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Tbilisi as the meeting place of different oriental and occidental phenomena

With its diverse population, Tbilisi, commonly referred as the meeting place of oriental and occidental phenomena, has always been the model of a multiethnic, multiconfessional, multicultural city in the Caucasus. The study of the relevant literary corpus (of Georgian, European or Russian authors) of Tbilisi texts in the general context of literature on Georgia implies the consideration of this literary – urbanistic model as a crossroads of cultural worlds, as an intersection between East and West that is both a borderline and a passage – a liminal region that instead of separating has rather the function of mediating.

This multicultural environment generated the eternal question: "Asia or Europe?" – as a reflection of the continuous process of defining Georgian national identity and cultural belonging. Something that possibly became determinative not only for European authors but also for the Georgians' auto – identification of their own existence as a culture situated at the hinge of West and the East.

By analysing the accounts of different western travelers, this paper tries to identify the strongest impacts on the cultural construction of the diverse and multiethnic image of this city/country. Along these lines, I ask the following questions: who constructed this image – is it a self – portraiture as self – representation of Georgian cultural memory? Or a picture of Georgian culture created and imposed by foreign authors?

Thus the paper aims to trace how the features of Tbilisi's symbolic profile are reflected both in a portrait of Georgian culture created by foreigners, as well as in its self – portrait, which obviously patterns the transformation of Georgian cultural self – perception in the literature of the last two centuries. Intertextual references illustrate how the representations of the capital city in Georgian literature are informed by the receptions of the city in foreign – language fiction and documentary prose since the nineteenth century.

Key words: cultural construction, self – portraiture, multicultural city, identity, Asia or Europe?

Eyüp Özveren

When Literary Space parts Ways with Physical Geography for a Critical Benefit: The Missing Islands of the Black Sea

Among the most important factors that differentiate the fortunes of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean comes the role the islands played in history. Whereas numerous islands served as stepping stones in connecting the lands surrounding the Mediterranean, thereby facilitating their integration, their conspicuous absence in the Black Sea became a formidable obstacle in an already notoriously inhospitable sea. The Black Sea has only very few islands, fewer of them are inhabited, and those by only a small number of people. In any case, they disappear from sight in maps because of the scale effect, as they are quite small by geographical standards. There is thus no puzzle to intrigue our minds, and physical geography can count them out easily. Human geography is another matter, where even the very few could matter.