

Historical Flows of Serbian Literature Created in Kosovo and Metohija in the XX Century

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the development of Serbian literature created in the area of the southern Serbian province – Kosovo and Metohija, during the XX and at the beginning of the XXI century. It is explicitly emphasized that literature created in the Serbian language, primarily for ideological and political reasons, was marginalized and forcibly separated from the mainstream of Serbian literature, created in the central part of Serbia, although it did not lag behind at all in terms of emphasized aesthetic and literary values.

Keywords: Serbian literature of Kosovo and Metohija, Literary tradition, Kosovo myth, Poetry, Prose, Critique.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of literature created in the southern Serbian province, Kosovo and Metohija, is inconceivable without knowledge of the historical, social, political and cultural circumstances that prevailed during the turbulent twentieth century, and which left lasting consequences on the place and reception of this literature in the overall course of Serbian literature as a whole. Its marginalization and a kind of secession from the native literature was more conditioned by the imposed ruling ideology and policy of "brotherhood and unity" (starting from the end of the Second World War), behind which hid deeper political and historical reasons for everything that bears the prefix - *Serbian* should be assimilated into what is imposed as "Kosovo". It is, therefore, a matter of decades-long tendencies to which both Serbian literature and Serbian writers paid a high price and which they still pay today, because they create in unimaginable conditions, in the few remaining Serbian environments, in a kind of ghetto of the XXI century.

However, this marginalization is a pure paradox, because Kosovo and Metohija in history, like some other parts of the Serbian cultural space, were not a marginal space, a margin, but on the contrary - the center. This does not refer only to the achievements in architecture and painting, but also when it comes

to oral and written literature. Let us remind you that at the beginning of the XIV century, sometime around 1310, Theodosius' *Life of St. Peter of Corinth* was written, after Domentian's *Life of Saint Sava* from the XII century, the most important work of Serbian medieval literature, which belongs to the highest achievements of European literature. In the following centuries, medieval authors - from Danilo Pećki, through Grigorij Camblak and Dimitrij Kantakuzin, to Longin and Pajsi Janjevac - wrote works (hagiographies, ie biographies) without which the history of Serbian literature and beyond is inconceivable, and many of those works even today constitute an unavoidable school textbook (especially in the study of literature). In addition, our oral tradition, the most beautiful and largest part of epic literature, is precisely classified in relation to Kosovo.

Changes in the historical course of development of Serbian literature and culture in Kosovo and Metohija were caused primarily by migration, ie the centuries-old occupation of Serbia by the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) and the fact that most of the educated Serbian population was forced to move north. Thus, at the end of the XVII and the beginning of the XVIII century, the center of Serbian literature moved to the area of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, ie today's northern Serbian province of Vojvodina and Hungary. Modern Serbian literature was practically born there, and it

will only reach the area of the southern Serbian province, Kosovo and Metohija, in the second half and at the beginning of the century in the works of Zarija R. Popović (1856-1934), Janić Popović (1883-1951) and Grigorije Božović (1880-1945).

2. TWENTIETH CENTURY — THE CENTURY OF SERBIAN KOSOVO-METOHİJA LITERATURE

Serbian literature created in this area achieves its full strength and visibility only through the literary work of Grigorije Božović, a writer who, after graduating from the Moscow Theological Academy, continued his literary and national and educational work in Old Serbia (Kosovo and Metohija, part of today's Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria). In the history of national literature he is marked as an excellent documentary maker and perhaps the most important chronicler of Serbian suffering in Kosovo and Metohija.[1] His collections of short stories (*Pripovetke*, 1926; *Roblje zarobljeno*, 1930; *Neizmišljeni likovi*, 1949) were published mainly in Belgrade and were noticed by both the readers and the critical public. His short stories, as well as his travelogues from Old Serbia, were written mostly in a recognizable realistic manner, and became available to a wide readership only after his judicial rehabilitation in 2008 (since he was sentenced to the heaviest sentence in 1942 by the Military Court of the Belgrade City Command as an "anti-communist and Greater Serb." A great deserving Serbian national worker and writer was shot shortly before Christmas in 1945).

Continuity in the development of Serbian literature in Kosovo and Metohija during the XX century was broken by the Second World War, and the generation that comes after it creates in a completely new spirit and changed historical and political circumstances. They make a radical break with the previous literary tradition, with relying on the epic past, mythical patterns and folklore tradition. Instead, they turn to a modern and different view of literature and the world, so instead of their own, they turn to other people's cultural patterns (probably under the influence of the imposed pattern of multiculturalism and multinationality).

More than anywhere else in the Yugoslav literary space, the influence of ideological doctrines and political currents was the strongest in the area of the southern Serbian province - Kosovo and Metohija.[2] These influences either encouraged or

slowed down the development of Kosovo-Metohija literature, creating a unique and specific, but isolated literary space from the main part of the Republic. In that sense, one can talk more about *geopolitics*, and less about *geopoetics*, especially if we keep in mind the fact that the literary achievements of the immediate post-war generation (above all prose literature), clearly lag behind the works created in other more developed cultural centers. Despite efforts to show the existence of a single Serbian cultural space, it actually did not exist at all. If a novel was a representative form of post-war Serbian literature in Serbia, poetry played that role in the southern Serbian province, and, with more or less oscillations, it formed the poetic matrix of Serbian literature in that area until the end of the last century.

The literary rise of creators from the area of Kosovo and Metohija in the first post-war years began first with youth magazines and the launch of the newspaper *Jedinstvo* immediately after the end of the war (January 20, 1945). Although it had representative role models at the beginning of the century, the literature created in the Serbian language in the 1950s and 1960s was more a reflection of the social circumstances in this area than it was an effort to continue the literary tradition. An additional difficult circumstance was the fact that this literature was created "in minority conditions, although in the home country". Still, there is an almost incomprehensible turn made by Serbian creators regarding the literary tradition. Unlike the excellent narrators of the pre-war generation who incorporated national pathos into their storytelling skills, a sense of strong connection with legends and collective awareness of the significance and duration of the Kosovo myth, the struggle to preserve national identity and a sense of belonging to Serbs, Serbian writers of the post-war generation often renounce traditions and turn to current topics. Thus, in the first short stories by Vuk Filipović, we find titles that refer to the themes and motives of the Albanian environment and Albanian culture: "Đemo", "Sanija" and "Ujupove brazde", as well as in Rade Nikolić's short story "Suljo govedar". However, such a turn towards other cultures was not reciprocal: Serbian writers were rarely represented in joint anthologies and selections of poetry and prose, while Albanian authors were always given more space in Serbian editions than they deserved by objective literary and aesthetic criteria.

One of the first chroniclers and a good connoisseur of the circumstances and literary

climate of Kosovo and Metohija, Radomir Ivanović, in the book *Literary Creativity of Kosovo in the Serbo-Croatian Language* (1971) [3] finds the reasons and justification for such a turn in the novelty of the theme and unusual ambience. If we accept this statement only conditionally, the question arises: what are the real reasons for breaking the connection with the narrative tradition in the thematic-motive, formal-content and cultural sense? The time distance of more than half a century indicates the undoubted tendentious isolation of this literary region and distance from the homeland by forcing works in the Albanian language and latent but conscious inclusion of Serbian writers in the corpus of literature of Kosovo and Metohija, which was supposed to have a multinational and multicultural character. The aspiration, whose background was political and not literary in nature, resulted in many writers continuing their development path outside the province (Čedo Vuković, Božidar Milidragović, Danilo Nikolić, Rade Nikolić), while those who remained obeyed to a certain extent the new literary standards and laws. In a sense, this meant the adoption of a unique normative literary model which, under the influence of Soviet literature, was generally accepted and obligatory in all socialist countries as well as on the literary left in the world, but it also meant conscious neglect of national tradition, all those things on which Serbian heritage and culture were founded. The issue of regionalization of this literature in the ethnic, political, territorial and confessional sense, it seems, is interesting in many ways, but also complicated, both then and today.

Nevertheless, this new generation of talented Serbian writers, which consisted of Rade Nikolić, Vuk Filipović, Vladeta Vuković, Danilo Nikolić, Momčilo Lazić, Lazar Vucković and Rade Zlatanović, still tried to indirectly join the currents of the entire Serbian literature, sometimes with a larger, sometimes with less success. We also recognize the effort to follow literary trends and trends of the time in the birth of a novel, which was already founded in the history of Serbian literature.

Although the decades-long (ideological, political and literary-historical practice) was such that the origin and development of novels in the Serbian language in Kosovo and Metohija in the twentieth century is viewed outside the context of Serbian literature as a whole, Serbian prose, poetry, drama and literature criticism written in the Serbian language, in the area of the southern Serbian province, must be interpreted as one of the currents

in the history of Serbian literature. History directs and obliges us to this as much as ethics, reality, consistency and responsibility towards the generations of creators who waged a written war to preserve the Serbian national identity - from Grigorije Božović, from the beginning of the century to Petar Sarić (a writer who still lives and works in Kosovo and Metohija, and is the greatest novelist from this area) at the beginning of the new millennium, when in new circumstances this identity is defended from the same enemy.

3. SERBIAN PROSE IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA

The first real date of the Serbian novel in Kosovo and Metohija is 1957, in which Vuk Filipović published the novel *Tragovi*. This novel was written in the spirit of the post-war years, under the influence of social realism and the adopted principle of multiculturalism (the characters are Serbs, Albanians and an Italian, which was not uncommon). Filipović's narrative potential was especially expressed in his second novel, *Strma obala* (1961). With this novel, Filipović secured the place of the ancestor of the modern Kosovo novel in the history of Serbian literature; it is indeed contemporary, especially because it is all built in the manner of condensed expression, in-depth psychology and philosophy of human tragedy, which is very reminiscent of the French new novel that appeared then.

In the fifties, some extremely talented writers entered the literary scene of Kosovo and Metohija, who soon after the publication of their first works left this area and moved to Belgrade, such as Danilo Nikolić and Božidar Milidragović. However, the real question is to what extent and by what criteria can we bring these authors under the corpus of Serbian Kosovo-Metohija literature? If we exclude them from this corpus (except for those works that they wrote and published at the time when they lived and worked in this area), a new question would open up: whether the works published at the very end of the XX century and the beginning of the new millennium areas outside the borders of Kosovo and Metohija, whose authors were forced to emigrate due to war conflicts, belong to this literature? It should also be taken into account that some of these works were published in publishing houses that nominally belong to Kosovo-Metohija, but with relocated seats. On the other hand, the new millennium brought two significant novels that were written and whose

author lives in Kosovo and Metohija even today (Petar Sarić, Štrpce), but the novels were published in leading publishing houses in Belgrade. We will base our relatively conditioned criterion of affiliation on the fact that writers in the 1950s voluntarily left their literary and life headquarters, striving to be close to the mainstream of Serbian literature, while writers from the end of the last century, regardless of their forced residence outside these areas, poetically, thematically and spiritually were close to the established currents of the Kosovo-Metohija literary tradition.

When it comes to the novel, it actually tried to establish a stronger connection with the currents of native literature, but it never, even today, acquired the status of a dominant literary genre, nor did it have the cultural value that poetry had in this area. The novels of Petar Sarić, which establish the continuity that began in the 1970s, can be considered all the more significant; in the time of general historical and cultural, and thus literary-historical turmoil in Kosovo and Metohija, their literary value is becoming increasingly important. He is considered the best narrator in the post-war literature of the Serbian south, the center of contemporary Serbian prose in Kosovo and Metohija, whose role in founding the novel is extremely important. But, he is not only the most famous Kosovo-Metohija writer, but also an important Serbian writer, whose achievements have been awarded prestigious literary prizes. He is the author of eight novels of unequal scope, but also of unequal artistic value, which is understandable, considering that they were created in a period of almost half a century, and that they reflected the writer's creative/artistic maturity: *Veliki Ahavski trg* (1972), *Sutra stiže gospodar I and II* (1979 and 1981), *Dečak iz Lastve* (1986), *Petruša i Miluša* (1990), *Strah od svetlosti* (2005), *Sara* (2008), *Mitrova Amerika* (2012) and *Klobuk* (2021). In addition, Sarić published four collections of poetry: *Bele kletve* (1970), *Nebeski dom* (1972), *Vrh polja* (1974) and *Konak reke* (1975). To this should be added the selected and new poems *Pakleno polje* from 1990. Although it cannot be said that he remained consistent with his poetic path, since the novel quantitatively dominates poetry and is mostly related to his first creative phase, Petar Sarić has shown another kind of poetic consistency, introducing into his novels poetic elements and lyrical passages, a "nerve" for the finest nuances of human nature, its intoxicating and dangerous abyss, which represent perhaps the most beautiful pages of his prose. Also, he entered the history of Serbian

literature as a playwright, because in 1995 he dramatized the novel *Sutra stiže gospodar* and published it as a play of the same name. Petar Sarić will also be remembered for returning the epistolary literary form to the Serbian literature of the southern province: the book *I vremenu se zaturio trag* (2015) brings a series of open and closed letters that the author sent to different addresses over a period of several decades: from parents to politicians, from writers to statesmen. Their value is twofold: on the one hand, they testify to Sarić's commitment to preserving the Serbian national identity in times of major historical changes in the cradle of Serbian spirituality - Kosovo and Metohija, while on the other hand they represent a contribution to understanding Sarić's poetics since in many letters the author clearly defined some of his autopoetic attitudes related to Serbian literature and its position today, so in them we recognize the thematic and stylistic elements of his novels.

Although Petar Sarić in some way strengthened the novel as a literary form and contributed to its development, he is not the only novelist and narrator from Kosovo and Metohija known outside that framework. There are also: Pera Stefanović, Milenko Jevtović, Aco Rakočević, Radosav Stojanović, Ratko Popović and others.

4. SERBIAN POETRY IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA — THE STRONGEST POETIC VOICES

Nevertheless, despite the results achieved in prose, the dominance of poetry over prose was evident throughout the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the Serbian poets of Kosovo and Metohija had a different development path than the poets in the central, native part of Serbia, which was influenced by the mentioned ideological and political reasons. They had a different regional literary and lexical heritage and an anachronistic path that relied on the tradition, continuity and heritage of the previous interwar era (between the two world wars). [4]

Poetry expressed events on the historical and social scene in a greater sense and more directly than prose through the transformation of individual talent, and it had a more pronounced national content. Unlike prose writers, Serbian poets quickly got rid of the realistic heritage and conventional poetics of the pre-war period. Considering that they did not have significant role models in the past (poetic achievements, formed directions and lyrical achievements), it can be said that Serbian poets of

Kosovo and Metohija pioneered modern poetry, models, form and structure of verse in the second half of the 20th century. Therefore, already in the fifties of the last century, we have a modern lyrical form, free verse, new phenomena and sensations of the age. The focus of the poet's attention is the chronotope of Kosovo and the Kosovo myth, a kind of pivotal point of Serbian essence and existence, a mystical space of Serbian culture. That poetic determination and turning to Kosovo as a theme is a civic and creative attitude about the need to create on that theme, the need to define the poet himself according to the historical past and the uncertain future. This was especially due to the fact that the celebration of six centuries since the Battle of Kosovo (1989) was being met, which only strengthened the national feeling.

The founder of contemporary Serbian poetry in Kosovo and Metohija is considered to be Rade Nikolić, who appeared in 1954 with the collection of Poetry *Dodir leta*. His generation includes a whole constellation of important poets, such as Vladeta Vukovic, Radoslav Zlatanovic and especially Lazar Vučković. Vučković lived a short life (1937-1966), but his poems became influential very quickly, just as his voice is recognizable in the entire Serbian poetry. He inherited the ideas of neo-symbolism, like his generation of poets in central Serbia (Branko Miljković, Ivan V. Lalic, Alek Vukadinovic), but in his poetry one cannot find the contents of Kosovo's orientation and cultural and spiritual heritage of this region.

One of the special, specific literary phenomena in Kosovo and Metohija is the professor, critic and poet Vladeta Vuković (1928-2003). As one of the founders and long-term professor at the Faculty of Philology in Priština and editor of the magazine *Stremljenja*, he made a significant contribution to the development of Serbian literature in this area. His poetry is of modern sensibility as much as it is experiential, mature, lyrically connoted, with the sad ease of accepting the laws of life and death. His poems are almost all in the elegiac tone of times past. He left behind more than ten collections of poetry and several books of critical studies and reviews of Serbian writers of the last century.

As the most distinctive poetic voice of Kosovo-Metohija poetry can rightly be considered the poetry of Darinka Jevrić (1947-2007), a poet who dedicated her entire life and work to Kosovo and Metohija, remaining living in occupied Priština after 1999. She is also one of the most translated poets from Kosovo and Metohija and the most

present in anthologies and selections of Serbian poetry as a whole. In the poetry of this poetess, medieval and modern lyrical codes and biblical language with a modern sensibility are intertwined. The language of her poetry is subtle and lucid at the same time, the vocabulary is as archaic as it is symbolic; Dečani's bells from her poetry resonate far beyond Kosovo-Metohija.

Certainly, we should mention the large number of poets who, along with Darinka Jevrić, created in Kosovo and Metohija, and who after the persecution in 1999 continued to create outside this territory: Radosav Stojanović, Petar Sarić, Milica Jeftimijević Lilić, Radomir Stojanović, Mirko Žarić, Blagoje Savić, Stoiljko Stanišić, Slobodan Kostić, and from modern poets Ratko Popović, Ranko Đinović, Milan Mihajlović, Zoran Nedeljković and many others.

5. CONCLUSION

After the misfortune that befell the Serbian people, after a political, national and cultural tragedy and expulsion, Serbian writers from Kosovo and Metohija gathered their lives and their lyrical reflections in books that were written mainly outside the southern Serbian province. Those few who remained living in the occupied territories continued their literary engagement in full force (mainly in Gračanica and in the north of Kosovo and Metohija - Kosovska Mitrovica and Leposavić). One of the most prominent and persistent who should not only be recognized for that, but also because of his extensive and significant novelist opus, which is one of the best achievements in the entire Serbian literature, is certainly Petar Sarić (who still lives and creates in a Serbian enclave, in Štrpce, at the foot of the Brezovica mountain).

The historical tragedy also reflected on the development of Serbian culture and literature, which have survived and are still surviving their most difficult period in history. The horrors of war, pogroms and migrations caused the break with the decade-long continuity of literary expression, so works are written in the diaspora; thus, we no longer know to which corpus they belong. Their poetics is necessarily connected with the latest historical events, because the authors themselves were actors in creating a new history that deprived the Serbian people of the right to their own territory, to their cultural and spiritual heritage. The territory where the roots of Serbian statehood and spirituality were conceived became a mythical projection in the literature created in the diaspora.[5]

The thematization of the current historical moment thus became a new model of the novel (and the literary work in general), just as history found its artistic projection in the stories of prose writers from Kosovo and Metohija a century earlier.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Marija Jeftimijević Mihajlović.

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