

Censorship and Self Censorship Reflected into the History of Albanian Literature

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Abstract: Throughout the human history there were many different kind of art censorship. The literature was part of it. So many times, literature was the result of a number of different prohibitions on the writings. In any case, one of the worst censorships occurred during the communist regime. The writer had to contend with significant number of do and don't elements otherwise s/he would face consequences. This model of ex USSR and China, with all the worst scenarios, took place in Enver Hoxha's dictatorial regime in Albania. The literature that started to develop so late, but before World War II, saw its peak, a time when prose took its shape, drama made its first steps, while on the other hand, the themes of writing were more colorful. Writers started to think and left some monographic, anthology of writers (for secondary school students), and even books on Albanian writers (introducing the starting elements of Albanian Literature History). During this regime, literature was subject to instruction and orders, on a limited number of themes of writings allowed (only those which were positive for the system, party and regime). But, there are also materials that makes one wonder if censorship that dictated literature and everything that had to do with it had been present the whole time, or whether or not there was also self-censorship that gave form to writings, and especially to the History of Albanian Literature. The aim of this paper is to compare published materials on literature shortly before this period and the period of the publication of the first History of Albanian Literature: obstacles, censorship and work done on it.

Key words: censorship, self censorship, literature, history of Albanian Literature

1. Introduction

Literature, as all other forms of art, so many times faced the restraint of fruitful and good work because of so numerous kinds of censorship. The leader or even the system left traces on many literatures, which diminished the possibility of writing proper books. So this ... left him with the choice either to write exclusively "for the drawer", or to court some danger by acquainting a narrow circle of friends with his work-in-progress, in which case the texts risked passing beyond the author's direct control (Vasily Rudich, 1997, p. 111).

There are two kinds of censorships prevalent in literature: preventive and retroactive. The preventive censorship prescribes topics to be elaborated, by setting out the framework that will confine such literary works. Any violation of prescribed confines would render the works non-publishable. Under this censorship, the writers understand who shall be the topic of their writing as well as the forms appropriate for the purpose. There are cases of irony being used, as a relief for writers as they would not have to exert themselves over the topics to be addressed or use their creative imagination. In view of the fact that writers were restricted by censorship on the

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topic of their writing, in the periods of the harshest censorship, a small number of writers, if any, managed to produce successful works that have withstood the test of time and transcend the national borders.

On the other hand, retroactive censorship would ban any works post publication. In cases when a government believes that certain work jeopardizes its existence, or is likely to trigger reaction by the people, it imposes a ban on such work. This type of censorship was applied extensively especially in democratic countries, where the freedom of speech is thought to reign supreme. A proof of retroactive censorship is George Orwell's work.¹ The book was only allowed publication after eighteen months. These actions and the types of censorship was also applied occasionally by the community governments as well. Ismail Kadare in Albania and his book "Dimri i vetmis se madhe" (The Winter of Great Solitude) was an example of a work banned post-publication.

Whatever the type of censorship operating upon a society, it chokes the literary and undermines literary creativity. By applying censorship in the name of moral, a writer was asked to do something that was immoral. Death was asked in the name of life.² A writer, prohibited to express his or her own thoughts and experiences, but writing "on order", cannot produce genuine literary value. Everything in our age conspires to turn the writer, and every other kind of artist as well, into a minor official, working on themes handed to him from above and never telling what seems to him the whole of the truth.³ This indicates the position of not only the writers but also of the literary itself. A by-order literature cannot be deemed genuine and achieve its true purpose. On the other hand, this also indicates that values the art sought to promote were not important nor was there any effort to enrich the artistic, i.e., literary treasure; rather, it was used as an instrument to achieve the ruling goals of the government in power. Of course, treating the writers as mere officials, required to respond to requests of the "employers" speaks of the status to which the literary and the writers were relegated and asked to subjugate, willingly or otherwise.

However, the reader himself, fed the literary elements proscribed by the state, becomes an obedient critic. Any work exceeding the framework would be rejected, criticized or completely ignored. Through censorship, a state produces not only an "artificial" literature, but also creates obedient writers, limited under the themes served onto them. It is these writers that condemn works that fail to conform to these standard, even in the pre-publication stage. A literary work, irrespective of the topic and how it was presented, when straying outside of ordinary, has a clear destiny in terms of reception, i.e., it is doomed to fail. Therefore, perceptions⁴ on any work are known even before it is published. The convictions prevalent related to elements of review, already instilled in the readers, become an instrument at the service of state censorship.

In the literary world, any mention of censorship, in most cases, is seen in correlation with communism. It is rarely, if ever, a censorship analysis encompasses broader time periods but also its scope outside of the clutches of

¹ George Orwell, The collected essays, journalism and letters, Volume IV, In Front of Your Nose 1945-1950, Letter to Philip Rahv, pg 140, "Yes, I saw the article in Time, which was a bit of good luck. I have no doubt the book (1 Animal Farm.) will be subject to some boycotting, but so far as this country is concerned I have been surprised by the unfriendly reactions it didn't get. It is being translated into 9 languages. The most difficult to arrange was French. One publisher signed a contract and then said it was "impossible" for political reasons, others made similar answers — however, I have fixed it with a publisher who is in Monte Carlo, and thus feels a bit safer".

² Ismail Kadare, *Veptra 20, Nga një dhjetor në tjetrin*, p. 12, "në emër të moralit shkrimtarit i kërkohet një gjë amoralë. Në emër të jetës, i kërkohet vdekja."

³ George ORWELL, The collected essays, journalism and letters, Volume IV, In Front of Your Nose 1945-1950, The Prevention of Literature, p. 60

⁴ Vasily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 408, "At any rate, innumerable controversial books — books for or against Soviet Russia, for or against Zionism, for or against the Catholic Church, etc — are judged before they are read, and in effect before they are written. One knows in advance what reception they will get in what papers. And yet, with a dishonesty that sometimes is not even quarter-conscious, the pretence is kept up that genuinely literary standards are being applied".

communism. Censorship, in one form or another, existed since the outset of published works. It has been used as an instrument towards manipulating the people. Additionally, the rhetorical mentality and a regime of oppression are also elements producing self-censorship, to the point that it becomes common.⁵ This is another dangerous element, which often put reins on various writers in their works, occasionally even unconsciously... an interaction of external circumstances with internal inhibitions represented at the same time the source of inspiration and of self-censorship⁶. Therefore, when it comes to the History of Albanian Language in particular, by comparing earlier anthologies and monographs, as well as books on writers, we are brought into position of needing to distinguish between the scope of censorship and onset of conscious or unconscious self-censorship.

The communist system was a very difficult period for writers. The limits of writing were given to the writers and they had to write according to the needs of the governing force of the state. Each writing had to deal with the positivity of the communism, with its glory and the good life of people under that system. Like common prostitutes, intellectuals found themselves inveigled into counterpropaganda operation. Very good example of instruments used to force writers to write according to the interest of system is Gorki's evocation. In 1928 Maksim Gorky accepted an invitation to go on an "excursion" to the Solovetski Islands, an experimental concentration camp that would "metastasize" (to use Solzhenitsyn's word) into the Gulag system. On his return Gorky wrote a book extolling the glories of the Solovetski camp and the Soviet government⁷. Writers, of this system, were second-hand intellectuals, who were checked and followed at all times (not only their work, but also their contacts, conversation, thinking etc). Different forms were devised and used to force writers to write as instructed or risk facing consequences. Deaths were also recorded of second-tier intellectuals who were under suspicion and were destined either for administrative deportation to remote areas of the country, codified in law by decree on 10 August 1922, or for the concentration camps.⁸

Censoring of literature was not exclusive to communism only. At any rate, innumerable controversial books — books for or against Soviet Russia, for or against Zionism, for or against the Catholic Church, etc — are judged before they are read, and in effect before they are written. One knows in advance what reception they will get in what papers. And yet, with a dishonesty that sometimes is not even quarter-conscious, the pretence is kept up that genuinely literary standards are being applied.⁹

Censorship operated in many countries and under various governments. The only thing that was different was the manner of its application and its various uses to achieve the desired goals. At any rate, censorship affected the quality of literature, but it also left its mark upon the writers themselves.

2. Censorship on Albanian Literature

Albanian literature was also influenced by this system. During the communist system Albanian leader followed the instruction and acted as USSR, and after that of China. In his memories, Todi Lubonja testifies:

⁵ Vasily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 15, "Otherwise, it made no point, but this does not mean that the author would not care: more often that not, the combined efforts of a rhetoricized mentality and a repressive regime help to turn self-censorship into habit".

⁶ Vasily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 19.

⁷ Stephane Courtois et al., *The black book of communism: crimes, terror, repression*; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England 1999, p. 20.

⁸ Stephane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England 1999, p. 129.

⁹ George Orwell, *The collected essays, journalism and letters*, Volume IV, *In Front of Your Nose 1945-1950*, p. 108. Writers and Leviathan, p. 408.

“Liberalization became the plague of the time, Most attractive elements became traditionalists, rotten conservatives, obsolete, anti-innovators, talentless, who were also joined by odd talented writer on the account of terror...”¹⁰ So the literature would only glorify the benefits of the Albanian people under the communism, the beauty of the country (where had almost no elements of civilized life, as was described on Stuart Mann’s), the glory of its leader. As Elsie sad it was “collective trauma” and the only “art” practiced in Albania was that of survival.¹¹

Albanian Literature is specific because of so many elements. Albanian writers wrote in number of different languages, Albanian speaking people live not only in Albania, but also in Kosovo and few ex-Yugoslav republics, but also Italy (the home of several well-known Albanian writers), Greece etc. All this elements gave different approach to the writings, and as the result, different elements to the literature.

Albanian literature inherited vestiges of conquerors from various literary periods. Influences are apparent since the period of Ottoman rule. Our literature, during this period was subject to strict censorship on any written works. In fact, the conquerors prohibited any works in the native language. As a consequence, depending on various influences, especially religious, Albanian writers would write in: Latin, Greek, Italian, Turkish, Arabic, etc. Of course, the influences of the respective literature would be reflected on the writing of the author, depending on the kind on his preference over the people or the language. There were also scattered attempts at works, i.e., fragments in Albanian, originally with religious topic. Exposure to various literatures, spurred by the migration of writers abroad, increased the desire to develop the language, and consequently, the literature written in mother tongue. In spite of the influences of other literatures, in time, the Albanian literature increasingly incorporated elements of Albanian folklore and the life of the people themselves.

On the other hand, a part of Albanian people lives in Kosovo as well as the former Yugoslav republics. Here, the censorship took on a different shape. Since early times, imposed under the “Yugoslav” literature, but also owing to education in Serbo-Croatian, the intellectuals were exposed to and fed desired content. A similar occurrence was recorded also after the World War II. When printing of Albanian books finally started, they were controlled and censored by the Yugoslav community regime. It is interesting to note that in Kosovo, and broader in Yugoslavia, a new literary current emerged, the symbolism. In an effort to evade the limitations placed by the system, but in a way, to also express deplore the condition of Albanians in this country as well as the silent frustration with the system, symbolism was employed. In the publications of this period, the writers combat the censorship by not subjugating to it, but by also finding ways to not remain silent. In this period too, there were writers loyal to the state and made no effort to stray outside of the bounds of glorifying and supporting the communism and the governance.

After the World War II, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine developed. In Albania, its spirit pervaded all the social life. The purpose of the doctrine was to educate the people in the spirit of Marxism. Any other doctrine, especially religious, would be seen as dangerous. Therefore, any censorship would also be exercised along these lines. The literature developed from many everyday elements, becoming thereby an enforced element of writing on the “dreams” and “wishes” of the power. As far as the ethnic platform is concerned, in Albania the writers endorsed

¹⁰ Blendi Fevziu: Enver Hoxha, e para biografi bazuar në dokumentet e arkivit personal dhe në rrëfimet e atyre që e njohën, Tiranë 2011, p. 290, “*Në kujtimet e tij Todi Lubonja dëshmon: “Liberalizimi u bë murtaja e kohës. Elementët më atraktivë u bënë tradicionalistët, konservatorët të mykur, vjetërsira të kohës, antinovatorët, të patalentuarit, me të cilët për shkak të terrorit u bashkua edhe ndonjë i talentuar...*”

¹¹ Jasek Kozak, review, Studies in Modern Albanian Literature and Culture – Robert Elsie, internet.

the social-realist platform. The merits of this literature as well as the place it should occupy in the history of our literature are still a subject of debate.

In this literary period, the esthetical criterion of soc-realist literary writing ranked third behind the Marxist and social ideology. The literature of socialist realism is a literature prescribed by the dictatorship and therefore produced pseudo-writers, mediocrities, operating under an ideological platform. The writers thus stopped being transmitters of ideas. The status of dogma prevailed over ideas. The state, and the ruling party, controls the writings to ensure compliance with the spirit of ideology. Official methods of social realism are represented by mediocre or poor writers (with few exceptions). An official method does not make one into a good writer, as the true writer will develop his own original methodology. Therefore, a considerable number of writers of social realism are provisional writers. However, this period also produced great writers who lived through it and left behind mature works of universal values.

In the other side, the government politics, as the result censorship, left its marks and gave the spirit of literature created under pressure of requests, respectly forced form and content. In different countries where Albanians were publishing and writing gave it different elements on books. So in Albania itself, the communist dictator Enver Hoxha, following the example of USRR and China, constricted the themes of the literature only on the few themes, which had to do with glorifying the system and its leader. When well known Albanian writer Ismail Kadare was asked about the faith of his book "Dimri i vetmisë së madhe" he answered: "The relationship of a great writer with a dictator are complex and difficult to explain. For the simple reasons that they are both tyrants, however, in this clash, the dictator is a false tyrant..."¹²

Albania, i.e., Enver Hoxha, depending on his relationship with a given state, would feed off their manner of governance, often devoid of any personal insight on the various aspects. Literature constituted no exception. On the other hand, the fear of personal loss of position made him even harsher towards writing. The literature was used to create an illusion about life in this socialist country. The Albanian state, after the example of Chinese, would now openly place writers under surveillance. The pressure was unbearable. At every meeting, there were calls: write about the people, free yourselves of the western decadence! This translated into the everyday language, means: become mediocre, fools, ideally idiots. Thus, the party would pardon your sins and embrace you...¹³ Being brave under these circumstances was very difficult. Due to the strong mechanism installed by the system, which held under control the whole press and publication industry, any attempt to be oneself, i.e., to write out of one's motivation, imagination and personal desire were a minefield.

A handful of writers would show such bravery, in spite of having suffered through the consequences of a war, not only personal in nature. Works written during the period by Ismail Kadare, but also partially by Dritero Agolli, Fatos Arapi, etc. in addition to sanctioned elements also contained bombastic elements, elements of a rebellion, an attempt to transcend the bonds of censorship. However, these attempts were pale and very small in reach. Notwithstanding, one way or another a small number of writers attempted to oppose any form of dictate in literature.

¹² Blendi Fevziu, Enver Hoxha, e para biografi bazuar në dokumentet e arkivit personal dhe në rrëfimet e atyre që e njohën, Tiranë 2011, fq 260, "Marrëdhëniet e një shkrimtari të madh me një diktator janë komplekse dhe të vështira për t'u shpjeguar. Për arsyen se të dy ata janë tiranë, por në këtë përballje, diktatori është tirani false..."

¹³ Ismail Kadare, *Vepra 19*, p. 458, "Shteti shqiptar, nën shembullin e kinezëve, i përgjonte tani haptas shkrimtarët. Trysnia ishte e padurueshme. Në çdo mbledhje dëgjoheshin thirrjet: shkruani për popullin, hiqeni mendjen nga dekadentizmi perëndimor! Kjo, e kthyer në gjuhën e përditshme, do të thoshte: bëhuni mediokër, budallallepsuni, mundësisht idiotizohuni. Kështu, budallenj, partia do t'ju falë gabimet dhe do t'ju pranojë..."

Anyway, during this period, respectively under the system... most severely punished crime has remained independent thinking.¹⁴

3. Censorship and Self Censorship into Albanian Literature History

Albanian literature felt the absence of its complete history. For years, there is talk of a structure that the Albanian History of Literature should have. Writing works not only in Albanian, but the separation and development of Albanian literature under various historic circumstances remain issues of contention. According to Kujtim Shala the Histories of Albanian Literature remain tied to the national and political history of Albanians, to the life of author and become the reading of concrete works, a domain of literary criticism.¹⁵

Although evidence of our written language are late, the literary cultures, especially the history of literature, as an indispensable form to summarize our literary creation and our literary writers under various periods, was late and deficient. A complete history of the Albanian Literature is yet to be produced. Furthermore, extensive discussions and views as to the best manner and content of the said History of Literature persist to this day. Reasons for such lack of decisiveness are twofold: on one side, the distinct features of our literature (as noted, the territorial scope, but also writing in various languages), but also the impact of censorship. The latter caused significant gaps in printed Histories.

If a comparison is drawn between the books printed during the pre-communism era, the books related to anthology, or a comprehensive book of writers and the History of Literature (such as the one of 1959/1960, as well as 1983), a clear overview of the extent of censorship upon our literature will unfold. Repeated attempts at producing even one single "critical endorsement" of the literary heritage of Gjergj Fishta, F. Konica, E. Koliqi, Z. Schiro into the textbooks and academic works (1960, 1976, 1989) encountered official opposition.¹⁶ The mere fact of exclusion (with the exception of negative references) of some writers that bequeathed written treasure, speaks to the power of censorship, both preventive and retroactive. An interesting example of the latter may be found in the previously printed works of Gjergj Fishta, verses earlier taught by heart by many, but also made part of school anthologies, but were later prohibited and not made part of written Histories of Literature in Albanian, at least not in the manner befitting their stature.

Another element illustrative of the severity of censorship in literature is the duration of publication of the History of Albanian Literature for 1959/1960. Although, according to certain manuscripts found in the Archive, the book was ready for print in 1955, it took several more years until it finally saw daylight. Taking into account the fact that hitherto there was no written History of Literature in Albania, there was no History of Literature published by Albanians, a testimony to its tremendous value, historic and otherwise, and on the other, in view of the fact that the objections and revisions to the book were not excessive, the time it took to print is astonishing. More than the problem of the content of the manuscript, there is a perception that it was more about the fear of possible omitting, which would result in retribution. On the other hand, in 1968, the third instalment of the History

¹⁴ Kristof Jacek Kozak, review, *Studies in Modern Albanian Literature and Culture*, Robert Elsie

¹⁵ Kujtim Shala, *Historia e letërsisë shqipe, Materialet e Konferencës shkencore*, 30-31 tetor 2009, në Prishtinë, p. 58, "*Historitë e letërsisë shqipe mbeten të lidhura me historinë nacionale e politike të shqiptarëve, me jetën e autorit ose bëhen lexime veprash konkrete, punë kjo e kritikës letrare.*"

¹⁶ Shaban Sinani, *Kritika e historishkrimi të letërsisë: çështje të hapura (Syllabus për studime të shkallës Master në studime letrare)*, Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike, Tiranë, 2011, p. 10, "Sprovat e druajtura për të mundur qoftë dhe një "pranim kritik" të trashëgimit letrar të Gjergj Fishtës, F. Konicës, E. Koliqit, Z. Schirë-it në tekstet shkollore dhe akademike, që u përsëritën disa herë (1960, 1976, 1989) gjetën kundërshtim zyrtar".

of Literature was given on print, for the literature of the period 1912–1939, a process which was terminated as the communist Albania waged an open war against religion. As the manuscript contained renowned names of Albanian literature of religious education, who also translated religious works, the manuscript was never printed. A number of authors included in the manuscript were not subsequently included in the History of Literature of 1983. The manuscript was found in the Archive of Archaeological Studies in Tirana.

4. Conclusion

Communist censorship in Albania exacted a high price on literature. A nascent literature of diverse thematic palette and shape of the post World War II, especially since 1955, was dealt a heavy blow under the iron censorship of Enver Hoxha, transforming into an unmotivated literature, within the pre-approved confines and themes. All the works would inevitably sing praises to flourishing socialism in Albanian, the dedication and relentlessness of workers, the processes, the joy of life and similar. The key element of praise was, of course, dedicated to “Mother Party” and its leaders.

All writers, who were thought to attempt otherwise with whatever insignificant detail, would suffer sanctions of various kinds, starting from forced labour to some place in Albanian, to deportation and imprisonment, along with all family member and ultimately liquidation. These forms of retributions, even for smallest of elements, often unintended, would bring writers into the position of utmost fear and added caution. In most cases, this also affected the censorship. There are also writers, who although before the war made important strides and entered the world of letters, subsequently preferred to remain silent rather than write to the tune of censorship. Thus, there is the case of Lasgush Poradeci, who although made a name for himself in the area of literature and had verses that were appreciated and recited eagerly, an author of two poetry volumes, as well as a number of stories of the time, withdrew on the account of control over work and quill by the censure, preferring to retire from the world of writing.

The censorship therefore left deep traces on the Albanian literature. Its consequences were also felt in the printed Histories of Albanian Literature, the consequences of which are rectified to this day, due to failure to print a new History of Literature. Uncertainty over elements to be incorporated into the history and evaluations of those under censorship, which left much wanting, produced this gap, even after this prolonged period.

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