a law graduate), their thirst for constant learning, and their "fanatical love for books", illustrated by their huge home libraries, not only as a professional obligation and a personal passion, but also as social engagement. "Their last consolation was books; they were the only thing that made them feel like winners with unfulfilled dreams [...]. For Father, reading was a sacred act, a way out of Balkan barbarism and damnation" (Starova, 2014, pp. 23, 27). However, these "Balkan booklovers" and "brothers in books", as the narrator describes them, share the destiny of "two Balkaners with peculiar destinies", intellectuals who are victims of Balkan absurdities and paradoxes: Kliment, because of his inclination towards Soviet pedagogical theory, the subject of his doctoral thesis at Sorbonne, becomes a victim of an Informbiro smear campaign in his fatherland and is sent to Goli Otok; whereas the Father, an immigrant from the Albanian city of Podgra-

dec, is “the always suspicious Albanian immigrant” (Crapova, 2014, p. 13). In their long conversations, they refer to episodes of Balkan history and analyse the relations between Balkan neighbours, narrowed down to the stereotypes of the Balkans as a “damned place”, “damned discord”, “labyrinth”:

Father saw the labyrinth as an image of always shifting Balkan borders that distance and isolate the lives of people and their families for long periods of time [...]. People made borders like labyrinths, hoping to be separated from the other, to be saved, to survive. (Crapova, 2014, p. 46)

“Balkan poker”, distinguished from “European poker”, is a metaphor for neighbourly relations. Namely, Father’s hobby is playing poker with two friends, while:

the fourth partner always changes, it’s always someone else. They couldn’t find a permanent, deserving and trustworthy partner. That has never been easy in a quarrelsome, divided Balkans, with all kinds of borders [...] at times, this almost mythical game reminded them of their Balkan destiny, always dependent on the uncertain card of the other, the second, the third, on chance. (Crapova, 2014, pp. 15, 17)

The novel also depicts the stereotypical European perception of the Balkans, as described by Kliment:

I often heard the West’s prejudices towards the Balkans, especially the ones regarding our languages: that we’re separated by many unintelligible languages, dialects, unfinished idioms, that we’re victims of the greatest Babylonian prophesy. This worn-out idea will drive the Balkans away from European linguistic circles, as they consider them inaccessible, complicated and unintelligible. (Crapova, 2014, p. 141)

However, there is also a positive stereotype of the Balkan family in the novel. Both Macedonian and Albanian families are depicted with the stereotype of the Balkan patriarchal community, dominated by male authority: the husbands and fathers are the breadwinners in the family, whereas the women – the wives and mothers – are always in the shadow of their intellectual husbands; they are housewives, dedicated to household chores and to creating a smooth working environment for the husbands.

By referring to historical and linguistic sources and authorities, the characters analyse the history of the Balkan peoples as an illustration of linguistic misunderstanding, as a “Balkan Babylonian syndrome”, which is a latent danger for conflicts: “Our concern is that we don’t want the Babylonian linguistic curse to continue in the new, fragile Balkan nations, lest there should happen a new Balkanization and new fratricidal conflicts”, Kliment

says (Старова, 2014, p. 89). The Father shares this concern: “The processes of linguistic cleansing, as a precursor to other forms of cleansing, especially ethnic, should be interpreted in all their danger and harmfulness” (Старова, 2014, p. 151). However, the social marginalization and experience of someone who has been outside of the Balkans provide a different perspective on neighbourly relations. Rising above the local community and the absurdities of current socio-political events, the Father and Kliment are engaged in a common “impossible quixotic mission to find a happy Balkan Babylonian” (Старова, 2014, p. 151) whose aim is to fulfil a cosmopolitan idea as a long-term investment in the future of the coming generations. In search of “ideas for the salvation of Balkan-Babylonism as a form of debalkanization” (Старова, 2014, p. 140), the characters think alike: “how to use my books to help them save my children, our successors in the Balkans?” (Старова, 2014, p. 46). They reveal the dangers of the Balkan way of living – discord, incomprehension, misunderstanding – but are focused on the possibility of uniting the Balkan languages once again, so that the Balkan peoples could coexist and get to know each other’s cultures. Cosmopolitanism as a universal value is suggested in the quotation that is the motto of the novel: “The world is only that which unites people” – Goethe. In favour of the model of cohabitation, the characters cite examples from history:

Under Ottoman rule, 95% of the people in the Balkans were illiterate but were still polyglots. How was that possible? Without a standard language, everyone used their own regional dialects and learned the dialect of their neighbour. In places where there were different linguistic groups, everyone knew the language of their neighbour, at least for the purposes of trading... After the fall of the empire and the creation of the first Balkan nation-states, this polyglotism disappeared progressively. The Balkaners, spurred by the propaganda of their new states, learned only their national language in school and ignored the languages of the minorities and of their neighbours... It’s as if they wished to find the power of the former happy polyglotism in the Ottoman Empire in their quest for languages and a happy Balkan Babylon. (Старова, 2014, pp. 142–144)

Aware that the labyrinthic Balkan borders never disappear but are multiplied in terms of geography, languages and identities, the characters seek a way out of the Balkan labyrinth through language: “We are both with and within language, opened by words, closed in words, open towards the Other (through communication), closed towards the Other (by lies, mistakes), open towards ideas, closed in them, open towards the world, closed towards the world” (Старова, 2014, p. 162).

There is destereotyping in both the themes and the narration of *Balkan-vavilonci*: the novel is structured as a dialogue between two intellectuals who exchange ideas and scientific knowledge in order to find solutions that would help create good neighbourly relations. By taking themselves as speakers of “your native Albanian language and my native Macedonian language”, as polyglots, they use scientific arguments and exchange ideas and knowledge to promote dialogue, linguistic tolerance, love for books and polyglotism as basic but also universal values that would provide and guarantee peaceful coexistence on the Balkans. “The raised awareness of the hybridity of the human race, of the polyphony of our culture, to live with the Others, not only beside them, to teach our children to respect individual opinions, characters and feelings” (Старова, 2014, p. 278).

Dragi Mihajlovski’s *Mojot Skanderbej* was published in a specific political context when the Skanderbeg monument was erected in Skopje (on 28 November 2006), which stirred criticism over the justification of having a monument of a significant figure of Albanian and Balkan history on a square of the Macedonian capital. The novel treats the way the Macedonians and the Albanians perceive each other, mainly through the prism of existing linguistic and ethnic stereotypes that stir nationalist rhetoric. The motif of the novel is the historical figure of Skanderbeg, seen through the existing national and nationalistic prisms, but also in a different, cosmopolitan aspect. Over 13 chapters/short stories, Mihajlovski refers to versions of the all-present Skanderbeg – in everyday, historical, cultural and literary contexts that shape collective memory: for instance, Skanderbeg as the name of a military tactic used in the armed conflict of 2001; in language (in phrases like “I’ll fix it up like Skanderbeg’s castle in Krujë”); in titles of scientific papers (“Skanderbeg as a literary figure in Prlichev and in works in English”, “King Marko and Skanderbeg – one or two figures”); in a play; as a bronze monument in Skopje; as a literary figure in the poem *Skanderbeg* by Macedonian author Grigor Prlichev; in a literary mystification ascribed to the British author Christopher Marlowe. In all these stories, as well as in the historical and political contexts they allude to, the negative linguistic and ethnic stereotypes that mark everyday communication between Albanians and Macedonians is always underlined.

It was the saint’s day of St. Athanasius, I think, and somebody struck up a conversation about the Albanians and the Macedonians and, as usual, under the influence of alcohol, people started spewing against the ‘Shqiptars’, as they called them, that they



are 'a real menace for the Macedonians', that they 'breed like rabbits and will soon destroy us if we don't destroy them, the Shqiptar dogs'. (Михајловски, 2006, p. 145)

In the short story/chapter "The Sculptor", we witness the traumatic experience of an Albanian immigrant: "No one called me 'Shqiptar' there. You don't know how much that hurts! To be a kid, to do your best in everything, and you're still an outcast!" (Михајловски, 2006, p. 33).

There is destereotyping in the fabula, themes and structure of the novel. In some of the short stories/chapters, the characters raise awareness of the need of coexistence, free from prejudice and verbal clichés:

What do we really know about them? Do you know that my grandfather has Albanian roots? And why do you call them Shqiptars if they don't want to be called that way, regardless of the etymology of the word? Do you know that they have pejorative names for us, too? I think it was 'shkinji' or something. If we keep this up, where's the end of it all? (Михајловски, 2006, p. 145)

Apart from raising awareness of the delusions created by stereotyping, the contribution of scientific findings in the shift towards a communication free of prejudice is also pointed out: the scientific comparison of King Marko and Skanderbeg, Macedonian and Albanian historical figures, is interpreted as a "contribution of the 'new politics' of 2000 for 'relaxed interethnic relations', which bore the burden of the survival of the still fragile state" (Михајловски, 2006, p. 144). Some of the short stories/chapters place emphasis on the mixed Orthodox-Muslim roots of Gjergj Kastrioti (1405–1468), or Skanderbeg,<sup>4</sup> as well as on his engagement in battles against the common enemy of the Balkan peoples and the Turks: the Ottomans. Referring to his biography, the author implies the dangers of stereotypical generalization, not only to suppress official data but to point out the misunderstandings and prejudices that plague interethnic, neighbourly communication. The characters comment on some of the delusions and dangers:

So much harm has been done in his name! He would be turning in his grave if he knew! The Albanian nationalists use his nickname as a scaremongering tactic against the Christians, like Attila for Islam, even though the man fought to defend Christianity against the rise of Islam because he felt pain, not hatred. As for the Macedonians, just hearing his name makes their hair stand on end, without knowing that he was at least half Macedonian, that many of their ancestors fought under his banner, that he might have been their king even and might have used their Old Sla-

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<sup>4</sup> The nickname given to him by the Turkish sultan, meaning "Alexander the Great".

von script. So much mystery, so much empty talk and bloodshed over a nickname.  
(Михајловски, 2006, p. 183)

Furthermore, Skanderbeg's altruism is underlined in some of the short stories/chapters. He was defending the freedom and the social justice of the Balkan peoples under Ottoman rule. In the short story/chapter "The Underground Theater", the character whose doctoral dissertation is "King Marko and Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg – two different figures or one and the same" asserts the supranational role of these historical figures who are fighting for higher human principles – freedom; the doctoral candidate concludes: "Who knows. Maybe people, in the face of the common danger from the rise of Islam, contaminated both figures into one to pluck up the courage in the fight against their common enemy" (Михајловски, 2006, p. 144). With the example of the conversions of the historical figure, the novel suggests alternative models of perceiving the Other/neighbour that rise above the inherited stereotypes and the political discourses that maintain and feed them. For example, the XIX century Macedonian poet Grigor Prlichev, a character in one of the short stories/chapters, talks about the creation of his works *The Sirdar* and *Skanderbeg* and how relative ethnic divisions become when people face existential problems, which are typical in Balkan history full of wars:

When they must pay taxes, most Albanians say they are Turks, and when they must serve in the army – that they are Christians. Many others have Ottoman first names and a Christian father's name. This bears witness to the time when their grandfathers became renegades. Yet others, supposedly more astute, are secretly pure Christians, and publicly pure Turks. They even have two names. These Babylonian tricks are used in many rituals. (Михајловски, 2006, p. 205)

The theme of destereotyping is especially present in the last short story/chapter, "The Graduate Student", which deals with Skanderbeg's cosmopolitanism. The graduate student's thesis is called "Skanderbeg as a literary character in Prlichev and in works in English". His research leads him to conclude that Skanderbeg is

an important European figure even before the idea of European values. I learned that he was an Orthodox Slav by birth, that maybe he was taken hostage to the Sultan, where he accepted Mohammedanism, and that he received the highest honours from the pope and Catholicism. Was he Albanian? [...] Skanderbeg was destined, as a triple prophet, to walk in all three directions at the same time, without prejudice, and prove that, despite insignificant differences that often stir wars, they all lead to the same – to God. (Михајловски, 2006, pp. 311–312)

Without a doubt, the author ironically plays with the theme of narrow, one-dimensional ethnic claims of possessing “shared heritage” among Balkan neighbours, refusing to recognize the global, civilizational and cultural dimensions of that heritage.

Skanderbeg is as great as Shakespeare. You can shove Shakespeare among the romantics, the realists, the symbolists, the modernists, the postmodernists, and he'll fit everywhere, but nowhere perfectly and completely, as he is beyond limitations. It is the same with Skanderbeg: you can shove him as much as you wish only among the Christians or the Muslims or the Catholics, or only among the Albanians or the Macedonians, the Serbs, the Vlachs, the Greeks, and he'll fit everywhere, but will never be whole in one particular group. This is because he is all of them and beyond them. A proud son of Orthodoxy, an athlete of Catholicism, a favourite of Mohammedanism. A star that shone on the dark Balkan sky and conquered most of what he could. (Михајловски, 2006, p. 312)

Destereotyping is also suggested in the structure. Mihajlovski organizes his work as a hybrid genre that oscillates between the narrative form of a novel divided into 13 chapters and a short story collection comprised of 13 short stories. The genre of the book is indicated as paratext in the subtitle: “13 contemporary narrative attacks on this heavily bombarded theme, from the perspective of a Macedonian writer, with select bibliography and conclusion” (Михајловски, 2006, p. 7). Each short story/chapter features different narrators and characters, thereby creating a mosaic of points of view, stories, comments, depictions of Albanians and Macedonians, and of their views on Skanderbeg. These different narrative visions advise the reader not only of the risks of stereotypical prejudices towards other ethnicities, but also of the benefits of promoting altruism, cosmopolitanism, and tolerance. Those methods are alternative models of communication between neighbours and an investment in Balkan culture and science.

Blazhe Minevski's novel *Nishan* is set during the 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia: the concrete chronotope is the frontline, where the snipers' targets of a Macedonian man and an Albanian woman meet.

I turn the towards sniper and I see her: she is watching me, too, she was aiming at me long before I saw her: 'She could've killed me sooner', I think. Her image is like that of a senior yearbook in my optical target. (Миневски, 2008, p. 19)

Their superiors constantly incite them to take definitive action to avenge the loss of soldiers from their rows – the narrator has been given an order from the captain to kill the shooter who has killed “ten of our boys” in three

days. Minevski uses retrospective narration to reveal the personal destinies of the two shooters. They are depicted as characters with individual pasts, desires, hopes and delusions: she has not fulfilled her desire to become a ballerina and has not had luck in love; and he has had good and bad love experiences, good and bad friendships. Despite being war enemies, the narrator notices the shooter's beauty, imagining her as a "creature of mesmerizing intelligence, unique charm and free spirit" and calling her Doruntina, like the character in an Albanian legend, "the most beautiful story on the power of love he had ever heard in his life" (Миневски, 2008, pp. 27, 19), told to him by a friend of his, an Albanian writer. Regardless of the situation they have been pushed into, the narrator keeps appealing to mutual understanding by communicating from a distance and through the target, as it is all about sharing human mishaps and universal experiences: "I see that you understand me. I already know for certain that you understand me, I know that you can read my lips" (Миневски, 2008, p. 38).

The story in the novel focuses on the possibility of basic interpersonal and interethnic communication even on the frontline; communication becomes a problem and is used as a reason for discord when it is burdened by political pressures, when it is abused in conflictive situations or when it is mediated by negative stereotypes of "ours" and "yours", imposed by current historical and political contexts.

I'd come to stroke your hair, but I know that I'd be killed the moment I start descending by my stream, if not by you, then by one of yours, but the same would happen to you, trust me: the moment you start descending by your stream, my people will kill you, too. (Миневски, 2008, p. 27)

This model of communication between the Macedonian man and the Albanian woman is depicted as an isolated case. It is juxtaposed to the communication between the enemy armies, driven by war logic and thirst for vengeance: "I know that, in the end, we'll count the dead to find a reason for a new vengeance; they need the dead to keep renewing the war" (Миневски, 2008, p. 39). The narrative structure supports this non-stereotypical pacifist story: the events are given through the perspective and the narration of the character but are received from Doruntina's position. She is the addressee and the silent interlocutor in this alternative model of communication, which is effective even between deadly bullets. In the end, she too tells her life story, revealing the reasons that forced her to fight; it is a story of a victim of patriarchal family

principles and abuses of women. She traces yet another stereotypical depiction of a patriarchal (Albanian) family, ruled by male authority.

The alternation between stereotypical perceptions of the Albanian and the Macedonian and the destereotyping suggested by the promotion of a different model of communication can also be seen in the dialogue between the narrator and some of the Macedonian fighters:

“Captain, we can only win this one war with those on the other side of the river, damn them. And that’s it. They have children for three more wars, and we don’t have enough even for this one.”

“Why measure everything in war terms?”

“Because that is the only thing that connects us. Everything else divides us”, Pispile said. “We couldn’t live without fighting. Nothing would be the same without war!”

“What about love?”, the young man that replaced Chalo Trchalov at Brichen Petel quietly asked.

“Love is also divided, young man. They have theirs, we have ours. Death is the only thing we have in common.” (Миневски, 2008, p. 231)

The literary representations of (de)stereotyping are probably not the primary focus now that visual and electronic media and their imagological constructs are dominant. However, literature’s interpretative appeal derives from its aesthetic dimensions, seen in the novels that we have analysed: they avoid pretentious one-dimensional ideological positions and do not betray their aesthetic value and literariness. We have selected these three novels not only because they illustrate our research topic, but also because of their high aesthetic performances, acknowledged by important literary awards: *Balkanvavilonci* and *Nishan* are recipients of the “Novel of the Year” prize (in 2014 and 2008 respectively), whereas *Mojot Skenderbej* received the “Stale Popov” prize for best prose work (in 2006), awarded by the Macedonian Writers’ Association.

Although these novels are analysed for the processes of destereotyping and have a distinctly referential function thematically, they are nevertheless literary, fictional texts in which the poetic function is dominant. The authors are primarily focused on the processes of literariness, on the inventive application of literary techniques, thereby avoiding aesthetic stereotypes in the representation of historical reality. The literary processes of destereotyping are demonstrated in the syuzhet, the characters, the descriptions, the chronotopes. The narrative structure in *Balkanvavilonci* is carried through the retrospective narration of a child, and the novel mostly consists of dialogues (in the Platonic sense) between the two main characters that project the mutual perceptions of the East and

the West (and their implications in the Balkan context), but at the same time deconstruct the inherited stereotypes. In *Mojot Skenderbej*, through the mosaic structure of characters, narrators and focalizers, the stereotypical perceptions of the Other are projected and deconstructed. In *Nishan*, the homodiegetic narrator reminisces over his personal past – we see the events through his eyes but also “listen” through the ears of Doruntina, the main addressee. The interplay between stereotypical images of neighbours and their problematizations serves for character development, for the shaping of their psychological and ideological points of view, but also for the way they are transformed throughout the action. The novels see the use of intertextual and metafictional techniques, which point to both the existent literary and non-literary textualizations of reality and to the distancing of their stereotypical implications (especially emphasized in the ironic distance in *Mojot Skenderbej*).

The creative fluctuation between the referential and the poetic function in these novels shows that they are not aimed at promoting non-literary theses but are a discursive field that creates possible (de)stereotyped representations of otherness. Finally, in the narrative and structural articulations of destereotyping, the novels suggest the relevance of literary and genre conventions and poetics as filters through which reality is modelled; thus, in respect to imagology, concerning genre, they confirm the precedence of fiction/novel over lyric poetry. The analysed novels illustrate current imagological tendencies whose focus is valorizing images not in the non-textual reality but in their textual meanings. Literary images are primarily fiction, although they could be subjected to all sorts of contextualizations. Therefore, literary texts, interpreted through the prism of the processes of (de)stereotyping, illustrate the complex relations between a given text and the contexts in which it is created, as well as the contexts of its interpretation.

## Conclusion

The analysis of these novels leads us to several conclusions relevant in terms of the theoretical aspects of (de)stereotyping and their literary articulation.

1. The parallelism between stereotyping and destereotyping implies the parallelism between auto-images and hetero-images. Stereotypical perceptions of the Other are reflected in the image of oneself. Referentiality and reflec-

tion make the image imagologically multi-layered – image, hetero-image, auto-image, counter-image. The stereotypes of the Other/neighbour speak of the prejudices of those who use them, which in turn projects auto-images of domination.

2. The processes of destereotyping can be interpreted as affirmation of the so-called “symbolic models” that Pageau discusses: philia as a model of “real, mutual exchange” and of “mutual awareness and recognition, with critical exchange and dialogue between equals” and a model of “union or restoration of a lost union” (cosmopolitanism) that helps overcome models of phobia and mania, based on stereotypical images (Пажо, 2002, p. 124). The three novels affirm the first two symbolic models of destereotyped communication.
3. If literature is not a closed system but takes an active part in the processes that produce meaning in culture, then literary works that promote destereotyping play an important role in the fulfilment of literature’s social and ethical functions, as well as its opposition to stereotypical depictions in other discourses. These works help raise awareness of basic human values which will be embedded in the promotion of social interactions and will guide readers towards different models of perception and communication between members of the community (especially multicultural and multi-ethnic communities, such as the Macedonian one),<sup>5</sup> different from those offered by mass media and political discourses. The reception of such works of art and their inclusion in curricula is an effective way of influencing readers and the younger population, of making them aware of the negative aspects of stereotypes, and of liberating them from prejudices and helping them build a positive attitude towards the neighbour/Other.

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<sup>5</sup> It might seem stereotypical to point out the nationality of the authors of the novels (Luan Starova is Albanian, Dragi Mihajlovski and Blazhe Minevski are Macedonian); however, it is relevant as it reveals that both Macedonian and Albanian writers feel the need to point out the importance of processes of destereotyping and illustrate them in their literature.

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## **Rola literatury w procesach destereotypizacji (na przykładach z literatury macedońskiej)**

Przedmiotem tekstu jest analiza roli literatury w dekonstrukcji stereotypów krążących w komunikacji między bałkańskimi sąsiadami z perspektywy imagologicznych koncepcji Innego autorstwa Daniela-Henri Pageau i Gordana Đerić. W centrum uwagi znajdują się trzy powieści zaliczane do współczesnej literatury macedońskiej (*Balkanvavilonci* Luany Starovy *Mojot Skenderbej* Dragiego Mihajlovskiego, *Nishan* Blaže Minevskiego). Są one paradygmatyczne z dwóch względów: 1. odwołują się do wydarzeń i postaci historycznych, czym potwierdzają, że historia jest podstawowym mechanizmem argumentacji obrazów o charakterze stereotypowym; 2. ujawniają procesy destereotypizacji zarówno pod względem tematycznym, jak i strukturalnym, a też przez zaktualizowanie określonego kontekstu społeczno-historycznego, co służy promowaniu wartości ponadnarodowych, uniwersalnych, ludzkich, cywilizacyjnych i kulturowych, takich jak miłość, empatia, przebaczenie, dialog, tolerancja, edukacja, miłość do książek, optymizm, humanitaryzm, traktowanych jako wartości fundamentalnie europejskie. Potwierdza to, że artykułując procesy destereotypizacji przez strategie narracyjne, literatura ma potencjał do działania korygującego w systemach, w których różne formy władzy oparte są na dyskryminacji i uległości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** stereotyp, destereotypizacja, przedstawianie innego/sąsiada, literatura macedońska, powieść współczesna

## **The role of literature in the processes of destereotyping (through examples from Macedonian literature)**

Considering the imagological conceptions of the Other by Daniel-Henri Pageau and Gordana Đerić, this text analyses the role of literature in the deconstruction of stereotypes that circulate in communication between Balkan neighbours. In the focus of our interpretation are three novels of contemporary Macedonian literature (Luan Starova's *Balkanvavilonci*, Dragi Mihajlovski's *Mojot Skenderbej* and Blazhe Minevski's *Nishan*), which are paradigmatic in two ways: 1. they refer to historical events and figures, thus confirming that history is the basic mechanism for the argumentation of stereotypical images; 2. they depict processes of destereotyping both thematically and structurally, but also by their appearance in a particular sociohistorical context, with the aim of promoting supranational, universal, human, civilizational, and cultural values such as love, empathy, forgiveness, dialogue, tolerance, education, love of books, optimism, humaneness, all of which are usually treated as originally European values. Literature, by articulating

the processes of destereotyping through the narrative strategies in the works, confirms that it holds the potential to act correctively on systems where different forms of power are based on discrimination and submission.

**Keywords:** stereotype, destereotypization, depiction of the other/neighbour, Macedonian literature, contemporary novel

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