

The Scientific Convention on Imagology in Zagreb

AN INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION OF THE COLLECTIVE

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At the Faculty of Humanistic and Social Sciences in Zagreb, between 2nd and 4th September 2009, the first international scientific convention of imagologists was held entitled "Imagologija danas: postignuća, izazovi, perspektive" ("Imagology Today: Achievements, Challenges, Perspectives"). The convention was attended by twenty-five people, i.e. three generations of reputable experts from ten countries: experts on comparative literature, literary theoreticians and imagologists. Some of the leading experts — such as HUGO DYSE-RINCK, DANIEL-HENRI PAGEAUX, CELESTE RIBEIRO DE SOUS and JOSE MANUEL LOPEZ DE ABIADA — were also present.

The topics varied from the historical survey of imagology, the semantic opposition national vs. foreign, view of the enemy, travel to a foreign country and notions of the natives, to the collective memory of stereotypes through literature, film and the media such as photography or artistic painting.

Imagology is a relatively new discipline in comparative literature and it can be even connected with psychology and neuropsychology in which stereotypes and prejudices are of vital importance. Namely, it is the analysis of us ourselves, of that other one. While analysing, we are either disrupted — or our view is made clearer — precisely by prejudice, collective memory, politisation of the media and literature, and various ideologies. The conclusions of the three day's lectures and exchange of experience were the ideas that nationalism is the instrumentalisation of the nation's own image, which would mean that every nationalism is instrumentalised from the higher sphere, in other words, the government of a certain country. All participants agreed that imagology was of practical value in culturally-complex communities, such as the torn asunder countries of South-eastern Europe or multi-ethnic groups in a community of a Paris suburb. Some also wondered if imagology could observe a larger picture,

in other words, whether international mental pictures which should be observed could also exist. The main topic was how we see ourselves and how we are viewed by others.

DANIEL-HENRI PAGEAUX claimed that imagology was toying with the levels of the boundaries of culture and the level of the images in the media, and that it could not be just a literary analysis, it had to be the analysis of the entire creation of mankind. MANFRED BELLER created a certain model which would explain how other nations or groups are viewed. He estimated, considering a great number of examples, that all groups evaluate others by analogy, equality, oppositions and reciprocal explanations of the other. With that model of redistribution of our views on those others, the author tried to generalise the human need to describe the observed group; although, in the end, the process of creating mental pictures cannot be generalised. The pictures are simply created with different experience, while in certain political processes those mental pictures are even more firmly established in the group memory.

A discussion of the presence of the so-called cultural studies, which are prevailing in the Anglo-Saxon model of education, was particularly significant. All participants agreed that such a form of education neglected the literary canon and aimed at interdisciplinary approaches to everything, but that was not the way the youth could receive a good education. Nobody — on the contrary — posed the question of the *literary canon* and of how that question could be viewed in various national and ethnic groups worldwide — since even the literary canon — here in the sense of classics — is not entirely devoid of prejudicial mental images and various prejudices against certain ethnic groups. Others, however, raised the question of a new imagology — *ethnoimagology* — and its significance in the science of literature.

Certain participants — primarily PAOLO PROIETTI — referred to the standardised images of a re-

naissance in science, which is why he addressed Protestant and Catholic circles who had initiated the consideration of *the other* and of *the foreigner*, but that lecture sounded somewhat archaic as it did not provide anything new. Others, such as PAVLE SEKERUŠ, were enthralled by ideas that we should not identify with anything except with the fact that we were human beings, and that every national identification should be redundant (which is slightly generalised and idealised for the twenty-first century that has only just begun).

Genuine theoreticians of literature, such as the organiser DAVOR DUKIĆ himself, initiated a discussion concerning the analysis of the discipline of imagology itself, for which he claimed that it was an image and a continuation of socio-psychological generalisations, and that the generalisation itself was one of the best weapons of imagology. He also claimed that only good national characters were described. JOSE MANUEL LOPEZ DE ABIADA analysed Spanish, European and American authors and their experience and description of Spanish wars, while HEINKE FABRITIUS thoroughly explained the contradictory images of KARA MUSTAFA in literature and artistic paintings, who is sometimes presented as a poor helpless old man, while at times as an imaginary monster. GINA WEINKAUFF studied the young readers' choice of books in past centuries compared to their selection of books today. Moreover, she posed the question of whether the media and the theatre intensified the already established stereotypes and of whether literature had introduced certain new ones. ZRINKA BLAŽEVIĆ analysed the proof of the experience: what the experience itself was, what the national experience was, and whether it could be viewed interdisciplinary.

Several facts connected to the first international convention of imagology that was held in Croatia are intriguing. The most important is that the convention was almost entirely held in two languages: German and French, while the English language was not the *lingua franca*, but was used only occasionally. Secondly, moreover, the imagologist ponders the identity itself, what the identity is and what influences the creation of a certain identity.

Imagologists are criticised for carrying out a certain analysis of the collective consciousness and history. However, that is also something good, as all sciences should analyse the collective history that is nothing more but the history of winners and small human groups which do not represent the entire humankind. The more the increasing number of members of the humankind ponder who they are and why they are *precisely* what they are, the more our self-criticism will teach us to be compassionate and merciful toward the other, the one whom we do not know and have not met. However, one should not forget that the human individual needs boundaries in order to survive, as the human mind has not developed well enough to be able to think boundlessly. National boundaries are not best, but, we still need state boundaries as the continents are too large for a tiny human to identify with the affiliation to a single continent or only to the humankind. Our consciousness has not developed that much. Conventions like this still prove that there is a growing number of individuals who ponder the *boundaries* within which they are and why the boundaries are set, which is increasingly raising —through the collective memory — our collective consciousness.]]