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## THE CONCEPTUAL VALUE SET IN YUGOSLAV LITERATURE (1945-1952)

*Abstract.* – The establishment of the communist model in the new Yugoslav state implied the creation of a *new* order in a culture in which culture/art, and in that sense literature, was perceived as an instrument of *the class struggle* and the *construction of the new man*. In this context, the paper aims to explore the selection of conceptual values in the Yugoslav literature that aimed to respond to such tendencies. It focuses on the collective categorization of what is *valuable* and what is *non-valuable* in the literature field. Having in mind that the categorization *valuable / non-valuable* in social frameworks is a fluid and very dynamic category, which is closely dependent on the context, the article shows the basic postulates on which the Yugoslav / Macedonian literature was established in the period before and after the conflict with the Information Bureau (Cominform).

*Key words.* – Yugoslav literature, writers, realism, modernism.

Literature and publishing activity in general had great significance for the new Yugoslav state. Knowing the meaning and power of the word / book in the education of the broad masses of the people, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) paid special attention to writers, i.e. to their work, which was perceived as an important link in the enlightenment of the people, and “the development of taste and the need for true art from the realm of beauty and entertainment literature”.

As an instrument for establishing the desired ideology, literature, like other fields related to culture and art, was oriented towards maintaining the collective categorization of what is *valuable* and what is *non-valuable* for

public distribution.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the categorization *valuable / non-valuable* in social frameworks is a fluid and very dynamic category, which is closely dependent on the context. In this sense, the basic postulates on which the Yugoslav / Macedonian literature was established in the period before and after the conflict with the Information Bureau will be shown.

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One of the key aspects of understanding the Yugoslav period in the first years after World War II, until the clash with the Information Bureau (1948), is the closeness of the state to the USSR. This closeness - the Yugoslav-Soviet relations and connections in every field of state structure and social life, in the field of culture, paved the way that Yugoslav literature would follow as well.

In conditions of centralism and complete control of all fields of social life, in the period from November 17-19, 1946, the First Congress of the Association of Writers of Yugoslavia<sup>2</sup> was held, which was perceived as "one of the most significant cultural events in the life of our people". It was also attended by six representatives from Macedonia, the writers: Jovan Boškovski, Blaže Koneski, Vlado Maleski - Tale, Venko Markovski, Aco Šopov and Risto Krle.<sup>3</sup> At the congress, the direction in which Yugoslav literature will act was established. It is socialist realism, to whose ideals, including Marxist teaching, the entire social and cultural life was subordinated. In their speeches, the participants of the Congress emphasized the "new social role of writers" and the need to adapt their work to the specific circumstances. That adjustment implied a creative approach, which had the task of affirming socialist social relations and the choice of specific motives, themes and symbols that would be understandable to the majority of people.<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, the article "On our literature, its position and its tasks today" („О нашој књижевности, њеном положају и њеним задацима да-

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<sup>1</sup> About the basic principles on which the cultural policy in the new Yugoslavia was built, see: Поповска 2021, 25-38.

<sup>2</sup> The Association of Writers of Yugoslavia was considered the most important league in the country: "politically the most important because it directly addresses the masses." See: Архив Југославије (further: АЈ), 507, VIII, II/5-(1-103)(К-26). ЦК КПЈ, Комисија за агитацију и пропаганду, „Записник са састанка Комисије за агитацију и пропаганду по питању пропаганде у иностранству, културно-масовног рада, приватне издавачке делатности и др.", Београд, 12.12. 1947.

<sup>3</sup> *Prvi Kongres Saveza književnika Jugoslavije*, 17-19. IX. 1946, Beograd (1946), 192-202.

<sup>4</sup> Prekić 2019, 864.

нас”) was also significant, in which Radovan Zogović, then a member of the Agitprop of the CPY Central Committee, in charge of culture, pointed out that the existence of literature aims to artistically broadly reflect “our modern history” and celebrate “our society and modern man”.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of literature and writers for the Yugoslav society was highlighted by Marshal Josip Broz Tito. At the meeting with the writers, held immediately after the Congress,<sup>6</sup> addressing the attendees, he underlined: “...it is not only about the writers in the artistic and literary form perpetuating the great historical epoch through which we have passed and through which we are still passing, but also about the fact that the writers with their works should work on forming the character of the new people. In the past, many people did not agree with influencing the direction of literary creation. And I am also opposed to molding that is, the uniformity of literature. A writer should have full freedom of development”.<sup>7</sup>

However, the leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the president of the new Yugoslav state saw “freedom” in writing in what the socialist society perceived as *normal* and the only *right* thing. This is confirmed by his further words: “...you will certainly agree with me, I am against writing harmful things under the pretext of defending the freedom of literary creation. For example, I cannot agree with what is said in the Western democracies about the seemingly full freedom of the press. What is that “full” freedom of the press and what does it consist of? It consists in the fact that everyone is allowed to write even the biggest lies and slanders, under the pretext that it is freedom and that it is moral. From our point of view it is abnormal and such freedom is harmful”.<sup>8</sup>

At the meeting, Josip Broz Tito emphasized the need for *progressive* writing, in the context of creating “literary documents about what is happening today”. From his words, it can be concluded that among the writers there was also talk about the impossibility of processing the heroic past and the present, due to the proximity of the events, but Tito, in his insistence on writing about the socialist reality, encouraged them with the words: “that’s why, if your works would not be processed artistically as they should be, no one will complain.” Pointing out to writers that their work cannot be treated like

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<sup>5</sup> Šarić 2010, 388.

<sup>6</sup> Музеј историје Југославије, Архив Јосип Броз Тито, КМЈ, II-2/37., Извештај Телеграфске агенције нове Југославије о пријему књижевника код Маршала Југославије Јосипа Броза Тита, Београд, 19 новембра 1946.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

other professions because of its importance, Marshall goes on to say: „I wanted to point out to you one more thing, very important in literature. It is the highlighting of the brotherhood and unity of our peoples. Wherever it is convenient, it should be underlined and it will never be unnecessary. It is very important and it is absolutely necessary in every way. Today we are forming the citizens of a new Yugoslavia. And in that matter, only administrative measures are not sufficient, nor efficient enough. There are still people with the remnants of impatience, many do not see what kind of work we are building...”.<sup>9</sup>

Through the words of Tito as the most influential figure in the state,<sup>10</sup> as well as the reports of leading party cadres (in various party and state positions) who played a significant role in social and political life, the work of literature was channeled in Yugoslavia, and in that context in Macedonia as well. The clear instructions about the direction in which writers should go as creators of cultural / literary creation, influenced the creation of literary patterns that are perceived as valuable to be left to the next generations.

Hence, in the specific period, socialist realism has a privileged position, whose doctrine focuses on social reality and its reproduction in the spirit of the ideology of the CPY. It is the model that was desired in social frameworks and that was presented as the only possible choice. His protagonists were writers – representatives of social literature, writers emerging from war and revolution, as well as representatives of traditional prose and poetry. According to the “Stalinist model”, works “national in form” were allowed, only if they were socialist in content.<sup>11</sup>

Contrary to this, the creation that did not satisfy the criteria of the party line was under the attack of political criticism. In this sense: expressionism, modernism and surrealism were sharply criticized trends in literature and in art in general.<sup>12</sup> Their protagonists were considered ideological opponents who representing the “negative” direction in literature.

The attitude towards socialist realism in Yugoslav cultural production, and in that sense in literature, began to change towards the end of 1949, when

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Tito was the personification and symbol of the state and its organization. See more: Brkljačić 2003, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Šarić 2010, 394.

<sup>12</sup> The crime novel, which was perceived as a typical product of bourgeois society, was considered ideologically unsuitable. Therefore, this type of creativity is absent in domestic production during this period. See more: Uzelac 2015, 27-28.

all sociopolitical, but also cultural and arts forces were aimed at moving away from the Stalinist model and reaffirming Marxist-Leninist principles.

The Second Congress of Writers of Yugoslavia was held in Zagreb, from December 26-29, 1949. A speech with a political tone was given by the Croatian president at the time and high representative of the party, Vladimir Bakarić, who demanded from the writers: “revealing the truth and proving the advantage of the Yugoslav socialist system compared to the Soviet one”.<sup>13</sup> The essays presented on this occasion marked the beginning of a public struggle for freedom in creativity, a struggle for its liberation from literary pragmatism and utilitarianism. The Croatian writer Petar Šegedin, for example, in his essay “About our criticism” („О нашој критици“), quoted the words of Edvard Kardelj that *scientific production is not an addition to the state structure*, concluding that it is not literature either.<sup>14</sup>

The literary utilitarianism of the Stalinist type was put to an end at the third Congress of the Association of Writers of Yugoslavia,<sup>15</sup> which took place in Ljubljana from October 5-7, 1952. Particularly noticeable was Miroslav Krleža's essay - “About freedom of culture” („О слободи културе“), in which he treats ironical socialist realism as a poetic and idea, and then referred to the illogicality of Stalin's conception of writers as “engineers of the soul”.<sup>16</sup> His exposition marks the decisive intersection with the rigid canons in the culture. This is a period when the process of liberalization and turning towards *modernism* begins in the country, but also in art, and in that sense in literature, as well.

The change of attitudes in the context of literature is also noticeable among the party/official ideologues who appeared as messengers of *the truth*. Thus, Milovan Đilas, as secretary of the Central Committee of the CPY, in 1952, speaking about the position of writers in *our society*, said, among other things: “Our Party and State understood the full importance of literature for the cultural elevation of our peoples and consequently took care of creating a better social position of our writers. They do that even today when, in the process of our general democratization, they allow the writers to solve the basic questions about their literary work and life by themselves through their professional organizations. The position of writers in our society is shown to

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<sup>13</sup> Peković 2012, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Peruško 2015, 20. Available at: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/171480>

<sup>15</sup> „Treći Kongres Saveza književnika, 5-7. X. 1952, Ljubljana”. *Književnost* (1952), 207-213. At this Congress, a revision of the previous Statute of the Union was made and it was unanimously accepted.

<sup>16</sup> Peruško 2015, 20.

us, in a light that is unique in the world, and it is only up to us, writers, not live up to the trust that our socialist social community so widely and unequivocally shows us.”<sup>17</sup>

The previous clearly shows that analogous to the trust (opportunities) given to writers within the socialist social community, it is expected of them to have a *responsible* approach to their production, i.e. to create works that correlate with the demands of Yugoslav society.

### LITERARY POLEMICS ON THE RELATION “MODERNISM – REALISM”

The end of the unquestioning acceptance of the Soviet literary model is a period in which the question arises for writers and cultural policy in general: What should replace 'socialist realism'? In essence, the writers did not aim at an explicit rejection of 'partijnost'<sup>18</sup> in literature. Prominent Croatian writer Petar Šegedin, for example, believed that the principle of *partijnost* should be refined with “human sense”, an expression that originated from Marx. The expression *human sense*, according to him, introduced *new qualities* into the work itself, and therefore allowed for *some surprise*. According to Dušan Bošković, “Šegedin did not use words recklessly to describe the individual's attitude towards the work of art, his output on the receptive consciousness. He implicitly contested the mimetic interpretation of the relationship between art and so-called reality. Namely, the theory of reflection does not allow surprises in the work of art, or in general in the creation / production of the human spirit: the real surprises, if there are any, are found in *reality*. Accordingly, to say that „the work of art is a surprise implies that it is its own reality.”<sup>19</sup> Šegedin hinted that talent is a human quality that cannot be acquired by belonging to a political party or a political-ideological declaration.

Among the Yugoslav writers there were also speeches in the spirit of the so-called „Kharkiv line”,<sup>20</sup> who considered that the role of literature is of

<sup>17</sup> АЈ., 507-VIII, II/2-b-(1-84) (К-4). Милован Ђилас, секретар ЦК КПЈ, „Положај књижевника у нашем друштву и стање домаће савремене књиже”, Београд, 1952.

<sup>18</sup> The term “partijnost” in literature denoted socialist realism. See: Šarić 2010, 388.

<sup>19</sup> Bošković 2011, 128.

<sup>20</sup> In 1930, the Second Conference of the International Association of Revolutionary Writers was held in Kharkiv. The writers viewed literature, among other, „as an instrument in the class struggle”. A special resolution on proletarian and revolutionary literature in the Balkan countries was also adopted at this Conference. See more: „Sukob na ljevici”. Leksikografski Zavod Miroslav Krleža.

“tremendous importance” for the development of socialism and that its importance derives from the role it has in “the formation of human consciousness.” The polemics<sup>21</sup> that developed afterwards were between: the creation of “new qualities”, i.e., the understanding of art as a *creation* on the one hand and “the formation of human consciousness”, that is, art as a *tool of construction*, on the other hand. On these polemics, Šegedin emphasized the following: “Research needs freedom, which includes the possibility of delusion.”<sup>22</sup> Serbian writer Vladan Desnica also showed an opposing attitude towards those who defend the idea of a synthesis of art and politics. He emphasized the need to separate literature from applied literature. The idea was to enable freedom in literary creation, even at the price of accepting the need for applied literature. According to him, in this way: “confrontations and struggles would cease, all practical, pragmatic, utilitarian and similar tendencies would be satisfied, applied literature could be recognized with full importance and even superiority over the other, and the other would get her humble but undisputed place under the sun.”<sup>23</sup>

The previous shows the way in which *the modernists* tried to gain their place in the sphere of Yugoslav literature.

We find similar thoughts among Macedonian writers - *modernists*. Namely, the emergence of *modernism* encountered a strong resistance, which was manifested through numerous polemical and opposing viewpoints which were mainly due to the new way of valuing Macedonian literature. Although the conflict took place on an identical ideological and philosophical-aesthetic basis, within its framework the positions were divided: some of them (Dimitar Mirčev, Georgi Stardelov, Aco Šopov, Slavko Janevski, etc.) defended realism at all costs, while others (Dimitar Solev, Milan Gjurčinov, Jovan Boškovski, Vlado Maleski,<sup>24</sup> etc.) pointed out that “literature has always been and should be *realistic*, but in a completely new time it cannot be only *realistic* (Solev), because the new time requires reality to be expressed and interpreted in many different ways, most of which do not have to be - *realistic*.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The ideological clash of the literary left began in 1928. See more: Милорадовић 2012, 100; Idem 2011, 69-84.

<sup>22</sup> Bošković 2011, 129.

<sup>23</sup> Desnica 1952, according to Bošković 2011, 133.

<sup>24</sup> According to Gjurčinov, Vlado Maleski had a moderately modern aesthetic orientation. See: Ѓурчинов 2015, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 64-65. Gjurčinov states that in the new polarization, Blaze Koneski, who did not belong to any literary block, had his own neutral position.

Dimitar Solev, in 1951, expressed his attitude towards changes on a literary level, especially in the context of the existing *fear* among writers of the *new* in literature, with the words: "For literature, any -ism is more fruitful than any primitivism."<sup>26</sup> Somewhat later, in 1954, Milan Gjurchinov, in the text "Marginalia of a topic: new" („Маргиналии на тема: ново"), published in the magazine "Mlada literatura", expressing his attitude towards the political oppositions that were an obstacle to the implementation of changes, underlined: "Art must be true to itself. It is nobody's maid."<sup>27</sup>

The "battle of opinions" between the Macedonian *realists* and *modernists* was also conducted within the Association of Writers of Macedonia,<sup>28</sup> which was the reason for the Association's management to make a decision to stop publication of the literary journal "Nov Den".<sup>29</sup> Namely, it was considered that his publish assumed "some clearly defined and more concretely established *official* line of the Association on the issues of literary creativity at us, a line that should be accepted by all members", which in the specific circumstances of constant mutual controversy among writers, was seen as a "danger of certain purely subjective opinions on this or that question ascribing some official importance to themselves".<sup>30</sup> In relation to the above, in the Report on the work of the Association and the Management from IV to V annual meeting, which was submitted by the secretary of the Association, Jovan Boškovski, it is said: "Starting from the fact that such a struggle of opinions exists within the Association, as well as from the fact that a series of differences and inconsistencies in tastes and evaluations have already been clearly expressed in our practice so far, knowing that the existence of such an official publication can become a brake in that struggle, the Management of the Association took the position that the journal should not be its official spokesman, and that the initiative for publishing journals should be left to the members themselves, and the journals should become independent, free tribunes in which all controversial issues, conflicting views and evaluations will find a place, and of course with the sole aim of results in new develop-

<sup>26</sup> It refers to Western European -isms. Ѓурчинов 2015b, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Урошевиќ 2018, <http://stephanos.ru>.

<sup>28</sup> *The Association of Macedonian Writers* was established on February 13, 1947. The first president was Blaze Koneski.

<sup>29</sup> The journal "Nov den" began to be published in 1945, as a publication of the Association of Artists, Scientists and Journalists from Macedonia, and in 1947 it became a publication of the Association of Macedonian Writers. This journal existed until 1950, and already in 1951 its "successor" became the journal "Sovremenik".

<sup>30</sup> "Од Редакцијата". *Современост*, април 1951, 1-2.



ment creative successes for our literature and to be in line and in step with the development of our socialist fatherland.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus, instead of “Nov Den”, the journal “Sovremenost” began to be published. Already in the first issue, the Editorial Board took the position that when publishing the works, it will be guided by the “principle of maximum possible tolerance”, i.e. it will also publish “those works for which there is no full agreement with their conceptual positions, i.e. artistic method and expressive forms “. The editors, in such cases, have reserved the right to take a critical (public) stance on what they have published. According to the editorial policy, only papers that promoted “an openly hostile article against the interests of our peoples, against socialism” or that did not contain artistic, scientific or journalistic qualities that were necessary to satisfy the criterion of the editorial Board.<sup>32</sup>

The debates between, the writers continued, *the struggle* was now also being waged within the journals, around which the contributors began to group. In 1953, the journal “Razgledi” began to be published, first as a part of “Nova Makedonija”, and since 1955 as an independent journal. The raging debates and confrontations on the “modernism-realism” relationship on the Macedonian literary scene were mainly reduced to the fact that the protagonists of realism presented their theses in the journal “Sovremenost”, while the protagonists of modernism responded to them and presented their views in “Razgledi”.<sup>33</sup>

The accusations that the realists directed to the modernists within the writings in the journals were that they are: ideologically dubious and subversive, “lured by foreign pro-Western influences”, that they are a “sabotage conspiracy group” that denied everything that had been created until then, in socialism. The modernists, on the other hand, considered that their competitors are anachronistic and showed an “absence of hearing about new poetic values and possibilities.”<sup>34</sup>

The Macedonian modernists were not a homogeneous and strictly differentiated group in a theoretical or ideological sense.<sup>35</sup> They wanted to make transformations inside the field where they worked, in terms of a different conception in literature, but their efforts and actions did not at all touch

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<sup>31</sup> “Годишно собрание на Друштвото на писателите”. *Современост*, јуни 1951, 76.

<sup>32</sup> “Од Редакцијата”. *Современост*, април 1951, 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Ѓурчинов 2015а, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Ѓурчинов 2014, available at: <https://okno.mk/node/36509>

<sup>35</sup> Ѓурчинов 2015b, 68.

the political (socialist) reality itself. On the contrary, they (just like the realists) avoided a critical approach to reality in their works, i.e., they never opened or problematized any less pleasant topic/issues, because they were an integral part of that reality. As Zlatko Kramarić states, in the Yugoslav combination of repression and participation, it was not easy for intellectuals to find adequate answers, which made it impossible for any resistance to exist in “society”. According to Kramarić, this assessment applies more or less to all Yugoslav intellectuals.<sup>36</sup>

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The foregoing identifies the socially established values in Yugoslav / Macedonian literature, between 1945 and 1952, as well as the way of their actualization and symbolic interaction in the social frameworks. The set of values in literature, which was current in the first years after the World War II, under the influence of external determinants, i.e. after the Tito-Stalin clash (1948), changes its logic and receives different interpretations, which affects further articulations of value. In this sense, there were also debates, which were conducted among writers, after the conflict with the Information Bureau, about what is the right way of expressing socialist ideas. As we can see, the set of values in Yugoslav literature in the researched period is a dynamic category, closely dependent on broader historical, cultural, economic and political tendencies.

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<sup>36</sup> Kramarić 2017, 143-144.

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