



Research Article

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## The Forbidden Literature During the Soviet Union and Communist Albania, its Ethical Role, and Innovative Features: A Comparison of M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina

Belfjore Zifla Qose<sup>1</sup>

Anila Mullahi<sup>2</sup>

Monika Hoshafi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dr.,  
Department of Literature,  
University of Tirana,  
Tirana, Albania

<sup>2</sup>Prof. As. Dr.,  
Department of Literature,  
University of Tirana,  
Tirana, Albania

<sup>3</sup>Prof. As. Dr.  
Department of Albanian Language and Literature,  
"Ismail Qemali" University,  
Vlora, Albania

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### Abstract

Literature is a vital tool for preserving moral stability, bringing attention to the human crisis, and reminding humanity about the risks that arise for the society and the individual when human rights and values are violated during turbulent political and moral times. These subjects are prevalent in the dissident literature of the 20th century, which emerged from the former communist countries. These works represent an effort for the "humane" to survive during periods of moral crises, political repression, and societal hypocrisy. This paper focuses in the comparison of two writers, the Russian M. Bulgakov and the Albanian K. Trebeshina, to exemplify the crucial role of literature in such times. Due to the political and cultural background, there are numerous well-known similarities between Albanian Socialist Realism and Soviet Socialist Realism; yet, there is little research about the similarities between the forbidden literatures. This paper analyses the similarities concerning the crucial topics of dissident literature, while drawing parallels regarding their modern and postmodern literary features. Combining the inductive and deductive methodologies, the emphasis is on comparative literary techniques, textual analysis and interpretation. This comparison contributes to our better understanding and evaluation of the past while also providing a more focused perspective on our future as it is portrayed in literature.

**Keywords:** memory, literature, fantastic, catharsis, comparison, subversive

## 1. Introduction

Numerous instances from literature have demonstrated to us that the raw forms of exposing the subject of evil may stimulate a cathartic effect. Literature helps with the inner revision of historical events and the nature of the “humane” particularly in times of oppressive, tyrannical political systems. The literary forms that provide this may vary pending on the historical period, context, aesthetics, and literary streams, and even on the individual writer’s style and the degree of experimentation or traditionalism. Despite the individual style and literary form, the canonic writers find the way to pose strong questions about morality, the nature of good and evil, the relation of politics and society, and above all, they elevate their discussions to the metaphysical and universal level. Literature helps society look more closely at the conscience issue, while simultaneously highlighting the human necessity for spiritual life.

The contextual similarities between Soviet Union and communist Albania led to unique resemblances of their literary systems. Communist Albania’s cultural policies (prior to the 1968 split) were modeled after those of the USSR, yet, communication between the subversive, forbidden literatures of both countries was rare. This is why the similarities between M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina are fascinating and such an investigation reveals new ways to approach literature’s impact on society and study the literary system, by understanding how ‘the dangerous’, unconventional writers have revitalized literature. In both cases, the great writers who challenged conventional art and exposed propaganda were considered as threats to the community. As a result, not only were their major works not published, but their personal lives were as well afflicted by outrageous persecution. Moreover, their underground writing juxtaposed the official publications while exposing their propagandic nature. (Jones, P., 2019: 1–27).

We found that Kasëm Trebeshina’s and Mikhail Bulgakov’s literary works display similar features and raise the awareness for crucial, ethical, and spiritual quests. They demonstrate extraordinary abilities in understanding the human need for the spiritual dimension, and expose the social and moral degradation that comes out of leading a life based on a materialistic worldview, completely excluding the metaphysical dimension and the moral compass coming from personal morality. These writers, through their literary works created strong dualities standing in the core of their ethical system, to help in a better understanding of the human nature from a universal perspective, while setting their narratives in a specific historical past. They explore the full dynamics of the characters’ inner voice while distinguishing good from evil in societies where such a balance is ruined, the ethical system comprised of religion values is not accepted anymore and the New Soviet Man paralyzed any kind of metaphysical beliefs or even dilemmas over the existence of any supernatural entity.

This paper explores a very special way by which Trebeshina and Bulgakov opposed the system; that is through revealing the need of the human being for spiritual life, morality, and conscience, while exposing the truth concealed by the official literature. Our analysis aims to compare the main resembling features in the novels of Trebeshina and Bulgakov, to understand how literature preserves collective memory through fictionalized facts. Some of the thematic similarities we can briefly mention are the strong awareness of the moral crisis, the humanity of the New Man, the demolition of nationalist myths, the duality between the sacral past and the profane present, the question of the “genius madman”, absurdity, anti-conformism, the conflict between the writer and critics, the supernatural issue etc., whereas their works’ formal aspects display elements of Modernism and Postmodernism.

Both authors make extensive use of the fantastic genre, using it as an escapism and a time for reflection, and the means to finally experience Catharsis through immersing in one’s conscience and the strong empathy for other human beings. This explains why the fantastic, the supernatural and the uncanny are very prominent in their literature. Literature’s heritage shows us great examples of preserving human values in difficult times, when the dangers of alienation increased due to the rise of ‘defeating’ forms against people, employed by the system.

## 2. Literature Review

The parallels between the forbidden literatures in communist Albania and the USSR are understudied, with most research focusing on the official literatures' similarities which does not provide a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the literary panorama. Through this paper we aim to enlighten some areas of our systematic studies unreached by traditional scholarly work, such as the comparison of the dissident literature, the thematic and narrative devices, communicative linguistic tools, etc., that create a new corpus study of the Albanian dissident literature.

Our literature review is classified as:

- a. Literature coming from the most important literature's journals and manifests of their time, to create the parallels of the official phenomena. This literature needed an intensive archival work and
- b. Theoretical literature regarding Socialist Realism, the center-periphery studies of literary systems, cultural influences and their extended studies in literature's studies etc.
- c. Critical literature on the writer K. Trebeshina, about whom there are very few serious preexisting research studies over his works and critical literature over M. Bulgakov, with an extensive corpus of studies.
- d. Comparative literature, as the core of this paper, is based mainly on theoretical Comparativism, as the specific comparison of the writers from the two different literary systems is our completely new contribution.
- e. Contextual literature related to the ideological situation in which literature was produced. Furthermore, this literature needed a great amount of archival research and material gathering.

The set of the above-mentioned theoretical sources is related to the complex nature of this study. The contextual frame of ideology and political influence over literature is combined with the complexity of the "dissidence" notion. Dissidence, in this context, referred to semiotics deriving from the western denomination of artists and activists of any kind, who through their activity opposed the system and faced multifaced forms of prosecution. This entitlement was affected by the cold war situation, and it represented an immediate validation of the subject. After the fall of the Berlin wall, during the transitional years of new democracies, dissidence was a preferred term used in the ex-communist countries as an honorific estimation for those who courageously resisted and faced consequences during the difficult past.

With the development of the field studies, the "either/or" logic of dissident literature versus the official Socialist Realism, converged into a more dynamic criticism, which reviewed the whole literary production of the time, as realities did not respond to the polarized theoretical depiction. (Nathans, B., 2022: 185-186) Being labelled a dissident was held in great esteem in Albania after the 1990s, and a hidden rivalry could be felt amongst writers for such a status. The fact remains that, beyond the split between the extreme polarization and the relativization tentatives, in both realities there were writers who wrote differently from the official directives, and their works were not published. The resemblances between the dissidence in both the above-mentioned settings, do not lie only on the fate of the writers and biographical facts regarding prosecution and unpublished or prison literature, but impressively they extend to aesthetic and completely literary techniques and devices. This applies to the case of M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina, whose literary works display remarkable similarities.

## 3. Research Methods

This study uses a combined set of methodological approaches, starting from the very specific textual-based methodologies and to the deductions and analogies related to the study of contextual comparisons. Combining the inductive and deductive methodologies, the textual analysis and interpretation, and comparative literature techniques are emphasized. The deductive methodology makes use of the contextual information and the general features of the literary phenomena in USSR

and communist Albania since the literary method of Socialist Realism incites similar manifestations on works of art and the instrumentalization of art as propaganda. On the other hand, inductive methodologies start from the very textual analysis and interpretation, resulting in a structured idea regarding the manner of the subversive literature displaying similar characteristics. This combination of methodologies is also employed because specific characteristics deriving from the deductive methods enlighten the inductive ones and vice-versa.

Our study examines the rise and consolidation of the official and forbidden literatures through a the diachronic analysis perspective, as well as the synchronic view of the interaction between literary systems and specific works of art (novels) during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The significant arrangements of specific modern and postmodern features determine the usage of hermeneutics, thematical comparisons, and textual interpretation. For example, the decision to choose an interpretative approach is based on the understanding of literature's creation as a historical phenomenon, framed within a specific contextual and political atmosphere. The usage of deductive methodology resonates with the fact that literature during dictatorial regimes utilize art as propaganda, thus its characteristics derive from the Socialist Realist method and important political Plenums. For example, this methodology is used to understand how the political directives and Socialist Realist dogma are applied into actual literary works. The inductive methodology is used when examining the nouvelle literary features in Trebeshina's prose works, such as in the novel "Odin Mondvalsen", in which the complex narrative scheme, the nonchronological order of the chapters, and even typical modernist themes, such as alienation, absurdity, existentialism, solitude and anxiety, indicate all the nonconformist, subversive aspect of his literature.

The research on the Fantastic, employing narrative devices and specific textual techniques like ambiguity and anticipation in both Trebeshina's and Bulgakov's work, are helpful in interpreting the crucial role that this element plays in their works, both as a modernist innovative form and in the involvement of more profound metaphysical discussions and allusions.

The multitude of methodologies utilized in this study culminate in the application of comparative methods to establish analogies between literary phenomena and specific works of art, such as for example, the use of similar narrative devices by Modernist and Postmodernist features in the subversive literature use to create the Fantastic modality. Additionally, the comparative methodologies emphasize the usage of similar themes and approaches to thematical discourse by the chosen writers, thus visualizing clearly the concerns of the intellectuals and great artists. This comparison contributes to our better understanding and evaluation of the past while also providing a more focused perspective on our future as it is portrayed in literature.

#### **4. Contextual Framing. Socialist Realism and Dissident Writers in Soviet Union and Albania**

The contextual frame of the post-World War II created a political situation in which Albania positioned into the eastern part of the wall, becoming thus a political and later cultural epigone of the Soviet center. According to Schwandner-Sievers "In Southeastern Europe, in which most nations soon became part of the Soviet sphere of influence, the Second World War had only just given birth to, or led to the reconstruction of, political entities (such as Yugoslavia), to new political systems (socialism), or to civil war (as in the case of Greece)." (Schwandner-Sievers, S., 2002: 13) The USSR cultural influence in Albania began only after 1942-1943, consequently following the political influence and the installation of the regime.

The 1905 Lenin's article "Party Organization and Party Literature" initiated the official foundation of literature's ideologization, through expressing the "principle of party in literature" while ensuring that the freedom of speech would not be endangered from it. Literature did not signify anymore a separate entity from politics, as the very core of literature's function became the representation of class struggle and the promotion of "socialist values". Serving the socialist society belittled the major role of literature as art and its acclaimed cannon. Literature's theoreticians and

critics emphasized the need to create a new era in Russian literature in which the Western influence would decline and spoke of the separation of Soviet art from the western degraded art. On 20 September 1946 in a propagandic speech A. Zhdanov attacked A. Akhmatova and M. Zoshchenko, as well as the active newspapers *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, for the following reasons. "These theories so-called as simple art, the art for the sake of art, that came from the west, are trying to reverse the progressive power of the Russian people.", "The literature stream without ideology and politics, is against our development course and it also had its teachers. This course appeared in the viewpoints of Formalist aestheticians, who are epigones of the subjective idealism." (Zhdanov, as cited in Fadajev, 1947: 16)

Negating the traces of idealism, Romanticism etc., represented both the conflict with the west and the attack against individualism in the name of Socialist collectivism. Even the writers had to publicly write their split with the decadent individualism and its heritage in Russian literature, M. Gorki for example, negates any type of Formalist experimentation and the Modernist poets that try to cover their ideological emptiness with their formal, outer brilliance. Like many other writers, he advocated transparent and direct art, reaching to the wider masses. A. Zhdanov asks the writers and critics to consider literature as a mission, to give it an active role in creating the social conscience and the writers to fabricate the 'human soul'. We must cease considering literature as a free creative product of the individual, but it should be considered "a national and a people's issue, considering it (literature) simply as a collective product, as well as dressing it with the role of the ideological superstructure." (Zhdanov, as cited in V. V. Ermilov, 1952: 69) This outer influence on literature, coming from ideology and politics also affected the aesthetics and quality of the works, creating a false hierarchy in which less talented writers tended to use more the ideological frame to be successful whereas the great writers of the era were forbidden and unpublished.

Whereas Socialist Realism in USSR experienced a longer creating process by which the main characteristics and principles were consecrated due to the ideological influence of communism, in Albania this literary 'dogma' was brought and adapted in literature much later, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The development of Albanian Literature up to that point, manifested the first signs of Modernism, through the work of exceptional writers, whose novelty promised a cultural thrive. (Gjikaj, E., 2019: 34) The normal historical course of Albanian Literature was interrupted by the political events and the ideological frame of communist propaganda. The violent disruption and the censorship of the canonical authors applied not only to the Albanian Literature, but it also modeled how World Literature was presented to the Albanian readership. Many western writers were cut off from the university and school programs, but even when they were included, they were interpreted in a "politically correct" way. Albanian Literature after 1944 cultivated only one form of writing and that was based on the Soviet model. The immediate execution and implementation of the Socialist Realist principles in the Albanian Literature had a direct impact on the literary system in general. The role of the critics and theoreticians was crucial in implementing this new literary method, in giving the primary function of literature to the spread of the Marxist and Leninist ideology, rather than using it for the artistic scope. Free thought was antagonized: "Here there is no place for absolute freedom of the created art, for absolute freedom of the writer's will." (Kallulli, A. 1978: 75)

Some of the main resembling features of both the Soviet and Albanian literature (1944-1990) are: the presence of the communist ideology, the revolutionary ideas, the proletarian values, the class struggle, the creation of new national and communist myths, the idealization of the socialist life, etc. It is understandable that the thematic variety was jeopardized by the limited number of what were considered as essential topics, while the narrative schemes and the character types suffered from the same flatness and unimaginative plots. Similarly, as in other aspects of life, collectivism was promoted, this is why events and happenings that could exist as separate, ceased being part of literature's production: diversity was substituted by homogeneity. Dialectics, whose deepness, and dynamics were used only at the beginning, when communists came to power, referring to the bourgeoisie and proletariat conflict, was disregarded. (Xhiku, Ali, 2022: 84)

The role of the historical and literary context is crucial, but there are also many differences

regarding the given contexts, as there are many cultural and historical differences we cannot underestimate. We can recount the fact that religion in Russia has always been very strong and a part of national identity, while in a multi religious county like Albania (although this nowadays is perceived and celebrated as religious freedom), the separation helped to soften the impact of religions towards the political system, and it made it easier for the new system to fight them. The transition to a secular life, empty of religious practices was easier, but not without an ethical and moral impact, which will be observed in the third part of this article. Also, in Albania self-publishing was never a phenomenon and all the forbidden literature was published only after the fall of the regime. This is the reason we believe it is interesting to distinguish many resemblances between the “forbidden” literatures, or in worst cases the “accused” literature of the chosen settings. In the case of Trebeshina and Bulgakov the parallelism of their life and the journey of their works towards the publication and readers are remarkably alike, they both never accepted the ideology, and they never wrote according to the official norm.

Particular attention is given to dissident literature, also because it represents the most emancipated and innovative part of the whole literary production, especially when compared to the dullness of propagandic literature. Modernist features, such as fragmentary narration, subjective perspective, and complex protagonists, sometime described as Antiheroes – all contrasted the idealized communist new world depicted in the official literature. The nonrealistic depiction of Socialist life and of the mythologization of history, especially of WWII, required pre-modernist artistic forms. “Socialist Realism somehow turned back to the Romantic tradition of myth creation, to create its own myths. Firstly, the myth of the socialist new man, someone who came from a completely different environment, as a propaganda inhabitant, the programmed man who had to unify in an archetype all the heroes. Secondly, the myth of perspective, expressed sometimes in the utopia for an ideal society. Thirdly, the myth of antifascism, the magnification of the war, heroism, and resistance.” (Sinani, Sh., 2010: f. 199-202) For example, Trebeshina’s prose exposes a reality of “the degradation of the myth”, in which the myth is ridiculed and nihilated, “drained from its essence”. (Isufaj, V., 2015: 62) Or we can say that the mythical imaginations and legends are used in a new meaning, a figurative one and the writer’s aim is not only retelling them but reusing them in completely new literary devises. (Mullahi, A., 2013: 321) Referentiality and neofunctionalization of the classical narratives, such as myths, religious stories, popular quotes from notable writers, as well as pastiche, the mixture of genres and the fluidity of art forms, are some of the Postmodernist features found in Bulgakov’s work that challenge every aspect of how literature challenges the power-structure. Even the Postmodern satire, irony and parody are used to ridicule the cultural and political climate of the time, as well as conformist and propagandic idealization.

##### **5. Thematic Similarities and Innovative Features: A Comparison of the Fantastic in the Prose Works of M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina**

The strong autobiographical elements included in the narratives of their literary works, or that dressed on their alter egos, are one of the most visible similarities between M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina’s works. They both had a conflictual relationship with the respective regimes and their literature was influenced by the contextual situation of their time, but their concern lied beyond the topic of human ‘degradation’ of their time, showing even greater worry over the future consequences in people’s morality and spirituality. Their refusal to write something acceptable, to reclaim their position as writers and to help their publication, is a sign of a conscious, firm rebellion. What is even more interesting, they both wrote letters to the dictators; these letters up to this day remain an act of courage and are important in biographical studies. (Bulgakov, M., 2016)

Their anti-conformist literature was characterized by both direct and discreet ideas against the system and its consequences both in the societal and cultural scene. The importance of their opus was strongly related to the context, but their works would not have been noticed if their aesthetics lacked imagination, originality, unique stylistics, innovative forms, modern features, experimentation

techniques etc.; all these features are in fact revealed exuberantly in their works. In short, the similarities between the opus of both writers, firstly regarding the ideas and secondly regarding their aesthetics, are being addressed in this analysis.

The main resembling features and ideas in “The Master and Margarita” (1976), “The white guard” (1925), “Fatal eggs” (1925), “Heart of a god” (1925) and in the notable works by Trebeshina, such as “Odin Mondvalsen” (1992), “Albanian song” (a novel in 5 volumes, 2001) “The Mekam” (“The teke”, 1994), “Golgotha’s path” (1994) and in the short stories by both writers, are remarkable. Some of the similarities we can briefly mention are the strong awareness of the moral crisis, the humanity of the New Man, the duality between the sacral past and the profane present, the modern and postmodern features of their prose, the question of the “genius madman”, absurdity, anti-conformism, the conflict between the writer and critics, the supernatural issue etc. In both their works there is a strong presence of the fantastic and the surreal, which is not only escapism, but also reflection, a way to deepen into one’s conscience and finally experience *catharsis*, through strong empathy for human beings.

### 5.1 The conscience topic displayed by fantastic features in Trebeshina’s prose works

Fantastic features are an important part of the prose on both writers, emphasizing the role of the supernatural in human life. The Fantastic is one of the most powerful Modernist features, that challenges the political reality, by exposing the futility and vanity of the idealized reality. It juxtaposes the venerated higher reality with the banality of Realism, and the importance of spiritual life over the vain materialist understanding of life, standing at the core of the ideological “new man”. In Bulgakov’s prose the existence of the otherworldly and the miraculous are presented as facts, whereas in Trebeshina’s works they express the need for an opening to a spiritual and religious dimension. In both cases the fantastic features do not participate in the narrative as entertainment, something very usual when the banal, massive literature uses the magical and the supernatural thematical frame. On the contrary, the fantastic through a sharp and masterful game of ambiguities, through the engagement of the reader’s imagination and intuition, emphasizes the contrast between a secular, materialistic perspective, and that of a spiritual life. The dualities that both writers use when they oppose the profane present to the sacral past, also stress this contrast, which is one of the most common characteristics of Postmodernist prose. Two worlds colliding while one might take over the other, is a duality that stands at the center of many postmodern works, one being the ordinary and the other the extraordinary, the supernatural. (McHale, B., 2004: 73)

Theoretically, the inclusion of the fantastic in one of the most challenging narrative schemes to achieve in prose, because it involves not only the combined elements of realistic and fantastic realms, but also a motivation behind such collision. Being considered as a subversive form, it harmonizes with the scope of the dissident literature, as “the dialogues between fantastic and realistic narrative modes often operates within individual texts, as the second attempts to repress and defuse the subversive thrust of the first”. (Jackson, R., 2003: 124)

The fantastic-real duality is based on the conventional nature of the fictional narrative, so is the implied reader’s belief in what the story considers as ‘truthful’ or ‘fantastic’ and not by comparing it to the nonfictional reality. The confrontation and the dualities are not always explicit, for example time and its cyclical nature is pattern that manifests the family’s damnation in the voluminous novel of 5 volumes, “Albanian song” by K. Trebeshina. Even in this novel with predominant features of Realism, the author finds a way to include the supernatural and totemic symbolism of the ancestors. The curse hanging upon the family since the beginning of the family is implicit and the reader is constrained to investigate while the narrative lines move forward. Eventually, the novel ends with the same image as it begins: a lonely woman walks with no direction with an infant in her arms, meaning that every other member of the family are dead. The story repeats itself, because it is part of the sacral time that the profane world of ideological materialism cannot undo.

In the short stories by Trebeshina, we notice the repetition of a central storyline, which creates

a pattern in his narrative structures: the protagonist experiencing a strong crisis from witnessing something horrible. We come to know this terrible cause step by step during the narrative, as the protagonist is unable to express anything after the shock, and because the plot is based on the combination of different perspectives, a technique that centralizes within the text subjectivity rather than objectivity. We know the crisis and its symptoms, but the cause remains hidden until the revealing moment in which the protagonist can rationalize over the traumatic event. Some of this shocking witnessing events are seeing the assassination of a child during the war by Albanians themselves, the many improvised courts that illegally gave death sentences to so many comrades, or the sexual humiliation which leads a mother and her daughter to kill themselves etc.

We perceive through the perspective of the character (who may also be the narrator, but not in every case) and because of his trauma, the world is often described as chaotic, misty, unclear, dark, he/she even does not remember what happened and with a blurred vision enters a realm which does not function in the same way as reality. It can be an old forest, a cave or a madhouse and it functions as a *heterotopia* in M. Foucault's terms. Foucault in the "Different spaces" chapter in "Aesthetics, Methods and Epistemology", refers by this term to the in between spaces, which in primitive or traditional societies are reserved for the sacred, privileged persons and rites, and in modern societies for psychiatric wards, prisons, theatres, cinemas etc. (Foucault, M., 1994: 178-179)

In "Odin Mondvalsen", Trebeshina's most innovative novel, the protagonist with the same name, speaks from a mental hospital, whose aim is not the rehabilitation of the patients, rather than their isolation. The novel speaks of policemen and investigators as frequently as of medical staff. In this novel the protagonist seeks oblivion, he wants to forget at all costs his past and whatever made him experience the existential trauma. His mental state is manifested in the unordered chapters and episodes of the novel, indicating a protagonist whose mental state has deteriorated because of some unknown trauma in the past. Only later do we understand that the protagonist has been subject to terrible psychological and physical tortures (chemical injections). It is thought-provoking noticing that if except for this novel, the trauma in most cases is not directly related to the character, but he/she was just a witness of a traumatic event that has happened to other people. In both cases, this is the perfect territory of the fantastic, the supernatural and the uncanny, when the characters (sometimes also narrators) display a troubled mental state and are unable to differentiate the real from the imaginary.

T. Todorov in his classic book "The Fantastic as a genre" states that it is precisely the ambiguity and uncertainty that create and sustain the fantastic. The ambiguity is sustained to the very end of the adventure: reality or a dream? Are we in the presence of the supernatural and the miraculous, or is it only an illusion? This brings us to the very heart of the fantastic. In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. "The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, or a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world remain as they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of the reality - but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us." (Todorov, T., 1975: 25) In such *heterotopia* of uncertain mental condition, the characters cannot distinguish the truth from the false, the supernatural from the imagination, the living from the dead.

Particularly in K. Trebeshina's short stories, when characters enter in such condition, we are presented with a 'misty' landscape, a setting in which time and space don't function as we expect, and every part of the narrative scheme indicated that we are entering a different, otherworldly realm. The hesitation is sometimes hidden in the specific phrases, locutions used, such as: "it seemed to me like...", "I believe...", "I have the feeling..." etc. The short story "Eagles abandoning the mountains" begins with equivocality expressed through phrases like: "It is said that...", "No one really saw it", "The word was spread that...", "It is possible that...", "As if between the worlds" etc. (Trebeshina, K., 2007: 43) The narration sustains the fantastic, as in most cases it is included as 'a story within the story', so the ambiguities can be sustained up to the end of the narration, because when ambiguity ends and



the real facts come out, the fantastic ceases to exist.

What happens during this *liminal* stage (Turner, V., 1969) is related to the conscience awakening and the evocation of this crucial topic in dissident literature. In most of Trebeshina's works, a ghost or predecessor appears to tell a story. These wanderers between worlds are an indicator of the living past that shouldn't be forgotten. These "confessions" come from the legendary past, up to the closer past, and the uncanny narrator is either the victim or a witness. Although the main character goes to the 'heterotopic' space to seek oblivion, he/she is forced to listen to another story, similar to the one he's hoping to become amnesic! This different 'time-place' seems at first as the perfect place for reflection and to seek absolute oblivion, but the past is filled with similar stories that question humanity, which finds its unique ways to communicate.

In the short story "Endless time" a partisan witnesses the murder of a child by his commandant's order and after that he withdraws in the woods, completely traumatized, and there he encounters an old man. He calls himself as "the man of the tree" (he's depicted with a long green beard), and as he begins to tell the story, he mentions that "*Now that we are in these woods, let's act according to their rules*". (Trebeshina, K., 1992: 11) He confesses to the first level narrator (the protagonist) that he has heard the mother's scream, because it happened two hundred years ago, at the time of the Turkish invasion when a janissary killed a little boy. And so on, another old man appears and tells an even older story using the same plot. The morbidity intensifies with each story and when the dreadful details get to the climax, the metaphysical questions arise.

The way to redemption and reconciliation of the ones who saw everything but did nothing, is conditioned by listening, by painfully facing their own past and their ancestral past. While the protagonist exits the cave, he completes the "rite of passage", and the liminal stage comes to its end. Catharsis comes through acceptance and reconciliation.

*"I don't feel the need to pray anything to Him, who stands beyond our understanding, because if He exists somewhere I am a part of Him, the part of the whole doesn't need to pray to itself. Now, from this ethereal being, I am passing to the unconscious inherency, who maybe exists in its unshaped form. This is the way for everyone! Anyway, mine is the most difficult... Much more difficult than the way of those who are being sent in front of a firing squad."* (Trebeshina, K., 1992: 41)

## 5.2 *The supernatural and the phantasmagoric opposing the materialist ideology in Bulgakov's "The Master and Margarita"*

The world as shown in "The Master and Margarita" is a manifestation of Grand Inquisitor's from "The Brothers Karamazov" quote "If God doesn't exist, everything is permitted", meaning that the belief in the immortality of the soul keeps the human life and our world from falling into chaos. (Kibalnik, Sergei A., 2016: 166) The exploits of Woland and his retinue unveil the usual human weakness for vanity and vices and through a series of masterful scenes and dialogues full of fantasy, magic and grotesque. In the materialist and secular new world people do not believe in anything supernatural, nor God, nor Devil. They think they can create their own fate, they also think that they can govern the world, so they have become self-contained.

*"But here is a question that is troubling me: if there is no God, then, one may ask, who governs human life and, in general, the whole order of things on earth?' 'Man governs it himself,' Homeless angrily hastened to reply to this admittedly none-too-clear question. 'Pardon me,' the stranger responded gently, 'but in order to govern, one needs, after all, to have a precise plan for certain, at least somewhat decent, length of time. Allow me to ask you, then, how man can govern, if he is not only deprived of the opportunity of making a plan for at least some ridiculously short period - well, say, a thousand years - but cannot even vouch for his own tomorrow?'"* (Bulgakov, M., 1997: 25)

The ontological discussion is embodied in the whole novel, in both main storylines. According to the materialistic worldview of the Muscovites the human being is only matter, and they hope that

such a being reduced into a mere biochemical combination, can come with a plan for the world. Ivan Bezdomnij's naïve explanation is ridiculed while at the same time Woland's storytelling is presented as accurate. Any interpretation is put aside, as Woland presents the existence of the supernatural as real, even the tone of the second storyline (The novel for Pontius Pilate) changes, and we immediately understand the respect for the sacral. We come to the core structural basis of the novel, which is the *duality*, that of the world and human beings.

Many dualities sustain the structure of the novel, the old world and the new one, the sacral and the profane, the light and the shadow, the society and the other/the excommunicated, the realistic and the fantastic etc. In Bulgakov's novel what is generally considered as supernatural is considered as normal. Even though Ivan is diagnosed as schizophrenic, we know that his experience of the otherworldly did happen. For the narrator the existence of the supernatural is substantial, he emphasizes this through many dialogues, but mostly by narrating the fantastic and the supernatural. He uses all his knowledge in esotericism to create grandiose scenes, such as Margarita's transformation and witchcraft, or the Satan's ball on the Full Moon. The Moon seems to initiate all these events, and it becomes the secret torturer of the witnesses, symbolizing the a. conscience and anguish in the case of Pontius Pilate, b. traces of the contact with another realm, forbidden to people.

M. Eliade differentiates order and chaos, as the basic duality of the world: "There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous. Nor is this all. For religious man, this spatial nonhomogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space' that is sacred-the only real and really existing space and another space, the formless expanse surrounding it." Eliade, M., 1959: 20). This heterogenous space gives existence to the uncanny, which indirectly exposes the falsity of the atheist communist ideology.

In this intermediate space Bulgakov places the most unusual events, where the fantastic is created by the effect of the supernatural, unfolding in front of us the glorious Ruler of Darkness and at the same time the modest and humble philosopher, Yeshua Ha-Nozri. At this intermediate zone, many unexplained phenomena happen. The uncanny explored so vigorously in the novel can be explained only by its own laws. T. Todorov explains the nature of this 'zone':

*"In addition to such cases as these, where we find ourselves – in order to explain the fantastic – there also exist the uncanny in the pure state. In works that belong to this genre, events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected and thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar." (Todorov, T., 1975: 46)*

The explanations given in the Epilogue of the novel for the uncanny events, considering them as speculations, opposes the materialistic and the religious worldviews, resulting in the Muscovites inability to accept any other way of thinking besides the ideological one. The two worlds don't meet, and the characters who have experienced the power of the uncanny manifest their otherworldly experience in the power that the moon as an esoteric symbol has upon them. Ivan Bezdomnij on contemporary Moscow and Pontius Pilate in old Jerusalem experience of the supernatural is reflected in the moon, which becomes the most important symbol of esoteric forces. Pontius Pilate experiences this beyond time, condemned until his redemption.

Fantastic emphasizes the contrast between the profane contemporary time and the sacral past, in which the forces of the darkness are considered more interesting than the materialistic new soviet man. The technical innovation does not impress much Woland, only Behemoth is sometimes surprised, as his aim is to investigate how people have changed internally. What impresses Woland is the thread of the lost balance between the universal forces, as darkness and light according to the novel are part of each other.

Changing the dominance of the narrative of the crucifixion of Christ for Pontius Pilate, is a

unique way Bulgakov uses to factorize the story for a completely different function than the Biblical. The novel written by the Master focuses on Pontius Pilate, whose contact with Yeshua, has changed him. Christ only appears once in this novel, all we read afterwards are the actions and feelings of Pilate. The *conscience issue* develops into the second storyline, particularly after the crucifixion. Pilate represents a crossroad where the forces of light and darkness meet, he stands at this crossroad and like every other person tries to understand his stand.

The ambivalence between legal and moral laws confront when he has to decide Yeshua's fate, he is condemned with eternal remorse exactly because he was conscious of the Yeshua's innocence, but decided his conviction to avoid personal damage. Even though he is the highest authority in power, he is a mere symbolic cohesive figure of governance and order. "The specter of Tiberius illustrates the intervention of the law that bars Pilate's desire while also revealing the impotency behind this law." (Cason, R. J. S., 2013: 213) Pilate displays the universal human dilemmas, becoming the archetype of the character who struggles by the risk of alienation. (This also speaks to the first storyline.) His transformation happens also because he feels in Yeshua the presence of the otherworldly, the sacral. The Procurator, the soldier, who fought in the Valley of the Virgins turns into a Pilate whose conscience tells him that the truth and righteousness are worth fighting for.

*"How can you, with your intelligence, allow yourself to think that, for the sake of a man who has committed a crime against Caesar, the procurator of Judea would ruin his career? 'Yes, yes...' Pilate moaned and sobbed in his sleep. Of course he would. In the morning he still would not, but now, at night, after weighing everything, he would agree to ruin it. He would do everything to save the decidedly innocent, mad dreamer and healer from execution!" (Bulgakov, M., 1997: 328)*

Undoubtedly, Pilate's realization of truth and his conscience issues make him an exception in the novel, his transformation is exemplary, especially because it contrasts with the materialistic greed ruling in contemporary Moscow. (De la Cour, A., 2005: 181) The role of the supernatural and the fantastic is the realization that the ideological influence in 20<sup>th</sup> century Moscow had paralyzed thought and imagination. The history of difficult publication and the censorship of the first publication (Lovell, S.: 30) of the "Master and Margarita" shows how provocative and threatening this novel was considered.

Another example that explores the implication of literature in resisting political oppression and shaping ethical discourse is based on Trebeshina's short stories, in which morality and religiosity are revealed in a story narrated by complex devices and modernist techniques. The short story "The witchers" is narrated through a modernist, complex narrative scheme, in which we detect three time references in the text: a. the contemporary time (and storyline), in which the first level narrator is dealing with an unjust trial pressured by an "infernal" bureaucracy and social unfairness; b. the story within the story, narrated by a second level narrator referring to the XVI century, more specifically to the witch hunt and condemnation of the progressives while considering them as heretics; c. without a storyline, the Biblical time enters the narrative scheme through allusions, references, parallels and profound digressions. The Fantastic is created through the unreal, dualistic realities, and through the uncertainties that the protagonist faces because of the unjust trial's verdict. In this narrative line the Fantastic is the central and parallels the main story with the Inquisition, by narrating over innocent people whose position in the power structure determines their fate: moral and intellectual superiority is the reason behind such condemnation. The core motif of the short story is the power generating itself while revealing its violent nature.

*"Thus, also the people, with their desire for eternity, find their power in the cyclical explosions of hysteria. [...] Hysteria lies in our nature!... The powerful ones reveal it through the crimes they do to conserve their actual power, while poor people is reminded from time to time that power exists, through collective hysteria." (Trebeshina, K., 2007: 193-194)*

Ethical and moral compass in dictatorial regimes are not actually rationalized, and even logic

ceases to exist, as the system generates the morality through the ideological forging. It is not only the human alienation during such regimes that concerns Trebeshina, but also the consequences of this alienation in the future. He is even more interested in the morality of the future humanity. The ideological morality tried to replace the traditional beliefs with the elevation of the dictator's figure. While according to the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, "Reason, due to its formalization, is unable to deliver any necessary model, but its advantage lies its accuracy, compared to the false ideology." (Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, Th., 2001: 78) The aid of literature is filling this gap that pure reason cannot deliver, especially after religions were forbidden: through narrating stories that reflect on the ethical dilemmas and the morality of the modern humanity.

5.3 *Otherness and the genius madman as central themes, indicating the fate of the artist in totalitarian regimes in Bulgakov's and Trebeshina's works.*

Another issue present in the prose of M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina is the question of the madness, we meet their main their alter ego protagonists in madhouses. Odin Mondvalsen created a strange name for himself, taken from the Norse mythology, symbolically meaning his need to feel far from his own reality. The Master does not remember his name as many other unimportant things of his life. They try to create a new identity and begin living by forgetting the past, so their old names are not important anymore. In both cases the characters feel that they don't belong to their place and society. The madness is considered as something that comes from the special knowledge that the characters have on things that might be forbidden for humans. Their contacts with the world of the absolute, the metaphysical understanding of the world and life go beyond the limits of human perception. This is why they become different from the others, sometimes even considered as cursed, and at the same time this is a blessing, the gift of geniality. The exclusion of the intellectual, the one who doesn't conform to the dictatorship, speaks about the relations of the individual with the society during the totalitarian regimes, no wonder these characters are the writers' alter egos. M. Foucault while describing the historical construction of the holy fool in the "History of Madness", differentiates from other types of madness a very specific one which sometimes might be part of a religious phenomenon, of a practice. This type of madness was even considered as a gift for the chosen. Surely it did not bring good fortune Trebeshina's and Bulgakov's characters, as we understand and sympathize with their deep suffering and isolation. But in terms of wisdom, they are blessed with a special gift, with knowledge beyond understanding for the average person.

*"This is the inaccessible, fearsome knowledge that the madman, in his innocent foolishness, already possesses. While men of reason and wisdom see only fragmentary figures that are all the more frightening for their incompleteness, the madman sees a whole, unbroken sphere." (Foucault, M., 2006: 19)*

The Russian culture is well known for the archetype of the holy fool (*yurodivi*) since medieval times, for which the above mentioned quote by M. Foucault is more accurate than in contemporary times. In literature, the holy fool had its own glorious characters, such as in Dostoevsky's "Idiot" or lately Vodollazskin's "Laurus" etc., or even in Tarkovsky's cinematography.

But in Trebeshina's case the preexisting literary material related to this topic was weak and unimportant. He may be the first Albanian writer to seriously transform this topic in a literary important subject. He engages absurdity in his narrative, as the character falls in love in a madhouse and find happiness in it, but when he gets out his girlfriend gets killed and he gets depressed. The reality seems reversed from what we would normally expect, because this is how the author perceived dictatorship, as an upside-down world, as absurd as a madhouse. The real madhouse he wants to depict is the totalitarian Albania during communist regime. Also, by composing a literary work with mixed chapters that don't respect any continuity or conventional logic, he also breaks the illusion of the seriousness and authority in which the fictional is based. (Plasari, A., 1993: 59)

The fact that *the other* (*the artist, the thinker, the intellectual*) is isolated and not accepted, speaks about the collective conscience, whose guilt is gloomily exposed. Confronting its own darkness is difficult for a society whose free thought was euthanized by ideology. The fear of confronting the past identifies with the lack of moral courage. The risk of the alienation is more threatening than facing the truth, Trebeshina's prose does not accept oblivion, only catharsis; Bulgakov opens the door to the supernatural through his fantastic narrative, becoming the quintessential "modernist" writer (Bethea, D. M., 1989 :187), and the process of reading becomes an opportunity for transformation through catharsis, reconciliation, and redemption.

## 6. Conclusions and Future Research

The subversive literature cannot be understood without the contextual background, which as related in this paper, reveals the center-periphery dynamics, and enlightens the trajectory of influences, from Soviet Union into the Albanian literature. Through analyzing how Socialist Realism happened in both respective literatures, we explored the political background and the ideological implications of this phenomena. The comparison also indicates some differences, such as the longitude of the consecration of Socialist Realism, the differences in secularism and religiosity, and the relationship between tradition and modernity in these two literary systems.

Paralleling and comparing the role of dissident literature in the correct representation of the reality, in cultures where ideology concealed everything through idealizing and mythologizing the actual reality; reveals the added value of the forbidden literatures, both in Albania and USSR. The relation with falsity and social hypocrisy is central in M. Bulgakov's and K. Trebeshina's works, producing a specific narrative mode, dominated by satire, irony, and black humor. By analyzing the ethical role of forbidden literature, we give credit to literature beyond its role as art itself.

Besides this contribution to the unideologization of literature and of society in general, the works of dissident literature display the most innovative literary devices, becoming the etalon of modernity and innovation. This paper contributes to the under researched relationship between Albanian Literature and World Literature in general, and more specifically to the USSR and Albanian literature. The frame of dissident literature and its stand against the conformist literature, used as propaganda, is the core approach of this paper. By analyzing how the Modernist and Postmodernist literary features emerged firstly and most foremost into the works of forbidden authors, reveals the strong aesthetic contribution of these writers, as well as the hidden link of personal morality, ethical values and integrity and literary estimation.

By examining the M. Bulgakov and K. Trebeshina's relation with the conscience, is relevant to understanding how the collective conscience was deformed by the ideological inclination of every art in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century USSR and Albania. The fact that both writers vividly depict fantastic imagery and create imaginary realities opposing the flatness and banality of reality, speaks of their risk of alienation and through understanding the reason behind escapism (which as investigated above does not result as such), we comprehend the inner struggles of the artists and intellectuals in the context of the respective communist regimes.

Alienation and otherness as central themes are studied while comparing how relevant characters in both writer's literary works relate to society. Enlightening the true nature of success, happiness and religiosity happens through these characters that stand out and oppose through their very existence the popular ideologized worldview. The concept of genius-madman enlightens the core of the dialectics, the estrangement of what is considered as individuality and genuine talent, is threatening to every society, even beyond the contextual frame of the communist dictatorships. Even in contemporary reality the extermination of individuality is a threat to people's freedom and creative abilities.

This article's contribution focuses on studying the ethical importance of dissident literature, in times that devaluated human dignity and tried to suppress any kind of individuality. Through this literature we witness the abilities of remarkable artists to not only rebel against the normative,

standard art, but also surpass it up to the recanonization of literature, based on the new standard of modernism and innovative literature they created. Finally, this utilization and evaluation of subversive literature, shows the great potential of the field of studies, in comparative literature, Modernism and Postmodernism studies, and interdisciplinary approaches towards fiction and literature in general.

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