

MEMORY AND LITERARY EQUILIBRIUM

Nysret KRASNIQI

University of Prishtina, Kosovo
E-mail: nysret.krasniqi@uni-pr.edu

ABSTRACT: The article discusses the relationship between literature and ideology, more precisely the inter-linkage between tradition and various forms of political pressure motivated by the political or non-aesthetic vigor. We will analyze the censorship of centralized state apparatuses to prove that it is a harming initiative when it is thought that politically motivated writings can replace memory, and consequently literary memory. We will further argue that in the evolutionary curve of the phenomenon of literature, there should exist non-ideological ethics, which implies that the author of literature, as well as the scholar who studies literature, by aiming the attractive innovatory and visionary future of literature, should not forget heritage, whether it is religious, cultural or of ethnic provenience. Likewise, we will point out the ideological transformations of the tendency of oblivion of the identity and religious heritage practiced by ideological criticism, recalibrated in their continuity in various forms of *post-s* and *ism-s*. Furthermore, we will argue that the utopian concept of the “new without the old”, transformed into *ideologeme*, always plays the game of structures that possess the will for power. Moreover, the political concept of the “new without the old”, always tries to erase individuality, to harm the normal contract of trust between people through the primordality of human *thymos*.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy of literature, history, thymos, memory, equilibrium, utopia, tradition.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the concepts of Marxism, which interconnected and strengthened the working class, were gaining their dominance in Europe. The theory of class struggle, as denial of the capitalist order, meant the destruction of the former feudal-bourgeois system, which according to Vladimir Lenin's claims had reached the zenith of the *moribund imperialism* (Lenin, 1974, p. 748). This initiative, designed as the will for equality, was thought to be achieved through the power of revolution. The revolution had to be started and won by farmers and peasants, with the goal of gaining political power. Lenin's request stated in his speech *What's to be Done* (1902) goes: “History has now confronted us with an immediate task... The fulfillment of this task would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat” (Lenin, 1969, p. 15). This was happening due to the reason that Russia was the most fertile ground to adapt to the development of this idea. In Russia, the rapid industrialization in the beginning of the twentieth century increased human exploitation, that resulted in massive refusal, which triggered three revolutions (1905-1917) within a short period of time (Carr, 1979, p. 2). Nevertheless, this “immediate task”, in actual fact, the task Lenin had placed upon himself in his fight for dominance and power, was non-historical in its essence, as we know his postulates of *vanguardism*, *partisanship* and *the creation of cultural planning*. *Vanguardism* implied the leading role of the working class and the peasantry, whether inside or outside Russia, and the influence of revolutionary principles on the universal sphere. Meanwhile, when the Party strengthened, *partisanship* was sought, a notion that implied ideological learning and censorship, pursuant to the teachings of the revolution, which were supervised by a “Special man” whose cult of personality defended the ultimate destination of the ideology of his model. The teachings of the revolution required the formation of *the new man*, who would be liberated from all the “obscurantisms” of the past, in order to form the man who needed to be active.

Politically required *vanguardism*, *partisanship* and *cultural planning*, inevitably required recalibration of the historical scientific essence as a thought of the past. On the ideological trinity, the essential historical lesson, which was traditionally based on *document*, *book* and *biography*, what is known as *historiography*, started to *design the present in the past*, a retrospective illusion, which initiated the erasure of the fundamental evidence of the past. Thus, the revolutionary historical lab was turned into a “political battlefield where each historian tried to use it for his own purposes” (Rubinsohn, 1987, p. 19) of glorifying the Leader. Writing was designed as a future, while it omitted the past, based on the principles of censorship and self-censorship of historians with the utopian thoughts that the present also changes the

past. Such a deconstruction of tradition and history would necessarily be related to *literary history*, which derives from the past, from the everlasting and immanent demand of society for its predecessors, but which, as such, does not conform to the intentions of the Leader and the program of ideological leveling. We accentuate this historical and cultural evidence for the fact that, it is these particular ideas which after the World War II, though in different transformations, but with similar essences, were disseminated in countries where the *proletariat's power* dominated, as political victory of the revolutions. Leninist starting point of “the dictatorship of the proletariat as the instrument of the proletarian revolution” (Stalin, 1953, p. 20) was an active permanence, a daily task of defending the values of revolution, reflecting on all political systems deriving from such ideology. Implanted in the great cultures, with a strong literary, cultural and philosophical tradition, these ideas of the censoring character towards the cultural and literary tradition, despite the obvious limitations, did not cause severe deformation within the evolutionary literary and cultural philosophy. Nevertheless, their application in smaller literatures and cultures as well as in the societies that have historically raised in their identities, with the spirit of identity sacrifice, this practice of writing as an ideological purpose, put literary aesthetics on Procrustean bed, with the tendency to lose all the signs of dead voices from the past.

1. Relation with literary heritage

Regarding the art in general and especially literary art, the phenomenon of ideological censorship or ideological pressure is nothing new. The ideological-political censorship was inaugurated by the ancient philosopher Plato, who stressed the need for *state unity* and the balance between *wealth and poverty*.

In his work *The Republic*, through the philosophical dialogic system, Plato, aiming pragmatism, saw art as a *mimetic* activity distanced from reality, even degenerating for the society and demanded the exclusion of artists from his state. Plato challenged the classics of antique Greek literature, Homer and Hesiod, since he considered that the ideas which derived from their texts were morally damaging, saying: “concerning these tales too, it seems we must supervise those who undertake to tell them and ask them not simply to disparage Hades' domain in this way but rather to praise it, because what they say is neither true nor beneficial for men who are to be fighters” (Plato, 1991, p. 63), and as such are in contradiction with the concepts of the State, even when spoken by allegorical discourse. As evidenced by this observation, Plato saw literary writing as a political or didactical function. He gave philosophical permission only for functional art works. This censorship, on the philosophical principles of idealistic morality, conveyed the heritage of censorship up to our time. However, unlike Plato, who nevertheless protected the eternal *eidōs*, Marxism did not accept *eternal truths*, moreover, did not have a viewpoint on reformation of such concepts in the new era. Consequently, it devalued the morality and the religiosity of the preceding literature by acting towards contradiction, negation and omitting of some basic principles of literary heritage. It is a well-known Marx's finding that was strongly exploited by his followers to form “their religion”, which states: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (Marx, 1971, p. 1). If Marxism regarded religion as *opium*, consequently it regarded the literary tradition as *obsolete*, it would necessarily invent a *creation method* by which it would censor the past and forget the tradition as well as it would engage the writer to form *the new man*, who should be freed from religious and perhaps traditional ‘opium’. This writing method would be hostile to the *thymos*, (Fokuyama, 2018, p. 23) because it required the conformation of writers to ideology, metaphorically speaking, to become “aesthetic soldiers” of the Faith without God project, as was the universal idea of communist fraternity. This method was called *socialist realism*, which would form a type of writing that would quickly be in accordance with the aspiration for a *Party literature* (Lenin, 1965, pp. 44-48) so to become a clear ideological medium. As a notion, *socialist realism* emerged after Stalin's meeting with Maxim Gorky in 1932, nevertheless, it became a fundamental method after the decision of the USSR Writers' Association in 1934, which enforced the requirements of adding the *socialist* determination to the aesthetic notion of *realism*, to respect the principles of ideology and revolutionary politics (James, 1973, p. 87). The utilitarian relationship with tradition, whether of the anonymous or authorial voices, experienced the great breakage which started at the moment when the connection with the *memory*, as a historical-literary as well as religious-literary heritage, was not allowed to be created by the

Author, but to be guided by Political Ideology based on political doctrines with universalist comprehension. The attack on the Author's memory came at a point when the supra ethno-national political doctrine was gaining space over evolutionary course change, demanding ideological curtains precisely on the path of this progression, which notwithstanding preserved the balances of the old as a memory with the new as projection, even within distinct cultural identities. Since this doctrine did not allow the recreated work of the Author as a Memory, on the utopia of curtaining with the tradition, it mostly instructed *the writer to forget*.

2. Author instruction

The evolutionary and historical relation of literature with memory was replaced by an arbitrary relation where literary writing had to build a relation or communication with forgetfulness. The censorship that formed this writing model, the instruction to forget, is investigated as soon as the aesthetic demands of art are replaced with the ideological demands, which surprisingly the soc-realism theory thought and applied as literary aesthetics. The basic restricted scheme of this request was:

The literary text that compulsorily had to be written in such a manner would contain the ethics of the ideological teachings of the party. This meant that ideological symbols such as “the truth, optimism, activism, and socialist humanism should be at the center of the involved writer's intent” (Heller, 1997, p. 51). This would mean merging literary *realism* with literary *romanticism* as well as merging the literary *form* with the literary *content*. Indeed, this ideological “aesthetic” was established law against literary canonical works. This ideological aesthetics was enforced in the “arguments” of its leaders when their speeches integrated ideologemes into art: “We must create new laws, and not canons of art... Socialist aesthetics will be not a dry science of long paragraphs, statues, frozen canons, and rubrics, but rather joyful science of the classical art of socialism” (Al'tman, 1968).¹ The “old” aesthetic literary forms, the great canonical works, as cultural monuments, recreated by iconic authors from old legends, great narratives, various identity reels, for socrealistic logic, no longer forming *timeless present* (Eliot, 1948, p. 22) of our culture and civilization. They need to be replaced by a new literary “science”, a new aesthetics, which would proclaim happiness as a universal utopia, with the political and ideological aim to replace memory of the past with the production of soc-realism unaesthetic works as a substitute for literary classics.

Consequently, the writer's memory was censored according to the *anti-literary nomocracy*, which principally required the following:

Literary writing without religion, except when the writing considered the doctrine of proletarians as a religion;

Literary writing without history, except when the history of the revolution was told and when the document of the past was darkened to the extent of its disappearance and when the history was projected as a discipline of the future based on the principle *we make the history*;

Literary writing without *eros*, except when love was realized as a reconciliation of human universal emotion with ideological conviction, which the youth's source of love was seen as a product of work and revolutionary industrial progress;

Literary writing without *thanatos*, except when death was the subject of heroism or sacrifice of the character for ideological progress, which was paradoxically considered as birth;

Literary writing where the authority of the family and the institutions of religious morals was replaced with the authority and pseudo-morals of state apparatus institutions.

The uniform and conformist writing without the linguistic diversity and within the linguistic intelligibility, without its image and philosophy, with the request that the literary text need to be dominated by clarity and without *eponymy* or *motivation* (Genette, 1995, pp. 3-53) and by the lack of conceptual philosophical questions, aiming its comprehension by overall masses, etc.

This restricted and denying approach to the basic categories of tradition turned the literary text into quasi-politics, furthermore, obliged the writer to transform into the engineer of the past, self-denying his

¹ Cited in Heller Leonid: “A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories” in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, (eds. Thomas Lahusen, Evgeny Dobrenko). Duke: Duke University Press, p. 55.

role as a “re-creator of tradition” (Frye, 1980, p. 67) and gradually forced into the abandonment of literary writing as a personal creation just to end up with a literary writing with ideas of collectivity and emphasized signs of one form of shared authorship. Looking at Aristotle's concepts, this anti-historical approach can be considered a philosophical fallacy, since “to remember the future is not possible, but this is an object of opinion or expectation; nor is there memory of the present, but only sense-perception. For by the latter we know not the future, nor the past, but the present only. But memory relates to the past”.² If the past, thus memory, forms us here and now, how could a new vision of the author be created, except as a *permanent denigrator of the canon*? The permanent denigration means using the writer to exert political influence where culture and literature are transformed into the medium of acceptance of political hegemony.

In addition, literary writing, in essence, lives in the deep philosophical questions, moreover it is created as such, having in mind the many mysteries of life and death, of ethics and morals, of forms of *thymos*, of influence of *The Great Code* or the *Bible* (Frye, 1982, pp. 6-29) in the cultural diversity from which a human mosaic is created as the eternal will and iconic culture. As a philosophical antithesis, socio-realism literary writing did not allow the *philosophical ambiguities*, but preferred the “solution” and the disappearance of the mysteries and reinforced the “truth” of the socialist work. It denied the concept of death and sketched life into the thematic uniform, compositional template and simple instruction in order to eradicate the cultivated reader, who did not require solving the problems with literature, but raising existential philosophical questions. The essentiality of the phenomenon of literature at this point of writing was falling into an abyss. Nevertheless, as a consequence of this selective relationship with memory, it was intended to create the memory of *soc-realism* through the poetics of realism, which transformed the literary concept of reality into caricature. However, the selective and aphasic relationship of literary writing with memory fails to undo memory as the essential phenomenon of the fluency of human life itself. Memory does not manifest its presence only in limited literary writing, but as such, continues its presence in the discourse of anonymous character, living in the paradox of *forgotten memory*, elaborated by Paul Ricoeur, based on the conclusions of Saint Augustine, who said: “How can we speak of forgetting except in terms of the memory of forgetting, as this is authorized and sanctioned by the return and the recognition of the “thing” forgotten? Otherwise, we would not know that we have forgotten” (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 30). This means that *forgotten memory* lives as latent magma even when literary writing tries to form *new memory* with the tendency to erase the *theatre of memory* as a well established gnosis. Political endeavor to use literary writing as a medium of memory *eclipsing* developed precisely by utilizing the space or influence of memory, although it was known that the eclipsing intent was an inadmissible and pejorative response.

Even though a wide field of memory is considered as *primitivism* or *obsolete nostalgia*, the thematic nucleus of many literary works with *social realism affiliations* depends on the space and phenomenology of memory, whether it is a national symbolic privy or a wider extension of the universal culture of the phenomena of memory. Thus, the intention to eradicate the memory is a utopian tendency since the writer does not have the power to erase its idiom or to obscure the cultural chain of symbols of universal culture through schematic limitations. Memory shows its presence even when it is denied, especially when the claim for the establishment of new memory, at the outset, is known to be a utopian initiative. Moreover, “memory is knowledge from the past. It is not necessarily knowledge about the past” (Margalit, 2002, p. 14). Similarly, much more powerful is *shared amnesia* (Gellner, 1987, p. 6) of the memory which silently keeps religious and national identities, rather than *supranational ideologies*.

3. Utility of memory

In his monumental work *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948) the philologist Ernst Robert Curtius speaks of the philological method, culture and literary classics, beside focusing on the philosophy of the existence of literary text. He says that unlike other human activities and deeds, the literary text cannot be characterized as “old or new” as “literature has different forms of movement, of growth, of continuity... For literature, all the past is present, or can become so” (Curtius, 2013, p. 12).

² Aristotle: *On Memory and Reminiscence*, Written 350 B.C.E, Part I, Paragraph 2, (trans. J. I. Beare), Internet Classics Archive. Available at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/memory.html>, [Accessed 10 August 2020].

He explains the relativity of time with the possibility of reading Homeric work here, there and beyond our time, in the vision of the future. Nonetheless, conscious and lucid in terms of literary continuity since the Antique period to the present, Curtius firmly defends the concept of the influence of tradition even in the harsh “dark” periods of social, political, and ideological changes, arguing on the fundamental etymological, anthropological and philosophical roots of what we call *Western culture*. This powerful base of knowledge as well as the assessment of the scholarly and literary continuity, which by nomination we qualify as *tradition*, turned into an anti-totalitarian philosophical concept. Curtius's belief, however resulting from the experience of the research of European philosophical-literary tradition based in the Latinity, in one form, was combined with the concepts of T. S. Eliot for the author's *prudence or maturity and the classic* (Eliot, 1957, p. 54) as a radiant pillar in a particular identity culture and literature, but also with his later request of integrating *Christian morality* (Eliot, 1960, pp. 1-71) into the European institutional system as an aesthetic way of culture.

Thus, the name of *new literature*, or the tendency of new literature proclaimed by *socialist realism*, actually reminds us of the *myth of the creation of writing as oblivion of memory*. The tendency to *atrophy people's memories* (Plato, 2002, p. 69) through the creation of soc-realistic memory is in opposition with the role of writing itself as a *reminder* of tradition. Moreover, according to the Plato's *thymos*, soc-realist writing attempted to create oblivion instead of creating a recipe for memory. It is known that memory, thought as anonymous discourse, is much more present within the identity culture than in limited writing. Limited writing, in its most utilitarian function, will always be *reminder* and its author a *re-creator* of tradition, whether it is an identity tradition, or a shared *discourse* of human universality. This means that the writer, in this case the one of the soc-realistic doctrine, whether conformed, censored or self-censored, did not manage to dominate the memory, which is a medium that lives in immanent and latent forms in every particular culture. These philosophies bring us back to the ancient Greek notion of *aletheia*, renewed in our *milieu* (Heidegger, 1993, p. 127). In etymological sense *aletheia* means “appearance”, “opening”, “truth” and, to a broader extent, state in which things do not remain hidden. We believe that a permanent quest for truth is the immanence of being, which is manifested in various forms, politics and ethics, the undivided part of which is literature. Since the search for the truth seems impossible without memory, literary writing, literary author as a *re-creator*, will always be a slave of persistent philosophical questions, which emanate from the memory as an *aletheia* intent toward the Truth as human ideal and morality.

We are aware that the insistence on *memory primacy* as a voice from the past can take the connotations that literary writing has its source only in dead voices. It may also be thought that there are no forms of memory other than those inherited from the space of the *text as an icon*, from the forms of its transfer through time. Nevertheless, we know that empirical and irreversible living processes still form memory and, consequently, even literary writing that carries reflections and figures of *personal memory*. Nonetheless, personal memory is always dependent on the memory that comes to us as an influence from the past and as such changes into memory for the future. As “without influence, there is no tradition, since the sense of a literary tradition is created from an impression of a succession of texts according to a principle of coherence” (Sauerberg, 1997, p. 168). Similarly, global as a unifying tendency and identity as authentic memory can not be in conflict, while there is also a universal type of *behavioral culture*, which is linked to the humanity demands as a universal hence global category. Thus, the memory of the universal categories of humanity, as a *politics of friendship*, linked to the immanence of global political and economic communication, in relation to the identity as an ethno-symbolic memory, must live in a crucial and permanent equilibrium.

Since the forms of memory establish human immanence, as a *recollection* through literary writing, the uniforming pressure, which seeks to unify or to abandon identity, cultural, and religious differences, establish a dual phenomenon of the hegemonic and radical relationship between these two forces. In order to maintain utilitarian balance of spirituality the *philosophy of equilibrium* (Gadamer, 2002, p. 205) is inevitably needed, since memory is connected with the authentic and rooted heritage, as distinctive feature of culture, but with the ethical human demand of global openness. An example of this harmonization of identity memory and globalizing outburst can be provided by the philosophy “adding while preserving”

(Scruton, 2017, pp. 3-25) rather than the ideologeme of “ruining to create”. We recall Harold Bloom's revelation, who states that in order to exist as a *strong author* or strong artist you must face the *catastrophe* (Bloom, 2003, pp. 10-11). As much as it is painful, this catastrophe may result in culminating artistic works which in the process of evaluation in the chain of value enters the *process of influence*. The catastrophe also implies ethical confrontation with codes, as we are in the field of literary space that is allowed justification. But this confrontation needs to be sincere, even utilitarian.

Apparently, when we have the tendency of post-post-modernism, we may have approached the stage at which it is necessary to return to the literature *dignity* and consequently the universality of the literary work. Returning to tradition, we will certainly turn to our primordial nature and make some progress. On this occasion, we use as a metaphor a statement by Giambattista Vico who, when speaking of Homer, says: “Inasmuch as the poets came certainly before the vulgar historians, the first history must have been poetic” (Vico, 1948, p. 278).

Conclusion

Within this article we have discussed the relationship of literature with ideology through various forms of non aesthetic pressure. We have analyzed the ideological censorship to prove that it is a utopian enterprise if it is thought that ideology replaces memory and consequently literary memory. We have also noticed the ideological transformations of the tendency of forgetfulness, recaptured in their continuity in various forms of *post-s* and *ism-s*.

Nevertheless, we have found that an aesthetic ethic needs to exist in the evolutionary curve of the literature phenomenon, which implies that the literary author, as well as the literary scholar, aiming for the future and its attractive vision of progress, should be careful not to forget the cultural heritage. Old authors or canonical authors shape our present and future consequently teaching us to be cautious about death, life, but also about the unborn generations. The utopian concept of the new without the old, transformed into ideologeme, always plays the game of structures that possess the will for power. The philosophical and political concept of the new without the old, always tries to erase or to deny the individuality, moreover to harm the normal contract of trust between people through the primordially of thymos. Literary works are always signs of a universal mosaic. This mosaic is the union of identity differences rather than the ideology of the denial of freedom or the ideology of pessimism or the tendency of memory loss.

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