

SPIRITUAL-RELIGIOUS MOTIFS IN TRAVELOGUES OF KAROL KUZMÁNY

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on the analysis of the way Italy is depicted in selected Slovak travelogues of the 19th century, specifically by Karol Kuzmány. Kuzmány visited Italy in 1852, and his travel report was published by the Slovak period press. The main emphasis is on the interest of the author/traveller, the construction of the author's image, and the way of expression, but also how nature, climate and other characteristic features of the country are reflected in his landscape image (the author's thoughts, feelings, reflections). In addition to a re-examination of the text-creation mechanisms, the description of natural, cultural and social realities, the paper reveals the relationship to the depicted reality/visited country, but also how the interest of the traveller/author was influenced by his theological education and his involvement in the Evangelical Church. By targeting this, the present paper outlines the form of the travelogue genre widespread in Slovak journalism of the 19th century in the context of the contemporary atmosphere and cultural events.

KEYWORDS: Karol Kuzmány. Travelogues. Religious symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

The opinion that 19th century literature can be described as “more or less secularized” (Kubínová 1997, 127) was an impulse for this paper. It forgets the fact that works such as travelogues by Catholic authors or priests pursuing primarily confessional goals instead of national considerations remain¹ outside the focus of literary historiography. Their peripheral position was also influenced by the fact that many of the texts remained in manuscripts or were published only in journals, for example on the pages of religiously oriented magazines (e.g. *Cyril and Methodius*, *Catholic Newspapers*), or these authors were characterized by a double reflection in relation to Slovaks (for example, due to the language question and inclination towards the Czech language). Despite the fact that the texts do not interfere with the development of travelogue prose, they can be perceived as stimulating not only from the point of view of imagological research, as it is the case with travelogues in general, but also from the point of view of the spiritual legacy of travelogue authors, their stylization, which “sometimes had a preaching dimension” (Golian – Molda 2018, 32).

The ambition of the paper is to explore how spiritual-religious motifs, personal religious experience, “relationship with the sacred” (Fabián et al., 2014)/experience of spiritual values (Stríženec 2007, 50)² are thematized in the travelogues by Karol Kuzmány (1806 – 1866), a poet, novelist, literary theorist, priest, publisher and editor of the magazine *Hronka* (1836 – 1838), founder of the Association of General Education in Banská Bystrica, professor of the history of ecclesiastical law in Vienna, superintendent, vice-chairman of the Matica slovenská in the years 1863 – 1866. Thus, spirituality will be seen in the context of the paper as a means/way of getting to know the world and its “spiritual nature”.

¹ Ján Gallik, in his study *Predvoj slovenskej a českej katolíckej moderny* [A Preface to Slovak and Czech Catholic Modernism], mentions in this context the importance of the development of Christian thought, which to a large extent shaped the history and culture of Europe, creating in many nations the principle of the inseparability of the link between national sentiment, culture and faith (Gallik 2018, 96).

² The complexity and various definitions of spirituality were highlighted e.g. by Stríženec (2007).

The starting point for the analysis aimed at emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of life and reviving one's relationship with God was the categorisation of aspects of the literary representation of Italy outlined by M. Beller (helps to summarise previous knowledge about the country or the form of the travelogue, e.g. the degree to which factual information prevails over subjective representations of individual experiences; see Beller 2007, 194 – 199). We will draw attention to this through the author's experiences from his journey to Italy, as Italy is traditionally perceived as the cradle of European culture and the Catholic Church.

In the country image structure of the selected travelogues, we will be interested in depicting the land's natural features and the image of Venice as part of this picture. The choice of the image of a particular Italian city, i.e. Venice, in the textual strategy of Kuzmány, was conditioned by two factors, namely the close connection of the city with the natural element, water as a symbol of life and purification (Biedermann 1992, 335 – 339), but also the tendency to perceive Venice as a symbol of Italy.

KUZMÁNY AS A TRAVELOGUE AUTHOR

A source for the study of Kuzmány's travelling activities and, consequently, the publication method is Kuzmány's biography compiled by P. Bujnák (who writes: "First the mother left with her daughter Ľudmila and the youngest son Peter, then the father went, followed a few days later by the second son Pavel, who also described this trip," Bujnák 1927) and also the research of Milan Pišút, who also points to the influence of Ján Kollár in connection with Kuzmány's travelling activities (see Pišút 1967, 11 – 33), from more recent research, we can mention E. Brtáňová, who participated editorially in the publication of Kuzmány's collected work.

In addition to personalities such as J. F. Fries, Lessing, Herder and Fichte, Ján Kollár had a significant influence on his "spiritual maturing". During his stay in Jena and on the basis of Kollár's suggestions, K. Kuzmány visited places and monuments reminiscent of the Slavic past (Bujnák 1927, 14 – 15) and subsequently impressions of these journeys also became part of his travelogue *Ladislav* (Hronka, 1838), remarkable from several points of view, as the author commented on issues of literature and art, reflected on the mission of man, the question of human happiness and ways how to fulfil it, emphasizing ethical values (Klátik 1968, 73 – 74). Despite the diverse genre characteristics – a novel in letters, a fictionalized essay, an educational novel, a sentimental novella (see Brtáňová 2014, 128 – 129), we agree with V. Faktorová, according to which prose corresponds to the current definitions of travelogue (see Janiec-Nyitrai 2011, 36 – 41). The "authentic" description of experiences from trips to foreign countries and information about geographical, cultural and social peculiarities as well as the confrontation of domestic and foreign environment speak in favour of this opinion, although "countries here represent only a kind of geographical-political plan for the ideological plan of Kuzmány's short story" (Klátik 1968, 76). Behind the "genre and motivically varied mosaic" (Brtáňová 2014, 658), "amalgams of various tendencies" (Šmatlák 2001, 39) it is necessary to see the travelogue and the category of the traveller in the context of the time. In Slovak travel literature, Kuzmány's travel writing is a type of sentimental prose, which, as a result of the function of literature and period prose, was supposed to support patriotic feelings and strengthen national consciousness. Kuzmány's travelogue fulfilled this function by depicting the life destinies of a young man, Ladislav Mníchovský, who represents an ideal type of national scholar (Pišút 1967, 30), and his harmonious, conflict-free relationship with other characters. Z. Klátik considers passivity of the hero, resp. of other characters who "think nobly, feel deeply but do not act" and experience drama only within themselves as another peculiarity of Slovak sentimentalism (Klátik 1968, 74).

Ladislav undertakes two trips, during which he visits traditional stops of romantic travellers (Venice, Rome, Naples, Greek islands, Serbia, The Tatras), as well as important centres of European culture (Jena, Weimar, Berlin, Prague). He does not describe the places visited in more detail, because – as he states in a letter addressed to Hanka – *“I don’t want to get tired of repeating what you’ve been reading for ten times [...] I’d rather share the feelings I live in here. Above all, I have to admit the feelings I live in here. Above all, I must admit that I was extremely moved when I entered this land, the holy Europe”* (Kuzmány 1968, 88 – 89), unequivocally, however, with regard to Italy, he believes that *“a completely different homeland, a different set of mind, a different history”*, that *“this region, due to its climate, even in this pleasant period, can be called the paradise of Europe [...]”* (ibid., 88). He overcomes this difference “between the North and the South”, between two cultural circles, by incorporating the “Slavic element” into the environment of Italy. He also creates the idyllic nature of the country through an atmosphere of “immediate, friendly relations”. However, in his depiction of cities, he did not deviate from the traditional literary image of Italy, perhaps also because he had not been in Italy before he wrote Ladislav. In addition to J. Kollár, he was inspired by other travelogues, specifically German writers – W. von Archenholz (England and Italy, 1785) and J. W. Goethe (Italian Journey, 1816).

Enchantment from a foreign country, its beauty is disturbed by unrest, springing from nostalgia for home. It clearly leads to the manifestation of an emotional relationship to the homeland, to the idealization of the country – the birthplace, the “Tatra region”, which in some aspects – “surpasses the privileged places of the European imagination” (Faktorová 2012, 128). *“I bless our Slovakia, where there are as many faiths as their priests living in tolerant unity”* (Kuzmány 1968, 104).

In addition to the country, Kuzmány also described the character and customs of the inhabitants and critically notes that *“the common people have a strong fondness for far niente (doing nothing)”* (ibid., 88), *“Rome and Naples are the opposites of London, and the life of the Italians is the opposite of the life of the English. Only the profit is sought there, and the beauty here, there are tools appreciated, here the art; there everyone collects treasures, here everyone spends them; there is a constant supply of the needs of life, no one will think about it here; there they live as if this earthly life were only an eternal search for goods, here as if nothing was needed tomorrow”* (ibid., 96 – 97).

K. Kuzmány’s Ladislav is based on his stay in Germany or current events “in the Slavic world”. Although K. Kuzmány tries to support the authenticity of his travel experiences (for example, friendly meetings of the main character with the Slavs, which “reflects” the period discourse, i.e. the attractiveness of Italy for a stay connected with the study or for work of artists of different nationalities, but also other events in Italy³), it is assumed that he had not visited Italy before he wrote Ladislav. His first trip to Italy was connected with visiting of his son during the holidays in 1852. Kuzmány decided to travel to Italy to visit his son Karol Ladislav, a naval officer in Venice who also lived in Trieste (Bujnák 1927, 135).

Insights and observations from northern Italy are part of Kuzmány’s notes published immediately after the trip and as a sequel⁴ under the title *Z cestovního denníka záletu z Vídně*

³ For example, in a letter sent from Naples on June 15, 1829: *“Undoubtedly, you already know from the newspapers that Vesuvius erupted again; I will never forget the moment when Andrejev and I were looking at the fire from some hill at that time”* (Kuzmány 1968, 98).

⁴ As Bujnák points out, they were published in 1852 on the pages of *Slovenské noviny*, in issues 105, 113, 115, 116, 118, 119. Bujnák retrieves some parts and presents in the context of Kuzmány’s biography. The language of the travelogue also documents the Czech language preferred in the given period in *Slovenské noviny*. In the present paper we prefer to work with the book and language form of the travelogue, which is part of Kuzmány’s complete work edited in 2014.

do Benátek [From the Travel Diary of a Voyage from Vienna to Venice] (1852) (see Bujnák 1927) in the *Slovak Newspaper*⁵ published in Vienna.

In his text, he shares his personal experience and adventures from his short stay in Trieste and Venice from 17 August to 29 August 1852, providing information about the landmarks of the cities he visited (Graz, Ljubljana, Trieste, Venice), mainly historical and artistic sights. He speaks enthusiastically about the Slovak character of diligence, which he also reveals through meeting his compatriots, who, thanks to their resilience, are among the leading personalities of Italian life. His remarks about scientific and technical progress, which together with education may be the opportunity to bring the expected social change and improvement of Slovak conditions (Kuzmány 2014, 486), can also be considered remarkable. Kuzmány's awareness of "journal" publishing limits is evident from the attitudes that are part of his travelogues: *"Don't expect me to describe it all to you. A superficial description is worth nothing, and a more thorough description of these things your newspaper could not possibly render; it would grow into a whole book, for there are hundreds and thousands of these things, and each has a history or intrinsic worth so great that it is impossible to speak of it merely briefly"* (ibid., 488).

ARTICULATED SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF NATURE BY KUZMÁNY

In Kuzmány's work, natural landmarks are given their place, although the author mentions the natural peculiarities of Italy only in a marginal way. Kuzmány associates nature with colours and sounds, evoking all kinds of emotions. The natural environment becomes a personification of strength and greatness, an asylum and a cure for the soul, but at the same time, it also symbolises something sinister, dark, and demonic—mainly because of its mysteriousness. It is against the background of these antagonisms that Kuzmány's "perception of the sea" is born – silent and infinite, deep, dark white, blue, green (Kuzmány 2014, 485), which, despite its changeability, does not lose its essence, "for it is something complete and indivisible, a unity that holds together everything that is disparate, heterogeneous and diverse" (Tomášek 2016, 30). It is a space revealing the infinite and the monumentality of nature. It appears as something sublime that transcends the subject, something whose essence is obscured and can only be suspected. The symbol of the sea's infinity interlinks with the semantics of the mountain: *"But the sea rises to a mount, and into what a wide, long one. Oh, may I not have a hundred eyes, may I be nothing but an eye, O Lord!"* (Kuzmány 2014, 482). The horizontal aspect is here augmented by the vertical. The mountain, or hill, represents a kind of intermediate link, a connection between the material and the spiritual, the earth and the sky, the meeting of two worlds, but also the place of God's presence, thus "the path to the top of the mountain [...] symbolises the path to God" (Janiec-Nyitrai 2012, 29). Kuzmány, intensely relishing the sight of the sea in Trieste harbour, refers to the "transcendental reality", the "reviving" power of the "word of God". We are led to this assumption by the fact that already in his first travelogue, he incorporates the image of the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius, symbolising the destructive forces of nature and the doom of Pompeii, as well as the image of water as a source

⁵ *Slovenské noviny* began to be published from 10 July 1849, first twice and later three times a week, and ceased to exist at the end of 1861. Their editor-in-chief was D. G. Lichard. Several published articles were taken from foreign-language periodicals (e.g. *Wiener Zeitung*, *Journal des Débats*, *Pesti Hírlap*, *Srbský dnevnik* and others), so they were translated from individual languages, first into Štúr's Slovak, later (from 1850) into Old Slovak or modified Czech, and finally (from 1858) the language of the newspaper was Štúr's standard Slovak, modified by Hodža and Hattala. However, it is at least worth mentioning that this periodical initially advocated the independence of the Slovak country and Slovak education, but from November 1852 it became an official organ of the Viennese government supporting Bach's absolutism. For more details see Duchkowitsch – Serafinová – Vatrál 2007, 143 – 145; Serafinová 2011, 280.

of life, into the image of the country/world (Kuzmány 1968, 99) to highlight both the universal law of evolution, birth and death (Eliade 1958, 154) and the sense of human destiny, “*life in humanity, regardless of time and place, regardless of happiness and its degree of perfection*” (Kuzmány 1968, 16). In the tectonics of his prose, the use of spatial imagery establishes a strong bond between the traveller/pilgrim and God and embodies the idea of an anticipated rebirth – grounded in religion and moving towards humanity. The confrontation of man and nature, man and eternity, is revealed through landscape painting, and the idea of a new age man penetrated by the “mystery of nature” is born.

VENICE – “THE DOOR TO EUROPE”

The fact that Venice is an attractive city and place is proven not only by numerous visitors to the city, but also by several authors. Thus, for example, the English writer Peter Ackroyd sees Venice as an “artificial” creation (2010, 244), but also a space of encounter between the “sacred and the secular”, the public with the private, piety with patriotism, past and present. He portrays it as an intersection of civilizations and cultures (2010, 371) and a religious frontier. At the same time, this limiting position gives Venice an important place in the unification of Western Christianity with “the rest of the world” (Eastern Christianity, Islam, Hinduism) (ibid.). “It was here that Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Christians, Turks and Europeans, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians met and made contacts” (ibid.).

The American urban theorist Kevin Lynch evaluates Venice as an environment of high imageability. This characteristic refers to a feature that evokes a strong image in the minds of observers of a given environment (2004, 9). The image of the city is a configuration of its identity, structure, and meaning. Lynch considers these aspects essential, as they are reflected in the mental map of the city or the mental representation of the environment in the percipient’s mind. From the point of view of grasping the perception of the selected city, the definition of the three essential parts of the city image by Radványi (1983) – natural, artificial and social – is equally stimulating for us. We will use the approaches of these two authors to uncover the idea of Venice as a city portrayed in the travelogues of the selected author.

VENICE AND MAGICAL NATURE

The natural features – primarily the location, which is very different from other Italian cities – make Venice a unique city, a “city of miracles”, a city on the water. Kuzmány also focuses on this particular feature, the close connection with the water element. His first impression of Venice was of the sea. The problematic access to the city across the sea and the length of the cruise itself signal the city’s isolation from the rest of the world. However, the city interacts with this water element, merges with it, or rises above its surface. The whole image, the comparison of the city to a “queen of the sea” (Kuzmány 2014, 486), a “mistress of a certain place”, has a solid spiritual charge. It contains the idea of the woman-earth-mother and the religious symbolism of water, embodying a wide range of potentialities, the basis of the whole world, of all cosmic manifestations, the primordial substance that preceded all forms, facilitating the emergence of life (Eliade 1958, 188 – 190). Kuzmány’s perceptual sensations anchored the synergy and differences between the primordial essences: “The waters are there at the beginning and end of every cosmic cycle; the earth is there at the beginning and end of every individual life. Everything emerges into being above the surface of the waters and is once again reduced to its primeval formlessness as a result of a historical disaster (like the flood) or a cosmic one (mahapralaya). Every expression of life is the result of the fertility of the earth; every form is born of it, living, and returns to it the

moment its share of life is exhausted; returns to it to be reborn; but before being reborn, to rest, to be purified, to be regenerated. Water precedes every creation, every form; earth produces living forms. While the mythological destiny of water is to open and close cosmic cycles, the destiny of the earth is to stand at the beginning and end of every biological form and of every form sharing in the history of place ('men of the place') (ibid., 254). Water can symbolise the depth of the human soul, the subconscious, which carries various desires and visions, but it can also be disconcerting, a threat to the end. We believe that Kuzmány contours the functions of water through natural phenomena (the function of creation and the function of decay; ibid., 210 – 211 and thus the cyclical conception of evolution. Along with this motif of the woman and the water, the moon symbolises evolution, death and resurrection (ibid., 210 – 211).

Kuzmány does not build his description only on the associative nature of the images, but through the visualisation of space, he also expresses his relationship to particulars. Concerning the sea, he mentions characteristics such as changeability, "iridescence" or "brilliance" (Kuzmány 2014, 489). Therefore, it is not about its celebration; he does not associate its purity with beauty or the "intoxicating play of waves", but the idea of something mysterious, dangerous or deceptive is present. The duplicity implies a certain concern⁶.

VENICE – A SACRED PLACE WITH REFERENCES TO THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

The perception of the city often reflects the interconnectedness of place with the sacred. This is also the point of K. Kuzmány's description.

The dominant feature of Kuzmány's account of Venice is the tower of St. Mark's, which is accessible "by a sloping floor" (Kuzmány 2014, 487) and from which one can view the whole city, "all the beauty of Venice" (ibid., 488). By highlighting its place in the context of other landmarks, Kuzmány seemed to indicate that the cult of St. Mark is one of the most important symbols of Venice. This tower reveals valuable views of the peculiar city and its diverse architecture to visitors. The verticality of the tower can also express "ascension to the absolute", detachment from earthly worries and interests (Kubínová 1997, 137). He attributes a prominent place to the Church of St. Mark. Its size and the style of its erection evoke a sense of infinity: "*Already in the magnificent anterooms you are captivated by an unknown, never before suspected emotion. [...] I thought I had entered some African catacombs*" (Kuzmány 2014, 487). The cathedral is thus a space that allows us to perceive a higher, spiritual dimension of existence. He seems to consider emotion as a natural tool/means of perceiving "immaterial, supersensible" reality. Perhaps this is why his description/characterisation of the city is, in many ways, abstract and vague, based on a generalisation of what impressions it evoked in him.

In addition to St. Mark's Cathedral, Kuzmány also emphasises other landmarks, whether by mere brief mention, as in the case of the "*antique palaces from centuries past*" (ibid., 486), or in connection with their function, as in the case of the "miraculous" or "most memorable" Ponte Rialto Bridge (ibid., 489). He seeks to impress the reader and win over the city by enumerating important cultural and artistic monuments of different styles and periods and accentuating their number and dimensions. Venice thus appears as a city of accumulated objects and materials,

⁶ The way of depicting space offers a comparison with the Czech writer of the second half of the 19th century and one of the most travelled poets of his generation, Julius Zeyer (1841 – 1901), who also repeatedly visited Italy. His restored and dramatised images represent „a kind of narration that can be segmented into a sequence of many successive concrete images. The resulting figurative metaphors comprise a loosely interconnected entity, while acquiring independent meaning“ (Schacherl 2021, 195). Understanding, which in Zeyer's writings is always tendential, „typically assumes the form of visually sensual rendering of reality“ in the poet's narrative (ibid., 196).

a prime example of a grouping of diverse elements (Gothic, Roman, Byzantine, Renaissance) that is difficult to compress into a single description (ibid., 488). This may be why they tend to be tiring for the visitor: “But that I sailed all day from palace to palace and saw a thousand things never seen before... I’m either drunk or in a trance. In a word, I can ‘neither slumber nor sleep’ because of the kaleidoscope in my head” (ibid., 485).

An essential part of the image of the city becomes the description of the architectonic design of the city, its subdivisions and connections (see ibid., 486 – 487), expanded by the image of an earthly paradise, which in Kuzmány’s travelogue is also connoted by the only public garden (ibid., 489). Even though it is an artificial space, its importance can be seen in its growth. In connection with water and trees, it evokes the Persian garden, representing the garden of paradise, which “later influenced greatly the ancient culture of the Mediterranean, especially Rome” (Hendrych 2005, 24). The garden size described by Kuzmány creates the impression of a park. The park “is a forest condensation, where what man finds useful is improved and what he finds troublesome is removed and destroyed” (Janiec-Nyitrai 2012, 26). This way of conducting again refers to the Christian tradition: “The park environment is an extension of the natural space of the forest. This space was created against the backdrop of the original natural space and carries within it a reflection of that original preimage” (Frye 2003, 126 – 127). It is also noteworthy that it draws attention to plane trees among the trees. They can be seen as trees of the divine garden that bring verticality to space and create the idea of both permanence and “eternal renewal” (Biedermann 1992, 287 – 288). All these visual phenomena tend to highlight art that originated in the heart of Christianity and further developed in the service of religion (Kuzmány 2014, 305).

SUMMARY

Travels to Italy in the Slovak context were mainly inspired by the need to know this cradle of European culture, history and education, valuable artistic monuments, holy places and aristocratic courts. Despite the “marginalised position” of Kuzmány’s travelogues, their importance lies in developing travel literature and the phenomenon of the Italian journey. Travelogues need to be seen in the context of the times. They show us the author/traveller as a “scholar, a rational researcher”, and a person “sensitive to the malleability of the world”, contemplating both objects and the meaning of everything existing. They are a journey “to knowledge, to discovery”, a kind of fateful “‘geography’ of the subject, of humanity, of their dreams and desires” (Hrbata – Procházka 2005, 76).

Kuzmány has a pragmatic reason for the journey. Nevertheless, he sees Italy’s appeal in the intoxicating beauty of nature, complemented by lakes, forests, valleys, and climate. The vision of the author is religiously motivated; nature and the city are sacred spaces with many references to the spiritual world, and Venice is a place where the divine meets the human. Kuzmány chooses details (e.g. shapes and colours on buildings, colour, emotional experience/impression) and thoughtfully “conceives” them into his image of the country when rendering a particular section of reality or image. Venice can be used as an example to document this. In Kuzmány’s account, they become, figuratively, as P. Ackroyd accentuates, a sacred text intended for reception and “contemplation” (2010, 309).

He enhances the educational value of his travelogue by his ability to discover and introduce peculiarities with the help of different motifs, including spiritual-religious. Kuzmány leaves it up to the reader to assemble and (aesthetically) evaluate the presented image of Italy. Although the view we have outlined is fragmentary, the examples given highlight the image of Italy as a country with an admirable Mediterranean nature but also a country of spiritual values and monuments.

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