

The Fantastic and Semi-Fantastic Element in Kuteli's Short Stories

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Abstract: What motivates the writing of the following article is the extended representation of mythical and demonic figures in the prose fiction of Mitrush Kutelii. Among these figures the reader can find: the nymphs, the hours, the shtozovalle... This study appears in a context of descriptive analysis, through which these figures are represented in the text, and their role in the structure of the narration. The fantastic and half-fantastic element in Kuteli's short stories appears not only through the presence of these creatures, but also through the structure of his storytelling. Special emphasis will be given to the structure of the prosaic action of the demonic characters, which are carriers of the prosaic storytelling, and as such they are narrated within an intermediate world, between the real and the imaginary. In these stories Kuteli's storytelling is represented in the threshold of two worlds: the world of the living and the world of the dead. The living characters are dying and presented in the agony of death, and the dead ones, through diverse forms and manners, return from the world of the dead to the world of the living. The study and analysis of the structural form in Kuteli's narrative world contributes in carrying forward the studies in the field of narration theory and affirms Mitrush Kuteli's propitious work in the evolution of the Albanian prose.

Keywords: fantastic world, mythology, narration theory, storytelling, mythical creature, narrative prose, character's action.

Introduction

Kuteli's artistic world is a world that resembles reality as much as fantastic. The characteristic of a fantastic text is not the simple presence of supernatural phenomena or beings, but a reluctance process, that occurs between him and the reader, when the last one needs to perceive presented events. During the history the reader wonders (sometimes this does a character, even the protagonist himself), whether the facts adduced unfold through supernatural causes, natural if in them (facts), it comes to hallucination or about realities.¹

Thus Todorov would have expressed related to the report that create fantastic texts with their reader. *"The reluctance in perception"* according to him arises because often the extraordinary event (hereupon, potentially supernatural) takes place not in a wonderful environment, but in an everyday context, that to us may seem common. If we look the narratives *"Natë gushti"* (Përtej valëve të kohës) [*"August night"* (Beyond the waves of time)], *"Lugetërit e fshatit tonë"* (*"The monsters of our village"*), *"Natë prilli"* (Kapllan Aga i Shaban Shpatës) [*"April night"* (Kapllan Aga of Shaban Shpata), or the dead and the alive, *"Rinë Katerinëza"*, *"Kryengritje për lugat"* (*"Rebellion for bogey"*), *"I pasuri që ish i varfër fort"* (*"The rich that was so poor"*) etc, we obey that Kutelis' fantastic story is, consequently a narrative of a perception that leads to puzzled.²

The story *"Rinë Katerinëza"* fits very well this general description of the fantastic genre. It is the major part of the differences between *"the two worlds"* that cause reluctance on both the protagonists embraced before the opened grave:

¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *"Poetika e prozës"*, Shtëpia e librit, Tiranë 2000, f. 75-76.

² Aurel Plasari, *"Midis të gjallëve dhe të vdekurve"*, Apolonia, Tiranë 1995, f. 40-43.

“How do you want to link the faith? Would you come in the other life, or shall I come here? For here to be in covenant with, o my God! And they stood up and are in covenant with, there in the mother’s grave, under the light of madam Moon. And nobody shouldn’t know a covenant, of their marriage!”³

And when Tat Tanushi describes Kalija’s face happens the process of reluctance: *“Because her face was dressed in a light as the light of the moon above the water. But the light of the moon is lifeless, whereas the light that covered Kalija’s face was alive. She had at the same time both the beauty of the dead and the living”⁴.*

We have reluctance also at the protagonist of the story: *“How did Ago Jakupi find the path of God?”*, but through a perplexed state: *“As if it was neither day nor night – a mixed thing – and as if Ago Jakupi climbed on the mountain, there by the road of the vineyards. It was like it had been yesterday but it was not like yesterday – because the world had other light. Walked and listened to his own crunches: bumb, bumb, bumb!”⁵*

These texts show an emphasized trend towards allegory, but that never becomes too strong, because they also preserve the elements that come from folk sources, anyhow making the text simple and understandable. There are cases when in the countering between the good and the bad, according to Plasar makes us arise the question whether we are dealing with moralizing stories, as in the cases *“Qysh e gjeti Ago Jakupi rrugën e zotit”* (*“How did Ago Jakupi find the path of God”*), *“Natë muaji Maji”* (*“May night”*), *“I pasuri që ish i varfër fort”* (*“The poor who was so rich”*), but it is exactly the fantastic element that makes the text literary and not at all didactic.

In Kuteli’s narratives are gradually distinguished supernatural wraith, ordinary for the fantastic story: Ago Jakupi’s daydreaming is realized in three consecutive scales followed by three *“awakenings”*.

“Aga woke up for the third time, but he didn’t wake up well because the dream continued. As if he was walking in a great heat, in a road with no shades and his soul was burning for a drop of water. As no worse also was suffering and panting, as if he had passed over the shoulders the devil”⁶.

Also in the story *“I pasuri që ishte i varfër fort”* (*“The rich who was so poor”*) the protagonist, before the daydreaming appeared to him sleeps and wakes up full three times.

“Slept and woke up, slept and woke up – three times in a row – then he slept deeper, because his body was very tired and the mind enslaved with affluence and penury and with sources for water”⁷.

It happens, that the narrator to be present himself inside the history that he is narrating, as in the narrative *“Përtej valëve të kohës”* (*“Beyond the waves of time”*), that facilitates the integration of the reader in the universe of the subject.⁸

According to Plasar, intimations for the unnatural are scattered everywhere, such narratives serve as decoration that pre-prepare us for their acceptance: leaves hissing, springs noises, sudden coverage or paleness of the moon, squeals of hope, trace, olive oil, honey bee, cypress wood etc.

“Të lugetërit e fshatit tim” (*“The bogeys of my village”*) and *“Kryengritje për lugat”* (*“Uprising for bogey”*) Kuteli carries this *“ghost story”* mostly on humoristic tones, without moving from the center the fantastic element.

“Now nobody cared to irrigate maize God himself and people stood careless in Çuka. They stood in Çuka smoking and talking – adulterant – not for a bogey that had come out in Osnat, not for a stone that had fallen from the sky

³ Mitrush Kuteli, “Rinë Katerinëza”, *“Netë Shqiptare”*, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë 1938, f. 209.

⁴ Mitrush Kuteli, *“E madhe është gjëma e mekatit”*, Apollonia, 1996, f. 15.

⁵ Mitrush Kuteli, “Qysh e gjeti ago Jakupi rrugën e zotit”, *“Netë Shqiptare”*, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë, 1938, f. 58.

⁶ Po aty, f. 59.

⁷ Mitrush Kuteli, “I pasuri që ish i varfër fort”, *“Netë Shqiptare”*, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë 1938, f. 219.

⁸ Aurel Plasari, *“Midis të gjallëve dhe të vdekurve”*, Apollonia, Tiranë 1995, f. 45-46.

over Shembiter of Pevelan and not for a snake that had come out and had talked that the world has come to the end. The trace of the snake seemed all over the rose sheets of the country”.⁹

In these narratives (but also in others) the absence around which the fantasy of the narrator weaves us transforms into presence. It is really about the bogeys, that in the narratives have the features of oral literature: act as genuine characters, meet people on the streets (especially, at night) and talk with them, inculcate the interlocutor in the eyes “two colorful flames with six corners”, kindle tobacco with tinder and measures, break tiling, overthrow buiscono, spill grain and spoil milk; they yell, crumble glass, swipe, enter in chicken roost and turn the heads of the chickens, defile the springs, put ricks on fire etc. “And as they were gathered there in shelters remained breathless, as corpses. They wanted to get up and they couldn’t get up, wanted to call and they couldn’t call, because their foot – mouth and hands occupied the bogey. The flame stood still like that for a while, and then kindled and set up. Some saw it on the top of the roof, some on the top of the poplar... And just as the bogey left, barely took breath and stood up from the place and locked in their homes. And everyone found there the traces of the bogey: whom had spilled buiscono, whom the grain, whom the milk”.¹⁰ The other part of the character of this fantastic gallery pass again “in this world” from the love. Kiroloj comes to respond to the call of a maid (Rinë Katerinëza); Zef Shabani returns “Nga malli i Dafinës” (“From the miss of Dafina”) (The letters to the night); and the white line maid of the old Katjel, whose the narrator feels on her forehead “elbowy hand”, from such a feeling returns.

All these descriptions as vivid presence, with details we distinguish them well, for example, someone’s clothes “smell moldy”, has the face “wasted”, the eyes “deep”.

“How wasted you are, o my lord. Your clothes have taken mold, your face has wasted and your eyes are deepening – but you are so sweet and I love you so much that I want never to be separated!”¹¹

Or another “The light goes side to side through his body” and smells a bit like soil and mold.

“The others didn’t notice much, because they had their joy, but the lord of the wedding beat his mind as *Flies bite more before a rain* whether he had seen or not this weddinggoer whom the light went side to side through the body and smelled a bit like mold”¹². This selfishness of the writer can not remind us the famous formula (and falsely tautological) of Henry James: “The presence that was in front of him was present”. Yes, “the presence present”, really has no responded. That’s why let’s better to return to the considerations of Martin Camaj and to remind that, in the case when we accept that this writer “does not belong to any literary trend fully” or “remains a friend of *three days*”, just for a pass, anywhere within the formwork of statements”, this not only that does not prevent us, but helps us to notice that the links of Kuteli with the fantastic story are so emphasized that necessarily challenge the reality, at least a reality in its classic meaning. If we accept the principle according to which the hidden mechanism of the fantastic type, stands in the reluctance caused between a wonderful (imaginary) universe, then we can accept what Todorov expresses, that in the fantastic literature we should see a narrow field, but privileged starting from which we can lay out hypotheses that are linket to the literature in general. By moving like that the analysis in the center of the fiction, Todorov practically stashes the issue of realism as a literary category that specifies a part of the literary production: We can talk about many various degrees in the function of some proceedings etc. Kuteli appears to us as a creator who had understood since earlier (in the 20-ies, when have started, for example, “I vdekuri dhe i gjalli” (“The dead and the alive”), “Rinë Katerinëza, that in literature

⁹ Mitrush Kuteli, “Kryengritje për lugat”, “Netë Shqiptare”, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë 1938, f. 202 -203.

¹⁰ Mitrush Kuteli, “Lugetërit e fshatit tonë”, “Netë Shqiptare”, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë, 1938, f. 299.

¹¹ Mitrush Kuteli, “Rinë Katerinëza”, “Netë Shqiptare”, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë, 1938, f. 207.

¹² Po aty. 210.

realism takes you away from the reality. He can seem as if he has passed through a “realistic” experience, but this hasn’t served just to prove, that the writer can find the reality only through the roads of fantasy. While reading Kuteli’s narrative prose, one of the lessons we can get from it is that the fiction is not free. The fiction seems appointed to unveil the real; to remind, as examples, daydreaming that does this task in the narratives: “*Qysh i gjeti ago Jakupi rrugën e zotit*” (How did ago Jakup find the road of God”), “*Përtej valëve të kohës*” (Beyond the waves of time”), “*I pasuri që ish i varfër fort*” (The rich that was very poor)¹³. “*Then lasted his hand – a skinny and hairy hand, (devil’s hand) – and caught the devil and threw in fire and fume, as he dismays with great horror. You instead of bringing me people, you take them away from me (You are not for me, because you beat to become a white angel! And hit to be hitted, so that the cave shook the whole, along with the tomcats and the cupboard that were inside)*”¹⁴. “*The fantasy, revealed aesthetic H.K.Mariategi when the reality didn’t afford us, serves us very little*”. As the philosophers who used fake concepts to achieve the truth, so the writers of Kuteli’s type use fiction with the same purpose. The fantasy has no other value except when it creates something real. “*Slowly-slowly as if from the today’s being started to arise a type of petite coverage woven by the waves of time. This resembled a fabric that kindled and set on fire in the twilight. Then the waves of the earth and of the lawns, spilled over walls and stones, because they retreated aside according to a command, and, in the blink of an eye, all the old buildings increased each on its place. Now Katjeli, this beautiful village of Mr. Nikoll Brane demeaned just as it had been four or five generations ago*”. The prejudices of the “reliable” should be qualified as one of the prejudices that has the most damaged the art. With his fantastic story, Kuteli is ranged into the artists that have appeared openly against such prejudice. “*The life – has written the contemporary of our writer J. Piradelo, for all the perky absurdities, with which thanks to God is full, has the privilege not to need that reliability to which the art is forced to obey*”. The absurdities of life have the need to seem reliable because they are true, contrary to those of art which, in order to seem true, need to be reliable that such paradox a writer as Kuteli has known well, this can prove to us and the following fragment, far from being a fiction, pretending to be a faithful registration of reality in the Testament that the writer left his wife: “*My mind is faintly because of the insomnia, because of the nightmares. A if I was followed by the Germans, to hang me. I was running, entered in pits and wells, got out again*”¹⁵. “*They were chasing me. Caught my mind. I was escaping again. In a moment I found you near me. And we were escaping. Then we separated. After all I found myself chased by our people. Again pits, wells, abysses. As if I was in Berat, under the Castle. In a shelter of the Castle, next to the Church. Someone called me: “Stay, Dhimitri! We caught you! They surrounded me, caught me and led to kill me. I was laughing. I wanted to kill me... And behold, I found myself in prison. So many people. Among them and Sofo Çomora who is dead. Looked at me with pain, “How it became like this, o Pasko? What did you do? – I don’t know. – Look here. And gave me some paperwork written beautifully: an act of accusation and some other relations. They called me “bejtexhi”*”¹⁶. They were telling me that I had made a verse about intolerance with Italian rhymes. I was Andrea. He felt sorry. It was decided to kill me. Again I was happy. After all I will die – I said. - I will rescue. I will get tired. My life has been very turbulent, confused, good and bad. How good, that it ended”¹⁷. Kuteli’s literary testament addressed to his wife and children is his most compassionate text that overtakes the situations of the end of the life in a state where is meditated for the

¹³ Aurel Plasari, “*Midis të gjallëve dhe të vdekurve*”, Apollonia, Tiranë 1995, f. 46.

¹⁴ Mitrush Kuteli, “*I pasuri që ish i varfër fort*”, “*Netë Shqiptare*”, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë, 1938, f. 223.

¹⁵ Dhimitër Pasko: Testament (1967) në “*Hylli i Dritës*”, 3 - 4 1994, f. 72-73.

¹⁶ A writer who writes poetries so-called “bejte”

¹⁷ Aurel Plasari, “*Midis të gjallëve dhe te vdekurve*”, Apollonia, Tiranë 1995, f. 51.

death, and even as in a dreadful dream outline together: Loneliness, pain, hallucination, escape, suffering, chase, betrayal, murder... This testament makes meaningful poetically and eternally the time of creative pain, essential, existential of the writer, in the most visualized moment of the death. It is a striking dialogue in the ratio: ego – interego, on a deep scrimmage with life – death, where the emotion and the reason meet within the ritual of insomnia or other evil dreams, next time. His testament is a strong allegory for the vital, human, social, but also literary absurdity in the time when is written. Even though it outlines also the past of the writer, its literary and critical significance focuses on an experienced time with the activation of an intentional act as a message, supreme will for his wife, for his children, for his district, even when the literary facts interlace with the life events. The investigation of the fantastic world of the writer is especially fruitful, not only to discover the sociologic parameters of literary genres, but also to control the meeting points between the writing and the reading. Because from the new conception, of the real elicits modern literature some of its best energies; from here Kuteli has elicited maybe the most realized part of his work. What “*welters*” the literature is not the fantasy in itself. It is inflammation of subjectivity that constitutes one of the symptoms of the general crisis of the civilization – and of the literature within it. The fantastic story of our writer proves us once again that those who the roots of the evil find in the excess of fiction are wrong, instead of seeking it in not having a bigger fiction that would serve to it as a star. The impression created until today from the criticism about Mitrush Kuteli’s creativity, has been that of an peaceful artist, linked since in embryo with the womb of folklore, a relation that did not separate from him during his whole life, that of a prose writer that is satisfied by telling and retelling, as a geezer close to the hearth, the histories of his unforgettable village, that the passage of time had worn in fantasy with the tales and the legends, that of a master of the language that leaves you open – mouthed with the richness of vocabulary, with the wealth of popular phraseology, with the sweet melody, with which was able to welter each word and each phrase, all these definitely are, true. Aurel Plasar in his book discovers to us another Mitrush Kuteli, a new one, unknown before for us, a Kuteli who explodes the frames in which, intentionally or unintentionally, we were accustomed to close it until today¹⁸. With his structuralist method Aurel Plasar today before our eyes discovers exactly these signs, in one of his “*invariables*” he teaches us to use his codes and to see the modernism of Kuteli’s artistic word, his thoughts that derive from a totally simple philosophy. His works were “*most acceptable*” as the narratives “*E madhe është gjama e mëkatit*” (“*Fine of the sin is big*”) “*I vdekuri dhe i gjalli*” (“*The dead and the alive*”), “*Rinë Katerinëza*”, “*Qysh e gjeti ago Jakupi rrugën e zotit*” (“*How did ago Jakup find the path of God*”), “*Kryengritje për lugat*” (“*Uprising for bogey*”), “*I pasuri që ish i varfër fort*” (“*The rich that was very poor*”). Kuteli tried, to make “*the visible invisible*”. “Aga slept, and saw a second dream: Was walking, all the way of the vineyards and listened to his own crunches bumb – bumb – bumb. He came out again in white with a crook in his hands and said to him: Hey ago Jakup, hey ago Jakup, do good and fill in this sack with soil. He started to fill the sack. The soil was hard and aga got tired and started to gasp. But he filled it”¹⁹. The story “*Qysh e gjeti ago Jakupi rrugën e zotit*” (“*How did ago Jakup find the path of God*”), he tries to break through the mysteries of life, the mystery that separates the life from the not – life, which after all consist a single entity (unit), the true “*reality*” of the being. Aurel Plasar reviews Kuteli as a “*fantastic writer*”, as a narrator in the search of divinity. In the most achieved narratives of Mitrush Kuteli, the central theme is the life of the Albanian village in the past, the vulnerable position of the villager, the oppression and injustices that weighed on his back, major social wounds²⁰.

¹⁸ Hylli i Dritës, “*Gjergj Zheji*”, Kuteli i panjohur, f. 133-135.

¹⁹ Kuteli, “*Qysh e gjeti ago Jakupi rrugën e zotit*”, “*Netë Shqiptare*”, Naim Frashëri, Tiranë 1938, f. 58.

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