

“Odin Mondvalsen”, a dystopia

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Abstract

Kasëm Trebeshina’s “Odin Mondvalsen – A love story” (1956) is one of the most important novel written under the dictatorship in Albania. The reality in totalitarian regimes experienced by the mankind constitutes a challenge in artistic discourse. Trebeshina is looking for a language and a style of his own, to truthfully transpose the human catastrophe. Following, it is shown how the author organizes the figures of literary speech, to create esthetic distance and the illusion of real life. Trebeshina’s concern has to do with the creation of a metaphysic world. The cause is alienism, madness, atrocity of the man towards the political power, unexplored motives for the time and against the trend with the motives of official literature. The analysis of the character showed that “Odin Mondvalsen” conveys a political, moral and psychological meaning for the time when the work was conceived, and for any time that regenerates the absolute dictatorial control upon the man. Trebeshina’s dystopian vision, seen in the international context of this genre, it is an authentic proposal, which comes from a world not yet affected from the conflicts of civilization, conflicts through which literature picks up great topics.

Keywords: dystopian literature, genre, narration, illusion, allegoric discourse, social realism.

Introduction

Dystopian literature has given to XX-th century literature representative texts in prose. Its genre is novel. Dystopian literature, engaged politically against totalitarianism, recalls that: “literature and society cannot be treated as two separate spheres that do not communicate among them”¹.

Dystopian, canonic novels, written by authors as Yevgenij Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, express the links between ideology, utopia and literature. We incorporate “Odin Monvalsenin” of Kasem Trebeshina, to this genre mosaic. This novel, though with strong dystopian elements, has no tendency to be missionary or purposeful literature. Such was the literature of socialist realism, which put into practice political thesis and encouraged pseudo humanism.

“Odin Mondvalsen” is a text, where esthetic dissidence is expressed as thematics, as discourse, as a new avant-garde and complete procedure in relation to the literature before and after the years 1955-’56, when the novel was written. As an innovative work, it tends to a diversion in the public reception horizon in that era. The philosophy, the outlook, the conceptualization and the construction of the text were not affected by the pressure of self-censorship and censorship. This happened because the text was not aimed for publishing. All these elements and factors give the features of free literature to this work.

¹ Booker, M. Keith, “The dystopian impulse in modern literature: fiction as social criticism”, Greenwood Press, London, 1994, p.175.

According to our opinion, “Odin Mondvalsen – A love story” is chosen among other proses from this prolific author because it represents a text where political and anti-totalitarian literary stand in harmony. In other words we can say “what was ‘world’ has become ‘language’²

Related to genre notion, sometimes it is called long story, sometimes novel³. In his literary testament⁴, Trebeshina categorizes it ‘prose’.

In the Albanian literature of this period, genres preserved clear features, even though the novel needed more time to gain hegemony. Preserving the genre purity is a requirement for the novel and one of the obligatory rules of the method of socialist realism.

In this context, the discussion of genre serves to see what Trebeshina does to the narrative limits related to the free use. The breaking of limits defines the writing manners and serves the negative recognition or a tragic outlook that the enigmatic character Odin Mondvalsen, brings to the individual and the world.

Narrative of negative recognition

Following, *inversion* in the literary work “Odin Mondvalsen” is analyzed. It is shown how the author organizes the figures of literary speech, to create esthetic distance and the illusion of real life.⁵

Trebeshina’s concept for the reality as antithesis unfolds: the way of narrating – who narrates; the narrative structure – the organization of chapters and the motivation of their inner connection; the character as a mirror where the outer world is reflected, perceived as a psychic-spiritual inner world and the attitude that the author gives to the character in an indirect way.

1. The narration is done by a character, “Odin Mondvalsen”, whose identity is shown only through his name. This is the narrator-character. He narrates in the first person singular in order to give a dramatic broken side and his inner world:

First, second and third chapter

CHAPTER I, II, and III

*Where is shown who I am
and who I am not*

No!... I was there, down there, and I had a name! Now I am here, and I have another name... Perhaps, there I had no name, as I was called with a name.
And now I am...⁶

These are the first words of “Odin Mondvalsen”, which demonstrate the antithesis of two conditions or two tableaux. These announce some of the effects of narration in the first person singular, that have to do with the organization of the chapters, prolepses and contrastive scenes, with the organization of narrative time for what has happened and for what is happening; with the organization of

² Wellek, René; Warren, Austin, “Teoria e letërsisë”, Onufri, Tiranë, 2007, p.250.

³ Mullahi, Anila, “Veçori të poetikës në prozën romanore të Kasëm Trebeshinës”, Dudaj, Tiranë, 2013, p.151.

⁴ Testamenti, dosja e hetuesisë nr. 12192/1, fl. 92.

⁵ Wellek, Warren, *ibid.*, p.221.

⁶ Trebeshina, Kasëm, “Legjenda e asaj që iku”, Sh.B. e Lidhjes së Shkrimtarëve, Tiranë, 1992, p.81.

the conflicts of the character with himself and with external forces. In this way, the narrator-character expresses that narrative vision that constitutes the subject of the text and “the construction of the subject is transformed into a game with the fable, which takes the forms of an anecdote or riddle”⁷.

Our esthetic experience that we acquire as readers is liveliness, dynamics that we perceive from the intensity of the elements of narrative method. But, often it happens that this density compresses the viewpoint of narrator-character.

2. Narrative structure is constructed as a complex subject with this order of chapters:

Chapters I, II, III (author’s underline); chapter IV; chapter V; chapters from the chapter VI to chapter XVIII; chapter XIX; chapter that comes after chapter XII; chapter that is before the first chapters; chapter II before the first chapters; chapter III after the second one; chapter IV and V; chapter VI; chapter VII; chapter VIII, chapter IX; chapter X; chapter XI; chapter XII; chapter XIII; chapter XIV; chapter XV; chapter XVI; chapter XVII; chapter XVIII; chapter that comes after that one that was never written; chapter II; chapter III; chapter IV.

In the ordering procedure of the chapters the scholar Aurel Plasari evaluates “another genre specific: genre parody (irony, mock)”⁸. Thus Trebeshina “destroys the illusion of seriousness and authenticity, upon which the literary fiction is constructed in principle”⁹.

The three first chapters, representing only one, are under the elliptic process. It is the implicit ellipses that help in drafting hastily an *expositio* that is not at all classic. This *expositio* of the place and the time where the character is shrunk and precursory. The text – in this study the use of the term novel is avoided – has those features that Kundera mentions as *the norms of a psychological novel*¹⁰ (information about the character, his past, his conditions, his independence from author’s estimations, upon the unknown of the individual and group psychics. Looking from this perspective Trebeshina creates synthesis with the opposites; individual/state, individual/society, ideal/materialistic, utopia/dystopia, love/affection/violence.

For a sensible character with a fragile mental balance, the author considers reasonable not to use formula that show a chronological order of the events.

It happens the same till chapter V, the introducing (investigation, maltreatment, judgment) of Odin Mondvalsen with Mars or with the *New World*.

The chapters from the sixth to the eighteenth, compressed in one, are subject to ellipsis and analepsis. This second operation in the *time* category notes a return back to the past:

“Who would believe that some parties led by the most unheard pharaohs would set up some directorates? Do you understand me right?... Some of the most unprecedented

⁷ Plasari, Aurel, “Odin Mondvalsen dhe fundi i utopive. Një paralele vizionesh Orwell-Trebeshina”, Gazeta “Drita”, 14 mars 1993, Revista “Hylli i Dritës”, Nr.5-6 1997.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kundera, Milan, “Arti i romanit”, Toena, Tiranë, 2001, p. 122.

¹¹ Trebeshina, “Legjenda e asaj që iku”, Sh.B. e Lidhjes së Shkrimtarëve, Tiranë, 1992, p.88.

pharaohs would order the setting up of departments scaled for telling fortune and for explaining dreams?! ..."¹¹

Anacronia used here creates associations of ancient times with the contemporary, setting side by side the pharaoh with the first party secretary; the temples of fortune telling and dreams with the political directorates.

"The chapter that comes after chapter XII" marks the inversion of the order of the chapters, a concept of the flow of events to vindicate the evocations and the episodes happening in (on-going episodes) within the extensive narration. The language of the room guest of Mondvalsen becomes even more allegoric. It is he, who pronounces for the first time the word "madhouse", which evokes a broader context of totalitarian instances for sentence-punishment:

"Here, though we have a whole lot of troubles, again, we are not that bad... But we have to be very cautious with these people with white blouses. Lunatic asylum, as bad as it is, it is much more better than the concentration camps... because swamps drainage, where the people are leaving the bones behind, where one is ready to eat what the other one next to him excrements!..."¹²

The thoughts and actions of the other characters are shown according to Mondvalsen viewpoint, who embodies the supreme narrator as well. Thus, the cited example highlights the narrator's consciousness, this is shown how he recognizes the world, how he perceives the reality where he lives. As for the character, Odin Mondvalsen, it is the moment to meet "the beautiful girl with the white uniform" and to fall in love with her.

Words, expressions, rhetoric questions: "It looked strange to me", "I couldn't understand", suggest clearly that this was a meeting with the illusion; it is a phenomenon that Trebeshina creates with intensity, especially in his novels¹³. For instance, in his novel: "The burnt skin. A story for two writings" (1995), he writes: "It is obvious that the time and place when and where we are trying to live are not as such if they don't have what we want for them to have".

The author confirms that the chronotopic concept is a premise that love illusion is gratified to the best as if it was happening *hic et nunc*, within the organization of narrated events. The illusion phenomenon stimulates reader's participation, because reality and fiction confusion is on the increase. Love affair, which is developed in some levels, being revived as a metempsychosis phenomenon in different time and spaces, it provokes a real effect with a lot of atmosphere that goes from euphoric, idyllic tones, towards those mysterious, oneiric tones, and by the end it goes towards horrible and mournful tones.

In "Chapter that is before the first chapters", analepsis techniques is deepened. Scholars think that we have to do more with a hypothetic time and a mixture of time that "are solved due to impossible associations in terms of usual chronotopic relations"¹⁴

This episode that "deals with Pharaoh, with Putifari and his beautiful wife" denounces

¹² Ibid. p.92.

¹³ Trebeshina, Kasëm, "Hijet e shekujve", Eurorilindja, Tiranë, 1996.

¹⁴ Shehri, Dhurata, "Odin Mondvalseni" i Kasëm Trebeshinës", MM, Nr.5, Prishtinë, 1996.

the moral purity of authoritarian regimes. According to their unwritten laws, when sexuality meets love, a man and a woman are consuming a criminal act. This tableau has clowned, grotesque and sarcasm tonalities:

“-It’s a matter of fact that, even looking at the beautiful naked woman, you are not subdued to her willpower ... Up to now everything is as we and you want it, as a Joseph from Israel, or as Youssuf from Arabia, you will remain pure morally...

I could have never thought that I would have become a Joseph or Youssuf, because two wild men in white uniforms entered. The toughest one yelled:

-What’s happening here? ...

The great Pharaoh replied:

- A small Trade Union meeting!”¹⁵

Even though that the data for that actual time are missing, the author uses a *chronological code* for the time when the event has happened, using real nominations for the Albanian socialist world, as for example: Block, Trade Unions, agricultural cooperative, etc. These are parts of the discourse language of the characters using biblical and anecdotic parables, where the actuality is hidden behind the naivety of pathological psychic and all of these together serve as an inseparable part of allegoric discourse.

Chapters from “Chapter that is before the first chapters” up to chapter XVIII, have a close inner meaningful connection. Repetition of love motif is interdependency. Here, the author proceeds inserting: a second story which is implied in the first one. Not only just that, but he also uses people-narrators that “it is the most conspicuous form of insertion”¹⁶ as the narration “as small as a palm on a big dragonfly as a starling”:

“It’s a matter of fact that in the Science Academy of Royal Woods they are having a great concern for Irene of George Dushman. This issue is a big mess, because many scientists insist that she committed suicide once she heard that Lek Zaharia was killed. Who knows the truth?!... There are some others that think something tragic happened in the desert. A love story in Ancient Egypt; maybe in one of the farms of Cartagena. It is said that two slaves ... A young slave girl and a young slave boy ... Yes, yes! ... They fell in love and one day they decided to walk through the desert and go beyond it, where freedom brings happiness that might be enjoyed in this land...”¹⁷

In digressions like this, as in chapter XIII, “where what has happened before are being told, the size of inserted story (the past time) dominates the tableau of main story (nowadays plan). In this way Trebeshina’s narrative structure highlights an essential feature: that “the inclusive narration is a narration for a narration”¹⁸ and “the inserted narration is simultaneously the image of that abstract great narration”¹⁹. Thus, the act of narrating pushes forward the action. This is a narrative technique in

¹⁵ Trebeshina, *ibid.*, p.96.

¹⁶ Todorov, Tzvetan, “Poetika e prozës”, Panteon, Tiranë, 2000, p.31.

¹⁷ Trebeshina, *ibid.*, p.141.

¹⁸ Todorov, Tzvetan, “Poetika...”, *ibid.*, p.56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Mitrush Kuteli's prose as well²⁰.

Subject-like episodes' circulating with alternated movements throughout the chapters, there comes a moment that they are merged into one, in the present of the character. The past is the consequence of the present and it disappears in the present. The present is the cause of the past, and the present is perceived as everlasting. The subject, the inner structure of narration, does not develop depending from events far away in time, but it develops on the basis of inversion, according to consequence-cause connection. The reader's curiosity goes furthermore from consequence to cause. The cause is alienism, madness, atrocity of the man towards the political power, unexplored motives for the time and against the trend with the motives of official literature.

"The chapter that comes after the one that was not written" and three others following it compose the last episodes for discovering the tragic cause. In a sense "Odin Mondvalsen" is a tragedy where the individual judges his own society.

3. The character – Odin Mondvalsen is not a character described with physical features and in situations that discover his psychological and moral attributes.

Describing scenes of his environment are missing. But the tableaux, where his act of narration is simultaneously his act of acting, have an oppressive and controlling atmosphere (we have noticed that one of the sentences most repeated in the text is: "Two people dressed as we were dressed entered the room."

Let's go back to the introducing tableau of the character in the first three chapters²¹:

"No! ... I was down there and I had a name! Now I am here and I have another name ... Perhaps, there I had no name, as they called me with a name. And now I am ...

Yes, my name is ...

They laugh because my name is ...

What's up here to laugh?"²²

The author narrates the viewpoint of the narrator-character. The discourse of Odin Mondvalsen is based on the inner monologue that in this case the reader is included as well, because the author addresses him straightforward with questions or negative questions, to encourage and make clear something that confuses his mind and has to do with his identity, which is his only vital ambition.

The author does not interfere to put things in order, because he has decided that his viewpoint would merge with the character's viewpoint. He "is not allowed" to say more than what the character knows about himself. This narrating method closes the viewpoint of the character, but at the same time the author creates freedom to the character to be sincere, because he avoids literariness, avoids dialectic and monolithic language and strengthens the illusion of the real.

²⁰ Kritik Ramadan Musliu pohon se me novelat "Stina e stinëve" konstatohet që "pas traditës kuteliane, ky është autori i parë i cili në letërsinë tonë sjell modernitetin e rrëfimit". Ramadan Musliu, "Vizioni Orwellian i totalitarizmit", f.13-14, tek "Trebeshiniana - studime, artikuj, ese", Marin Barleti, Tiranë, 1998.

²¹ Author's underlining E.D.

²² Trebeshina, *ibid.*, p.81.

The same tableau follows:

"Before, I had a name, now my name is ... My name is Odin Mondvalsen. What does it matter to them if I am called like this? ... You have never heard this name. Very good, listen it now! How? ... Don't you like to hear it? Why? ... Because you have never heard it? And so what? ... If you haven't heard it before, hear to it now.

People with white blouses wander, do the injection and go. Then, those without blouses come in and they don't care for my name. They do not want to believe that I was on the Moon, and then, after I buried my four friends, I came here in Mars, and I became Odin Mondvalsen! ...²³

As it seems, the facts and the outer world are of no importance, what he says and the way how he says it are important. The character and the environment are sketched through a minimum of details, which are connected with the following questions: What's his name? Where is he from? What events have marked his life where he was? How is his actual psychic state? How do the others behave towards him?

Verb tenses, changing the past tense to the present tense "had/have, was/am"; juxtaposition of affirmative/negative adverbs, of the adverbs of place "down there/here", of the adverbs of time "before/now", the juxtaposition of sentences "I was on the Moon/I came in Mars", all these used within one paragraph express a narrating position, carry and transmit contrasts of emotional states. An undefined environment, "with people with white blouses" and "those without blouses", define the lack of individual freedom and anxiety dominating the character.

The reality in totalitarian regimes experienced by the mankind, constitutes a challenge in artistic discourse. The real writer is looking for a language and a style of his own, to truthfully transpose the human catastrophe.

"Ah, my Lord! ... The dream is not a dream when we see! ... It becomes a dream when we wake up! ..."²⁴, this is what a Trebeshina's character discovers in the drama "An everlasting dream". Acknowledging and transmitting such a reality with the 'right' language as in a dream would be impossible. That is why, the agnostic Trebeshina, according to our opinion, accomplishes this mission genuinely. He says:

"I don't know at all modern literature. I know classic literature ... Judging from the old philosophers of the ancient Greece, I come to this conclusion: the world cannot be known throughout the time, and we get that infinity of time through dreams. There, we get something more complete than what we get directly from the reality ... I do not rely either on the Russians, or French, the French know this, I don't rely on them, I rely on oneiric ... I do not consider onirism as an absolute object of my literary creativity."²⁵

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In other words, Trebeshina's concern during his creative process, it is not to tell stories where the empiric world is reflected. His concern has to do

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Trebeshina, Kasëm, "Ëndrra dhe hije - Drama", Botimet Enciklopedike, Tiranë, 1996, p.12.

²⁵ Çali, Edmond, "Intervistë me Kasëm Trebeshinën", Aracne, Romë, 2006, pp.21-22.

with the creation of a metaphysic world. According to this outlook "Odin Mondvalsen" is the world of Trebeshina soul.

As a conclusion, Trebeshina's dystopian vision, seen in the international context of this genre, it is an authentic proposal, which comes from a world not yet affected from the conflicts of civilization, conflicts through which literature picks up great topics.

The analysis of the character showed that "Odin Mondvalsen" conveys a political, moral and psychological meaning for the time when the work was conceived, and for any time that regenerates the absolute dictatorial control upon the man.

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