

Anglo-American and French Literary Studies and Their Impact on Kosovo/Albanian Scholarship

Muhamet Hamiti & Lindita Tahiri

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology
University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina,” Rr. “George Bush”
p.n. 10 000 Prishtinë, Kosovo
Email: Muhamet.Hamiti@uni-pr.edu; Lindita.Tahiri@uni-pr.edu

Abstract This paper conducts a comparative study of the dominant English and American critical-literary scholarship and French criticism and theory (often simply referred to as Theory, with a capital T) in the twentieth century with a view to examining their reception in - and impact on - the Kosovo Albanian literary scholarship in the last quarter of the century, at a time when Socialist Realism was reigning in Communist dictator Enver Hoxha’s Albania. Modern Western literary scholarship was anathema there for half a century. The emergence of a modern literary scholarship in Kosovo, with ramifications eventually for the Albanian studies in general in both Kosovo and Albania, the two Albanian-speaking countries, shall be examined, and the seminal role of Kosovar scholars played in this emancipation appraised in terms of literary scholarship and the practice of the teaching of literature. Important consequences for the evolution of a more integral history of Albanian literature adopting a non-ideological, intrinsic approach, have arisen. There are prospects for the Albanian national literary history, gravely deformed by the dogma of Socialist Realism in Albania, which affected also literature and literary studies in Kosovo too, to be redressed.

Keywords American New Criticism; French Theory; Socialist Realism; Kosovo; Albania

Authors **Muhamet Hamiti** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Prishtina, Kosovo. He teaches English and American literature as well as Literary Theory. His research interests cover English, American and Albanian literature, as well as cultural issues. He has written extensively on E. M. Forster, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce, and is the author of three books of literary criticism and essays in

Albanian: *Aspekte të romanit të E.M. Forsterit* (Aspects of E.M. Forster's Novels), *Proza moderne: Xhozef Konradi dhe Xhejms Xhojsi* (Modern Fiction: Joseph Conrad and James Joyce), and *Besimi letrar* (Literary Belief). He has published numerous scholarly articles in English. **Lindita Tahiri** (corresponding author) is Associate Professor teaching both at the Department of English Language and Literature and at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina. She focused her Master and PhD studies in the field of stylistics. She has publications, including three books in Albanian - *Monologu, personazhi dhe autori* (Monologue, Character, and the Author), *Rrëfimi impersonal i Kadaresë* (Kadare's Impersonal Narration), and *Gjuha dhe ideologjia* (Language and Ideology) - in the field of critical linguistics, literary criticism and discourse analysis. She has published numerous scholarly articles in English recently.

Introduction

The literary critical practice of I. A. Richards and T.S. Eliot during the first quarter of the twentieth century grew and was transformed into an overarching method during the three middle decades of the twentieth century. We are referring to American New Criticism whose major representative, and key practitioner up to 1960's was Cleanth Brooks. This is the moment when Structuralism, Post-structuralism and French Deconstruction vigorously interacted with, and hugely influenced, literary studies in Great Britain, the United States of America, and all over the Anglophone world.

The American New Criticism (Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, alongside Cleanth Brooks) produced a literary critical body and pedagogy of literature that looked for the organic unity of the literary work through *close reading*. This strategy underpinned French literary scholarship and its "textualist" strategies in a form different but related to *explication de texte*. While New Criticism is no longer the prevailing theoretical model in American universities, *close reading* remains a fundamental critical and pedagogical tool for the subsequent theoretical approaches to literature, such as Post-structuralism, Deconstruction, as well as the Reader-Response Theory. This is also true today, at the beginning of the new millennium, when New Materialist and Cultural Studies serve as umbrella terms for the multitude of approaches to literature and literature-related studies.

The French critical practice and pedagogy (Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, and Jacques Derrida; the latter became an academic star in the

USA in the 1970s) will be examined in comparison with the prevailing American approach at the time in a bid to foreground the emergence of a new Albanian literary scholarship in Kosovo that will prompt changes in literary studies in Albania, after the fall of Communism in the early 1990s.

This paper examines the influence of the French theory—but also, tangentially, Anglo-American criticism and Russian formalism—on Albanian literary scholarship in Kosovo, more precisely on such scholars as Ibrahim Rugova and Sabri Hamiti (students of Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette, respectively), as well as on Rexhep Ismajli (a student of André Martinet).

European and American Literary Scholarship in the Twentieth Century

The European-born René Wellek and the American scholar Austin Warren introduced European literary scholarship to America with their seminal *Theory of Literature* (first published in 1949), instilling an intrinsic approach to the study of literature that was a hallmark of American New Criticism. Wellek's Prague Structuralist thinking had certainly something to do with it. Russian Formalism (1917-1930) was introduced to the US in the fifties and the sixties, at the height of New Criticism. The two formalisms (the Russian and the American) had things in common, primarily with regard to the studies of the special(ized) language of literature (mostly poetry), but differed in terms of defining meaning. The New Critics dwelt on the meaning of poetry, whereas the Russian Formalist desisted from this. They both pressed for the separation of literature and politics.

While the New Critics dominated the field with their kind of formalism, Victor Erlich introduced Russian formalist criticism in the USA. His influential *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* was published in 1955, whereas a decade later Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis translated and published a book of four key essays, two by Victor Shklovsky, and one by Boris Tomashevsky and one by Boris Eichenbaum, prominent Russian formalists.

Meanwhile, in 1965 Tzvetan Todorov, the Bulgarian-born French literary scholar, introduced Russian Formalism tenets to his adoptive country, France. But Todorov's version of structural analysis was different from the New Criticism's school of thought. "While both focus on internal literary features of works rather than on external concerns such as historical context, he [Todorov] notes that the New Criticism deals only with the individual work itself," according to *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (Leitch 2022). In his essay "The Heresy of a Paraphrase" (Chapter 11 of Brooks' 1947 book *The Well Wrought Urn*), Brooks talks about "the resistance which any good poem sets up against all attempts to

paraphrase it,” and concludes “it is highly important that we know what we are doing and that we see plainly that the paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem” (Leitch 1219). In his idea—and he in fact became the ablest articulator of the New Critical thinking *per se*—*form* and *content* are not separable, adding that the structure of a poem resembles that of a play.

T. S. Eliot shaped the New Critics’ thinking, with his somewhat elusive, but seminal, concept of ‘tradition’. Very early on, in the 1920s Eliot was taken up by British young academics, paving the way for his formative influence on and ubiquitous prominence in the English studies in the next several decades. Louis Menand, the great scholar of Modernism and an authority on T. S. Eliot, sums up well Eliot’s stake in the establishment of “a new method of teaching” English literature:

[The University of] Cambridge is where Richards taught. He sought Eliot out at the bank to entice him to teach a course. Eliot demurred (he liked his job at the bank), but Richards and other Cambridge academics, including Richards’s student William Empson, and even Richards’s rival F. R. Leavis, found in Eliot’s books the template for a new method of teaching English. Their American counterparts, the New Critics, were also Eliot’s devoted exegetes (and almost all of them cited Richards as a model and inspiration). Together, they created the modern English department.

The English department is founded on the belief that people need to be taught how to read literature. (Menand, “Practical Cat”)

The American New Criticism did not produce a body of theory as such, but rather a tool-kit of literary criticism, while the critic became a teacher and an explicator of meanings at a time when literary studies were finally established as a distinct and worthwhile discipline in academia. Curiously enough, John Crowe Ransom (in his 1937 essay “Criticism, Inc.”) blasted literature professors for not being literary critics (Newton).

The New Criticism developed in contravention to the older philological school—originating from 19th century German philology—and repudiated external sources as key to the study of literature.

Structuralism emerged in France in the 1950s and grew to eminence in the 1960s, as the American New Criticism’s appeal was on the wane. The key French literary critic was Roland Barthes, whose Structuralist and Post-structuralist

analyses overflow the boundaries of the two ‘isms’, heading towards Cultural Studies, the dominant European and American all-encompassing mode of studies in the late 20th century and early on in the 21st century. With their semiotic and narratological studies, Barthes, Todorov and Gérard Genette dominated the French literary empire together with Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, the last two becoming stars in America of the French Structuralism in literary criticism started in protest against the literary history and biographical criticism that had dominated the French university literary orthodoxy for long. It sought return to the text, like the American New Criticism, but unlike it, pursued instead an objective methodological model for the study of structures and analogies. Barthes and Genette, as well as Michael Riffaterre, produced a metalanguage that served both as “a theory of literature and as an outline of an analytical method” (Culler 1364). Their metaliterature and the literature they examined became bound up with one another and often indistinguishable in terms of pursuit and value.

Deconstruction, especially in the USA, is very much a New Critical offshoot, and one of its key practitioners, J. Hillis Miller, had actually been schooled in the method. Indeed, the Structuralists and the Deconstructionists, the proponents of an affective criticism, “the Northrop Fryes and the Hillis Millers, the Jacques Derridas and the Frank Kermodes...make up a strange assortment of bedfellows,” as Cleanth Brooks maintains (“The New Criticism” 604).

Deconstructionists and the other sister methods have relegated issues such as good and bad literature in ways that would have been unthinkable for New Critics, for whom this distinction was a crucial duty of criticism, as René Wellek (“The New Criticism: Pro and Contra”) emphasizes.

One can posit a centripetal drive in New Critical thinking against a centrifugal drive in post-structuralist and indeed much of the ensuing literary scholarship in Europe and the US. The ideological protocols of New Criticism lead to a stasis in contrast to the protocols of the post-structuralist thinking that lead to subversion. None of the major theorists or practitioners of New Criticism—although laying emphasis on the poetic language—expressed any interest in contemporary discoveries in linguistics and semiotics, the way the French theorists did. These are perhaps the main clashes of ideas between the two camps. As Graff (256) pointedly stresses:

If there is any point of agreement among deconstructionists, structuralists, reader-response critics, pragmatists, phenomenologists, speech-act theorists, and theoretically minded humanists, it is on the principle that texts are not,

after all, autonomous and self-contained, that the meaning of any text in itself depends for its comprehension on other texts and textualized frames of reference.

Traditional Literary Scholarship and the Rise of Albanian Socialist Realism

Albanian literary scholarship as such arose at the end of the 19th century, during the period of *Rilindja* (what Italians would call Risorgimento) literature of the National Revival and consolidated itself as a discipline during the Albanian Independence (1912) period, up to 1944, when Communists took over Albania at the end of WWII, according to a book (a reader) by Ibrahim Rugova and Sabri Hamiti (*Kritika letrare*), which features texts by, and comments on, 16 authors covering the period, from De Rada to Migjeni. The father of Albanian criticism as such is Faik Konica (1875-1943), editor of the journal *Albania* (Brussels, 1899-1902) (Mann 99), who was also a gifted writer of fiction. Other notable scholars of the first half of the century were Krist Maloki (1900-1972) from Kosovo, working in Austria), Ernest Koliqi (1903-1975) and Eqrem Çabej (1908-1980), who became the foremost Albanian linguist of the second half of the century, as well as Namik Resuli (1908-1985) and Karl Gurakuqi (1895-1971), who edited the seminal book, *Shkrimtarët shqiptarë* (Albanian Writers) in two volumes, published in Tirana, Albania, in 1941, under the auspices of Ernest Koliqi, who was Albanian Minister of Education under Fascist Italian occupation. Other talented young critics were Dhimitër Shuteriqi (1915-2003)—who would after WWII refashion himself into the main advocate of Socialist Realism as a scholar and head of the Albanian Writers and Artists Union—and Arshi Pipa (1920-1997), an avowed opponent of the Communist literary establishment in Albania and its dogma.

Faik Konica parted ways with the traditional Albanian Revival ideology of adoration and mythicizing of everything Albanian, thus embarking himself on a modern, critical approach to Albanian literature and culture.

Krist Maloki adopted psycho-analytical and cultural-historical approaches—though he claimed he simply engaged in objective criticism—to redress the critical reception of a foremost classical poet (Naim Frashëri) and the rising star in Albanian poetry, his contemporary, Lasgush Poradeci. In his long study on Frashëri, published in 1925, Maloki (“Naim Frashëri”) reassesses him, whereas in a sequel, published in Vienna, he writes also about contemporary Albanian literature and blasts the Albanian literary practice of the time, as Rugova (*Kahe dhe premisa* 108) rightly observes. Meanwhile, in his 1938 polemic essay “A është poet Lasgush Poradeci?” (Is

Lasgush Poradeci a poet?) he questions the very Albanianess of the poet, positing an overdue level of Slavic, Rumanian and French influences on his poetry.

Ernest Koliqi and his two collaborators in their work on Albanian literature, Namik Resuli and Karl Gurakuqi, pursued a model of scholarship in pursuit of an essentialist, cultural and literary mode, at a time when an ideological approach was gaining ground in the writings of Fan S. Noli (famous for his translations of Shakespeare's works into Albanian, for which he wrote introductory notes) and the budding writer and critic Dhimitër Shuteriqi before WWII.

Eqrem Çabej, who studied philology in Austria, introduced philological and cultural-historical approaches in Albanian studies. He authored key text-books on Albanian language and literature in the 1930s as well as his seminal study on Romanticism in Eastern and South-eastern Europe and in Albania, written in 1945, published in 1994. After the war, he committed himself to linguistic studies, less politicized in Communist Albania than literary studies.

Arshi Pipa, meanwhile, the most vocal critic of the Communist leanings in literary scholarship, wrote mostly in English in his later career. His work became available in Albanian only recently.

This tradition was upended when Enver Hoxha's partisans seized power in Albania at the end of WWII. A literary graveyard was planted in which Albanian Socialist Realism grew, claims Arshi Pipa (23), who was imprisoned by the regime for a number of years before he fled Albania and moved to the United States, where he became an academic, critical of Hoxha's government and the literary establishment there. Pipa's *Contemporary Albanian Literature* provides a tableau of the rise and a rigorous implementation of Socialist Realism in Albania in the first part of his book (3-123) featuring also the most renowned Albanian writer Ismail Kadare (born in 1936), who alternatively embraced and spurned the dogma in his poetry and fiction. Kadare had to rewrite his *Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur* (*General of the Dead Army*), first published in 1964, because of ideological deviation, Pipa (32) states, quoting from *Historia e letërsisë shqiptare të realizmit socialist* (*History of the Albanian Literature of Socialist Realism*), published by the Albanian Academy of Sciences in 1978.

"With the communists seizing power in Albania towards the end of World War II, a literature modelled after socialist realism as concocted by Stalin and Zhdanov," Pipa says at the outset in his Foreword to *Contemporary Albanian Literature*, adding that "Literature thus came to be the main channel for the diffusion of Marxism-Leninism, through poems which were versified elaborations of Party slogans and with novels fleshing out Stalin's formula that writers are the 'engineers

of the human soul” (iii).

Literary criticism was “duty-bound to abide by the tenets of realist socialism” in Albania, Pipa points out, asserting that “literary criticism in Albania continues to lag behind all other literary genres” (112). Although he published the aforementioned book in 1991, developments in the literary scholarship in Kosovo from the two previous decades, which are the subject of this paper, are not treated at all in Pipa’s book. In his Foreword, Pipa claims the Albanians in Kosovo (in former Yugoslavia) had “produced...some remarkable books” in the first two decades after WWII, damning Kosovars for having accepted eventually the Standard Language—“the Stalin-inspired language reform of Stalinist Albania” (sic)—based on the Tosk dialect; Kosovo’s literature, he claims, previously written in the Gheg dialect, which he favoured, “declined...after two [ensuing] decades of futile experimentation” of Kosovars writing literature in the newly instituted literary medium (vi). Strangely enough, Pipa declared literature produced by Kosovars afterwards effectively null and void.

The most ambitious project for a national literary history in Albania has been *Historia e letërsisë shqiptare* (*History of Albanian Literature*), a collective enterprise, under the direction of Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi, published in 1983. It built on a two-volume History of Albanian Literature that Shuteriqi and his colleagues had published in 1959-60. The latter had been preceded by Shuteriqi’s own textbook History of literature for high schools published in 1955. The 1983 History (reprinted in Kosovo in 1989 too), covering the Albanian Literature up to WWII, ostensibly academic, bears the clear imprimatur of Enver Hoxha’s party line and the signature of Shuteriqi, an undisputed literary tsar enforcing the Party’s programme for the creation of the “new socialist man.” A number of major Albanian writers of the first half of the 20th century (Gjergj Fishta, Faik Konica, Ernest Koliqi, etc.), who had been established as such and featured in earlier publications of this nature, were excluded altogether from or treated briefly and disparagingly (Fishta and Konica) (cf. Shuteriqi 471-2) in the most recent History of national literature published during the Communist era in Albania. With its ideological bent, trying to refashion literature in its mold, the History serves biased and self-serving interpretations of some important authors/works to make them fit into the picture, as alleged predecessors of Realist Socialist literature. Migjeni (1911-1938) and Fan S. Noli (1882-1965) are pronounced as such.

While the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* (in two large volumes) provides insightful information on the plight of these cultures at the junctures and disjunctures of the 20th century, the Albania situation gets a marginal

treatment; the Kosovan plight is all but missing. Robert Elsie's short paper ("The Hybrid Soil of the Balkans"), while insightful, cannot do justice to the complexity of the literary situation in the Albanian lands. His *History of Albanian Literature* does a better job in this regard, though.

The Kosovo Albanian literary scholarship in the last quarter of the 20th century will substantially redress the damage Communist Albania had done to the Albanian literature and the studies of literature in general, as the next section of this paper purports to demonstrate.

The Rise of Modern Kosovo/Albanian Literary Studies

The Republic of Kosovo, an independent country since 2008, was a majority Albanian-inhabited autonomous province in former Yugoslavia in the wake of World War II. The literary scene in Kosovo developed in a Communist country with more liberal cultural tenets than in the neighbouring Republic of Albania, where the doctrine of Socialist Realism was instituted by the Communist regime and strictly enforced until 1990.

In post WWII Yugoslavia, Socialist Realism was introduced but soon abandoned, after an intervention by the well-known Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža (1893-1981) ("Socijalistički realizam") [Socialist Realism], who was close to Yugoslav dictator Josip Broz Tito. Addressing the third congress of the Yugoslav Union of Writers in Ljubljana in 1952, Krleža stood for freedom of literary expression.

The first generation of Kosovan literati were educated in Belgrade (Serbia) before university studies were launched in Prishtina in 1960, at the time as a University of Belgrade campus in Kosovo.

Literary critic and historian Rexhep Qosja (1936), a renowned scholar of Albanian Romanticism, also a novelist and playwright, and Ali Aliu (1934), who adopted a hermeneutic approach in his criticism, became leading professors of literature at the University of Prishtina, founded in 1970. Qosja criticized Ismail Kadare early in the 1970s for his Realist Socialist practice in his fiction. Meanwhile, Aliu played a crucial role in publishing in Kosovo contemporary literature from Albania. Both Qosja and Aliu are senior members of the Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Relations between academic and literary establishments in Kosovo and Albania were almost non-existent for a couple of decades or so, before contacts were established during the 1970s and broke down after the 1981 political upheavals in Kosovo, when Yugoslav authorities cracked down on peaceful protests of majority

Albanians for a full, republican status, for Kosovo.

It was during those 1970s that a younger group of writers and budding literary scholars—some of the latter educated in France—broke ranks with the dominant Socialist literature in Kosovo and Realist Socialist literature in Albania, and the imposed dogma of Socialist Realism in Albania, paving the way for the introduction of new literary methods, the adoption of an intrinsic approach to literature.

In 1971—an ‘annus mirabilis’ for Albanian letters (M. Hamiti 243)—a literary manifesto was launched against Socialist Realism, entitled “Vox clamantis in deserto,” published in the cultural section of the Kosovo Albanian daily newspaper “Rilindja” on 2 October 1971—to the consternation of the old guard of writers, and the political-literary establishment in Albania. The leading author of the “Vox” was Anton Pashku (1937-1995), author of several collections of short stories and a novel, *Oh* [the title in Albanian, just like in English, is an interjection], published earlier that year, which is now considered a modern classic of Albanian literature. (Young writers and scholars, including Ali Podrimja, Mensur Raifi, Rexhep Ismajli, and Eqrem Basha, were amongst the signatories.) Anton Pashku was banned from being published in Albania in 1973 (Gjoka 47-9). He is celebrated as a great writer in Kosovo and Albania, although less read and understood in the latter. His *Oh* is written in the Gheg dialect, predominant in Kosovo and northern Albania.

Three major Kosovar linguists and literary scholars, Rexhep Ismajli (1947), Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) and Sabri Hamiti (1950) introduced French literary theory—wider modern and largely contemporary scholarship, too - to the Albanian studies, initially in Kosovo, and later, after the fall of Communism, in Albania too. In 1970s, Rexhep Ismajli studied under André Martinet in Paris; he translated into Albanian Martinet’s seminal *Éléments de linguistique générale*, alongside Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale*, and introduced them in the University curriculum. Ismajli contributed Albanian terminology for new structuralist and semiotic concepts. In writing about literature, he adopted the method of textual analysis. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Rugova studied under the eminent literary theorist Roland Barthes, whereas his younger colleague Sabri Hamiti studied general literature in Zagreb (Croatia)—Zagreb had the most pro-Western school in literary scholarship in Yugoslavia at the time, in the 1970s—and specialized in the theory of literary forms under Gérard Genette at L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris in 1980-81. Translated by Ismajli and Hamiti, respectively, a book by Roland Barthes (*L’aventure sémiologique*; Alb. *Aventura semiologjike*) and Gérard Genette’s *Figura* were published in the 1980s. In addition, Tzvetan Todorov’s and Oswald Ducrot’s *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du*

langage (1972) was published in Albanian in 1984, translated by Ismajli (*Fjalor enciklopedik i shkencave të ligjërimët*).

The New Critical thinking was introduced to the Albanian literary environment with the translation of Wellek and Austen's *Theory of literature* in Prishtina in 1982 (*Teoria e letërsisë*). That very year a selection of essays by T. S. Eliot was translated and published in Albanian (*Ese të zgjedhura*) in Prishtina. *The Idea of a Theater* by Frances Fergusson and the seminal *Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye were published in Prishtina in Albanian translation in 1983 (*Nocioni i teatrit*) and 1990 (*Anatomia e kritikës*), respectively. Northrop Frye's theory of codes served Hamiti well to re-write aspects of Albanian literary history of the 17th and 18th century in his seminal *Vetëdija letrare* (1989).

The Literary Circle of Prishtina / the Prishtina School

Kosovo Albanian literary scholarship broke decisively, although in a seemingly discreet manner, from the dominant Albanian Socialist Realism dogma—which had its advocates in Kosovo too—in the early 1970s thanks to the rise of a new generation of scholars who studied literature in Prishtina, Zagreb (Croatia), and Paris. For the first time, in as many decades, Albanian literary studies were in touch directly with contemporary literary studies in the West. This had only happened in pre-WWII Albania at a time when the country did not even have a university.

Sabri Hamiti and Ibrahim Rugova published seminal books of literary scholarship that drew amongst others on French and American literary scholarship. Since 1974, Hamiti has published a dozen or so books of literary studies on Albanian (and general literature), amongst which *Vetëdija letrare* (*Literary Awareness*), *Bioletra* (2000) (*Bio-Letters*), a highly idiosyncratic theory of life writing, and *Utopia letrare* (2013) (*Literary Utopia*), making him the leading literary scholar in both Kosovo and Albania at present. Ibrahim Rugova produced a great body of scholarship by the late 1980s, including his seminal monograph study *Kahe dhe premisa të kritikës letrare shqiptare* (1986) (*Directions and Premises of Albanian Literary Criticism*) and his collection of essays entitled *Refuzimi estetik* (1987) (*Aesthetic Refusal*), before he embarked upon a political career. (He is seen as the Founding Father of independent Kosovo). The French-educated Rexhep Ismajli, on the other hand, contributed to both linguistic and literary scholarship in Albanian. He is arguably the foremost Albanian linguist today in both Kosovo and Albania. His early books, *Shenjë e ide* (1974) (*Sign and Idea*) and *Shumësia e tekstit* (1977) (*Textual Multiplicity*) were groundbreaking in the field, whereas his *Studime për historinë e shqipes në kontekst ballkanik* (2015) (*Studies on the History*

of *Albanian in the Balkan Context*), a seminal book on the contacts of Albanian with other Balkan languages as well as the history of Albanian language.

With his own body of scholarship, as well as an academic, Professor Sabri Hamiti revolutionized literary studies and indeed the literature curriculum at the University of Prishtina in the 1990s, as well as well into the 21st century, with a new mode of teaching Albanian and general literature, in a way similar to what T.S. Eliot had done with the English department, as characterized by Louis Menand (“Practical Cat”). With his practice, Hamiti validates Scholes’ dictum that “teaching and theory are always implicated in one another” (*Textual Power* ix). Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, though not teaching himself, had a stake in this too, by virtue of his modern literary scholarship and as a very original thinker in the Albanian-language cultural area.

Meanwhile, Professor Rexhep Ismajli, as a translator of seminal books in Albanian in the 1970s and the 1980s, became tangentially influential in literary studies. In addition, he edited and wrote about Martin Camaj and Arshi Pipa, important Albanian writers of the diaspora, as well as other Kosovan and Albanian poets.

The literary scholar-turned independence leader, Ibrahim Rugova, became the first democratically elected President of Kosovo, whereas Rexhep Ismajli and Sabri Hamiti, formerly professors at the University of Prishtina, are senior members of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo. Ismajli has also served as President of this Academy.

These three scholars (Hamiti is also a leading poet), alongside poet Ali Podrimja (1942-2012), and novelists Anton Pashku and Zejnullah Rrahmani (1952), the latter also a prominent scholar of literary theory (*Nga teoria e letërsisë shqipe*), as well as literary critic, translator, and French literature professor Mensur Raifi, formed the backbone of the Literary Circle of Prishtina (Alb. *Qarku letrar i Prishtinës*; sometimes called also the Kosovo Modern School), whose legacy extends amongst others to such Kosovar scholars as Kujtim Shala (1974) and Nysret Krasniqi (1976), academics and prolific literary critics. Krasniqi authored his voluminous *Letërsia e Kosovës* (2016) (*Kosovo’s Literature*), a study on the evolution of a distinct literary branch within the wider Albanian literature, as well as a monograph on one of the leading members of the Literary Circle (*Sabri Hamiti*).

In his treatise *Shkollat letrare shqipe (Albanian Literary Schools)*, published also in English and French translations, one of the leading members of the Prishtina School, Sabri Hamiti, postulates the existence of a distinct Kosovo Modern(ist) School in the canon of Albanian literary schools alongside Philo-biblical, Romantic, Critical, Modern, Socialist Realist, and Dissident schools. This is how Hamiti sums

it up:

It is about Kosovan authors, and would normally be simply called modern, but, since such a school appeared in the past [in Albanian literature], now the modifier *modern* encapsulates a literary memory/recollection, which is associated with the literature of a half century before [the body and mode of literature that was brought to an end by the new Socialist Realist literature in Albania, MH]. Therefore, it seeks re-establishing structural and literary continuities.

This school strives to synthesize earlier literary experiences. It rules out the ideology of the actual rule (oppression), establishes the cult of the topic of freedom in both individual and national aspects. It establishes thematic and discourse correspondences with modern Albanian literature and modern literatures of the West.

The figural literary language becomes the very essence of literature as well as a vehicle for double protection: from censorship and militantism (...)

Meanwhile, basic problems of interpretation and theoretical discourse of contemporary literature underpin the field of literary criticism. (*Shkollat letrare shqipe* 26)

Ibrahim Rugova (in his *Refuzimi estetik*) and Sabri Hamiti (in his *Bioletra*) provide the most profound theoretical articulations of the Prishtina Circle's literary tenets, according to Kujtim Shala (*Prishtina letrare: Petit Paris* 42).

The Literary Circle of Prishtina's influence extended to Albania too, with acolytes such as Dhurata Shehri and Persida Asllani, both born in 1973, leading contemporary literary scholars and academics in Tirana. Shehri maintains that the new canon of "the Modern school" in Kosovo that arose in the 1970s, "rebuilt the hierarchy of tradition by re-evaluating the [Albanian] modernist avant-garde of the first half of the 20th century, which had been excluded by the retrograde [Socialist Realist] canon" (39). This new, modernist canon continues to be rejected in Albania, she asserts (Shehri 39).

The body of literary scholarship from Kosovo was virtually unknown in Albania until after 1991, when Communist rule crumbled. It took time for it to become widely available there, though, as Kosovo at the time was under Serbian occupation and literary traffic between the two Albanian-inhabited entities kicked off slowly, not only due to difficulties of communication, but also the resistance put up by the literary *ancien régime* in Albania. Joint conferences organized in Tirana

in the mid-1990s by Kosovan and Albanian academics, namely the Institute of Linguistics and Literature of the Albanian Academy of Sciences and the Prishtina-based Faculty of Philology of the University of Prishtina (two international conferences on Albanian studies and a conference entitled “Literature as such”) were a watershed moment in this encounter between the two largely divergent schools of thought.

The result of the long, imposed, separation between Kosovo and Albania was the “rise of two very different Albanian cultures and two different Albanian literatures,” maintains prominent Canadian-born scholar of Albanian studies, Robert Elsie (*Albanian Literature* 211); his language of ‘two different’ Albanian cultures/literatures is disputed by Albanian scholars themselves, although they recognize the idiosyncrasies involved.

The Kosovo Albanian literary scholarship of the past 40 years, summarized here, canonized to a degree, has been criticized by some writers for its alleged “aberrations.” Mehmet Kraja (1952), a prominent novelist, the current President of the Kosovo Academy and Sciences and Arts, has blasted some of the critics for being self-centred in their methods of study - superseding literature itself—in his view (“Në Akademi...”). This has echoes of the pejorative epithets formalisms have accrued in the era of historicisms, as Culler observes (*The Literary in Theory* 9).

Conclusion

The influence of Anglo-American criticism and French theory, alongside Russian formalism, as well as their offshoots in literary scholarship, underpinned the rise of a new Albanian literary scholarship in Kosovo during the last decades of the 20th century while Socialist Realism dogma reigned in Communist Albania for much of the second half of the century with devastating effects for Albanian literature.

The mapping of the new Kosovo Albanian literary scholarship—largely unknown to the outside world, repudiated by Albania’s establishment that policed literature brutally for decades—necessitated taking stock, in the first half of this article, of the evolution of, and interaction between, the Anglo-American criticism and French literary theory in the past century.

During the 1970s, when French theory was at its peak, several Kosovo Albanian literary scholars were educated in France, under major French practitioners, among whom Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette, and found themselves at the receiving end of new protocols in the field of linguistic and literary studies. This helped them chart new ways in their approach to literature, including their national literature. New formalist methods were used, textual

strategies adopted, and the Socialist Realist dogma rejected, in pursuit of a more autonomous, apolitical and non-ideological, engagement with literature.

The new literary scholarship's credo is indebted to the French theory and American criticism. In turn, it helped nurture a new modernist literature in Kosovo. Writers and scholars from Kosovo have in retrospect been seen to have formed a distinct group, the "Literary Circle of Prishtina," whose legacy lives on in both Kosovo and Albania.

Ibrahim Rugova, Rexhep Ismajli, as both a linguist and literary scholar, and Sabri Hamiti, leading academics and the driving force behind the Literary Circle, have revolutionized Albanian studies in the academia and have paved the way for eventually redressing the damage that Socialist Realism's dogma has done to the Albanian culture.

In a tug of war of sorts, the Prishtina School prevailed over the Tirana school of literary scholarship in the second half of the 20th century.

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