

Stagnant Utopia

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Using the methodology of linguistic anthropology and the anthropology of literature, this thesis draws links between the works of prolific Serbian authors' works, the social unrest and unease present in late stage Yugoslavia, and the Balkan Wars of the nineties.

By applying the theories of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, works by Danilo Kiš, Milorad Pavić and Borislav Pekić are analyzed by style and content, which despite not being directly linked, unite the works of the authors, and lend credence to the question posed by the thesis: what do the authors express about their time, and how do they present alternatives to it?

Fernando Poyatos, in 'Literary Anthropology' already laid out the feasibility of treating fiction novels as anthropological artefacts, but it is by analyzing the works using Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, dialogism and Hanks' textuality that we can make sense and grasp at a link between the works under analysis. It is through Bakhtin that this dissertation is able to analyze and theorize on the temporal dimension of the novels being analysed.

The conclusion of the thesis is that the attempt to draw attention to a stagnated society and in their way, theorize about the social order to follow. This is done through indirect critique of the ruling order and the presentation of alternatives.



Map of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia.



Map of Serbia (including Kosovo), and neighbouring countries.

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1. Introduction

The events surrounding the dissolution of Yugoslavia have no doubt been litigated half to death, and I do not aim to solve anything or assign blame to any particular party. What I instead aim to do is to explore can what was to come, that is the bloody conflicts and genocides of the nineties, be inferred from a development of symbols and themes in literature. These themes and symbols should be ones that can be understood to represent or reference discernible elements within a discourse of Serbian nationalism.

Even though at the time that these works were published, the guiding principle in inter-ethnic relations within the constituent peoples of Yugoslavia was “brotherhood and unity”, I posit, that the cracks, caused by external forces, were beginning to show, and that the pains of economic and societal uncertainty were beginning to show, in many different ways, but that this uncertainty gave rise to less than constructive ways of coping (such as ultra-nationalism) which would have catastrophic consequences.

This invariably leads us to the question of the nature of the atrocities and tragedy that was the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Was it simply an expression of the feelings of Serbs and Slovenes, or was it, as I would argue, the product of a series of conscious choices made by politicians in late Yugoslavia, with their own ideologies and objectives. It turns out that the answer is, as most things, more nuanced than either of the two mentioned above. Later in this introduction, I shall be diving deeper into the reasons laid out by scholars on the topic of late Yugoslavia, but here, I intend to outline my objective for this thesis.

What began as a project focused on blatant and easily recognizable symbols and acts of nationalism, has transformed into a thesis on something far more subtle namely: if we take it as a fact that literature can be used as a way of gaining an understanding of the attitudes and feelings present in a given society at a given point in time, what can we gather about the literature that was written in what would become Serbia in the 1980's? More specifically, I am interested in the ways that these feelings are given shape in the works of authors, and how these authors express the uncertainty of the times in their works. Could an intensely collective nation react with hostility to those it perceived as threatening the collective

project? How do the rhetorical methods used by the authors attempt to capture and change the time they find themselves stuck in.

I came to this topic through first wanting to research the spread of nationalistic Serbian propaganda online. I have an academic as well as a personal interest in the Balkan region in general and Serbia in particular, as well as an interest in far-right extremist politics and movements. This research is important due to the rise in far-right politics globally, and a linguistic/political anthropological lens serves to elucidate the technologies at play behind the scenes of instances of far-right activity.

This kind of propaganda is spread online through phrases, music and videos, and while some maintain an ironic distance to the messaging, some have taken it seriously, as is the case with the perpetrator of the Christchurch attacks in 2019, who, before entering the mosque, played a song made during and for the war in Bosnia (1992-1995). While this is not strictly relevant to my thesis, I included it as an example of the potency of Serbian nationalistic signs, symbols and symbolism, and that even though the horrors of genocide are far removed from the minds of most Europeans, it is perhaps not as far removed as one would like to think.

What comes up again and again in the works of authors such as Marko Živković and Susan Woodward, is the concept of paranoia, and especially Živković references paranoia and conspiratorial thinking in his work *Serbian Dreambook*, as a response to the repression and fabrications of the Yugoslav government. The conspiratorial thinking also served to position Serbia in a geopolitical context, where all the ills of the collapse of socialism could be explained with the fact that Serbia was at the center of a conspiracy that aimed to destabilise the country and that the fact that this conspiracy existed served to prove that there was something of value in Serbia that attracted the attention of global organizations (Živković, 266). Although these books serve only as the theoretical root for this thesis, ideas and attitudes brought forth in these are present in the works that will be discussed in this thesis. The novels chosen for this thesis are the attempts of the authors to come to terms with the uncertain conditions they find themselves in.

The topics of paranoia and conspiratorial thinking are actual in the year 2020 with most notable examples being Q-Anon and the unclear circumstances surrounding the death of disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein. The spread of conspiracies, in my mind, are due to a

rising mistrust and feeling of disconnection to the ruling classes, with the American political system having come under fire for undemocratic practices during the past 2 elections (2016, 2020). Indeed, this phenomenon has long been a researched yet underappreciated part of American politics, such as the paranoid style idea coined by Richard Hofstadter.

Based on a cursory look online, there have not been theses written on this topic, yet. But I am sure there is an abundance of linguistic anthropologic study on the topics of extremist nationalist rhetoric in several contexts and literature born out of strife.

What follows is a brief summary of the field site, method, and timeframe, after which I will briefly explain the societal conditions in the Yugoslav Republic of Serbia, which will help to understand the effects it may have had on the sort of literature that was produced and consumed in this period in time.

1.1. Field Site

As stated, my original desire was to approach this topic through music, but I have been advised to switch my focus to literature. As this is an anthropology of literature, I have no physical field site. Seeing as my topic is temporally fixed, and temporally fixed in the past, my field site will be comprised of works of fiction dating to the 1970's and 1980's, written by writers identified as being Serbs, by themselves or by others.

Identity in the area of former Yugoslavia (the Western Balkans), can roughly be understood by dividing people according to religions, not because this method is valid by any means (because it is far too simplistic to define people by any single characteristic) but because it is the metric most in use today, and a ruling logic in the region itself. The three main groups are: Catholics (Slovenia and Croatia), Muslims (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Orthodox Christians (Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). These categories could also be seen as ethnic, as they only apply to ethnic Slavs, which excludes Albanians, Roma and Turks (to mention a few) who live in the area. The roots of this division lies in the millet system introduced by the Ottoman Empire, who divided the population of the Balkans according to their religious affiliation. The minority groups mentioned are not the only minority groups present in the area of former Yugoslavia, but the list has been abridged for brevity's sake.

The three novels chosen for analysis are the result of some personal interest, and some circumstance. This thesis is being written in the midst of the Covid 19-crisis of 2020, which has restricted the availability of resources somewhat, but I feel that they give a varied insight into the literature and attitudes prevalent in late socialist Yugoslavia, as they are the works of several different authors with different views and styles, which is important because having a multitude of viewpoints represented widens the base of the anthropological analysis I will be engaging in.

The three books I have chosen to analyse in this thesis are ‘Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča’ (A Tomb for Boris Davidovich) by Danilo Kiš, ‘Hodočašće Arsenija Njegovana’ (The Houses of Belgrade) by Borislav Pekić, and ‘Hazarski Rečnik’ (Dictionary of the Khazars) by Milorad Pavić. The three novels are all examples of fiction novels, with heavy tones of realism, as they all portray precise moments in time, fusing the fictional events depicted with real events. Although the novels analysed do not directly comment on the social challenges of late Yugoslavia, what matters is when they were written.

There are a number of common themes that the three novels to be discussed attempt to do. The first is that they seek to transcend time in which they were written and change perception of history, analysing the past, or events set in the past in the future (such as analysing Jenne d’Arc as a feminist figure).

The three novels are also similar in the way that they are presented to the reader. The novels are presented as a will, a dictionary, and writings on headstones, all three of which are types of writing (genres) that carry weight and are not easily altered.

The third feature is the attempt to shake up a stagnant system, or rather maybe an attempt to shake the readers of the novels and make them aware of reality as the authors interpreted it.

While my original topic was to be literature and how it could have been used as a vehicle for Serbian nationalist propaganda, my current topic is less concerned with the Yugoslav wars themselves, and more to do with the decades leading up to the war and the larger socio-economic causes of the wars.

The events and materials that I will be discussing in this thesis are directly linked to the wars of the 1990's, because as will be shown in the next chapter, the causes of the wars were less so an explosion of nationalist violence, and more the result of several internal and external forces acting within and without and reacting to events in Yugoslavia.

1.2. Method

My method will be based on the reading and analysis of fiction works by authors from the former Yugoslavia and using, at least to begin with, an anthropology of literature lens to analyse these works.

At first glance, anthropology of literature seems to be an odd idea, and something more within the purview of majors in languages, but as explained by Fernando Poyatos in 'Literary Anthropology' (1988), literary sources are a treasure trove for anthropologists when it comes to semantics and semiotics. It is when we link literary anthropology to linguistic anthropology that the links become more evident. Drawing from the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose literary theory has been pivotal for the linguistic anthropological concepts such as textuality, we must see not only the novel itself as an entity, but the stories with the text as speech events (an example would be a character in a novel telling another character a story). Written works occupy the same sphere as spoken language and create the possibility to imagine a situation where the reader and writer are able to speak to one another. Novels and fiction writing in general represent the work of a single individual, the greatest works are those that manage to tap into a sentiment in society at large, and speak to readers, as it were.

What Poyatos brings to this project, more than anything, is the very idea that fiction literature itself is worthy of anthropologists' attention. And why shouldn't it be, it is a cultural artifact in itself, that transfers messages and meaning through time. It would be disingenuous to try to accurately portray a people at a certain point in time without looking into the art produced during the time we are interested in. Luckily the period in time I am interested in has already had the time to be contextualized and analysed, so that I have ample research to base my thesis on.

It is nevertheless important to take into account the author as a person, and to research the lives of the authors to place oneself as much as possible into the frame of mind of the author to understand their intent. This is a risky endeavour, due to the fact that one may easily come to attribute intention put words into the mouths of authors. It is thus most reasonable to keep speculation as speculation, and not to try to solve the mystery or give definitive answers.

What inspired me to pursue this line was reading 'Writing the Yugoslav Wars' by Dragana Obradović. In this work Obradović studies the work of three postmodernist writers: David Albahari, Semezdin Mehmedinović, and Dubravka Ugrešić. While this work falls more into the camp of literature analysis, the premise that styles of writing could be influenced by real-world events seemed like a useful tool to try and incorporate into my thesis.

What Obradović argues, is that the chaos of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990's lead to the popularity of postmodern literature, which is identified by a variety of aspects, but the most important may be the use of unreliable narrators in postmodern works. According to Obradović this drive towards fiction that obscures the truth was a mechanism born out of the repression of Yugoslav society, and the confusion and horror that followed the dissolution of the state of Yugoslavia. Obradović's unreliable narrator appeals to the reader as a sort of ally, who like the reader exists outside the social world depicted. This echoes with the idea of the chronotope that will be explored further on the next page but suffice it to say that the elements of insecurity cause the reader to doubt the world being written about, as well as established understandings of said world and the authors claims, causing all grand narratives to lose credibility. At the same time this particular chronotope creates the space for an unreliable subject.

Another scholar whose work proved to offer a helpful insight into the attitudes and mechanisms active within late Yugoslavia, is Marko Živković. In his work, *Serbian Dreambook*, he employs the idea of the "imaginary" borrowed from Lacanian psychoanalysis, to describe the ways in which the regime of Slobodan Milošević managed to control and shape the very dreams and ideas of the future that the Serbian populace harboured.

This control affected the ways in which Serbians saw their own past (as in the example provided in the work of Serbs being the "oldest people"). The recontextualization of the past

affected understandings of the future, and what the fate and destiny of the Serbian people was, which could serve as an explanation for things that happened later in the 20th century.

Using the concepts described above, which help to lend credence to the idea that literature and real-world events affect each other, I intend to analyse the three works I have mentioned.

I also intend to use concepts explored in William F. Hanks' 'Text and Textuality', especially the concept of textuality, which Hanks characterizes as the particular quality of coherence inherent to a large body of text, which is particularly helpful, when analysing the qualities of a non-fiction work (in this particular example). As far as I understand it, textuality provides tools for understanding and analysing text as a whole, and what particular features coalesce to form a totality.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's 'The Dialogic Imagination', Bakhtin discusses the term chronotope, which he explains to mean "time-space" which Bakhtin admits having borrowed from mathematics (Bakhtin 1982:84). In my thesis, I will be making use of Bakhtin's chronotope to analyse what textual characteristics are present in the works and the ways in which that betrays their *genre*.

Bakhtin also discusses the ways in which books of similar genres share themes or "motifs" (Bakhtin 1982:88), and the differences in works are composed of the amount and frequency of such motifs, of which Bakhtin offers the example of Greek romances. In 'The Dialogic Imagination' Bakhtin posits, that the language used in a novel represents a dialogue between certain individual and collective experiences. The primary genre of speech refers to forms of speech or writing that has to do with these situations or experiences.

An example of this is found in Valentin Voloshinov's 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language' (1973) where hunger means different things to different people. Voloshinov uses the example of a "beggar" (1973:89) whose hunger is a matter of chance and how this individual experience of hunger affects the person experiencing hunger, as opposed to a group of people experiencing hunger on their own (here Voloshinov uses the example of peasants), as opposed again to a group of people experiencing hunger together (soldiers or workers on a collective farm, and so on).

In Alexei Yurchak's 'Everything was Forever Until it was No More' (2005) we find an example of the schizophrenic situation that people in the Soviet Union found themselves in, where the social reality of people was completely opposed to the official narrative, which told them that the Soviet Union was going to last forever when, in fact, most people had come to accept the fact that the Soviet Union was going to collapse. In a phenomenon Yurchak called "hypernormalized" (2005:107) language itself became unmoored from reality, so that it no longer served to express everyday things, but the party line.

The point being that In late Yugoslav literature these different ways of experiencing the same thing present themselves, are experienced, and lead to different actions (physical actions or speech). In 'Houses of Belgrade the houses are not only a physical abode, but a trope for societal stability, and for Arsénie a metaphor for bourgeois attitudes towards ownership and aesthetics. For their inhabitants the houses are of course something else such as the surroundings for childhood memories and so on. These attitudes enter into a dialogue in a text that discusses houses and buildings and "house" gains different meanings like "hunger" in Voloshinov's example.

As such, that chronotopes also inform genre; certain motifs appear more regularly or constitute a larger part of certain *genres*. It would stand to reason that chronotopes are not independent of the context in which they are written, as it has been accepted that chronotopes can be used to express the opinions and ideas of the author through time.

"Three basic types of novels developed in ancient times, and ... three corresponding methods for artistically fixing time and space in these novels" (Bakhtin 1981:84)

For Bakhtin, chronotopes are "poetic" (1981:84) that is to say ways of creating time that "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (1981:84)

Take for example the moral tales of the Brothers Grimm, or Hans Christian Andersen, where the style and content is dictated by the time in which they were written and what values were important in that time, to the extent that they should be transmitted through cultural products. In the works of the Brothers Grimm and Andersen, a tale set in the forest represents isolation from society and formative experiences that mould an individual into a member of society. It is the setting of the forest that is the chronotope. Isolated and formative experiences

(romanticism of the inner, as opposed to the public) are located in a particular time and space (the forest). Novelistic genres focus such life in specific categories of people (for example a landlord, a gambler and a diplomat) and use these to develop contradictions, such as between the public medium of novels and the private content of said novels (Bakhtin 1981:123-125).

A look into the past is never a true representation, but rather a projection of values into the past, if we are dealing with a work which casts its events into a time before in which the work was produced, like our modern depictions of ancient cultures in media. Our representations will forever be flawed due to the differences in ontology.

From James Jasinski's 'Sourcebook on Rhetoric' (2001) I will be adopting and applying the definitions and concepts of *ethos* and *logos*, where *ethos* is to be understood as "the ways in which the perceived attributes of speaker, manifest in discourse, are persuasive" (2001:133) and *logos* "is understood as rational argument or appeals based on reason as opposed to appeals to the emotions or the character of the speaker or writer" (2001:194). While *logos* may at a first glance appear to be somewhat of a cumbersome and opaque tool through which to analyse fiction works, it is my understanding that it can be reduced in meaning to simply the way an author constructs a reasonable narrative and the ways in which reason functions in the discourse or narrative. *Ethos* also allows the speaker a subjective position that is intelligible to other people because it aligns with particular aspects of language, even as it makes this language meaningful in the present context.

Both terms are based on Aristotelian rhetoric, but despite their vintage, have nonetheless retained their usefulness as modes of analysis of speech events. The problem when analysing rhetoric used is that it can be up to subjective interpretation what the author is trying to convince us of.

1.3. Theoretical Framing

As stated previously, my intention is to include this thesis within the anthropological theoretical frameworks of literary and linguistic anthropology. Literary anthropology is almost forcibly linguistic anthropology, because there would be no literature without language. Literary anthropology is confined by the material being analysed and studied.

Literary anthropology as a discipline is concerned with peeling back the layers of abstraction in fiction writing and thus to reveal something about the society that produced the work. If I am successful in my endeavour, I will be able to relay to the reader a brief analysis of an aspect of the attitudes prevalent in Serbian society in the 1980's and going into the 1990's. Much can be understood from language, as language, especially the written word, is much more considered and deliberate than a spontaneous speech event. Writing causes a reaction in the reader, and this is done through the words used and metaphors, for instance.

Literary works inherently create in- and out-groups, due to the fact that the language used and the context of the book will only really be fully accessible to a certain group of people. A skilled author will of course be able to describe an environment in such a way that readers will be able to imagine themselves in the scenario, but certain details or ontologies will seem foreign. Changing societal trends or events may also banish a work to irrelevancy in a short amount of time, because it may no longer hold true to audiences.

Using the methods mentioned in the last section, the frame for this thesis is made up for an anthropological analysis of the literature of late socialist Yugoslavia, as seen through the lens of three authors. The theoretical perspective I will be using in this thesis, is that political and societal changes and uncertainty will be present in the themes and language of the literature being analysed.

The kind of language used by the authors is the main object of analysis in this thesis. It is thusly paramount to have a sufficient understanding of the circumstances surrounding them at the time of writing to try to peel back the layers and to view the works in the right context.

In the following chapters, I shall be laying presenting material from the works presented, analysing them and tying them together. A chapter will be dedicated to each of the three novels, their plots and observations of their themes, followed by a comparative chapter and a conclusion.

2. Setting the Stage

So, why are the 1980's in Yugoslavia of interest? The 1980's are of interest in the context of Yugoslavia because it is the last full decade that Yugoslavia existed. Yugoslavia was the second incarnation of the state of the same name, born after the Second World War and ruled over until his death in 1970 by Josip Broz "Tito". There are many reasons for the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990's and one of the most enduring myths is that without the leadership and charisma of Tito, there was little to keep secessionist desires in check. The reality is far more mundane, and I dare say grey, and in this chapter, we will be discussing those that are most of interest to me and my thesis topic.

The very nature and character of Yugoslavia was long a topic of discussion for those outside its borders. As detailed by Robert M. Hayden in 'Blueprints for a House Divided', and by Susan L. Woodward in 'Balkan Tragedy', these were mostly attempts by Western countries to try to delegitimize the Yugoslav project as impossible due to the various ethnic groups and religious denominations present in the country, not to mention the fact that the Second World War had been a masterclass in animosity between neighbours, with several factions with different political ideologies seeing who could inflict the most casualties on the others through ethnic cleansing, concentration camps and regular old warfare. This position missed the fact, as Woodward mentions, for almost fifty years, these groups lived peacefully side by side. But that all started to change in the 1980's. But why?

What I long thought was that the break-up of Yugoslavia was caused by the awakening of long dormant nationalism in the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, but what seems to have happened, based on the writings of Woodward and Žarkov, is that the nationalism that raised its head in the 80's and the 90's, was a reaction to external economic phenomena, inflation, and unemployment.

The tragedy referred to in the title of Woodward's book, refers to the failure of the Yugoslav project, which sought to unite the majority Slavic speaking peoples of the western Balkans in a shared nation, which, for nearly half a century seemed to have been a success, with a relatively high standard of living and relative harmonious coexistence of its diverse populations, with their different religions, identities and historical experiences (parts of the

nations of the second Yugoslavia had been under Austro-Hungarian rule, while others had been part of the Ottoman empire). The tragedy referenced must thus be understood to be the failure of the Yugoslav project, instead of a diverse multi-ethnic union, we now have, as the inheritance of nearly a decade of warfare, seven republics, with troubled internal politics (a degree of illiberal politics is emblematic of western Balkan regimes as well as ethnic tensions, see Montenegro and Bosnia and Hercegovina, for example) and more or less inflamed relations to one another (the dynamics present in the three headed presidency of Bosnia and Hercegovina come to mind, as well as the ongoing disputes over the sovereignty of Kosovo).

The unemployment caused by shifting occupational trends in Yugoslavia, with large numbers of the population shifting from subsistence agriculture to wage employment that was to be provided by the state, and a growing consumerist culture within Yugoslavia, which suddenly had no customer base with inflation rising from the 70's through to the 90's, culminating in hyper-inflation in 1992.

The pressures to reform the Yugoslav economy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), also lead to policies of austerity which furthered disillusionment in the regime of Yugoslavia, heightening tensions among the constituent populations.

This would not be the first or only time that external pressures have led to internal tensions, but the consequences of this policy by Western powers (including the IMF) for weakening the position of the Soviet Union (as Yugoslavia at this time still was a nominally communist country) as part of the strategy in the hostilities of the Cold War, were extreme. To say that anyone could have foreseen the consequences of these actions is optimistic at best, but it serves as a stark reminder of the real-world consequences of interventionist politics when the goals are not the betterment of human living conditions, but rather the toppling of political systems for the sake of an ideological conflict.

Yugoslavia at this point in time (late 1970's to the 1980's) was a nation whose bell was tolling, and the echoes of those bells had real world consequences. Unemployment, starvation and ethnic strife to just name a few were now realities that had long been foreign (to a certain extent) to the citizens of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia were now becoming far more common. The effects of decisions made far away had an effect on the lives of everyday

people, and I believe that the works I will be analysing foreshadow the coming of the coming post-modern situation, where Yugoslavia no longer exists and western liberalism offers an alternative for people as to how they should be, even though it leaves the question of what kind of society people should be striving for. The authors discussed in this thesis were no doubt of western postmodernist tendencies, and some of their contemporaries such as Slavoj Žižek used it as a springboard to semiotically analyse western popular culture as it offered them a new source of identification. Stagnation was painful and people were desperate for an alternative but were critical of a way of life that advocated bourgeois values and individualism.

None of the authors whose works are dealt with in this thesis are to my knowledge associated with the Yugoslav state and are regarded to be great *Serbian* authors. The extent to which the delineation between Yugoslav and constituent republic identities and belonging overlap in use or identification is an interesting topic, which I have not seen referenced in the material for this thesis.

In this thesis, the selected works are of value due to not necessarily directly addressing societal upheaval and change, but rather because they serve as bellwethers for the sentiment of the society at large channelled, if you will, through the authors and works chosen for this thesis. Then again, someone might say that the book is needed to articulate what is otherwise a "structure of feeling" (as coined by Raymond Williams in *Preface to Film*), a vague loss of certainty and an impulse to turn to the future or to the past as one looks for the ideal or "normal" state.

In the next chapter, I will through the use of quotes from the works being analysed, attempt to provide evidence of the characteristics laid out in earlier chapters and passages that prove their merit in this investigation of the connection between society and literature, and as works of fiction as expressions of the mind state of the societies that produced them.

3. Houses

If one was aware that one's life was coming to an end, but came to realise perhaps too late that one had left trying to impart one's values and ideas on another person what would one do? Would one simply accept that a lifetime of thought and opinion now simply vanishes like tears in rain, or would one attempt to seek to influence people not in one's immediate circle? This what the main character in the first novel to be analysed attempts.

'Houses' was written in 1970 by Borislav Pekić who, despite having been born in Montenegro in 1930, is considered to be one of the most important Serbian authors. Pekić moved to England from Yugoslavia in 1970, which caused his work to be banned by the authorities in his homeland for half a decade.

The novel tells the story of Arsénie Negovan, who after 27 years of isolation, due to supposed illness, leaves the apartment he shares with his wife Katarina to inspect the properties he owns and rents out in Belgrade. This radical change in Arsénie's habits is brought on by a sense of it being the proper thing to do when nearing death. Thus, he escapes his apartment in order to assess his holdings.

The narrative in 'Houses' jumps between the present (1968) and the past, recounting Arsénie's experiences from the Russian revolution in 1919, of Belgrade in 1941 during the protests against the pact between Nazi Germany and Yugoslavia and the bombings of Belgrade during the Second World War.

The opening of the novel informs the reader about the nature of 'Houses' (the novel) in the eyes of Arsénie. The character views the story being told as a last will and testament. This is a documentary genre that transcends time and to borrow from Bakhtin on "fixing time and space" (1981, 86), a will draws the attention of the reader to a specific point in time where the writer of the will expresses their last wishes. The meanings of many past and future events are encapsulated in that moment. But Arsénie's statements in the book do not transcend the social relationships and situations in which they are made. We see clearly that they are fake, unconvincing, self-deceiving and perhaps made in bad faith.

What characterises the novel, is the non-linear storytelling, and the moments that have affected Arsénie are viewed through the prism that of buildings, in general and particularly those that the main character has a personal relationship to. The reader follows Arsénie as he makes his way through Belgrade and comes face to face with the consequences of his actions, or rather lack thereof.

“Since I have now reached those years in which man’s allotted span comes to its natural end, and moreover since my health is no longer of the best, I, Arsénie Negovan, son of Cyrill Negovan, rentier here residing, have decided, being fully lucid and in possession of all of my mental faculties as prescribed by law, to set down this testament, and in it to state my final, incontestable will regarding my movable and immovable possessions, and whatsoever may concern their preservation as follows . . .” (1968:27)

The main character’s isolation is revealed to be because of injuries both physical and mental sustained during a protest. The only people that Arsénie has had contact with during his isolation are his wife, his brother George’s (deceased) housekeeper Mlle. Foucault, and his lawyer Mr. Golovan.

What makes Mlle. Foucault stand out among the other characters is that she is in many ways the opposite of the reader, she is a contemporary of Arsénie’s, a person in the past and a person with whom Arsénie has had conversations. She could give the reader a second opinion on the character of Arsénie, instead of the reader having to rely solely on the image that Arsénie seeks to project. Mlle Foucault represents (and is) the servant (Bakhtin 1981:125) who says little but knows all about their masters, which may become apparent to the reader. When Arsénie expresses an something favourable to him, Mlle. Foucault and the reader may adopt a different point of view which may be critical, judgmental, compassionate and so on of Arsénie.

It becomes evident from the text, that Arsénie’s and Mlle. Foucault’s relationship is one based on a certain level of certain social obligation. It would be uncouth for Arsénie not to stay in touch and oblige his dead brother’s housekeeper. Arsénie does however take the opportunity to make Mlle. Foucault uncomfortable by asking pointed questions about his brother George, whom Arsénie knows to be dead, but pretends not to know this. It should be

noted that Arsénie was not overly fond of his brother either, and explicitly states that he had no warm memories of George.

Arsénie's relationships with those closest to him are characterised by obfuscation, Arsénie hiding how aware he is of goings on outside the apartment, and the others hiding things from Arsénie that they feel would upset him.

“In all honesty, I heard about George's demise quite by chance. I could barely make out the words. They were broken, hardly penetrating the bedroom (Katarina's indisputable kingdom), and they were not intended for me even though they concerned me in the highest degree, since they were about my brother's wretched and quite unbefitting end. They further demonstrated the family accord never to tell me anything, an agreement which I had mutely legalized and in fact required of them.” (1986:50)

One explanation for this mutual deception and speaking past one another is offered in the book: Arsénie's health. The people in Arsénie's life hide the truth of their situation from him because they worry that a shock might worsen his condition, even kill him, and Arsénie on his part does not want to worry his wife. Katerina, especially.

But another explanation that I find more compelling is the unconscious and unspoken knowledge that speaking the truth may collapse the stagnant reality that exists in the Njegovans' apartment. As long as everyone plays their part, time can stand still, things can be as they were in 1941, Arsénie's houses are still his and the couple are financially secure.

The narrative then focuses in on Simonida, a house owned by Arsénie (Arsénie has taken to naming his houses after women). The protagonist fears for the fate of his Simonida, a house which holds specific fetishistic value for Arsénie. As Arsénie ventures into the outside world, in secret from his wife Katarina, Arsénie realises the consequences of his absence for his buildings.

His dear houses have been expropriated by the authorities of the new communist Yugoslavia, and Arsénie begins to question whether his decision to retreat from his affairs has led to this calamity befalling his beloved properties. Arsénie fears that his houses will be taken over by Bolsheviks, or their like, who are coming to claim his property as their own. This may betray

a guilt concerning the way in which Arsénie has made his living: by charging for a basic human need, and that deep down, he is aware of the fact that he deserves to have his property taken from him.

“You were talking to her about Russia and the Bolsheviks again...

“They’ll be here too if things go on like this! They are here, everywhere, all around us.”

(1968:56)

The Bolsheviks are the opposite of Arsénie in almost every way, they are unwashed, rude and emotional, whereas Arsénie is a cultured sophisticate with all the appropriate airs and graces. One can’t help but to notice a slight touch of condescension.

Throughout the novel Arsénie explicitly equates the houses he owns with women, and what becomes clear, is that Arsénie has become so fixated on his role as a landlord, that he has allowed it to blur his ability to interact and perceive with animate and inanimate objects:

“Houses are like people: you can’t foresee what they’ll offer until you’ve tried them out, got into their souls and under their skins.” (1968:43)

The language here strongly implies a possessive attitude towards women, that they are mysteries or riddles waiting for the right person (read: man) to figure them out, as one cannot imagine Arsénie imagining women owning property, let alone carrying out the duties of a landlord.

“My last-born, the lovely Greek Simonida with her fine, dark countenance, her milky complexion beneath deep blue eyelids, and her full-blooded lips pierced by a bronze chain, African style.” (1968:68)

The troubling comparison an attitude between women and houses continues in Arsénie’s description of Simonida, ascribing to her qualities that are congruous with attitudes toward women, especially African women, in the imagination of Europeans as exotic, directly fetishizing Simonida.

“Was it because I had been guilty of her misfortune?

Was I guilty?” (1968:221)

What is noteworthy about Pekić’s novel is the strange, but not all that uncommon, role in society that the main character occupies. He is at the same time a person of privilege due to his profession and upbringing, but his profession also alienates him from the rest of society, as is shown in the novel, Arsénie’s interests are directly opposed to the interests of more progressive societal elements, as he has a vested interest in the preservation of the old order as a landlord, whose living requires as little change as possible in society, so the payment of rent is not disturbed.

The human category that Arsénie places himself in, that of a landlord and property owner, is in fact not a profession at all. But the fact that Arsénie professes these things as a virtue makes it so. Literature makes public what is proverbially private (Arsénie’s tastes, moral notions and ultimately the whole bourgeois, privatized worldview of house-ownership as a central focus of his life). Compare this to the story of Lucius in Bakhtin’s ‘The Dialogic Imagination’ where through the use of a third party that is innocuous to all, events that otherwise would pass by unnoticed become visible, the personal becomes public (Bakhtin 1981:123).

While Arsénie is not as innocuous as Lucius in the guise of a donkey, Arsénie serves the same narrative purpose: making public feelings and thoughts that would otherwise find no expression. In comparison to Arsénie’s quiet expression of a short period of his life, Saint Augustine’s ‘Confessions’ is about Saint Augustine very publically drawing attention to the private by pondering the events of his life from childhood to the point he wrote the book. The title refers to Saint Augustine confessing to have lived an immoral and God-less life for much of his youth (Bakhtin 1981:135). Landlords have been depicted as unsympathetic characters, such as in Feodor Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment’, where the main character Raskolnikov murders his landlady.

The portrait painted by Pekić of Arsénie and the events of the book give us an image of a man cut off from the world, with very little interest to interact with it other than through his possessions, who are of more import to him than the people in his life. This is a conscious

choice that the main character has made and the primary attribute of his personality, and his choices have led to suffering for others (perhaps most of all his wife).

Relayed to us by Pekić as though the memoirs of Arsénie had somehow made their way into the possession of the author, we can only guess to the true feelings of the author and to what extent this work is an extension of the writer himself.

“As editor of the manuscript of the late Arsénie K. Negovan and also as the self-appointed chronicler of the Negovan-Turjaški clan, I, Borislav V. Pekić, would like to explain how the manuscript came into my possession.” (1968:471)

As the title would suggest, the leading trope of the novel is houses, and the ownership of them. It is through the houses and through Arsénie’s thoughts and feelings that we must decipher a message from Pekić’s text. The houses or house serve to express feelings of powerlessness, fear of dispossession, general uncertainty, and insecurity about the future in a larger sense to us readers. But Arsénie also represents a world that no longer exists but tries to maintain its relevance in the face of progress. The fact that it is so explicitly stated that Arsénie needs things to stay the same in order to survive seems like more than pure coincidence, so too does the fact that it is all a façade, and that façade allows Arsénie to carry on as if everything was still in order.

It is the tearing down of the façade that forces Arsénie to accept the fact that the world has passed him by as he sat in his apartment for 27 years. Here we can draw a comparison to late Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, where reality and rhetoric were in direct opposition.

Despite the houses also representing aesthetic, military and aristocratic opulence and grandeur, the value of which is seemingly beyond the grasp of new social orders and paradigms, as we see in the novel, these values are held by Arsénie and those in his immediate circle, but time has passed them by, and now few remain who view the houses in a positive light. They embody the excesses of an earlier age.

Time in ‘Houses’ is splintered, not only is the temporal order non-linear (meaning that events do not unfold in the order that they happened). Bakhtin’s *chronotope* places events in a

temporal context, so that we are to envision events as being representations of the time and place described.

What 'Houses' attempts is to offer the reader an insight into the possible experiences of an aging landlord in Socialist Yugoslavia, what makes such a person tick and how would they react to the world changing around them. In fact, it is as if Arsénie has purposefully removed himself from society, so that he may be the vehicle for a person to see the fate of the Yugoslav project, as Arsénie locked himself away, and kept very few tabs on the outside world during the first 23 years of Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1992).

What we get in 'Houses' are windows in time. While we do not follow every second during the narrative of 'Houses' we follow Arsénie during an afternoon (in the main narrative), but we also experience the memories of Arsénie as they inform his character and his actions. In language Pekić tries to approximate the language and reactions of a person of Arsénie's standing in society, or rather signals to the reader through secondary genres (conversations and so on).

This novel, if we are to understand it as Arsénie's will, or the confessions of a dying man, is strange. Strange because it does not make sense in context. If Arsénie wishes someone to act upon what he has written, then it seems he is too late, as there remain precious few to do so. His son is dead, and Katarina does not seem to be interested in executing Arsénie's affairs. Rather, throughout the narrative of the novel she has been forced to hide the truth from her husband and done things that she knows he would not approve. Arsénie's houses are all but gone, as changes in sensibilities has seen to it that they no longer have a need.

How then does Arsénie speak to the reader of the novel (his will)? In what way is the reader in the same place and time as Arsénie, even though Arsénie is speaking to them from the past? Arsénie is addressing the reader of the novel in two different ways.

The reader inhabits for the duration that they interact with the novel the part of a person who is reading Arsénie's will, as a part of the world of the novel, but at the same time, the reader is certainly aware of the fact that the novel, though it attempts to push the reader into a certain course of action, is just that, a novel.

To the reader as well as to Arsénie, the events of the Russian revolution, the second world war and protests of the 1968 lie in the past. Is it thus Arsénie's supposition that based on these similarities between us and him we will come to view Arsénie as having been in the right? Is the reader also horrified by the vanishing of bourgeois values from society?

Arsénie expresses his disgust at lowering himself to the position of a simple landlord, as someone who merely does it for the money, so his values and his worldview is under siege on two fronts, from the left, who would seek to make him obsolete, and the right, who would sneer at his sentimentality.

At the same time, Arsénie represents the arrogance of the owning classes, who view their position in society as almost holy, but at the same time, Arsénie is a warning against complacency and stagnation, which might also be caused by arrogance. One stops to rest on one's laurels, but the world moves on in the meantime. It could also be that Arsénie was driven to lock himself away by fear. Not just fear of physical harm, but also that all that Arsénie had achieved could be taken away, so if Arsénie is unaware of it, it's almost as if it didn't happen.

The way in which the reader, the author and the events in the novel communicate with one another across time is fickle. To some, Arsénie is a tragic, but comical in his delusion, character, to others he is the representative of an idealised past of decency and manners. Although one interpretation is more accurate than another, there is no way to dictate what the reader understands about the novel, the characters and the author. The ability to understand 'Houses' is determined by how many novels one has read in the past, how well one is able to interpret metaphors and themes present in works of literature.

Pekić's rhetorical technique is heavily dependent on anchoring the narrative of the novel in reality, by explaining the motivations and attitudes of his characters with real world events, such as the Russian revolution and the student protests in Belgrade in 1968. We are also guided through the events of the novel by Arsénie, such that the main character seeks to impose on the reader an explanation of Arsénie's life historical events (for instance, the physical and mental trauma and alienation from the outside world that lead to Arsénie's reclusion).

Pekić's 'Houses' is the will of Arsénie Njegovan, a man outside of and out of time. For the most part the people Arsénie speaks of are dead (his relatives, and so on). Thus, the account of the events of the novel are only ever told and only ever represent the views of Arsénie Njegovan himself.

The problem is that Arsénie's interpretation of events around him are flawed to say the least. He has only heard news of the world outside from people close to him who make an effort to mislead him, and he has watched the world from afar. The reader is in the same place and time as Arsénie as he leads the reader through the novel, choosing which events to elucidate, and which to obfuscate or omit. Thankfully the character cannot help but being himself, so that the reader understands the particular quirks of the main character and why he talks and thinks about things the way he does.

'Houses' sets the tone for the works that will be analysed next. The works share in common the narrative techniques that have been analysed here (non-linear progression, several primary genres present in the text), and that the characters depicted in novel are often of questionable character. A direct link between 'Houses of Belgrade' and 'A Tomb for Boris Davidovich[sic.]' can be found, as the story 'The Sow that Eats her Farrow', the story of Gould Verschoyle, an Irish fighter in the Spanish Civil War, who is executed in Soviet Russia. The dedication seems to refer to Pekić's fall in favour after leaving Yugoslavia.

"I feel some discomfort in my rib cage, something like a slight muscular spasm. Probably I've been sitting in the same position for too long and the edge of the desk has been pressing against my chest. If it doesn't stop soon, I'll have to take my pills. They must be on the shelf, Mlle. Foucault set them out before she left. Really I ought to take them at once, but those drugs make me sleepy, and I don't dare sleep. It's stuffy in here. I was wrong to shut the blinds before morning. Perhaps it's already light. Perhaps I was wrong. What was it that Isidor said? He'd been concerned only with himself, not with architecture. But my concern hadn't been with myself. I've dedicated myself to my houses. To my beautiful houses. But where are they? Where are those houses? Tout cela est un mod" (1968:397)

4. A Tomb for Boris Davidovich

Danilo Kiš's 'A Tomb for Boris Davidovich' is a collection of seven short stories. Although the stories are not connected to each other, they form a thematic whole. Danilo Kiš was born in Subotica in 1935, and 'Tomb' was published in 1976. From this novel, I have chosen as the topic of analysis the short story 'The magic Card Dealing'.

As with the previous two novels discussed, 'A Tomb for Boris Davidovich' also makes use of a type of text that is rarely altered or questioned, or rather evokes the texts on gravestones, as in this novel Kiš sets out to tell the life stories of people who might otherwise have been lost to time, writing the texts on their headstones. This choice imbues the novel and the stories within with a weight, as we are not often encouraged or asked to question what is written on headstones, this combined with the fact that we are often told to not speak ill of the dead further adds to the idea of the stories within being *the* truth. Making use of Bakhtin's primary and secondary genres of speech.

'A Tomb' by its secondary genre is a novel, but the primary genre is more complicated to extract. The primary genre of speech is concerned with the speech registers and patterns of speech utilized within the novel. In 'The Magic Card Dealing' Kiš makes use of many different registers, such as an official sounding notice of death and the crude speech patterns of the inmates of Norilsk prison camp. 'A Tomb' bears some similarity to Edgar Lee Masters' 'Spoon River Anthology' (1996) which lays bare the conflicts between the epitaphs of the town's inhabitants and the true nature of those written about.

Like Masters' work, 'A Tomb' is concerned with the discrepancies between the narrative of the glorious revolution and her heroes, and the fates of those smothered by her. This is not an automatic endorsement of the individuals and their actions and fates, but rather to present notions of honour that the revolution does not recognise. The challenges concerned with playing cards and the debts incurred in the process, as well as the ways to express them are a primary genre in this short story.

Kiš is said to have intended 'A Tomb for Boris Davidovich' as a critique of the Soviet Union, so the fact that many of the stories take place in the Soviet Union make sense, but also the

fates and narratives that befall the characters in the novel chime with modern understandings of the level of violence and repression of the Soviet state. The stories in the novel take the place of headstones in a cemetery for the victims of the Soviet Union. While relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union had soured in the 50s, outright critiquing a socialist country may have been interpreted as an indirect critique of Yugoslavia.

All the stories are told from the third person perspective, and the narrator is not identified, although most of the stories are purported to be true by the narrator of the novel, some actually are, although heavily altered. The book reads like an extended and detailed critique of the Soviet Union and the Russian Revolution.

Hungarian doctor Karl Taube's life and times are depicted in the short story I have chosen to analyse in this chapter. Taube was a doctor whose political leanings, or maybe misgivings, lead him to the Soviet Union, where he ends up imprisoned and eventually murdered.

Karl Taube went by many names during his travels through Europe. Taube's fate becomes entwined with a prisoner called Segidulin who attempted to cut off his own fingers with a blunt axe in order to escape toiling in the nickel mines of the prison camp. Segidulin beats a man named Kostik at cards, and his prize is the life of Karl Taube, who denied him reprieve.

Dr. Taube, Karl Georgievich Taube, was murdered on December 5, 1956, less than two weeks after his formal rehabilitation, and three weeks after his return from Norilsk prison camp. (Not counting his imprisonment during interrogation, Taube had spent seventeen years in prison camps.) This murder was not solved until June 1960, when they arrested in Moscow one Kostik Korshunidze, called "the Artist" or "the Eagle," the top safe-cracker in the country, respected by the underworld as the king of thieves- ...". (1976:96)

The passage in the short story discussed here, where the prisoners play cards bears great resemblance to a similar scene depicted in Varlam Shalamov's 'Kolyma Tales', in its portrayal of the sheer indifference to human life that the inhuman conditions of the gulags brought forth. In the short story in 'Kolyma Tales' a bystander is murdered for a jumper that one of the players places as his own wager during a game of cards.

The trope of the card game is a trope that exists in Russian literature, not simply in Shalamov, but in Fyodor Dostoevsky's 'War and Peace' as well, where Nicholas is invited to play faro

by Dolokhov and loses his all his money and more, being forced to ask his father to help him pay off his debt. One may see that the need for Nicholas to pay off his debt is rooted in a sense of honour, where not paying of his debt would cause Nicholas and his money to lose face, although the drive to pay off his debt may also be driven by a fear of the repercussions of failing to do so.

The fact that life has become so cheap in the extreme surroundings of Kolyma and Norilsk forces one to consider what the meaning of such a concept as honour is, and why it continues to carry weight. One can assume that in an environment so removed and different from everyday life, a need to create some sort of organic order that makes sense to the inhabitants would arise. That the rules for one's life are not dictated by the authorities alone, but that the prisoners would seek to create a societal order of their own. There is precedent for this within the gulag system, where an order of criminals arose, known as the thieves in law. The thieves in law managed to create a hierarchy within those convicted in the Soviet prisons, and at various times either opposed or sided with several institutions within the Soviet Union, such as the Orthodox Church and the state itself.

We see that honour is a thread in a web of sociality, that binds individuals to one another with invisible but strong obligations. More precisely, honour is an archaic form of sociality that binds them together and sets them apart from normal people. In Dostoevsky's example, however, this attempt to set oneself apart comes across as pathetic.

What seems to be more likely however, is that Korshunidze was driven by a fear for his own life. In the case that Korshunidze would not have paid his debt to Segidulin, no doubt someone would have come to collect the debt from Korshunidze. The question then arises: can there ever really exist such a thing as honour among thieves? Or is this social order merely held together by the power of fear?

What Kiš seems to be drawing his readers attention to is the concept of a promise, and how a promise compels the person obligated by it to commit acts that have far reaching effects. Assuming thus that this is a chronotope the author wishes to make evident, why and how would he do this? In my mind a promise is another example of a force that transcends morality and justice. There are many instances in which an individual may be compelled to act immorally in the eyes of society at large, in order to fulfill a promise, such as the case

with honour killings present in many societies. Morality must then be understood as something that exists on several spheres: the personal, the familial, and the societal (in a crude simplification). Individuals and groups then can be seen to act on several moral planes at once, and it is difficult to reason with morality, which then may lead to actions and outcomes deemed unjust and immoral.

“... the bands of criminals under the flattering and privileged label of "socially acceptable" gambled through endless polar nights for anything they could; money, caps with ear flaps, boots, a bowl of soup, a piece of bread, a cube of sugar, a frozen potato, tobacco, a piece of tattooed skin (one's own or someone else's), a rape, a dagger, a life.” (1976:113)

The wheel of fortune metaphor is apt in this work, as it seems that many of the fates depicted in ‘A Tomb’ seem to have been decided in an unjust way, to people who did not deserve it.

The comparison of the wheel of fortune in this story brings to mind the reference to God in a previous short story in this same novel, ‘The Knife with the Rosewood Handle’, where the young Miksha is cursed by his employer Reb Mendel after spreading the smell of a skunk throughout Mendel’s shop, which leads to Mendel cursing Miksha, and it is implied that this is what leads to the death of Miksha. This comparison could be accidental, but it seems unlikely. This comparison being that the fates of Miksha and Karl Taube were decided for them by a force much larger than them.

”while the wheel of the Great Lottery turned relentlessly, like the incarnate principle of a mythical and evil deity, the victims of this inexorable merry-go-round, driven by the spirit of an at once platonic and infernal imitatio, emulated the great principle of Chance...” (1976:113)

The perception and presentation of time, present in the previous novels continues in *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, with decades or even centuries separating the different stories in the novel and gaps in time within the stories themselves, such as in *The Magic Card Dealing* where the life of the main character is followed from a distance over several decades, and where the event that leads to the card game that costs Taube his life occurs years before his eventual murder. Kiš decides for the reader which parts of Taube’s life merit attention, as such the author is informing the reader what is important for the interpretation of the novel.

“The exhausted and halfdead prisoners below stopped whispering: something was happening, A criminal is dangerous when silent. The Wheel of Fortune had stopped. Someone's mother would grieve.” (1976:120)

Analysing the chronotope or chronotopes present in the novel is slightly trickier, as the author inserts himself into the novel, explaining the process of compiling the novel, and speaking with the knowledge of someone who lives decades even centuries after his characters. We must thus see that the events of the novel are being told to us not only in the time period of the story, but also in the 1970's, so events are pass through two gates of time. In actuality the only gate is that of the time of writing, but the author projects his message into the past.

The stories in the work do not proceed logically in time, but flit back and forth. Kiš's attempts at persuasion are grounded in the seeming ordinality of his narratives and characters. We have all felt as though we are at the mercy of a cold and indifferent universe, and as such we sympathize with the characters of *A Tomb*, and the events in which the characters find themselves in are at least familiar to many (such as the Spanish Civil War, the prison camps of the Soviet Union, or the religious persecution of Jews over many centuries in Europe).

It is however, the idea of honour that offers us the ability to place alongside each other the 19th century, a Soviet gulag and late stage Yugoslavia, as honour allows individuals to create their own social realities, where no matter how pathetic it may appear to those outside, the idea of a thieves code or honour among thieves may be perceived by black marketeers in Yugoslavia, who although they are enriching themselves on the breakdown of society may still consider themselves to be moral for following a morality that they share with other individuals engaged in similar professions.

It is in this work that we perhaps most strongly witness the dichotomy between Bakhtin's dialogism, where the language of a novel expresses individual and collective experiences, and Aristotelian rhetoric, where the author attempts to convince us of one thing or another through language.

Kiš wishes to draw our attention to injustices throughout history, so that we may begin to consider these injustices in our own time. What happened to Karl Taube in a gulag, is probably happening today in some part of the world, near or far. The sprinkling of the

narrative over time and space only makes his argument stronger, as we see that injustices and cruel twists of fate are a universal phenomenon.

5. Dictionary of the Khazars

What is the most important thing about historical accounts? Their factual accuracy, or the fact that they serve a purpose today? It is with the question of historical accuracy and the utility of historical narratives that 'Dictionary of the Khazars' deals with, while adding a touch of the fantastical. Accounts of the past are always tinged with the ruling ideology in which they are told, and 'Dictionary' is an account of the Khazars as they would have written it themselves. If we are to compare the position of the Khazars to that of authors in late Yugoslavia, we would not be wrong in saying that both exist on the margins of the ruling system, even outside it. Yugoslav writers were not seeking the role of dissident but attempting to step outside the system using language incomprehensible to it.

"The event discussed in this lexicon occurred sometime in the 8th or 9th century A.D. (or there were several similar events), and this subject is commonly referred to by scholars as "the Khazar polemic." The Khazars were an autonomous and powerful tribe, a warlike and nomadic people who appeared from the East at an unknown date, driven by a scorching silence, and who, from the 7th to the 10th century, settled in the land between two seas, the Caspian and the Black. " (1984:13)

Historical novels are attempts to frame events in the past in a new light or to inspire the reader to think about and understand the motivations of characters in the past. In the case of 'The Dictionary of the Khazars', it is difficult to accurately profile the audience for whom this novel is written. Given that it was written in Serbo-Croatian by a Yugoslav author, it seems likely that the primary audience for this work is and was readers in the former Yugoslav republics. It stands to reason the the primary audience for this work is people who are familiar with the works of Pavić or are interested in Yugoslav fiction writing. But then again, given the subject matter of the novel, one could also assume that the work would appeal to readers with an interest in history and religion.

Nonetheless, historical novels in general are an attempt to create a static historicity, to present an authoritative version of the past.

‘The Dictionary of the Khazars’ is a fictional account of the history and fate of the real Khazar empire, which existed in the area of what is now modern Russia, Crimea, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, but which in the novel is situated in modern day Romania. The novel deals with the events surrounding the conversion of the Khazar rulers to Judaism in the 8th or 9th century, and the attempts to collect an account of the events of the Khazar Polemic.

The events are told from three different perspectives, which are laid out in the forms of historical documents told from the perspectives of adherents of Judaism (the Yellow Book), Islam (the Green Book) and Christianity (the Red Book), which all give accounts and references to the Khazar Polemic, the debate between the representatives of the three religions over religion. ‘Dictionary of the Khazars’ was written in 1984 by Serbian author Milorad Pavić (1929-2008), who was a popular and decorated author in his native Yugoslavia and Serbia, as well as internationally.

‘Dictionary of the Khazars’ takes the form of a lexicon, so the novel has an implied level of factual accuracy from the start. A lexicon is a dictionary of a language or a subject. An explanation as to how the “dictionary” is to be used, can be found on page 30:

“... this book ... can be read in an infinite number of ways. It is an open book, and when it is shut it can be added to: just as it has its own former and present lexicographer, so it can acquire new writers, compilers, and continuers. It has a register, concordances, and entries, like a holy book or a crossword puzzle, and all the names or subjects marked with the small sign of the cross, the crescent, the Star of David, or some other symbol can be looked up in the corresponding book of this dictionary for more detailed explanation.” (1984:30)

Similarly to the primary genre of ‘Houses’, this novel also implies that it represents a solid genre, as dictionaries and the like have a level of implied import and are not easily changed or amended. As the title would suggest, this is *the* dictionary of the Khazars, the authoritative work on the subject.

So, while the novel is primarily the fictional account of key events surrounding the conversion of the Khazars, it also employs some elements of non-fiction works. The narrative switches between third and first person from one chapter or story to the next, and it should be noted that the narrators can be somewhat untrustworthy, as in the case of Avram Brankovich,

whose story is told by the demon Nikon Sevast, Brankovich's scribe. The novel could be classified as historical fiction, with modern elements, such as non-linear storytelling and morally ambiguous main characters.

The main thrust of the narrative concerns the compiling of the Khazar Dictionary, which is a stand in for the body of Adam, with the implied message being that there may be unintended consequences to attaining and understanding the secrets of creation, as the composing of the dictionary is likened to the reforming of the body of Adam. The events of the novel are put into motion when the kaghan (ruler) of the Khazars sends out for the representatives of the three major religions to interpret a dream the Kaghan has had, igniting the Khazar Polemic. The Khazar Polemic refers to the differences in opinion surrounding the conversion of the Khazars. Which religion the kaghan and the Khazars converted to and why.

The characters of the books have counterparts in the other books, with the characters playing a particular role (representative of the religion in the Polemic, chronicler, seventeenth century student (Avram Brankovich, Yusuf Masudi, Samuel Cohen), twentieth century scholar, and a devil from each religion.

The narrative centres on the attempts of several people of different faiths in different times (17th century, 20th century) trying to combine their versions of the dictionary of the Khazars, and how these attempts are foiled by the demons of the three religions.

This splintering of the narrative provides the reader with the same account told from three perspectives in different times, with none being the only truth. It is in uniting the accounts and those tasked with the knowledge of the Khazar polemic that the whole truth and its consequences can be understood.

Dreams play an important role in the novel, as a medium of communication between the main characters of the novels and as a way for the dictionary to be combined, as Yusuf Masudi is a dream hunter, who works to bring Avram, Samuel and himself together and thus complete the dictionary (the body of Adam). Dreams in this novel are a primary genre, which explain the motivations and drivers of characters. Dreams are also key to understanding the chronotope of the novel, behind a dry dictionary lies the subjective world of dreams. The

dictionary seeks to explain the actions of its characters through dreams, so as to make the intangible tangible.

Pavić is said to have stated that the Khazars are a stand in for all small nations doing what they have to survive in the face of threats from larger world powers.

Although the I read the male version of the work, the male and female versions are only separated by one passage in the last letter of the book, which fits into the fictional narrative of the book having been compiled by two separate characters, one male, one female. This appears to have been simply a marketing ploy to sell the same book twice.

Pavić mixes fact with fiction (or rather uses artistic license) to tell the history of the Khazars and give colour to their society. The register, or form of speech here represents a removed, cold, factual telling of events, and this continues throughout much of the novel.

It impossible to say whether the conversion of the Khazars truly happened as described by the author, but it serves to set up the culture of the Khazars, as well as the narrative of the novel, as dreams are portrayed as being of great importance to the Khazars throughout the narrative.

Dreams and sleep emerge as being of great cultural and spiritual significance to the Khazars:

“According to ancient chronicles, the Khazar ruler, the kaghan, had a dream and sought three philosophers to interpret it for him. “ (1984:15)

While it is unlikely that this is factually accurate, due to the fact that little is known about the Khazars, and what is known is debated, it is of importance to this novel. For the Khazars, sleep and dreams simultaneously represent vulnerability, but at the same time a space for spiritual experiences. We can see in this, elements of shamanist spirituality, and it is a safe bet to assume that as the Khazars are thought to have been a Turkic tribal confederation, that their religion would bear similarities to the religion of the Mongols under Genghis Khan. Shamanism is particular for its emphasis on the “travelling” of the soul to commune with gods and spirits. Could sleep thus not be seen as a state of the spirit being absent from the body?

“Thus, she was protected from her enemies while she slept. This, for the Khazars, was the time when a person is the most vulnerable.” (1984:35)

Another interpretation of the message of ‘Dictionary’ is that the only way to lead a nation is through a divinely ordained autocrat, as was the case with the Khazars. I argue that this is a potential interpretation when one places the work in its temporal context: that of late socialist Yugoslavia. This interpretation may also fit into narratives pertaining to nationalism, as the metaphorical body of Adam may be understood to mean a great national project, the achieving of which sanctifies all means.

It is not only history itself is unclear and uncertain, but also the main characters’ stories, as there is uncertainty surrounding the life and times of one of the central characters of the novel. This gives the narrative credibility, as the sources for ‘Dictionary’ are almost ancient reports of an event recorded by representatives of religions who wish the narrative to reflect positively on their particular religion, hence why Princess Ateh is said to have converted to Christianity and argued with a representative of Judaism, as she is said to have been an object of veneration among eastern orthodox populations.

One of the main characters in the novel is Avram Brankovich an Austrian diplomat in Constantinople who becomes interested in the Khazars, and dreams of a man he calls Kuros (Samuel). Avram Brankovich has two biological sons, but also a foster son called Petkutin, created by Avram. The creation of Petkutin resembles the story of the creation of the Golem, a story from Jewish folk tales, where the Golem is a being of clay imbued with life by rabbis proficient in Jewish mysticism or *Kabbalah*. The most famous narrative about the Golem is the story told about the Golem created by the Rabbi of Prague to protect the Jewish population of the city from anti-semitic attacks.

A uniting theme between the Jews of Prague and the Khazars is that they both exist on the fringes of the ruling orders. The Jews in their own area of the city, and the Khazars on the Eurasian steppe. The dictionary is an attempt to create a conceptual order in a chaotic world, such as in the case of Foucault’s fictional Chinese dictionary (1970:xv), where one class of animals is the class of animals that from far away appear to be a swarm of flies. The point of the example is that order is not naturally occurring, but rather that it is created discursive formations.

What makes Avram's Golem different, is that he built death into his Golem, whereas in the traditional narrative, the rabbi wrote the word "truth" (*emet*) on the forehead of the golem, and to "kill" the golem, the rabbi erased a letter, to spell out "death" (*met*). In the story of Avram and Petkutin, the concept of opposites and balance are emphasised. Kalina, upon finding love (although through manipulation), throws away a piece of jewelry so as to sour a happy memory, and Petkutin upon being given life, was also given death. The story of Petkutin and Kalina ends with both being killed by ghosts in a ruin, to which they had been sent by Avram Brankovich.

The Golem symbolism is present once again, but this time I wish to stress the similarities between the creator of the Golem, and God. According to Jewish belief, only God can create life, and so the "truth" written on the forehead of the Golem refers to the true name of God. While Avram does not have the ability to merely create life, he has the ability to create life by proxy.

I wish to draw attention to the fact that Avram creates life in order to take that life away when it suits him, and here we have a similarity with Christianity, where it could be argued that God created Jesus in order for him to die in order to save humanity's collective soul from eternal damnation.

The story of Avram contains two important elements for the analysis of the narrative: the readiness to go to great lengths to achieve one's objectives, and the significance of prophecies received in dreams. Erika Bourguignon's article in 'Psychological Anthropology' (1972), lays out a theory that argues that dreams can be grouped together with trance and possession as access points to spiritual experiences and guidance among several cultures, which seems to be the case amongst the fictional Khazars, though it is left unclear what deity or deities interact with characters in this novel.

The fictional narrative is interspersed with snippets of fact, to give the novel the appearance of being a factual account of the history of the Khazars. This seems to have been done more as a flourish, rather than as an attempt to make the work something it is not (an actual lexigraph). Pavić employs the same method that Pekić did, namely removing himself from the role of author to that of a compiler of a found document and as such is not responsible for

the unreliable narration in the work, with all accounts and none being true, but it becomes clear that the main narrative of the novel does not concern the conversion or the fate of the Khazars, but rather the collection of the scattered dictionary.

The Khazars are shown to be shrewd, and like Avram, they do what they must to survive, such as professing to adhere to one religion, while privately holding another. Examples can be found throughout history, such as in Finland, where under Swedish rule, people would profess to having converted to Christianity, while privately holding on to traditional beliefs.

As can be gathered, the particulars of how the Khazars came to be converted are convoluted and still up for debate, in the narrative of the novel, but what should be noted is that the theme of the story seems to be the lengths that humans are willing to go to safeguard their future, be that in the example of Elah and the kaghan of the Khazars, who play the representatives of the different faiths against each other to gain the most favourable outcome for themselves, or the example of Avram Brankovich, who sacrificed his “son” in order to fulfil his objective of completing the dictionary.

Much as in ‘Houses’ time in ‘Dictionary of the Khazars’ is defined by temporal discontinuity of the narrative. The plot is told from different perspectives at different times and by people whose motives are not always to give an accurate account of events. The rhetorical style of the novel seeks to influence the reader by seeming to present a removed, third party account of events at times, while at times recounting events, most often fairy-tale like, collecting together aspects of the narrative from different sources, so as to distance the author himself and his influence from the narrative.

To accurately analyse the temporality of the work one must have some imagination and make use of it to discover what the characters in the novel and the author mean for us to understand. ‘The Dictionary of the Khazars’, if we follow the train of thought that posits that the novel is a critique of the stagnation of late socialist Yugoslavia, may then be an exercise in making public the idea of the legitimacy of divine mandates. In a multi-ethnic federation, advocating for the supremacy of any one group is contrary to the stated aspirations of the state, though we know that cracks in the façade of brotherhood and unity had started to appear.

Pavić seeks to impress upon the reader through the style of narrative he has chosen, that certain projects are multi-generational, even ancient. This is done through letting the reader understand that the compiling of 'The Dictionary of the Khazars' is a task that spans centuries, and is beset by mighty foes, who wish to hinder the project's completion. The reader is also made to understand through the actions of the novel's characters that a sense of being guided by divine inspiration is legitimate despite the fact that the Khazars are the antithesis of a structured state society. The fact that in the novel the Khazars are beset by forces much larger than themselves is an apt comparison for the situation for which Yugoslavia found itself in, threatened by much larger geopolitical forces. The dictionary itself is here a stand in for a hidden truth, and what if that hidden truth happened to be an independent Serbia?

6. Comparison

What common features can we find in the aforementioned works? Seeing as the works are fairly different in their themes, structures, and stories, the attributes of *genre* betray the similarities between them. To start off with, a non-linear structure is shared by all three books, but what is most interesting to us, and most important to this thesis, is that uncertainty permeates all three books. From the uncertain present and future of Arsénie Negovan in ‘Houses’, to the uncertain and confusing story and structure of ‘Dictionary of the Khazars’, where the very central question of the book (which religion did the Khazars convert to and why) is left unanswered, to the existential uncertainty of nearly all of Kiš’s characters, who seem at all sides beset by the machinations and schemes of others. It all combines to leave the reader with a very distinct picture of reality being subjective and unimportant, as the realities that we have built for ourselves, our understanding of the world, seems to have been built on sand.

In trying to understand the context of these works and why they may share some similarities, Bakhtin’s chronotope seems to be our best tool in gaining a better understanding of the topic. The works discussed here are not removed from a wider global (at this time) literary context, where we can talk about authors having access to influences from all over the world (or in reality probably mostly from the Occident). We can confidently say that the societal conditions of late Yugoslavia give rise to a particular implementation of larger trends within literature. The three works dealt with in this thesis all share the genre chronotope of using clear, but varied examples of expressing space-time.

The easiest comparisons to draw are between ‘Houses’ and ‘A Tomb...’. Not only are they temporally closer linked (mostly taking place during the 19th and 20th centuries) but share many common themes (that of revolution and the juxtaposition of societal classes and the result of the following conflict). Another important similarity between the works is that many of the main characters are up against forces much larger than themselves and how they attempt to resist these forces. I am especially thinking of the similarities between Arsénie and Dr. Karl Taube in the story ‘The Magic Card Dealing’. Arsénie and Taube are both cosmopolites of higher social standing, but their lives are irrevocably affected by events they had no control over, and in which they become involved by chance. Arsénie’s assault in the

hands of the demonstrators leave him physically and mentally scarred and lead to his recusing himself from life, and the war that destroyed many of his properties and whose destruction caused him such great anguish. The values and affects of cosmopolitanism turn into a private experience for these characters, which is then contrasted with revolutionaries and criminals who have no interest in the bourgeois and the cosmopolitan life enjoyed by 19th century elites. The only way to give public meaning to these ideas is to give them a literary context. The expression of these ideas may be the authors' way of making these ideas visible, offer an alternative to the stagnation of Yugoslav society, but it may also be a way of creating a starker contrast between the characters and their environments.

The malevolent forces at play in the fate and death of Dr. Taube are not quite as dramatic, but yet, his fate is sealed in a card game that he was not a participant in. Using Kiš's metaphor, he just happened to be lucky (or unlucky), and had he not been imprisoned he would not have even eligible for participation.

What 'Dictionary' lays bare is the unreliability of historical narratives. Historical narratives are always tinged with, what for lack of a better term and for a bit of fun we shall refer to as, ideology. I am in particular thinking of the accidentally parallel narratives of the Khazars converting to either Christianity, Judaism or Islam after a conflict. Even in a fictional novel, the trope of events being conceived of very differently and being interpreted almost completely differently still holds true (an apt comparison could be the continuing disputes and disagreements surrounding the wars of the 90's in the Balkans).

The ways in which these three works try to convince us, though, are the real unifying factor. All three frame their events as being factual in what could be called real time, that is to say the time outside the novels (which also raises interesting questions about how these works are to be understood in time, are they meant to be read in a certain spatial or temporal context?). It is an interesting coincidence that this should be the case, and the fact that one of the stories in 'Tomb' is dedicated to Borislav Pekić, the author of 'Houses'. What I mean by the authors trying to convince us of their works existing outside the realm of the books, is that all three are being relayed by a third party. 'Houses' and 'Tomb' are being relayed to us by their real-world authors, whereas 'Dictionary' is given to us by an unnamed person, possibly a fictional Milorad Pavić.

The works are also tied into real events and people, from the story of the Khazars being tied to scholars and kings, to Arsénie making reference to designer of the plans for the city of Belgrade Emilijan Josimović and frequently pondering the names of streets in Belgrade and their histories, to the characters of 'Tomb' being based on real people, and taking part in battles and wars that took place and so on. It is unclear whether the intention is to convince us that these people and events are/were real, or that (which in my opinion is far more likely) this is merely a literary flourish and that the style appealed to and suited the needs of the authors.

To establish whether these works are a Bakhtinian dialogical expression of individual and collective sentiment or the expression of authority through monovocal rationality is impossible without speaking to the authors themselves. Elements of both are present in all three books and it seems that what matters most is authorial intent. What we can say is that the works in question can be analysed using both. The works are trying to convince us of something and are representations of the experiences of the individuals and groups in which they were produced.

Now analysing these works as anthropological objects(?). I am unable to come in cold to the analysis of these works as representations of the societies that produced them. Being aware of the conditions from which these works arose will affect how I analyse them, but that being said, the first thing that jumps out is the feeling of uncertainty. Uncertainty is stronger in 'Tomb' and 'Houses' than in 'Dictionary', but even in the last book it is present, although not maybe as present as such a dreadful presence (dreadful as in dread inducing, not as in bad).

In my assessment these are artifacts produced during an uncertain time, that then makes itself known in different forms. In the pessimism of 'Tomb' where one gets the distinct impression that there are shadowy assailants behind every corner, or the malaise of 'Houses', which makes one question whether one should even try because "they'll" come and take it anyway and you'll be helpless to stop them due to having been assailed, or the very questioning of consensus reality and the realisation that we are all part of a game played by much more powerful people and our victories are ultimately temporary and as such futile.

7. Conclusion

The societal pressures of late socialist Yugoslavia produced literature that that were affected by uncertainty. The uncertainty in question was not always the uncertainty of Yugoslavia in particular, but also the uncertainty of the Cold War and the potential of conflict it brought. The works analysed in this thesis are defined by strong political and societal themes and their embrace of uncertain and jumbled narratives, that depict people and societies faced with insurmountable challenges and odds and how they attempt to unsuccessfully resist these forces.

To understand what these novels seek to achieve, it is necessary to return to Bakhtin and the question of time and temporality. If we take the titles and primary genres of the novels as a stand-in for stagnation, what does it tell us about the society and time that produced these novels? The titles of the novels suggest a desire to fix time and space in a way that preserves and validates the private experience that has been made obsolete by the present social order.

While it is difficult to guess at what the authors themselves saw as the next stage of society, we can postulate that all three novels serve as a refutation of the stagnation present in late Yugoslavia. Much as in the way public and private discourse became contrasted in the Soviet Union, these novels through the chronotopes and dialogism present in them stand opposed to the public speech which served the state, seeking to offer an alternative vision of social existence in which private experience is given space and validated, instead of being pushed to the side.

The models for societies where one's private and personal experiences can be validated are found in an idealised past. In one sense, by seeking to capture a time in the past, the novels seem to argue that society in the present form is not inevitable, and that after socialism there might be another feudalism, or another bourgeois order in which personal rather than public and collective affairs are the emphasis of social discourse. This is not to say that the authors were striving for such futures: they point to "alternatives" by way of irony, even as they seek to avoid the fate of dissidents such as portrayed in Yurchak, where dissidents were seen as little more than nuisances and ideologues, and thus buried their critiques in their works, so that the critique would be one interpretation among many.

The fact that three works chosen at more or less random still managed to bear such striking thematic and structural similarities shows that something unites them, and I argue that that something is genre, and the traits that the style of the time imbued the works under analysis with and what Williams calls “structure of feeling” in his 1980 work ‘Marxism and Literature’, in other words an unarticulated feeling that precedes historic change of the collective experience and the social order being out of sync.

Literary anthropology and linguistics have proven themselves to be formidable tools for those who wish to analyse culture and cultural objects. This topic could be further studied by simply choosing different works, or by analysing the thematic evolution of one author’s works.

This thesis has shown that in the works of Kiš, Pavić and Pekić can be felt the despair of the people of the Socialist Republic of Serbia at the stagnant time they found themselves in, but also the yearning for a different future. What that future would be was unclear, but it had to be different.

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