

Folklore And the Fantastic Element as A Form of Intertext in The Folktales of Mitrush Kuteli

Dr. Rovena Mikeli - Vata (Grand Master)

Academy of Albanological Studies, Tirana - Albania

Prof.Dr. Arburim Iseni

State University of Tetova, Tetova - North Macedonia

Abstract

In Albanian literature and literary studies, Dhimitër Paskoja (1907–1966), also known as Mitrush Kuteli, wrote in line with the Word of Oral Literature. He is well known for his work as an economist, translator, and writer. He started his studies in Kumanovo before moving to further education in Bucharest to study economics. Albanian Nights (1938), Ago Jakupi and other narratives such as *My Village Consumes Brandy*, *Kapllan Aga of Shaban Shpata* and *The Love of Barbarian Artan* are among the works he has summarized and published in 1944. He constructed the subjects in accordance with known preliminary models, oral culture, songs, fairy tales, wise words, ethnic tradition, speech, and white magic and black magic, reaching the depths of their mythical, historical, narrative, and semantic sources. It is important to note that the oral discourse frequently developed as a discourse of typical Albanian ethnocultural identity in Kuteli's prose. We are dealing with a writer who fervently thinks that oral tradition served as the foundation for his development. Kuteli rightfully refers to folklore as a spiritual meal and the story as a narration. This style of storytelling, which Kuteli refers to as a narration, was characterized by romantic tones, unforced comedy, rich vocabulary, and well picked lexis.

Keywords: narratives, fairy tales, magic, the elders, custom, etc.

INTRODUCTION

In various stages of its growth, Albanian literature has produced master writers who, using their talent and creativity, have recreated the Albanian universe in all its grandeur and beauty. Without a doubt, Mitrush Kuteli also holds a respected position among these master writers.

In various periods of its development, Albanian literature has brought out masters of the pen, who with their art and genius have recreated the Albanian world in all its beauty and greatness. A place honored among these masters occupies, no doubt also Mitrush Kuteli.

Great and unique as a writer, but yet understudied, Kuteli represents a unique

phenomena in the area of Albanian letters (particularly in short prose) and has earned his rightful place in the hierarchy of values of our culture (Gjoni, Spiro: 2018)

Through oral literature, the author Mitrush Kuteli is connected to Albanian letters as a language, a national ethnos, and a model of writing and thought. He is also connected to the literature of the nation, which he will revive in his own unique way through literary writing that begins with description and progresses to metonymy and allegory (Rrahmani, Kujtim: 2000)

In Kuteli's works, fantastical circumstances and scenes that have no real-world significance are included (Suta, Blerina: 2004). Kuteli's short writing is a

phenomena that is both singular and intricate, harmoniously combining skill, passion, creative interests, training, and the author's life, which had its ups and downs. If the author lived and created in two different times, in two places and during two different systems, his work is a reflection of only one place and one time. When we say this, we mean the Albanian countryside (represented by the writer's birthplace) and its past (Gjoni, Spiro: 2018)

So, in Kuteli's prose, the elements of orality are also present in written literature, such as scenism, which means that gestures, facial expressions, grimaces are felt, in other words, the oral text gives Kuteli's written text a cinematographic effect (Rrahmani, Kujtim: 2000). Kuteli's artistic world is a world that resembles both reality and fantasy (Vata, Rovená: 2015)

According to Mircea Eliade, who claims that myth serves an essential purpose, myth frequently emphasizes and codifies ideas, defends and upholds moral values, ensures the efficacy of ritual rites, and offers useful guidelines that are still applicable to modern man (Eliade, Mircea: 2005). Fantasy, as an element of artistic fiction, appears in various forms, where precisely the fantastic element is layered in a double manner. But in the entirety of this creativity, we also come across stories, where the fantastic element obtains or presents other functions. He is not only the bearer of an ideal reality that rests on the earthly environment. This element goes beyond these limits, both in time and in space, as in the case of narratives (*Rinë-Katerinëza*, *Dead and Alive*, *Uprising for Ghost*, etc). (Gjoni, Spiro: 2018)

According to Mitrush Kuteli, he stated that, my grandmother's and my neighbors' tales, part of our rich folklore that I first learned about as a child, provided me with the actual literary foundation. Moreover,

he adds that, when I was young, the fairy stories I read or heard provided me with protection, then our people's oral histories, particularly those told by the elders by the fire in the shade of the trees about ancient occurrences, wars, and exile-related incidents. (Hamit, Sabri: 2000)

Mitrush Kuteli introduced innovation to Albanian storytelling by presenting the reader with a brand-new style that was reminiscent of the folk narrative, complete with romantic hues, innate comedy, rich and varied language, and an overly poeticized treatment of the past. (Vata, Rovená: 2018). Although most of Kuteli's works contain a fantastical aspect, he avoids religious mysticism or sick imagination. Instead, he stays in the real Albanian world, with intriguing happenings and distinctive phenomena, where the protagonists are the country's brave, wise, and hardworking citizens. (Gjoni, Spiro: 2009). But Kuteli's work and in this context, the universe he creates, offers us other dimensions of time and space, where the fantastic element stands out. (Gjoni, Spiro: 2018)

According to Mitrush Kuteli, rather than being a reflection of any one work of literature, my stories are a reflection of the elders' stories. I've included the name of the person who told me some of the stories at the conclusion. Why? Because of the gratitude. The individual, including the writer, must be truthful with the person who assisted him. The editors felt it necessary to remove a black line, to erase the names; even though I had done something similar in the *Tales of the Xinxifilua* volume (I had put the narrator's name there). *And I apologize!* (Plasari, Aurel: 1995)

With the categories "narrative" and "storytelling," Kuteli classifies his short prose, with the former referring to real life and the latter to the fantastical codes of fairy tales and, generally, to his oral formation. (Vata, Rovená: 2019). Kuteli

tells the story of the event rather than the actual event itself. As a result, the author occupies the position of mediator between the story and the reader or listener. The author's repeated interventions in the story, addressed to the reader, are an appeal to make the event readable as well as to give it its own personality (Vata, Rovená: 2018). No matter how much of the narratives are fiction, the many occurrences and phenomena that are at its core are heavily inspired by the reality of the Albanian countryside. Along with life and joy, these stories also contain anguish and unhappiness, and in some cases, outright revolt. (Gjoni, Spiro: 2018)

In the story Autumn of Xheladin Bey, the curses of Maro of Kovi, the former madwoman of Xheladin Bey, that she inflicts on him because she wanted to dishonor him, without even knowing his daughter, flow many and fast and are typical as in folk tales:

“Plague, Y, y, y. Istanbul down. God bless you, the demented person! May God take your brain because you have caused me much shame! You’ve devoured my life and been consumed by death! (...) Let’s descend and remove the intestines! Be spit-roasted alive! Lose and you won’t be heard or seen. (...) Crack us and the eyes will follow! Kill our dread; the grave is the scariest place! To burn the ghosts, they burned us. (...) May you leave and don’t return; may you not come home alive! Do not return home alive!” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1972)

This whole stream of curses has a definite meaning. They are the manifestation of a great pain and characterize, very accurately, the real face of Xheladin Bey. They are evidence of a social, psychological and spiritual history of a woman, but also of a social group that has tried the hoof of the Bey, who considered everything as his property.

All in vain; the pasha was not touched by the first word. She is my miss, I will marry her myself. “Pashai listens to him, and at the conclusion he said: OK, I heard. You go, leave the maid here, because it is my longing, from my manor.” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1972). A thematic structure is developed as a result of the intertextual connection that is made by the intensity of their purpose, and Xheladin Bey is forced to wipe it all away on a board in the same way that the abused lady had said *he would go insane*. The story and idea in Kuteli's prose are frequently constrained by formulae, namely by brief expressions of oral inventiveness like proverbs, curses, and celebrations. The narrator of other evenings in Kuteli can plainly sense the tone of the story *“April Night.”* Proverb: *In sorrows, stand up and walk alone; in joy, wait to be invited.* (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1972)

In the relationships that have developed within the relationships of the characters, this word semantically strengthens the text and confirms its authenticity. However, tale curses have a very different purpose. *I decided to go on a pilgrimage, where we find curses like:*

“–May the red cow or the patchy mother surprise you, who will be the last to enter the water! - The toads took the goats’ milk and left them without buttermilk! - Close the door with three locks and three padlocks!” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1938)

The story *Uprising of the Ghosts* is built on a special plot of ideas and social projections, at the root of which are pagan and sub-pagan religious superstitions and beliefs in the Ghosts and their destructive missions.

One of the earliest projections of reality and life facts, superstition is here intertextualized and empowered to the point of being a “verifiable” reality:

“Since the word came out to the son of Cyprus that he does not believe in ghosts,

he lost the honor and love of the village, both in Turk and Kaura. Not only does no one say good morning to him, not only do they call him a mason and a papist, but they have accused him of his work - that he doesn't believe in ghosts! - The God works so hard for the village. It rains a lot and the Great River comes: the fault lies with the city of Cyprus! It doesn't rain and the corn dries up: it's the fault of Cyprus! The phlegm falls to the sheep: the fault of all the people of Cyprus! All the people of Cyprus are to blame for the fall of the vineyards, for the fish to escape from our borders and for the worm to enter Banush's nut. And not only that, thus word got out that he eats bread with masons and the devil". (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1938)

The entire story is founded on an ethnological truth, as is clear from the story's opening. This world serves as the fundamental intertext for the tragedy of the Cypriot character *Çuni*, who challenges the fundamentals of this superstitious reality.

The Cypriots' mistrust of ghosts, which for the village, for its mental and spiritual reality, represented an unheard-of heresy for which God punishes people, the things of their lives, trees and harvests, is tied to the narrative structure and mystery of the story itself. With the son of Cyprus's outright denial, a drama has emerged within this intrigue. Here, the dramatic struggle manifests itself not just as an intellectual conflict but also as a discursive and moral conflict.

All these beliefs reflect the same feeling, which is deeply religious: 'our world' is the holy ground, because it is the closest place to heaven, because from here, from our residence, it is possible to grasp heaven; so our world is a high place (Eliade, Mircea: 1956). Rituals can only fully express the character's retroactive reality through interdiscursivity. The widely known ethnological formulas, such as those for pigeons and sparrows, can be

used to this function. (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1972)

They represent significant information and go beyond simple play and size-based speech dialogue. In fact, these indications of an oral discourse that invites intertextual and interdiscursive play in the text reflect the writer's overall relationship to the oral world. For Kuteli, orality is not just knowledge and passion, but also experience, both as a text and as ethnology, and thus as a ritual. In the story *The Third Autumn Night*, the magical ritual is given mainly as an introduction to the character. Such is this sequence:

"The world also says that my grandmother had such a strong eye that she knocked the rider from the horse, held the millstone in place and made it break into pieces. Just with a look. He knew about broomsticks and salt shakers thrown into the fire: Magjira didn't know. He didn't even want to listen. With magic, he healed those who had lost their sight, those who had stepped between roof shelters or in some shade of walnut and others of this kind..." (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1972)

A key component of the setting of Kuteli's characters as well as the geographical and ideological interior of his story is this narration in relation to the grandmother and her rituals.

As for the other Rusa-Papusa story, the ritual accompanied by seasonal songs introduces real consciousness, brand to the world of the respective narrative. There, children are the ones who bring rain and other good things through their prayers; but they should be rewarded for their work:

"Ora-ona, Tri perona, make it rain, in our fields" "When dry weather fell and the corn burned in the field, neither the priest, nor the hoxha, nor both together could gather the clouds, can you say to us the

world: - Come on you lads make it possible with some Russian girls, so that it can rain! We didn't talk about it, because we had the spoon in our belt and eat! As in month of May going from door to door. And so you could look then, you a good man, how Krusha darkened behind our trail, how it thundered and how a rain as thick as a rope fell, which made Turks and Kaura happy” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1938).

The story *Ghosts of our Village* contains a collection of narratives that are all connected by a topic, a particular type of character, and a particular kind of comparable circumstance—all involving ghosts. The entire premise of the story and the incidents are well-known, and in this instance, the oral intertext is the text itself.

“—Last year we had the strong ghost Shaqo of Shaban, another year that became even stronger and this year Mero of Cute. This monk Mero fell and died there two months from some ograia, because it was not written to him. As long as the village is alive, you say that the ghosts will rise. And indeed, as soon as he died, he fell and rose again.” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1938)

This projection of the flow of time is likely an intertext-authorial commentary, interspersed in the character’s mouth. Some mentioned elements are quite present in the story *Threads from the life of Theofil Kostori*. There, the ritual of ascertainment, but also of the beginning of the dissolution of the spell or even of the teacher's estrangement, begins with such a scene:

“—Until Milka comes, my mother washed me with a Shërmarene stone. The Shërmarene stone was a piece of chert, with many holes, taken from the cave of Mrs. Shërmarene. The mother kept him there in the kora. When I fell asleep, he filled a corn with water, made a cross on it and threw it in and gave me to drink. If

there were scallions, it was one by one that I had noticed. Sumbulla had done this turn a lot! – May the eye blast to the one who is wrong!” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1938)

This ritual of learning verification that also serves as a preventative mechanism is part of the character's youth, which he describes in the form of reminiscence. In this case, the ritual comes to life as it goes on:

“—Come out, my love; let’s rid him of his evil, cast him into the river, and let the fish devour him. We’ll put this boy to sleep if you bring me some salt and a broom to clean up two or three threads. Three broomsticks were handed to the child by the mother when she stood up, walked to the cupboard, took some salt, and went to the door. - My sister, there are some sycophants and squints in this world! It’s gone; don’t let the whites see it any longer!” (Kuteli, Mitrush: 1938)

The anti-magic ritual is now serving as an intertext for the characters' meanings and worldviews in the novel. Ritual is a way of approaching and maintaining values in everyday life. Every ritual employed in magic and anti-magic is therefore a form of description. The paramodel, to which the narrative's component parts are tied, remains the major axis, despite Kuteli’s attempts to impose some of his own language as a description and characterization of the situations of the characters.

The end of the story, like its body, presents a fairytale ending. In a word, in this type of stories, Kuteli does not let go of the popular model, but processes it in an authorial hand, as a style, message and narrative.

The fairy tale is explicitly mentioned and used as a genre term towards the conclusion of the story *The Rich Man who was Poor* under the pretext: based on a

fairy tale I heard growing up in Pogradec. However, the word “worked:” in this context must be taken to mean “reworked,” or at the very least, “elaborated.” Despite this, Kuteli is always seen as playing the creator or narrator, not a simple or incidental role. Indeed, the rich man of the story *The Rich Man who was Poor* meets the devil, where in this meeting he seeks his thing and gains the conscious life. The closing sentence of this narrative: Because now he lived with the cheerfulness of giving, which is greater than giving, has the traces of a brief authorial message, which of course, in the spirit of the tale narrated and elaborated above, emphasizes powerfully the idea that emerges from there, giving it a sentential, moral, mystical and metaphysical character, which emerges as an act of experience and meditation on the forms of spiritual life.

CONCLUSIONS

At the conclusion of this study, we can say that Mitrush Kuteli used oral literature as a basis for his writing and thought as well as a language and national ethnos, adding a unique prose style and a fresh perspective to Albanian storytelling—what he himself refers to as “narrative”. The fantastic and folklore element is visible in all his creativity, where the fantastic element as an element of artistic fiction, appears in the most different forms, where this element is layered in a double manner. According to the analysis and the research of confessional cases like *Rinë Katerinëza*, *The Dead and the Alive*, *Uprising for the Ghosts*, *The Rich Man who was very Poor*, *April Night*, etc., this aspect transcends the confines of both time and space.

According to the folklore aspect, which runs concurrently with the weird element, Kuteli himself asserted that the genuine literary basis was provided to me by the tales of my grandmother and the neighbor, our rich folklore, which I first became

familiar with as a child. My early protection came from the fairy stories I read or heard. Kuteli heard tales that were based on oral tradition rather than on any written works of literature.

A strong effect of the oral intertext in Kuteli’s prose is presented by some performances or performances that can generally be summarized as scenic, but which also have narrative elements or some lyrical sparks. Such is the presence of spells, magical rituals and formulas in general, either by creating situations through which the characters are tested, or as efforts of ideological, emotional and mystical ideas and reflexes, scenes with laments, lamentations and curses.

Mitrush Kuteli began to approach the life of the people and reflect their psyche as well as the social wounds of the time he lived. To reflect negative social phenomena, Kuteli used allegory to consciously whistle the evils of society.

According to critics, Kuteli is known as one of the creators of modern Albanian prose, where this modernity stands out in the artistic form of this prose in general and in particular the narrative style of writing together with the language expressions used mainly in his narratives.

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