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The Image Building of a Nation: from *Illyria* to *Skiperia* to *Elbonia*, Albania as an Imaginary Country in Fictional Representations

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Abstract

Fictional countries are, it is the case to say, a world apart in the field of Literary Studies. Starting from Plato's Atlantis up to the Orwell's fictional superstates and beyond, imaginary worlds have always reflected individual as well as collective hopes, desires and fears. Their conceptual framework is based on models ranging from utopia (taken in its dual meaning of "perfect" or "non-existent" place) to dystopia.

This contribution deals with a specific pattern of imaginary worlds, namely with a range of fictional countries whose real referent is Albania, in the frame of American and European modern and contemporary literature.

From the *Land der Skipetaren* of the German Karl May to the English-speaking novels inspired by the ancient Illyria to the comics set in the funny world of Elbonia, Albania is the background for narrative plots where it is never indicated with its real name, and yet is easy to recognize by several clues and references scattered throughout the text.

In the light of these findings, and according to the analysis conducted with the tools of Comparative Literature, this paper aims to find out if this narrative genre is nourished by previous representations of nationhood and national identities, as well as if, and to what extent, it can contribute in its turn to disseminate and consolidate national stereotypes.

Keywords: *Comparative Literature, Albanian Studies, Fictional Worlds, Geocriticism*