

Literary Attempts to Evade Control over Discourse: Macedonian-English Comparative View

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This text examines how specific literary works undermine the common understanding of the notion of *power*. The interpretation of the selected literary works starts from Foucault's theory of how potentially threatening discourse is controlled by the institutions of society, and this essay investigates how Foucault's theory is applied within literature. On the other hand, the text also questions how literature alternates Foucault's division between those who freely produce discourse and those who control this production of discourse. The selected poems and novels by three contemporary Macedonian and two contemporary English writers show how authorities abuse *power* to promote their aims and how individuals, who, according to some definitions of *power* are powerless, may on the contrary display another type of *power* that surpasses the *power* possessed by the ruling institutions.

CAN PRODUCERS OF DISCOURSE BE CLEARLY DISTINGUISHED FROM CONTROLLERS OF DISCOURSE?

Thinkers and analysts in the areas of humanities and social sciences who investigate the phenomenon of *power* mostly consider it in the state of order, that is, they explain and interpret the various characteristics that *power* has in given static circumstances. This approach is necessary for understanding the essence of *power*, for understanding why some are more powerful than others, as well as for understanding the differences between the notions of *power* and *authority*, *power* and *influence*, and *power* and *capability*. Situations in which there are changing circumstances or where there is a lack of authority and control are much more difficult to examine, as *power* in that context is more dynamic and less stable, and thus it is considerably less convenient as an object of investigation. Literature, however, has certain methods that reveal some characteristics of the phenomenon of power that are not usually emphasized in the humanities and social sciences.

In his text, 'The Order of Discourse', Michel Foucault says that 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain

mastery over chance events'.¹ According to the views expressed in this text, power is in the hands of those who sustain the existing order, and they are the ones who have at disposal certain procedures for controlling those discourses that are potentially undermining. Order gives an illusion of sense, it conveys the impression that nothing is accidental or dependent on chance, that everything happens for a reason, and that everything is predictable. If one is nice to others, they shall be nice to him/her – this is just one of the possible examples. Order provides people with the comforting belief that life makes sense.

The first implicit division that Foucault makes in the abovementioned text is that there are, on the one hand, people who produce discourse, and, on the other hand, people who tend to control that discourse. On the one hand there is discourse (which can be understood in a very general sense as speech, newspaper articles, literary texts, and other types of discourse), which is, or may potentially be, freely produced and which depends on the will of its producer both in the sense of its content and in the sense of its distribution and existence. On the other hand there is the society, which in order not to be jeopardized by the discourse that may point to its weaknesses and drawbacks at once controls that discourse.

From one perspective, this can hardly be denied: institutions directly affect the production of educational curricula, controlling the spheres and topics of study at every level of education, which in turn controls the source of desirable influence on the population in general. For example, publishing houses choose, in accordance with their policy or financial interests, to publish certain selected books but not others – this shows how indirect control acts as a form of power. From another perspective, however, those who produce discourse may at the same time act as controllers, and those who, as part of the institutions, control the discourse may privately produce discourse that does not support the existing social order.

UNDERMINING THE POWER OF AUTHORITIES: POETIC EXAMPLES

The only way for an ideology to retain its control is to establish an order in which it is easy to discern deviations. Society retains the existing order through something that Foucault calls procedures of exclusion, which include: prohibition of certain types of discourse, and a division (and a rejection) that creates a clear line between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. How literature undermines the control in the hands of the authorities can be discerned in the poems 'Giordano Bruno' by the Macedonian poet Katica Kulavkova, as well as in 'The Breaking of Strength' by Blaze Koneski. These poems can be analysed in the context of the phenomenon of *power* as they both deal with characters (Giordano Bruno and Marko

¹ M. Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse,' translated by Ian McLeod, in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edition, edited by P. Rice and P. Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), pp. 221-233. p. 221.

Krale, respectively) who have challenged the power of a generally accepted authority. In Kulavkova's poem this undeniable authority is the Inquisition, which ruled Europe for centuries during the Middle Ages. Krale Marko² from Koneski's poem is one of the most famous of Macedonia's legendary heroes. In fact, King Marko really existed and ruled in the 14th century in and around the town of Prilep (on the territory of present day Macedonia), but very few facts are known about him, so a great deal of what is known was actually invented or altered in legends. In the folk poems and tales, he appears as a strong king fighting against characters who symbolize evil, tyranny, and occupation. The purpose of his struggle is to bring freedom to his native land and fellow citizens. In the selected poem, however, not only does he challenge some locally known villains, but he also rebels against the ultimate authority – God. Where Krale Marko is a legendary hero who is greatly exploited in Macedonian literature in the past and the present, Giordano Bruno was an Italian scientist mostly mentioned in Macedonia in the context of philosophy or astronomy. Although the protagonists of these two poems are very different, the similarity in their struggles against such well-established authorities (the Church and God) is the common element which makes them convenient for analysis of the transformation of the notion of power.

Bruno's discourse in the poem 'Giordano Bruno' is forbidden; it is situated beyond what is acceptable. In order to intensify this impression, the poem does not present the side of Bruno, but the positions of those who pronounce prohibitions and divisions – their discourse is present and Bruno's discourse is absent, despite the title of the poem bearing his name. The Inquisition is so powerful that his voice is completely silenced. His work, although forbidden and suppressed, is permanently present throughout as motivation, incentive, inspiration and hated object. Thus, Bruno is marginalized, but because the authorities employ so much effort to prohibit his views he is paradoxically placed in a central position in their struggle against him and consequently a central position in the poem itself.

The procedure in which Bruno is both placed in the centre of the poem and removed from the poem, by letting his persecutors control its discourse without once mentioning his name, provokes reviewing and re-examination of the certainty of our actions and attitudes. Literature most often gives the views of the victims, but in this case Kulavkova gives the point of view of the torturers, and it is interesting that the torturers themselves recognize that they are victims of an ideology, refusing to accept that the Sun is the centre of the solar system and that the Earth revolves around the Sun. Hutcheon writes,

Postmodernist art and theory have self-consciously acknowledged their ideological positioning in the world and they have been incited to do so, not only in reaction to that provocative accusation of

² "Krale" means "king", although Marko is referred both as a king and as a prince.

triviality, but also by those previously silenced ex-centrics, both outside (post-colonial) and within (women, gays) our supposedly monolithic western culture.³

Kulavkova's poem, like the historiographic metafiction that Hutcheon talks about, is aware of its own poetic voice's ideological positioning, and does not consider that its view is the only true one, while other views are the result of ideology – which, as Eagleton concludes, is common not only in literature but in all human practices. In 'Giordano Bruno', the poet manages to achieve understanding of the impossibility of avoiding ideological positioning through the poetic voices of the Inquisition which are aware that they 'haven't risen from the ground', that they 'hate the truth | exorcising it like the devil | collectively stoning it | to banish it'.⁴ The Inquisition recognizes its place of conservative power and acknowledges (although to no one but the reader) that it controls, selects, organizes, and redistributes the discourse (to use Foucault's words):

We, who dictate
 who will address the public
 on how to describe 'reality'
 so that we may hear
 - at least while we are alive -
 only what suits ourselves.

The Sun must turn
 the sky must be unreachable
 the Earth captive.⁵

The authorities generate control, a system of order where the way things function is clear and indisputable. The Sun revolves around the Earth and the Earth is in the center of the universe. This is the only acceptable reality and everything that deviates from this "truth" is forbidden: 'prohibitions are an indispensable condition | in the Senate, the Altar and the Bed | in Science and Art'.⁶ Due to the prohibitions, order can be maintained and deviations can be discerned much more easily. When Bruno supports the Copernican concept of the solar system, the Inquisition can immediately notice that, according to him, neither is the Earth calm ('captive'), nor does the Sun revolve. This awareness enables the authorities to decide that all the new discoveries and all progress shall be collected 'on a stake'⁷ and shall be burnt.

³ L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 179.

⁴ K. Kulavkova, 'Giordano Bruno', translated by I. Čašule and T. Shapcott, in *The Song beyond Songs: Anthology of Contemporary Macedonian Poetry*, edited by V. Andonovski (Prilep: Stremez, 1997), pp. 213-214, p. 213.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 214

Although we, as readers, never come into direct contact with either the life or the opinions of Bruno (the poem requires us to have some previous knowledge of them), we understand that he becomes painfully aware of his powerlessness, and his inability to face the more powerful institutions. Those institutions are fully aware of the fact that they are 'small and mortal', that they actually know nothing about the world, and that they will lose their power sooner or later. It is that recognition precisely that leads them to use it to its full extent, 'but at least we have a hell of our own | and we choose whom to kill'.⁸

The poem does ostensibly confirm Foucault's theory that the exclusion procedures are at the disposal of those who have power in their hands, and the Inquisition does use punishment as a method to impose its power. The poem, however, problematizes the Inquisition's power in the sense that the notion of power is used by Foucault. The Inquisition is, indeed, able to implement the ultimate physical punishment – death – but its force controls the body, not the personality. Its representatives kill Bruno, but they never possess sufficient power to force him to abandon his ideas and accept theirs.

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The danger of surpassing the more powerful authority is also recognized by the poet in 'The Breaking of Strength' by Blaze Koneski. This poem is based on an old Macedonian legend in which God has given Krале Marko enormous physical power. However, when God saw Krале Marko in action and realized how powerful he was, he took away two-thirds of the power he originally bestowed on the hero. Just as in the legend, God is a typical representative of the system of power, and he has the will and the strength and the means to control the behavior of the individual should he threaten to become too strong. God defends himself from the powers and dangers of Marko Krале's discourse. Attempting to answer the question why God has taken away his strength, Marko Krале –the speaker of the poem – realizes that there is power greater than himself and that someone else, God above him, is omnipotent. He also understands that God is as frightened as he is powerful when he realizes that his absolute power is threatened. It is this fear that makes him reclaim the strength from those he bestowed it upon so that they do not undermine the established system. However, the poet recognizes that such a system, one that acts on the basis of fear and wants to show 'cruelly its power over me', apart from being powerful, is, at the same time, 'merciless', and 'd disdainful', and it 'stooped so low'⁹ to destroy the one who was special.

⁸ Ibid., p. 214.

⁹ B. Koneski, 'The Breaking of Strength', translated by A. Harvey and A. Pennington in *The Song beyond Songs: Anthology of Contemporary Macedonian Poetry*, edited by V. Andonovski (Prilep: Stremez, 1997), pp. 56-57, p. 56.

In the beginning, the poet acts naively with full faith in the representative of the higher order and puerile innocence, admiration, and the need for someone to take care of him. As time goes by, he realizes that this higher order (which may be either God, the society or the ideology) has its own sly methods of approaching the individual, of revealing his or her weaknesses and strengths so that it may destroy him/her most effectively. In the poem, God assumes the disguise of a beggar dressed in tatters, 'so I should not see the cunning in your eyes - | And all to test me better'.¹⁰ That beggar in 'The Breaking of Strength' is what Foucault identifies as a whole system of institutions that attempts to retain the existing order. 'Did you not think that one man | will testify of an instance of your wretched weakness',¹¹ the poet asks, expressing his view, or perhaps his hope, that he who took away his strength, who humiliated him, no matter how strong and powerful he may be, actually displayed weakness by amending his original intention to grant the strength.

My God,
 the fire with which you burnt my wings is not yet extinguished in your hands
 my essence rises again you,
 my heart curses you,
 humiliated
 I feel something in me that surpasses you,
 that you may have once had, but have now lost it
 when you created us to tear away from the misery,
 alone
 I have to search for the path of my life through difficulties.¹²

These verses – filled with defiance, disobedience, and faith in the belief that something more humane (or more divine) exists in those who do not to fear the powerful – refuse to accept the superiority of the ruling ideology that does not allow for a greater strength than theirs to develop. The whole poem, in all its verses, believes in the moral superiority of the one who asks why and who recognizes that his strength has been taken away from him. The poem also advocates for those who feel that something surpasses God or society (whoever is in the position of authority), whose stake still burns, whose controlling procedures are still visible. It represents a noble belief of literature that there is, after all, something that is more powerful than the raw and cruel force of the powerful ones. It is noble, but hardly provable in reality. Even in the poem itself – the strength is taken and never given back. 'Rises against you | curses you'¹³ – the poet's discourse itself indicates his powerlessness; his words

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹² Ibid., p. 57.

¹³ Ibid., p. 56.

indicate that he makes an attempt, but they also imply that this attempt is unsuccessful. His verses are not claims, but desires to surpass the omnipotent.

Still, the questions asked, as well as that unnamed thing inside him which surpasses God, imply a different type of power that Krsto Marko has. This is moral power, for Marko does not establish himself as a person who knows everything, but as a person who questions, searches for explanations, and seeks the truth instead of the quick and easy answers. The Macedonian critic Zoran Ancevski points to this fact as well in a different way, entitling the text where he discusses this poem 'Building Strength in "The Breaking of Strength"'. He discusses here that 'giving strength and taking it away are, in fact, two different initiations that are generated from each other, and are necessary for the existence of the epic hero'.¹⁴

Although in the context of most social and political theories of power, God would clearly be the one who possesses power, as he is the giver of strength and can reclaim it when he chooses, so the decisions are always in his hands. This poem points to a different view of the relations between God and Marko, in which the moral and emotional strength of Marko humiliates the superior being and, from an ethical aspect, places him in a subordinate situation.

A short comparison of the character of Marko in this poem by Koneski and the characters of, firstly, Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and, secondly, Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* reveals how the understanding of power has changed in the 20th century in comparison to the previous centuries. It is precisely the different time frames of the respective works of Marlowe and Milton that enables the opposition of the 20th century to the long lasting power systems to become so much the more visible in Koneski's poem. It is not that in the past centuries there have been no attempts to oppose power, but the difference is remarkable; Faustus and Satan do oppose God, but in their speeches in the above-mentioned literary works, they always emphasize their awareness that their rebellion is due to their own vanity and ambition. They do not at all suspect the greatness and good intentions of the more powerful, which is God in both cases. Faustus does indeed swear that he will never mention the name of God, and will burn the Holy Scriptures, but he never questions God's good intentions, and even the devil characters, Lucifer and Mephistophilis, say that God is good and just. Milton's Satan also says that it was pride that made him rebel against God and that God never deserved such treatment from him because God's attitude has always been good and just. The characters of both Marlowe and Milton have a desire to oppose the existing hierarchy because of selfish reasons, but in principle they do not doubt that it is a hierarchy well-established. The authors from the 20th century, in comparison (Koneski being one of numerous examples), question the superior being, and wonder if he actually shows cunning weakness when he punishes those weaker than himself,

¹⁴ З Анчевски, *За традицијата* (Скопје: Магор. 2007), p. 270.

if he humiliates himself by destroying those that may pose a threat to his position, and if he is merciless by showing no understanding and having bad intentions.

It is rather the different time frame as opposed to the cultural context that brings into light the disparate treatment of and the attitude towards *power* in the discourses of the poems. In the past, many poems, similar to *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and *Paradise Lost*, employ the topic of rebellion against *power* because the protagonists want *power* for themselves, which signifies only the possibility of replacing one system of *power* with another. The protagonists of many literary works since the 20th century, 'Giordano Bruno' and 'The Breaking of Strength' being but two examples, do not strive to replace the authority; they in fact want to undermine the foundations upon which authorities build up their *power*.

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Just as in the case with these two poems, the use of violence is so much the more frightening when he who punishes and uses violence has legitimacy to use *power* for such purposes. The poem 'Punishment' by Seamus Heaney represents two such parallel situations: a ritualistic punishment of an unfaithful fourteen-year-old girl (perhaps in that time viewed more as a woman than as a girl) carried out in the 1st century A.D. on the territory of present-day Germany; and the use of a similar ritual in the 20th century of punishing Irish women who dated British soldiers. Heaney finds the information for the fourteen-year-old girl from the book of Danish archeologist P. V. Glob, *The Bog People*. By representing the two parallel situations, the poem asks the question whether violent punishment, which in the past used to be a legitimate way of dealing with sinners, becomes today an unjust and inadequate method. The poem does not offer a direct answer to this question, but its implications lead to upsetting conclusions.

As a footnote of this poem suggests, according to the old Roman historian Tacitus, the Germanic peoples in the past punished adulterous women by shaving their hair and either expelling them from the village or killing them. Such a punishment, regardless of its cruelty and the fact that the victim never had a fair trial, used to be a legitimate punishment, part of the established order. The primary objective of the order, just as in the case of 'Giordano Bruno', is to display and retain its power. This demonstration comes even at the expense of implementing terror upon its subjects. Authority is sustained by fear.

The legitimacy of this kind of punishment has disappeared today, at least in the contemporary European and Western societies. But this is exactly the point where Heaney's poem problematizes our certainty that the legitimacy of such punishments has been eliminated. The punishment carried out against the girl who lived two thousand years ago was in accordance with the restrictive system of that time. Has anything changed since then?

Seemingly, it has, for in the 20th century in Ireland, the cruel punishment against the girls who date British soldiers goes beyond the existing restrictive system, and is not carried out by officers of the law. But the fact that the contemporary Irish ‘betraying sisters’, as Heaney calls them, are ‘cauled in tarred’ and ‘wept by the railings’¹⁵ to which they have been tied by IRA representatives as a punishment for their keeping company with the British is an indication that this punishment is carried out frequently and in contemporary times. Therefore, although the punishment is illegal, it tragically becomes recognizable as it is carried out by members of an influential organization.

Just as in the mentioned poems by Kulavkova and Koneski, this poem also has a kind of an unexplained connection between the poetic voice and the torturers and an arcane understanding of the system of order that punishes those that deviate from it. In this context, the ethical dimension is vanishing as much as it is being emphasized.

In the poem, we do not see the direct presence of the villagers who had expelled the girl and tied her with a rope, but we do feel their presence throughout by witnessing the girl’s body and seeing what they have done to it: they have ‘shaved [her] head’, they put a ‘blindfold’ around her eyes, they tightened a rope around her neck in a ‘noose’, and they put ‘the weighing stone’ on her to keep her body under water.¹⁶ However, the poem expresses faith that there is something more powerful than the raw and crude force, if not objectively, then at least in the eyes of the poet: namely, despite the fact that she was pronounced guilty of adultery by the majority of the people in her village, the poet today does not accept the sentence, but, on the contrary, he condemns the unjust torturers, centuries after their actual crime. The readers can see this moral condemnation of the perpetrators in the verses in which the poet identifies himself with the victim. He feels so close to the found body of the girl that it seems to him that he himself feels ‘the tug | of the halter at the nape | of her neck’.¹⁷ Although he sees a picture of a black corpse, which resembles a tree trunk, he has a kind of a vision in which ‘I can see her drowned | body in the bog’.¹⁸ Yet, something unexplainable, perhaps the punishment implemented against her, felt deeply by the poet to be unjustified and cruel, subconsciously brings him close to her, so he imagines her in the time while she was alive as both an attractive girl (‘flaxen-haired’) and as a poor victim (‘undernourished’). That closeness grows into something that resembles love (‘I almost love you’), the poet recognizes, which, in fact, is an expression of his compassion. Still, the poet says something that does not quite coincide with these feelings: ‘but would have cast, I know, | the stones of silence’, he admits. In other words, had he lived two thousand years ago, and even today, he

¹⁵ S. Heaney, ‘Punishment’, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 8th edition, Volume 2*, edited by S. Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 2006), 2826-2828, 2827.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2826.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2826.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2827.

would have stood dumb, as he claims himself, when the Irish girl were tied to the rails. This confession leads to a moral dimension, which is opposite to that expressed by the verses of compassion towards the victims.

On the other hand, the poem expresses understanding that the primitive, primal, instinct for punishment is still retained in today's civilization. The position of the speaker not to defend the victim is not due to his conviction that she has sinned and must therefore be punished. The poem does not discuss the issue of whether the poet morally condemns either the bog girl or the girls tied to the rails in Ireland, so this dimension is irrelevant to the poetic ideas and images generated by the verses. What the verses focus on is the moral condemnation or lack thereof towards the perpetrators – and here the ambiguity reaches its peak. Despite his sympathy for the victim the poet realizes that he would both be an accomplice in the crime against the victim as well as participate in the civilization's condemnation of the barbarian punishment used by the perpetrators. At the same time, he does not defend the contemporary victims before his eyes – the reason may partly be due to fear of opposing the angry mob prepared to punish; but it is also certainly due, at least partly, to what the speaker himself recognizes at the end: 'yet understand the exact | and tribal, intimate revenge'.¹⁹

Although Heaney, on the one hand, and Kulavkova and Koneski, on the other, belong to different cultural contexts, they do have many things in common. One of them certainly is the defiance of the exclusion procedures. The Inquisition tries to silence the voice of Giordano Bruno lest he should jeopardize its dominance; God takes away Krsto Marko's strength so that he does not pose a threat to his absolute power; the Irish nationalists punish women so in order to convey the message that the British are the enemy and anyone who keeps them company shall be punished.

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, *Wikipedia*, *power* is commonly defined as control, influence, and ability to affect other people and the environment.²⁰ According to this basic and commonly-held definition, the Inquisition, God, and the Irish nationalist undeniably have *power* over their victims. Yet, poets show that there may be a different kind of *power*, whose definition will not necessarily be found in dictionaries or political works, but which may rightly and legitimately be called *power*. Thus, Bruno's truth has prevailed, and even if this is not presented in the verses of the poem, the poem itself, dedicated to Bruno, expresses the understanding of the Inquisition that it was deeply wrong: 'Maybe we're small and mortal | maybe we turn endlessly | around

¹⁹ Ibid., 2828.

²⁰ See, for example, S. Wehmeier, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 6th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

ourselves'.²¹ Marko's noble intentions to help the unfortunate exceed God's power even if Marko has his strength taken away from him: 'I feel something in me that surpasses you, | that you may have once had, but have now lost it'.²² And the poet in 'Punishment', even if too frightened to publically admit he condemns the violent punishers of the girl in the bog and the women tied to the rails, still he pronounces he 'would connive | in a civilized outrage'.²³

IMPOSSIBILITY TO OPPOSE THE AUTHORITIES: PROSE EXAMPLES

A comparison between the treatment of power in English and a Macedonian prose works will also show how the procedures of exclusion that Foucault refers to affect the course of development of the narrative text. *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie attempts to show India from the point of view of an insider, thereby undercutting the common views of India and Pakistan by the West. *My Skenderbei* by Dragi Mihajlovski displays almost a scientific approach in treating the subject, Georg Kastrioti Skenderbeg, a hero from 15th century, who became ruler of Krujë (on the territory of what is Albania today) and fought against the Ottoman Turks. Skenderbeg's territories also included parts of the territory that today belong to western Macedonia, and consequently his significance in present-day Macedonia is very ambiguous, particularly in the context of the ethnic disputes between the Macedonians (mainly Orthodox Christians) and the Albanians (mainly Muslims). Mihajlovski's novel confronts the popular (both Macedonian and Albanian) views and the insufficiently serious historical views that represent Skenderbeg in a very simplified way. Such struggles to represent conclusions drawn from a more thorough research is what has brought *Midnight's Children* and *My Skenderbei* together here and what makes them relevant for this essay. Both novels discuss numerous significant aspects that deserve to be the subject of extensive studies. However, as this text, however, focuses only on certain aspects of *power*, it has employed just a few examples from the novels that may clarify those aspects.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem, in narrating his personal history starting with his grandfather Aadam Aziz, shows the functioning of power systems with their methods of exclusion and control of discourse. According to the ruling ideology in India, India was discovered by the Europeans. This idea is close to what the Palestinian-American literary theorist Edward Said emphasizes about the Orient: that it is represented by representatives of a culture external to it.²⁴ Their representation cannot be valid unless it contains the vision of those who belong to the Orient. In this sense, the novel *Midnight's Children* puts an end to

²¹ Kulavkova, 'Giordano Bruno', p. 214.

²² Koneski, 'The Breaking of Strength', p. 57.

²³ Heaney, 'Punishment', 2828.

²⁴ E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Routledge, 1978).

such an external representation of India through its protagonist, Saleem, who shows the events as a man from the inside, so apart from the views of the ruling ideology in India, the readers are also given the views of Saleem.

In Rushdie's novel, however, the citizens of India themselves accept the view imposed by Europe. Their views distance Aadam Aziz from his friends, and make him a renegade as he is the only one who cannot accept that he is an invention of the European comers. The system of exclusion of the ruling ideology functions perfectly, making a taboo-topic of the political issue of the creation of modern India. Aadam Aziz is in a difficult situation – he has to fight against the prohibitions established by the white people in India, but he also has to fight against the traditional principles of India, which do not recognize the stethoscope, and do not accept women to be examined by male doctors. His medical bag expresses something foreign, something invasive, and something progressive, which the culture of India strives to reject. The exclusion of Aadam Aziz takes place from two sides – from both the imperial and the Hindu side. To his fellow citizens, the fact that he comes back from the West as an educated doctor is upsetting.

According to Foucault, the division between reason and madness serves to exclude those labeled as “mad” from social life. Saleem, in this context, is on the other side of reason when it comes to his abilities – to read other people's thoughts. As long as he manages to live a normal life, however, his powers are not visible to the others. He will become aware of the cruelty of exclusion when, gathering his closest family, he wants to announce the happy news and to show them how special he is for having an unusual talent – telepathy. But instead of the expected admiration or, at least, an understanding for his gift, Saleem faces beating (which forever impairs his hearing on the left ear), yelling, and expulsion. At that moment, Saleem faces *power*: he is the victim of a punishment that establishes the usual power relations in a state of order; the parents are the ones who dictate what is acceptable and what is not, and clearly point to the fact that whenever their rules are broken, the perpetrator will face punishment. His closest community, his family, is not ready for him. ‘In a country where any physical or mental peculiarity in a child is a source of deep family shame, my parents, who had become accustomed to facial birthmarks, cucumber-nose and bandy legs, simply refused to see any more embarrassing things in me’.²⁵ Realizing the seriousness of rejecting the unusual, Saleem concludes that secrets are sometimes a good thing, no matter how hard it is for a nine-year-old child not to share a secret. He accepts the noise in his ears, the temporary deafness, and the headaches that will remind him, for the rest of his life, of the danger of being special.

Fear, too, contributes to the perception of increased *power* in the object we fear. Saleem wants to expel Shiva from the Conference of Midnight's Children after he finds out that Shiva

²⁵ S. Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 168.

is the real child of his parents Ahmed and Amina Sinai, and that he and Shiva were exchanged at birth. Although he does have power to expel Shiva from the Conference, Saleem experiences reduction of his *power* because of his fear of Shiva for whom history is 'continuing struggle of oneself-against-the-crowd'²⁶ and who, as Saleem assumes, will certainly insist on his birth right – to be leader of the Conference – being the very first child born after midnight on the day of India's independence. Thus, Shiva's power enlarges in the eyes of Saleem, and he is certain that Shiva will be able to discover what has not been available for the others.

Even without the problems that come from his dealing with Shiva, Saleem will not be able to use his power because, when he is eleven-years-old, the power of adults over children takes up the scene. The movement to Pakistan depends on his parents, so he has to leave against his will and without being asked, and the border with Pakistan represents to him an obstacle in the telepathic communication with 581 other gifted children born in the first hour after midnight on the same day as himself.

Saleem has no choice but to accept the consequences of the instruments of *power* brought about by the authorities: the institutional parents, the more powerful individual, the imperial authorities. He accepts the hearing problem, he accepts the greater power of Shiva, and he accepts the decision of his parents, the procedures of the British authorities and the Indian customs, for he understands the danger of trying to surpass the more powerful instance, just as the poet in 'The Breaking of Strength' does.

* * *

The most emphatic division that Foucault identifies is the division between truth and untruth. Foucault finds the roots of the will to truth in the ancient Greek poets from the 6th century B.C., according to whom the discourse of truth was characterized with speech enunciated through strictly determined ritual. Therefore, the age-old division between what is true and what is not true is actually the 'will to truth', which does not refer to truth in the literal sense of the word, as an opposition to lie, but rather 'the history of the range of objects to be known, of the functions and positions of the knowing subject, of the material, technical and instrumental investments of knowledge'.²⁷ Similarly, Said claims that the truth becomes function of a learned judgment, and does not pertain to the truth value of the material itself.²⁸

Additionally, according to Terry Eagleton if a person wants to be recognized by the institutions of the system, he/she has to speak the accepted language, so, in line with his

²⁶ Ibid., 282.

²⁷ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', p. 224.

²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*.

example, it does not matter what a student thinks about Chaucer's literary works, as long as the text that he writes about them is written in accordance with the necessary rules. 'All that is being demanded is that you manipulate a particular language in acceptable ways. Becoming certified by the state as proficient in literary studies is a matter of being able to talk and write in certain ways. It is this which is being taught, examined and certificated, not what you personally think or believe'.²⁹ This is one of the practices of the government: establishing acceptable forms of behavior or intellectual production. This will to truth is so strong that following the acceptable form becomes more important than discovering the essence.

The division between what is considered to be the truth and what is considered not to be the truth is found in Macedonian writer Dragi Mihajlovski's novel *My Skenderbei*. Taking into consideration the social and political circumstances in Macedonia, this work directly addresses reality. The monument of Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeg was placed in the square in the Turkish bazaar in Skopje in 2006, which became a spark for discussions about the origin and role of Skenderbeg in the Macedonian and Albanian history. These discussions existed before, but they especially intensified during this period. As the media reported, at the ceremony of uncovering the monument of Skenderbeg on 28 November 2006, there were several thousand citizens present, among them Albanian, Macedonian politicians, historians, and diplomatic representatives. In his speech, Chair Mayor Izet Mexhiti called Skenderbeg 'an Albanian hero, who fought for universal values'.³⁰ In the address of the Albanian Prime Minister Alfred Moisiu, it was mentioned that his monument 'will strengthen the good neighborly relations between Macedonia and Albania'.³¹ In fact, Skenderbeg's monument at that moment provoked political discussion about the present rather than historical discussions supported by historical evidence.

There are no indicators that *My Skenderbei* was directly motivated by the political and cultural events in Macedonia in 2006, but its publication coincided with the more general reexamination of the personality of Skenderbeg in Macedonia. Despite dealing partly with the hero from the 15th century, Skenderbeg, Mihajlovski's novel does not have a romanticist approach to the topic, and it does not turn back to the past with nostalgia. On the contrary, it discusses how various characters from the present moment, linked by the same motif, have understood Skenderbeg, and therefore the events of the novel are mostly located in Macedonia in the 21st century, whereas there is more detailed information about Skenderbeg himself only in two chapters.

²⁹ T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 175.

³⁰ Н. Поповска, и Борис Георгиевски, 'Откриен споменикот на Скендер-бег во Скопје', *Утрински весник* бр. 2246. 29 ноември 2006. 26 април 2011.

<http://www.utrinski.com.mk/?ItemID=8622C30244FE9A4482583E92265793FD>

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2246.

It is visible from the political statements of Mexhiti, Moisiu, and many other politicians that their description of the commander from the 15th century is more an expression of what Eagleton calls a conventionally acceptable speech (i.e. Foucault's will to truth) than an expression of the historical reality about Skenderbeg. This demonstration of the will to truth in particular pertains to the lack of precision about what "fighting for universal values" actually means, or the praising of the hero without giving explicit examples for the reasons why he is thus praised.

According to the data available to the public, Skenderbeg is an Albanian Christian hero, who had been kidnapped by the Turks when he was young, whereas later he fights against them, defending his motherland. This is the "truth" promoted in the reality outside the novel. In this context, Mihajlovski's novel presents an open, although indirect, discussion with the Macedonian and Albanian media, political representatives, and historians in Macedonia. They are absent from the novel, but are permanently present as subjects whom the work indirectly, even unintentionally, addresses. The title of the novel is followed by a kind of a subtitle, which expresses a firm attempt to escape from the strong and almost inevitable will to truth. In his subtitle, namely, Mihajlovski directly attempts to put the truth not 'in the function of learned judgment', but 'in the function of the material itself'. The subtitle is as follows: 'Thirteen contemporary narrative attacks of this much exploited topic from the point of view of an unbiased Macedonian writer with a selected bibliography and a conclusion'. The attempt for impartiality is an attempt not to gratify the will to truth, and the unbiased Macedonian writer is the one who does not base his work on the generally accepted views that are popularly promoted, but makes an attempt to interpret directly from the original sources, that is, testimonies of people who either personally knew Skenderbeg, or lived in the time of his rule and felt the consequences of his actions. That does not mean that this literary work is not aware of the subjectivity of the sources, but what is significant is its attempt to reveal the manipulations of the powerful ones who own what is considered to be a 'learned judgment'.

The title itself, *My Skenderbei*, is an indicator of the possible attitude of its author that it is impossible to reach the absolute truth, that everyone has his or her own truth about Skenderbeg, and that everyone has his or her own Skenderbeg or Skenderbei or Skenderbeu, which marks some small difference in comparison to what the name and the person means to the others. The "i" at the end instead of the usual "g" is defiance of the generally accepted speech, according to which the things are named as they have traditionally been named, without researching whether such view and interpretation is reflective of the historical or any other truth.

Although marginally mentioned, the context of 2001 during the conflict in Macedonia is very important. In the beginning of 2001 a war conflict began in Macedonia between the Macedonian military and police forces, on the one hand, and the Albanians, who were termed

“rebels” by the Albanian population and by the international community and “terrorists” by the Macedonian government and media. It was the last of the wars that broke out on the territory of former Yugoslavia, but it was soon settled with the mediation of the international community by the end of the summer 2001. In this context, the placing of a monument of Skenderbeg, widely known as an Albanian hero in the center of Macedonia’s capital Skopje in 2006 became “the apple of discord” between the Macedonian and the Albanian communities in Macedonia. The novel was already written in the time when the monument was placed, so these particular confrontations were not a direct source of the novel, but the disputes which were present before 2006 probably are. The mentioning of the 2001 conflict in the novel introduces the social context in which the notion of Skenderbeg is used for promoting one’s own selfish aims, where a fighting unit adopts the name of this historical person without knowing who Skenderbeg actually was or what he fought for, based only upon very superficial information generally known in the public. In the first chapter (or, rather, story), the characters have been trying, as they say, in 2001 to understand what is happening in Macedonia, ‘what is this fighting unit “Skenderbei” that attacks our soldiers and police officers’.³² This is all about Skenderbeg in this story. The action then goes on to present a character (the nameless narrator), whose neighbor, Sime, asks him to cut all the branches that hang upon his yard. Sime’s presence in the story is very impressive because he perfectly understands, perhaps not in theory but certainly in practice, the essence of power. Counting on the fact that his neighbor is too polite to argue, Sime manages to infuriate him. Asked by the narrator to be patient, to wait for a little bit, to see that there is a war going on and that cutting the branches is not so important at the moment, Sime expresses his power by not taking into consideration any of these explanations. It seems that this is one of the characteristics of power – to make decisions, to talk, and to behave without worrying how those decisions, words, or behavior will affect the others.

There is one more aspect at this point which is not very emphasized in theories of power, but points to the fact that sometimes the powerful are powerful not only because of a characteristic they themselves possess, but also because the victims allow them to prevail. Thus, the narrator admits that ‘the thunder has already stroke’³³ and that although he pretends that Sime’s words do not affect him at all, he knows deeply in his mind that they tear him apart. He even wanted to hit Sime, but is too tired to do anything. He does not only claim he is tired, but discusses broadly what the consequences are of not undertaking any action. He ironically concludes that the tiredness is a reason

³² Д. Михајловски, *Мојот Скендербеј* (Скопје: Каприкорнус, 2007), p. 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

for many problems, many undesired complication into which we fall, unable to defend ourselves at the critical moment, so we naively and stupidly get stuck, and then, once we rest and gain strength, impaired by politeness and courtesy, we cannot get unstuck.³⁴

The narrator is aware of this situation, but it is not in his power to amend it. He gets into trouble, and he is aware that it is due to his good manners, but, in accordance with his character, he has no strength to fight for his justice, which puts him in a subordinate position. He becomes obsessed with the questions of what suddenly happened to Sime and why he acts in such an unreasonable way; he incessantly thinks about the reasons for Sime's behavior, so much so that this problem completely takes over his thoughts. That the power of the torturer would be much smaller if the victim does not allow himself to be obsessed by the torturer's influence is shown in the words of the narrator's wife: 'Let him be! [...] Relax and enjoy! If you start looking for the reasons for everyone's foolishness, who knows how will you end up!'.³⁵

Yet, the narrator does not manage to carry out in practice the advice from his wife to enjoy and not to think about the torturer, which could completely destroy Sime's superiority over him. He therefore remains powerless for a long time, until 'a stupid, illogical counter attack'³⁶ comes to his mind: he demands that Sime moves his house a little bit – which seems to be the only way of gaining power. This happens frequently: the powerful ones in this literary work, just as in many others, can be defeated only with their own means. It is the realization that when someone attacks with a force greater than that of the attacked, then the attacked ones cannot fight back with gentle or morally righteous principles, but must adjust their methods so that they match the attacker's power. Therefore, Sime's absurd insistence on such a trifle as cutting the branches hanging over his yard cannot be confronted by the pleas directed to him by his polite and courteous neighbor or by the explanations that in the middle of a war, the branches are the least important thing. The only thing that *can* defy Sime is a counterattack with just as an absurd (or even more absurd) request, to which Sime does not know how to respond.

In both Rushdie's and Mihajlovski's novels, the use of language and style also marks the evasion of the existing power systems: *Midnight's Children* violates many of the rules of the standard English language as taught by the British educational system within Britain and in the English schools throughout the world: it coins partly Indian and partly English words that do not exist in the English language; the narration is interrupted by the author's discussions with his wife Padma; the beginning of the chapter entitled 'Revelations' even includes misspelled words, words in italics, and words in capital letters without any visible

³⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

reason for such a mixture of fonts and styles. *My Skenderbei* brings into use many words from 19th century Macedonian folk stories, words that have been long forgotten or neglected; it also employs a very original procedure in composing the narrative – namely, the chapters of the novel are at the same time separate stories. The stories are not connected with events or characters, as is usual in novels in general, but they cannot properly be called individual stories either, as they are connected with the leitmotif of Skenderbeg. Such linguistic and stylistic deviations from the standard rules of writing are an additional method of these novels for attempting to avoid the power of those who dictate the rules both within the narrative and outside, in the social context in which the narrative has appeared.

CONCLUSION: INDIVIDUALS POWERLESS IN ACTION, POWERFUL IN DISCOURSE

The poetic voices in the three mentioned poems, as well as the protagonists in the two novels under review, show willingness to defy those who are more powerful than them. Krале Marko's moral and intellectual power surpasses the physical power of the superior being; despite his absence from the poem, Giordano Bruno overshadows with his *power* the murdering Inquisition; the poet in 'Punishment' identifies with the victim; Saleem's telepathic abilities are superior to the narrow-mindedness of the various representatives of the authorities; the narrator in *My Skenderbei* eventually thinks of a way to strike back. They all produce discourse that is threatening to the authorities they face within the narratives, the authorities that want to retain their power and superior position: either the Inquisition, or God, or the fervent nationalist, or the Imperial rule or the historians who have only superficial knowledge of Skenderbeg. As the examples show, however, there is not much space for optimism, as the protagonists are usually defeated at the end. This supports the view that the procedures 'whose role is to ward off its [the discourse's] powers and dangers'³⁷ are strong and not easily destructible. Yet, even if in their reality, the poetic voices or the characters do not achieve victory against the superior being – Marko loses his strength, Bruno loses his life, Saleem has to go to Pakistan – they at least have their discourse to oppose it, and it is precisely the poetic and narrative discourse that the authors compose and transform in order to defy the widely accepted notions of *power*.

³⁷ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse'.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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