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# Opinions and evaluations of Albanian critics and translators on the work of Stefan Zweig and their experience of translating him into Albanian



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#### Abstract

Since language is the homeland of one's cultural entity, translation becomes a bridge between the author and his foreign reader by engaging the reader's involvement in terms of the reader's own linguistic realm and cultural idiosyncrasy. Another aspect concerns the position and the function of translated literature and its relation to the corpus of literature of a given country in terms of scope, contents and forms. Usually, to translate is to introduce. To translate is to bring over verbally, from one space to another, not only texts but patterns, things, elements, fragments of dissimilar cultures. It involves an act, a cultural imitative or innovative as any other as far as the reception public is concerned. The following work brings as a result some thoughts of Albanian critics and translators about Zweig's work in different periods of time, specifically from the sixties, at a time dominated by the communist ideology dominated, when we have the first full edition with some of Zweig's novels, continuing with the years after the fall of dictatorship and the creation of a new uncensored thinking, the years of democracy, the nineties, until today.

Keywords: translation; translator; Albanian; critics; reception; literature

# **1. Introduction**

The reception of foreign authors in a particular literature and time forms a direct and integral part of the literary taste and hence the shaping of an audience for a native author, as well as the native author's own artistic and critical consciousness. In this way, elaborate and still usable methods of studying reception and popularity have been developed. It can be traced through critical and other comments in newspapers, journals, magazines, diaries, and by mentions and allusions in literary works. It can be partially measured by the sales of an author's works, by the size number and size of the editions published, and by translations. Translation has to do with the possible world, so much so that in order to translate it one has to guess at the possible world (Eco, 2006).

Translation is itself a creative act; the translator brings into his contemporary native literary tradition a work written in another language and often at a different time. The radical difference between literary translation and other translations lies in the fact that literary language is not ordinary, which is not the language just for daily communication, but a special language of art with aesthetic

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## functions (Shunqing 2013).

Nevertheless, any translator, to a greater or lesser degree, adapts the translated work to the taste of his own time, while modernizing an older work he undertakes to translate. The theory and practice of translation admits relative freedom of omission, addition, paraphrase and change of form, and often of style. Thus, translations do not belong only to the study of the reception of a foreign author in a particular literature, but to the study of literature itself. They provide the best intermediaries between the work of the foreign and native authors, and it is often the form and the content of its translated form which has the greatest effect upon the native literature, for in this form it is directly assimilable into, and indeed already a part of the literary tradition.

#### 2. Methodology

This paper deals analytically with the literary activity of Zweig translated into Albanian, from the beginning to the first decade of this century, using the method of chronological, philological, comparative, historical, etc., interesting data and opinions have been extracted from translators and critics of Zweig's work into Albanian, at different times.

#### Opinions and evaluations by Albanian critics

In his time, the Austrian Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) was the most widely translated writer of works of fiction, biography, and essays in the world (Sonnenfeld, 1981).

Translation is not just a transition from one language to another, but also a transition from one culture to another, from one encyclopedia to another (Eco, 2006).

Zweig's works have a special place in Albanian culture and literature, and although quite a few introductions, reviews and articles were written up to now, there was not a serious study dedicated to his life and work. However, he was so well-known among Albanian readers that one might say that he is the most popular foreign author translated into Albanian. In this case, in order to understand, at least partially his reception in Albanian literature, we are going to scrutinize the attitudes and viewpoints of two Albanian critics, Luan Rexhepi and Fatos Kongoli, about Zweig's short stories.

In 1962, a collection of following Zweig's short stories was published: "The Governess", "A Burning Secret", "Anxiety", "Moonbeam Alley", "The Invisible Collection", "Leporella", "Mendel the Bibliophile", and "Chess Story or The Royal Game". The translators of this collection were Klio Evangjeli and Mahmut Bobrati, while the introduction of the collection was written by Luan Rexhepi, an outstanding literary critic of the time. In his critical introduction or essay, Rexhepi tries to assess the echo of Zweig's short stories in Albanian literature, by focusing his attention to the main characteristics of the short stories.

In addition, he points out that in modern European literature, there are few writers who have written with such devotion, skill and love about the dilemmas of human beings (Zweig, 1962). The Albanian critic underlines that Zweig, with all his works, has succeeded to glorify the triumph of the best ideals of mankind. According to Rexhepi's opinion, when an Albanian reader reads Zweig's short stories, he/she finds out an open-hearted and generous writer, who very often identifies himself with his characters. Nonetheless, he reproaches Zweig for ignoring "the objective laws" of development of society; therefore, he was not able to understand the difference between bourgeois humanism and socialist humanism.

Then, he quotes Gorky, who once said that Zweig was not only a gifted artist but he was also "an ardent" humanist (Zweig, 1988). In this case, the Albanian critic feels sorry that the Austrian artist was not able to wholeheartedly recreate a new brave world in conformity with socialist realism. Instead, he

aspects of capitalist civilization and cruel ideologies of this civilization.

Likewise, he reproaches Zweig because the Austrian writer was not always capable to understand the subordination of the internal world of human being of external circumstances, as he could not grasp the connections of human psychology with external work, on one hand and on the other, underestimating tragic contradictions and conflicts of life. Furthermore, the Albanian critic points out, that Zweig although often dealing with social inequality, does not treat the problem of poorer lower classes who struggle for survival, but deals rather with characters who do not care for others because they live in well-being. L. Rexhepi believes that it is very probable that despite their different situation they were able to notice the problems and troubles of life. He thinks that when the writer discovers and exposes the contradictions between the poor and rich classes, then he will become a real master in his craft and create immortal works.

After the first edition of Zweig's short stories in 1988, the Albanian readers had the opportunity to read a second enlarged edition of Zweig's short stories with an introduction written by the Albanian novelist and critic, Fatos Kongoli. This introduction is very interesting because, as a matter of fact, it is a comprehensive assessment of Zweig's literary activities, in general, and his short stories, in particular.

To start with, writing about the age when Zweig lives and works, F. Kongoli ascertains that the Austrian writer lived in an age of social crises, political turmoil, economic upheavals, ideological confrontation and conflicts, which caused two tremendous world confrontations and tragedies in history. So, Kongoli, in this case, accentuates that Zweig has felt and experienced intensively many political and social events and changes, remaining almost always in the position of "a utopist humanist" (Zweig, 1962). At the same time, our critic marks that Zweig had a sensitive soul, as he kept hoping and dreaming still about tolerance, goodwill, friendship, solidarity, equality, and fraternity of nations and states. Occasionally, he pretended to appear as calm and self-restrained philosopher, with his firm character and fierce temperament, he could not help being a sharp critic of the chaos and anarchy, like the majority of his characters and heroes in his short stories, novels and dramas.

Furthermore, it is worth stressing that Kongoli dedicates a significant importance to Zweig's education, maturity, recognition, affirmation and popularity, highlighting his various creative activities and works, at first as a poet and translator, next as a journalist and essayist, afterwards as a short story writer and a novelist, then as a biographer and a scholar, and finally as a historian and social critic of various ages, genres, styles and symbol of human, altruistic and democratic ideas. That is why the number of his readers was growing steadily. According to our critic, the cause for his success as a writer came due to his essential humanism of his works as well as to crucial and actual topics of his books. In the meantime, his works were read, spread and distributed all over the world.

Thus, when he visited Brazil in the forties, he was surprised to find out that he was already famous in that country. Therefore, he said: "My fame in this country is incredible; it has been spread among all the social layers." (Zweig, 1962). And yet, the Albanian critic sometimes changes his attitudes towards Mr. Zweig rebuking the well-known writer because of being incapable to grasp and understand correctly the social events and contradictions of the age. In such a situation, our critic complains that Zweig failed to react toward certain political, social and ideological values, universally known, as for instance, The October Revolution in Russia (1917), and the class struggle at national and international levels.

Furthermore, he failed to understand the causes and consequences of explanation, class oppression, although he longed for the prevalence of peace, tolerance, goodness and harmony in society. Likewise, the Albanian critic points out that Zweig does not assess the way of liberation and transformation of a community. Therefore, he avoids being involved actively in politics. After the First World War, he appeals to his fellow writers to keep away from political activities in order to keep mutual friendship and cooperation among nations after slaughter.

In Kongoli's opinion, the glorious Austrian writer remains rather passive and confused with his dilemmas and delays, not only in the First World War, especially after the burning of his books by the Nazis. Thus, instead of commitment, he prefers to get involved indirectly by publishing his books and keeping in touch with his friends. During the First World War, his soul friend was R. Roland, while later he finds warm support and encouragement in Casteglione and Erasmus of Roterdam, and as he began to reflect about death he found guidance and consolation with Montain" (Mrasori, 2008).

According to Kongoli, it was sufficient to publish only a selected collection of his short stories in order to ensure a place of honor for him.

P. Jorgoni in the preface of the book Balzac, translated by K. Evangjeli into Albanian, speaks of a high class of Zweig's creativity, calling him an erudite, with deep wisdom, a thinker and a psychologist, a master of many facts, who rejects any possibility of distortions, this master tries to sculpt vividly and as expressively, as realistically and powerfully the portrait of Balzac and the many people who nurtured his experience and imagination (Zweig. 1989)

Jorgoni, thinks that the book about Balzac is the deepest, most extensive and complete literary and scholarly creation of his, at the same time and the most arduous, over ten years just a collection of facts, Zweig should have written and presented to humanity life and ideals of this colossus. Thus Balzac provided the reader with all aspects of his personality, with his greatness and genius. Zweig's book, according to the talented translator Evangelis, is permeated by the feeling of reverence for the titan Balzac, for his powerful talent and for his hard and passionate work (Balcac).

#### Opinions and evaluations by Albanian translators

We have made efforts to pick up and select a few motives, opinions, viewpoints and experiences about Stefan Zweig and translation of his works in Albanian. Thus, when we asked Oriana Tamburi, the young Albanian translator (she is also a dentist), she pointed out at the beginning that she was attracted by reading Zweig's short stories. With these Zweig's great artistic works, she was not only delighted but also thrilled by features of the characters of his short stories and literary biographies such as "Nietzsche, Casanova and J. Fouche".

Hence, she managed to grasp the life and craft of the author, who accomplished a whole world of interesting and marvelous themes, plots, and characters. Besides, she was also enchanted by his eloquent style and harmony of his works. She was convinced that as one reads Zweig's works, it will seem as if one is listening to an aria or a piano piece. At the same time, the reader will notice that the writer is able to pick the right and adequate words radiating the meaning of the whole paragraph. Obviously, her first task was to read and understand very well Zweig's short story, and then recreate it in Albanian.

She sounds peculiar when she admits that during the translation of the short story, she concluded that she managed to improve her craft as a translator. Just due to this fact, she considers Zweig as her teacher, and consequently, she continued to read his works, as a creative reader, as she had the impression that the Austrian writer was her soul dearest mate. Finally, she emphasizes proudly that: "All this act is called passion".

(Mrasori, 2008). So Zweig's passion is life and artistic craft, his passion for everything awakened in her a passion for him and determined to recreate his works in her own language.

Well-known translator R. Schwarz in the preface of the book about the portrait of Joseph Foché, describes the character of the most talked about figure of the century in which he lived. Describing him as a heartless accountant, and a cynical amoral, who never served an idea, but always only to power, betraying them all at the most opportune moment.

Twenty-five years in a row he managed to escape fate like this, until Talleyrand managed to finally overthrow a brilliance, minister, duke and millionaire. Schwarz considers this biography as one of Zweig's masterpieces which arguably describes the portrait of a masterfully delineated Fouché, who is still remembered today as one of the most prominent and incomprehensible figures of the time (Zweig, 2003).

The translator of "Erasmus of Rotterdam", Ferdinand Leka, whose first profession is lexicographer can translate from three languages, Italian, French and Russian, had translated several books. "As in a dream", he recollects, "one day I accidentally ran into Zweig's work "Erasmus of Rotterdam" translated in Italian with a very illuminating introduction. Frankly speaking, I must confess that at that time a considerable number of people with liberal and fresh ideas were occasional victims of totalitarians regimes. So, the tragic destiny of Erasmus of Rotterdam had something in common with many intellectuals not only in Europe but also with many intellectuals in Albania. Therefore, he was inspired and determined to translate this work in Albanian. Leka believes that this work has an autobiographic character, as Zweig had not only meditated about it, but had also identified his emotion with the feeling of Erasmus" (Mrasori, 2008). The circumstances in which Erasmus had been living and working in his age were, more or less, similar to the situation he was living in a troubled Europe menaced by Fascism and Nazism. According to Zweig, it took Europe 400 years to understand, explore and elaborate his works. In other words, while in Erasmus's age there was a clash and a conflict of viewpoints and ideals, with bloody consequences in the 20th century Europe, there were totalitarian systems and ideologies clashing with liberal and democratic ideas, conceptions and ideals. However strange it may seem, Zweig, who came from a Jewish family, rather felt himself as an Austrian citizen, while feeling particularly as a free European, although he did not feel safe in European countries especially after the occupation of Europe by the Germans, where he was caught between two fires. Nonetheless, he did his utmost to face, tackle and overcome various difficulties, prejudices, and obstacles. However, whereas Erasmus in his age overcame obstacles and difficulties, Zweig did not succeed to achieve that, because he nearly lost his patience. His Albanian translator Leka points out that while Erasmus was often lucky to find hospitality and shelter, Zweig failed to secure either a shelter or a safety remaining like a fish without water lost in his dreary world and committed suicide. Likewise, Leka emphasizes that humanism, tolerance, friendship and mutual understanding permeated Zweig's personality. In addition, quoting Camus, he adds: "The writer must support those who suffer from history, but not others, who make the history".

Bearing in mind that Zweig was the most published author in Russian during the twentieth century (Nymphius, 1998) and the connections of the political systems of the time were in a strong friendship between Russia and Albania, which later made the book in Russian and the Russian language quite popular and spread in Albania, and of course Zweig to be translated into Albanian from Russian.

Elaborating the motives and echo of Zweig's works translated into Albanian, the experienced Albanian translator from Russian, Jorgji Doksani, has provided a very high appraisal of Zweig. He is convinced that Zweig is the most popular Austrian writer in the world. In his evaluation of Zweig, he points out Zweig's capability to detect the enigmatic whereabouts of human heart of his characters.

There is no doubt that due to many travels, his profound knowledge, large experience and relatively good financial conditions, he managed to publish his works in various countries and languages.

Apart from that, bearing in mind that more than hundred years elapsed from the publication of his best short stories, Doksani notes that even in our time, whenever one picks up a selected volume of his short stories, is enchanted immediately, being faced with most sensitive feelings, passions, secrets, illusions, dreams and enigmatic messages.

So the main characteristics of Zweig's short stories, according to Doksani are:

- 1) Dramatization
- 2) Uncommon themes and plots
- 3) Interconnections of actions and events
- 4) Internal and external conflicts
- 5) Consequences of conflicts and character
- 6) Strong impact on readers

As a matter of fact, Doksani, as translator and interpreter of Zweig's short stories considers them as rather fragile, tender and defenseless in front of challenges of life. At the same time, some characters are overwhelmed by fierce passions, and soon they are crushed by traumas. Interestingly, events of plots happen on different places, areas, countries, and situations (Mrasori, 2008).

Relating his great desire for translation of Zweig's works, he had the following explanation: "This ambition was a heavy burden for me. In the meantime, the Albanians had the opportunity to read excellent translations of F. Schwartz from German, as well as other translations of Zweig's works by K. Evangjeli, F. Fico, and A. Ristani. It seemed to me that there was a load off my mind. Thus, I began to translate Zweig's short stories carefully, gradually and with a great attention. After a while, I succeeded. Some of my fellow translators appraised my translations. By the way, a year ago I translated Zweig's novel "The Impatient Heart". This time I managed to translate so well in Albanian that it was received very warmly by readers.

Last but not least, Doksani has also translated Zweig's literary biography "Maria Stuart". He considers that his work is permeated by a logical, dramatic, and epic element, but at the same time this work proves that Zweig was also historian familiar with traps, lies, schemes, intrigues, and diplomatic flattery. Besides, Doksani has also translated Zweig's "Legends and Portraits", depicting his extraordinary gift, cultural, and historical craftsmanship.

He explains that during the translation he had to be very vigilant, cautious, and responsible, as the book includes also the portrait of Aleksander Moissi, the famous Albanian actor (Mrasori, 2008). Discussing the passage of the book entitled: "Departure from Aleksander Moissi", Doksani confesses: "It was necessary to describe everything precisely, but it was also necessary to emphasize the feelings and admiration of Albanians for a renowned and glorious Albanian and that he was proud, honored and lucky to be a friend of Zweig. These paragraphs were written carefully with attention, consideration and deep respect.

As I have done in previous well-known studies, Zweig had a friendship and sympathy for the great actor of Albanian descent, although in his writings Zweig described him as an artist with an Italian temperament. In 1935, Alexander Moissi, close friend of Zweig's passed on a personal request from Luigi Pirandello to translate his new play, *Non si sa come – Man Weiss nicht wie*. It was to have its world premiere in Vienna in German. (Rovagnati, 1988 & Sonnenfeld, 1981). Premiere which never appeared due to illness and after the death of the king of the scene. The loss of the great artist Zweig described in the following words: Such artists are not citizens of one state, they become citizens of the whole world... he was Greek with Sophocles, British with Shakespeare, German with Hauptmann and Hofmannsthal, Russian with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Italian with Pirandello (Zweig, 2003).

In additiont, Doksani translated another work of Zweig entitled: "The Starry Hours of Mankind". According to the Albanian translator, this was a historical work, because its language is accurate, direct, clear-cut eloquent but without ornate figures. Latern on, Doksani translated another literary biography, "Amerigo", fascinating with its historical arguments. Finally, Doksani gives the following motives and reasons of the popularity of Zweig among Albanians:

- Skill for description of passions,
- Sentimental inclinations of Albanian readers,
- Diversity of topics, plots, events, and style,
- Various characters and their conflict,
- His narrative technique,
- An attractive dialogue between Albanian readers and Zweig's works.

Besides the well-known translator and journalist, Donika Omari, has recently beautifully translated Zweig's novel "Clarissa", which was received with particular interest by Albanian readers. According to the translator, Zweig was one of the most translated writers in his age and likewise; he was a very popular foreign writer among Albanian readers.

Omari says: "As soon as our office hours are over, we are impatient to return home and continue reading of Zweig's works" (Mrasori, 2008). There is no doubt that Omari evaluates Zweig's works so much, aware that his works will enable readers' taste and enrich their cultural experience. In the meantime, at the beginning of the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zweig became a staunch opponent of violence, destruction, and vandalism, on the one hand, and on the other, he became a symbol of friendship, cooperation, solidarity, equality and peace among people.

He declared that: "Europe will be an inhabitable place only when it will become united. Likewise, Albanian translator stresses out that Zweig's message in his autobiography "The World of Yesterday" is to keep peace among people and countries of the world. The same message is found in his last novel "Clarissa". In his last novel, it is obvious that the author aims at writing again his biography in another way: the world of yesterday seen by a young Austrian girl. Consequently, the author elaborates his ideological viewpoint aimed at overcoming rationalism by friendship, tolerance, cooperation, and brotherhood among nations. At the same time, he is worried about educational problems and recommends a useful method of recovery of human traumas and introductions.

Our translator highlights that the series of travels in different countries of Europe, were opportunities for Zweig to know some of the most outstanding figures of his age, such as an E. Verhaeren, S. Freud, Hesse, J. Joyce, J. Rot, and M. Gorki. Romaine Roland's impact on him was enormous and crucial for him. The friendship and admiration for him and constant friendship with this great French writer helped him to be vigilant and to understand the world, making possible to him to keep sending sincere and noble messages through his books and literary activities.

The prominent Albanian translator of Zweig's works from German, A. Ristani, calls it unnecessary to make any comments or give any opinions, claiming that Zweig speaks of Zweig himself, for Zweig speak about his work, because Zweig is Zweig. He also agrees with the convictions by Zweig, who openly believed that man knows best to confess to himself (Gelber, 1987). Regarding the merit of translators, I generally like to quote the famous saying of the eminent Portuguese writer and Nobel laureate in literature José Saramago: "The author creates national literature in his own language, while world literature is made by the translator." (Mrasori, 2008)" In the book of Zweig "Rausch der Verwandlung", translated into Albanian, Ristani writes that this book not only in his taste, but also by the foreign press, is considered as one of the masterpieces of the author, swan song by Stefan Zweig, which based on this novel was made Molinaro's great film in France (Zweig, 2005).

Zweig's work in Albanian, according to chronological development can be reflected in four phases: 1939-44, Zweig was never censored. Even during the period 1944-1960 censorship was not strict. After the 1960s, when relations with the Soviet Union broke down, censorship deepened and as a result many authors were not read openly (Mrasori & Kryeziu, 2021). After the 90s, there were translators and interpreters who "censored" Zweig's work out of ignorance, the inability to translate, transmit Zweig's literary messages in Albanian, of course this does not include specialized translators.

Table 1. Evaluation	Phases of	translation	and	censorship

1939-1944	1944-1960	1960-1990	1990- 2010
Zweig was never	Censorship was not	Censorship deepened	"censored" young and unexperiencied
censored	strict		trnslators (ignorance, inability to translate).

## 3. Conclusion

It is interesting how Zweig's work comes into Albanian from several languages by a large number of translators, having the same works in Albanian coming from two or three translators or from two or three languages. Apart from German, Zweig's works are translated also from French, Italian, and Russian. This author's popularity is quite high and the demand is always growing, as noted by the large number of translations and reprints. Coincidently or not, just as Zweig considered Moissi and himself as a world citizen and not belonging to a single country, so his works came in Albanian, not from a state or one language, but from many countries, translators, and languages. As U. Eco says, "The language of Europe is translation".

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